

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Weston-super-Mare Town Council

21-23 April 2026

Feedback report



Corporate Peer Challenge

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1. Introduction

A team of local government peers, led by the Local Government Association (LGA) delivered a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) of Weston-super-Mare Town Council (WSMTC) 21-23 April 2026. This was the council's first CPC.

CPC is a well-established and respected improvement and assurance tool that provides robust, strategic, and credible challenge and support to councils. Further details about the CPC process can be found in Appendix A.

Our peer team consisted of highly experienced and knowledgeable senior local government councillor and officer peers (see section four). We considered the five core areas covered by all CPCs: local priorities and outcomes, organisational and place leadership, governance and culture, financial planning and management and capacity for improvement, in addition to a focus on the devolution of assets from North Somerset Council.

This report provides WSMTC with feedback on the peer team's findings. It provides the council with a set of a high-level recommendations alongside further recommendations under each of the CPC's core areas. There is an expectation the council will publish this report and a clear action plan to respond to all the recommendations highlighted.

2. Executive summary

Weston-super-Mare Town Council (WSMTC) is the council representing local communities and delivering a range of services across the town of Weston-super-Mare. In recent years, it has assumed responsibility for the delivery of a range of services devolved from the unitary council North Somerset Council (NSC), including areas of street cleansing, waste management, and some play areas and parks. As outlined in NSC's devolution strategy, this approach is set to continue. WSMTC has also delivered development and regeneration, for example, regenerating the Old Town Quarry into a hub for creative businesses and the revitalisation of the Weston Museum.

The council recently moved to a new building and appointed a new Town Clerk. The



council used this as an opportunity to transform how it operates. Peers found the physical move has helped nurture a positive organisational culture, reinforced by significant investment in senior and middle managers, helping to sustain this and promote consistent communication. This transformation has been largely successful with staff and councillors committed to the new culture.

Throughout the report, there are numerous references to substantial organisational change, including the office relocation, governance reforms, introduction of new management and performance frameworks, investment in leadership development, service expansion and the management of an ambitious devolution programme. These achievements provide important context for many of the recommendations and help explain why the focus is now on embedding and refining improvements rather than addressing fundamental weaknesses.

Building on this, more work is needed to ensure that new ways of working are fully embedded. Many officers highlighted the need to revise functional processes, such as communication methods between officers and councillors, timing for papers to councillors, content and style of officer reports to councillors, and delegation of decision-making from councillors to senior officers, and senior officers to relevant middle management officers. Building time to reflect on practices and projects and assess effectiveness and value through structured debriefs will help the town council move even further forward on its improvement journey.

Partners say that WSMTC is well-placed to strengthen its place-making role for the town. The town council could expand its work with the unitary council and partners, as a facilitator of collaborative conversations to create a long-term, outcomes-based vision. The council is in a good position to build and nurture collaborative partnerships to unlock shared opportunities, strengthen service delivery, and support more joined up responses to local challenges.

As it grows its role in place-shaping and service delivery, there is an opportunity for the council to adopt a more clearly defined, long-term strategy for the council and the town. The recent updates to “Town Council Strategy 2020-2030” are a good starting point, but the peer team recommend ensuring that the strategy is underpinned by clear outcome measures for residents and local businesses. Outcomes would be

locally determined, but could include, for example, specifying an increase in employment within five years and within ten years. These ambitions would need to be developed and agreed with strategic partners in the town, including North Somerset Council (NSC). WSMTC would then use this strategy to help drive decisions and the direction of the council. Service Plans may be shorter-term, and more action-focused, but could be derived from the overall strategy for the town. The strategy would need to be regularly reviewed and visibly drive priorities and resource allocation. This work is already underway.

Partnership with NSC is particularly important and valuable. Many of WSMTC's councillors also sit on NSC, and the council could maximise the insight, intelligence and influence that dual hatters bring. This could be through clearer information sharing and ensuring that WSMTC's strategies and delivery programmes work alongside and with NSC. In addition, early conversations with NSC around planned work in the town, could help to establish shared expectations. This could help to minimise duplication of effort and clarify specific responsibilities between the two councils.

WSMTC is taking a measured and sensible approach to NSC's devolution plans. Council officers carefully assess each potential activity for financial and reputational risk before agreeing to take on responsibility for new devolved services. As the council continues to work with NSC on its devolution plans, there is an opportunity to further strengthen WSMTCs approach to assessing future potential devolved services, capturing all financial considerations, including service delivery models, precept implications and organisational capacity, alongside wider community impacts and opportunities.

The council's general reserves are low, and it remains a priority to strengthen its financial resilience. Continuing to ensure robust budgeting practices and improving councillor understanding of the importance of reserves will help long-term sustainability. The council is already taking action to build reserves.

The team acknowledges that many of the recommendations are already underway, for example the Town Council Strategy, the performance management framework and the development of service planning arrangements. The council has strong

foundations, and the recommendations are intended to support the next stage of organisational maturity and continuity. Weston-super-Mare Town Council is at a good stage in its development and the peer team hope that the recommendations throughout the report are aimed to help support the council with its plans.

