

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Frome Town Council

15, 16 and 17 July 2025

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 Frome Town Council from 15, 16 & 17 July 2025. This was the council's first Corporate Peer Challenge.

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.

This report provides Frome Town Council 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

Frome Town Council is an ambitious, values-driven organisation with a distinctive ethos of fostering community capacity and energy – organising, nurturing, co-ordinating, advocating and connecting – all delivered in a way that is 'made differently'. This approach has helped establish the council as a highly valued and integral part of the Frome community. Notable recognition includes the Non-League Club Award at the Football Supporters Association (FSA) Awards for its efforts to protect Badgers Hill Stadium – the first time this award has ever been given to a town council – as well as being named Star Council of the Year and securing second place

in Council Project of the Year awards by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in 2015.

Over recent years, the council has taken on greater responsibilities as it has grown. Whilst this is in part due to the broader devolution initiative prompted by Somerset Council's financial circumstances, it is also often out of a sense of duty and responsiveness to local need. This includes stretching into areas that go beyond the traditional remit of local government at this level, such as climate and the environment, refugee support, and young people's mental health. As a result, the council has evolved from a £1m to a £4m organisation, significantly increasing its visibility and impact.

This growth has been underpinned by a culture of innovation, a commitment to community engagement, and a willingness to operate beyond conventional boundaries. However, such expansion brings with it new challenges that require strengthened systems of governance, leadership, performance management, project management, and financial and risk management.

The peer team found that Frome Town Council is widely respected for its enabling approach and civic leadership. Its ambitions are clear and well understood internally. Yet, to deliver sustainably at its current scale, the council now has the opportunity to invest in the systems and capabilities that support increased strategic clarity, improved financial planning, governance consistency, and further internal cohesion. Additionally, in light of likely ongoing devolution and the evolving landscape of regional partnerships, there is a clear opportunity for the council to continue to strengthen its relationship with Somerset Council. Doing so would support more effective planning and a smoother possible transition of local assets, ensuring that community needs continue to be met in a collaborative and forward-looking way.

Staff reflected positively on working in a friendly and supportive environment, and the council benefits from a committed, loyal and motivated workforce. However, there is



a perception that the senior management team feels unnecessarily remote, and tensions are increasingly noticeable across the senior political and managerial leadership. These tensions appear to reflect:

- a diversity of views around the evolving remit and purpose of the organisation
- the changing requirements of how the council needs to be managed and governed
- contrasting approaches of ‘by the book’ versus ‘just do it’
- a blurring of roles and responsibilities between councillors and managerial leadership

Addressing these tensions constructively will be essential. The council now has an opportunity to dedicate time and space for open dialogue across its leadership, ensuring alignment and cohesion as it continues to grow. This will support the wellbeing of its people and the positive progression of the organisation.

Recommendations

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

2.1 Develop a medium-term financial plan

Introduce a medium-term financial plan and strengthen forecasting to support long-term sustainability and prepare for the financial implications of future asset devolution.

2.2 Strengthen governance and decision-making

Continue to enhance transparency, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure governance structures enable both agile decision-making and strong accountability.

2.3 Invest in councillor development and culture

Improve induction processes, promote shared leadership development, and foster a more cohesive and respectful culture among councillors.

2.4 Embed project and performance management

Introduce basic project management tools and a performance framework to support effective delivery, learning, and continuous improvement.

2.5 Prioritise staff wellbeing and development

Recognise staff as the council's greatest asset by maintaining a strong focus on welfare, health and wellbeing, and providing ongoing support and training.

2.6 Deepen collaboration with Somerset Council

Continue to build and strengthen the council's relationship with Somerset Council to support effective partnership working and shared outcomes.

2.7 Align communications with strategic goals

Develop a communications and engagement strategy that clearly links the Council Plan with delivery, ensuring consistent messaging and community alignment.

2.8 Review and strengthen risk management

Update the Risk Management Plan, particularly in relation to future service delivery and devolved responsibilities.

2.9 Leverage sector tools and networks

Make greater use of sector resources, initiatives, and professional networks to support councillor and staff development, and to access relevant insights and best practice.

