Annexe to Agenda Item 10.

Peer-Led Challenge Report

Section 1: Introduction

Date of Peer – Led challenge	14th & 15th October 2010
Organisation	South Derbyshire District Council
Peer Challenger	Tim Spencer Sarah Dawes

Section 2: Peer-Led Challenge Findings

THEME 1	Leadership & Corporate Governance

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	Leadership across the organisation is strong with elected members and senior managers clearly understanding the value and contribution of culture & sport
2	Leaders and senior managers are seen to actively encourage collaboration with voluntary and private sector partners
3	Leaders recognise and champion success in culture and sport services
4	Leaders and senior managers can clearly demonstrate a vision for the contribution of culture and sport

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
1	Some thought needs to be given to the future vision for culture and sport after the local elections in May 2011 to ensure that the service continues to be a central part of the councils priorities and ambitions for the next 5 years
2	Members may benefit from a more formal training programme, particularly post the May 2011 elections.

Evidence to support the above
Clarity and vision present at every meeting we attended. Member discussions showed the benefit and learning from being involved with the service and increased understanding of the service, but showed concern that often attendance at informal training sessions was small.

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge

3.8 – agreed with self assessment record.

THEME 2	Policy & Strategy

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	The service has had clear policies in place for economic development, children's play and sport and physical activity which have delivered a clear vision and established its priorities over last 3 years
2	Service priorities are clearly linked to the community and corporate plans
3	Council has achieved 'achieving' standard of Equality Framework & EMAS accreditation
4	The 'golden thread' was evident throughout the organisation

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
1	Service needs to develop new strategies to replace those coming to an end to maintain momentum
2	Better use needs to be made of effective benchmarking, including use of non financial information
3	There is no policy in place for development of arts or heritage services

Evidence to support the above
Consistent understanding across the organisation of the role and wider contribution of culture and sport Policies clearly in place which have prioritised activity over last 2-3 years Little use of benchmarking – both internally and externally.

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge

3.7 – as in self assessment

THEME 3	Community Engagement

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	A range of consultation approaches were demonstrated and regularly used to inform service planning
2	Staff and Members were able to evidence where consultation has influenced service planning and delivery
3	Staff have actively sought to engage with identified 'hard to reach groups'

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
1	Service needs to develop a strategy for engaging with non-users to uncover potential markets and identify reasons why people do not access services
2	Raise awareness of the COMPACT agreement with voluntary sector

Evidence to support the above
Number of examples given about consultation with service users and hard to reach groups to inform service delivery.

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge
3.75 (3.9 identified in self assessment – 3.2.a & b should score 3 with gap in non-user consultation)

THEME 4	Partnership working

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	Partnership working is a clear strength – genuine, open relationships that deliver real results.
2	Partners are confident in the team to deliver their priorities.
3	Partners felt this was a trusted partnership and the commitment was right the way through the organisation.
4	Partners talked about how partnership working had improved over past five years and that was exemplary example compared to other authorities they work with. Partners commented that that the leisure and culture team were instrumental in this.

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
	None identified

Evidence to support the above
Partners were clear and consistent in their comments and praise for the service and the council. It should be noted that partners were confident that the commitment of the authority to partnership working would be unaffected by the anticipated reduction in public sector finance.

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge
4 – (3.6 in self assessment)

THEME 5	Resource Management

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	Council has clearly identified role of culture and sport in delivering corporate priorities and resources have been allocated to support this role
2	There is a clear methodology for allocating financial resources corporately
3	The service has attracted significant amounts of external funding to support project development

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
1	A more consistent approach should be developed for project management, particularly where this may have significant resource or reputational risks
2	Improved use of benchmarking should be used to inform financial and target planning
3	Project management training should be included in training programmes
4	Asset management planning needs to be reviewed and appropriate levels of planning for future maintenance issues need to be identified in budget planning to ensure standards are maintained to minimise future risk to the authority

Evidence to support the above
Range of service delivery methods and partnerships are employed by the council to maximise use of resources Little benchmarking evidence in place No consistent approach to project management High levels of externally funded programmes The authority does not have a proactive approach in place for financial planning to meet future asset maintenance needs

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge	
3.3 – agreed with self assessment	
THEME 6	**People Management**

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	Staff feel supported and can evidence how the corporate training programme has supported their professional development
2	Staff can clearly explain their role in delivering service priorities
3	Staff feel their contribution to the organisation is recognised and appreciated
4	Embedded use of PDRs throughout the organisation

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
	Non identified

Evidence to support the above
Staff meetings support above findings

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge
3.9 – agreed with self assessment

THEME 7	Customer Service

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	Service actively seeks and makes use of customer feedback to inform service planning
2	Service actively targets service delivery to meet needs of residents
3	Service makes use of external accreditations to inform service delivery
4	Service is beginning to make use of mystery shopping

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
1	Service could share learning from accreditations achieved across whole service to ensure consistency in service standards
2	Include customer service standards in the leisure contract
3	Improve feedback to customers on website

Evidence to support the above
Service gains accreditations such as Greenflag, Quest – but does not proactively share that learning across the service Emerging use of customer feedback and mystery shopping demonstrated.

