



Planning Service Peer Challenge

London Borough of Haringey

Interviews: 16th to 19th October 2023

Final Report: 24th November 2023



1.0 Executive Summary

This report sets out the findings of a planning service peer challenge, organised by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), as part of the Local Government Association (LGA), at the request of the Planning Service (the service) of the London Borough of Haringey (the Council).

It is the review's findings that the London Borough of Haringey's planning service is performing well and is regarded positively by developers and agents as users of the service as well as the community groups who regularly interact with the service. It is well respected by other services within the Council, councillors, and senior management. The senior leadership of the service is particularly highly regarded. The working and supportive nature of relationships within the service, and between officers and members and partners are excellent and there is a strong commitment to and recognition of the communities of the borough.

The new local plan is recognised as key in delivering the Council's priorities in the Corporate Plan. It is vital in helping to deliver the Council's objectives and helping the service to make the link between the work of the planning service and the corporate aims and objectives. However, there is a lack of awareness from many, both inside and outside of the Council, of the vision and benefits of the plan and the timetable for the plan. There was a lack of clarity regarding the resourcing and programme of work required to deliver the new local plan, to what the review considers to be a challenging timetable.

There are presently limited resources in the policy team delivering against the proposed programme of the local plan. This includes a lack of dedicated leadership and project management support to produce the local plan, and a detailed and resourced project plan of the work required to deliver it. We believe this to be a significant risk. Having a consistent and recognised political champion for the plan and planning is vital in showing the corporate ownership, leadership, and importance of delivering the local plan. There are opportunities for the service to build on the award-winning engagement work already undertaken to further engage with communities, in line with the Council's Haringey Deal commitment, through the local plan production.

Every planning service in the country would like more resources, and Haringey's is no exception. We believe the Development Management service is working very hard to keep up with the increased volume of work the service is handling compared to previous years, but it is not making significant inroads in to reducing the backlog to become a wholly effective decision-making authority. The growing backlog of applications and risk of lost income through the return of application fees through the planning guarantee is concerning and needs to be managed.

Haringey has a comparable ratio of volume of applications to planning officer numbers working on them to other similar sized local authority planning services. A reduction in resources presently would affect performance. We conclude if more resources are not going to be available, or even if they are, the service will have to consider changing some of its present processes and to maximise the benefits of the new IT system to best utilise the planning resources and skills available. Changes can include making sure that work is undertaken at the most appropriate level within the service, using the professional planners to focus on planning work rather than administrative work. It should also look to upskilling individuals to enable them to take on complex cases, to have the confidence to engage with key partners, to negotiate on schemes with confidence, recognising where efforts and resources could be better focused. There should be a consistent and positive performance management process across the Development Management teams, helping identify any specific issue early and accessing support as required. The service should continue and build on the work to maximise commercial income already underway, through fees, costs, enforcement, and developer contributions, and recognising where these can be spent to support the aims of the Council and maximising the visibility of the planning service.

The approach the service is taking to develop the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) is innovative and comprehensive. The IDP summit held in early October was a pragmatic and collaborative approach to stakeholder engagement. The service needs to make sure the IDP is focused on supporting the development and adoption of the local plan.

There are lots of examples of delivery occurring within the borough. The Council needs to recognise how it can attract new development coming into the borough; actively promoting what the Council wants to achieve over the next 10 or 15 years for the communities and the area, the right kind of development for the area and where those opportunities are. This comes from the Council's long-term vision and the new local plan. It should be presented as a single narrative and backed by the full Council's commitment.

2.0 Recommendations

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.

3.0 Background and Scope of the Peer Review

This report sets out the findings of a planning service peer challenge, organised by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), as part of the Local Government Association (LGA), at the request of the Planning Service (the service) of the London Borough of Haringey Council (the Council). Peer challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. They are improvement orientated and are tailored to meet the individual council's needs. Designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement, they help planning services review what they are trying to achieve, how they are going about it, what they are achieving, and what they could improve.

The aim of the peer challenge was to assess the operation of Haringey Council's Planning Service and how it can respond to the present and future challenges.

