


# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

LB Enfield Council

22<sup>nd</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Feedback report





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# 1. Executive summary

Enfield Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to transformational change, with clear evidence of being a driven organisation, focused on improving the borough for all residents. It is clear on its priorities and is set to build upon on the successes of previous years, continuing to create positive outcomes for residents, with ambition and at pace.

The council has strong political leadership, and the Leader is highly regarded by partners and staff. The administration is keen to provide strong and stable leadership and has worked hard, alongside the senior management team, to promote good officer and member relations and ensure that members are the driving force for the organisation. This work must continue at pace as this is considered a key priority. Member and officer relationships are good, with members also working closely together cross-party, with opportunities for overview and scrutiny available.

The council understands its communities and the challenges they face. It has made a real impact on place-making, striving to model the behaviour it wants to see in all development in its borough. It has been accelerating delivery of homes for residents, creating spaces that people want to live and work in, and harnessing the additional social benefits available in a change programme of this magnitude, with the creation of thousands of jobs and new training opportunities. The council has gained strong resident buy-in, demonstrated through positive redevelopment consultation with high turnout and positive results in neighbourhood ballots. There are several development schemes underway in the borough; the redevelopment of Meridian Water and Joyce and Snells Estate are just two successful examples

Whilst being ambitious in transforming the borough through regeneration and renewal programmes, Enfield Council has also created strong and resilient core services, including attaining social care provision that is considered good by external inspection, against a backdrop of significant financial challenge, increased demand, and a caseload featuring greater complexity from those seeking help. The workforce in this area is incredibly dedicated and skilled, with the organisation alive, and responsive to, workforce pressures. Enfield's work to mitigate some of the staffing challenges in social care, that are endemic throughout the country, includes using innovative

solutions like their project recruiting social workers from Zimbabwe and South Africa. This is alongside regularly benchmarking and refreshing terms and conditions to attract new staff and retain existing staff. All of this helps Enfield to maintain the required staffing numbers.

The council is well-regarded by partners and stakeholders, with the council appreciating that there are routes to their community and residents that are more easily navigated and better served by the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The VCS are keen to be part of the change in Enfield and expressed an appetite to build on the existing positive relationships and work more collaboratively with the council. Investing in this relationship is always important, but more so at a time when residents struggle with the cost of living and need help to navigate the support mechanisms available. Rising interest rates, increased mortgage, loan and debt payments, alongside higher heating costs, brings financial hardships to parts of the community not always familiar with the support of councils and where a broader engagement is essential, and partners are well-equipped to deliver the information and elements of support.

The council demonstrates its place and partnership ambitions in the successful investment it has secured for Enfield through its relationship with the Greater London Authority (GLA), evidenced by the high share of success relative to similar boroughs, for example gaining funding post-pandemic to improve town centre spaces, and the Meridian Water scheme. It has invested in securing good quality private rented accommodation to meet local need and help fulfil its homelessness duties with the creation of the council-owned company Housing Gateway, currently holding a portfolio of 600+ homes.

The council is aware of the need to address certain areas of service delivery and performance, and plans are underway or being prepared to address these issues. For example, the planning department is not meeting targets for dealing with planning applications and improvements are underway. The peer team have recommended that this service area may benefit from immediate targeted resource to meet the backlog alongside the larger structural and process changes underway.

The council has also highlighted areas where they are keen to improve and work in different ways, these include stretching their digital ambitions building on their Digital

Services Strategy 2020-23 and looking more closely at ways to ensure a consistent and accessible customer experience. The council set up a Customer Experience Board in 2022 focused on making improvements in this area and this has seen early success.

Enfield like many councils has experienced a history of reduced grant funding and is working hard to manage that alongside the current pressures with inflation, post-COVID costs and the cost-of-living crisis. The council demonstrates active management of their finances, has a well-developed understanding of its financial position and of likely future challenges. These are being modelled through their Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP). The current financial challenges, from increased demand, a more complex demand caseload, and the fast pace of change because of external financial pressures, will require dynamic models which help to identify the extent of this challenge as it emerges further. It will also require the ability to make timely, risk-based, collective, and difficult decisions. It is important the council keeps that prudent management and finds the right balance of internal controls and management to make sure things don't get out of hand whilst also appreciating excessive control may impede progress and inhibit the development of the council's ambitious programme. Much of what the council seeks to improve to provide better outcomes for residents requires appropriate investment in the right place (for example, significant investment will be required in digital to achieve the transformation required). Communicating the financial position in a way that filters down to operational leads is important.