3. Recommendations

The following are the peer team's key recommendations which have been prioritised on the grounds of urgency and importance.

3.1 Recommendation 1: Continue progress towards financial resilience

Maintain momentum in strengthening financial resilience. This includes building reserves, improving financial planning, and ensuring robust budgeting practices that support long term sustainability and the council's strategic ambitions.

3.2 Recommendation 2: Embed and sustain the Council's Transformational progress

Continue building on the strong foundations already established through the council's transformative journey over the last couple of years. Focus on embedding the new ways of working so they become part of the organisation's culture, ensuring improvements are sustained and continually refined, measuring success through the new performance management scheme.

3.3 Recommendation 3: Strengthen governance through an effective scheme of delegation

Clear delegated authority from councillors to officers, and from Senior Management Team (SMT) to managers will streamline decision making, reduce bottlenecks, and enable officers to act confidently within defined parameters. Particularly enhance the scheme of delegation from councillors to officers to support the Planning Committee.

3.4 Recommendation 4: Embed reflective practice and lessons learned

Formalise reflective practice across the organisation to ensure lessons learned translate into meaningful improvements. This includes structured debriefs, shared

learning mechanisms, and a culture that values and measures continuous improvement.

3.5 Recommendation 5: Strengthen the leadership role of the council in the place making agenda

Position the council as a proactive leader in shaping the future of the town. This includes influencing development, championing local priorities, and ensuring the council's voice is central in wider place making conversations. Build on the existing structures (such as the place making partnership) and re-invigorate what you can do together for the town.

3.6 Recommendation 6: Build on and further strengthen the joint working relationship with North Somerset Council (NSC) in support of devolution.

Clarify shared expectations, establish clearer formal communication and agreements, and be involved early in discussions about matters pertaining to the town. Ensure that dual-hatted councillors help to support smoother transitions and reduce risk through open conversations and priorities.

3.7 Recommendation 7: Build and nurture collaborative partnerships

Prioritise continuing to develop strong, collaborative partnerships locally, with businesses, voluntary and community sectors, and local leaders. Effective partnership working will strengthen service delivery, unlock shared opportunities, and support more joined up responses to local challenges. Monitor and refine as needed.

3.8 Recommendation 8: Develop the long-term strategy into one that is active and outcomes-based

Develop a dynamic strategy that guides day to day decision making. Ensure the strategy is clearly and appropriately communicated, internally and externally, regularly reviewed, and visibly drives priorities, resource allocation, and community outcomes. This should be done with partners to share responsibility for delivery. Identify desired outcomes and ensure relevant data sharing to identify needs and



goals. This could then feed into the next update to the “Town Council Strategy 2020-2030”.

In addition to the key recommendations, section five of this report captures our detailed feedback and additional recommendations within each of the CPC’s core areas of focus.

4. Peer team

Peer challenges are conducted by experienced LGA peers, including elected councillors and senior officers. The composition of the peer team was shaped by the specific focus of the challenge, with the LGA selecting peers based on their relevant expertise. The peers for this CPC were:

- Cllr Richard Morris, Leader of the Council and Executive Board Member for Economic Growth and Tourism, Wychavon District Council
- Clare Evans, Town Clerk, Houghton Regis Town Council
- Luke Trevaskis, Chief Executive, Morecombe Town Council
- Matt Kirby, Deputy Chief Executive, Chippenham Town Council
- Becca Singh, LGA Peer Challenge Manager
- Rachel Stevens – LGA Project Support Officer (working offsite)

5. Detailed feedback and recommended actions

This section of the report provides detailed feedback along with additional recommendations related to the five core areas of focus and the additional focus on devolution of assets.

When developing the action plan in response to the CPC's findings, the council should consider both the key recommendations presented in section three and the additional recommendations set out below.

5.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Weston-super-Mare Town Council (WSMTC) is one of the largest town councils in the country. It is increasingly seen as a key partner for organisations and communities across the town, with a growing role alongside the unitary council in supporting and delivering local priorities. Partners who spoke with the peer team welcome the opportunity to work further with the town council in support of shared priorities for the benefit of residents, businesses and communities.

Council priorities based on local context

Staff, councillors, stakeholders, and residents all demonstrate a shared connection to and knowledge of the town, which is a powerful asset for future growth. Councillors and officers demonstrated a strong civic intent for priorities to be grounded in what matters locally, addressing practical issues that residents recognise and value. The recently updated 'Town Council Strategy 2020-2030' is a good starting point for Weston Super Mare.

Large-scale work (such as the Weston Museum and the Old Town Quarry) is often opportunistic, but it is well considered and planned. See section 5.6 for more details about services devolved from North Somerset Council (NSC). Well-planned engagement with local communities has led to demonstrable good outcomes in these two examples. WSMTC knows this approach works and is rightly proud of its achievements. This approach could be built into everyday service delivery, demonstrating the clear link between engagement, town council activity and impact on people.