The review has focused on:

- The recognition of the role of the planning service to deliver and support the Council's strategic priorities and deliver the ambitions for the area.
- How the service understands its communities and delivers their aspirations.
- The perception of the service from within the service, the council, communities, and partners, and how it engages with them.
- The services' performance particularly in terms of the core development management process and local plan progress.
- The use of resources within the service.

The review took the form of an analysis of data and information relating to the operation of the planning service. The review team watched recent Planning Sub Committee meetings of the council, online and in-person. It reviewed key documents and supporting material produced by the Council and undertook interviews from 16th to 19th October 2023 with councillors, senior managers, and staff from both inside the planning service and other parts of the Council, community groups, external consultees, developers, agents and partnering organisations.

This report is structured around the headings of:

- **Vision and leadership** - how the authority demonstrates leadership to integrate planning within corporate working to support delivery of corporate objectives.

- **Performance and management** - the effective use of skills and resources to achieve value for money, and the effectiveness of processes (and the roles of officers and members) in decision-making on development proposals.
- **Community engagement** – how the authority understands its community leadership role and community aspirations and uses planning to help deliver them.
- **Partnership engagement** – how the authority works with partners to balance priorities and resources to deliver agreed priorities.
- **Achieving outcomes** - how well the service leverages national and local planning policy to deliver the sustainable development and planning outcomes its community requires.

This review takes place a few months after the Council has undertaken a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) of the authority. Some of the findings of this planning service review build on and develop some of the findings from the CPC within the planning service.

Local government and planning services across the country are presently in very challenging times, with extensive resourcing difficulties that are expected to continue into the future. The review occurred at a time that the Government’s Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is progressing through Parliament to set future national planning policy, give details of any future changes in the national planning process and set out how the service will have to respond over the coming years, as well as more immediate new requirements for local authority planning services, such as the delivery of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain.

The Haringey planning service has 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 within the borough.

The Council has also gone through a recent period of change to its political leadership. This has brought a new and ambitious agenda for the council, aiming to transform its relationship with residents, creating stronger and more engaged services that can deliver their ambition for Haringey’s many communities. The Council is in the process of establishing a long-term vision for the borough. The Council’s new local plan will have the opportunity to be the spatial representation of the new council vision. The planning service is key to delivering the Council’s aims but it needs to be recognised that the timetable for local plan preparation is limited by the national requirement for local plans in the present planning system to be submitted for examination by 30th June 2025.

Overall, it is very evident from the review’s interactions with staff, councillors, communities, and partners during the review that there is a genuine passion for the service, the Council, and a real desire to deliver the best for the area and its communities.

The peer review team was made up of serving council officers and a councillor from local authorities from across the England and a PAS review manager.

The review team members were:

- **Marilyn Smith**, Head of Planning & Assurance, Barking & Dagenham Council
- **Sarah Scannell**, Assistant Director of Planning, Birmingham City Council
- **Jon Palmer**, Head of Planning, Milton Keynes City Council
- **Cllr Danny Beales**, Cabinet Member for New Homes, Jobs and Community Investment, Camden Council
- **Steve Barker**, Peer Challenge Manager, Planning Advisory Service

We commend the Council and the service for inviting in the review and its open and transparent approach to hosting the review. The team would like to thank the officers and members at Haringey Council and everybody they met during the process for their time and positive contributions.

4.0 Detailed Feedback

4.1 Vision & Leadership: how the authority demonstrates leadership to integrate planning within corporate working to support delivery of corporate objectives.

It is the review's findings that the London Borough of Haringey's planning service is performing well and regarded positively by developers and agents as users of the service and the community groups who regularly interact with the service. It is well respected by other services within the Council, councillors, and senior management of the Council. The senior leadership of the service is especially highly regarded.

The supportive working relationships within the service between officers, between officers and members, and the service's relationships with partners are excellent. There is a strong commitment to, and recognition of, the communities of the borough. The planning service has an overall good and dedicated group of staff within it, who all work supportively together, with a large amount of pride in working for the service. The whole team and the leadership of the service should be strongly commended in garnering this collective and supportive team spirit.

The senior management of the service is very honest in its leadership and has a drive to challenge itself and strive for improvement, as highlighted by the desire to undertake this review but also in its honest challenge to the service.

