

# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Tameside Council

16<sup>th</sup> January – 19<sup>th</sup> January

Feedback report



## Contents

1. Executive summary.....	3
2. Key recommendations .....	5
3. Summary of the peer challenge approach .....	6
4. Feedback .....	8
5. Next steps.....	17

## 1. Executive summary

With this Corporate Peer Challenge, Tameside Council sought feedback on whether the council has in place the capacity, skills and culture to deliver major change. This reflects the clear wishes of the leadership of the council – to increase the pace and scale of delivery. This is symptomatic of council leadership that is highly committed to taking Tameside forward and undertaking the changes this requires.

The peer team were able to recognise how the council has been navigating through a period of significant change and challenge over the course of the last 18 months. A lot of work has been carried out to put in place the capacity, skills and culture to deliver, with more work required to have the consistency and depth of what is needed for the scale of ambition the council has.

There are clearly exciting opportunities to capitalise on across the borough of Tameside, not least at Ashton Moss, Godley Green and across the town centres. In the last year, partners working with the council around these projects have begun to see a step change in the council's economic development work, to capitalise on these opportunities. This is very much welcomed and has great potential for the borough.

Tameside is a borough which is distinct in having nine town centres, which the council is able to demonstrate a deep understanding of. This report provides examples where a deep understanding of place is shared with key partners to support collaborative efforts. The Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Framework for example, appears to be a particularly strong example of co-production, which is helping to address the priority health and wellbeing issues for Tameside. Relationships with partners are generally positive and there is a keenness to continue to build on this and further develop partnership working for the betterment of the people of Tameside.

To make the most of these opportunities, it is important that the council is able to communicate a clear and consistent vision of what it is seeking to achieve overall and what it is prioritising in order to achieve this. Work has already begun on this, with a new Corporate Plan in development. Approving this at Full Council can help

the council in further aligning its capacity, resources and plans around a vision and core set of priorities.

Communicating this vision and priorities with a clear, compelling, consistent narrative that tells the positive story of how Tameside is changing will help garner the further support and input of stakeholders and partners around the changes that the council is prioritising. This is one aspect of developing the leadership skills required for this journey of improvement and change, building on what is already in place at the council.

A new Corporate Plan can then be used to develop a more nuanced understanding of the capacity, skills and resources required to deliver on the improvements and transformation priorities the council has. This will incorporate for example the key transformation projects, economic growth projects as well as bringing about the pace of improvement in children's services the council is seeking.

An overarching organisational improvement plan, which is collectively owned can help to understand interdependencies, common needs, crunch points and further prioritisation. This should include dispersing specific corporate responsibilities across the different members of the senior leadership team.

Building on what is in place, there will be a need to strengthen the skills and capacity to deliver major change programmes along with the cultural requirements of this, at this scale. Bringing in experienced additional senior capacity can help to drive continuous improvement and transformation with pace and rigour, which can support the council to move forward in this way and should be there to complement the strengths that already exist.

There has been a clear message from the leadership of the council, to stop using reserves to support the revenue budget in an unplanned way. This has been followed by action to put in place the foundations for increased financial grip, which is something the council should continue to build on.

The council has many capable, committed and enthusiastic councillors and officers. This is an opportunity the council can further capitalise on, in delivering the changes and improvements it seeks. For example, empowering and supporting assistant

directors, heads of service and staff more widely to work across the corporate priorities can bring more benefits to the council.

An example of which is in taking the opportunities of improving the use of digital, which the council recognises as a priority area. Officers the team spoke with welcome this, can see the benefits and want to help with this. Taking this step forward will require the council to invest sufficient funding to realise the benefits it can bring against the priorities in the emerging Corporate Plan.

The delivery against such investment will of course require careful monitoring and accountability, as is the case with all change and improvement work. With more change, comes more / different risks. As the council continues to move forward it should therefore continue to evolve and develop its approach to assurance to reflect this.