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.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

3.1 The 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:

- Helen Ball, Town Clerk, Shrewsbury Town Council
- Cllr Paul Hilliard, Christchurch Town Council
- Sally Jones, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Bridgwater Town Council
- Justin Griggs, Head of Policy and Communications, National Association of Local Councils
- Chris Bowron, Senior Regional Advisor, Local Government Association
- David Harding, Regional Advisor (South West) & Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

3.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all corporate peer challenges. These areas 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?
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?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

3.3 The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the council and its context, challenges and opportunities. The team then spent three days onsite in Frome, during which they:

- gathered evidence, information, and views from more than 19 meetings, in addition to further research and reading
- spoke to over 50 council staff, councillors and external stakeholders

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and councillors.

4. 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.

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.

4.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Frome Town Council's Council Plan 2025 to 2027 sets out a bold, community-led vision that centres on wellbeing, environmental sustainability, economic vitality, and transparent governance. It reflects a commitment to managing growing responsibilities while staying true to the town's distinctive identity and values. The plan provides clear strategic direction and has enabled officers to deliver services in a cohesive and consistent way. Whilst not stressed as strongly as could be, it does recognise that as Somerset Council will likely want to devolve further services and assets, Frome Town Council may choose to take on and face greater responsibilities. This is already having an impact on the current functions of the council, and it will likely impact the future role, function and purpose of the Town Council as it continues to grow.

Whilst the objectives within the Town Plan are considered bold, the absence of measurable (SMART) objectives currently limits the council's ability to demonstrate its progress and fully evaluate its impact. Introducing defined targets would enhance clarity, improve transparency, and help communicate achievements more effectively to both residents and partners.



This strategic document is supported by an internal Work Programme that underpins day-to-day delivery of the Council Plan and provides a structure for oversight through council committees. While this framework supports operational consistency, it's not yet fully aligned with the strategic aims set out in the Council Plan, which limits its ability to drive joined up working across the organisation. Project planning could also be strengthened by applying more established methodologies, and decision-making frameworks need to be more robust. Improving these areas would help ensure resources are used more efficiently and focused on agreed priorities. In addition, there is currently insufficient senior management oversight of significant programmes and projects – particularly those with higher levels of risk or complexity. Introducing more regular and focused oversight at this level would improve project governance, support earlier identification of delivery risks, and ensure resources are used more efficiently and directed towards agreed priorities.

The council's strong reputation for community-led initiatives continues to be a distinctive strength and a key part of its identity. This approach is well regarded by residents and partners, with recent examples including support for the Cheese & Grain, taking on the Key Centre, and expanding the ranger team to manage public spaces with and for the community. These initiatives demonstrate the council's commitment to working collaboratively and responsively. However, staff have highlighted that while current projects are valued, there isn't always a consistent process for reviewing their impact or assessing whether they should continue. Without this, it's harder to ensure that resources are being used effectively or that learning is being captured. Developing a council-wide performance framework – including but not limited to a focus on benchmarking and comparative analysis – would help monitor progress, support learning from others, and ensure that projects remain responsive to changing needs.

Frome Town Council has long been at the forefront of community engagement, with its distinctive approach sitting at the heart of its 'made differently' ethos. Over time,



this has continued to evolve, deepening the council's connections with residents and partners alike. This includes the introduction of Go Vocal, a digital platform designed to support participatory decision-making. It offers tools for surveys, idea sharing, mapping, voting, and even participatory budgeting – helping residents engage with projects in ways that suit their time and interests. Alongside this, the council continues to use more traditional methods of interaction, maintaining accessibility across different groups. However, as the public sector landscape becomes more complex – with blurred lines between local and unitary responsibilities, rising demand for services, and growing expectations around transparency – clearer communication around project outcomes and the respective roles of Frome Town Council and Somerset Council is becoming increasingly important. As the lines continue to blur due to the changing local government landscape, partly because of the devolution agenda, some residents are becoming unsure who is responsible for what and have turned to the Town Council for support on wider public services. In this context, Frome Town Council is not only responding to community expectations but actively helping to shape them. However, as the council continues to evolve, there is a growing need to carefully consider what it takes on. At the heart of this lies in it experiencing a shift from the fundamentals of its 'made differently' – ethos rooted in enabling and connecting – towards a more service-oriented role. This transition has brought differing views and perspectives, which are contributing to emerging tensions across the political and managerial leadership. Strengthening the council's messaging and reinforcing the trust it holds within the community will be vital to not only to manage expectations, but to ensure its leadership role remains clearly understood and valued.

