Corporate Peer Challenge
London Borough of Lambeth

4-7 October 2016

Feedback Report

1.   Executive Summary

The view of the Corporate Peer Challenge peer team is that London Borough of Lambeth is a well-led organisation, with respected member and officer leadership. Senior members and officers alike have a strong understanding of Lambeth the place and the communities living, working and visiting the borough. Lambeth has a sound reputation for its commitment and approach to equalities and community cohesion. As part of our engagement we met staff from all levels of the organisation who were clearly committed and passionate about improving Lambeth.

The council has worked hard to deliver improvement in Children's Services following an 'Inadequate' rating from Ofsted in 2015, and many council services are delivered well, with general resident satisfaction with the council high, and increasing year on year.

The council benefits from skilled and committed cabinet members who have an effective handle on their individual portfolio briefs, and councillors across the authority are rooted in their communities and are supportive of the council's improvement agenda. Overview and Scrutiny adds value through their activity, but there is potential for the council to make more of the skills of frontline councillors, for example through building in more opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny of policy before reaching the formal decision-making stage. This could involve considering policy implications through early engagement with councillors.

Overall there are good member/officer working relationships with clear demarcations around roles and responsibilities. Staff at all levels are committed to Lambeth, both as an organisation and as a place.

There is clear culture of partnership working and collaboration and integration of services with external partners. While partners recognise that the council is on a journey of improvement, Lambeth has earned respect from a wide range of its partners for the progress it has made.

The cooperative council approach resulted in the authority becoming much more outward looking and seeking greater community engagement on key projects. However, there is a need to update what the cooperative council means today as there is some confusion about what local people can expect of the council and how staff should operate. To overcome this, it is important for the council to be clear in its vision and strategy going forwards, and to ensure that the cooperative vision is delivered in practice.

The council has recently agreed its high-level strategies, with a new Borough Plan for 2016-2021, a 3-year financial plan, and an organisational redesign strategy now in place. There is now a need to ensure that they are fully aligned, and that the priorities they identify cascade throughout the organisation providing clarity to all staff about what they are expected to deliver.

Lambeth Council has worked hard to develop a three year financial plan, with robust financial planning. It has communicated the headline savings message well and this

message is widely understood, but staff are understandably unsettled waiting for the detailed plans for how the savings are to be achieved. Furthermore, the council has yet to be clear about which services are no longer priorities and explore how to ensure its priorities are reflected in its budget setting. Few councils, in the local government financial landscape, can avoid the need to prioritise more closely to ensure they achieve their key objectives. There is a need to hone priorities further to be clear on how different activities measure up against an assessment of what is 'must do' and what is a 'nice to do' that needs to be reined in, alongside priorities for investment and transformation services. Lambeth should consider devoting more resource to fewer projects to ensure they are successfully delivered.

There is a strong appetite among Lambeth residents to be engaged, to be involved, and to be heard, and the Borough Plan offers an opportunity to channel this enthusiasm and for the council and residents to work together to deliver shared priorities. These local residents are a real asset: they are keen to help bring about a positive change in the borough, and provide challenge and scrutiny to the council.

Lambeth has seen an increase in positive resident satisfaction over recent years and there are a number of examples of how the council has worked well with local residents.

However, some projects have not taken the community with them, resulting in significant challenge and dissatisfaction from some local people, and delay and non-delivery of projects. There is a need to ensure that, where needed, early engagement with local people is built into projects to enable residents and the council to work together to develop ideas and shape services. To underpin this, residents need to understand the priorities of the Council.

There is an opportunity for the council to be more prominent in speaking up for the people of the borough on issues that are controlled by other decision-makers, for example on issues such as the status of EU citizens post-Brexit, and the need to increase Brixton station capacity.

There is a need for the senior management team – who are a capable set of individual leaders – to develop into a stronger team, able to take the corporate overview of the organisation and to be greater than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, the organisation would benefit from the senior management team empowering the management below them to take on more responsibility, speed up decision-making, avoid small issues being escalated up the organisation unnecessarily, and free up capacity at the very senior tiers.