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge
3.6 – agreed with self assessment

THEME 8	Performance, achievement & learning

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	Quarterly monitoring of performance is in place and embedded
2	The service sets targets and monitors performance against those targets
3	The organisation promotes change and manages change well to achieve improvement
4	The organisation recognises good performance and celebrates success

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
1	Better use of benchmarking – qualitative and quantitive data and use of learning from accreditations received

Evidence to support the above
Evidence seen of target setting and related performance reporting Staff throughout the organisation demonstrated their understanding of their role in achieving targets Staff magazines celebrate success. Members and senior managers gave examples of individual and team success. Staff throughout the organisation were able to demonstrate changes to how services are delivered and organisational changes which have been well managed (both major corporate schemes such as the Northgate partnership and small individual projects such as the Older Persons Dance Project.) Little evidence seen of effective use of benchmarking to improve service delivery

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge	
3.7 – agreed with self assessment	
THEME 9	**Efficiency**

Strengths identified through Peer led challenge	
1	The service has explored a number of delivery and partnership options, through externalising leisure management contracts and transfer of community assets in order to maximise use of resources
2	Corporate Northgate partnership is delivering back office efficiencies
3	The service has been commissioned by other partners and has commissioned partners to deliver services.

Areas for improvement identified through the Peer-Led challenge	
1	Improved use of benchmarking information (see earlier)
2	Developing a commissioning relationship with Adult Social Care to deliver outcomes through culture & sport services
3	Examine areas for closer working with other local authorities

Evidence to support the above
Evidence of jointly commissioned leisure centre contract with E Staffordshire Range of partnership programmes in place to deliver services internally and externally Not a large amount of evidence of joint procurement of services and functions with other neighbouring authorities

Ratings identified through the peer-led challenge
2.9 – agreed with self assessment

Section 3: Key themes and Priorities

Key strengths
Leadership and vision for culture & leisure services is strong. This was evident from members, corporate management team, down to front line staff. Everyone understood the contribution and value of the services to the wider community and act as advocates for the service. Clear direction about what they want to achieve and the key priorities – clear throughout. Golden thread was in place – everyone knew what the priorities were and their role delivering that vision. Furthermore we felt people felt supported to deliver those through the corporate training programme and that this also supported their own professional development. is it more than Stuart? Partnership working is a clear strength – genuine, open relationships that deliver real results. Partners are confident in the team to deliver their priorities. Felt it was a genuine and equal partnership which people had trust in. We only saw a selection of strategic partners but that message was consistent across all partners. Partners felt this was a trusted partnership and the commitment was right the way through the organisation. Partners talked about how partnership working had improved over past five years and that was exemplary example compared to other authorities they work with. Partners commented that that the leisure and culture team were instrumental in this. We learnt about the range of partnership delivery that happens. The service seems to have a creative approach to forging new partnerships and commissioning services – or being commissioned to deliver. This approach seems to be maximising use of resources and contributing to the councils use of resources achievements. Furthermore staff overall seem quite comfortable and can see benefits of Northgate partnership and the challenges and changes that could bring.

Key areas for improvement
Sports/environmental offer is very strong – but arts/heritage offer appears to be smaller – may be missing new markets or failing to appeal to everyone's interests. Performance management is developing but we feel there is some improvement to be made here. In particular around robust target setting linked to outputs, outcomes and priorities. People through the organisation talked about impact but we couldn't see a consistent approach to capturing anecdotal or wider impacts. There is little use of benchmarking – not just in terms of financial and quantitive data but in terms of learning from good practice and using learning from performance frameworks in place across the service. We thought that project management was not always consistently approached, with outcomes,

targets always agreed at the outset. We saw that ideas were openly discussed and evaluated – but learning and project management didn't seem to be consistently approached. We think this is a potential risk area – particularly as we understand that the corporate risk management process doesn't seem to support smaller development projects and didn't appear to be often used. Whilst projects may carry a small financial risk thy will often carry a larger reputational risk.

Asset management is a risk area. Whilst the re-use of assets is systematically approached but maintenance of assets is reactive rather than proactive. We understand that budget provision isn't made to build funds to support asset management plans for larger items. This could be a future risk area in relation to the leisure contract as without clarity of responsibility or funds in place to maintain standards this could lead to tensions in the relationship with the contractor. This will be an issue if the council is not able to maintain to the agreed specification and the contractor experiences a loss of income.

There was a lot of evidence about use of customer feedback and also targeted activity to hard to reach groups. We felt you had a lot of understanding about who your hard to reach groups were. However we didn't see much use of non-customer info to target resources effectively and pick up untapped markets.

Members were real advocates for the service. They described to us how they used the summer recess to undertake informal learning but this was inconsistently taken up by members. We thought they might appreciate a formal structure, perhaps using the IDeA member programme to equip members with a more scrutiny skills.

Working with planning policy appears to be working well to identify future demand linked to growth agenda – but this will need to be a key focus for future work and to use available tools through Sport England and Living Places programmes.

The team has recognised a need to improve its approach to customer services and is beginning to make use of mystery shopping. It should continue to develop this approach, using results to drive improvements. It should consider how such quality measures will be contained within the monitoring framework for the leisure services contract to ensure an appropriate balance is achieved between use of qualitative and quantative measures to ensure high levels of customer service are at the heart of standards. We did not have the opportunity to visit venues and look at service standards in practice but felt the self assessment reflected this as a priority area.

<u>Observation!</u>
We didn't get chance to see services being delivered or speak to lots of frontline staff. We weren't able to therefore test whether the people management strengths we saw are reflected throughout the team. We feel that it would be useful for you to use the framework to double check whether the golden thread is well knitted in to the end of the sleeves of the team!