



# Corporate Peer Challenge



Time2Connect



## Action Plan July 2024



## What is an Action Plan?

The purpose of an action plan is to serve as a roadmap or guide for achieving a specific goal or set of objectives. An action plan outlines the steps, tasks, resources, and timelines required to accomplish something. It helps to:

1. Break down a large goal into manageable steps or action items.
2. Assign responsibilities for who will do what and by when.
3. Allocate resources (money, people, materials) needed.
4. Set deadlines and milestones to track progress.
5. Identify potential obstacles or risks and ways to mitigate them.
6. Establish accountability by clearly defining roles.
7. Provide a framework to monitor and evaluate the implementation.

A practical action plan, developed collaboratively, provides clarity, direction, and focus. It helps coordinate efforts across teams or individuals working towards a common objective, ensuring everyone is working towards the council's goals. An actionable plan increases the chances of successfully executing a strategy, project or change initiative within the desired timeframe and budget.

## What is the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan?

Houghton Regis Town Council (HRTC<sup>1</sup>) completed a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in March 2024. This process is a highly valued improvement and assurance tool delivered by the sector for the sector. The CPC Team (senior local government councillors and officers) undertook a comprehensive review of key finance, performance and governance to provide robust, strategic and credible challenge and support in the form of a report.

This Action Plan, designed to build on the council's strengths and identify areas for improvement, is a direct response to the recommendations and suggestions made in the Corporate Peer Challenge report. It provides a clear roadmap for the council's future actions.

This Action Plan, driven by the council, provides clarity, direction and focus to coordinate efforts across the council to initiate positive change for the community of Houghton Regis through its locally elected council.

The Action Plan pulls from the CPC report recommendations and suggestions under the six reviewed themes:

1. **Local priorities and outcomes:** Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering its priorities effectively and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities?
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 respect, challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management:** Does the council clearly understand its current financial position? Does the council have a clear strategy and plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement:** Can the organisation support the delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?
6. **Regeneration Growth** and whether the council is sufficiently resourced and prepared for this, especially regarding its staffing, budgets and governance, to accommodate the significant housing, community, infrastructure and other growth planned for Houghton Regis.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of acronyms and abbreviations can be found at the end of this document.

## What HRTC currently does well

- ❖ **Notable recent achievements**, including its recently completed artificial football pitch, management of open spaces, and activity programmes for its younger and older communities. There is a commitment to build on these.
- ❖ **A committed team of councillors and staff** greatly helps HRTC address key opportunities and challenges.
- ❖ **Pioneering ambitious and impressive plans**, including the HRTC Corporate Plan, the Houghton Regis Neighbourhood Plan and the Houghton Regis Town Centre Action Plan, with a wide focus and good understanding of specific issues.
- ❖ **An impressive Youth Council and Later Living Group**, who organise local events & activities, champion advocacy, and promote support.
- ❖ **A high-quality services and assets provider** in the town centre and wider Houghton Regis area.
- ❖ **A friendly, positive, supportive and productive culture** with good relationships aiding the effective delivery of the work of the council.
- ❖ **Effective and collaborative relationships** with the principal authority, with HRTC described as a “partner of choice”, and with local partners and community groups.
- ❖ **Strongly committed** staff and councillors to deliver the best services to residents, visitors and businesses.
- ❖ **An employer of choice**, resulting in high staff retention and satisfaction.
- ❖ **Highly successful in acquiring project funding.**

## CPC Report Recommendations<sup>2</sup>

The Action Plan has been assessed using a RAG status. The RAG acronym stands for Red, Amber, and Green. These colours make up the traffic light colours coding scheme for categorising project status.

These colours represent different types of required management action and are a shorthand for discussing projects that are going well or those in trouble.

A coding of Blue has been added to show when a project has been completed or closed.

