

**Report for:** Cabinet 12 March 2024

**Title:** **Planning Service Peer Challenge Report & Action Plan**

**Report authorised by:** David Joyce, Director of Placemaking & Housing

**Lead Officer:** Rob Krzyszowski, Assistant Director Planning, Building Standards & Sustainability

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Report for Key/  
Non Key Decision:** Non Key Decision

**1. Describe the issue under consideration**

- 1.1. This report sets out the Council's response to the recommendations from the Planning Service Peer Challenge that took place in October 2023, looking at the Planning service functions.
- 1.2. The Peer Challenge was led by a team of local government peers and facilitated by the Local Government Association (LGA) Planning Advisory Service (PAS).

**2. Cabinet Member Introduction – Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning – Councillor Sarah Williams**

- 2.1. Peer Challenges are a valuable tool offered by the LGA/PAS to provide challenge and to support council Local Planning Authority (LPA) functions. I would like to thank the team of local government peers from councils across the country who were invited to Haringey to look at how our Planning service is run, how we engage with our residents and communities, and where we can improve.
- 2.2. This is a time of considerable change in Haringey, not least in our relationships with our residents and communities through the Haringey Deal. This is why we asked the peer team to specifically look at this theme.
- 2.3. I am really proud of the positive nature of the report and feedback we've had from the peer team. It shows the journey the Planning service has come over the last 10 years – in 2012 the then Secretary of State named Haringey as the "worst" planning authority and now we are not just seen as high performing but one of the best. It is a testament to the hard work of our planning staff, our partners and the residents and communities that work with us every day.
- 2.4. However, we know that we still have a lot of work to do to ensure that we are consistently the best Planning service we can be. There is no room for complacency not least because of the incredibly challenging financial

environment which councils – including Haringey – find themselves in. The recommendations the peers team have set out in their report will be really helpful in taking that the Planning service on the next step in its journey to remain a high performing planning authority.

- 2.5. It is important that we don't just tackle the symptoms highlighted by the peer report but we tackle the root causes, so the proposed Action Plan helps ensure there is a stable, well-resourced and well-led Planning service for the future of Haringey's residents, businesses and partners.

### **3. Recommendations**

#### **3.1. Cabinet is asked to:**

- Note that Strategic Planning Committee at its meeting on Monday 19 February 2024 agreed to refer this report and appended documents to Cabinet with the recommendation to endorse the Peer Challenge report and approve the Action Plan.
- Endorse the recommendations in the Peer Challenge report (Appendix A) and approve its publication on the Council's website.
- Approve the Action Plan (Appendix B) which responds to each of the 10 recommendations in the Planning Service Peer Challenge report.

### **4. Reasons for decision**

- 4.1. There is an expectation that all councils undertaking a Planning Service Peer Challenge will publish the feedback report and produce an action plan which responds to the recommendations in the report.
- 4.2. Implementing those recommendations are important as it will help the Planning Service improve, including building stronger relationships with the residents, businesses and partners in Haringey and provide a better, more efficient service.
- 4.3. The Action Plan (Appendix B) sets out what the Council's Planning Service intends to do in response to these recommendations, including specific actions, when they will be delivered, and who will be responsible for delivering them.

### **5. Alternative options considered**

- 5.1. The option not to respond to the Peer Challenge recommendations with a formal report was considered. That option was not considered appropriate as publishing the peer team's report, and the Council's response to it, ensures that the Council is transparent in respect of its improvement plans for the Planning Service.

