

# Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Report of: Chief Executive

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## Brief summary

This report provides an overview of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review report, which outlines the findings of the one-day follow-up visit made by the Peer Challenge team on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023. A copy of the full Progress Review report can be found at Appendix 1, with a summary of progress against the 2022 recommendations, feedback from the 2023 revisit and proposed next steps attached at Appendix 2.

The revisit followed the Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2022, when the Peer Challenge team made 15 recommendations grouped around five themes (Values, Culture and Workforce; Locality Working; Financial Planning; Transformation approach as an organisation; and Work beyond the city). The [Corporate Peer Challenge report](#) was considered by Executive Board in December 2022, with the action plan developed in response to the recommendations considered by [Executive Board](#) and [Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board](#) in February 2023.

The Peer Challenge team prepared for their revisit to Leeds by reviewing the council's updated position statement, which outlined progress made against the recommendations of the November 2022 Peer Challenge. During their revisit to Leeds, the team spoke to over 60 people, including Elected Members and colleagues from across the Council.

## Recommendations

Members of Executive Board are asked to:

- a) Note the findings of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Report, following the Peer Challenge team's revisit on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023.
- b) Note the progress made against the original LGA Peer Challenge recommendations from November 2022 and the findings of the peers following their revisit in September 2023.
- c) Note and comment on the proposed next steps developed in response to the findings of the peers following their revisit in September 2023.
- d) Refer the findings of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review report to Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board's December 2023 meeting.

## What is this report about?

1. This report provides an overview of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review report, which includes the findings of the follow-up visit by the Peer Challenge team on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023. The revisit followed the Corporate Peer Challenge which took place in November 2022.
2. Early last year, the council requested that the LGA lead an independent Corporate Peer Challenge to help assess progress towards our Best City Ambition, the financial challenge and post-pandemic recovery, and to recommend where we could improve further. Following their visit in November 2022, the Peer Challenge team made 15 recommendations, were grouped into five themes (Values, Culture and Workforce; Locality Working; Financial Planning; Transformation approach as an organisation; and Work beyond the city). The [Corporate Peer Challenge report](#) was considered by Executive Board in December 2022, with the action plan developed in response to the recommendations considered by [Executive Board](#) and [Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board](#) in February 2023.
3. The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately 10 months after the Corporate Peer Challenge, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on early progress made and to receive feedback on this, including how actions align to the peers' recommendations; consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the Peer Challenge team were "on-site", including any further support needs; and to discuss any early or learning from the progress made to-date.
4. The Peer Challenge team for the follow-up visit consisted of four peers: Pat Ritchie (former Chief Executive, Newcastle City Council and Chief Executive Peer); Sarah Reed (Executive Director of Corporate Services, West Northamptonshire Council); Jon Rowney (Executive Director Corporate Services, London Borough Camden); and Judith Hurcombe (LGA Peer Challenge Manager). The team prepared for their time in Leeds by reviewing the council's updated position statement which outlined the progress made against the November 2022 recommendations. During the one-day revisit the team spoke to over 60 people, including Elected Members; Scrutiny Chairs; senior officers; groups of middle manager and front line staff and Staff Network Chairs.
5. Full details of the Peer Challenge team, its scope and focus and the process followed can be found in the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review report, which is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

## 6. What impact will this proposal have?

### Key Messages from the Peer Challenge Revisit

7. As a broad overview, below are some of the headline findings and observations made by the Peer Challenge Team following their revisit on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023:
  - Building on a strong approach to improvement, tangible progress has been made on the recommendations, with the council building further on its many strengths over the past 10 months.
  - Members and officers are energetic and enthusiastic about shaping and planning further improvement to deliver the council's clearly stated values and ambitions for their city, whilst being realistic about the challenges ahead.
  - The concepts of Best Council, Best City and Team Leeds are widely recognised and understood on a day-to-day basis, by elected members, staff and partners underpinned by clear and consistent internal communications and engagement which are regarded by recipients as open and honest. This is supported by a strong sense of belonging and loyalty to the council and the city.

