

Accelerating local growth

support from the peer challenge approach

Local growth and economic development are one of councils biggest priorities. Over the last 18 months the Local Government Association has been working with councils across the country as they use the LGA's peer challenge to examine how they can accelerate their work on local growth.

In the enclosed short case studies we examine how two authorities are tackling local growth and how they are using the insight from peers from local authorities and the private sector to make better progress.

Case studies from:

Eastbourne Borough Council

Thurrock Council

Heading in the right direction on local growth

We are passionate about the role the council can play in local growth. Since 2009, we have made it a major priority for the council. We have sought to establish ourselves as a credible partner driving growth, ensure the successful delivery of a number of major regeneration projects, including a £70m scheme for the town centre and the development of the area's strategic employment site. We have also looked to invest our resources in a way that would transform Eastbourne whilst at the same time providing a financial return to the council.

The peer challenge in July 2012 came at a crucial time. We wanted to understand from an objective and experienced perspective whether the direction we had embarked on was correct and if key partners believed we had the right priorities for the town. We also wanted to know if what we were doing was sustainable and viable.

The peer challenge team found the council had made significant progress in promoting economic growth but to maintain progress we needed to set out an overarching economic strategy and develop a brand for the town, accelerate our 'asset challenge' process to focus on investment in priority buildings, improve links with education and training providers and integrate tourism, events and conferences functions into wider economic development activity

In response, we are investing significant capital in our core assets including a £30m re-development of Devonshire Park, the town's cultural and conference centre. We have renewed our corporate plan to set out more clearly our economic agenda and our marketing and inward investment service has been revised. The dialogue on the branding of the town has also commenced.

For us, the added value of the LGA peer challenge was it providing us with very practical feedback and ideas to help us plan for the future. This was invaluable and really helped us progress our plans even more positively.

Rob Cottrill
Chief Executive
Eastbourne Borough Council

The Thurrock Business Board

Agencies across an area play a huge role in promoting local growth and progressing development plans. In December 2011 we wanted the LGA peer challenge team to look at regeneration in the borough which, with a value of £6bn, is of huge scale and significance. At the time of the peer challenge, the council was about to assume responsibility for regeneration and economic development in the borough with the closure (in April 2012) of the Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation. With other regional agencies also closing the onus for place leadership would be squarely with the council.

The team identified the need to build stronger external relationships with key partner agencies and stakeholders. In response, we have created the Thurrock Business Board; assumed the lead role for transport within the LEP; secured money from the Growing Places Fund and Regional Growth Fund for key regeneration projects and growing businesses and developed a powerful narrative to promote our regeneration programme.

The team highlighted the need to for the smooth integration of Development Corporation staff into the council. In response, we strengthened senior management leadership of regeneration to manage this and delivered a purposeful induction programme. As a result there has been a seamless continuation of major projects, including London Gateway and the Lakeside expansion.

The challenge also emphasised the corporate nature and importance of regeneration. We expedited the production of a community regeneration strategy, which draws together strands of the council's activities including education, housing and planning along with those of key partners. There is also now stronger political leadership of regeneration.

Securing benefits for local people from the planned creation of 26,000 new jobs is clearly important. We have enhanced initiatives to connect local businesses with schools and now present Thurrock's regeneration 'story' to every secondary school in the borough. Also, we have completed the building of the National Skills Academy for creative industries in the borough and construction is commencing of a new campus for South Essex College.

The thing we most liked about the challenge was that it provided timely and expert advice and support that helped to reinforce our direction and actions around regeneration and gave us assurance to progress and prioritise an agenda for growth.

Graham Farrant
Chief Executive
Thurrock Council

You can find out more information about the corporate peer challenge by visiting our webpages: www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenge

This includes information on how the challenge is being used in different ways by local authorities, what the sector has told us about peer challenge as well as enabling you to explore the links to the published reports.

To book a corporate peer challenge or discuss how it can be tailored to meet the needs of your local authority, please contact:

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