The service is in the process of updating the local plan from the present 2017 local plan document. This new local plan is recognised as a key document corporately through the Council's principles laid out in the Haringey Deal and the Haringey Corporate Delivery Plan by senior management. The Council is aiming to submit the new local plan in 2025, ahead of central government's proposed deadline of 30th June 2025 for local plans to be submitted for examination under the present local plan process. After this date the plan would need to conform to the new style plan making process presently progressing through the legislative process. The service's present timetable for the new local plan of: Draft Local Plan consultation in 2024, Proposed Submission consultation in 2024/25 and Examination and Adoption in 2025/26, has little to no flex against the central government-imposed requirement for submission by the end the June 2025. The review has some concerns that the present timetable to take the plan forward is going to be challenging, especially with what we believe is presently a lightly resourced local plan team.

There are positions within the planning policy team that have remained unfilled for an extended length of time. We believe this, along within Head of Planning Policy, Transport & Infrastructure having a wider responsibly away from the local plan, has hindered the plan coming forward. This is together with the fact that this small team also undertakes other policy work which can take the focus away from local plan work. The plan needs to be their principal focus to be able to deliver the new local plan on the proposed timetable.

The new local plan is vital in helping to deliver the Council's objectives and helping the service to make the link between the work of the planning service and the corporate aims and objectives. However, there is a lack of awareness from many of the purpose of the local plan, how it is a tool to deliver the growth that the borough needs and what outcomes can be achieved from having an up-to-date local plan. There is no published timetable, or clarity on the resourcing, and programme of work to deliver the new local plan. This includes a lack of dedicated and specific leadership and management of the local plan production.

There appears to be very little political ownership of the new local plan and little to no awareness by partners both inside and outside of the council. This local plan needs to be supported by vocal and consistent political leadership. It is recognised that there have been a number of changes over the recent past in the holder of the role of Cabinet Member for Planning. This high turnover of the role has brought a reduced visibility of the role as the political champion for the local plan and possibly in awareness of progress and timetable both internally and externally of the new local plan. The present Cabinet Member for Planning has a well-established understanding of the planning process from her previous role as the chair of the Council's planning committee and will be a great asset in her role of championing and leading

the local plan. This role is vital in promoting the progress of the local plan but also in giving strong leadership, governance, awareness, and linkages across the council.

The present governance structure with the local plan updates going to many of different boards and groups is not maximising the return of political leadership for the local plan. Due to the importance of the local plan corporately we suggest that there should be a more formal Local Plan Member Working Group. This working group should be chaired by the Cabinet Member for Planning with other relevant cabinet members on it. It should be receiving regular updates on progress of the local plan, focusing on the work undertaken, highlighting the work to come, making strategic joined up decisions across portfolios and giving the officers clear political steer and leadership for the production of the local plan and political ownership of the Council's local plan.

There also seemed little political or senior leadership vision for using developer contributions such as CIL and Section 106 to provide infrastructure, and then highlighting the benefits of this spend for infrastructure provision and resident engagement.

There is recognition of the Council priorities around the agenda of housing delivery in the borough and how the planning service plays its part in supporting this priority. There is awareness of the priority of the Haringey Deal across the service but little practical reflection of what this means on the ground presently for the service. In some areas of the service there was a lack of clarity or understanding of their role in delivering the Council's priorities, and that planning plays an important role in delivering them. There is a need to better recognise, own and embrace the Council's priorities, recognising its key role in delivering them. The planning service is often a public shopwindow for the Council and its therefore critical that the recommendations that are made are outcome focused. The new local plan and wider understanding of the Council's aims will be key in helping to bridge the gap of understanding and ownership of the Council's priorities with the service.

There are lots of examples of delivery occurring within the borough. The Council needs to recognise how it can attract new development coming into the borough; actively promoting what the Council is wanting to do for the next 10 or 15 years for the communities and the area, what the right kind of development is for the area and where those opportunities are, and present the full Council's commitment to it. This comes from the Council's long-term vision and should be a driver in the new local plan.

The Chief Executive wants to establish and deliver the strategic direction and priorities for the Council and sees the role of the planning service as a key driver for delivering them. The new local plan is key in making this linkage.

