



Cabinet

Title	LGA Corporate Peer Challenge - report and action plan
Date of meeting	5 th September 2023
Report of	Councillor Barry Rawlings, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources and Effective Council
Wards	All
Status	Public
Key	Key
Urgent	No
Appendices	Appendix A – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report Appendix B – Barnet Council Action Plan
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Summary

In June 2023, a group of local government peers visited Barnet to undertake an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (Peer Review).

The Peer Review provides a ‘practitioner perspective’ and ‘critical friend’ challenge to councils, covering five core elements of good performance – 1) local priorities and outcomes, 2) organisational and place leadership, 3) governance and culture, 4) financial planning and management and 5) capacity for improvement. We also asked the Peer Review team to look at what more we can do to embed our priorities and strengthen our partnership working, and -recognising the move to and operation of a Cabinet and Scrutiny system is still new - what more the council can do to support, develop, and embed new ways of working in the new Governance arrangements.

The Peer Review team carried out 40 interviews with more than 100 staff and councillors, representatives from the voluntary, community and faith sector, and a range of our key borough

partners including the Police, NHS, Saracens and Middlesex University. The visit took place before the council held its first Cabinet meeting.

In headline terms, the review team concluded that the council is a well-managed and well-run organisation; it recognised the ambition of our plans for the future and had particularly strong praise for our relationships with partners and commitment to EDI principles. Ten recommendations for areas of refinement and improvement were identified - full detail of the review (including the recommendations) is contained in Appendix A.

As part of the process, the council publishes the report and prepares and publishes an action plan (note the LGA will also publish the report on its website and the action plan will be shared with DHLUC as part of LGA reporting on its sector improvement work) setting out how it will respond to the recommendations and over what timescale. That is contained in Appendix B.

In addition to publishing the action plan, there is an expectation that a couple of the Peer Team will return for a progress review (likely to be spring 2024). The LGA then will produce a shorter report, which is also published. The action plans and progress reviews are then shared with DLUHC on a quarterly basis.

Recommendations

- 1. Cabinet agrees the contents of the report and accepts the recommendations of the LGA Peer Review team (as set out in Appendix A).**
- 2. Cabinet agrees the contents of the action plan prepared in response to those recommendations (Appendix B) and that implementation of the actions is delegated to the Chief Executive, who will report progress to Cabinet or appropriate committee.**
- 3. Cabinet agrees to publish the LGA Peer Review report and the action plan on the Barnet website.**
- 4. Cabinet notes that there will be a follow-up visit from members of the Peer Team to review progress against the action plan - date to be confirmed but likely to be spring 2024.**

1. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 1.1 The LGA requires the report and follow-up action plan to be published.

2. Alternative Options Considered and Not Recommended

- 2.1 In developing the action plan, officers considered alternative actions. Those put forward here were considered the most appropriate and the action plan, therefore, represents the preferred approach.
- 2.2 We have also considered the alternative option of forgoing to publish and prepare an action plan, but we do not recommend this approach.
- 2.3 The council has invited the LGA to undertake the review and agrees with the observations and recommendations provided by the LGA Peer Review team, so there is no basis not to publish the report or produce an action plan. It would go against the spirit of the process and likely have a

negative impact on our reputation and our relationship with the LGA. Further, the LGA now reports peer review information to DLUHC (on a quarterly basis) who would also want to know that we are following-up on the recommendations.

3. Post-Decision Implementation

- 3.1 Subject to Cabinet approval of the recommendations, we will share our action plan with the LGA and publish the report and action plan on the website.
- 3.2 There also will be a follow-up visit by the Review team – which will review progress against the recommendations – within 12 months of the review. A date is still to be confirmed but it is likely to take place in spring 2024.
- 3.3 Actions within the plan either have specific dates attached to them or have been identified as ongoing activity. This means that activity will become incorporated as part of our ways of working and business as usual activity.

4. Corporate Priorities, Performance and Other Considerations

Corporate Plan

- 4.1 The action plan is aligned with corporate plan priorities, particularly the Engaged and Effective theme.

Corporate Performance / Outcome Measures

- 4.2 Implementing this action plan will support the delivery of the objectives of Our Plan for Barnet 2023-26, supporting the delivery of the council's strategic priorities.

Sustainability

- 4.3 The proposal set out in this report has no direct impact on the council's sustainability strategy. Through the delivery of the action plan, we will support the delivery of the council's sustainability commitments.

Corporate Parenting

- 4.4 In line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the council has a duty to consider Corporate Parenting Principles in decision-making across the council. The outcomes and priorities in the refreshed Corporate Plan, 'Our Plan for Barnet', reflect the council's commitment to the Corporate Parenting duty to ensure the most vulnerable are protected and the needs of children are considered in everything that the council does.
- 4.5 The proposals set out on this report have no direct or indirect impacts on looked-after children or care leavers identified beyond those applicable to the population as a whole.

Risk Management

- 4.6 Effective management of risk is an integral part of asset management and the council's Risk Management Framework has established strategic and departmental risk registers.
- 4.7 Implementing the actions in our proposal may lead to improved risk management due to more substantial planning regarding MTFs and transformation programmes.

Insight

4.8 Not applicable to this report.

Social Value

4.9 Not applicable to this report.

5. Resource Implications (Finance and Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT and Property)

5.1 At this stage, there are no resource implications. However, some of the LGA recommendations and our subsequent actions may potentially have resource implications in the future.

5.2 Many of the recommendations highlight priorities already known and several of the actions outlined in the plan are already in progress.

6. Legal Implications and Constitution References

6.1 Under the council's constitution, Part 2D the terms of reference for Cabinet including responsibilities for the following functions:

- Development of proposals for the budget (including the capital and revenue budgets, the fixing of the Council Tax Base, and the level of Council Tax) and the financial strategy for the council
- Monitoring the implementation of the budget and financial strategy
- Recommending major new policies (and amendments to existing policies) to the council for approval as part of the council's policy framework and implementing those approved by council
- Approving policies that are not part of the policy framework
- Management of the council's capital programme.

6.2 Many of the peer review actions are executive functions such as monitoring the budget etc. For any functions that may be for council side committees these will be reported to them for example risk and company governance may be referred to GARMS.

7. Consultation

7.1 This is not applicable in this instance.

8. Equalities and Diversity

8.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires the council in the exercise of its functions to have due regard to the need:

- to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the 2010 Act; and
- advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations, between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

8.2 The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

8.3 There are no significant implications on groups with protected characteristics as a result of the proposal in this report.

9. Background Papers

9.1 None.