The current approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is a good base, but the peer team suggest increasing the awareness of how EDI principles interact with day-to-day working practices. This includes varying internal and external communication methods to be more accessible to different groups of people and considering the differential impact changes to service delivery or policies could have on staff and communities. More training may be needed, to ensure that managers are confident to challenge when needed.

Councillors and officers demonstrate a clear desire to respond to community needs. Developing more systematic processes and practices that ensure communities feed into service and policy delivery would help to make this work better. There are good examples of how the council has increasingly embedded community engagement across a wide range of service areas, including devolution, parks, and youth services.

Performance and delivery against priorities

The council's vision: "Ever Forward – ensuring Weston-super-Mare becomes a more vibrant, prosperous, cleaner, greener, safer and inclusive place for everyone to enjoy" is supported by three key values:

- Positive leadership
- Integrity and transparency
- Listening to and working with communities.

Place-based delivery is organised around five pillars:

- Weston View – enhancing civic pride
- Cleaner and Greener – commitment to make the council carbon neutral by 2030
- Healthier and Happier – fostering inclusivity and resident wellbeing through youth services, voluntary groups and improved accessibility
- A Bright Future – strengthening the local economy, maximising tourism and collaborating with local businesses

- Heritage Arts and Culture – supporting cultural venues such as the Blakehay Theatre, Weston Museum and the Old Town Quarry, alongside funding key festivals.

The council aims to support all residents, communities and businesses using this model.

The new formal performance management framework is beginning to be embedded following the recent transformational changes. The plans illustrate a clear golden thread from the council's vision, through the values and the five delivery pillars, down to individual development plans. Individual development plans have not taken place in recent years, and are being reintroduced in 2026, so it is too early to comment on the effectiveness of the system.

However, current performance measurement often focuses on activity. This reflects the council's increasingly wide-ranging work. The next stage is to connect that activity to what difference it has made. For example, how much has the increase in street cleansing in a particular area supported an increase in footfall and business investment and decreases in anti-social behaviour reports?

Through discussions with staff and partners, peers found examples of high-quality, high-volume delivery of key projects. A strong example of this is Weston Museum. Peers felt that WSMTC is delivering a breadth and scale of services not always seen in town councils, with a strong focus on responsiveness, which is commendable.

Organisational approach to continuous improvement

Many staff told the peer team that the pace of ambition and delivery for residents does not always allow time to fully evaluate and improve. The peer team recommend that delivery is routinely complemented by structured reflection, with teams regularly considering:

- What worked well
- What could be improved
- What should be done differently next time

This can be supported through practical measures such as:

- Building formal review points into project lifecycles
- Introducing “lessons learned” cycles as standard practice
- Making process improvement an expected part of performance

In addition to key recommendations outlined in section three, we also recommend the council progress the following actions:

- **Develop a community engagement plan to support the strategic vision.** Use the lessons learned from the engagement around the Quarry and the Museum. This can be informal as well as formal, and can help to identify and measure specific outcomes for the council to achieve
- **Ensure council and service plans are outcomes-based**, with relevant outputs and activities supporting the ambitions and objectives set out in the Town Council Strategy 2020-2030.
- **Develop a more structured approach to planning, sequencing, and organisational learning, ensuring that this is consistently aligned with capacity, impact, and long-term priorities.** Link plans for devolution and development to long-term strategic aims.
- **Strengthen awareness, knowledge and skills of EDI.** Consideration of these issues can improve community engagement and service delivery across councillors and officers

5.2 Organisational and place leadership

Both the leader and the town clerk are well respected amongst partners, staff, and councillors. The Leader’s inclusive approach to political decision-making, involving councillors from all parties, and the town clerk’s approach to organisational development are particularly noteworthy.

Staff and councillors both demonstrated understanding of the council’s values, and a clear shared desire to provide and maintain high-quality services. Examples of collaboration across the organisation include developing the new performance management framework, and bringing together relevant officers, councillors, partners

and communities for the development of Old Town Quarry.

As the council continues to deliver (and potentially grow) devolved services, it may help future plans how it sees itself: as a strategic leader, a delivery organisation, an advocate for the area, or a combination of these. In programming future work, the council can ensure that activity remains aligned to core objectives and capacity is focused on work that genuinely contributes to desired outcomes.

Effective organisational leadership (councillors)

The Leader of the council has introduced a collaborative approach to decision-making, with decisions usually made by consensual cross-party working. There is a 'leaders of political groups' group, which meets regularly, as well as communicating informally outside of these meetings. This helps to build a constructive political environment where all parties are involved in decisions.

Peers heard of some examples where it would help to have a clearer agreed strategic direction (for example, strategic approach to asset management and devolution plans), and a clearer scheme of delegation from councillors to senior officers (and senior officers to managers – see below). This should reinforce the principle that councillors set strategic direction, while officers provide professional advice on the development of that strategy and lead its delivery.

