
Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report December 2023



Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 4 March 2024

What is a Corporate Peer Challenge?

- Independent assessment of local authority resilience by LGA peers based on five broad areas of interest:



- Validation and challenge
- Original assessment took place in November 2022 with feedback report making ten recommendations for consideration/business improvement
- Council agreed summary action plan to address recommendations in early 2023

CPC progress review process: October - December 2023



- Council submitted new tranche of evidence including new position statement.
- LGA also received independent financial and performance assessment.



LGA peer team returned on 10 November to carry out a single day on-site visit and engaged with members/officers.



LGA peer team evaluated progress on the 10 recommendations using a range of written/verbal evidence.



Draft progress report agreed with local authority and published on Council website on 21 December 2023.

Overview of CPC progress report

Original report and progress report contains validation and challenge with peer advice/suggestions future actions.



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.



Deep dive on recommendations 2, 9 and 10

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



The peer team recognised that Enfield Council has a good understanding of their financial position and a clear commitment to ensuring a balanced budget...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



...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.



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.



Recommendation 2: Ongoing response and next steps

This work continues as we seek to meet an ongoing economic climate that remains highly challenging.

- Refresh of all key documentation and risk management.**
- Balanced budget set for 2024/25.**
- Internal communications/forums remain key activity to drive savings.**
- EMT budget meetings continue alongside regular updates to Leader/Cabinet/Groups**

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



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 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 9: Ongoing response and next steps

- Reconfiguration of Property Services completed.
- Strategic decision to shift Property Services into Resources to maximise operational efficacy and inform future investment/financial strategy.
- Finalisation of definitive property portfolio with indicative/agreed positions for each property:
 - Retain/redevelop
 - Dispose



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.



Recommendation 10: Ongoing response and next steps

- **Progress continues to be made. Latest key indicators show the following:**
 - **Team restructuring now completed.**
 - **Backlog now further reduced.**
 - **Planning enforcement actions escalated slightly.**



Regulator of Social Housing inspection pilot

- In 2023 Council Housing took part in a voluntary inspection pilot with the Regulator for Social Housing
- Inspection involved desktop review of our website, Cabinet housing papers and specific information relating to regulatory standards
- Inspectors also visited the organisation, observing meetings and engaging with officers
- Received positive feedback on our approach to data assurance, improvement plan and approach to understanding the diverse needs of our residents
- Noted that we need to continue to deliver our Decent Homes Plan and our plans to increase the involvement of our residents in shaping services
- Feedback has been used to develop 2024/25 workplan that is to be presented to Cabinet in March

Future view of peer challenge and formal assessment of local authority performance

Overall picture remains highly challenging, and plans continue to evolve to meet organisational need.

- DLUHC/Oflog – new indicator sets incorporated into quarterly performance reports.**
- Greater significance being attached to assessments.**
- Likelihood of more formal government led assessments.**
- Good relationships established with DLUHC/Oflog**