4.2 Performance & management: the effective use of skills and resources to achieve value for money, and the effectiveness of processes (and the roles of officers and members) production of planning policy and in decision-making on development proposals – including how the Council's Planning Committee is functioning.

The service is regarded positively by developers and agents as users of the service and the community groups who regularly interact with the service. It is considered "professional" and "engaging" and seen as a "positive", "problem-solving" service. It is well respected by other services within the Council, councillors, and senior management. The senior leadership of the service is especially highly regarded and seen as accessible, responsive, and supportive. The working and supportive nature of relationships within the service, and between officers and members, and partners are positive. This was noted by many people we spoke with from both inside and outside of the service, including external partners. The leadership of the service should be highly commended for building this culture within the service.

As already highlighted, the timetable to produce the new local plan is going to be challenging with what we believe is limited resources in the planning policy team, with no room to delay against the national government target of submission of the local plan in the present system before June 2025.

Presently there is only a very small planning policy team of only 5 to bring the plan forward, with an unfilled post of Planning Policy Team Manager, and the Head of Planning Policy, Transport & Infrastructure interim for a couple of years. This is less than we would expect to see in a planning policy team for a London Borough or comparable sized authority. We have concerns that there is a lack of the required resources available and focused leadership and direction within the planning policy team to facilitate and deliver the plan against the proposed timetable.

Production of the local plan has already fallen behind its initial proposed timetable of submission in early 2023, which is now delayed until 2024/25. As noted above, there is also a distinct lack of awareness of (and focus on) the timetable and aims for the new local plan. This view was from both external partners and some key internal council partners.

A detailed and resourced programme of work to deliver the new local plan to the proposed timetable needs to be produced, with a specific project management responsibility and clear and regular communication to internal and external partners.

Recognising the resources that will be required for the different stages of work to deliver the plan is critical to delivering the plan to the proposed timetable. We believe that the planning policy team will be able to work with individuals and skills from across the Council within the Regeneration Service and others to deliver the production of the local plan.

There has been good work undertaken around the initial digital engagement on the plan, and this very much supports the Council's aims around engagement with communities through the Haringey Deal, and we have heard that there is draft local plan material available. The local plan is a great opportunity to build on this already heralded engagement work and support the Council's aims of engagement and delivery with the communities of the borough.

We are aware that the Council is presently working on its vision and aims for the area. The local plan should be recognised as the spatial manifestation of that vision and aims. There is a great opportunity to move these forward together, but the local plan cannot be delayed.

The Development Management service is 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. There is a strong recognition of how the service has improved over the last 10 years.

The borough has seen a steady increase in the number of applications received, with major applications practically doubling, compared to previous years but this appears to be slowing again.

The services' internal performance management is highlighting a considerable increase in the average days taken to decide major and minor applications in the present period. Caseloads have been rising historically over the last year but there is some recognition that this is starting to reduce with recent increased output from the service. We suspect that this is due in part to managing the impact of integrating the new Arcus IT system into the service, which, along with the hard work of the Development Management team is starting to make some inroads into the backlog of cases but it is recognised that there is still a lot of work required to bring the backlog down. The high number of backlog cases and risk of lost income from the return of fees through the planning guarantee is concerning and it has been recognised from within the service that it needs to be proactively managed by Team Managers and the service with some importance.

The service has bid to access funding from central government to help reduce the backlog and they are waiting to hear if they have been successful. This is similar to almost all local planning authorities across the country. Hopefully the service will be successful in accessing the requested funding but how the service chooses to use this extra resource to clear the backlog will be interesting. We would suggest that even though the service will have to undertake some short-term actions to help reduce it there will need a more permanent rethink to help the service remain on top of it going forward.

There was a consistent message from individuals we engaged with that the planning service was under resourced. Data from the last few years, compared to other London Boroughs, shows the Haringey planning service appears to be below average for staffing numbers, 37 planning staff compared to a London average of 46, but with fairly comparable numbers of development management staff, and in recent history dealing with a just below average number of applications when compared across London. However, as highlighted previously, there has been a noted increase in the number of planning applications, particularly major applications, received by the council recently albeit this appears to be starting to decline this year. The service is performing well in delivering above average net dwellings, affordable housing provision, and reported performance in handling timeliness of applications. It has as an average for expenditure per head of population and below average cost delivering the service compared to other London Boroughs.