The election in 2027 will likely result in a high intake of new councillors as several long-standing councillors have publicly stated their intention to stand down. The next twelve months present an opportunity to prepare for the potential intake of several new councillors, ensuring that a comprehensive induction programme is prepared well in advance. This should include planning introductory and mandatory training, and reviewing the council's recent achievements, to be able to share with new councillors and feed into Town Council Strategy 2020-2030 reporting and revision process.

Effective organisational leadership – officers

The leadership shown by the town clerk is impressive, and highly valued by staff and councillors who spoke with the peer team. The town clerk has led the officers through a significant period of transformation and change, new frameworks are in place for

corporate planning, budget setting, and team objective setting. It also includes the office move from Grove House and a staff restructure. This has been done with strategic investment in management development, introduction of corporate values performance management, regular staff engagement and collaborative leadership arrangements, all of which underpin future improvements.

There is a positive atmosphere around the council building. Staff told the team that they genuinely like working here and are proud to work for the council. Staff are committed, enthusiastic and dedicated to the work that they and the council more widely do. This includes staff who have worked in other councils, including at different tiers of local government. Staff gave several reasons why they wanted to stay working at WSMTC, such as 'partnership working,' 'management', and 'interesting work'. The council should continue to harness this enthusiasm to further build its confidence, working alongside partners and residents, to deliver its agreed priorities for the town.

The council has invested in leadership and management capability and capacity through a programme bringing together managers from across the organisation with the senior leadership team. Managers at all levels described how this has led to an increased sense of 'one team' across the organisation and demonstrated a clear understanding about their role in delivering agreed priorities.

There are sometimes delays in decision-making or actions due to pinch-points at senior officer level for sign-off of projects or plans. Having successfully stabilised and strengthened the organisation, there is now an opportunity for senior officers to increase delegation to managers. Senior officers would maintain effective governance, oversight and appropriate checks and balances, but managers would be empowered to act, ensuring continuity of delivery when key individuals are not at work (for example, on annual leave or through sickness absence).

The management team below SMT demonstrated a strong appetite for professional development, taking ownership of their growth and building the confidence to operate with greater autonomy. There is an opportunity to further strengthen this by supporting the development of political awareness and judgement at this level and below. Over time, this will help to build a more resilient and capable organisation,

with leadership that is sustainable and distributed across different levels of management.

All levels of the organisation identified a need to improve practical processes and systems such as administrative arrangements for council committee meetings. Although this may be a lengthy piece of work, this is an ideal time. There are several months before the next election, and the council will be in a better position to support any new councillors if practical and logistical systems have already been revised and established. The peer team suggest dedicated additional resources to the democratic services team to enable this with regards to supporting councillors, and in time expand this work across practical arrangements across the organisation.

Partnership working and place leadership

Partners speak very highly of the town council, recognising how effectively it delivers within its available capacity and resources. WSMTC is transitioning from a service provider mindset to a 'place leader' role, demonstrating ambition to shape wider outcomes for the town. There is a keen sense of shared purpose and commitment to delivery, with staff and councillors aligned around improving outcomes for residents. Partners indicated that the town council was in a good position to grow this role.

There are several service level agreements in place with partners, such as the local police and North Somerset Council (NSC), but there are opportunities for the town council to be more strategic. NSC recently secured significant external funding (including £20M in Levelling Up funding and £20M through Pride in Place) for the town. WSMTC could be a core strategic partner with NSC to shape how that investment is deployed. The town council should continue to work collaboratively with NSC to be clear about what it wants to achieve with these funds.

Partners are clearly working with the town council on various community safety initiatives, for example tackling anti-social behaviour, organised crime and money laundering. Partners felt that there is an opportunity for WSMTC to strengthen its involvement in the regeneration of retail spaces to help revitalise the town centre, whilst recognising this is largely in the unitary authority's remit. The council can build on its experience supporting the local foodbank to operate in a vacant shop, but partners and some officers felt that the further revitalisation was needed due to the

numbers of retail vacancies. The peer team felt there is an opportunity for WSMTC to continue to build on its relationship with North Somerset Council and other partners to support a more joined-up and collaborative approach to these spaces.

Place leadership

In addition to the key recommendations outlined in section three of this report, the peer team also recommend the following actions:

- **Undertake business process review and revision as soon as possible.** This is to ensure that all new processes are effective and in place before the election in 2027. This should include looking at how responsibilities and decisions could be delegated.
- **Continue to work collaboratively with NSC, ensuring WSMTC is actively involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of work within the town that NSC has secured funds to deliver.** The town council should be at the heart of this work, supporting NSC, delivering where appropriate, working with partners to ensure that the funds reach where it is most needed.

5.3 Governance and culture

After a period of transformational change, there is a strong culture of respect, transparency, and challenge. This is demonstrated by the collaborative approach at a councillor level and the strength of the management team. Officers and councillors better understand their respective roles and work constructively together.

Significant governance improvements had already been implemented prior to the peer challenge, including revision of Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegations Financial Regulations (all using NALC models), reviewing committee work and report writing frameworks.

