

# Corporate Peer Challenge

## **London Borough of Haringey Council**

*11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> February 2019*

Feedback Report

## 1. Executive Summary

Haringey has experienced significant political and managerial change in the past two years. The Leader, though a Councillor for many years and the previous Deputy Leader of the Council, only became Leader in May 2018. 50 percent of all councillors were newly elected in May 2018. The Chief Executive commenced in post only two years ago and the Corporate Board has changed its membership.

Given this level of change the peer challenge took place at an opportune time.

This peer challenge took place five years after Haringey's last corporate peer challenge (which is recognised as good practice). Since the previous peer challenge significant progress has been made in many areas of the Council's services and it was particularly pleasing to hear of the genuine improvement in Children's services and health and social care integration, in financial awareness and in both partner and staff engagement.

Tremendous ambition and a changed strategic direction are being demonstrated by the current administration and this is reflected in the recently published Borough Plan. The Council is keen to be demonstrably aligned to community needs and has good data and evidence which support the agreed priorities within the Borough Plan. The Borough Plan also has good partner co-production and buy in. This positive start now needs strengthening with the alignment of resources and performance data which will underpin the delivery of the plan during the next three years.

Additionally, the Council needs to ensure that it is externally focussed and is fully responding to the needs of all residents, rather than just the most vocal, when determining its strategies going forward and, to more clearly articulate and communicate its agendas around economic and social renewal, and community wealth building. This should be undertaken on an urgent basis. Headline priorities, such as the aspiration to build 1,000 social housing units over four years, need to be underpinned by clear financial and delivery plans, whilst also being positioned as part of a more complete economic and social renewal strategy. The Council could be more forthright in seeking to improve the public realm and leverage the public estate which, in places, is starting to feel dated and if not invested in could cause economic stagnation.

The Leader and Chief Executive are recognised by many as leading the place well at a time of significant change. Partners are positive about the inclusive leadership they bring to the organisation. The Council is seen as a system leader particularly around health and social care integration. The significant improvements in school performance and children services more broadly are also recognised and welcomed.

All the Council staff that we met were highly committed and enthusiastic and they demonstrate a real passion for Haringey. We also met some very talented senior staff whilst on site. A strong shift in culture within the organisation has been delivered in the time since the Chief Executive was appointed, however, significant challenges remain. Staff see the Leader and Chief Executive as being both supportive and accessible, but the organisation needs to take care that it is not overly reliant on the personal interventions of these individuals and that a more dispersed leadership model and culture is developed. Cross party working is increasing and this too is positive.

The Cabinet was newly appointed in May 2018 and Cabinet members are seen to be committed and enthusiastic. The Corporate Board are committed to delivering the Borough Plan and relationships between members and officers are largely positive. It is essential that this positivity is reflected in all aspects of the Council's work and that Overview and Scrutiny ensures that the very fine line between holding people to account and appropriate scrutiny is observed.

The Council's financial position is very challenging. The policy ambition of the Council makes this position even more challenging.

Under the leadership of a new Finance Director, over the past year the Council has significantly improved its financial capacity, understanding and ownership of its budgetary position. The Council now needs to put in place a decision-making process which will deliver the required level of savings through to 2022. The Council will also need to ensure that its programme management capacity is robust, is closely aligned with its savings plans and operates on a whole Council basis in order to ensure delivery of planned savings whilst also enabling significant change.

In the first instance, the Council needs to immediately address the requirement for significant savings in 2020/21. To facilitate Councillors making these decisions officers will need to further strengthen regular financial monitoring arrangements and report on the financial and operational risks related to the delivery of the Borough Plan. This needs to be a continual process and a clear decision-making pathway through to autumn 2019 is required. Failure to take this action would result in the further depletion of reserves and a precarious future for the Council and its services.

Like all councils the capacity in Haringey is stretched and, therefore, it is imperative that members and senior officers direct their time to the Council's agreed strategic priorities. It will be essential that the Cabinet focuses on the strategic priorities in the Borough Plan and demonstrate considerable political resolve to be able to deliver on their agreed agenda. If this is not achieved and they, and so staff, are diverted on to non-priorities then the policy imperatives of the Council will falter.