R	Red	The project is likely to deliver late/over budget
A	Amber	The project has missed some targets, but overall end date/budget is not at risk
G	Green	The Project is on track
B	Blue	The Project completed or closed

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<sup>2</sup> Pages 5-7 of the CPC Report

CPC Ref :	CPC Recommendations	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required <sup>3</sup>	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation	Accountability
3.1	Set formal annual committee and staff objectives to progress your corporate plan, including setting measurable annual targets.	Allocate work from the Corporate Plan to committees.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Town Council	Clerk & SMT
		Committees will consider tasks and formulate SMART action plans for delivery and for this to become an annual process.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Committees	SMT
		Objectives linked to the Corporate Plan are to be included in staff appraisals.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Town Council	Clerk & SMT
3.2	Delegate committee and SMT operational decision-making and activities to your staff so your senior politicians and management team can focus on strategic issues	Review and update Scheme of Delegation.	Staff resource	£0	May 2024	Town Council	Clerk
		Implement a newly approved Scheme of Delegation.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Clerk	SMT
		Active review of committee reports in light of the new scheme of delegation and removal of standard reports which come under the Scheme of Delegation or where they are expressly covered by the approved Committee Functions & Terms of Reference.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Clerk	SMT
		Review newly released model Financial Regulations.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Clerk	Head of Corp Serv

<sup>3</sup> The budget indicated is to deliver the specific action, depending on the outcome further costs may be involved. This is especially highlighted for larger projects such as Council Offices and Community Centres

CPC Ref :	CPC Recommendations	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required <sup>3</sup>	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation	Accountability
		Consider and approve new Financial Regulations, ensuring that they provide delegation by the Scheme of Delegation.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Town Council	RFO
		Consider a delegation scheme to enable policies to be reviewed and approved at the officer level when in accordance with legislation or when there is no significant change.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corp Serv
3.3	Improve the quality of your decision-making by focusing on strategic issues at your council meetings – ensure your agendas give necessary weight to those issues.	See 3.2	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Clerk	SMT
		Ensure agenda items are presented in order of strategic importance.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Clerk	SMT
		Consider establishing a Futures committee to discuss and consider high-level strategic issues impacting Houghton Regis.	Staff resource	£0	Winter 2024	Town Council	Clerk
3.4	Develop a long-term financial plan.	Consider external support to assess maintenance and refurbishment requirements for key assets	Budget availability	£2,000	Autumn 2024	E&L Committee	Head of E&C
		Develop a lifecycle plan of asset maintenance and refurbishment and ensure that it is aligned with earmarked reserves.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	E&L Committee	Head of E&C

CPC Ref :	CPC Recommendations	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required <sup>3</sup>	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation	Accountability
		Develop a three-year rolling financial budget as required by the Corporate Governance and Accountability Practitioners Guide and ensure that it incorporates the HRTC Corporate Plan Objectives, the CPC Action Plan responses and the asset lifecycle plan .	Staff resource	£0	Winter 2024/25	Town Council	RFO
		Develop and approve a reserves policy which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>confirms the desired level of general reserves.</li> <li>steers the council away from using reserves to fund revenue costs.</li> </ul>	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Town Council	RFO / Head of Corporate Services
		Develop and approve a reserves strategy which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allocates funding to long-term projects.</li> <li>allocates funding for long-term maintenance and refurbishment (linking to the asset lifecycle plan).</li> </ul>	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Town Council	RFO / Head of Corporate Services
3.5	Reset your relationship with Central Bedfordshire Council at a strategic level to agree and prioritise shared objectives	Seek to meet/link in regularly with CBC's Chief Executive and SMT.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Town Council	Clerk
		Seek to meet/link in regularly with CBC's senior cllrs.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Town Council	Clerk



CPC Ref :	CPC Recommendations	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required <sup>3</sup>	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation	Accountability
		Seek to meet regularly with CBC’s Communications Manager, especially in shaping the partnership Agenda.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Town Council	Clerk
3.6	Develop a plan to improve further and/or move your offices, including immediately making the reception area more welcoming and informative so it is fit for future use. <sup>4</sup>	Consider options for new/refurbished office space.	Budget Staff resource	Option dependent	March 2025	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
3.7	Improve the HRTC communications strategy.	Consider an external support to assess council's communications strategy to promote the work and services of the council	Budget availability	£3000	March 2024	Community Services Committee	Head of E&C
		Review and update the council's communications strategy to promote the work and services of the council using various digital, physical and face-to-face options.	Staff resource	£0	March 2025	Community Services Committee	Head of E&C
		Seek to meet/link in regularly with local partners and stakeholders.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Clerk	SMT
		Support local partners and stakeholders by promoting their work and services/facilities.	Staff resource	£0	March 2025	Head of E&C	Communications Administrator

<sup>4</sup> This Recommendation has the potential to be high cost.