There's also scope for the council to strengthen its collaboration with external partners to help amplify its messaging and improve outcomes for the community. External stakeholders pointed to areas like local economic development – where challenges such as skill shortages, empty retail units, and a limited tourism offer



present opportunities for more visible leadership. These are complex issues that require a joined-up approach, and the council is well placed to bring people together around shared priorities. Working more closely with local businesses, education providers, tourism groups, and Somerset Council would allow the council to move from largely reactive support to a more proactive, strategic role. As expectations grow – from both residents and partners – for the Town Council to step into wider leadership positions, reinforcing trust through clear communication and collaborative working will be key to making that role sustainable and effective.

As the organisation has grown from a £1m to a £4m operation over the last decade, so too have the demands on staff. This expansion reflects the council's increasing responsibilities – from managing grass verges and stretches of river to maintaining public toilets and supporting art installations. While this growth has enabled the council to deliver more for the community, it has also placed greater pressure on staff, particularly in communications and project delivery roles. More significantly, this shift places fundamentally different requirements on how the organisation needs to be managed and governed. The scale and complexity of the council's operations now demand more formalised systems, clearer structures, and a strategic approach to leadership and oversight. Balancing the council's enabling ethos with the realities of increased service delivery will be key to navigating this next phase of organisational change.

The Badgers Hill Stadium project is a good example of the increasing responsibilities the council is encountering and the increasing complexities of some of its projects. In response to the threat of repossession, the council stepped in to secure the site for the community, working with partners to establish the Frome Town Community Benefit Society and secure over £500k in external funding for essential repairs and improvements. While the project delivered clear community value, it also surfaced important considerations around how governance operates and how activities are scoped, particularly in relation to complex partnerships and long-term stewardship.

These issues are not unique to this project, with similar themes having been identified in other initiatives.

Although internal capacity is a factor, the more pressing challenge lies in ensuring the council has access to the right expertise – particularly external professional support – to avoid overstretch and maintain clarity of purpose. As projects of larger scale become more common, alongside a steady flow of smaller initiatives, the organisation will need to balance ambition with the structures and resources required to deliver effectively and sustainably.

A key issue is that if the council decides to continue accepting devolved assets from Somerset Council, they will continue to come without accompanying staff or funding, leaving Frome Town Council to absorb the operational and strategic burden. In many cases, the council has taken on these responsibilities out of a strong sense of duty and commitment to the community – a reflection of its values and leadership ethos. However, if the council decides to accept more devolved asset or services the scale and complexity of these transfers will increase, and there will be a growing need for a more proactive and structured approach. This could include setting clearer criteria for asset acceptance, identifying priority assets in advance, assessing long-term resource implications upfront, and negotiating transitional support where appropriate. Without such measures, there is a risk that the council could become overstretched, not only in terms of internal capacity, but also in terms of governance, oversight, and access to the external expertise needed to manage these responsibilities effectively and sustainably.

Staff may benefit from a more structured performance management framework, tailored to their roles and complementing the organisation-wide approach outlined earlier. While staff did not raise direct concerns about individual performance, there was a shared view that annual appraisals are not consistently applied across the organisation. Strengthening this process would help reinforce consistent feedback

across all levels of the organisation. Crucially, it would help establish a ‘golden thread’ – linking council priorities to service plans, and then to individual objectives through appraisals and regular one-to-ones. This connection matters because it gives staff a clearer sense of how their work contributes to the bigger picture, supports accountability, and helps managers identify and respond to development needs early as the organisation continues to grow and take on more complex responsibilities.