- The success of the Be Your Best manager development programme was recognised, and consideration could be given to widened out to a wider cohort of staff to support resilience and workforce retention.
- Continued focus and progress on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), with the Be Your Best EDI training programme having wide reaching impact across the organisation.
- Staff survey showing very positive results with the workforce very loyal and readily identify with Team Leeds, however capacity and resilience need ongoing attention. The scale of transformation required will be challenging and will test this resilience further.
- The peer team heard a variety of views about the Community Committee review and suggest that there is further work to do on clarifying what the review is aiming to achieve and what is in and out of its scope, and how it relates to transformation.
- Progress on developing locality working approaches has been made through a distributed leadership model, however, to gain more traction and impact consideration could be given to treating the programme as a more explicit change programme.
- There is positive energy around transformation and change with an increase in horizontal capacity and working.
- Children's Services pressures in Leeds are high, and consistent with the demand-led pressures in other upper tier councils. Enhancing capacity in Children's Services, based on strong evidence-based approach with strong executive level leadership and buy-in with social care workforce, should help to deal with this challenge.
- Strong national leadership on children's social care, growth, housing and the future of local government. Further consideration is needed on whether the council is maximising its membership and role within the West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority.
- There is collective political and officer leadership of the budget and its challenges, with an openness about the scale of the budget gap and the need for collective efforts to address it, including new ways of working dealing with demand, delivering services differently and whether the traditional role of local government is still feasible within the resources available. The council will need a very clear plan for balancing the budget, with clear accountabilities for delivery across the organisation.

8. A summary of progress against the 2022 recommendations, feedback from the 2023 revisit and proposed next steps in response to the further feedback is attached at Appendix 2.

### **How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?**

- Health and Wellbeing                       Inclusive Growth                       Zero Carbon

9. The alignment between the city and council is a significant strength in our work, for example with many employees living in the city, with a connection to the city or committed to the wider role of the council in the city. This connection continues to help us to come together and work in the context of the Best City Ambition, which provides a shared vision (based on the interlinked pillars of: Health and Wellbeing; Inclusive Growth; and Zero Carbon) for all city partners.

10. Consistency in our Best Council ambition, values and priorities is key to help us fulfil our convening and delivery roles, bringing people, partners, and services together, as we aim to be the Best City in the UK, focused on tackling poverty and inequality.

11. The recommendations from the initial Peer Challenge in November 2022 have informed the scope for the refresh of the Best City Ambition and work to progress the three pillars, including the strategy refresh processes that have recently been completed for the Leeds Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?  Yes  No

12. Executive Board and Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board in February 2023 checked and challenged the action plan developed in response to the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations last November 2022, with it having been developed through senior leaders on Extended Best Council Leadership Team.
13. As part of planning for the Peer Challenge revisit, an updated position statement outlining progress against the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendation was developed through engagement with Executive Members and the council's Corporate Leadership Team. As occurred for the original visit in November 2022, briefing material relating to the revisit was provided to those meeting the Peer Challenge team, including our updated position statement.
14. The Peer Challenge team met with a wide range of elected members and officers as part of their revisit to hear the views from as many people as possible during their day with the council. This included meeting with Elected Members and staff from various levels, including the Chief Executive; a cross-section of managers and frontline staff; and Staff Network Chairs.
15. Initial headlines of the Peer Challenge revisit findings have been shared with members, staff and partners ensuring that colleagues and stakeholders are kept updated.
16. The findings of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review report will be considered by Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board's December 2023 meeting.

## What are the resource implications?

17. There are no specific resource implications from the Peer Challenge recommendations at this stage. The Peer Challenge team insight into the council's financial planning approach, with actions outlined in Appendix 2 will be followed up as part of the regular budget planning, monitoring, and reporting cycle.

## What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

18. As we are progressing the recommendations, any risks identified will be a consideration in line with the regular approach to risk management and reporting.

## What are the legal implications?

19. There are no specific legal implications arising from the Peer Challenge report. Any that arise will be picked up as part of progressing the recommendations through the council's regular governance routes.

## Options, timescales and measuring success

### What other options were considered?

20. There is an expectation that councils having a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge will commit to a return visit to see what progress has been made against the original recommendations therefore, the follow-up visit was always intended when the council entered into this process.

### How will success be measured?

21. The follow-up visit is a further method of assessing progress against the recommendations of the Peer Challenge in 2022. Success will be measured by regular reporting through the Annual Performance report, as well as through the refresh of the Best City Ambition and ongoing financial planning and monitoring.

**What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

22. Following Executive Board, the Challenge Progress Review Report will be considered by Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board in December 2023. The Director of Strategy and Resources is responsible for implementation, which will happen through the refresh of the Best City Ambition and council's Being Our Best organisation plan in Spring 2024, as well as through the Financial Challenge work.

**Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review report, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023.
- Appendix 2 – LGA Peer Challenge recommendations, progress update and next steps.

**Background papers**

None