The corporate centre of the organisation could be differently organised to provide better support to the organisation. Investment in IT systems and an HR function which is fit for purpose will be essential to enable significant in-sourcing of services. The sequencing of in-sourcing alongside the capacity of the organisation to support a larger and more delivery focussed organisation will be critical to its success.

Good leadership intentions were evident in the establishment of staff equality networks to ensure staff have a voice to both celebrate their differences as well as a point of contact to be consulted on council wide policies. Staff networks praised the Chief Executive for this initiative, however, much more needs to be done to raise awareness and demonstrate its effectiveness on the ground. The Council's statutory equality objectives need to be aligned to the corporate performance report in order to ensure equalities and tackling inequalities is taken seriously.

In summary, Haringey has delivered in the past and it can deliver in the future. It has an exciting future ahead for its residents if it can resolve its budgetary position at pace and with engaging, distributed leadership.

## 2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations on-site, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

- Given the number of priorities within your Borough Plan, look to agree and focus on the key strategic priorities with political resolve to ensure that these are delivered
- Agree a sustainable Medium-Term Financial Strategy by October 2019 with a clear decision-making pathway
- Focus and obtain management grip for the delivery of your operational and financial plans
- Further develop team working between Cabinet and Corporate Board
- Develop an inclusive programme of member and officer development to enable greater clarity of roles for all fostering a culture of appropriate challenge and collaboration
- Celebrate your successes
- Better communicate your intentions to communities, partners and staff with a clear and coherent narrative for place

## 3. Summary of the Peer Challenge

### The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Haringey Council were:

- Carolyn Downs - Chief Executive, LB of Brent Council
- Cllr Rishi Shori - Council Leader, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
- Liz Bruce – Director of Adult Social Services, Richmond and Wandsworth Councils,
- Adrian Loades - Corporate Director of People, LB of Redbridge Council
- Jonathan Tew – Assistant Chief Executive, Birmingham City Council
- Shammi Jalota – Head of Partnerships & Equalities, Essex County Council
- Peter Robinson – LGA Associate (Finance)
- Peter Rentell - LGA Peer Challenge Manager

## Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges cover. These are the areas we believe are critical to Councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the Council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of Place: Does the Council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the Council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the Council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to provide a critical friend review as follows:

*“The Council is agreeing its Borough Plan in February 2019 so is keen to focus on how well set up it is to deliver against the plan, especially in relation to the way it prioritises within the Borough Plan, and invites the peer team to reflect particularly on how set we are to deliver the level of partnership working required to make the ambition of a Borough, rather than Corporate, plan a reality by the end of the plan period.”*

## The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual Councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a Council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 4 days on-site at Haringey Council, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 120 people including a range of Council staff together with Councillors, external partners, stakeholders and young people.
- Gathered information and views from more than 50 meetings and additional research and reading.

- Collectively spent more than 280 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending over 8 weeks in Haringey Council.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> February 2019). In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

## 4. Feedback

### 4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

The Borough Plan was developed through effective engagement with residents and partners over the course of one year with a series of surveys, events and conferences. The Borough Plan is based on good data, in particular the State of the Borough report July 2018 and the Residents Survey of 2018. These, along with other sources, provide a comprehensive and insightful view of residents' expectations for the Borough. The Administration is keen to be demonstrably aligned to the community needs and this was evident from our discussions.

Partners consistently referred to their engagement with the development of the Borough Plan and their ownership of it and gave good examples of co-production. The monthly breakfast meetings with the Chief Executive were highly regarded as opportunities to take forward the development of strategy and to respond to current key issues.

There is clear and tangible political and officer passion for the place and understanding of its context both locally and nationally. Haringey has representatives at London Councils' various forums and are part of the Central London Forward grouping of Councils for sub-regional partnership working on jobs, skills and housing.

The Borough Plan contains a large number of objectives and, though all relevant, a greater focus on a smaller number of key strategic priorities would be helpful to delivery. We suggest that objectives need prioritising early with an associated annual delivery plan with targets and financial information in support of the desired outcomes. Moving forward the analysis of data needs to be more obviously aligned to both resources and performance. This will then underpin the delivery of the plan over the next three years.