The council is at a critical juncture as it moves from the last Council Plan 2020-22 to the refreshed Council Plan for 2023-27, scheduled for approval in February 2023 alongside the 2023/24 budget and the new Local Plan. Some of the feedback the team received from officers was that whilst understanding the significant financial pressures in the sector and appreciating the need for prudence, there was a level of anxiety and uncertainty in the teams. Communicating the financial position for Enfield, alongside the refreshed vision and council priorities, will put the council on a clear path and help staff to understand what changes are needed and what it means for them. The sooner the revised vision is launched, and clearly linked to the budget and key performance indicators (KPIs), the better. This will empower staff to look forward and commit to the ambitions in the work programme.

## 2. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

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

The launch of the 2023-26 Council Plan, alongside the budget, is crucial for ensuring all staff and stakeholders understand what the council is seeking to achieve and how staff, partners and stakeholders can share the responsibility in delivering these goals. Ensuring staff understand and strive to achieve the council's vision and priorities requires the council to invest ensuring in managers are kept informed of opportunities, challenges and changes. Managers should be resourced to have the time to lead, develop and motivate their people, with organisational development processes including appraisals key to achieving this

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

COVID-19 has impacted heavily on council finances and local economies across the country. Enfield Council has been careful to manage expectations around their overall finances in this difficult time and is keen to prioritise spend with reduced resources. The workforce are nervous about the financial position and what it means for them, so there is a need to create strong communication routes to deliver timely and crucial information. Continue with active financial management and keep controls under review to ensure they are proportionate and can flex for impact of external factors. Have regular conversations with staff, members and budget holders communicating

Enfield's budget position.

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

Complex cross-departmental issues remain a concern of staff and members. Consider a further review of the board structure – both member and officer level – and the outcomes they provide, to reduce duplication and increase efficiency.

**2.4. 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.**

It is important that members are supported adequately to deliver their roles and responsibilities as elected members.

**2.5. 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.**

Review and define what good customer experience and engagement means to Enfield Council. The peer team suggest that the council might start by defining it and use the expertise in the central team to drive the change. Look to what other authorities are doing with digital solutions to engage with communities and stakeholders.

**2.6. Exploit ICT and digital opportunities for their transformational potential.**

Ensure the council is utilising the digital potential to enhance resident experience, streamline resident contact points, boost productivity, and manage operational performance and improvement indicators. Pockets of digital excellence are evident in the council, including reporting and interrogation of performance management data but there is a strong appetite from staff to move quickly with improvements.

**2.7. Build on recent achievements to work more inclusively with VCS partners and residents to shape programme development and improve service delivery.**

Partners were enthusiastic about working with Enfield as Enfield staff are well-regarded. Ambassador programmes were working well with opportunities for these to be extended to other programmes, capturing the resident voice and using their influence to drive forward change. Some suggestions were made by partners on how the procurement process could be improved, and communication streamlined.

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

Enfield is at the forefront of redevelopment in the borough, looking to accelerate delivery and keen to model how redevelopment – when done properly, holistically, and with all council departments supporting the change – can create fairer, safer and stronger communities. Ensure all departments in the council understand the wider improvements that regeneration and redevelopment schemes bring for residents' wellbeing and their experience of living in Enfield from a safety, health and opportunity perspective.

**2.9. 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.**

It is crucial that you make the most of the assets you have in the difficult financial climate

**2.10. Resource the planning department to address backlog**

As part of the wider planning transformation consider the speed at which a new approach will be ready and what improvements in performance could be made now, possibly with the inclusion of a targeted, time-limited resource to reduce numbers of applications in progress, and reduce chaser enquires and poor customer service and complaints.

