



## London Borough of Enfield

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| <b>Report Title</b>                  | Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Report |
| <b>Report to</b>                     | Overview and Scrutiny Committee                                       |
| <b>Date of Meeting</b>               | 4 March 2024  |
| <b>Cabinet Member</b>                | Cllr Ergin Erbil  |
| <b>Executive Director / Director</b> | Tinu Olowe, Director of HR & OD                                       |
| <b>Report Author</b>                 | Shaun Rogan<br>Shaun.rogan@enfield.gov.uk                             |
| <b>Ward(s) affected</b>              | All   |
| <b>Classification</b>                | Part 1 Public   |
| <b>Reason for exemption</b>          | Not applicable  |

### Purpose of Report

1. This report provides a summary briefing to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcomes flowing from the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) progress review which took place on 10 November 2023 and the content of the subsequently agreed progress review report which was agreed with the LGA in December 2023.

### Main Considerations for the Panel

2. The Panel is asked to consider the LGA CPC Progress Report and its findings relating to the ten recommendations agreed with the local authority as areas for improvement. A summary of their adjudication against each of these recommendations, with key quotes highlighting achievements and areas of ongoing challenge is set out here.
3. Overall, the progress report commented that the local authority was making good progress against all recommendations and highlighted areas

where further work could be focused to consolidate achievements so far and push forward with actions that could increase organisational resilience and secure further positive outcomes.

4. It is worth noting the summary comments of the visiting LGA CPC Team as set out in the report:

5. *“ 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” (CPC progress report 2023, p.2).*

6. This acknowledges the sound progress made and the ongoing vigilance of Cabinet and EMT as to the challenging position the local authority and local government increasingly finds itself in.

- **LGA CPC Team assessment against each recommendation**

7. **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.*

8. There was recognition of the progress made in connecting the outlook and objectives of the administration with the operational effectiveness of the local authority as an organisation delivering services to our residents. The launch of the Council Plan, delivery of a new Workforce Strategy and ongoing refinement of the manifesto tracker with steers from both elected membership and staff were seen as indicators of organisation wellbeing and purpose in testing times for local government.

*“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’.” (CPC Progress Report, p.5).*

9. Despite the high degree of challenge facing those working in local government presently, and the inevitable pressure being placed on the workforce, the Peer Team were encouraged with our efforts to maintain a positive dialogue between senior management and officers.

*“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;” (CPC Progress Report, p.5)*

10. The ongoing impacts of austerity and financial challenges facing the local authority means that these opportunities to engage, inform and receive feedback from staff will remain of the highest priority as we seek to sustainably deliver our ambitious programmes and retain the highest levels of service to residents.
11. **Recommendation 2:** *Explain the financial position to staff and stakeholders, using your financial strength and resilience as an enabler for transformational change.*
12. The preservation of financial resilience and a robust approach to managing the budgets at the local authority will always be of paramount importance to our EMT and Cabinet. All local authorities across the country are facing a perfect storm of ongoing austerity and unprecedented demand for services as the economic outlook for the country remains uncertain.
13. Our Resources Department has been working closely with the administration and across the whole operational organisation to keep spending in line with our budgetary envelope. This work has extended down through the organisation to both encourage and feed thinking to help us retain our financial health and encourage all staff to see the budgetary wellbeing of the organisation as something they have a stake in and can contribute positively to.

*“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 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... It is clear a lot of work is going into having these critical conversations...” (CPC Progress Report, p.6)*

*“...there are tight financial controls in place...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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.8)*

*“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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.8)*

14. The Peer Team also recognised the huge financial pressures we are seeking to manage relating to managing local people in temporary accommodation. This remains at the very highest level of priority for the local authority and senior managers are delivering proposals to alleviate costs and lobbying strongly to Government to seek further support to assist with an issue with its long-term solutions firmly in the hands of Whitehall.

*“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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.8)*

15. **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.*

16. Much work was carried out by our Corporate Strategy Service in 2023 to comprehensively review and refresh our corporate performance reporting mechanisms and departmental service plans. This has proven to be a highly successful venture with a warm reaction from both within the organisation and from the Peer Team. The local authority is now able to examine its performance more transparently and by linking activity and outturn to our Council Plan themes as well as underpinning departmental service planning, we have created an environment where reporting is more transparent and accountable. It has also fostered a greater collegiate mindset for the organisation as thematic reporting considerations lift teams out of silo and place them in a more dynamic and helpful cross cutting environment.

*“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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.8)*

*“...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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.9)*

17. The new Oflog (DLUHC) indicator suites have also been integrated into the corporate performance framework and links back into departmental service planning. This places the organisation in a strong position to report

on areas of interest to the Whitehall Department and creates the basis for new lobbying and engagement opportunities with central Government.

