



Local Government Association - Peer Review

In March 2023, the Town Council welcomed the Local Government Association and the National Association of Local Councils to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge.

The purpose of this scheme is to provide benefit to local authorities, offering guidance, mentorship, and advisory reports to support councils as they develop.

Whilst high tier authorities are regularly offered such opportunities, at the time Morecambe Town Council was only the fourth parish and town council to be offered the opportunity nationally.

The report from the review was recently published and it is a requirement of the Council to respond to the feedback ahead of an update visit which is scheduled to take place in February 2024.

The Corporate Peer Challenge delivered by the LGA is an important milestone in Morecambe Town Council's improvement journey. The report is a testament to the hard work of staff and the continued efforts of members to improve Morecambe and the services the Council provides to the town and residents.

There is recognition that whilst progress has been made, the Council is at the start of its journey with its new administration and there is much to do in coming years. For instance, the Community Action Plan needs to be revisited to become more strategic and the Council is in a position to look to capitalise on new opportunities as they arise. This is timely, as the Council also must set a new budget in the new year, and a revised strategic plan will help to inform the Council's financial position over the next three years.

Some of the highlights of the report by the LGA include:

- "The peer team witnessed a commitment to continuous improvement at MTC and were impressed by the developments that have been put in place over the last two years. As stated by an interviewee (external stakeholder), "there is hope, optimism and a sense of looking forward".
- "Commitment to developing income generating opportunities is also evident; with a programme of events and the initiation of a district-wide weeding service commissioned by Lancashire County Council, providing additional revenue for the council.
- "This is an ambitious town council with a desire to make a fundamental and long-lasting change to Morecambe. This is illustrated through the drive and progress that has been made by MTC over the last 2 years by both members and officers, demonstrated for example through improvements to governance arrangements, expansion of public realm work, enhanced engagement with the community and delivery of a successful programme of events.
- The peer team saw commitment to Morecambe from MTC members, staff and key stakeholders, including Lancaster City Council, Morecambe Business Improvement District (BID), Eden Project Morecambe and Marketing Lancashire, matched with a strong vision for Morecambe and visible leadership from the chief executive officer and chair. This has contributed to a sense of optimism for the town from the range of stakeholders that we spoke to."

The Council must publish an initial response to the key recommendations outlined in the report and at its meeting held on 19 October 2023, the Council approved the below summary of actions.

Proposed High-Level Response to the LGA's Peer Challenge Review:

The Council would like to thank the Local Government Association, the National Association of Local Councils and peers from Frome Town Council and Falmouth Town Council.

The Council has considered the report and is encouraged by the positive feedback.

The Council acknowledges the areas of focus as highlighted within the recommendations and sets out its high-level plan to address these below.

Place Shaping

The Council agrees that it should be undertaking a key role in place-shaping for Morecambe.

Since the LGA's visit, a new Planning and Regeneration Committee has been formed, the primary responsibility of which is to play a significant role in place leadership, working with other agencies to oversee the Council's input into matters concerning the planning and regeneration of Morecambe, including projects earmarked for key sites such as Frontierland.

Mission Statement

The Council will be considering a new corporate mission statement when it revises its strategic action plan, underpinned by shared outcomes and aligned to its longer-term aims and objectives.

Staffing

The Council has already undertaken a full staffing review since the LGA's visit. Interviews have taken place for positions and new officers are due to commence employment in the coming weeks.

It is anticipated that the new staffing team will better meet the current and future ambitions of the Council, to ensure the authority can deliver against its strategic plan.

Partnerships

The Council acknowledges the benefits of becoming further embedded in local partnerships and community groups, to influence the delivery of shared outcomes. The Town Council has the capacity to adopt a role as a facilitative council, working to champion the local voice to influence the delivery of shared outcomes through other authorities such as Lancaster City Council and Lancashire County Council.

Communications Strategy

A PR and Marketing Officer will commence employment in the coming weeks and they will be tasked with developing a communications strategy that increases and enhances the reach of internal and external communications. This will include a review of the website and help to ensure information about the Council is updated more frequently for residents, visitors, and stakeholders alike.

Civility and Governance

As noted by the LGA, the Council became the first parish and town council in Lancashire to achieve Quality Gold accreditation through NALC's Local Council Award Scheme. This scheme assess standards in transparency, responsible governance, and exceptional community impact, with Quality Gold illustrating that the Council is not only meeting basic requirements, but is also demonstrating good practice in a range of areas.

The Council has undertaken significant work in recent years to address issues identified in historic audits, and it has improved governance - this is evidenced through the 2021-2022 internal and external audit reports that provide assurance that the Council now has a sound system of internal control.

The Council will continue to focus on its governance and procedures, with the new Finance and Governance Committee tasked with providing periodic reports and recommendations back to the Council.

Branding & Information

The Council acknowledges that it can sometimes be confusing for residents to know which of the three tiers of local government they should contact in relation to which service. The Council hopes this will be clarified as it defines its communications strategy and promotes the activities within its remit.

The Council is considering how it can develop its street-level branding for residents to access information. Some discussions have taken place regarding the Principal Authority's decision to close the Visitor Information Centre, and dialogue is ongoing to ascertain the feasibility of the Town Council supporting a similar service in the future.

Conversations have also been had regarding the Council's noticeboards throughout the town. The current noticeboards that have fallen into disrepair are being removed and the Environment Committee is currently exploring options to ensure that information can continue to be easily accessible by a wider demographic who may not have access to the Internet.

It is a key responsibility of the newly formed Planning and Regeneration Committee to play a significant role in any rebrand of Morecambe that will provide a clearer tourism offer.

Consultations

The Council has noted that it has undertaken some good online consultation to date, and accepts that more targeted offline approaches to consulting with communities should be considered in the future. It is hoped this will help to engage with hard-to-reach communities in ways that local residents can easily access and understand.

It is a key responsibility of the newly formed Planning and Regeneration Committee to hold regular meetings and consultations with the community, and engage with local stakeholders and authorities, to establish a vision for Morecambe's future.

Income

The Council will be employing a prudent approach when considering additional income generating opportunities - including applying for additional grant funding for projects and schemes. One of the key roles of the new Finance Officer will be to advise the Council on potential funding opportunities and any financial risks with undertaking service delivery. A key role of the Events Officer will also be to ensure the Council's annual events programme delivers a return to help subsidise costs.