## 3. Summary of the peer challenge approach



### 3.1. The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Andrew Blake-Herbert, Chief Executive at LB Havering
- Shaun Davies, Leader at Telford and Wrekin Council and Senior Vice-Chair of the Local Government Association
- Ian Williams Group Director of Finance and Corporate Resources at LB Hackney
- Lorna Carver, Director of Place and Communities at Central Bedfordshire Council
- Susan Zeiss, Director of Law and Governance at BCP Council
- Charlotte Albion, NGDP management trainee at Cambridge City Council
- Rebecca Ireland, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

### 3.2. Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of

local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these themes, the council asked five specific questions:

1. Given the transformational objectives in housing and regeneration – what are the peer team’s thoughts on how to configure our programmes given the current economic conditions and pressures?
2. We are transforming our planning service and welcomed the peer team’s views on how to enhance member-officer relationships.
3. Can the peer team provide their views on the approach to establishing and maintaining financial resilience?
4. How might LB Enfield increase positive outcomes for residents and improve customer experience?
5. How might LB Enfield gather and share data and information across the local authority to support evidence-based decision making?

These questions will be addressed within the feedback section of this report.

### **3.3. The peer challenge process**

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. 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 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 four days onsite at LB Enfield during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings, including observing planning committee, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 80 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team’s findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

## 4. Feedback

### 4.1. Local priorities and outcomes

Enfield's Council Plan, *A Lifetime of Opportunities for Everyone*, was published in 2020 to cover a two-year period to 2022. In this the council set out its vision and priorities for the council, and for staff and partners delivering services to Enfield residents. The vision involves ensuring:

- residents have good homes in well connected neighbourhoods,
- safe and healthy and confident communities and
- an economy that works for everyone.

To achieve this Enfield identified that it needs to be a modern council, that prioritises climate action, strives to be fairer, and amplifies early help and prevention services.

Alongside the Council Plan sit 41 manifesto commitments based around the council's vision. The projects are impressive and tangible, with 60% reported as on track in the manifesto pledge tracker, one of the best performance trackers the team has seen.

During our visit the peer team was shown several examples of successful projects meeting local priorities and needs, including the extensive work to manage covid alongside partners in the community, an award-winning Public Health programme based on healthy eating, a council-led house building programme, and the New Beginning Service working with young people, providing mental health support and short stay accommodation.

Supporting the most vulnerable in the community and meeting their statutory commitments is a priority for the council, with investment in these services to ensure they are solid, adequately resourced, well-supported and forward thinking and acting. Enfield Council spend half of their annual budget on adults and children's social care services and have recently asked residents ahead of setting the 2023/24 budget if the priority given to this area is correct, in their view, going forward.

Both adults and children's services are regarded as good by external evaluation, with the peer team given the opportunity to observe the council's relationship with Ofsted in their Annual Engagement Meeting, during the review. The team observed that the council were open to challenge and questions about their services and were seen to

proactively seek recommendations and ideas for improvement. Members and senior staff are extremely proud of having strong and solid services in this area and are keen to maintain these.

Enfield, like many councils, found that COVID increased demand for the council's services. Demand for social care assessments and support increased post-COVID where strains on people's health, relationships, and finances had increased. Additional resources were injected into social care to meet this demand and Enfield Council has modelled the likely cost of this support over the short and medium term, amending their MTFP, reflecting an increasing budget pressure.

Leadership of place is very important to the council, with the peer team visiting two impressive regeneration sites: Meridian Water and the Joyce and Snells Estate. Through these and other regeneration programmes, including the work to improve the five town centres in the borough, the council explained that it is striving to lead and model how development in the borough *should* be delivered, to provide the full benefits to communities, in terms of delivering better health, and economic and socio-economic outcomes. Enfield residents, many on low and medium incomes, struggle to access affordable and good quality accommodation. Demand for council help with housing is increasing, with the numbers of residents on the council's housing register at 4,500, with 3,000 households in temporary accommodation and higher numbers of residents seeking help when homeless. Building more homes to meet this demand must be a priority for the council to help meet some of these challenges and mitigate some of the financial risks and pressures identified by the council, one of which is homelessness and specifically the provision of temporary accommodation. From what the team saw this priority for more and better homes from the development side, is well-developed, resourced and delivering tangible outcomes with the first phase of affordable accommodation at Meridian Water coming on-line in spring 2023.

Linked to this desire to lead on place and development in their borough, the council has identified an issue with their planning service and processing of applications, leading to delays and backlogs. Work to address the service issues has included reviewing the leadership in the department, a review of staffing structures and processes are underway and work to provide better IT and digital support to staff and those trying to apply to the council's service ongoing. It is crucial that the planning process is efficient and makes good, informed decisions. Furthermore, wanting to be

at the forefront of place agenda in the borough also means being an efficient and professional borough to do business with. For Enfield to be the leader it wishes to be in this area, with businesses, partners, and residents and to make the transformational shifts it desires the planning department needs the capacity to work at supporting renewal, development, and investment into the borough. During meetings with staff and members there was a strong desire to push forward and be ambitious bringing opportunities and better outcomes for residents, whilst appreciating that follow through and delivery needs to be as strong and vigorous as the strategy planning phase.

