


LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

LB Haringey Council

16th – 19th May 2023

Feedback report





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1. Executive summary

The London Borough of Haringey is a dynamic and improvement-focused local authority. It has a powerful sense of place, appreciating and celebrating the diversity of the area and the people it serves. It provides many good core services to its residents for which it should be rightly proud. The Borough is well-regarded for its high performing schools, and the parks and library services are valued, with the Friends groups keen to collaborate with the Council. Haringey has achieved significant improvement, including a 'good' Ofsted rating and successful renewal projects aimed at improving the physical environment and building economic prosperity. It has also held and been successful in a number of resident ballots on changes to existing estates and the creation of new and better homes. Challenges remain in housing and landlord services, but the Council is actively working on improvement plans.

In *The Haringey Deal* the Council has committed to ensuring it is consistently 'getting the basics right' in service delivery and communication with residents. It is striving to improve the relationship between the Council and its residents, instilling more trust, better communication and providing more opportunities for resident participation and co-design. There is widespread commitment within the Council to these objectives, with visible evidence of both members and the workforce going the extra mile to contribute to these aims and achieve a fairer and greener Haringey.

Haringey has a strong political and executive leadership team, and the peer team heard a great deal of praise for the leadership of both the Leader and Chief Executive from members, staff, and partners. The Leader of the Council provides strong, robust leadership, and has steadied the political position after an extended period of turbulence. This stability is acknowledged and praised within the member and staff groups. They recognise that the magnitude of change the council is embarking on and the increasing demand for Council services, and that this requires strong political leadership, with a clear roadmap of change and a well-defined success framework.

The Council recognises that the organisation needs a strong and well-supported senior management team and has undertaken a restructuring of the senior team to realign structures to meet emerging business needs. The Council has also designed and delivered a new leadership training and support programme, which has been

successful and highly valued by the members and officers.


The peer team found the staff they spoke to enthusiastic, professional, and proud to work for the Council. The work of the staff networks who champion the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) agenda across the Council is impressive, with a new Workforce Strategy due soon.

Officer and member relations were observed as being generally good. There is scope to improve these in some areas, including widening and formalising briefings and information sharing on council performance and policy changes to all councillors. The Council could also look at opportunities to better support non-executive members to connect and support the communities they serve and improve the member enquiries process.

Haringey has an ambitious programme of work to complete in the coming year and has a strong political and managerial base to support this. *The Haringey Deal* and supporting plans provide the operational detail for delivery and details of prioritisation. These inward-facing documents are important and valuable, but the peer team felt that the Council would benefit from a longer-term vision and values statement for the Borough that could be communicated both internally and externally. With this in mind, it is recommended that the Council should take some time to look at the future direction and vision for the Borough over the medium term to craft a compelling, concise vision and narrative that states what Haringey stands for and where the Council is going.

The Council has an ambitious programme of work set out in its Corporate Delivery Plan running from January 2023 to April 2024. The programme of work to deliver the Council's priorities and outcomes is extensive and ambitious; and considering the need for strong financial leadership in Haringey, there may need to be trade-offs to maintain a balanced budget.

The Council recognises its 'challenged' budget position and is taking steps to address this. There is a good understanding of the Council's financial position across members and officers, with some spending controls in place and savings targets identified across service areas. With relatively low reserves it is important that there is a strong emphasis in the Council on getting value for money and ensuring strong monitoring of capital programmes. Additionally, the Council needs to instil and maintain focus and



rigour around adherence to savings targets. There is some evidence of this happening, but it needs to be sustained and embedded throughout the organisation.

The Council should also look to develop a reserves strategy to maintain and replenish reserves. The Council recognises the importance of a strong collective narrative regarding the budget position, both organisationally and politically. Telling this story is important for everyone to understand the Council's financial position and explain how the restricted revenue position aligns with the expanding capital programme. The peer team was impressed by the Council's innovative approach to budget setting, including the 'budget fortnight', and noted that this has succeeded in improving cross-Council budget literacy and engagement.

Establishing a collaborative relationship with Haringey's communities and partners is a key priority for the Council, leading to a renewed sense of purpose in serving the residents. The Council's relationships with the police, Integrated Care Board, health partner agencies and other London Boroughs are strong, with the Chief Executive providing active and authentic leadership that benefits the Council and its residents.