## 1. 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:

- 1. Agree and approve the overarching vision and priorities of the Council in the Corporate Plan by the end of March.**
- 2. Craft a compelling, consistent narrative that tells the positive story of how Tameside is changing and the opportunities this brings.**
- 3. Use the Corporate Plan to develop a detailed understanding of what needs to be done and what capacity, skills, resources and funding are required to deliver on the council's improvement and transformation priorities.**
- 4. Once the Corporate Plan is approved, put in place a relevant performance dashboard, shaped from the new council priorities, for the Cabinet and senior officer team to ensure wider ownership and oversight.**

5. **Bring in additional, experienced senior capacity to help drive improvement and transformation with pace and rigour, complementing the strengths that already exist.**
6. **Work with staff across the organisation to drive progress in the use of digital, resourcing the costs of this to realise the benefits it can bring.**
7. **Put in place an overarching organisational improvement plan, which is collectively owned. Include specific corporate responsibilities across the senior officer team.**
8. **Building on what is in place, strengthen the skills and capacity to deliver major change programmes across the council and develop the cultural requirements of this.**
9. **Empower and support assistant directors, heads of service and staff to work more across the corporate priorities.**
10. **Continue to develop rigour around in-year budget management to ensure demand pressures can be managed within the annual budget as much as possible.**
11. **Develop a strategic plan for unallocated reserves that sets out how one-off money will drive and deliver lasting benefits and contribute to future financial sustainability aligned to the Corporate Plan.**
12. **Develop a Strategic Asset Management Plan to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan and major change.**

## 2. 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:

- **Susie Kemp** (past Chief Executive – Swindon Borough Council)
- **Cllr Peter Marland** (Leader of Milton Keynes Council)
- **Cllr Mike Wilcox** (Staffordshire County Council and Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling, Ecology & Climate Change - Lichfield District Council)
- **David Wilkin** (Executive Director of Resources and Business Change - South Gloucestershire Council)
- **Helen Isaacs** (Assistant Chief Executive – North East Lincolnshire Council)
- **Shazia Hussain** (Deputy Chief Executive – LB Waltham Forest)
- Shadow – **Cllr Anthony Okereke** (Leader – Royal Borough of Greenwich)
- Peer Challenge Manager – **Dan Archer** (LGA).

### 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 commissioning this peer challenge, the council asked the peer team for specific feedback on having the capacity, skills and culture to plan and delivery major change.

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 in Tameside, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 45 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 140 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.

## 3. Feedback

### 4.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Tameside is a borough which is home to approximately 231,071 people across nine distinctive towns. The borough sits within close proximity to both Manchester city centre to the west and the Peak District to the east. The towns across Tameside have different characteristics and needs which the council demonstrates a particularly strong local understanding of.

The team heard how the council has been able to put a deep understanding of the borough to effect in the development of its plans and strategies. This includes for example how analysing population level data at a locality level, has had a positive impact on reducing the need for hospital beds. The Council has also been able to use



and share performance information to identify opportunities for transformation in adult social care through the use of new digital solutions.

This deep understanding of the local area is also seen in the regeneration and inclusive economic growth plans the council has developed, which seek to capitalise on the opportunities available locally (e.g. Ashton Moss, Godley Green and the town centres). Significant investment has been secured to support the delivery of these place based schemes, not least three successful levelling up bids. To support and inform this, the council has developed its approach to business engagement and the networks around this, which the council and borough can continue to benefit from moving forwards.

The local anti-poverty strategy 'Building Resilience – Tackling poverty in Tameside 2023 – 2027', is a document which is seen to have clear outcomes and buy-in. The recently refreshed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy is also well regarded and is seen to present both an honest and challenging reflection of where the council is now, the priority objectives of the council and the work that is required. Positively, these documents do not sit in isolation and the peer team observed them being used to inform the work of the council in different service areas.

The council has been progressing the development of a new Corporate Plan, moving on from the last version which was a joint plan agreed between the council and local Clinical Commissioning Group which was disbanded in 2022. Approving the new Corporate Plan at Council will give the council a clear, current overarching vision and set of core priorities. Having this will help the council to prioritise its use of resources and support wider planning. This new Corporate Plan plays a crucial role in providing a clear focus to the council's change and improvement ambitions to then build around. Given the importance of this document as the core strategy document corporately, putting in place a suitable performance dashboard, shaped from the new council priorities, for the Cabinet and senior officer team will help ensure clear and relevant oversight of progress against the organisation's priorities.