CPC Ref :	CPC Recommendations	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required <sup>3</sup>	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation	Accountability
		Provide communications to residents to promote the variety of available services, retail, leisure, heritage, parks, and wider countryside opportunities.	Budget Staff resource	£5000	March 2026	Community Services Committee	Head of E&C
		Development and promotion of the Town Branding Scheme.	Budget Staff resource	£5000	March 2025	E&L and Community Services Committees	Head of E&C
		Options for branded merchandise.	Budget	£1000	March 2026	Community Services Committee	Head of E&C
3.8	Develop a plan to create your community centres – in the town centre and all your estates <sup>5</sup>	Consider external support to assess the current use and availability of existing community centres, and options for the future	Budget availability	£3000	March 2024	Community Services Committee	Head of E&C
		Liaise with CBC and other local partners to identify options, including new premises and refurbishment options to make more fit for purpose.	Staff resource	£0	March 2025	Community Services Committees	Head of E&C
		Liaise with partners to assess the need for additional community space and any associated specifics.	Staff resource	£0	March 2025	Community Services Committees	Head of E&C

<sup>5</sup> This Recommendation has the potential to be high cost.

CPC Ref :	CPC Recommendations	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required <sup>3</sup>	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation	Accountability
3.9	Create an implementation group to ensure the delivery of your neighbourhood plan and set a renewal date for reviewing and revising it.	Consider an external support to support the implementation of the NHP	Budget availability	£3000	March 2024	Planning Committee	Head of Democratic Services
		Create an implementation group to agree on and ensure the plan's delivery and renewal date.	Staff resource	£0	March 2025	Planning Committee	Head of Democratic Services
		Review the planning committee's terms of reference to support the NHP's implementation and renewal.	Staff resource	£0	March 2025	Planning Committee	Head of Democratic Services

CPC Report Suggestions<sup>6</sup>

CPC Report Section	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required	Timeline	Monitoring and evaluation	Accountability
Section 5 Feedback						
Proactive participation in the CBC community governance review due in 2025.	Understand the community governance review process and timeline.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Clerk	Head of Corporate Services
	Consider the engagement of consultants to support community and town council engagement in this process	Budget availability in 2025/26	£10,000	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
	Preliminary/informal consideration by the council.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
	Regular liaison with CBC.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn / Winter 2024	Clerk	Head of Corporate Services
	Engagement with residents.	Staff resource	£0	Winter 2024 / Spring 2025	Head of Corporate Services	Communications Administrator
	Formal consideration/response/engagement by the council.	Staff resource	£0	Spring 2025	Town Council	Head of Corporate Services

<sup>6</sup> Taken from the body of the CPC report, Section 5 Feedback, pages 9-23

CPC Report Section 5 Feedback	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required	Timeline	Monitoring and evaluation	Accountability
Increase the council's staffing levels to deliver their corporate plan objectives	Formulate a five-year rolling staffing plan and review it on an annual basis.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
	To ensure budget provision for the delivery of the staffing plan.	Staff resource	£ dependent on the staffing plan	Autumn / Winter 2024	Town Council	Clerk
	To establish an enhanced set of ancillary staffing benefits to enable the council to offer an attractive employment package.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
Ensure that the council fully utilises the talents and skills of current members of staff	Consider the engagement of external support to undertake a skills audit of staff, to identify any skills gaps and develop a training and development strategy	Budget availability	£2000	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
	Undertake a skills audit of staff and use it as a basis to identify any skills gaps and develop a training and development strategy.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
	Use the adopted appraisal process to explore with staff areas in which they feel they could bring added benefit, through their skills and talents, to the delivery of the work of the council.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services