The council is at a point where it can continue to move away from traditional perceptions of parish-level operation and towards a more modern, strategic model. This reflects its growing service delivery and responsibility across WSM.

It is important for WSMTC to ensure that governance arrangements and

organisational behaviours are clearly understood, confidently applied, and actively enabling delivery at scale. The recommendations at the end of this section represent the next stage of maturity, not fundamental weaknesses.

Robust governance arrangements

There is a committee system in place, which politicians and officers find clear and effective. This is supported by a small democratic services team. As the council's service delivery and activities grow, the council will need to be mindful of capacity pressures on this small team.

The peer team had several discussions about the limited capacity in democratic services team to adequately support committee meetings for different reasons, including frequency of meetings. The peers suggest reviewing committee scheduling alongside other business processes to ensure that they are aligned to agreed priorities. Reducing the frequency of some committees could release capacity to focus on other councillor priorities.

The peer team considered the council's Corporate Risk Register for 2024–2025 and found it to be comprehensive and clearly action-focused, with a strong emphasis on team and operational risks. Building on this, there is an opportunity to further strengthen the strategic focus of the register, including ensuring that reputational risks are consistently identified and understood. This could be supported by enhancing the role of the council's communications function in advising on reputational considerations as part of routine decision-making.

Building councillor capacity and capability

As the council's ambition and profile grow, so too does the importance of supporting councillors in their roles. There is a clear opportunity to invest further in councillor development, particularly in areas such as governance, decision-making, media handling, and the distinction between strategic leadership and operational delivery. Ensuring councillors are well-equipped and confident will be increasingly important as the organisation operates in a more complex and visible environment.

Peers heard from councillors who noted some variation in the standard of reports.

Clear, evidence-based and balanced reporting, setting out risks and opportunities, supports effective decision-making. Building a consistent approach will support officers to contribute professional insights at the right point in the decision-making process. One option is to establish a short-term task and finish groups to ensure councillor involvement early in policy developments.

The peer team also recommend looking at councillor allowances. There is a good case for ensuring that they recognise the size and scale of the work of WSMTC and responsibilities that have been devolved from NSC.

Organisational culture

The council has achieved a clear, positive, and significant shift in organisational culture. Relationships across the organisation are constructive and collaborative, and there is a stronger sense of shared purpose among councillors and officers. This is reflected in a culture that supports delivery, encourages cooperation, and demonstrates a genuine commitment to improvement. The council has also built increasing civic credibility, with officers showing a strong understanding of the organisation and its role within the community. The overall direction of travel is therefore clearly positive.

As the organisation continues to mature, the peers recommend embedding learning from experience as an integral part of effective governance. Building a culture where staff are encouraged to reflect on how they work, as well as what they deliver, will support stronger collaboration, adaptability, and resilience. This includes recognising personal strengths, identifying areas for development, and understanding how different approaches can influence outcomes.

Communications

Staff and councillors indicated that the council does not always consistently and proactively promote its positive work or use consistent town council branding. This has been a conscious choice. The peer team encourage the council to keep this under review. Council activity is shared through the council's website and social media channels, but it is not always clearly identifiable as town council led. WSMTC



should be confident communicate clearly how the council spends its money and the impacts and benefits the services and facilities are having upon the town and its residents. Without doing so, the council does not always get the credit for the work that it does.

An example is the updated town council website. When completed, it will be part of a town-wide partnership website, intending to be more accessible to residents and businesses. This is a decision that has been taken partly in light of town council resources, but also a desire to be a clear part of the town community infrastructure. The peer team suggest that use is monitored, using tools such as Google analytics or similar to ensure that the council knows the impact it is having online. More communications resource may be needed to do this.

While activity levels are high, there is an opportunity to strengthen how this is translated into a coherent external narrative. This includes ensuring that communication reflects not just what the council is doing, but the scale, ambition, and outcomes it is seeking to achieve.

A more structured communications and engagement strategy would support this, including:

- Clearer articulation of who the council is and what it does
- More proactive approaches to addressing misinformation
- Broader and more representative engagement, ensuring the council is not disproportionately influenced by small or unrepresentative groups
- A stronger understanding of resident perception, supported by wider consultation and insight gathering

Several of the key recommendations in section three relate to Governance and Culture. The peer team also recommend the council progress the following actions:

- **Strengthen how proposals and decisions are brought forward to councillors.** Set up a start and finish group to look at preliminary stages in policy changes and in shaping new initiatives. Ensure that councillors feed into the process

- **Develop a comprehensive councillor induction and ongoing councillor development programme.** This can include online as well as face-to-face sessions.
- **Develop clear council identity and narrative and consider reviewing the policy around branding.** Consider putting the Town's crest visibly on assets and publications or saying, "delivered by the town council for Weston-super-Mare". The peer team recognise the need for the council to achieve the right balance between place branding and corporate recognition. The LGA's communications hub can help with this, [Comms Hub – communications support | Local Government Association](#).