This new Corporate Plan then also creates an opportunity to articulate the story of the council's corporate priorities and how they relate to the nine individual towns (e.g. regeneration, investment and so forth). This is important to the council's leadership

role - how it then works with others and the capacity, partnerships, resources, insights and skills it can seek to draw on.

When considering relevant service performance metrics, the most recent, published [performance data on LGINfom at the time of the peer challenge shows](#) that the council has a higher recycling rate than the CIPFA nearest neighbour group average, with particularly low levels of residual waste. The council also has low numbers of vacant dwellings (21/22) and low numbers on the housing waiting list (22/23), however the housing benefit waiting time is higher than is found amongst the councils most CIPFA similar neighbouring authorities (2023/24 Q1).

The percentage of adult social care service users who were satisfied with their support was the lowest in the CIPFA nearest neighbour group at 57.8% in 2022/23. The council has engaged with peer support from the ADASS and LGA to support continuous improvement within Adult Social Care and to support preparations for CQC assessment. Following this, the council has established an improvement board, which mirrors the arrangements in place within children's social care and is giving particular attention to getting under the performance information available including the results of service user and carer surveys.

In December, the council had a full OFSTED inspection of children's social care, the feedback from which had not been published at the time of this corporate peer challenge. The council has prioritised the improvement of both children's social care and SEND, sharing with the team the steps they are taking to accelerate improvement in these areas. Whilst bringing about improvement, the council is very aware of its high level of spend within children's services, spending around £1,565.04 per head of population in 2022/23 compared to a CIPFA nearest neighbour group average of £1,351.28. Figures that are significantly influenced by the higher than average number of children looked after in Tameside which was 127 per 10,000 (2022/23), compared to a CIPFA neighbour group average of 98 per 10,000.

Following a joint area SEND inspection from OFSTED and the CQC in 2021, a Written Statement of Action was published, focused on the ten significant weaknesses identified. This is a joint responsibility of both the council and local NHS.

An independently chaired improvement board has been put in place to support the improvements sought here.

## **4.2 Organisational and place leadership**

The council benefits from leadership that is highly committed to taking Tameside forward and undertaking the changes this requires. This has been demonstrated as the council has been navigating through a period of significant change and challenge over the last 18 months, with ongoing work in place to reflect this also. This drive for taking Tameside forward is also reflected in the council seeking feedback from this peer challenge on the approach taken and further steps the council can take for delivering major change.

The Cabinet members the team spoke with mirror this commitment and ambition to drive forward change, working closely with officers. Cabinet members recognise how the Leader has supported and encouraged this period of change, with openness and trust. This openness includes relationships with opposition members, with the Leader and Chief Executive being recognised for creating more regular and ongoing dialogue with the leader of the opposition. The council also benefits from positive, pragmatic and respectful relationships with the Trade Unions which will be important to the council in delivering further, future change.

The peer team were provided with examples of the positive relationship that the council has with the local voluntary, community, faith sector and social enterprises (for example Action Together and Citizen's Advice). Once the Corporate Plan is approved, building on this by developing a compelling, consistent narrative that tells the positive story of opportunity from how Tameside is changing can help the council and borough to benefit further from this. Using strengths-based thinking and positive examples to support the narrative for Tameside and the language used will be key to this. Using this positive narrative, both locally in Tameside, across the nine towns as well as using it with confidence in Greater Manchester can help in taking further advantage of the opportunities available. This is one aspect of further developing the leadership and management skills required to lead the delivery of your corporate priorities as well as major change, building on what is already in place.

Creating more space and time for informal engagement as a Cabinet and as a senior officer team (both as individual groups as well as together) can be used to help develop the collective leadership, narrative and management required for delivering fully on your corporate priorities.

Over the past 12 months, the council has made some significant progress against major capital programmes, which is recognised by partners. Building this into the narrative of how Tameside is changing, the opportunities this presents for residents and what this means and requires will be an important aspect.