4.2 Organisational and place leadership

Frome Town Council’s leadership is widely recognised by both the community and the local government sector for its collaborative, community-first approach, as evidenced in the awards it has been given across this last decade. Evidence for this can be found in the Non-League Club Award at the Football Supporters Association Awards for its efforts to protect Badgers Hill Stadium – the first time this award has ever been given to a town council – as well as being named Star Council of the Year and securing second place in Council Project of the Year by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in 2015. Its ability to convene, advocate, and enable has significantly increased its local influence and allowed it to build strong, trusted relationships with residents and partners alike – a reflection of its commitment to doing things ‘made differently’. This role has taken on even greater importance as the council grows in both capacity and visibility. The feedback provided by external stakeholders was overwhelmingly positive, with comments on Frome Town Council leadership being supportive, helpful, and forward-looking. These comments reflect the general feeling on efforts made over the years by the leadership, both political and officer, to build relationships across the local community to better deliver on behalf of residents. The council partners want this to continue to be an ongoing focus for the organisation.

Frome Town Council is aware of the financial and operational pressures facing



Somerset Council, and there's a shared understanding of the challenges involved. However, practical collaboration between the two organisations can be difficult as Somerset Council struggles with capacity. Officers commented that it's often hard to reach counterparts at Somerset when needed, which can slow progress on shared issues. Communication at political level was seen as easier and more regular, though often reliant on informal channels. Frome has made efforts to continue to strengthen this relationship, particularly at senior officer level. At times, differing perceptions of roles and responsibilities between the two councils have added complexity to joint working. A more structured and proactive approach – with clearer lines of communication, regular engagement, and shared forward planning – would help build resilience and ensure alignment on key issues. This matters because many of the challenges facing Frome, such as asset transfers, service gaps, and community expectations, require coordinated responses. Relying on informal channels alone risks inconsistency and missed opportunities. A more joined-up way of working would help both councils collaborate more effectively, reduce duplication, and give residents greater confidence in how services are delivered.

Frome Town Council continues to show a strong commitment to supporting community groups and initiatives – a core part of its role – with the recently devolved Key Centre being a good example of this in practice. The council's approach to transparency is well-regarded, with the forum that allocates community grants meeting in public and offering a clear line of sight into decision-making. As the number and complexity of these relationships grow, however, prioritisation is becoming more difficult. Staff and partners noted that while the council is responsive and supportive, there's now an opportunity to build on existing good practice by introducing a more consistent framework for managing community partnerships. This could include clearer criteria for funding, monitoring, and alignment with council priorities, which would contribute to the council continuing to make strategic decisions while maintaining its inclusive ethos. This would ensure that limited

resources are directed where they can have the greatest impact, and that support continues to be delivered in a way that's transparent, inclusive, and aligned with the council's wider objectives.

There's an opportunity for Frome Town Council to strengthen its connections not just with other town and parish councils in the region, but also through existing networks and initiatives supported by the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) and NALC. These organisations offer platforms for collaboration, shared learning, and strategic dialogue – resources that could help Frome amplify its voice and align more effectively with wider local government efforts. At present, collaboration at this level is limited, despite the potential benefits it could bring. Staff acknowledged that there's scope to share practical tools and approaches – from governance documents and ways of working to lessons learned from community projects – which could help speed up progress and avoid duplication. Beyond local partnerships, there's also value in making greater use of sector tools, initiatives, and professional networks to support staff and councillor development, and improve access to relevant insights and best practice. Building these connections would allow the council to tap into existing knowledge, test ideas more quickly, and learn from others. It would also position Frome as a proactive contributor to shaping practice across the sector.

The continuity provided by the Clerk and senior officers has been a source of strength throughout a period of significant expansion. Their long-standing leadership has helped guide the organisation through change and growth. At the same time, staff reflected a sense that the Senior Management Team can feel unnecessarily remote, and that recent changes to the senior structure have caused some confusion, in part due to inconsistent communication and a lack of visibility around internal decision-making. Positive steps have already been taken to improve internal communication and engagement, including regular staff meetings and the weekly open session, which was praised for fostering a stronger sense of connection. Building on this, there's now an opportunity to create more space for strategic

dialogue and inclusive decision-making at senior levels. This would help reinforce a more cohesive and collaborative working environment, particularly within the leadership team.