Based on feedback received from elected members of all political persuasions and positions within the Authority, there was a clear sense that the Council did not adequately celebrate its many successes, for example the increase in the Council Tax Support Scheme, and also engagement with the broader population on key policy challenges facing the borough. An example that was given was the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) led by the previous administration which was a policy devised around economic regeneration which faced considerable political and resident opposition. The new administration has cancelled this scheme based on the political preference 'to build council homes on our own land'. This needs to be explained within the context of a wider strategy for economic and social renewal in order to ensure that a clear narrative is given about the change in policy and its wider impact. In fact, the Council has very recently moved to agree terms with a development partner Lendlease to continue work on the major High Road West scheme in Tottenham. This will help to build confidence that the Council is keen to continue economic renewal of the right kind and should make this known and clear to residents, businesses and developers.

This example shows that the Council can make tough decisions and that will be a key requirement moving forward. Newly elected members will need to be courageous in their decision-making in the light of the financial challenges faced. In addition, they will need to engage directly with all residents as well as vocal activists on significant issues.

The development community we spoke to saw Haringey's spatial planning team as one of the most impressive and efficient across the country. This is to be commended around a service that, until recently, was benchmarked in the bottom quartile nationally. Developers

felt that regardless of the political context, Haringey was always likely to be a strong area with growth potential due to exceptionally good transport links.

Because of the issues relating to the HDV, feedback was given in interviews that some now see the regeneration agenda as 'toxic'. On that basis there was a lack of clarity in relation to what the administration's approach to social and economic renewal is and as stated elsewhere in this report this is an area which needs to be urgently clarified.

This equally extends to community wealth building. The Council should create a clear narrative of how they intend to use their significant asset base in Wood Green and their significant spending power to genuinely create community wealth through economic and social renewal.

For example, the Council priority to deliver 1000 homes over the next four years needs to be positioned alongside a more comprehensive economic renewal strategy. This strategy needs to consider job creation, whole-system skills improvement and maximise opportunities for growth through both community wealth building and residents' accessing the tremendous employment opportunities presented by the Greater London economy. Partners pointed to positive examples such as Tottenham Development Charter as opportunities for the private sector to demonstrate to local politicians their willingness to engage in improving social outcomes whilst also generating profit.

## **4.2 Leadership of Place**

The Council Leader and Chief Executive are recognised as key players in providing strong leadership for the place during a period of considerable change and financial challenge. The Council leadership are seen as positive and proactive system leaders by the CCG and health partners. In addition, the recognition and support for future housing needs as a key area of focus within the future plan are welcomed.

Overall the Council is well regarded by the majority of partners and is seen to have improved significantly in terms of service delivery and partnership working over recent years. There was a strong sense that leadership, partnership and system wide commitment to own and deliver the priorities within the Borough Plan were genuine and this was evidenced in terms of the partnership approach to knife and other serious violent crime. The Council is showing strong system leadership in responding to the issue of young people at risk. There is good statutory, voluntary and community sector commitment to developing a shared strategy and working with the Council to better protect young people.

Likewise, with the Community First programme is considered by the peer team to be a great initiative. The Community First programme is looking to different parts of the public and voluntary sector to respond to early warning signs that individuals or families may need help using data to predict where assistance would be best directed. This approach to identify low cost, community-based interventions to prevent people from entering into acute need is commended.

The Community First programme is taking forward approaches to asset-based interventions that support residents to meet their needs through co-ordinating and connecting them to resources in the community. There is a strong and positive cross Council working on this initiative which extends to a new approach to tackling street homelessness. It is encouraging that the Council has commissioned an independent evaluation of the initiative, however, there is a strong national evidence base that demonstrates the success of asset and community-based working which should be

considered. In the light of the budget and demand challenges it faces, the Council should consider how the programme can be mainstreamed across the Borough and have even greater impact on statutory services by ensuring that need is met upstream.

The voluntary sector considers the Council to be a strong and receptive partner and felt that their voice is being heard. The Bridge New Trust were very supportive of the ambitions within the Borough Plan. Increasingly the wider Council is perceived as recognising the benefits of partnership working within the sector. Cross-Council working and engagement with the sector was also seen as improving and this has enabled the leverage of funding opportunities.