18. **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.*

19. Our Democratic Services team led by the Director for Law and Governance and with input from EMT and Cabinet has revisited the member offer and made changes and improvements in response to feedback given from our elected members. We believe that, whilst still a work in progress, member support is on a journey of improvement, and we will continue to work with our members to give the best support to them with the resources available. This can be evidenced by improvements to support on scrutiny, the work to agree an increase in member allowances and our ongoing work with them to transition to a more modern and accountable MEQ system.

*"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. 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." (CPC Progress Report, p.9)*

*"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 MEQ system...The peer team heard that the quality of responses is not always to the standard expected." (CPC Progress Report, p.10)*

20. We note that there is an ambition from some members to be supported to be more active in their local communities and we will be seeking to work further with members to gain the best understanding of what is required and match this to the resources we have available. The local authority as an organisation remains committed to doing what it can to support members to represent their residents.
21. **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.*

There has been some sound progress made in terms of improving the customer experience and our ability to gather quality data to help gauge

operational efficacy and drive improvement planning where we are/were falling short. The fuller impacts of these changes and those that we will continue to deliver in the future within budgetary envelopes are more likely to be felt in the longer term as we analyse changing behaviours and use increased granular data to help us make the local authority even easier to engage with for residents and other stakeholders.

*“...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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.10)*

*“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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.11)*

22. We noted the recommendation from the Peer Team on conducting an annual resident survey and whilst we believe this has merit, the financial position of the local authority presently makes this an inopportune moment to initiate one. However, we do track our customer related service data closely from the whole range of areas of interaction and will look to revisit the use of annual resident surveys in the future. The Council does use focus groups to assist with delivery objectives in many areas such as shaping youth services and will be looking to make this activity more visible in future.

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

The report commented that progress had been made in delivering the Digital Strategy for the local authority despite the highly challenging environment that was driving tough financial decision making. The local authority's ability to refine its digital offer both in terms of back office and digital platforms to support engagement with residents remains of the highest priority and continues to be driven in highly challenging financial conditions.

*“...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.” (CPC Report, p.11)*

24. The report did flag that financial considerations were impacting on the reach and pace of change.

*“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.” (CPC Report, p.11)*

25. The Council continues to drive key programmes within its Digital Strategy given the prevailing economic climate and remains on course to continue with its programme of taking steps to harmonise applications and software in conjunction with creating a better interface with our residents.

26. **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.*

27. The report reflects on the changes made within the organisation and is encouraged by how we are taking steps to harmonise and create a ‘single front door.’ Commissioning staff under the direction of EMT in the People Department have been working to prepare for a holistic grant bidding round to take place from November 2024 to help embed this new approach and present a more consistent engagement cycle with our VCS partners.

*“...the Council has taken steps to streamline its relationship management links with the VCS... 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.”*

*“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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.11)*

28. The Council is also exploring how to deepen its engagement with our residents. We have made much progress where the grounds for engagement can be most clearly linked to core operational business (for example the Customer Voice and work with our social housing tenants) but we are also seeking to use engagement opportunities through our Community Hubs and in set piece consultations such as the current Libraries Review to identify ways to increase the influence of local people on service shaping and delivery.

*“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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.12).*

29. **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.*
30. The CPC Team recognised the work that had gone into making regeneration and the delivery of transformational change a Council owned and celebrated issue rather than one focused on those teams delivering projects. The use of internal communications and the creation of an internal offer to staff to feel part of transformational change has characterised a new approach and more staff are becoming more familiar with key transformational activities as a result. This should ensure more opportunities for collective thinking and reduce silo working.

*“The Council is rightly proud of the regeneration and infrastructure projects...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.”*  
*“Enfield has also worked hard to make links with local and national media to share the positive transformational programmes led by the Council.”*  
*(CPC Progress Report, p.12-13)*

31. It has also been recognised that increasing work has been delivered to message progress and success outside of the Civic Centre with a greater emphasis on using local and national media channels to share our successes (and challenges). The local authority has also enjoyed further recognition in terms of receiving awards for its innovation across the regeneration and place shaping agenda. This work will continue as the Peer Team reflected in the progress report.

*“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.”* (CPC Progress Report, p.13)

32. **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.*

33. The report recognised that necessary organisational reconfiguration and renewed clarity of purpose regarding the function and operational outlook of the Property Team had been achieved.

*“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.”* (CPC Progress Report, p.13)



*“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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.13)*

34. This meant that the local authority was now better placed to gain the maximum benefit from a pipeline of investment and disposal options arising from robust evaluation of assets. The programme to deliver this is at an early stage but the organisational preparations to execute a better approach and form a new home within the Resources Department provides assurance and should mean better outcomes.
35. **Recommendation 10:** *Resource the planning department to address the backlog.*
36. The CPC Team felt that the Council had evidenced great progress against the recommendation as reflected in the following comments expressed in the report.

