

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

LB Enfield Council

November 2023

Feedback





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1. Introduction

The Council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in November 2022 and published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately a year after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the Council's senior leadership to:

- Update peers on the early progress made and receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns with the CPC's recommendations.
- Consider peers reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team was 'on-site' including any further support needs.
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.

The LGA would like to thank LB Enfield for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open, and close relationship that the Council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at LB Enfield took place on 10th November 2023.

The progress review focussed on the ten recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge.

In addition to the ten key recommendations the CPC report also included further observations and advice on areas the Council may wish to consider for review or improvement.

For this progress review, the following peers were involved:

- Cllr Clyde Loakes, Deputy Leader at LB Waltham Forest
- Andrew Blake-Herbert, Chief Executive of LB Havering
- Ian Williams, Corporate Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151) at Liverpool City Council

- Rebecca Ireland, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

The peer team initially completed a desk-top review of the latest information, performance information and strategic progress which was then considered when the team met over the course of a day on 10th November 2023 with the leadership team, councillors, and staff from the Council.

Prior to the progress review, the peer team received the following information from LB Enfield:

- An updated position statement.
- A RAG rated action plan progress report.
- Supporting Council documents

The peer team met with 29 individuals during meetings and focus groups held on 10th November.

This report provides a high-level summary of the meetings, discussions and peer team's reflections based on the pre-engagement, fieldwork meetings, focus groups and LB Enfield's provided pre-reading. The following summary is not intended as an exhaustive record of activity undertaken by Enfield Council in response to the CPC.

It was clear from the documentation and the discussions the team undertook that Enfield have made good progress against the actions identified by the CPC, with the Council focused on securing positive outcomes for residents. Since the CPC, the Council have continued to deliver a programme of service improvements, organisational development, and regeneration in the borough. The Council have taken further steps to build operational sustainability to achieve the strategic objectives of the current administration and is acutely aware of the ongoing financial challenges for them and the change in the local government context over the last year.

3. Progress Review – Feedback

Recommendation 1: The Leader and cabinet are ambitious in their vision. This needs to be clearly articulated to staff and stakeholders, drawing on organisational development practices to connect the workforce effectively and

the development of consistent and positive external messaging to enable confident delivery of outcomes.

The peer team saw considerable progress against this recommendation, with Enfield's new Council Plan, 'Investing in Enfield 2023- 2026', launched in June 2023, and the Council rolling out a series of internal and external communications to raise awareness and embed their 'reinvigorated approach'. The peer team noted at the last visit that the Council should look to amalgamate the ambitions set out in the 2022 manifesto, into their wider plan, conveying an overall vision for the whole organisation and a plan employees can link their roles to and work to deliver. The new plan sets out the strategic objectives, operating principles and behaviours that underpin Council delivery and links to the commitments made in the manifesto. The peer team also emphasised the importance of keeping staff informed of opportunities, challenges and changes as the organisation works to achieve service improvements, enhanced organisational development, and deliver regeneration in the borough.

Since the CPC, the Council has launched a new Workforce Strategy, a new Staff Handbook, and new Service Plan templates, and set up regular communications with staff through the Staff Matters and Culture Matters series. The peer team heard positive feedback on the regular focus groups set up with staff to discuss the Council's position, especially the Hearts and Minds sessions led by the senior leadership team. Work to communicate the Plan and the Council's priorities has been seen as positive overall; however, the peer team also heard, and the Council recognises, that for the middle management tier, capacity remains challenging, demand pressures make opportunities for strategic thinking very limited, and frustration about the impact of this on their ability to deliver good quality services to residents was clear. The Council would benefit from further reflection on how to work more closely with this group of officers to provide support, empower and energise them.

Recommendation 2: Explain the financial position to staff and stakeholders, using your financial strength and resilience as an enabler for transformational change.

The peer team heard how Enfield Council has faced increased financial challenges over the past 12 months following steep rises in inflation impacting borrowing and operational costs – both capital and revenue. Since the CPC, the deteriorating economic context and developing pressures have required the Council to continue a strong focus on financial resilience. The peer team heard how the Council is also facing extraordinary demand pressures for services and is having to make tough operational decisions to ensure a financially resilient position can be sustained and core statutory services delivered. The Council, to deliver a balanced budget, must deliver against an ambitious programme of savings, and the peer team observed that the activity has the full support and involvement of the political leadership. Work on ensuring longer-term financial sustainability continues with refreshing the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MFTP) in September 2023 and further updates planned in November and January. A notable development is the recent review of the Capital and Treasury Strategy, ensuring the capital programme is affordable in the current economic climate. The peer team heard that tough decisions have been made to pair back some of the Council's regeneration activity, for example in Meridian Water, because of the budget pressures. The Council's Capital Strategy 2024/25-2033/34 highlights the need to adapt the capital programme for it to remain prudent and affordable in the new economic climate.