The organisation needs to ensure that corporate grip is strengthened further, through effective performance management and clear accountability for delivery – not through creating more processes and plans. It is essential that senior management set out a strong message about expectations and clarity about where accountability sits, and then take action in instances of non-compliance or non-performance.

Delivering the organisational redesign is an urgent priority, with the new structure needing to be in place as soon as possible. Once the structure is confirmed, progress can be made to embed culture, values and behaviours for the organisation moving

forward. By introducing a staff performance framework tied to the priorities in the Borough Plan, the council will be able to ensure focus on delivering members' priorities and increase its responsiveness to the community and member concerns.

The council had seen a step change in improvement over recent years and particularly in the last 18 months, and is now well-placed to increase the pace and set out a clear delivery plan to move the organisation on. We hope our feedback below, along with some suggestions for how to do this, is helpful to the organisation.

2.   Key recommendations

Our key recommendations, outlined in more detail in the body of this report, are as follows:

- Set out a clear narrative for the Council's role in the borough, including clarity on the future of the 'co-operative council' concept, and communicate this widely
- Be seen to speak up for the borough and residents by campaigning on issues controlled by other decision-makers
- Be clear on the key priorities of the council and ensure that there is close alignment between priorities and budget proposals
- Be more vocal – the Council is doing a lot of good work and should feel able to speak for the borough
- Now that the new policy framework has been agreed, focus on delivery plans
- Commence the implementation of the Organisational Redesign immediately and deliver the restructure quickly
- Develop the senior management team to act corporately and strategically, and to be greater than the sum of its parts
- Empower middle managers to take on more responsibility and get rid of bottlenecks in decision-making
- Introduce a staff performance appraisal process aligned to the Borough Plan priorities, which sets SMART targets for measurable performance and accountability
- Ensure corporate grip is strengthened through effective performance management and clear accountability for delivery

3.   Summary of the Peer Challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at LB Lambeth were:

- Joanne Roney OBE, Chief Executive, Wakefield Council
- Councillor Richard Watts, Leader, LB Islington
- Councillor Hamida Ali, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Justice, LB Croydon
- Jonathan Bunt, Strategic Director, Finance & Investment, LB Barking & Dagenham
- Sarah Reed, Assistant Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council
- Nick Ball, Project Manager, LB Redbridge
- Kate Herbert, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
4. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition, you asked us to consider the following questions as part of our work:

- Our Borough Plan, Budget Strategy and Organisational Redesign are coming together – are they individually and collectively coherent and deliverable?
- Our financial position and budget strategy is a challenge – are our plans sound and deliverable?
- What more can we do to effectively deliver our ambitious and challenging agenda in the context of the political and community engagement of our citizens?
- What do we need to do to ensure we have the capacity to deliver?

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The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. 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 for the peer challenge 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 Lambeth, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 180 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external stakeholders
- Gathered information and views from more than 50 meetings, visits to key sites and additional research and reading
- Collectively spent more than 280 hours to determine our findings – the equivalent of one person spending 8 weeks in Lambeth

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings along with suggestions for some next steps. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (4-7 October 2016). In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time, and the peer team appreciates that some of the issues raised may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting

Senior members and officers alike have a strong understanding of Lambeth the place and the communities living, working and visiting the borough. The council has a long history of celebrating the diversity of Lambeth and the cooperative council approach has resulted in the authority becoming much more outward looking and seeking greater community engagement on key projects. However, there is a need to update what the cooperative council means today as there is some confusion about what local people can expect of the council and how staff should operate.

The recently agreed Future Lambeth Borough Plan 2016-2021 sets out clear headline ambitions around inclusive growth, reducing inequality, and strong and sustainable neighbourhoods. With previous high-level strategies, priorities have not been expressed in a way that creates a 'golden thread' linking the high level ambitions of the council to the day to day work of staff throughout the organisation. It will be essential to the successful delivery of the Borough Plan that this golden thread is created. In doing so, it will ensure that all activity is focused on what is important to the council and that the Borough Plan is driving the organisation's work.