The Council has prioritised building trust and relationships with residents. The Council acknowledges that it hasn't always approached and communicated with residents in the way it would have liked. Therefore, it has embarked on a journey of change with its workforce to create better relationships, increase resident engagement and work towards the goal of fostering more trust in the Council. In *The Haringey Deal*, the Corporate Delivery Plan, and with Think Haringey First principles, the Council has created a new framework for everyone working for the Council to refer to. A renewed energy and sense of purpose around serving communities has followed and the peer team saw evidence of how this was having an impact on how residents perceive the Council differently, than they did in the past.

Getting the basics right is a key priority for the Council with much work done on understanding what needs to happen in the service areas and across the Council for customer service responsiveness and good levels of service delivery.

2. 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:

2.1. Establish a long-term vision for the Borough.

LB Haringey, in collaboration with its communities and partners, should work to establish a comprehensive long-term vision for the Borough. This vision is an opportunity to go beyond short-term goals and address the aspirations of Haringey's communities. It should provide a clear direction for the Council's activities and articulate a narrative that identifies the Council's role within the vision. By having a shared long-term vision, LB Haringey can align its efforts and resources towards common goals, fostering a sense of purpose and unity, and articulate how staff, members, partners, and stakeholders can share the responsibility in delivering these goals.

2.2. Embed leadership of the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) agenda in the Council.

Leadership of the EDI agenda should be further integrated into all levels of leadership and management throughout LB Haringey. This includes promoting diversity, ensuring equal opportunities, and creating an inclusive work environment. By embedding the EDI agenda, the Council can further foster a culture of fairness, respect, and equality, both within the organisation and in its interactions with Haringey's communities. There are opportunities to reflect the council's commitment to EDI in policies, practices, and decision-making processes and ensure that this is demonstrated and modelled by all the senior leaders in the organisation.

2.3. The Council should continue proactive work with local communities and make it clear which methods of engagement will be used in different service situations.

LB Haringey should continue its proactive approach to engaging with local communities. Building strong relationships and partnerships with communities, organisations, and stakeholders is crucial for effective governance. The Council should actively seek input from residents, listen to their needs and concerns, and involve

them in decision-making processes. The new Participation Framework should provide the organisation with the framework to be clear with communities on what the Council means by participation and engagement on any given project. Ensure that internal networks are fully utilised for sharing successful participation tools and techniques, and record and communicate the learning.


2.4. The Council should develop and embed mechanisms to improve oversight and management of the Council's capital programme.

The Council should enhance its oversight and management of the capital programme, which involves the planning and implementation of major projects and investments. Robust processes should be put in place to ensure effective financial planning, risk management, and resource allocation. A balanced Medium-Term Financial Strategy should be developed and owned across the Council, providing a clear framework for financial decision-making. By improving the oversight and management of the capital programme, LB Haringey can maximise the value and impact of its investments, delivering tangible benefits to Haringey's communities.

2.5. LB Haringey should look at ways to strengthen and embed performance and programme management arrangements across the Council.

Haringey should strengthen its performance and programme management arrangements across the Council. This includes ensuring there are established, clear performance measures to monitor progress and evaluate outcomes. By having robust performance management systems in place, the Council can track its progress towards its goals, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions including on efficiencies. Effective programme management is imperative to ensuring that projects and initiatives are delivered on time, within budget, and with the desired outcomes. By embedding performance and programme management, LB Haringey can enhance its accountability, transparency, and efficiency and ensure that any co-production is genuine and meaningful.

2.6. Strengthen member/officer relationships within the Council by creating time and space for members and officers to interact outside of formal meetings to understand each other's roles and responsibilities and build trust.



LB Haringey should continue its efforts to build wider and better relationships between members and officers, including by creating opportunities for members and officers to develop a deeper understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. By fostering effective collaboration, communication, and mutual respect, LB Haringey can enhance its decision-making processes and governance. Improved relationships between members and officers contribute to a more cohesive and productive council, benefiting Haringey's communities.

2.7. Maximise your links with partners and stakeholders using your place leadership role to build coalitions that help with the delivery of local priorities.

Capitalise on the strong relationships and the goodwill built through the partnership work with the communities in Haringey during the COVID-19 pandemic by proactively engaging with stakeholders and partners. Look at opportunities to re-establish and take a leading role in bringing partners together around issues and policies that all of you have a significant role in working to deliver or challenges you are looking to resolve or mitigate.