5.4 Financial planning and management

The council demonstrates a clear and positive awareness of the importance of financial management. Councillors and officers recognise that financial sustainability matters, alongside a willingness to think differently, explore opportunities and consider income generation. This provides a solid foundation for the next stage of development. Financial governance arrangements are in place, including medium-term financial planning, a cautious approach to devolution proposals, success in applying for external funding and proactive financial management.

WSMTC have published their audited accounts up to 2024. It is understood that the unaudited accounts for 2025/26 remain with the external auditor following a query raised by a member of the public. At the time of the peer challenge, the timing for completion of this audit had not yet been confirmed, and the council continues to engage with the external auditor on this matter.

The peer team received a short statement from the internal auditor indicating no immediate or pressing issues.

General reserves

The council's general reserves remain below the level recommended in the Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) Practitioners Guide, (published by NALC March 2026 [Practitioners' Guide 2026/27](#)). This guide advises holding the equivalent of three months to 12 months of net revenue expenditure. Although the forecast shows reserves improving to around £800,000 by March 2027, this still falls short of best-practice expectations. There is no statutory minimum or maximum, but in parish and town councils, external auditors often seek an explanation where general reserves fall outside this range. The risk remains that, during periods of financial pressure, planned contributions to reserves may be diverted to address other budget gaps.

General reserves play a key role in providing a buffer against unforeseen events, income volatility, or emerging cost pressures. There is an opportunity to establish a clearer position on the appropriate level of reserves, informed by risk, scale of activity and future ambitions.

To strengthen financial resilience, it would be beneficial for councillors to receive training on the purpose and importance of general reserves. Establishing a formal General Reserves Policy and Action Plan would also help by setting a clear target range based on risk assessment and outlining how reserves will be maintained or replenished over time. Taking these steps would significantly enhance the council's ability to respond to unexpected challenges while continuing to deliver its priorities.

Project budgeting

General reserves were reduced due to the capital contribution required for the Quarry project, highlighting the importance of robust contingency planning in future capital schemes. Given the current volatility in construction and materials costs, ensuring that projects are financially resilient from the outset will help support the council's longer-term financial stability.

Devolution and financial planning

The council's cautious approach to devolution is appropriate given the limited reserves available to absorb unforeseen liabilities. The council's process requires

that any decision to take on new assets or services must be informed by a full understanding of both the immediate revenue costs and the longer-term capital investment required, when significant investment in additional assets is needed (for example, staffing, equipment).

Income generation

The council has demonstrated impressive performance in securing grant funding for capital projects and continues to explore additional income opportunities. The peer team heard from councillors that there is very little Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money available but encourage the council to keep exploring this with NSC. There may be potential for the Planning Committee to advocate for CIL contributions within planning application responses to help strengthen the council's ability to secure funding for essential community infrastructure.

There is a clear appetite and a range of ideas around income generation, from officers and councillors. The peer team recommend that WSMTC develops a more deliberate income generation framework, where:

- Opportunities are prioritised based on impact and deliverability
- Activity aligns to wider strategic objectives
- Income generation is treated as an ongoing programme, rather than a series of standalone initiatives

For example, there may be opportunities to:

- Explore commercial or shared service models, such as extending public realm services to other local parish councils
- Identify ways to maximise local economic benefit, ensuring council activity supports wider town prosperity

Aligning financial planning with strategic priorities

The council demonstrates high ambition, which is a clear strength but needs to be consistently supported by alignment between aspiration and available resources and capacity. This includes a clear understanding of funding sources and constraints and will help ensure that ambition translates into achievable, sustainable outcomes.



Peers also heard that financial and strategic discussions are not always fully aligned. Embedding financial considerations into all strategic and operational decision-making and strengthening the link between budget setting and delivery planning will help ensure financial decision-making to support the council's priorities and outcomes, ensuring that every pound spent is clearly connected to agreed priorities and the difference it is intended to make.

Develop a clear medium-long term financial strategy

The council has a medium-term financial plan until 2030. This aligns with the Town Council Strategy 2020-2030.

As has already been stated, the council's current financial priority is rebuilding the reserves. The peer team suggest that the councils looks longer-term, accepting the realities of a fluctuating financial situation, affected by many things beyond the council's control.

The peers suggest explicitly considering how council decisions affect financial sustainability and improve the alignment between ambition and available resources. The measured approach to devolution of assets and services from NSC is a good approach, but the council could built on its success in winning funds to explore alternative funding for capital projects, such as the Public Works Loan Board (through NALC).

In addition to the key recommendation in section three, the peer team recommend the following:

- **Establish a General Reserves Policy and Action Plan**
- **Set a target reserves range and a plan for maintaining reserves**
- **Explore income generating activities in a strategic and targeted manner**
- **Improve longer-term financial planning with clear links to the council's ambitions**

5.5 Capacity for improvement

Despite a prolonged period of organisational change, the peer team highlighted staff engagement, morale and commitment consistently throughout the visit. This forms a significant organisational strength upon which future improvements will be built.