Every planning service in the country would like more resources, and Haringey is no exception. We recognise that resources are limited within planning and local government. The Development Management service is working very hard with the resources that it has available and that this is at a comparable ratio of volume of applications to officer numbers to other similar sized local authorities. We do believe that a reduction presently would affect future performance and we conclude if more resources are not going to be available, or even if they are, the service will have to consider changing some of its present processes. This includes embracing more opportunities for the new IT system to better utilise the planning resources and skills available to it, recognising tasks which could be undertaken by non-planning staff.

Feedback from users and partners of the service suggests that there is a considerable reliance on engagement with the Assistant Director and Head of Development Management & Enforcement of the service. It is great that these individuals are seen so positively, but it does raise concerns about the resilience of the service and dependencies on these key individuals. We understand that the Development Management service has previously embraced a Systems Thinking approach to the receipt and decision making of applications. This approach is not universally popular with officers, many of whom see it as part of the cause of the backlog of applications. Case officers are “tied up” with competing deadlines around validation of applications, appeals, and application decisions, that if do not happen within ideal timescales, put more pressure on timely decision making by the service.

There are obviously some very well informed, experienced, and very committed Development Management officers within the service. Using their expertise within the department, we believe that a small working group of DM officers from across the service, including the Performance Manager, could engage with something like the PAS DM Challenge Toolkit, to recognise blockages, improving the DM process, helping own an improved process and freeing up planning resource. Changes could include making sure that work is undertaken at the most appropriate level within the service, using the professional planners to focus on planning work rather than administrative work. The service should also look at upskilling individuals to enable them to take on complex cases, to have the confidence to engage with key partners, to negotiate on schemes with confidence. Recognising where efforts and resources could be better focused. There should be a consistent and positive performance management process of individuals’ throughput and removing any duplication of checks. The service might have to be brave to even suggest reducing the quality of some activities that are obviously welcomed by applicants that cannot be supported with limited resources such as not validating applications when they are unacceptable, reducing the length of reports, requiring all advice to be directed to pre-application service, reducing negotiations with applicants on schemes without pre-application advice, reducing number of staff attending planning committee and other corporate meetings, and undertaking committee site visits by exception. We are not advising that all these activities specifically need to stop but that the service needs to evaluate what can and cannot be done with the limited resources available.

The initial implementation of the new Arcus IT system has been undertaken and the initial potential benefits are starting to be recognised by some within the team. This is a great start but there are further opportunities to embrace that the new system can support the service. Only a few individuals are actively and fully invested in getting the most out of the new system and the level and depth of usage appears to have stalled with some team members, so the maximum benefits of the new system are not being gained.

There is a reliance on a single external contractor to support the new system with little or no dedicated internal ownership.

We suggest that such a long-term and key programme requires a more specific and detailed project management resource and support for a number of “super users” in the service to support and drive embedding the new system and maximising of its benefits.

The system can also help to actively manage performance across the teams. There were concerns expressed that there is presently an inconsistency across the teams in performance management. Consistency across the Team Managers can allow more targeted use of resources and support to keep on top of performance, being proactive in addressing the backlog of applications, delivering timely decisions and consistency across the service.

The Council’s Planning Enforcement Team is working very well with high levels of performance compared to other local authorities’ enforcement functions both nationally and within London. They are issuing timely decisions, high numbers of notices and offering paid for advice. They are recognised as an integral part of the planning team and the collective team spirit of the service and they recognise that they could work closer with the Development Management service and are a potential resource to aid the reduction of the backlog of applications, particularly as many planning cases are joint enforcement cases. They are actively embracing the new Arcus IT system, using it to develop their own workflows. There is potential for the Enforcement Team to be recognised as part of the focus on income generation by the planning service through cost applications, prosecutions and applications submitted due to enforcement.