*“...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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.13-14).*

37. In terms of outstanding planning applications awaiting determination this has similarly reduced to a current position of 616 which is bringing us very close to an agreed service level target of 580.
38. The backlog in planning enforcement notices has also been effectively addressed. Since the changes instigated by the Director for Planning and Growth the planning enforcement backlog has shrunk from a high of 1,694 in 2022 to a present number of 98 in hand cases (93% reduction overall).
39. Good progress has also been made in issuing of enforcement notices where strong strategic leadership combined with effective resource reconfiguration has seen figures increase by over 2000%. In 2022 only 8 notices were served and by the end of 2023 this had risen to 194. These improvements led the CPC to comment as follows.

*“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.” (CPC Progress Report, p.14).*

- **Regulator for Social Housing inspection pilot**

40. Additionally during 2023 the Council Housing Service volunteered to be part of an inspection pilot with the Regulator for Social Housing. This was to help shape its new regime as part of its pro-active regulation focus from April 2024 which all local authorities will be part of.
41. The inspection involved a desktop review of our website information, Cabinet papers on housing and specific information seeking assurance on compliance with the regulatory standards. Inspectors visited the organisation and observed a number of management meetings and spoke with the Customer Voice to get feedback.
42. A written report was not provided but we received positive feedback on our approach to data assurance, on our improvement plans and our approach to understanding the diverse needs of our residents and shaping services in response.
43. It was noted that we need to continue to deliver our Decent Homes Plan, alongside our wider improvement plans including those focused on increasing the involvement of residents in scrutinising and helping to shape services.
44. The feedback has been used to develop our work plan for 2024/25 which is being presented to Cabinet for approval in March.

## **Background and Options**

45. To recap the purpose of the LGA – CPC process is to offer an independent expert peer evaluation of how a local authority operates with a view to providing recommendations that can assist in optimising the operational resilience of councils. It is not a formal inspection, but it is recommended that local authorities permit a CPC at least once every 5 years. This was the first CPC taken by Enfield Council and the original 4-day CPC took place in November 2022 where the ten recommendations were made and included in the original Corporate Peer Challenge Report that was published in April 2023.
46. The local authority agreed an action plan with the LGA which set out a high summary of actions to be taken to address the recommendations.
47. The CPC progress review process consisted of a submission of relevant materials in October 2023 by the local authority including an updated position statement as part of a literature review carried out by the LGA-CPC Peer Team.
48. The officers on the progress review team were Cllr Clyde Loakes (Deputy Leader, LB Waltham Forest), Andrew Blake-Herbert (CEO, LB Havering), Ian Williams (Director of Finance, Liverpool City Council) and Rebecca Ireland (Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association).

49. The team visited the local authority on 10 November 2023 to carry out face to face engagement with a range of officers and elected members to help gain further understanding of how the local authority had responded to the key recommendations made. It should be noted that whilst the Opposition Group participated in the original CPC Review carried out in November 2022, they declined to do so for the progress review in November 2023.
50. Following the conclusion of the progress review visit, the LGA-CPC Team drafted a progress review report which was agreed with the local authority in December 2023 and was published on the Council website later that month.
51. The Progress Report was based on refreshed documentation supplied by the local authority including a revised position statement and new key strategic documents and reports. Whilst on site the CPC Team engaged with almost 40 officers on 10 November 2023 including officers from several different grades. In combination and with additional independently sourced key indicator reports that examined key areas of financial resilience and operational outturn, the Peer Team was able to base its commentary.

### **Relevance to Council Plans and Strategies**

52. Whilst not a formal inspection report, the CPC Progress Review process is a key independent assessment that has enabled new thinking within our Executive Management Team as it seeks to drive improvement and efficiencies at the Council whilst retaining a dynamic sense of purpose.
53. The new Council Plan, signed off in June 2023, was at the heart of the documentation shared as were other key policy documents such as Fairer Enfield, our new Workforce Strategy, new Corporate Performance Reporting tools and the manifesto pledge tracker.
54. The ability to receive independent feedback and validation on the key documents we utilise to deliver our operational priorities and serve residents was a compelling reason to engage in the CPC process. The report will serve as a reference point for our Executive Management Team and Cabinet as we seek to continue our journey of transformation to support and provide the best services possible to all Enfield residents.

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### **Appendices**

1. Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Report OSC PowerPoint presentation

## **Background Papers**

[Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report, November 2022](#)

[Corporate Peer Challenge Summary Action Plan 2023](#)

[Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Report, November 2023](#)

**Departmental reference number, if relevant: N/A.**