With the revised Council Plan launching in early 2023 and a commitment to *more and better homes*, looking across all the housing tenures in the borough for opportunities and improvement, is essential. Enfield's work on improving standards in the private rented sector has been clearly evidenced but it is equally important that Enfield as a social housing landlord meets its commitments for better homes, for existing tenants, in their current homes.

The manifesto was cited by staff as an area they were aware of being a current priority, the ambition around these aims are clear and understood, with the manifesto planner viewed as impressive. Some staff reflected that that these short project-based objectives needed to be clearly linked to the council's larger vision and objectives and explained to staff in a way to receive the required buy-in from them. Resourcing these projects was also raised with the peer team, with staff not wanting to 'drop the ball' on the council's core service provision, while seeking to meet the manifesto projects.

Throughout the course of this peer challenge, the peer team was able to speak to a cross-section of staff who were excited by the ambition of the Council and the Leader's vision. Occasionally the peer team heard confusion over what should be the current focus. With the existing Council Plan objectives, the new Council Plan imminent and the manifesto commitments, some staff explained that they felt that focussing on fewer priorities/objectives could be a useful step for ensuring they are fully and sustainably delivered.

The Council has put equality, diversity, and inclusion at the forefront of its agenda. The work of the Enfield Poverty and Inequality Commission (EPIC) in 2020/2021 was crucial for the council to understand and evidence what makes Enfield different to other areas and discuss with residents and partners how resources should be used to

meet the challenges Enfield people face. The Fairer Enfield Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy 2021-2025 built upon the findings, with the council making clear commitments, publishing a work programme with goals and targets, and regularly monitoring these at the equalities board. Staff were aware of the requirements for Equality Impact Assessments on new policy and commented that these have improved over time and with training. The peer team also saw examples of how the council uses staff groups to consult on policy changes and support diversity and inclusion within the council.

On the gender pay gap, the council reported in March 2022 pay equality, with women occupying 59% of the highest paid jobs and 55% of the lowest paid jobs.

#### **4.2. Organisational and place leadership**

The political leadership is ambitious and driven, clearly wanting to build upon the successes gained in the period 2020-22 and accelerate the transformation of the borough with the support of staff and residents over the course of the current municipal cycle.

With the period of the current Council Plan ending this year, work is underway on a refreshed Council Plan due for approval in early 2023. It focuses on five priorities, each underpinned by a set of strategic high-level actions:

- Clean and green places
- Strong, healthy and safe communities
- Thriving children and young people
- More and better homes, and
- An economy that works for everyone

At the same time the council is refreshing the Local Plan, updating the Housing and Growth Strategy, and working on setting a budget for 2023/24.

The Council's organisational structure is arranged around 4 core pillars/departments: Chief Executive, People, Place and Resources. Human Resources (HR), Law & Governance and Strategy are centralised, with the Council operating a business partner model to service departments. The Council employs 3,723 people on a range of contracts, with almost half of the workforce living in Enfield. The peer team identified

this as an area of opportunity for the Council where they might wish to explore how to harness their staff's local knowledge and identify how staff might be ambassadors sharing information on the ambitions of the council into the communities they live in, especially in regeneration areas.

In the peer team's meetings with staff, the Leader and Cabinet were praised for their strong, decisive leadership. Partners spoke highly of the council's place leadership, and their ability to bring partners together. One partner reflected that the support of the Leader and Chief Executive was excellent. The peer team heard examples of how the senior members and council officers operated at sub regional and London wide spaces, together with national bodies and as such had rich contacts, respect, and influence to help them with presenting the challenges their organisation faced in providing services to Enfield residents with potential solutions, to central government and funders, all to the benefit of the local area. Partners were keen to support those from Enfield to exploit the benefits to the Borough and wider partnership learning. For example through Community Safety, enforcement, and crime.

