

	Cabinet 7 April 2025
	Report from the Chief Executive
	Lead Member - Leader of the Council (Councillor Muhammed Butt)
LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback Report and Action Plan	
Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	Two: Appendix A: Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report Appendix B: Brent Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan
Background Papers:	
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1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. In January 2025, Brent received a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). The last LGA Peer Review at Brent took place in 2021 and focused on the Council's equalities work, prior to this Brent had last had a full CPC review in 2016.

- 1.2. This report shares, for information, the full findings of the CPC feedback report, attached as Appendix A.
- 1.3. The report shares, for approval, the recommendations and action plan from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in Appendix B.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1. Note the CPC feedback report from the LGA, attached as Appendix A.
- 2.2. Approve the CPC Action Plan, attached as Appendix B.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword

- 3.1.1 The CPC process is a robust and effective improvement and assurance tool which is owned and delivered by the LGA and a Peer Review team. The Local Government Association offers all councils a Corporate Peer Challenge as part of our membership every five years.
- 3.1.2 We thank the Peer Team for their feedback and time on site, and the positive nature of their report is testament to the hard work of our staff, partners, residents and communities who continue to make Brent a great place to work and live.
- 3.1.3 However, we are acutely aware of the difficult financial circumstances in which all councils find themselves in, and Brent is not immune to those pressures. The Peer Team's recommendations will be invaluable in ensuring that we continue to improve as a borough and help to drive forward our wider change journey as a council so that Brent's residents can live their best lives.

3.2 Peer Review and Feedback Report

- 3.2.1. The January 2025 Brent peer review covered six focus areas. This included the five core peer review areas and a sixth area - a focus on the council's Landlord and Housing Services function – included at the request of the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council:
 1. Local priorities and outcomes
 2. Organisational and place leadership
 3. Governance and culture
 4. Financial planning and management
 5. Capacity for improvement
 6. Social Landlord

3.2.2 Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team was selected by the LGA based on their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Dr Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive, City of Bradford Council (Lead Officer peer)
- Cllr Peter Marland, Leader, Milton Keynes City Council (Lead political peer)
- Cllr Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader, London Borough of Bexley
- Clive Palfreyman, Strategic Director Finance (s151) and Governance, London Borough of Southwark
- Zelda Wolfle, Director of Housing Services & Resident Engagement, Westminster City Council
- Sonia Grewal, Chief Operating Officer, Swindon Borough Council
- Harry Parker, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

3.2.3. The Peer Review team visited Brent from 14-17 January 2025, spending four days meeting with members, staff, partners and residents, in line with LGA guidance. Meetings and focus group activities provided an opportunity for candid discussion and an honest and open assessment from all stakeholders on what Brent council is doing well, and what could be improved. Alongside this, the review team had access to all of the council's key strategies and documents, using this and their time on site to come to their conclusions outlined in the feedback report, which is attached as Appendix A of this report.

3.2.4. Overall, the review found that Brent is a well-performing council with a positive organisational culture and a good track record of delivery across key service areas. The council's stable political leadership was identified as a strength, contributing to effective working relationships between the Cabinet and Senior Managers.

3.2.5. While Brent is well-regarded as a strategic partner, there was a shared sense among partners that it can be further enhanced through the Radical Place Leadership approach. The vision has been warmly welcomed by public sector organisations and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), with partners energised by the concept and eager to move to delivery.

3.2.6. Frontline staff are a valuable source of insight and innovation, with many eager to contribute ideas on service design, efficiencies and cost savings. However, there is a need to create more structured opportunities for these ideas to be heard.

3.2.7. In terms of areas in which the council could improve, the Peer Review team noted that the council could do more to break down siloed working across the organisation; highlighting that collaboration is key to solve issues within individual departments. To address the council's key challenges, the team noted that collaborative behaviours and a corporate mindset from senior managers would be crucial in promoting collective problem solving.

- 3.2.8. The report also highlighted the council's temporary accommodation crisis as the biggest single challenge facing the council. Given the scale of this challenge, it requires greater organisational ownership, with a collective response to address both the immediate pressures and the underlying systemic issues contributing to homelessness.