### **6. Background information**

- 6.1. In October 2023 Haringey welcomed a team from the LGA/PAS to undertake a Planning Service Peer Challenge. The team was comprised of:
- **Steve Barker**, Principal Consultant, Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
  - **Cllr Danny Beales**, Cabinet Member for New Homes, Jobs & Community Investment, London Borough of Camden
  - **Marilyn Smith**, Head of Planning & Assurance, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
  - **Sarah Scannell**, Assistant Director of Planning, Birmingham City Council
  - **Jon Palmer**, Head of Planning, Milton Keynes
- 6.2. The peer team spent three days on site meeting with staff, councillors, partners and stakeholders. The team also observed a number of Planning Sub Committee meetings and had access to a range of documents and information in order to support their work.
- 6.3. A Peer Challenge is not an inspection but nonetheless is an important way for councils to identify and prioritise areas for development or improvement.
- 6.4. Planning Service Peer Challenges focus on 5 key themes:
1. **Vision and leadership**
  2. **Performance and management**
  3. **Community engagement**
  4. **Partnership engagement**
  5. **Achieving outcomes**
- 6.5. In addition to these standard themes, the Council asked the peer team to consider the Planning service having regard to the following:
1. The findings from the **LGA Corporate Peer Review** which took place in May 2023 and was reported to Cabinet in October 2023
  2. The **Haringey Deal**
  3. **Value for money** and efficiencies
  4. **Developer perspective** and narrative for investment
- 6.6. Following the ‘challenge’ a Final Report was produced by the peer team which included a number of recommendations. The full report is set out at Appendix A. Some headline quotes regarding the Planning Service from the report are provided below:
- “**regarded positively** by developers and agents... community groups”
  - “**genuine passion** for the service”, “**good and dedicated** group of staff”
  - “**Committee is a very good example** of how public facing planning committees are run”
  - “been on a **dramatic journey of improvement over the last 10 years** with unrecognisable improvement in planning performance and the delivery of high-quality large development sites in the borough”

- “**performing well** against the national planning performance regime for speed and quality of planning decision making, with a **very low number of appeals and complaints** compared to other local authorities”
- “The council needs to recognise **how it can attract new development...** actively promoting what the council wants to achieve **over the next 10 or 15 years...** This comes from the Council’s **long-term vision** and the **new Local Plan**”

6.7. The recommendations in the peer team’s report are:

- **R1.** Prioritise work to address the **backlog** of applications and manage the risk of lost income through the return of application fees.
- **R2.** There should be a dedicated **officer lead for the local plan**. The unfilled position of Planning Policy Team Manager and the combined responsibilities of the Head of Planning Policy, Transport & Infrastructure is not giving enough priority to the production of the local plan. This must be seen as key going forward.
- **R3.** Maintain a clear and consistent **political lead for the local plan**. Have a more formal Local Plan Member Working Group, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Planning with other relevant cabinet members on it, to receive regular updates on progress of the local plan, focus to the work, and highlighting the work to come, making strategic joined up decisions across portfolios and to give clear political steer, leadership and champion the local plan.
- **R4.** A detailed and resourced **programme for the production of the new local plan** should be produced, with specific project management support, recognising the resources required, the timetable for delivery and confirming the proposed timescales are deliverable. It should have a clear communication strategy to partners and communities, to support meaningful engagement beyond the “usual suspects” as part of the Haringey Deal, as well as broader policy work in future for area specific policies and design codes.
- **R5.** The planning service, as part of the Placemaking & Housing Directorate, need to be fully engaged in the work on the **long-term vision of the Council**, being clear about what type of development Haringey wants to see in the future and how the local plan will reflect the aspirations and needs of different communities of the borough, including working with agents and developer forums in sharing these key visions. Officers should engage with senior counterparts within the GLA and TfL to accelerate key opportunities and remove existing blockers.
- **R6.** Continue the work on the Council’s **Infrastructure Delivery Plan** and make sure it is integrated to support the development and adoption of the local plan.
- **R7.** Look at relationship between the **Planning and Regeneration functions**, recognise where there can be mutual benefits, more joined up working and shared resourcing - as is already occurring for Housing. Placemaking and Planning should be more intrinsically linked, utilising planning and placemaking and regeneration team resources, streamlining or sharing engagement processes. Investigate scope for developing a shared resource, potentially using capital funding, to support the

production and delivery of the local plan and Regeneration priorities. Making use of architects, planners, designers and project managers from across the Directorate to use their skills to assist with local plan.

