

	<b>Cabinet</b> 19 January 2026
	<b>Report from the Chief Executive</b>
	<b>Lead Member - Leader of the Council</b> <b>(Councillor Muhammed Butt)</b>
<b>LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review report</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	Two: Appendix A: Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report Appendix B: Updated Brent Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
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## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. Brent's latest LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) took place in January 2025. As part of the process, the peer reviewers returned on the 26 November 2025 for a Progress Review which provides an opportunity for peers to understand and give feedback on progress made against the recommendations. This report shares the process and outcome of the Progress Review.

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1. Note the feedback and next steps emerging from the CPC Progress Review.
- 2.2 Note the Appendix B which sets out the updated Brent Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

## **3.0 Detail**

### **3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword**

- 3.1.1. On behalf of Brent Council, I would like to begin by thanking the LGA Peer Team for returning to Brent and for the openness, challenge and honesty they have brought through this Progress Review. Their feedback is constructive but also clear eyed about the scale of the task we face, and I am grateful for the seriousness with which they have tested both our progress to date and our readiness for the next stage of change.
- 3.1.2. Over recent years, Brent has made real strides as an organisation. We have stabilised services through exceptionally difficult financial conditions, strengthened relationships between political and managerial leadership, and begun to put in place the foundations for longer term transformation across the council. In Housing Services, for example, we have strengthened the arrangements for securing the essential improvements in services that our residents deserve and have begun to address the growing pressures of temporary accommodation, one of the most acute challenges facing the borough and, indeed, London. We are continuing to prepare for regulatory scrutiny, while also striving to deliver as many new homes as our finances allow, recognising both the scale of need and the constraints we are operating within.
- 3.1.3. This Progress Review also underlines a harder truth. Good strategies, strong ideas and pilot programmes will never be enough on their own. We now have to turn ambition into action, consistently and at pace. We must show that Brent is a council not only for those at the edge of care or in crisis, vital though that will always be, but also for the many residents who rely on us to actively transform their neighbourhoods, town centres and public spaces; who judge our success by the visible change around them; and by whether we are improving everyday wellbeing.
- 3.1.4. We have demonstrated what ambition looks like in places such as Wembley Park, within the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) area, and through long term regeneration in South Kilburn. These successes matter and will change lives.
- 3.1.5. For many of our residents, the importance of action is sharpened by their daily financial insecurity. A significant proportion of households are living pay

cheque to pay cheque, exposed to rising housing costs, energy bills and everyday living expenses. For these residents, the quality of place, access to opportunity and the condition of their local environment are not small concerns. They directly shape and impact wellbeing, security and life chances.

3.1.6. The Peer Team's encouragement to continue to sharpen our grip on change and to develop a clearer shared vision for Brent's future is therefore both timely and necessary.

3.1.7. This Progress Review is a reminder that the next phase of our journey must be about delivery at both pace and at scale. With the Peer Team's challenge, and with honesty about the work still to be done, we will continue to reshape the council so that we can build a better Brent for our residents of both today and tomorrow.

## **3.2 Progress Review scope and process**

3.2.1. The Review is a check-in and follow up from the initial visit, seeking to ensure that the council is progressing the Peer Review Team's recommendations and enabling the team to provide feedback on that progress. The Review was conducted by most of the original Peer Review Team:

### Peer Review Team

- Dr Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive, City of Bradford Council
- Cllr Peter Marland, Leader, Milton Keynes City Council
- Clive Palfreyman, Strategic Director Finance (s151) and Governance, London Borough of Southwark
- Sonia Grewal, Chief Operating Officer, Swindon Borough Council
- Harry Parker, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

### Review focus areas

1. Financial planning and management
  - a. Recommendation 1 - Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
  - b. Recommendation 5 - Reserves
  - c. Recommendation 6 - Financial processes and organisational grip
2. Change and transformation
  - a. Recommendation 2 - Breaking down silos
  - b. Recommendation 3 - Change and transformation programme
  - c. Recommendation 8 - Shared vision for the future of Brent
3. Housing and temporary accommodation
  - a. Recommendation 4 - Temporary accommodation
  - b. Recommendation 10 - Housing allocations and waiting list
  - c. Preparation for the Regulator of Social Housing inspection
4. Partnerships and engagement
  - a. Recommendation 7 - Voluntary and community sector (VCS)

- b. Recommendation 9 - Community and tenant engagement
  - 5. People services
    - a. Recommendation 11 - Adults and children's services
  - 6. Equity, diversity and inclusion
    - a. Recommendation 12 - Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
- 3.2.2. The Review took place over one day, 26 November 2025, and comprised of a series of meetings and focus groups, focused on the areas above, with senior officers and Lead Members.

### **3.3 Progress Review findings**

- 3.3.1. Overall, the Peer Review Team praised the council's progress across the recommendations, highlighting:
- The positive, cohesive working relationship across the managerial and political leadership.
  - The progress in developing an organisational culture through our new values, People Strategy and refreshed staff networks.
  - The Radical Place Leadership programme and launch of the Integrated Neighbourhood Team in Harlesden.
  - The positive outcome of Brent's Local Area SEND Inspection.
  - Steps taken to improve Housing Services, including to address challenges around temporary accommodation demand and spend.
- 3.3.2. In addition to recognising our progress, the Team also identified further opportunities, particularly around change and transformation (i.e. the Embrace Change Portfolio managed by the Portfolio Management Office) and financial planning and management.