2.8. Review the scrutiny function within the Council and look at opportunities for building mechanisms that enable the Council to measure the impact of scrutiny activity.

Work on strengthening the scrutiny function in the Council. Effective scrutiny can help with driving forward the Council's project delivery and support the ambitions on resident and partner engagement.

2.9. Continue the work on developing the key lines of business systems to increase efficiency in operations and enhance customer service.

Investing in key line of business enquiry systems including Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools and procurement management systems can help enhance operational efficiency, improve customer service, help with making data-driven decisions, aid transparency and help with resource management.

3. 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:

- Althea Loderick, Chief Executive at LB Southwark
- Cllr Sir Steve Houghton, Leader at Barnsley Metropolitan Council
- Carol Culley OBE, Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer at Manchester City Council
- Matt Wilton, Assistant Chief Executive at Newcastle City Council
- Yolande Burgess, Strategy Director: London's Communities at London Councils
- Tom Alexander, Project Director at LB Tower Hamlets
- Rebecca Ireland, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

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 the Council's 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 the delivery of local priorities? Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these themes, the Council asked that two additional areas be explored:

1. The relationship between the Council and the Haringey community, and
2. The effectiveness of the Council's work on Getting the Basics right.

3.3. The peer challenge process

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 to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent four days onsite at the London Borough of Haringey during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Visited High Road West, Broadwater Farm, Wood Green Library & Rising Green Youth Hub speaking to staff and residents.
- 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.

4. Feedback

4.1. Local priorities and outcomes

Haringey is a diverse borough geographically and demographically, with a resident population of over 260,000 people, a large proportion of which are younger people, with over 180 languages spoken, and areas of both high deprivation and affluence. The Council is aware that meaningfully engaging with such a diverse population is a challenge, one that the Council embraces. It is also keen not to be complacent in thinking it completely knows the area and the views of residents, when the population demographics are changing so rapidly, and participation mechanisms are not able to keep up with these changes. The Borough has several recognisable and impressive landmarks and venues, bringing additional vibrance and income to the borough. Whilst the Borough celebrates these, they also necessitate the Council to offer resources, oversight, and community leadership role to support the entertainment activity whilst balancing the gains with the needs and impact on the wider communities.

The Council produces a State of the Borough profile report annually which provides an overview of Haringey, using the most current data available. This information is clear, easy to digest and visually appealing, and it aims to give residents, partners, members, and officers access to a wide range of data to provide a better understanding of the borough, its population, and the key issues facing the Council and its residents. This data is used to shape priority setting.

The priorities for Haringey Council are set out in their Corporate Delivery Plan, which details how the Council will achieve building a fairer and greener borough. The plan was adopted in January 2023 and covers a period of 18 months. It is organised around eight themes and builds upon the work the Council completed in 2022 on crafting *The Haringey Deal*, aimed at forging a new way of working within the Council and with residents.

The Deal emphasises the importance of building greater trust between the Council and residents, learning from mistakes, and putting things right quickly, empowering communities to make change happen for themselves, and finding new ways to share power with residents and communities. Through *The Haringey Deal*, the Council also recognises the importance of getting the basics right when operating services and communicating with communities. The Council is keen to improve outcomes for its

residents in the most deprived areas and to increase participation in Council services and decision-making. This includes work to broaden engagement to include all Haringey communities and promote getting involved in local democracy. The Council are keen to understand the barriers and find ways to support greater political engagement in local elections, with some Haringey wards having extremely low election turnout rates.

The peer team heard about residents' experiences when they accessed services, and it was understood that while there are pockets of good practice there are still areas where customer service is not living up to the aspirations set under *The Haringey Deal*. This was particularly the case with housing and landlord services. This is an area where the Council acknowledges significant improvement is required and has committed to this in a detailed, high-profile Council-led improvement programme. These services are now managed by the Council since the housing stock was transferred back from an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) in 2022. Considerable issues have been identified with these services, and an extensive improvement plan is in place. The peer team recognised the leadership demonstrated by the Chief Executive in sponsoring the improvement programme and chairing the housing improvement board, highlighting the priority status of this work and providing oversight of the improvement activity.