The new Borough Plan provides a great opportunity to sharpen priorities, set out a clear narrative to the community about what the council is doing for residents, and reposition the cooperative council values to reflect the current context, communicating this both internally and externally. The council should think about how to launch the Borough Plan and how the community will be involved in this. There is a strong appetite among Lambeth residents to be engaged, to be involved, and to be heard, and the Borough Plan offers a focus for this enthusiasm and for the council and residents to work together to deliver shared priorities.

The council could use the new Borough Plan to clarify the hierarchy of council strategies and simplify the policy framework that it is working to deliver. The council needs to be clear that the Borough Plan supersedes all other strategies and not just another plan on top of a number of other plans.

The council has yet to be clear about which services are no longer priorities and explore how to reduce or stop those services. Few councils, in the local government financial landscape, can avoid the need to prioritise more closely to ensure they achieve their key objectives. There is a need to hone priorities further to be clear on how different activities measure up against an assessment of what is 'must do', what is 'nice to do', and what it needs to stop doing.

Lambeth has seen an increase in positive resident satisfaction over recent years (the 2016 Resident Survey found satisfaction with the council at 72%) and this is driven by high quality universal services, and positive changes to the place and outcomes. As mentioned above, there is a strong desire from some Lambeth residents to be engaged, to be involved, and to be heard. Senior officers and members recognise this and are keen to think about how best to involve local people. There are a number of examples of how the council has worked well with local residents, particularly on smaller, frontline projects.

However, some projects have not taken the community with them, resulting in significant challenge and dissatisfaction from some local people, and delay and non-delivery of projects. A number of 'hot topics' remain, such as estate regeneration , and these consume a lot of member and officer capacity. It appears that part of the reason why some of these projects have met significant opposition is due to lack of clarity from the offset about what the council is seeking to do and what scope there is from influencing the project in question, and/ or engagement seen as late in the process or limited in reach. Although engagement will not address all concerns and issues, the peer challenge team's view is that the council would be in a better position if it consistently engaged residents at an earlier stage in the policy development and through this set out clearly the parameters on which the engagement is based. This would allow the authority to articulate a clear narrative to residents about council priorities, what these will mean to the services they receive and the place in which they live and work. It would be particularly helpful to outline how residents and their families will benefit from the delivery of these priorities. Furthermore, ensuring early engagement of relevant stakeholder groups on new large scale projects that come forward will help identify and respond to local concerns from the offset.

A new Equality Commission, led by the Leader of the Council, has been set up to identify and tackle the barriers that still prevent many Lambeth residents from fulfilling their potential. This exercise will help to bring greater clarity to council priorities, building greater understanding to what is meant by the 'inclusive growth' priority in the new Borough Plan in particular.

Recommendations

- Set out a clear narrative for the Council's role in the borough, including clarity on the future of the 'co-operative council' concept, and communicate this widely

- Be clear on the key priorities of the council – what is 'must do', what is 'nice to do', what should the council stop doing? It may be best to do fewer things better and clarify the role residents and communities have in helping the Council to deliver its priorities.

- Be bold on ambition and maintain resolve on priorities. Once priorities are set, resist the temptation to add to them

- Show how residents and the borough as a whole benefits from new opportunities: for example, how will young people benefit from increased access to apprenticeships?

- Don't retreat – retain your outward focus and continue to develop new ideas from the community to ensure that you remain open to new ways of working

4.2. Leadership of place

Lambeth Council has a reputation among its partners for being an independently-minded borough, forging its own path and setting out ambitious plans, with a prioritisation of place over politics. For example, there was strong interaction with LB Wandsworth, Transport for London and the Greater London Authority on the Nine Elms development at Vauxhall.

The council is seen as a good local partner by a range of organisations (including the Police, Fire, partners from health organisations, developers, and other London Boroughs), and there is well-established and successful multi-agency working. While partners recognise that the council is making changes, Lambeth has earned respect from wide range of its partners for the progress it has made to date. There is an opportunity to build on these successful partnerships through exploring the potential for the use of common assets, including estates and staff, to support the further joining up of services for local people.