The Council has made strong progress, particularly over the last few months, in strengthening its children's services, as recognised by Ofsted. An approach that focuses on ensuring that the basics are done well has secured improvement. Schools were positive about their relationships with the Council and felt well supported. The Haringey Education Partnership provides a vehicle for taking forward further improvements in educational standards in a strong partnership with schools. The Council was ahead of the national developments of Integrated Care systems with longstanding partnerships in place to develop the integration of health and social care services. Relationships provide a strong foundation for progressing the operational integration of commissioning and services.

However, there is a need for the Council to establish wider buy-in to delivery and budget plans for its housing targets within the Borough Plan. It was clear to us that elected members and strategic partners were generally supportive of the housing priority to deliver 1000 homes over the next four years. Given that some officers are sceptical as to whether the target can be achieved it is also clear to us that that it will be essential to put in place an agreed delivery plan as soon as possible.

We picked up a sense from elected members that the borough plan whilst ambitious is not focussed due to a lack of prioritisation. Providing that focus is established it will then support conversations on budget setting, provide direction to staff and enable unambiguous conversations with communities.

A clear and coherent narrative that tells the story of the Council's ambitions for the place into the longer term will provide greater clarity and direction. This stronger narrative would help communities, partners and staff better understand the Council's priorities more clearly and would also enable the Council to focus its resources on the partnerships and relationships that are most important in achieving its vision.

### **4.3 Organisational leadership and governance**

The peer team saw evidence of constructive member and officer working relationships at all levels across the Council and respectful behaviour between officers and members. The Council Leader and Chief Executive are seen by staff and partners as symbolic of the improvement journey the Council is on and both are passionate about achieving their ambitions for the Council and the place. Staff and partners also told us that both were accessible and supportive. In addition, we saw positive working relationships across the Corporate Board which is starting to cascade into the rest of the organisation.

Cabinet members are seen to be committed, enthusiastic and gaining confidence and knowledge in their respective portfolio areas. Given the significant number of new Councillors in May 2018 this is encouraging but the Administration has been in post for nine months now and needs to concentrate on delivery of the Borough plan. It is important

to ensure adequate support is in place going forward to enable councillors to fulfil their roles and that they have the 'tools to do the job'. To meet the future challenges there needs to be absolute clarity about the roles and responsibilities of elected members.

Cross-party working, including for instance through a Fairness Commission, to identify and act upon key areas of inequality, is increasing and this is a positive step.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny committee is fully conversant with the role and its importance in scrutinising the work of the administration. A particularly good area of practice was identified in relation to the setting of the Overview and Scrutiny work plan which included inviting members of the public to a public meeting (called a Scrutiny Cafe) to help determine the committee's priorities. However, it is very important that the scrutiny panels better understand their role and the fine dividing line between the appropriate challenge of officers and behaviour which could be perceived as being confrontational. As such the Council may wish to consider an inclusive programme of member and officer development which will facilitate a culture of collaboration where all are fully conversant of their roles.

Overall the Council has sound corporate governance and is strong on probity issues. We found no significant standards issues and the Monitoring Officer manages this area with rigour.

The Chief Executive is highly regarded by partners and staff and is seen as a driving force behind a range of partnership and Council initiatives. Staff consistently saw the Chief Executive as accessible and the person to go to with new ideas and proposals. However, the council's corporate structures do not currently best support the Council's ambitions. Functions that are normally considered as a part of the corporate centre such as performance management and procurement are dispersed more widely across the organisation. As a consequence, the Council does not have a critical mass of services at its core to drive forward Council wide improvement and initiatives and is too dependent on the Chief Executive undertaking such a role. This needs to be resolved and it is imperative going forward that any structure, and any appointments to it, must have the full buy-in of both Cabinet and the Chief Executive.

Some frustration was reported as to the speed of decision making within the Council. When tested it transpired that the number of steps that need to be taken for decisions to be made was not significantly greater to that in most councils. However, decision making could be quickened through more delegation and better co-ordination. The Leading Together development programme for managers has been highly regarded by managers and created a stronger expectation that managers will be empowered to make appropriate decisions. There is some frustration that this does not match the reality and the Council should consider how it can actively and appropriately devolve decision making through the organisation.