The Council provide many good services, with multiple examples of the Council delivering against its priorities. This includes Adult Social Care in Haringey emerging as an effective model of successful locality working and community engagement, closely interconnected with various community networks. Additionally, in the recent Ofsted inspection, children's services, received a 'Good' rating. The Council has worked hard to improve children's services, and this result is a testament to the commitment of all involved. It will help the Council to continue its work over the past few years to build trust in social care services, and function as an exemplar of the improvement journey the Council is undertaking in other service areas. Furthermore, the Council's dedication to addressing the climate change agenda is commendable, with enthusiastic members and officers keen to make the Council's services more sustainable.

While the ambitious work programme of the Council clearly is articulated in the Corporate Delivery Plan and *The Haringey Deal*, the peer team found that the priorities

and focus were not always understood by all members, staff, and stakeholders. There is scope to address this by clearly articulating which of the activities in the extensive work programme are the more important priorities and there is significant goodwill amongst partners to collaborate with the new Leader and Chief Executive. There is also an opportunity to reflect on the scope of the Corporate Delivery Plan, to ensure that the Council has the right levels of capacity in the right places with the right skills and systems to deliver the plan. The outcome of this activity will also help to produce the next phase of the Corporate Plan and medium-term financial plan and a future narrative that is easily understood by members, officers, and residents.

It is likely over the course of the Corporate Delivery Plan period that the Council will face challenges in meeting all its priorities within available resources, and that trade-offs will be necessary to ensure an appropriate balance between meeting statutory requirements, responding to service pressures, and delivering affordability. To address these dilemmas, the Council would benefit from building into its decision-making processes opportunities to undertake comprehensive assessments, consider expert opinions, and actively involve the communities in Haringey in exploring options. By striking a balance and making informed choices, the Council can maximise the positive impact of its ambitious programmes.

Overall, the peer team felt the Council understood the current needs of Haringey's communities and is in the process of setting the programmes and projects it wants to deliver to meet those local needs. The Council's approach to community engagement and climate change action shows a dedication to improving the lives of its residents and ensuring a sustainable future. By strengthening their locality working and community networks, the Council is demonstrating its desire to build bridges with communities and offer meaningful opportunities to influence the decisions of the Council. By revisiting the vision, prioritising work, and aligning climate change goals with financial planning, the Council can further enhance its impact on Haringey's communities. Addressing trade-offs will require careful consideration; striking the right balance will be essential to achieving Haringey's ambitious objectives.

4.2. Organisational and place leadership

Haringey Council has an ambitious political leadership that is dedicated to delivering improvements and better outcomes for Haringey's communities. The Leader of the

Council is very visible and provides clear and inspiring leadership to the organisation. The Leader and Cabinet is a cohesive, collaborative group, committed to delivering their manifesto pledges of 2022, which have been incorporated into the Corporate Delivery Plan.

External partners told the peer team that they have confidence in the leadership of Haringey Council, highlighting the Leader's efforts to create broader opportunities in the Council for receiving feedback and encouraging resident participation, and the Chief Executive's approach to place leadership and ability to bring stakeholders together. The Council is now seen as more open and engaging by its partners, with partners reporting that communication from the Council with external agencies has improved in the last 12 months. There is an opportunity for the Council to be more confident in London and nationally, highlighting the great work it does.

The Council is actively striving to shape places around changing communities, demonstrated in the work highlighted to the peer team around Seven Sisters and Tottenham Hale, and in the opportunities in Wood Green and Broadwater Farm. A committed and knowledgeable workforce supports the Council and actively engages in multi-agency collaboration, cultivating strong relationships within the Council and with other statutory bodies, community networks, and voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) partners. It has established a strong and supportive foundation with these groups working together to address the needs of local people. Much excellent work was done with these partners and the Council during and right after the COVID-19 pandemic, and in response to the cost-of-living crisis. The strong relationships with the VCFS, businesses and other partners provide a springboard for the Council to strengthen the role these stakeholders have in supporting the Council's placemaking ambitions.

The Council does face challenges in placemaking of which it is aware. These include delivering an ambitious housing delivery target of 3000 new homes by 2031, and having the ability to efficiently deliver this programme while also investing in the existing housing stock and improving customer service, which require significant attention and improvement. The Council should ensure it continues to nurture and capitalise on relationships with the VCFS, businesses and other partners to gain community support, and look at opportunities to collaborate on activity that will support the achievement of Council priorities. The Council may wish to exercise its convening

role bringing partners together to discuss and coordinate activity, for example through re-establishing the community partnership forum.