CPC Report Section 5 Feedback	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required	Timeline	Monitoring and evaluation	Accountability
	To consider separating its Responsible Financial Officer and Town Clerk roles.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
Ensure that staff undertake decisions and delivery at an operational level to enable the council to focus on its strategic direction.	See 3.2					
	Support the Clerk and SMT in engaging with peer councils, officers and colleagues.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Clerk	SMT
	Encourage councillors to engage with peer councillors and colleagues.	Cllr resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
Improve relationships between political groups	Political groups, perhaps through their group leaders, discuss opportunities for improved ways of working. This could comprise regular informal meetings, team-building sessions, etc.	Cllr resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Group Leaders	Cllrs
Clarify the differences between council policies and council plans so that the community understands the differences in purpose and use.	Review and update the council's website to ensure clarity on council policies and council plans is provided. Use other means of communication in support.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Clerk	SMT

CPC Report Section 5 Feedback	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required	Timeline	Monitoring and evaluation	Accountability
Engage more widely with Houghton Regis communities	Use demographic data (e.g. national census, CBC Local Insight and Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion) to better understand the community to shape an effective and proactive Communication Strategy (see 3.7).	Staff resource	£0	Autumn / Winter 2024	Community Services Committee	SMT
	Extend the functionality of the council website to enable email updates to be sent out when a page is updated.	Budget Staff resource	£300	Autumn 2024	Community Services Committee	Head of E&C
	Develop a programme for increased community engagement activities & events (changing location for full council mtgs, joint cllr surgeries, small scale competitions).	Budget Staff resource	Up to £1000	Autumn 2024	Head of Democratic Services and Head of E&C	Administration Assistant and Community Services Manager
	Develop a programme to increase the visibility of the town council in the new housing areas of Bidwell West and Linnere.	S106 Land and facility transfers Staff resource	£60,000	Autumn 2024	E&L Committee	Head of E&C
Strengthen the council's relationship with CBC at a strategic level, especially through the Houghton Regis Partnership Committee.	To discuss new and improved ways of working with CBC through meetings with senior officers and Cllrs to agree on and prioritise shared objectives.	CBC engagement Staff resource	£0	Autumn / Winter 2024	Clerk	SMT

CPC Report Section 5 Feedback	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required	Timeline	Monitoring and evaluation	Accountability
	Review the terms of reference for the Partnership Committee.	CBC engagement Staff resource	£0	Autumn / Winter 2024	Partnership Committee	Clerk
	Ensure that the Partnership agenda has a strategic focus.	CBC engagement Staff resource	£0	Autumn / Winter 2024	Partnership Committee	Clerk
Ensure the lease with the Beds FA for the Tithe Farm sports project is robust and comprehensive.	Review the draft lease to ensure that it covers the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>timing of the Football Association's obligations to refurbish pitches.</li> <li>clarity on related finances and responsibilities of both partners.</li> <li>length of lease, review periods and scope for extension of the lease.</li> </ul>	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Head of Corporate Services	Head of E&C
Provide, support and encourage engagement for councillor training and development.	Re-shape / Extend the Member Open Sessions to provide an annual training and support programme.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Town Council	Clerk & SMT
	Continue to promote external cllr training opportunities.	Staff resource	£0	Summer 2024	Clerk	Head of Democratic Services



CPC Report Section 5 Feedback	Action / Response	Risks & mitigation	Budget required	Timeline	Monitoring and evaluation	Accountability
Ensure that the council thoroughly assesses and mitigates against potential strategic risks.	Continue to review the council's risk management strategy & schedule annually.	Staff resource	£0	Autumn 2024	Town Council	Clerk & SMT
	To undertake an external succession planning exercise.	Budget Staff resource	£5,000	Summer 2025	Corporate Services Committee	Head of Corporate Services
Review committee structures against corporate plan objectives and financial plans.	Continue to review on an annual basis the council's committee structure to ensure it is effective and efficient.	Staff resource	£0	Spring 2025	Town Council	Clerk & SMT

## Acronyms

CBC	Central Bedfordshire Council
Cllr	Councillor
CPC	Corporate Peer Challenge
E&L	Environment & Leisure Committee
HEAD OF E&C	Head of Environmental & Community Services
HRTC	Houghton Regis Town Council
NHP	Neighbourhood Plan
SMT	Senior Management Team