Workforce planning

Peers found that staff are committed, enthusiastic and dedicated to the work they deliver. As the council continues to grow and develop its ambitions, there is an opportunity to further support staff through the production of a dedicated workforce strategy. This will help WSMTC ensure staff continue to be supported, developed and well-deployed so the organisation has the skills and capacity to deliver its priorities now and in the future. As part of this, the council may also need to review and strengthen its recruitment strategy and processes.

Peers heard from some councillors and officers that capacity pressures exist across several parts of the organisation. While financial considerations are well established in major proposals, capacity and delivery implications are not always clearly linked. This is particularly important going forward as the council considers its future appetite for further devolved services.

The peer team also suggests that a skills analysis would be beneficial and help establish a process for future capability mapping aligned to strategic priorities. This would reframe staff from an operational resource to a strategic asset enabling growth and providing a structured working environment where priorities and workloads are clear.

Volunteers

The town council has a significant number of volunteers, working at many different sites across the town. They bring considerable knowledge, experience, enthusiasm and time and are well respected and appreciated by the council. Volunteering is known to support improved mental health and wellbeing, offer valuable work experience for young people and long-term unemployed people, and help reduce isolation, particularly for older and disabled people. Volunteers' feedback to the council and in discussion with the peer team demonstrate that volunteering with the

council lead to positive, successful outcomes for those involved.

The peer team suggest that the council quantify and qualify these benefits, for example, through an anonymous survey of volunteers exploring the impact of volunteering. Has volunteering for example at Weston Museum or Clara's Cottage, helped people into employment? Quantifying the value of volunteer contribution will help inform decision-making and support planning for future resourcing needs.

Effective strategic planning and sequencing

The council demonstrates a strong and commendable drive to deliver, underpinned by a clear sense of purpose and commitment to improving outcomes for the community. The delivery focus would benefit from a more structured approach to planning, sequencing, and organisational learning, ensuring that effort is consistently aligned with capacity, impact, and long-term priorities. Clear sequencing will help to minimise the risk of equating activity with progress and will further support prioritisation and clarity.

The peer team recommend strengthening how proposals and decisions are brought forward, ensuring that all council motions and projects include a clear delivery timeline. This should include an indication of how it will integrate into an overall delivery plan if approved and a capacity assessment to identify if it requires additional investment. Encouraging early-stage reflection on deliverability before proposals are progressed will improve decision quality and reduce pressure on delivery teams.

This approach also supports a more strategic use of organisational capacity. In practice, it may mean progressing fewer initiatives at any one time but delivering them to a higher standard with better outcomes. The Weston Museum is a good example of focusing on one well-scoped, deliverable project and executing it exceptionally well.

Organisational development

Within the wider operational framework, the workplace is continually evolving, shaped by changing workforce demographics, expectations, and priorities. As this evolves, there is an opportunity to further embed a culture of self-awareness,

reflection, and continuous improvement across the organisation. The peer team suggest that the council explores imaginative ways to broaden staff experience. This may include cross-authority learning, shadowing, and exposure to external best practice, all of which can provide valuable insight and act as a form of constructive challenge for officers and members alike.

In addition to the key recommendation in section three, the peer team recommend the following:

- **Develop an active workforce strategy to capture workforce learning and knowledge and consider succession planning.** It should also identify future needs for the council, looking ahead to further devolution of assets
- **Undertake a skills analysis of current staff, identifying skills shortages to target in recruitment**
- **Introduce a sequencing framework for projects (short, medium and long terms).** Ensure councillors are involved in sequencing plans and know where their role lies.

5.6 Devolution of assets and services

NSC has a local devolution programme to “give communities greater influence over the spaces and services they value most” ([Local devolution | North Somerset Council](#)). It engages with town and parish councils to devolve and manage local assets, such as parks, play areas and community spaces through flexible delivery pathways. WSMTC have actively engaged with NSC in this programme and intend to continue to do so. The council is clear that it would be willing to take on more but were also clear that they require the resources to ensure they are delivered to a high quality. Councillors expressed concern that the council should not overreach. The current approach has been intentionally developed to protect both councils and local council taxpayers through robust due diligence, long-term financial modelling and partnership with NSC.

Strategic approach

The town council demonstrates clear ambition to take greater control locally, alongside a recognition that assets, services, and local leadership can drive identity, outcomes, and long-term change. WSMTC has researched and evaluated all options before agreeing to take on activity to ensure financial reliability and has identified additional North Somerset assets it may wish to bring under its control at some point.

Building on the collaborative work already undertaken with NSC, there is an opportunity to develop a clearer, more strategic, programmed approach for WSMTC and its aspirations to take responsibility for further devolved services. This could cover explicit criteria such as aims/benefits for the local community, capacity, financial implications, governance arrangements and taking on devolved assets in a formalised and programmed way agreed with NSC. This will ensure that that transfers are deliberate, planned and outcome focused. This programmed approach could future-proof assets. For example, when considering play areas, early thinking could be given to how emerging trends (including technology, digital engagement, wellbeing and changing patterns of use) may influence how future generations interact with these spaces.