There are a number of examples of where the Council has been able to work more closely with residents in ways that work for residents, including the work with the SEND Forum, improving the relationships between residents and the Council, and creating a better environment for collaborative work to improve services. The engagement and participation work on renewal, new housing, and economic regeneration through the resident ballot at Broadwater Farm Estate and the Wood Green Voices project have both forged a new, improved approach to engagement by the Council. It is important that the successes achieved are celebrated, and that learning about effective engagement activity is captured to help other areas in the Council to emulate successful approaches.

Through the new participation approaches being taken, the Council is making inroads into engaging with specific communities, as evidenced by their outreach to the Turkish community in Broadwater Farm. The leadership team is hailed for its dynamism and willingness to embrace innovative approaches. However, the ambitious agenda they seek to achieve requires careful consideration and effective time management.

The Council's communication with businesses is considered strong, but there is scope for improvement. For example, the council could consider establishing a business champion and refining communication methodologies both internally and externally to enhance the Council's interactions and maximise the opportunities for them to help deliver on the Council's economic development aspirations.

The Chief Executive has reconfigured the senior management team to better align with current demands and transformation programmes. The Council have invested time in team building and development for senior leaders, with this now cascading through the management layers. Haringey appreciates the importance of having a strong senior leadership team, with the ability to make key decisions and empower their staff teams to deliver change. This is imperative to a well-functioning Council and to achieving change at the rapid pace the Council is aiming for. Efforts are underway to move towards a more distributive leadership, management, and decision-making model in the Council, to counter the established practice of centralised decision making, with decisions being passed up the chain unnecessarily. This new way of working will help

empower senior managers and Heads of Service to act on their experience and expertise, helping to speed up decision-making, and improve service delivery and the speed of outcomes for residents. It is envisaged that this will also free up much needed capacity in other staff, to enable the Council to operate more quickly and less bureaucratically. Overall, the peer team found that there is clear and dynamic leadership at the Council, coupled with a lot of ambition and positive activity on place-shaping, reducing inequalities, and working on regeneration and restoration in the area.

4.3. Governance and culture

A strength of the Council is their strong and stable political leadership that will enable them to consider long-term strategies and implementation. This has not always been the case in Haringey and this period of stability should be appreciated and embraced by the political leaders, including using this time to forge a clear longer-term vision for the Borough, in consultation with staff, partners and Haringey's communities.

Both the Leader and Chief Executive are well-respected by members and officers, both as individuals and as a team, and the peer team was told that they provide a united and effective partnership for the organisation.

The peer team observed that member-to-member, and member-officer relationships, are good at the strategic level, with the Cabinet Strategy Meeting a good example of collaborative joint working. The peer team saw evidence of a culture of reciprocal respect and understanding between members and these officers of each other's roles and responsibilities, in addition to examples of positive working within teams where team members feel safe to speak up and share their insights. Trust by members in the ability and decision-making skills of the wider staff group however is still patchy in certain areas, attributed to legacy issues with members queries and underperformance in key service areas.

Overall, there is a good approach to governance in the Council and an appetite to ensure there is effective scrutiny and challenge. While there is ongoing support for members to conduct their roles, non-executive councillors told the peer team that they believe more could be done to support them in their role, to engage with residents in the wards, and to keep them informed of progress and performance within the Council.

Scrutiny work programmes appear to be set every two years and there is inconsistent adoption of mechanisms in place to measure the impact of scrutiny activity. The peer team would therefore recommend the Council conducts a review of the scrutiny function, to enhance the operation of meetings and further enhance the decision-making processes of the Council, as well as facilitating broader member engagement.

Whilst it was felt that the knowledge and understanding of members about the business of the Council and the issues on the horizon in local government is good, the Council should not be complacent and should continue to work on ensuring members possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and support to operate effectively. Alongside this, Haringey should ensure there are opportunities for members and officers to spend time together to develop a deeper understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities in a politically-led environment.