The council benefits from strong leadership. The Leader of the council is well-respected and recognised as being a strong community-based leader who builds consensus. The Chief Executive is also well-regarded and there is recognition that he has had a positive impact on the organisation since joining the council in 2015. There are a number of examples of this joined-up leadership working effectively.

Lambeth has a strong reputation for its commitment and approach to equalities and community cohesion. Initiatives such as the Equality Impact Assessment Panel ensures that there is member-led oversight on the extent to which equalities and community

cohesion considerations are front and centre in decision-making. The new Equality Commission will provide a further opportunity to test the council's approach and improve it further.

Lambeth is a borough with a high number of individuals and communities that are politically active and engaged at grassroots level. These local residents and organisations are a real asset: they are keen to help bring about a positive change in the borough, and provide challenge and scrutiny to the council. There are a number of examples of how the council has worked well with local residents, building in early engagement, and working together to develop ideas and shape services.

However, community engagement practice is inconsistent across the organisation. The council should develop a strategic approach to community engagement that will ensure consistency of good practice across the organisation. This should include an assessment of reputational risk, clarity about the purpose of the engagement, clarity and consistency of messaging (across both members and officers), and early and creative engagement methods that fit the target audience. This will pay dividends for all council consultation and engagement, but especially on complex and controversial issues. In addition to this, there is an opportunity for the council to be more prominent in speaking up for the people of the borough on issues that are controlled by other decision-makers, for example on issues such as the status of EU citizens post-Brexit, and the need to increase Brixton station capacity.

The reality of the financial context facing local government is that it will be a challenge to realise the ambition of the borough and achieve tangible results for residents without making difficult decisions about some services: decisions that will be unpopular with local people. This reinforces the need for early engagement with local residents. Furthermore, the council would benefit from considering how it can ensure that its communications activity clearly sets out the council's stance and the challenges it faces, both internally and externally, and that there is consistency of message through all communication channels. That said, it is inevitable that there will be occasions where the council's consultation, engagement and communication is exemplary but there is opposition from some local residents to a proposal. In this situation, the council will have to be robust in progressing its policies in the face of opposition.

Recommendations
- Build on successful partnerships to explore how partners can join up common assets to bring about closer delivery of public services
- Speak up for the borough and residents by campaigning on issues controlled by other decision-makers
- Improve and co-ordinate Council communications to ensure clarity of message, both internally and externally
- Be willing to be robust – sometimes you need to have greater resolve in the face of opposition

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4.3. Financial planning and viability

The council has worked hard to develop a robust, three year financial plan. It has communicated the headline savings message well and this message is widely understood, but staff are understandably unsettled waiting for the detailed plans for how the savings are to be achieved.

There has been detailed Cabinet involvement in the development of the budget proposals, and this has led to a collective understanding across Cabinet and ownership of the 2017-20 budget by Cabinet Members. However, moving forward the council should consider how to achieve a clearer read across from the new Borough Plan to the Budget Plan, by allocating savings targets and developing the budget proposals in a way that clearly links to and is driven by council priorities.

There is strong oversight of the delivery of savings targets, with the Monthly Programme Management Office savings tracker in place to identify and monitor the implementation of agreed savings. The detailed review of savings proposals has minimised the risk of double counting and is helping to identify interdependencies and reduce the chance of any unintended consequences across departments.

The council should continue to explore opportunities for further efficiencies. This might include income generation or collaborating with other authorities.

There is a good understanding of the Children's Services position and its direction of travel. There is a need to ensure that the 2016/17 pressures on Children's Services and the Organisational Redesign are closely managed to ensure that the careful budget planning is not undermined. For example, in order to deliver the £8m Organisational Redesign saving for 2017/18 in line with Council change policies, action needs to begin immediately .