It is recognised that the service has contributed to the Council’s financial position directly through Section 106 and developer contributions, application fees, accessing external funding and savings already made and indirectly through the related extra Council tax, Business rates and New Homes Bonus for new homes and commercial spaces from planning decisions. There is good initial work underway to maximise this commercial income available from the service to support capital projects and recognising where planning can actively support the Council’s wider agenda. This work needs to continue and be built on to maximise commercial income brought in by the service. This might mean that the service has to become a little more “hardnosed” in some of its external dealings with customers, such as limiting advice to the paid for planning advice service and having a streamlined processes for receiving requests for advice and recognition of the associated income. The widely held recognition that the service is working with limited resources and the present goodwill held towards the service will go a long way in supporting this.

As part of the review, we took the opportunity to view the Council’s planning committee, the Planning Sub Committee. This was done through watching a sample of recent committees both online and in-person. The Haringey Planning Sub Committee is a very good example of how public facing planning committees are run. The role of the planning committee Chair is recognised as a key role. The present Chair is well respected, well informed, clear in managing the process of decision making. There appears to be a very good and trusted relationship between the committee chair and the Head of Development Management & Enforcement and the Assistant Director Planning, Building Standards & Sustainability. It was very apparent that the members of the committee work respectfully with each other, the Chair, and officers. The planning case officers are well respected and treated professionally by the committee members in the meetings and were considered helpful by planning committee members we spoke with. Officers are professional and responsive to questions that are raised by the committee members and the interactions between officers and members appear professional and courteous.

The Council’s streaming of the Planning committee is very good, with good audio and targeted video of anybody who speaks at the committee.

As the service looks at how it uses its planning officer resources it should include how it supports the committee. Recognising the time taken to service the committee, produce committee reports, including very comprehensive appendix to reports, and the time of senior officers attending committee.

The role of the councillor on committee is important and challenging and access to training, as well as support from planning officers, is essential for members to fulfil the role well. The service should work closely with the Council members to give informal opportunities to share information between officers and committee members and that they are aware of how they can engage with officers if they have questions, to ensure that any required information will be available when the committee sits to enable quality decision making. This informal advice should sit alongside an increase in the number and variety of more formal training and briefing sessions for committee members around key topic areas, to review decisions, appeal outcomes and progress of delivery against local plan policies. We appreciate that some of this is occurring during the regular site visits that the committee undertake and through the triannual Strategic Planning Committee meetings. Some of this training should be expanded to help ward councillors in their role as intermediaries for communities to engage in the planning process.

4.3 Community Engagement: how the authority understands its community leadership role and community aspirations and uses planning to help deliver them.

It is apparent that the planning service is very aware of, and focused on, the many diverse communities of the borough. It was widely recognised that the Council faces a challenging “East/West” divide in engagement with communities of the borough. There is a strong awareness and engagement of the often “seldom heard” key groups of the community by both officers and members. There is a clear and positive commitment to the principles of community engagement within the service.

There are some very well-informed community groups and individual local residents within the borough, with a very good understanding of the complexities of the development and wider planning processes, the developments, and the opportunities of their areas, as well as great knowledge of their communities. Many were also very aware and sympathetic to the Council’s resourcing challenges. There is a strong recognition from the service that the community and residents’ groups are an important part of ensuring that communities can effectively interact with the planning system. Of the residents’ groups that we spoke with there was a lot of positivity towards the service with recognition that the service is working hard, recognising how they can engage with the service, with good engagement with senior leaders of the service being out and about and engaging with the communities. There was recognition of a difference in engagement with residents in the east and west of the borough. In the west, the more traditional amenity groups like paper, whereas greater engagement is digital in the east where there are fewer formal groups. There was a strong desire from the residents’ groups and communities that we spoke with to engage in the planning process. This was expressed particularly around early and ongoing engagement in the local plan production, engagement in the pre-application process where appropriate and improved communication on planning enforcement cases. It was highlighted that some resident’s groups had received very useful briefings on the local plans, whereas others were not informed.

Though the awareness or knowledge of the “what” of the Haringey Deal has very much landed with the service there is not a strong understanding of the “how” of the Haringey Deal will be applied within the planning service in the day to day working practices.

Embracing the Haringey Deal and bringing the engagement of the local communities to the heart of the service’s work on the local plan is a great opportunity, it will help local communities to shape how the borough develops and for the service to practically embrace a key council objective.