The sharing of performance management data with members and their engagement with the performance management process could be improved. Some members said they were not sufficiently engaged with performance management arrangements. Appreciating that a new performance management dashboard, Monday.com, was recently adopted by the Council, and that this may have impacted member and staff access or understanding, the Council should look to ensure reliable performance management data is available and used to inform the work of the Council at all levels. Ensuring that members have access to data will enable them to do their job to advocate for communities, explore opportunities to help support councillors in their local leadership role and help community capacity building and engagement.

Haringey's workforce is committed, engaged, passionate, and proud of their work and the leadership of the Council. The peer team heard from staff that the Council cares about their employees' well-being and that they are pleased they can bring their whole selves to work, with the Council fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment. The peer team also found that the Council's values are known amongst the staff team and starting to embed, and that the Council has placed a significant focus on developing confident and capable leaders and managers who can make decisions to improve their work with residents. A new Workforce Strategy is in development.

The work of the staff networks who champion the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

(EDI) agenda across the Council is impressive, with the networks often acting as the first port of call when the Council embarks upon a project or policy consultation that needs EDI consideration. The level of engagement and strength in the networks is something to be celebrated. However, there must not be an over reliance on the networks to lead the EDI agenda. The council can further demonstrate the importance of EDI for the organisation as a corporate responsibility, by strengthening the way in which EDI is led and modelled by the senior leadership in the Council. The new Workforce Strategy should ensure a clear top-down approach to leading this work, alongside the great work of the staff networks to make sure EDI is embedded in the organisation's values and behaviours.

Staff relationships within the Council and between departments are positive and are becoming more collaborative. Staff members are generally positive about their work in the Council, sharing that under the new Chief Executive they have seen positive changes in the culture of the organisation, including a better focus on aligning the organisation towards common goals, prioritising resident needs, and ensuring basic services are delivered efficiently. However, it is acknowledged that this cultural shift may not be entirely embedded throughout the whole organisation.

The peer team were impressed with the Council's 'extra chair' idea, where staff members who are not part of the senior management can come to the senior leadership team meeting and observe and participate in the issues being discussed. This initiative aids transparency on how and why decisions are made by the senior team and bolsters opportunities for new innovative ideas to be aired, while also offering staff who aspire to take on these leadership roles opportunities to gain experience and insight. Furthermore, it is an additional method of cascading messages about the organisation's priorities and how the business of the Council should be conducted and discussed amongst peers.

The appraisal process is highly valued by many staff members. There is an opportunity to integrate the new values and behaviours around *The Haringey Deal* and 'getting the basics right' into these conversations. This approach will foster a culture of growth and improvement, ensuring that services remain dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of the communities in Haringey.

There is a clear political appetite to continue to deliver programmes of improvement

and the priorities set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan, but also an appreciation of the reduced financial capacity of the Council to do so. To further ensure good organisational leadership and success, a focus on risk literacy should be included in member and staff training, thus ensuring clarity and adherence to risk management practices across the organisation.

4.4. Financial planning and management

Cabinet members and the senior leadership team at Haringey have a good understanding of the financial position of the Council and the wider challenging financial climate that local government is operating in. Haringey, like many councils, has experienced a history of reduced grant funding and is working hard to manage that alongside the current pressures associated with inflation, post-Covid-19 costs, and the cost-of-living crisis.

Haringey recognises the importance of a strong collective narrative regarding their budget position, both organisationally and politically. It is crucial to tell the story of how the restricted revenue position aligns with the expanding capital programme. The financial situation is tight, and there is a risk that the budget gap may worsen due to increasing pressures. While the level of reserves is not critical yet, a clear strategy is needed to maintain and replenish them in line with organisational risk, and the Council should review the Minimum Revenue Position (MRP) Policy to ensure it is sufficiently prudent, proportionate to the level of debt, and aligned with the new MRP guidance due in the near future.

A limited assurance opinion from the Council's internal auditors in their report on "Delivery of MTFS Savings" had been given for a reason. It is now necessary to prioritise, create delivery plans, maintain control, and follow through on the ambitious plans and ambitions. This is especially crucial for achieving budget savings.

The Council also recognises the need for strong and collective financial leadership across the whole organisation to address its challenged budget position and is taking steps to achieve this. There is a whole organisation approach to addressing the budget challenge, with the peer team hearing about their innovative 'budget fortnight' initiative which has succeeded in improving cross-Council budget literacy and engagement. Greater collective awareness and ownership of the budget position and challenges is still needed, as there are significant financial risks, with a chance that the

£17.4m budget gap could increase. The Council recognises that there is also a need to align the budget planning process with the Council's transformation plans.