There are examples of internal communications already in place, such as the Chief Executive's weekly email, which staff appear to value. Further developing the role and approach to corporate internal communications, making this systematic and proactive, aligned to the priorities and change agenda can contribute to developing the culture required for major change. This revised approach to internal communications includes busting myths when needed as well as providing relevant reassurance and clarity when needed too.

Partners the team spoke with clearly welcome working with the council and are keen to continue to build upon those relationships, recognising the strength they can have for the borough when working well together. The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Framework and Board Charter appear to be strong examples of co-production and their delivery is helping to address the priorities set out (for example support for local job losses, debt journey mapping and understanding and addressing poverty). Equally, the council commissioned a pilot study into the state of the local cultural sector in 2020, identifying a number of factors which were limiting the strength of the local cultural sector. Following this, the council committed to a new cultural framework to help address this, leading to a new Cultural Strategy which is linked into local heritage and demonstrates strong buy-in from local people.

The partnerships the council fosters and develops are central to how the council is then able to deliver change at pace. Recognising the important roles that different partners can play in doing so, and what this requires. This includes partnerships with public, private, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise partners. It also includes helping to maintain and further develop the good relationships between all

political stakeholders, including Members of Parliament, to continue to take Tameside forward.

The council and borough can further benefit from local partnerships is the opportunity to join-up the commissioning of the VCFSE sector to get greater benefit from what it brings, aligning it with the overarching priorities for Tameside from the new Corporate Plan.

### **4.3 Governance and culture**

The peer team observed a 'can-do' and committed culture, from many of the members and officers that the team spoke with at the council. An emerging culture of cross-directorate working within the Assistant Director and Heads of Service cohort was observed by the peer team and is something the council should look to further encourage and empower.

In order to support the delivery of major change and improvement, the Leader and Chief Executive have previously recognised the culture at the Council needed to change and have taken action to start to address this. This will require further, ongoing work as change happens, which should be led across both the Cabinet and senior officer team, with both common and specific roles and responsibilities here. Continuously developing this forward-looking culture - which empowers members and officers and builds trust and confidence, will help the council in the delivery of the Corporate Plan vision and priorities and the major change ambitions.

There are clearly strengths at the council in regard to its approach to governance and assurance. For example, the Audit and Governance Committee is seen positively as engaging with the right things, asking broader questions and providing good challenge. There has been a positive direction of travel in regards to the impact of this Committee which the council's governance and assurance arrangements benefit from.

There are also examples of good practice in regards to Overview and Scrutiny. For instance the work to support the development of the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy as well as the engagement of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the

development of the 2024/25 budget. The council has in place committed Chairs to support this who are keen to help further develop the impact of Overview and Scrutiny and are also keen to develop their individual skills further in these roles, building on the opportunities for mentoring and support already made and taken up. Ensuring all Chairs have regular engagement with their respective Cabinet member(s) can also help the committees to maximise the impact of their challenge and policy development role. Finding ways to further bring to life the role of Overview and Scrutiny and the impact it has, will help to engage people in the role of Overview and Scrutiny - therefore increasing the impact it is able to have. This might include giving more visibility to the work of Overview and Scrutiny, the examples of the difference it has made and the responses to the questions and challenge given. Finding ways to better engage the public in Overview and Scrutiny can also play an important role in this regard and help bring further benefits to decision making at the council.

Inevitably, when working in a dynamic and sometimes unpredictable sector, whilst seeking to deliver change and improvement, additional and new types of risk will come. Further developing the approach to governance and assurance, in a way which is responsive to this will of course be important.

The council has refreshed the internal audit approach recently, as well as refreshed the risk management strategy. Internal audit have proactively recognised when all the specific skills they require are not in place locally for aspects of internal audit, seeking the right external capacity as necessary (e.g. in regards to cyber). Moving forward, the council can make more strategic use of Internal Audit against the key priorities and risks of the council – taking into account both the new corporate priorities and key improvement / change areas.

As the council moves forward in delivering against its transformation ambitions and economic regeneration and growth projects, reviewing the governance around these to ensure delivery is happening at the pace, as safely, robustly and with the impact you seek will help the council to both deliver in full against the commitments it makes. This will also support organisational learning, which can then support future change and improvement work too.