The peer team recognised that Enfield Council has a good understanding of their financial position and a clear commitment to ensuring a balanced budget. The peer team encourages the Council to ensure that monitoring and reporting of the savings programme are rigorous as the council's longer-term financial sustainability requires these savings to be achieved, some of which are significant contributors to the budget challenge such as the revisions to the Council Tax Support scheme, and further savings will continue to need to be identified for future years. Collective ownership and delivery of savings across the whole organisation is key. The peer team encourages the Council to ensure that all is being done across the Council divisions to mitigate rising costs and pressures for the Council. There are areas that the Council might wish to consider reviewing to help with managing the overall financial situation and optimise spend, especially in the high-cost service areas, for example reviewing care packages, including the financial contribution of Health in this support to ensure the correct allocation is being received from the National

Health Service as well enhancing momentum behind the review of the number of buildings the Council operates.

The peer team also heard how the Council has been affected by a rapid decline in supply in the local private rented sector, pushing up costs for the Council while it works to meet statutory duties to support local people affected by homelessness. Demand for services and temporary accommodation (TA) is at unprecedented levels in Enfield and across many local authorities. The peer team heard of a large overspend against the expected budget in 2022/23 which has required an increase in the overall TA budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25, alongside the policies, plans and mitigations being brought forward to manage this demand surge and the associated costs. The peer team recommends the Council and Cabinet Member closely monitor these changes as they are implemented, continuing to test the credibility of the assumptions about the level of change and reduction in demand and costs that can be achieved, especially given the national trends in this area. Temporary accommodation costs continue to cause concern nationally and given the increase in demand for service and costs in Enfield it is important that there is strong officer and political accountability in this area both in decision making and scrutiny.

From conversations had with staff in November 2022, the peer team recognised the nervousness about the financial position and worries the uncertainty was causing in the staff group. The CPC recommended that the Council should explain the financial position through strong and timely communications. From the discussions during the progress review, the message has clearly been received by staff that the council is in a challenging financial position, with an awareness of the mitigations needing to be put in place to reduce spending. Additional forums for the Senior Leadership Team to discuss the situation with staff have been arranged. The peer team reflected that the additional communication structures have been well-received by staff and the Council is using a range of methods and mediums to ensure the position is communicated and financial resilience discussed. The Chase the Waste sessions are staff-led, and facilitated by management, and enable joint working and communication around meeting the financial challenges together. It is clear a lot of work is going into having these critical conversations and the peer team reflected that the level of understanding about the position and the actions needed to be taken to meet the challenges will have been heard, yet perhaps inevitably, a sense of nervousness

remains within the staff group.

During the CPC the peer team heard that there are tight financial controls in place, including spending limits requiring additional approvals. The peer team recommended at the time that these be kept under constant review to ensure they are proportionate and can flex for external factors. These limits have remained in place, and the peer team would reflect that although financial control is important – limits should not be too punitive as to deter opportunities for spend-to-save or income generation options to be brought forward, not that the peer team saw evidence of this but wanted to flag a note of caution. Having a spending limit that is too low can also add unnecessary work and delays to services on the ground. The peer team would recommend that these limits are reviewed regularly accounting for inflation and the messaging to staff and members be clear that spend-to-save opportunities are welcome and will be considered.

From the elected members they spoke to during the progress review, the peer team heard a consensus that they knew what they needed to do about financial decisions, understood the process, and had some ownership over it. They also heard members say they felt like they were making the tough decisions needed for the right reasons. They explained that the current budget setting process started earlier in the year to ensure a detailed and robust process has been well-received by members and staff, with a reflection that members are more engaged overall this time and have better financial oversight of their portfolios and of the financial interdependencies between divisions and service areas.

Recommendation 3: Consider your mechanisms for joined-up cross department working, including a review of the council’s officer/member board structure to clear barriers to workflows, create efficiencies and optimise performance.

The peer team heard that a review of all officer/member boards was completed earlier this year. Work was also completed with Cabinet Members to review and refresh how they were briefed on the portfolio areas, seeking to gain maximum impact from the regular briefing sessions. The Cabinet Members the peer team spoke to during the progress review spoke positively about the briefing information they receive from staff and other councillors.