In the context of regular political turnover – councillors completing no more than two consecutive terms, and leadership elections held annually – the organisation would benefit from a period of continuity and a renewed focus on councillor development. While the current structure supports democratic renewal and broad participation, it can also lead to the loss of institutional knowledge and disrupt momentum on longer-term priorities. The current Leader was elected with a clear mandate and is widely respected for her skills and approach. She is well engaged, well networked, and has quickly earned the confidence of colleagues and the wider community. Both staff and councillors have described her as having had a baptism of fire, and noted that she is learning and adapting in real time. Her experience highlights the value of strong, stable leadership and reinforces the case for investing in councillor development to support consistency, clarity, and confidence as the council continues to evolve

The senior staff management team, including the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk, are both respected and long-serving officers. To ensure that the stability they have provided to-date continues long into the future, it would be prudent for consideration to be given to succession planning.

4.3 Governance and culture

Frome Town Council has shown a willingness to evolve its governance arrangements, with recent reviews of committee structures and meeting formats aimed at improving coordination and promoting collaborative working. These changes have been welcomed by councillors and officers alike, and reflect an adaptable culture. They also align with the council's broader 'made differently' ethos – one that values adaptability, collaboration, and a willingness to challenge traditional ways of working. Ensuring that the rationale and expected benefits of these changes

are clearly communicated is essential to secure shared ownership and confidence in the system over the long term.

Relationships between councillors have been tested in recent years, shaped by differing working styles, varying expectations around communication, and a reliance on informal channels. These dynamics, while not uncommon in growing organisations, can affect cohesion and make it harder to maintain a consistent approach to governance. Differences in expectations around how and when work is carried out, often influenced by professional background or experience, have occasionally led to misunderstandings. Developing more structured governance protocols, reviewing communication channels, and investing in targeted councillor development would help reduce tension and foster a more inclusive, collaborative, and respectful culture. This would also support clearer decision-making and help councillors work more effectively together, regardless of their individual working preferences.

There is a growing awareness among both officers and councillors that the organisation is fundamentally changing – a recognition that provides a strong foundation for managing this transition effectively.

Despite increased pressures, staff generally report a supportive and positive workplace culture. Positive comments on the themes of support, teamwork, and the quality and skillsets of staff were commonplace in the peer team's interviews with stakeholders. However, public criticism from some councillors has, on occasion, impacted morale and trust. Reinforcing the council's values around respectful conduct and providing safe mechanisms for resolving concerns – including those detailed within the Staff and Councillors Protocol – will be important in maintaining a positive working environment.

Lead Member roles are a constructive step in formalising councillor-to-officer communication channels. These roles have helped improve the structure of enquiries

and supported more efficient information sharing.

The invitation by the political leadership and the senior management team to the LGA and NALC to jointly deliver this CPC activity, and the openness and honesty of all interviewees, demonstrates a clear desire to improve the organisation further and along best practice lines. This should be commended.

4.4 Financial planning and management

The council continues to manage its finances prudently, with independent reviews from an external auditor and broad public support for its budget-setting process. The increase in precept in recent years, alongside expanded responsibilities, reflects a level of trust and transparency that many councils would rightly view as an asset. The council also has a strong record of external auditing outcomes and minimal underspends on project activity. General reserves have been increasing steadily, albeit not yet to the levels typically advised in national best practice, which may limit flexibility in responding to unexpected pressures.

The absence of a medium-term financial plan and limited capital forecasting pose risks to long-term strategic planning. Strengthening these areas, alongside refreshed risk management, would improve the council's ability to seize future opportunities and mitigate emerging risks, especially as more assets and responsibilities might be devolved from Somerset Council. For example, the Key Centre, recently transferred to Frome Town Council, is a valuable but underused asset in disrepair due to historic funding cuts. While the council has ambitious plans and is investing significantly, limited financial forecasting raises concerns about long-term viability and the impact of future devolved assets. The absence of a strategic risk plan or contingency arrangements also leaves the council more exposed to unexpected shocks. Introducing these measures would support better risk identification and mitigation and ensure resilience as the organisation grows.