There is a strong Member-led appraisal of asset and capital schemes, with a clear link to revenue planning. However, the council would benefit more if the approach to asset management moved from being opportunistic to strategic, including prioritising the current list of projects. The Council should resolve outstanding community asset transfer issues.

The peer team found that there was limited empowerment of middle managers on financial decision-making, with examples of low level financial decisions being escalated to Strategic Directors. This risks managers not being accountable for and empowered to lead their service areas, and creates bottlenecks with decisions being held up until busy senior managers are able to make a decision. This is a frustration among middle managers and also among external partners who have experienced delays as a result. Pushing financial decision-making down the organisation to increase ownership of and accountability for the budget and empower staff will help to free up senior capacity in the organisation.

Recommendations
- Develop a clear narrative on how the Council's priorities are reflected in the budget proposals for 2017-20

- Maintain the process and pressure to deliver savings for the remaining budget gap 2017-20 – don't lose the momentum you have on this!
- Commence the implementation of the Organisational Redesign saving for 2017/18 quickly to avoid further, reactive, voluntary redundancies, and address gaps in the management structure
- Pursue opportunities to expand investment for financial return within an appropriate understanding of risk
- Give further consideration to whether you have exploited all opportunities for efficiencies, shared services and income generation to minimise impact on the frontline
- Push financial decision making down the organisation to increase ownership of the budget and empower staff

4.4. Organisational leadership and governance

The Leader and Chief Executive are well respected and senior officers and members work well together on policy discussions, highlighting good member/ officer working relationships with clear demarcations around roles and responsibilities.

Elected members are rooted in their communities, understand their borough, and are supportive of the council's improvement agenda. Scrutiny members are engaged and work well on commissions, with evidence of adding value through their activity. The council could make more of the skills of non-executive councillors, for example through building in more opportunities for overview of policy before reaching the formal decision-making stage. It may also be helpful to undertake a short piece of work to explore how overview and scrutiny could add more value to the council more widely.

There is a view that middle management tend to escalate issues up through the organisation. There is a need for the senior management team to become a stronger team that is able to take a corporate overview of the organisation and to be greater than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, the organisation would benefit from the senior management team empowering the management below them to take on more responsibility and free up capacity at the very senior tiers.

It is not clear what the council's organisational values are, and the layering of priorities on top of priorities creates a lack of focus for what staff are expected to deliver. Internal communications are not yet embedded and there are also gaps and inconsistency in external communications. The effective implementation of a communications plan for the new Borough Plan will be essential to provide clarity for staff about expectations, as well as the narrative for residents mentioned above.

The Chief Executive has been clear about the importance he places on the need for greater 'grip' on corporate processes to drive improvement, and there has been a great deal of progress in this area. For example, decent performance monitoring systems are now in place, and the challenge now is to ensure that the data produced is used to drive improvement and accountability. Care needs to be taken to ensure that corporate grip is strengthened through effective performance management and clear accountability for

delivery – not through creating more processes and plans. Unnecessary bureaucracy should be challenged and stripped out.

There remains a degree of 'corporate disobedience' – not always following corporate processes – with seemingly no consequence for non-compliance. It will not be possible to have a strong grip on corporate processes if this continues to be tolerated. It is essential that senior management set out a strong message about expectations and clarity about where accountability sits, and then take action in instances of non-compliance. As a starting point, this message needs to be given on budget management to ensure that overspends are actively managed and reined in.

Recommendations
- Build in more opportunities for frontline councillors to use their skills to support policy development, for example through pre-decision scrutiny
- Undertake a short piece of work to explore how overview and scrutiny could add more value to the council
- Develop the senior management team to act corporately and to be greater than the sum of its parts
- Empower middle managers to take on more responsibility and get rid of bottlenecks in decision-making
- Restate corporate values and behaviours, and expectations around performance and accountability
- Ensure corporate grip is strengthened through effective performance management and clear accountability for delivery
- Work with budget holders to ensure they spend within budget

4.5. Capacity to deliver

The council benefits from skilled and committed Cabinet members who have a strong handle on their brief, and councillors across the authority are strong advocates for their community. Staff at all levels have a strong work ethic and are committed to Lambeth, both as an organisation and as a place. There is a strong partnership working and collaboration and integration of services with external partners.