There is a strong working relationship between the S.151 officer and the cabinet member for finance, with the cabinet member having a good understanding of the challenges the Council is facing. The information produced by finance for the senior leadership team as part of the recent budget presentation provided a good narrative of the Council's financial position. It is clearly stated that everyone in the organisation has the responsibility to work towards ensuring Haringey meets its statutory duties and actively manages expenditure, including delivering identified savings. The peer team also observed that business partnering is well established in the Council, providing that critical link between central finance and service areas.

The peer team would recommend a stronger emphasis on demonstrating and delivering value for money (VfM) within the Council. There is some evidence of this happening, but it needs to be embedded and sustained throughout the organisation. The Council's ambitious capital programme requires robust and realistic management, with effective viability assessments and scrutiny given VfM in housing and placemaking investments. Having an efficient and effective monitoring system for the Council's capital scheme is something that the senior leadership of the Council are keenly aware needs to be in place. There is some evidence of work happening to minimise and mitigate risk in this area; however, these arrangements should be reviewed, formalised, and enhanced given the scope of the capital programmes and the current economic climate. It is important that staff and members are provided with an appropriate space to discuss the capital programme priorities beyond the current arrangements and as part of the budget process.

It is positive to see that the Council has developed financial strategies to support their ambitions in placemaking and housing; while they have avoided embarking on high-risk commercial transactions, with their ambitious capital programme, an estimated borrowing requirement of £2.2 billion by 2027/28 to fund Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund capital schemes, it is critical that formalised and rigorous processes are continued to ensure that HRA schemes are affordable and sustainable within the HRA business plan before approval. Particular attention needs to be given to the increased levels of borrowing required and that the HRA can sustain the capital financing costs.

Looking across the board, trade-offs are likely to be necessary between priority areas, such as housing regulatory requirements, decent homes, low carbon ambitions, and increasing housing stock, as increased borrowing costs may make them unaffordable. Having a framework in place to make informed decisions in this regard is essential.

A significant portion of the Council's budget is allocated to demand-led services such as children's and adult social care. The peer team observed that there was an implicit view from Cabinet members that the Council cannot take money out of demand-led services. Although it is true that these services often have statutory elements that mean a minimum level of service is legally required, there are often parts of the service that can be reviewed and considered in the round when looking at the budget and the revenue available to the Council. Maintaining and developing the relationship with NHS partners to agree funding models for services in Haringey will be important given the constrained NHS budget position. Consideration should also be given to how demand and risk can be managed, particularly in the adult social care budget with the ability to evidence base the strength-based work and cost reduction and avoidance to deliver financial savings. In general though, delivering savings in such services takes time and requires careful planning.

The Decentralised Energy Network project is an exciting endeavour and important to the climate change agenda. Care should be taken to ensure that appropriate governance, advice, risk assessment, financial modelling, and appraisals are in place and the Council is confident in the financial position and viability of the scheme before progressing. Moreover, the Council must ensure there is a strong client-side management to oversee the project and take corrective action if necessary. More widely on the ambitious climate change agenda, it is vital for Haringey to ensure proper alignment with a medium-term financial plan and a capital strategy. By integrating climate change objectives into the financial planning process, the Council can allocate resources more effectively. A well-thought-out financial plan will not only streamline the implementation of climate change initiatives but also foster a sense of financial stability and prudence.

There are local concerns that the borough does not receive an appropriate share of funding for NHS services delivered in Haringey, and the Council takes an active, dynamic, and challenging position with NHS partners working to bring about better funding distribution for the Borough. Given the constraints surrounding the NHS

budget, it is important to maintain traction in this area. There needs to be a well-thought-out approach to managing demand and risk, particularly in the adult social care budget. It is essential to evidence the strength-based work and reduce costs accordingly. It is also important that the Council creates a clear strategy to maximise the benefits of partnership working with the NHS and other agencies, for the management of cost and risk in all demand-led services.

4.5. Capacity for improvement

The Council is on a change and transformation journey and has achieved significant improvement in the last year. The 'good' Ofsted rating in April 2023 was a watershed moment for the Council, built on a successful improvement programme for children's services, championed and invested in by members and officers. The council acknowledges however the need for further improvement and sustainability on their journey.