- **R8.** Consider how allocation of **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** and Neighbourhood CIL spending can support members and broader community engagement in the planning process, highlighting the positives of development, and giving clear communication of how those decisions are made.
- **R9.** Give the **Development Management & Enforcement service the headspace to review their operation and improve the service** from within – this means assessing their structure, processes, workflows, potential access to shared resources in other teams and opportunities to maximise income. This will mean ensuring a good commercial approach by striking the right balance between good customer service and experience with providing more advice through the paid-for planning advice service. Working with something like the PAS DM Challenge Toolkit to identify any structural issues, process improvements and customer engagement processes that could be introduced to better focus the use of planning resources and, through a workforce strategy for the service, highlight any skill deficits or resilience issues across the service. Planning officers may require some additional training or support to enable them to take on complex cases and have the confidence to engage with key partners, and negotiate on schemes with confidence, having clarity on the key aims for development in the borough. Freeing up senior leadership in the service to focus on managing the service and team leaders to actively manage the caseload performance.
- **R10.** Specifically project manage the integration of the **new IT system (Arcus)** to embed and maximise its use within the service. Highlight and support key super users to support and advise others, upskilling case officers in its use and team managers in using the system to manage performance, in Planning and Enforcement.

6.8. In line with the expectations of the Peer Challenge process, we look forward to welcoming the peer team back later in 2024 to check back on our progress.

## **7. Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2022-2024 High level Strategic outcomes**

7.1. The Planning Service Peer Challenge responds to all themes in the Corporate Delivery Plan supporting improvements across the Planning Service, relationships with residents, communities, partners, stakeholders and with Members.

7.2. In particular, the Corporate Delivery Plan states “The Local Plan will embed a more Placemaking Approach” and the peer team report makes recommendations relevant to this.

## **8. Carbon and Climate Change**

- 8.1. This Action Plan does not have direct impacts on carbon and climate change but does support the Council to deliver more efficient, resilient and resident-focused services. This may have a positive reduction of carbon and helping services deliver on the Council's climate change ambitions.
- 8.2. The peer review team was sent high-level information regarding the Climate Change Action Plan, Annual Carbon Report, Community Carbon Fund (funded by developer contributions), Carbon Literacy Training and other strategies and initiatives.

## **9. Statutory Officers comments**

### **Finance**

- 9.1. The acceptance of the recommendations of the report will not create an additional financial burden on the Council as the delivery of the actions will be contained within existing resources.

### **Procurement**

- 9.2. N/A

### **Assistant Director for Legal & Governance**

- 9.3. The Planning Service Peer Challenge Action Plan is a non-statutory document that sets out the actions the Planning service intend to take to give effect to the recommendations in the report prepared by the peer team.
- 9.4. The approval of the Action Plan to facilitate the discharge of the Council's planning functions under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Act is ancillary to those functions and so authorised under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 9.5. The actions to be taken by the Planning service in the Action Plan are not non-executive functions and so the decision to endorse the recommendations in the Peer Challenge report and approve the Action Plan can be taken by Cabinet in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

### **Equality**

- 9.6. The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
  - Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not.
  - Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

- 9.7. The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.
- 9.8. Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.
- 9.9. The decision in question is regarding the note and endorsement of the Planning Service Peer Challenge and the approval of its subsequent action plan.
- 9.10. The Planning Service Peer Challenge Action Plan makes a number of specific proposals on how the Council can improve its approach to tackling inequalities. This includes one specific recommendation on the emerging new Local Plan having a clear communication strategy to support meaningful engagement beyond the 'usual suspects' as part of the Haringey Deal. As a result approving the action plan should lead to a positive impact on those who share protected characteristics and should positively advance the PSED in Haringey. The Local Plan has been, and will continue to be, subject to a dedicated Equalities Impact Assessment as it progresses.

## **10. Use of Appendices**

Appendix A: Planning Service Peer Challenge – Report

Appendix B: Planning Service Peer Challenge – Action Plan

## **11. Background papers**

None