While financial responsibilities are well structured, with clear segregation of duties across officer tiers supporting role clarity and trust in financial management, some staff have expressed a lack of confidence in using key budgeting tools. Providing additional training, simplifying financial documentation, and increasing member involvement in financial planning would create a more inclusive and strategic approach to resource management. There is also scope to strengthen the budget-setting process by encouraging greater participation from both councillors and officers, helping to shape a more collaborative and strategic financial direction.

The finance team would benefit from targeted professional development and opportunities for peer support. As the council's financial responsibilities grow in complexity – particularly in areas such as capital forecasting, medium-term financial planning, and strategic budgeting – there is a need to build greater confidence and capability within the team. Officers have expressed a strong willingness to embrace more professional development opportunities and recognise the importance of strengthening their skills to meet these evolving demands. This commitment, combined with the organisation's awareness of the challenges posed by asset devolution and limited accompanying resources, provides a strong foundation for managing the transition effectively and sustaining financial resilience.

4.5 Capacity for improvement

Frome Town Council continues to demonstrate impressive adaptability and creativity despite the pressures of rapid organisational growth. Councillors and staff remain deeply committed to delivering for the community and are seen by local stakeholders and external partners as responsive, engaged, and easy to work with. This culture of innovation and dedication, underpinned by its 'made differently' ethos, is a significant asset.

However, the scale of activity is increasing and the organisation's capacity is under pressure, particularly at management level, where administrative workloads are



affecting strategic bandwidth. This shift in scale and visibility has also introduced a different risk profile, placing fundamentally new demands on how the organisation is managed and governed. Creating additional administrative support and exploring outsourcing options for specialist corporate functions (for example, legal services, IT, HR) could help free up capacity and enable senior managers to focus on leadership and strategic planning, whilst also potentially mitigating risk in key business functions. The council's healthy financial position provides a useful opportunity to invest in external expertise where needed.

A specific gap exists in dedicated HR expertise. While work is underway to address this through training opportunities internally, strengthening HR capacity remains a priority, both to support staff welfare and to help embed good people management practices across the organisation. Coupled with clearer, more structured induction processes and investment in staff training, this would improve consistency and support future workforce planning.

There are opportunities to build staff capability through targeted professional development. Gaps have been identified in areas such as financial systems, project management, and cross-team (matrix) working. Addressing these gaps will help ensure staff are confident, empowered, and equipped to meet the demands of a growing organisation. Staff would also welcome more informal engagement opportunities with senior management, which could further strengthen internal communication and mutual understanding.

As the council continues to take on new responsibilities, regular reviews of resource allocation, staffing models, and internal systems will be critical. Balancing the need for innovation with the delivery of core services will allow the council to remain responsive while maintaining high standards of delivery. As part of this, the council will need to continue constructively challenging how it works and be willing to invest in the professional expertise needed to support its evolving remit.

5. Next steps - action plan and progress review

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, it is a requirement of the CPC process that the final report of the peer team is published in-full within three months of the review being completed. In this instance, this requires the report to be published no later than 17th October 2025.

There is a requirement for Frome Town Council to develop and publish an action plan within five-months of the peer team being onsite, no later than 17th December 2025. This action plan should provide clarity on the activity, milestones, and timelines that the council will work to in responding to the team's findings.

The action plan will also be central to the peer team's re-engagement with Frome Town Council through a progress review which is due to be completed by 17th May 2026.

6. Contact details

In the meantime, Paul Clarke, Principal Adviser for the South West region, is the main contact between your council and the Local Government Association. As outlined above, Paul Clarke is available to discuss any further support you require and can be contacted on

Paul Clarke, LGA Principal Adviser for the South West region

Email – paul.clarke@local.gov.uk

Tel – 07899965730

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

The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. This included a position statement prepared by the council in advance of the peer team's time on site. This provided information on the local context at the council and what the peer team should focus on. It also included a comprehensive LGA Finance briefing (prepared using public reports from the council's website).

The peer team spent three days onsite at the Frome Town Council during which they gathered evidence, information, and views from more than 19 meetings, in addition to further research and reading and spoke to over 50 council staff, councillors and external stakeholders.