Action Plan and Recommendations

- 3.2.9. In addition to wider findings and feedback, the CPC report sets out 12 key recommendations. As part of the CPC process the council is required to produce and publish an action plan that responds to and addresses each of these recommendations.
- 3.2.10. An action plan (included as Appendix B) has been developed by CMT and Senior Managers, as well as an initial session with staff who are part of the Change Champions cohort. This document represents the start of a range of activity the council will commence based on CPC feedback and, whilst it will be owned by CMT and Senior Managers, all staff will be involved in its delivery.
- 3.2.11. Once approved, the action plan will be shared with all staff via the council's internal communications, to provide visibility on the feedback as well as offering opportunities for staff to get involved in next steps.

Monitoring and Reporting

- 3.2.12. Each milestone in the action plan has been categorised into delivery timelines based on short (within 3 months, ongoing work) medium (6 months) and long-term (A year or more) delivery. Once finalised, reporting against achievement of milestones will be through established quarterly corporate performance monitoring arrangements, beginning in Q1 2025/26. Cabinet will be updated on the progress of the action plan as a whole after in early 2026.

Next Steps

- 3.2.13. After approval from Cabinet, the Council's Action Plan and the CPC report will be published on our website, alongside the LGA publishing the CPC report on their own website.
- 3.2.14. Within 12 months of the CPC, the council are also required to undertake a progress review to update on the actions identified in the LGA's initial visit. The progress review will provide space for the council's senior leadership and Members to report to peers on the progress made against each of the CPC's recommendations, discuss early impact or learning and receive feedback on the implementation of the CPC action plan. The progress review will take place over one day in November 2025.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1. The Peer Review team spoke to a range of stakeholders across the period of the challenge session. Staff were kept informed via the Chief Executive's update and video, as well as an article on the intranet.
- 4.2. Backbench councillors were consulted with as part of a wider focus group session with the Peer Review team.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1. The LGA Corporate Peer challenge review cost is met within the existing membership of the Local Government Association. Costs related to the preparation of the CPC were met within existing budgets.
- 5.2. The final report of the Peer Review team does not include any recommendations which carry material financial consequence.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1. It is vital for the CPC process to be underpinned by trust and take place in an environment in which people feel they can be open and honest. LGA peers are encouraged to return to their own organisations at the end of the process and talk about their experiences. But in doing so, they are asked to respect that some of the information considered by the CPC may be sensitive in nature, and it is important that it is not used in any way that may undermine the council or integrity of the CPC process.
- 6.2. The LGA is required to comply with the obligations under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004.
- 6.3. If the LGA receive a request, it will inform the council and allow comment/consider the application of an exemption, as appropriate on the intended release. The final decision as to what information will be released resides with the LGA. Similarly, should the council receive a FOI or EIR request they should inform the LGA and allow comment, with the final decision resting with the council.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 7.1. As part of the CPC six core components of investigation, organisation, place leadership, Governance and Culture, all evaluated the council's work to embed Equity, Diversity and Inclusion across decision-making; and have regard to any implications which may impact the Council's public sector equality duty pursuant to the Equalities Act 2010.
- 7.2. Brent's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy was shared with the Peer Review team as part of the Information & Data pack.
- 7.3. As part of the action plan, Brent are addressing recommendations from the LGA to further improve EDI practices across the council.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 8.1. Brent's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy was shared with the Peer Review team as part of the Information & Data pack.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

- 9.1 As incorporated within the report.

10.0 Communication Considerations

- 10.1 As part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process the council is required to publish the LGA findings within a three-month window of the CPC having taken place.
- 10.2 The council's dedicated action plan in response also must be published on the Brent Council website.
- 10.3 While the LGA process is an opportunity to undertake an honest and self-critical appraisal of the council's undertakings, the publication of the final report does carry significant reputational risk, depending on the nature of the recommendations.

Report sign off:

Kim Wright
Chief Executive