#### 4.4 Financial planning and management

Over the course of the last 12 months, the leadership have set out a clear message to increase the level of financial grip at the council and stop the continued use of reserves to support the budget in an unplanned way.

This message has been heard and clear steps have been taken to bring about an improved financial grip at the council. At the time of the peer challenge, the in-year (2023/24) budget forecast using month 7, is that without management action, the council would overspend against its budget position by £13.007m. Steps taken have reduced this figure to £4.274m – with the development of budget recovery plans being just one example of those steps taken.

Such are the financial pressures on local authorities, this will inevitably need to be a continued area of attention, which will require ongoing action and an ongoing shared commitment. Continuing to have rigour around in-year budget management to ensure demand pressures can be managed within the annual budget will require constant oversight. Ensuring improvements to financial management take in to account the required skills, capacity, systems and customer requirements of all of those with financial responsibilities is key to strengthening this financial grip in a collective way, preventing or limiting the pressures that may emerge later on. This should also include reflecting on the learning from current and previous savings non-delivery and how the learning from this can support the council moving forward. At the time of the peer challenge, £3.4m of the £10.6m agreed savings in 2023/24 had 'serious concerns' for delivery. Those particular savings being in Children's Social Care (£1.695m), Adult Social Care (£0.989m), Place (£0.699m) and Education (£0.050m) predominantly.

The council appointed a new chief finance officer in 2023 whose positive impact and approach has been welcomed. This has included establishing positive working relationships across the council. This includes a strong working relationship with the lead Cabinet Member who has also demonstrated a strong grip of the portfolio since taking on this responsibility. Taking an approach which has reflected the needs of the portfolio and how that has started to change over time, with the recruitment of the new chief finance officer.

In both supporting the council's ongoing financial resilience, whilst maximising the potential impact of the council's financial resources within the borough, there are further opportunities to capitalise on. Continuing work to identify and deliver the savings required to balance the MTFP over its full term is clearly important. Developing a strategy for maximising income, including fees and charges and cost recovery can also help and aligns to the plans the council has for its budget in 2024/25. The percentage of Council Tax not collected in Tameside in 2022/23 was 6.34% compared to a CIPFA nearest neighbour group average of 5.24%. Bridging this gap is one example that can help to support the council's overall financial resilience.

Developing a Strategic Asset Management Plan will also help the council to capitalise on the assets and estate the council has, taking into account the different opportunities presented by parts of the estate and the priorities of the council across the short, medium and longer term.

Further progress is now being made in getting previous years accounts signed-off. It was anticipated that the accounts for 2021/22 would be signed-off shortly after the peer challenge, with the accounts for 2022/23 expected shortly after. Continuing work to ensure financial statements are signed-off within an appropriate timescale supports the foundations for strong financial planning.

The steps taken to improve financial grip appear to be having an early impact and have been well received. The council has a relatively strong level of reserves when compared to its most similar councils. However, whilst the council has £171m in reserve (including the General Fund and schools-related reserves), the majority of these are, earmarked for specific purposes. Within this, the council has £26.094m in the General Fund reserve and a further £30.843m in other available reserves as at month 7 2023/24. The council is acutely aware that reserves can only be used once to fund unplanned pressure, pressures that would then only return if not otherwise dealt with.

The council's focus on stopping the use of reserves for unplanned purposes is strongly supported by the peer team. With stronger financial grip in place, there is then an opportunity to look at how these reserves could be used to both continue to



support the resilience of the council, whilst also further supporting the delivery of the priorities of the council. This is a careful decision to make and ensuring all members and staff have an appropriate understanding of the local financial position and what this means is important to this, as without strong financial grip, this opportunity will not be there. This can build upon the steps that have already and continue to be taken, to improve financial reporting to support collective ownership. Putting in place a strategic plan for unallocated reserves that sets out how one-off money will drive and deliver lasting benefits and contribute to future financial sustainability aligned to the Corporate Plan can therefore play an important role in helping to deliver major change at the council and across the borough.

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

A lot of work has been carried out at the council to have in place the capacity, skills and culture to deliver. Building on this, further work is required to explore and reflect on the consistency and depth of what is needed for the type of ambitions the council has.