There is a widespread understanding among members and officers alike of the need to transform the organisation and recognition that there has been an emphasis on improving performance of the council in the past 18 months.

The peer team was asked to consider whether the council has the capacity needed to deliver its plans. Galvanising capacity requires a 'one council' approach that is understood by all involved. Now that the council has agreed its top level plans – the Borough Plan, Budget Plan and the Organisational Redesign – it needs to galvanise the capacity it has around the delivery of these plans. Shifting from strategy to delivery seems to have been problematic in the past and opportunities for plans to be delivered effectively being missed. It is essential that this does not happen with this new policy framework.

The council is delivering well in response to the 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating of Children's Services in 2015 and has made progress. The Chief Executive has provided strong leadership to support the improvements made in Children's Services. . With this work moving in the right direction, it is now the right time for him to step back. This will free up some of his time to allow him to focus on ensuring that the delivery of the new policy framework moves at pace and that the organisational redesign builds the culture he and the Leader of the council want to see in Lambeth Council.

Quick delivery of the organisational redesign, along with a clear Staff Plan and effective processes to support the redesign, is crucial. Staff need to be clear about roles, what is expected of them, and how they will be held to account. Once the structure is confirmed, there needs to be an emphasis on embedding culture, values and behaviours for the organisation moving forward.

By introducing a staff performance framework tied to the priorities in the Borough Plan, the council will be able to ensure focus on delivering members' priorities and increase its responsiveness to the community and member concerns.

It is not clear how the council is harnessing internal talent to develop the future leaders of the organisation, and ensure that staff capacity is focussed on the delivery of council priorities. In addition, it was not clear how the achievements of staff are recognised and celebrated. Both of these could be factored into the organisational redesign programme.

The council is aware of the importance for the organisation internally to reflect the community it serves and needs to pay particular attention to the top tiers within its management structures. It would be helpful for this to be given greater attention in the organisational development strategy to ensure that diversity is given the priority required.

There are gaps in the organisation as a result of the voluntary redundancy programme, resulting in staff and partners being unsure of the right contact for work areas where there are now vacancies and the long-term plans for vacant roles. While the peer team recognised that a number of staff had left the authority in the fortnight before the team arrived on site and these comments may reflect the timing of the challenge, the council may wish to reflect on how to support colleagues and partners through staff changes in the future to ensure a smooth transition to new working arrangements.

Finally, it needs to be clearer how the council is working with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the wider community to explore strengthening the viability of the sector. Many local authorities are having conversations with the VCS about whether they could step into the space left as the council contracts and resources reduce. There is a need to work in partnership with the VCS to identify together what the future holds for the sector and work with them to develop their capacity, where appropriate.

Recommendations
- Now that the new policy framework has been agreed, focus on development and implementation of delivery plans

- Free up the capacity of the Chief Executive to be able to drive the delivery of the new policy framework
- Restructure quickly and develop a clear workforce strategy supported by effective HR processes
- Consider how to ensure the organisation reflects the community it serves , with particular attention to the top tiers within its management structures
- Ensure the organisational redesign removes duplication of effort across teams and departments and that any centralising of corporate services adds greater value to the delivery of services
- Introduce a staff performance appraisal process aligned to the Borough Plan priorities, which sets SMART targets for measurable performance and accountability
- Recognise achievement of staff and consider how to nurture talent within the organisation
- Engage with the voluntary and community sector to reach a shared understanding of the contribution the sector could make to the borough, and work with the sector to develop its capacity

5. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate you will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions with your senior managerial and political leadership in order to determine how the Council wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Heather Wills, Principal Adviser, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Her contact details are 07770 701188/ heather.wills@local.gov.uk.

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide additional information and signposting about the issues the peer team have raised in this report to help inform your ongoing consideration.

Follow up visit

The LGA peer challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 12-24 months.