Enfield is ambitious in its place shaping aims, wanting to model what good development looks like, ensuring sustainability, looking holistic at community benefits, and ensuring good community engagement. The drive for more homes to meet the needs of current, and future residents, is evident, but also are the ambitions about ensuring schemes include training, job creation and are places that people want to live, work and spend their free time and money, benefiting the Enfield economy

The focus on place in Enfield, has been further demonstrated through commitments on being carbon neutral for 2030 with a clear Climate Change strategy, the commitment to having clean and green spaces and ambitious tree planting target of 1 million. All large regeneration schemes have sustainability plans, with the 5 town centres being enhanced with the direction from the council clear that this should happen 'each of them on their own terms'. However maximising the support and investment of the GLA, partners, and residents is important. Evidence of the work to support local high streets came through their successful bids to funding post-COVID to enhance street accessibility and safety, the Council's business resilience work during covid and after, and in their commitment to be visible in their high streets by taking on empty shops to use to facilitate community-based activity.



The Meridian Water regeneration project is impressive. The project is a multi-phase, 25-year project of housebuilding providing 10,000 new homes, 4,000 of which are affordable, with major infrastructure improvements by way of the new Meridian train station. Looking to deliver on the clean and green places priority, the council and developer partner are utilising future phase development space and providing 'meanwhile' purpose in the form of open green spaces residents. Other space on-site has been used for a training facility, to support training and employing thousands of people as a result of the project.

On organisational leadership, the council structure of four departments (Chief Executive, Place, People and Resources) was described in one meeting with the peer team as 'the four kingdoms', with the inference that each department operated independently of the others, with little cross-organisational activity. Ensuring there is a consistent 'One Council' approach, which has all services are working towards shared goals and helps different areas of the council work together more effectively, is imperative to achieving the transformational change agenda Enfield seeks.

The use of cross-departmental groups to co-ordinate between service areas is essential to be effective in delivering transformational change and an important tool to breakdown silo working. The peer team also received feedback that it may be helpful for the council to review the remits of internal board meetings to strengthen cross-cutting work and optimise officer time. Most organisations require cross-divisional working to be effective and in Enfield the boards are a mixture of departmental and cross-cutting. Whether there are too many can only be determined by knowing if they are meeting their individual objectives set in the terms of reference and achieving the desired outcomes. The boards were reviewed by the executive team and Leader in 2022 with some boards being deleted or amalgamated into another, however the peer team believe that further reflection on purpose and outcomes may result in further streamlining to ensure effective oversight.

There is a huge amount of positive activity on place shaping, reducing inequalities and regeneration. The team heard about numerous successful projects and programmes, each with their own Board. There is clear appetite to continue at pace with these programmes and while there may be some delays due to availability of materials or workforce, the peer team did not observe any reasons to stop the ambitious plans from continuing.



### 4.3. Governance and culture

The Council has a good approach to governance. This approach is well-managed and encourages wider cross-party engagement, with senior political members reporting they feel well-briefed and -engaged around Council decision-making and service performance.

Members spoke positively of their work with officers, and vice versa. Councillors sitting on overview and scrutiny, or other committees suggested changes they would like to see to the committee meeting plan to enhance the opportunities to review the progress and performance of the council. It was suggested that 4 meetings a year were effectively only 3 'real' meetings, as the first meeting of the year was always taken up with workplan setting. Members suggested ways of having more time to work through the projects and the business of the council, including the possibility of adding an additional meeting a year or having the last meeting of the year longer, to set next year's agenda. Peers also heard that members would like more opportunity and space to invite external bodies and representatives to their public meetings.

The council's legal team is well-resourced, with reports that the team is dedicated with most of the legal work is done in-house due to a wide and experienced staff team. The Democratic Services and Registrations teams were noted as operating well. The peer team heard feedback that there is the right balance in most instances between the legal team supporting delivery areas and contributing legal advice in papers and on initiatives.

The peer team received suggestions for committee and council reports to only be provided in electronic form rather than in paper form, although this will often be down to personal preference for working styles. It would be worth discussion with members in more detail. The peer team noticed while on site some departments are still having service booklets or departmental guides professionally printed. There may be an opportunity in the review the communication methods and the use of printed material.