The peer team also heard that the introduction of Service Plans and the work of the boards and focus groups had helped with fostering better joined-up cross-departmental working. An example was shared of how a focus group was created with the aim of breaking down silos and pulling previously disparate teams together, to increase common understanding and coordinated work. The creation of this focus group improved implementation of the Council's plans to increase the digital offer in the borough, by introducing Fibre to more buildings.

The peer team noted that it is hard to gauge the overall effect of improvements against this recommendation in just one day of the Progress Review and acknowledged that they had seen a limited number of elected members. However, from the discussions they had members reflected that joined-up working is happening more frequently, with the current Boards seen as effective and configured in a way to meet the current priorities as set out in the Council Plan.

Recommendation 4: Benchmark and review member support and the offer to members. Ensure the Enfield offer reflects the Council's ambitions to be a modern, member-led council.

The peer team heard a review of member support was completed in early 2023 and changes have been made to enhance member support, including adding additional staff. This change was credited in a conversation that occurred as part of the review for helping the political executive to organise and deliver on the wider objectives of the Council. A review of allowances was completed, and maternity/ paternity arrangements improved to support members with families in line with commitments to equality and diversity, and to encourage participation in local democracy. A member training and development programme has been running since the summer.

The CPC recommended that Enfield review the Overview and Scrutiny and committee structure to ensure there is a political management framework that allows members to fully deliver their roles and responsibilities. Although at the time of the revisit no changes had been made to the structure following the review, the Council reports an improvement to the Scrutiny function including the way they develop work programmes to reflect both the Council's priorities and issues that are important to residents.

It is important that the structures of governance of the council reflect the priorities,

behaviours, and political cultures of the current councillors. It appeared from conversations that the peer team during the review that more councillors wanted to be out in their communities and neighbourhoods- being community 'Leaders'. The Council may wish to look at how the Council structures enable and more importantly support this approach, including councillors having strong briefings that equip them to have constructive conversations with the community including around issues that are likely to impact them and the levels of service delivery as result of current financial pressures the Council faces.

The CPC also recommended a review of the way the council manages and reports on performance, recognising that in November 2022 not all members were sighted on the performance information. The Council advise that a review of performance management information and sharing of information, has been completed, with officers and members active participants in the review, and that a new corporate scorecard based on Council Plan priorities, principles, and outcomes is in place, which will be reported to scrutiny as and when relevant to their work programme.

The peer team was unable, on this occasion, to get sufficient feedback to determine if the Members Enquiry System (MEQ) that members frequently use and were having difficulty with in 2022 has been improved. The peer team heard that the quality of responses is not always to the standard expected. Without speaking to a wider group of councillors the Peer team are unable to comment on whether the issues noted with the system have now been resolved.

Recommendation 5: Review how customer service, communication, resident engagement, and involvement can better improve the journey of the resident underpinned by tried and tested digital solutions from elsewhere in the sector.

The CPC recommended that the Council begin by reviewing its approach to customer service. The peer team heard from meetings with staff and members that customer service is still an area of concern for them and an area that requires continued focus and improvement, and that new technology has been introduced to the contact centres to better monitor performance and satisfaction. This includes the introduction of an automated customer satisfaction tool to collect information following every connected call to the call centre. Customer transaction/contact tracking provides valuable information, used by the Service Leads at Enfield, on the

ease with which customers had their issue resolved on the first attempt, providing rich data for understanding how to optimise interactions and work to resolve bottlenecks in the customer journey.

The peer team encourages Enfield to consider opportunities to enhance resident engagement more generally and ensure consistency across all areas of the councils' services and gateways. Although there is evidence that resident engagement on an individual project basis is strong, the Council should look at how it engages more widely with residents and the communities about the priorities for them. There are many ways this engagement and consultation can happen, with some councils using an annual resident survey to gather information and others using a focus group model to collect data throughout the year. The Council clearly wants residents involved in the transformation of their borough.

Recommendation 6: Exploit ICT and digital opportunities for their transformational potential.

The peer team heard how the Council continues to deliver against their Digital Services Strategy. The Council has implemented a new telephony system, digital access for residents for benefit and council tax, and a new housing management system in the last 12 months. Work continues in the Council to harmonise applications and software. This summer the Council conducted a Digital Services 'Amber' review of digital service suppliers and contract register to help identify efficiencies. The Council acknowledges that there are ongoing challenges concerning duplication of systems, which are taking longer to resolve than initially expected. The peer team also heard and appreciates that the Council's current budget challenges are impacting investment in digital, and the progress made in this area. Projects are progressing, and the Council suggests spending in this area is still high. The Council's focus has been to prioritise upgrades and fix the basics rather than embarking on large transformational items at this time.