There was a feeling from elected members that the flow of information from within the Council to elected members and to the public was not as good as it could be. A more effective flow with greater transparency will help to take some of the heat out of controversial issues. A more open and swift flow of information will also serve to facilitate more purposeful scrutiny.

Performance management is not currently sufficiently robust. There are good tools for monitoring performance corporately, but these do not appear to be kept up to date and performance needs to be considered routinely by the Corporate Board and then through

Directorate Management Teams. The Borough Plan provides an opportunity to align corporate objectives with individual objectives and appraisals.

There is a desire to embrace and embed staff equality networks and the leadership from the Chief Executive in this area was warmly welcomed. However, there was a view from network members that some senior managers don't see the value of allowing staff time to participate. Staff networks are often asked to get involved in advising on Equality Impact assessments which is positive, but more could be done to ensure networks have sufficient time to engage in the process rather than just at the end of the process. Funds could be made available to support Network Chairs develop their role and align their work more closely to the work of Human Resources.

#### **4.4 Financial planning and viability**

The Council has made significant progress in the last year under the leadership of the new Director of Finance and has reached a position where increasingly realistic budgets are in place that are more widely owned across the organisation. This has involved both cultural change across the Council, led by the Chief Executive, and also the abandonment of unrealistic savings targets particularly in social care services. Nevertheless, the Council's financial position remains fragile. In its medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) to 2023/24 the Council has a growing gap between estimated income and expenditure that will require it to identify additional savings of £20m. The bulk of these new savings or increased income, £13m, will need to be identified by at least October 2019 and in place for April 2020 in order not to further reduce reserves.

Members recognise that 2019/20 has effectively been a transition year following significant political change in the Council and that they now must urgently put in place a decision-making process which will deliver the required financial savings through to 2023/24. Additionally, whilst the 2019/20 budget process has been more robust it will be important to monitor savings delivery to ensure the culture of non-achievement is not repeated as any shortfall will further add to the significant future budget gap.

The 2019/20 budget process was focused on balancing the first year of the MTFS. During this period the Council has now agreed the Borough Plan, which has sign up from staff, and partners. It now needs to be explicitly linked to the budget and to be fully costed particularly in Adult and Children Social Care which need to be more explicitly linked to both demographic growth and increased complexity.

Additionally, the delivery of new council homes should relieve the pressure on the general fund temporary accommodation budget. A detailed financial and operational plan to achieve these saving needs to be urgently agreed and delivered.

As is the case in many councils a deficit in relation to the Council's Dedicated Schools Grant, estimated at £2.6m, has arisen in 2019/20. This is due to increasing demands in the "high needs block". This deficit, like in other Councils, will be exacerbated over the coming years and is estimated to increase to £3.9m by the end of 2019/20. The Council needs to tackle this in addition to its projected general fund deficit rather than it just being considered by Children's Services and the Schools Forum.

There are differing levels of understanding across the Council both politically and managerially about the scale of the overall financial challenge being faced by the organisation. It is important to establish a single, shared understanding of what is currently an unsustainable financial position, with both members and officers fully owning this challenge. In order to do this financial management and monitoring arrangements need to

be strengthened to better enable councillors to have a stronger oversight of the financial opportunities and risks related to priorities. This would include publishing earlier in-year monitoring in July rather than waiting for the end of quarter one and publishing in September.

The Council is embarking on a corporate savings programme for front and back-office services (FOBO) which there is understandable nervousness about whether it will deliver the planned savings or impact on service delivery. Any successful change programme needs to be a broad cross-cutting programme that is fully owned across the Council. It is recommended that a stronger Council-wide invest to save programme is put in place to demonstrate this. In addition, the Council will need to look for more creative opportunities to generate income and adopt a more commercial approach.

#### **4.5 Capacity to deliver and resources**

The Council has a good track record of delivery of improvement over previous years with associated efficiency savings so use the transferable learning and skills to deliver the future corporate priorities. This will require you to be creative, courageous and resilient.