The digital initial local plan engagement has been recognised as innovative in its use of technology to help enhance engagement. Good and meaningful public engagement of the local plan making is often the most resource and time intensive in plan making. Given limited resources and time this could present a challenge where the opportunity is greatest for meaningful collaboration with the community.

Residents highlighted that when they engage with their ward councillor on planning issues is dependent on the particular ward councillor and how well they are informed. We had limited engagement with ward councillors during the review, but they should be seen as a vital part of the service’s engagement with

communities and every opportunity should be given to help them be informed on planning process and issues and include them in planning engagement work.

There are positive community engagements being undertaken in the Regeneration and Housing work through the Placemaking agenda. However, the planning process does feel a little disjointed from these wider placemaking engagement processes. There are concerns, and some examples identified, that this will bring a duplication of efforts or missed opportunities to enhance both agendas or appear disjointed or confusing to communities.

The Council does not have a large number of neighbourhood plans made or in production but there was some frustration noted amongst some neighbourhood groups about the level of engagement with them on their neighbourhood plans. It is a really interesting challenge for the service and recognised by the Council's commitment to engagement with the breadth of communities in the borough, of how to engage and support constructively with different communities, with different requirements of support and representation, to be a positive experience.

The service has started some good initial work around participatory budgeting around Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and there are examples of how this money is being spent in different areas. However, there was quite a low awareness of how to access this amongst community and councillors, so we recommend building on the participatory budgeting approach or even undertaking a lower-level engagement, recognising that CIL & NCIL spending supports the aims of the Council of working with, and delivering for, communities and maximising the visibility of planning service.

4.4 Partnership Engagement: how the authority works with partners to balance priorities and resources to deliver agreed priorities.

It is the review's findings that the London Borough of Haringey's planning service is regarded very positively by developers and agents, as users of the service, and, as previously noted, the community groups who regularly interact with the service.

The officers of the service are well respected by the councillors, other services within the council, and senior management. The senior leadership of the service are especially highly regarded.

The direct working relationship between the officer and members of the planning committee and Cabinet Member appear to be very strong, with a lot of professional trust and support between the two.

External partners, developers, and agents are very positive about their engagement with the service and particularly appreciate the level of access to senior leadership of the service, especially Assistant Director and Heads of Services. We heard some really good examples of excellence in customer service in dealing with planning applications in a timely manner and the delivery of good professional pre application advice.

It was highlighted that there is a lack of consistency with engagement and performance in some parts of the team and the challenge of accessing planning officers by telephone was raised a number of times. This lack of consistency appears to mean that a lot of engagement is directed at the senior leadership of the service; Assistant Director, and Head of Service. We recognise that this puts a strain on the level of the service and is a potential critical failure point in the future of the service.

Partners were aware that there were some resourcing challenges within the service, particularly around the limited resources available in heritage and design.

Other Council departments are also very positive about the work of the team and believe them to be open, collegiate, and focused on delivering the Council aims. There is an appreciation of the high volume of work undertaken in the team and that they see the value in engaging and contributing to support to achieve significant outcomes for the borough, for example working with the Housing Delivery Team.

Very few of the partners we spoke with were able to articulate what they believed the aims and objectives of the borough were when it came to development and placemaking. There was very little awareness or engagement from the developers and agents we spoke with of the local plan, its aims, work to date or timetable going forward. Many did not appreciate the local plan's relevance to their own priorities, particularly as "things were getting done anyway" from those that were already active in the borough.

Some partners, including some councillors, are not clear how decisions were made about the direction for development in the borough and the roles of each part of the Council. This limits the ability to maximise opportunities and build relationships for the future of the borough.

There is a significant opportunity for the council to better engage with the GLA (Greater London Authority) and TfL (Transport for London) as key partners around bringing the local plan forward, highlighting opportunities for the potential release of sites e.g., Crossrail 2 safeguarded sites, and raising awareness of the development aims and opportunities in the borough.

The local plan is the opportunity to bring partners with you about the type of development that the Council wants to see.

4.5 Achieving Outcomes: how well the service leverages national and local planning policy to deliver the sustainable development and planning outcomes its community requires.