Members raised the new Members Enquiry (MEQ) systems in our discussions with them. Many saw the introduction of the system as having some positive aspects for the council, although some felt that the system benefits the staff more than the

members. As a council having one database for member enquires enables you to manage all incoming requests in one system and collate requests, monitoring performance and explore themes and patterns from one system. It reduces the opportunities for lost requests sitting in email inboxes. However some members felt that the introduction of the system had made the enquires process sterile, impersonal and responses more formulaic. The peer team heard that in some cases responses showed a lack of understanding of the interdependences between services in different departments. An element of good governance is providing insight and members do this through their daily interactions with the community they serve. The system may benefit from a further review now the system has bedded-in to see how improvements can be made or additional opportunities added to the member/officer relationship where dialogue is possible. A clear priority for the council is how to best support residents and meet expectations while utilising digital solutions, and good information management systems and tools. Good quality data and information including hard demand statistics, surveys and case studies of resident experience give the council a richer understanding of how the services are operating. Focus on these and use them to determine what good customer service should look like for your residents. Make those metrics available to the residents and monitor them closely. There are huge amounts of data already used by the council to inform decision making. A focus and shared understanding could help with decision making but also impact.

Helping member-officer relationships in the planning department can be achieved in several ways including, encouraging open and regular communication between both groups, providing space and time for collaboration, fostering an environment of mutual respect and ensuring expectations and roles are clearly defined.

#### **4.4. Financial planning and management**

Members and the executive team at Enfield Council know the financial position and understand the difficult financial climate local government are currently operating in. The peer team was on site shortly after the publication of the Autumn Statement and the council was busy reprofiling its financial position in light of the statement. The council is overall in a better financial position than expected, but key financial pressures and risks remain, with the council still needing to make difficult decisions

about the priorities to meet statutory obligations and do the most with their reduced finance.

Enfield have identified key areas of financial pressure and risk around adult social care, specifically older people with physical disabilities; children's social care, including Special Educational Needs transport; homelessness, specifically temporary accommodation demand and provision; and the economic position of Enfield residents due to the cost-of-living crisis, resulting in increased demand for council services. The council has, or is developing, plans to address and where possible mitigate some of these risks.

The budget challenges require the council to explore opportunities and review the resource base at the council, ensuring the resources available are in the right places. There is opportunity to review the council's assets and ensure they are working for the council. This work requires a full project team, political buy-in for the objectives and time, as changes to an asset base can take many years to complete and benefits to be felt.

The peer team heard that tight financial controls had been put in place and including resourcing and recruitment in some parts of the organisation. Communicating the council's financial position and any response to changes in the position is very difficult when change is happening quickly, like at this current time. Investing in good and quick communication processes is essential, because the risk with not providing updates on the direction of travel and reasons for this is that uncertainty and fear can undermine the trust in the organisation and slow the pace of staff working to achieve the aims and goals set out in the vision, plan and manifesto. It is important that all council staff have the opportunity to learn and attend briefings to understand the council's financial position and how it might affect them and the services they provide. This should form part of the induction process and be available at key points of the year for all staff, but managers especially. It would be worth working alongside the council's internal communications team to agree five key financial messages that all members of staff should have and ensure these are communicated clearly and comprehensively.

The peer team found the financial monitoring at Enfield to be robust with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in place and regularly updated considering the changing

position and any expected changes in statutory requirements.

The peer team observed that there have been several changes in staff in the senior finance team in the last year resulting in an inevitable period of transition but noted the dedication and professionalism of the team. Staff are coming out the other side of this and the peer team noted that it is important to ensure during these challenging financial times, when there are senior staffing changes, that the council ensure the senior team is provided additional support.

The team felt that the finance leadership team needed to ensure it is appropriately resourced compared to peers and had sufficient resilience.

The finance team is clearly overseeing the financing of ambitious regeneration schemes. The team need to continue to look at ways to mitigate risks through considering phasing of plans as well as alternative delivery methods.

#### **4.5. Capacity for improvement**

The council has a positive and committed workforce. This was exemplified by the dedication of staff during the pandemic, leading, and exceeding expectations in responding to COVID-19. Continuing to take to time to celebrate the council's successes and thanking staff for their hard work is important and makes staff feel valued and appreciated.

The peer team found the workforce highly motivated. With the new vision clearly communicated vertically through the organisational tiers, the organisation is a good place to deliver the council's vision. Given the opportunity staff will develop innovative ideas for smarter ways of working. The council could consider developing a framework to embed new approach and opportunities.