The council has demonstrated a creative approach to support the recruitment of council staff in social care. A recruitment roadshow approach has been developed which is a streamlined approach to the recruitment of social care staff. This involves local people being invited to an event to hear about the career opportunities available, speak to staff currently performing the role(s), with interviews taking place and job offers made on the day. The first roadshow in March was attended by 40 people, with 21 job offers made on the day and similar successes at subsequent roadshows. This is an example of good, creative practice which has the potential for further benefits both in Tameside and the sector more widely.

There are also examples of the innovative use of capacity when working with partners and strong examples of joint-working in commissioning where costs have been driven out through focused discussions. Examples of which include being the first borough in the country to have home care workers trained and competent to

administer insulin as well as the use of 'blended roles'.

Earlier in this report, the 'can-do' culture the peer team experienced at the council is reflected on. The cohorts of assistant directors and heads of service the team met with being particularly positive example of this. These cohorts demonstrate an enthusiasm for collaborative ways of working and a desire to do more of this. Empowering and supporting assistant directors, heads of service and staff more widely as appropriate, to work across the corporate priorities is key to having the culture in place to deliver on the corporate priorities and major change programmes.

The council clearly recognises the opportunities available from improving its use of digital, highlighting this to the peer team from the start of the peer challenge process. The officers the team met with across the council very much recognise and welcome this, seeing the benefits this can bring and are eager to help. A clear delivery plan for this, similar to the blueprint plan approach used for the recent budget discussions, would help with moving this forward. In taking these steps forward to realise the benefits that digital can bring, the council will inevitably be required to invest sufficient funding and should be prepared for this, once those costs are known.

Digital however is just one part of an organisational wide improvement and change programme. Those improvements and changes will both call on the efforts of people across the council and have impacts on people across the council too. Having in place an overarching organisational improvement plan, which is collectively owned is therefore an important step in this regard. This should include specific cross-cutting responsibilities across the senior officer team and help to identify key interdependencies, pressure points and opportunities as well as help monitor the pace of improvement and change.

This overarching plan can then be used to help the council to build on what is in place, by strengthening the skills and capacity available to deliver major change programmes. Whilst the council has commissioned an external consultancy to support the development of its immediate change programme, developing the council's own internal capacity and skills for delivering major change programmes is an important stream of activity, which will include considering the cultural

requirements for working in this way and the leadership this requires from a range of people.

The council's current 'People Plan' comes to an end this year and so presents an opportunity to align the next iteration of the People Plan (from 2024) to the new corporate priorities and major change requirements. This should plan for the skill and cultural requirements for this next stage, and the capacity requirements – both for day-to-day delivery as well as the capacity and skills for delivering major change.

Given the significant economic projects the council is now progressing, it is important to ensure the capacity required to deliver is in place to meet these ambitions. This will involve carefully considering the type of role the council wishes to take in each of these schemes and be strongly aligned to a new strategic asset management plan. This will also include considering the demands of projects on other services corporately and the capacity this may then require (whether inside or outside the organisation). This is another example of why an overarching improvement and transformation plan can help to identify cumulative demands from different change and improvement work on such services, for example legal, and help to plan for this in good time to help gain and maintain the pace of delivery that the council seeks. A similar area for the overarching organisational improvement plan is the activity to bring about improvement in children's services as mentioned earlier in this report. This will require a sustained focus from a whole council / partnership approach, requiring an understanding and oversight of how this might impact other priorities moving forward.

In light of all of the above and to help support the council to deliver against the level of ambition for delivery it now has, it is the view of the peer team that the council should bring in additional, experienced senior corporate capacity to help drive improvement and transformation with the pace and rigour the council seeks. This capacity should be there to complement and work with the strengths that exist. Having this in place will help the council in having and further developing the 'capacity, skills and culture to plan and deliver major change'.

## 4. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings. The CPC process includes a progress review, which provides space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the recommendations from this report and is due to take place in September 2024.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. Claire Hogan, Principal Adviser for the North West region, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Claire is available to discuss any further support the council requires.

[claire.hogan@local.gov.uk](mailto:claire.hogan@local.gov.uk).