

Dear colleagues

LGA Peer Review

We have received the final report from the LGA following the peer review conducted last Autumn. The review was overseen by a number of councillors and officers from other authorities and they were on site for a week. They conducted over 50 different interviews and focus groups as well as visits across the borough. Their findings and report were intended to give us a sense of our progress but to also highlight what we might do differently or better. Having heard their initial feedback and now having received the final report it seems appropriate for us to set out our initial response and to set out how we will take this forward.

Their role is to be a critical friend using their experience of local government to advise us on our progress. They recognised a lot of strong work going on but also highlighted areas that we need to focus on. They picked up on a number of our challenges – many of which they face in their own authorities. The need to provide enough affordable housing, maintain good services, ensure budgets balance and have clear priorities are all areas they empathised with. However they made the point strongly that we need to be willing to engage earlier, confront our major issues and be willing to prioritise if we are going to be a successful organisation and borough. The Borough Plan should enable a lot of this and they called on us to focus on this as the overarching guide as to what we do over the coming years.

You can read in more detail in the report the range of issues and suggestions they have raised. We felt it was important to reflect on how we are already responding to these challenges but also to consider what we will do next.

How are we progressing?

We were already focused on addressing a number of issues highlighted in the report and we can point to progress on a number of issues:

- We have the Borough Plan that sets out our 3 core objectives and the Equalities Commission is progressing so that we are getting a better understanding of how to reduce inequality in the borough.
- There are a number of issues we have begun to advocate for including putting a hold on the large increases to business rates; improving transport particularly into Streatham; solving the air quality issues; and protecting the finances to our schools that is under threat. We will do more about these but we have started to pick up on the challenge they have given us to be more vocal about the interests of Lambeth.
- We have considered how we can engage citizens in a constructive way so that we are clearer about issues by learning from our experiences to date.
- We are going to align our business planning to the Borough Plan and this will begin shortly. This will be alongside a clearer approach to organisational development and performance management. This means not only will we start to define clearly what it is we are here to do, we will also be clearer about how we manage our performance against this work.
- We are developing our offer to staff so that they are clear about their own development and role. There was a challenge into senior management to be more of a team and we have done a lot of work to agree shared approaches and priorities.

We also know we need to do more to enable our middle managers to be able to take more responsibility.

- The organisational redesign has been carefully planned and is now almost ready to begin. This has been discussed with staff through Chief Executive briefings before Christmas.

What do we need to do next?

There are a number of issues that the peer review highlighted that will need ongoing focus. Not everything can be fixed simply through an action plan but some of the areas we need to focus include:

- We need to prioritise but we have commitments that cannot simply be stopped so this will need to be managed in a considered way and on an ongoing basis.
- We want our top tiers to reflect the community we serve and we know that development and support is going to be important for this to happen. Again this is not a quick fix but a longer term commitment.
- One of our biggest challenges is about how we work with our residents. The ethos of the cooperative council is important and we want to work closely with residents to achieve the outcomes set out in the Borough Plan. Resources are inevitably more stretched but that is an incentive rather than an obstacle to closer working with residents as long as it is built on an honest understanding of what we are able to do.

Next steps

The LGA peer challenge process includes a follow up visit to see how well we are doing against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. We can determine when they come but it is usually 12-24months after the initial review.

There are now a range of issues that we will want to look at and we think that there is a lot of sensible progress underway but still more that we can do. Over the coming months we are going to talk to residents and staff and see how we can continue to meet the challenges we have been given.

If you want to give some initial thoughts on the report and recommendations please email us at communications@lambeth.gov.uk so that we can collate these and use them to determine the actions we need to pursue.

Regards,

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