The longer-term approach could mean working with NSC to jointly manage any reputational considerations for either council in the loss of local amenities where WSMTC does not accept their transfer, even where this reflects sound financial judgement.

The peer team also recommend seeking opportunities to acquire or influence income-generating assets, such as car parks or commercial opportunities such as kiosks or retail units, which can help offset costs and create a more sustainable overall asset portfolio.

Focus on outcomes

In addition to physical assets, the council is delivering a youth service. A recent report from UK Youth demonstrates that the Town Council's FY2526 youth budget of £106,711 delivers a benefit to the taxpayer £341,475.20 which enables improved physical and mental health and a reduction in crime

(<https://www.ukyouth.org/2025/02/uk-youth-in-direct-call-to-government-to-realise-benefits-of-youth-work/>). The town council now needs to translate all work in this service into tangible metrics demonstrating this return on investment on a regular basis. For example, Sport England's analysis on health and social care savings by improving physical activity (<https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-inspiration/sport-and-physical-activity-generates-over-100-billion-social-value>) positions the town council's investment in parks, play areas and open spaces including Grove Park, Ellenborough Park East, Clarence Park and Millenium Park as valuable, preventative public health infrastructure.

To quantify this, using Sport England's figures, if these enhanced play areas support in the region of approximately five hundred child play visits per day (as recently reported by the council), this equates to c.3,500 weekly visits. This could reasonably correspond to up to 1,000 regular users achieving moderate weekly physical activity. In turn, Sport England suggests that this level of activity could be associated with up to £230,000 of health and social care savings annually, a significant return on investment.

This also reinforces the council's role as a long-term steward of place. The town council is uniquely positioned to focus on the enduring value of local assets and services, ensuring they are protected, enhanced, and aligned to community need over the long term.

Recommendations:

- **Set out WSMTC's evaluation criteria for potential devolved services or assets.** Ensure these align with the town council's strategy.
- **Work with NSC to look longer-term at assets and services that could be devolved at some point in the future.** These may ultimately become income generating. Keep the conversation going with NSC about the future.
- **Take a more programmed approach to NSC's devolution plans.** Where possible, sketch out or work up project plans ahead of assets becoming available
- **Work closely with NSC to mitigate any negative impacts where closures**

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Chief Executive (Interim): Jenny Rowlands

President: Baroness Grey-Thompson

may occur in the town

- **Consider calculating returns on investment for devolved or potentially devolved assets and services.** Use this information to ensure communities know how much you are working to deliver for them.

6. Action plan

The senior political and managerial leadership of the council should review and reflect on the findings and recommendations from this CPC.

To promote the principle of transparency, the CPC process requires the final report to be published in-full within three months of the review being completed. In this instance, this requires the report to be published no later than 23 July 2026.

Weston-super-Mare Town Council should develop and publish an action plan within five-months of the peer team being onsite, no later than 23 September 2026. Dates were discussed with the town council. Due to summer holidays, the report and action plan should go to full council in September 2026 and therefore published with associated council papers. The action plan should provide clarity on the activity, milestones, and timelines that the council will work to in responding to the team's findings.

7. Contact details

The LGA recognises that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

There have been discussions about the costs involved in a Progress Review in 12 months' time, which could provide space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

In the meantime, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is able to discuss any further support that you may require by emailing anders.hanson@nalc.gov.uk.

Appendix A – What is CPC?

CPC is a valued improvement and assurance tool that is delivered by the sector for the sector. It involves a team of senior local government councillors and officer peers undertaking a comprehensive review of key information and spending three days at the council to provide robust, strategic, and credible challenge and support.

CPC forms a key part of the [improvement and assurance framework](#) for local government. It is underpinned by the principles of [Sector-led Improvement](#) (SLI) put in place by councils and the LGA to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector. These principles state that councils are responsible for their own performance; accountable locally, not nationally; share a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector; and rely on the LGA to provide the tools to support them.

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five areas which form the core components of all CPCs. These are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities? Is there an organisational-wide approach to continuous improvement, with frequent monitoring, reporting on and updating of performance and improvement plans?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges? What is the relative financial resilience of the council?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to bring about the improvements it needs, including delivering on locally identified priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?



As part of the five core areas outlined above, every CPC has a strong focus on financial sustainability, performance, governance, and assurance. Weston-super-Mare Town Council also asked that the peer team looked at the Devolution of assets and services from North Somerset Council.

The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are designed to support improvement, not inspection. They are not intended to provide a detailed or technical assessment of plans and proposals. Instead, the peer team uses its experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information shared with them, the things they observe, and the material they review.

To prepare, the peer team looks at a range of documents and information to understand the council and the challenges it is facing. This includes a position statement prepared by the council before the visit, which sets out the local context and highlights areas for the team to focus on. The preparation also involves reviewing an LGA Finance briefing (based on public reports from the council's website).

The peer team then spend three or four days at the council. During this time, they gather evidence, information, and views by meeting with council staff, councillors, and external stakeholders. This helps them build a rounded picture of the council's strengths and areas for improvement.