The peer team heard from across the organisation of the commitment of staff to be ambitious in improving services and outcomes for residents. The capacity to deliver the council's ambitions relies on having the right people in the right places and addressing recruitment challenges. Some parts of the organisation are holding high numbers of vacancies, for example the peer team heard that the asset management team has a number of vacancies to fill. To make the most of opportunities to generate income, provide a pipeline of investment, and do things differently with community

assets will require resources in place.

The Council provides many good quality services. Enfield children's services are graded as 'good' by Ofsted, and a focused visit in the summer looking at care leaver provision was positive. Investment has been made in reducing serious youth violence with early help and intervention as the focus, partners in the Police noted that the investment is starting to show benefits for the young people of Enfield. Concerted efforts and innovative methods are being used to fill the social work posts in children's services with Enfield experiencing the same national trends concerning recruitment issues. This includes revising terms and conditions to provide opportunities for sabbaticals to attract and keep staff. A recruitment, support and training project was completed to support 20 social workers from Zimbabwe and South Africa to take up posts with Enfield council. The learning from this project could be shared with other departments experiencing recruitment challenges and shared across the sector, celebrating the innovation of staff and the success

Conversely, the Council is performing poorly in planning, with LG Inform reports for the first quarter of 2022/23 showing a further reduction in the percentage of minor and major planning applications decided within timescales. A transformation programme has started to address the performance issues. The council may wish to consider what targeted intervention or resource might be available to support the department for now and until the improvement programme actions start delivering their results.

For effective delivery communication between services and departments must be strong to avoid lost opportunities to take a strategic view. The peer team heard varied experiences from staff of the support they receive from the 'corporate core'. Work with the strategy and communications teams were described as good quality and productive. Engagement with the HR services was described as patchy, with the responsiveness and level of support, perceived to vary depending on which directorate you worked for. An example was given of one part of the organisation carrying a number of staff vacancies where slow responses resulted in longer than necessary gaps in the team and service provision, alongside a view that another department received a 'gold plated service'.

The peer team heard that there had been a notable increase in bureaucracy. An example provided of the practical experience of the decentralisation of recruitment

functions and a current situation of 'perma-recruitment'. It is important that managers are involved in the recruitment to their teams but too heavy an emphasis on the service area to administer a recruitment or other process, can reduce delivery and improvement capacity in the core business functions.

To unpick this further, the council might consider exploring this in more detail with staff across the organisation with a view to refreshing the relationship between the corporate centre and the service areas. Sharing information with service areas on demand and outstanding queries by functions in the corporate centre can be a helpful exercise to better manage the needs and priorities of the organisation and communicate them to staff.

The leadership team is proud of the investment made by the council in their new buildings for their staff teams. Two buildings have been refurbished with staff moving in in 2023. This investment in the building and staff was described to the peer team as part of Enfield's transformation. The investment in them and the physical spaces they occupy communicates to the staff that they are valued, belong and their work is important to the council. There are opportunities to advance the ICT and Digital options in the council with the peer team hearing a real desire from the staff for a digital shift. Staff want to have a system that enables one view of customers/ residents/ service users/ partners and their interactions with the council. The move to a more automated performance data collection system was also discussed, aiming for less time collating and more time interrogating and using that information to meet demand and intervene earlier with prevention is and early intervention resulting in better outcomes of residents.

The council clearly wants partners and residents involved and at the heart of the transformation of the borough. The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) are keen to do more with the Council. They suggested improvements including a simplified route into the council for queries that included more than one service area. The council might wish to consider reviewing how the organisation engages with the VCS and if there is any merit in making this function part of the Executive and strategy functions. The perception of the team was that role of the VCS as a delivery partner, as well as organisations seeking grants, could be better understood and utilised by the council, appreciating with the opportunity this brings.

The council clearly wants residents involved in the transformation of their borough. A route could be a critical assessment of the degree to which current routes for residents to be involved meet that ambition. Change will require setting challenging goals for resident engagement that make clear to the organisation that the appetite of the Leadership is for the council to be much bolder in this area.

The Council's approach to governance is good with the council keen to make further progress in supporting members to be bold and lead their portfolios areas. Member development and support is critical to ensuring the council's priorities and aspirations for residents are achieved. The council may wish to review the mechanisms in place, to train, brief and support members to fulfil their role and potential.

## 5. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month check-in session, which provides space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

In the meantime, Kate Herbert, Principal Adviser for London, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Kate is available to discuss any further support the council requires. [Kate.Herbert@local.gov.uk](mailto:Kate.Herbert@local.gov.uk).