Staff the peer team met are loyal, committed and are largely highly motivated to deliver good quality services. A 'can do' attitude is developing. New initiatives are welcomed and generally considered to be effective; for example, the establishment of the Learning Together programme. We also saw evidence of talented and committed managers at middle management level who want to be an integral part of the improvement journey.

Staff were generally positive about the direction that the Council has been taking over the last few years and there was a strong underlying loyalty to the organisation and the Borough. There is some frustration that this loyalty is reducing the progression opportunities for staff and the Council should consider how it can continue to develop a structured approach to development and progression such that individuals are best prepared to take the opportunities that arise.

The Council has a developing organisational culture with staff at all levels starting to reflect new behaviours and values. The Learning Together development programme was welcomed and highly regarded by middle managers and staff generally were positive about your corporate approach to learning and development. However, the changing nature of local government and the increased focus on growth and commercialism will require different skills and competencies going forward so leadership development programmes and succession management will be a critical area of consideration. We suggest you push harder and faster on embedding your values with confidence and be more open to and connected with other councils at service level to promote learning and bring in new ideas.

A range of cross Council initiatives and working were witnessed. It is clear that there are generally positive working relationships across Directorate and Service boundaries which are starting to promote an internal culture of integrated working. Regardless, at present, too much is dependent upon too few people and you need to consider better distributive leadership.

The Council is developing its approach to significant organisational changes. This is still largely undertaken through Directorate structures and arrangements, for example the Front Office Back Office (FOBO) programme has ambitious savings targets attached to it. However, the programme and savings are confined to the corporate customer services and

back office budgets and there needs to be a broader change programme that is owned across the whole Council given the level of savings required.

There was some evidence of the corporate change approach being adopted within Adult Services and through the 'Your Council' programme using innovative thinking and diligent practice and this exhibits a degree of maturity. It was recognised by a number of officers that savings could be delivered through investment in areas such as IT and earlier intervention and a clear and corporate approach to accessing invest to save funding is recommended as previously stated.

The Council will need to ensure that its programme management capacity is sufficiently robust, is closely aligned with its savings plans and operates on a whole Council basis to deliver transformation. The Council describes an ideal 'hub and spoke' approach which provides programme management capacity, consistency and visibility at the centre with a business partnering and distributed leadership model in directorates – NOW is the time to urgently step up and implement this model.

The corporate centre of the organisation could be differently organised to provide better support to the organisation, particularly given the Council's intention to in-source services. Investment in IT systems, Procurement, Legal and a Human Resources (HR) function which is fit for purpose will be essential to enable significant in-sourcing of services. The sequencing of in-sourcing alongside the capacity of the organisation to support a larger and more delivery focussed, and unionised workforce will be critical to success.

Despite the positive response to issue of new laptops to enhance flexible working, there was consistent frustration around the capability of the Council's IT systems and processes to support the effective delivery of services. Self service capability is currently limited, and the Council continues to operate a range of paper-based services that are both costly and time consuming in the light of financial and capacity pressures faced. The Council needs to consider the development of longer-term business cases for investment in its IT systems.

The Council needs to adopt a consistent approach to digital transformation which at this stage is in its infancy. It would be beneficial to automate as many tasks as possible and introduction of enhanced mobile technology for staff would increase efficiency and reduce use of paper.

In summary, officer capacity is stretched. The Council needs to ensure, therefore, that their time is directed to strategic priorities and not on administration nor on protracted decision-making or the justification of policy decisions.

## 5. Next steps

### Immediate next steps

We appreciate that the political and senior managerial leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Kate Herbert Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). Her contact details are [kate.herbert@local.gov.uk](mailto:kate.herbert@local.gov.uk) / 07867 632404.

In the meantime, we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

Thank you to everyone involved for their participation and for engaging so constructively with the peer challenge. In particular, please pass on thanks from the peer team to Ben Hunt, Joanna Sumner and Nikki Adams for their help and sterling support prior to the peer challenge and during the on-site phase.

### Follow up visit

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council.

Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.

### Next Corporate Peer Challenge

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all Councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the Council will commission their next Peer Challenge before 2024.