There are lots of really good things happening in Haringey; lots of examples of delivery occurring within the borough and in the pipeline to happen in the future. The planning service is seen very positively, as "builders not blockers" by both internal and external partners and there is a strong recognition that the service is trying to get positive outcomes for the borough. And as mentioned the planning team is well respected and valued within the Council and across other services.

The council needs to recognise how it can attract new development coming into the borough; actively promoting what the council wants to achieve over the next 10 or 15 years for the communities and the area, the right kind of development for the area and where those opportunities are. This comes from the Council's long-term vision and the new local plan. It should be presented as a single narrative and backed by the full Council's commitment. The new local plan needs to have a greater visibility, greater awareness of the aims and the timetable for production, particularly for external partners but also internally.

As already mentioned, the policy team feels very lean, and we believe will need resource to deliver to the timescale required for what is such a key council strategy. There appears to be potential resource outside of the policy team, principally in the Regeneration programme, that we believe can support the plan making process and bringing more consistency in how the placemaking agenda and the new local plan can work collectively together.

We feel there should be greater clarity on the political leadership and governance of the local plan. The present engagement with the multiple officer boards which are not signing off or contributing on the plan but feels more of "tick box" rather than governance.

Across the service there is a strong commitment and understanding of the Council's corporate priority to deliver housing in the borough.

The Council's Quality Review Panel (QRP) process is welcomed and recognised as driving good quality design in the area and the recognition of good design through the Council's Design Awards. The Council's design officer was highlighted as a particular positive, helping to drive good design quality. However, the limitations of the resource with only one design officer were also highlighted. Access to urban design skills are particularly limited at present within the sector, but with an increasing focus in this area of work in the future through planning reform, the Council might need to think how it can increase this

resource through access to shared services with the neighbouring boroughs or expanding the knowledge base within the team.

The approach the service is taking to develop the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) is quite innovative and comprehensive. The IDP summit held in early October was a pragmatic and collaborative approach to stakeholder engagement. The service needs to make sure the IDP is focused on supporting the development and adoption of the local plan.

More transparency of the process of allocating CIL to infrastructure projects, and the benefits this brings to the borough, is needed. It is recognised by some that the opportunities that Planning income from CIL brings, how its allocation can support the delivery of key projects for the communities and the wider borough but there is very little recognition and understanding of how CIL spend is allocated on projects across the borough or had clarity of where the political oversight or leadership of the CIL spend happens. The use of CIL and NCIL spend could be used positively to engage with communities, delivering recognised infrastructure needs. It is felt that there could be improved communications with communities on where CIL & NCIL is to be spent.

As previously mentioned, the service has made a strong start of making the planning service become more commercial and this will need to be built upon and embedded to help the service to continue to be resourced to deliver the good work occurring in the service and maintain the good delivery occurring in the borough.

5.0 Implementation, next steps and further support

It is recognised that the Council and service will want to consider and reflect on these findings.

To support openness and transparency, we recommend that the council shares this report with officers and that they publish it for information for wider stakeholders. There is also an expectation that the council responds to the finding in the report and develops an action plan to be published alongside the report.

Where possible, PAS and the LGA will support councils with the implementation of the recommendations as part of the Council's improvement programme.

A range of support from the [LGA](#) and [PAS](#) is available on their websites. Some specific areas of support that the authority might wish to look at includes:

- [Local Plan Project Management support](#)
- [Development Management Challenge Toolkit](#)
- [Improving governance of developer contributions](#)
- [Biodiversity Net Gain Readiness Checklist for Local Authorities](#)

It is recommended that Haringey Council discuss ongoing PAS support with Steve Barker, Principal Consultant, stephen.barker@local.gov.uk and any corporate support with Kate Herbert, Principal Adviser, kate.herbert@local.gov.uk

As part of the LGA's peer review peer impact assessment and evaluation, PAS and the LGA will contact the Council in 6-12 months to see how the recommendations are being implemented and the beneficial impact experienced.

The author of this report is Steve Barker (stephen.barker@local.gov.uk), on behalf of the peer review team.

This report was finalised in agreement with the Council on 24/11/2023.

We are grateful for the support of everyone that contributed to this review.



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