#### Embrace Change Portfolio

- 3.3.3. The Portfolio has seen some early successes - including the establishment of the Base (a new innovation hub) and the aforementioned launch of the Harlesden Integrated Neighbourhood Team – but it remains in its early stages, and the organisation is at a stage where it can build from the Portfolio's foundation and move towards delivery and realising benefits. To do this, we need to continue to develop and integrate a quantified savings pipeline, expand the dedicated Portfolio Management Office (PMO) resource and establish greater accountability across the Senior Leadership Team. These changes and improvements seek to supercharge the Portfolio, helping it to produce outcomes at greater pace and with clearer timescales.
- 3.3.4. In response and to supplement existing actions:
- The savings pipeline is being developed and aligned with the council's new cross-cutting savings approach.
  - We are in the process of reshaping the PMO through realignment of existing posts.

- We have included a new milestone within action 3 to train programme Sponsors and Senior Responsible Officers (SROs), helping to clarify roles and responsibilities.
- We will also align the Portfolio more closely with the Borough Plan, particularly any new priorities within the next Borough Plan which will be developed once a new administration begins in the new year.

#### Financial planning and management

- 3.3.5. While our new three-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is a positive development, the organisation should aspire to a longer-term five-year strategy. Additionally, the council needs to reduce its reliance on reserves to balance budgets and part of the solution remains the need to strengthen financial capability, ownership and literacy across all services.
- 3.3.6. In response and to supplement existing actions we opted for and are on track to adopt a three-year MTFS in February 2026 as this aligns with the three-year local government settlement. After this year's budget cycle, we will aspire to a longer term, rolling five-year MTFS as the new, upcoming local government funding formula is likely to remain in place for this duration. Once certainty has been established about longer term government funding we will be better placed to plan on a five-year cycle. We also recognise our budgetary and reserves position and have steps in place that are already outlined in the Action Plan.

#### Shared vision for the future of Brent

- 3.3.7. There's an opportunity to use a new Borough Plan to develop a shared place vision for Brent, with partners.
- 3.3.8. This idea is currently being scoped and explored ahead of the upcoming election and additional text has been added to action 8, milestone 2 around establishing a compelling Brent narrative as part of work to develop a new Borough Plan. To establish a compelling narrative and unique identity we will explore bringing in external expertise to develop and co-produce this with partners.

#### Housing services

- 3.3.9. The organisation's data around compliance needs to be more robust to understand and provide assurance around our improvement journey and while the approach and infrastructure tenant satisfaction has improved, actual satisfaction has declined in some areas. We recognise and agree that these are areas for improvement and, as captured in the action plan, we have now established the infrastructure to improve our services. We hope to realise some quick wins, supplemented by longer term change that improves our outcomes and reputation as a landlord.

#### Partnerships and engagement

- 3.3.10 We acknowledge the recommendations provided by the Peer Review Team regarding strengthening partnerships and community engagement. Work is already underway to address these areas. The council has established a new

VCS Steering Group to enhance collaboration with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and public sector partners, with a focus on co-production and shared outcomes. This group has delivered key initiatives, including the 'Shaping the Future of Brent's Voluntary and Community Sector' event, and is progressing discussions on a refreshed support offer for the VCS, coupled with the Integrated Neighbourhood Team pilot in Harlesden.

- 3.3.11 In relation to community and tenant engagement, the council has introduced an internal Community Engagement Network to review and improve engagement practices across the organisation. Work is ongoing to develop a comprehensive Community Engagement Framework, ensuring consistency and best practice and a review of the Council's approach to Brent Connects Forums is underway. The new Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy is being embedded, supported by the Housing Management Advisory Board, to strengthen tenant involvement and service responsiveness. We will continue to build on positive examples of co-production, particularly in Adult Social Care, and extend these approaches more widely across the council.

### **3.4 Next steps**

- 3.4.1. The Progress Review marks the end of the CPC's formal process. In response to the findings and feedback from the Progress Review we have updated our CPC action plan, see appendix B. The CPC has proved invaluable in helping the council learn more about itself and how it can continue to develop and improve. We will now continue to focus on implementing the recommendations and strive to make to develop the organisation and deliver the best possible services for residents.

### **4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 4.1. Throughout the entire CPC many stakeholders and partners have been engaged and updated through various communication channels. During the Progress Review the Review Team engaged with a range of internal stakeholders including Lead Members, Heads of Service, Directors and the Corporate Management 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.

### **6.0 Legal Considerations**

- 6.1. The LGA recommends every member council undertaking a Corporate Peer Challenge at least once every five years, to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector. In doing so the LGA recognises this assists councils in meeting their Best Value Duty, which is a statutory requirement contained within Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999.

- 6.2 The LGA's CPC offer is effective and well recognised method of bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of member and officer peers, a peer challenge provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils. Peer challenge also enhances the capacity of the sector and helps to avoid insularity within councils.
- 6.3 Each CPC covers the five core elements listed below as well as any additional local areas of focus or specific challenges requested by the council:
- local priorities and outcomes
  - organisational and place leadership
  - governance and culture
  - financial planning and management
  - capacity for improvement.
- 6.4. The LGA is required to comply with the obligations under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004.
- 6.5. 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. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is one of the areas of focus and recommendation that emerged during the initial visit. The Progress Review examined our progress around this a deemed no further actions was necessary. We will continue to deliver the EDI recommendation as captured in the CPC action plan, attached as Appendix B.

## **8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

- 8.1. Brent's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy (2021-2030) and associated delivery plans were shared and discussed with the Peer Review team. Its recommendations relating to the council's climate work continue to be progressed within the CPC action plan, attached as Appendix B.

## **9.0 Communication Considerations**

- 9.1. The findings of the CPC's progress review will be communicated to Brent staff following Cabinet approval. The update report will be made publicly available as part of the Cabinet agenda pack. The current Action Plan on Brent Council's website will be replaced with the updated version, attached as Appendix B.

**Related documents for reference:**

[LGA Corporate Peer Challenge - Feedback Report and Action Plan](#) - Cabinet report,  
April 2025

**Report sign off:**

**Kim Wright**  
Chief Executive