Recommendation 7: Build on recent achievements to work more inclusively with Voluntary and Community Services (VCS) partners and residents to shape programme development and improve service delivery.

The peer team heard that the Council has taken steps to streamline its relationship management links with the VCS. This has been achieved by transferring more

responsibilities into the People Services Directorate, moving the Council closer to having one 'front door' for their VCS partners, and thus mitigating some of the issues identified through the CPC of inconsistent contract management and grant application processes. Part of this work has included moving management of the Voluntary Sector Strategy Group and coordination of the new Residents' Priority Fund into the department, alongside some grant-based teams. The Council advise that this move has been welcomed by partners and staff and is enabling a wide-ranging coordinated VCS commissioning round for services in November 2024. The single front-door is helping to streamline contacts and create more positive working relationships with community groups and elected members. The aim is to have a holistic commissioning approach ready for 2024 where increasing coordination of opportunities could enable greater opportunities for consortium approaches and help prevent grant application fatigue in the sector.

During the CPC visit in November 2022 the peer team was able to visit some of the regeneration estates and speak to residents about their experiences engaging with the Council. The peer team were unable to recreate this in the limited time available in the progress review, but the Council provided examples of how they are using the successful approaches they pioneered in other projects in their current work. The successful Upper Edmonton regeneration ballot is a model that is being applied to other regeneration and housing projects currently underway, these include helping local people shape the 'Living Room' community space on Fore Street and encouraging resident engagement in planning the Angel Yard work-space development.

The CPC recommended that the Council look at opportunities to harness their staff group who are also Enfield residents, collecting their experiences to improve and shape service delivery and be ambassadors for the Council. This is being done and the Council is gaining helpful insights into how residents experience Council services and utilise Council facilities.

Recommendation 8: Be proud of your regeneration projects and the infrastructure provided. Ensure there is a clear focus on all elements to bring about delivery, not just finance.

The Council is rightly proud of the regeneration and infrastructure projects that are

happening in the borough. They have highlighted their successes in the Staff Matters and Culture Matters magazines and via the videos they have commissioned featuring local people positively impacted by regeneration in the areas they live. The peer team heard that regeneration has been positioned prominently as part of the Chief Executive's Updates to staff in the Senior Leadership and Middle Managers Network meetings and through a renewed offer to staff to visit regeneration sites, like that of Meridian Water which the peer team visited in November 2022. It is important that the Council continues to share the value added to the communities through regeneration beyond bricks and mortar outcomes, showcasing the social value benefits achieved.

Enfield has also worked hard to make links with local and national media to share the positive transformational programmes led by the Council.

Recommendation 9: Invest in the asset team to make the most of opportunities to generate income, provide a pipeline of investment and do things differently with community assets.

The CPC report recommended that the Council invest in the asset team, to make the most of opportunities to generate income, provide a pipeline for investment and look at ways to do things differently with community assets. The peer team heard that a restructuring of the Corporate Property Team was completed in May 2023, including an expansion of the corporate property service and the creation of a Director of Property Services, in post from September 2023. The Council advises that it now has a list of assets that enables it to make decisions about the life and use of its property. The peer team heard that since recently starting in the role, the new Director has already brought forward opportunities for the Council and made suggestions for asset disposal/sale. The peer team reflected that the messaging around assets and a change in approach or plans for assets currently in use or with staff and stakeholders involved, will need to be communicated clearly and sensitively.

Recommendation 10: Resource the planning department to address the backlog.

The peer team heard that there has been great progress made since the CPC to address the planning department backlog. In November 2022, there were more than 1,900 applications awaiting determination. By July 2023, this number had shrunk to

799, marking a reduction of over 60% in three operational quarters. This reduction has led to a decrease in determination time from 24 weeks to just 8 weeks, with the Council reporting being on track to completely clear the historical backlog by the end of the current operational year. This has been achieved while the Council continues to receive an average of 380 new applications each month, making the outcomes achieved deserving of celebration. The peer team recommends that the Council review the action that was taken with this service and the success factors that led to vastly improved performance, using this as a blueprint to assist in further improvement programmes within the Council.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

Having been through the CPC process we would welcome members and officers to consider being part of the sector support offer and have further information on how to become an LGA peer at [Become a peer | Local Government Association](#)

The LGA would like to thank LB Enfield for undertaking an LGA CPC progress review.

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

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice, and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Kate Herbert (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA), and her e-mail address is kate.herbert@local.gov.uk.