The Council has successfully embarked upon several renewal projects aimed at improving the physical environment and building economic prosperity. It has also held and been successful in a number of community votes on changes to existing estates and the creation of new and better homes.

Haringey is proud of the work it has done to improve relationships and build trust with residents, including through established forums comprising service users and Council members and officers. The transformation of the SEND forum is an example of significant improvement, highlighted to the peer team by residents and staff alike. The review team heard how the forum has more productive meetings and that trust in officers has increased. This has enabled the forum to spend more time working towards better outcomes for Haringey's young people.

The peer team heard that there is recognition of the abundance of talent and ability within Haringey's communities and that the Council aims to tap into these valuable resources through positive engagement. The senior leadership team has been instrumental in co-designing work and instilling confidence in the Council's professionalism and ability to share good practice.

While there is evidence of a lack of clarity in understanding the key priorities for the Council from *The Haringey Deal* and Corporate Delivery Plan, the Council is reflecting

on how to communicate this better, and the peer team recommend that Haringey look now to crafting a longer-term vision for the Borough. With an ambitious programme the Council acknowledges the importance of sequencing resources effectively to make informed decisions and prioritise effectively.

There is also work to be done on embedding the new performance management system at the Council and Haringey is working on consolidating knowledge and intelligence within the Council departments by developing a unified data strategy. The council recognises the need for investment in the digital team and has plans to recast some portfolios to improve project management across the Council.

The Council does face some challenges in engagement and participation, and the peer team heard of some community stakeholders capitalising on the lack of clarity in engagement tools and methods. The new Participation Framework should help to ensure this is clear for each project and the appropriate methods are defined from the beginning and there are opportunities to road-test the strategy itself to ensure the residents voice is genuinely incorporated.

There has been investment in additional capacity to deliver improvements in the housing and landlord service, and the Council must approach this work realistically and consider the challenges involved. Not doing so could risk damaging the trust the communities in Haringey has in the Council and the service.

Haringey Council has made positive strides in improving various aspects of its operations, and ambitious plans for further improvement and transformation are in place. By leveraging internal expertise, engaging with communities, maximising relationships with invested stakeholders, and clarifying roles, the Council can drive positive change and achieve its goals effectively. Prioritising the new Workforce Strategy and increasing understanding of the views of staff by re-establishing staff surveys will contribute to a unified and motivated team across the organisation, strengthening the Council's ability to serve its residents and address their needs.

The Workforce Strategy also provides an invaluable opportunity to reset and move forward, particularly for staff with protected characteristics. This plan symbolises the commitment to "building our own" decreasing dependence on interim or agency staff. This will recognise the wealth of talent existing within the organisation and seeks to nurture and develop it further, and empower staff to explore new approaches, with the

message resonating that they have permission to try new things. This culture of innovation, coupled with a shared sense of dedication, will cultivate an environment where staff members are willing to go beyond their duties. Their commitment and exceptional work should be acknowledged and celebrated by colleagues.

4.6. Relationship with the community

The Council deserves credit for its responsiveness to the needs of residents, particularly in addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. The relationships established in Haringey's communities, and with partners helping to deliver support, improved during the pandemic. The goodwill and social capital created during this time should be acknowledged and capitalised on by the Council for future engagement and participation projects.

Haringey Council's commitment to strengthening Council-community relationships is evident through their embrace of *The Haringey Deal* and engagement with various stakeholders. The Council is clearly invested in and prioritising having a better relationship with residents, seeking to improve the well-being of its communities. The Council is working to reset the relationship, and the way the Council and its staff interact with, and provide services to, residents. Furthermore, the Council's engagement with partners is commendable, fostering a sense of alignment and partnership to ensure a positive response from Haringey's communities.

While there are challenges to address, the Council's efforts to measure the Deal's impact, leverage community expertise, and build trust, reflect their dedication to inclusive and sustainable development. By fostering open communication, transparent governance, and sustained community involvement, Haringey Council can continue to make positive strides towards achieving their shared goals and fostering a thriving and interconnected community.

The Council understands the importance of open dialogue with its residents, actively seeking through the new Participation Framework to formulate and test new models of engagement to complement those already successful approaches but should not miss the opportunity to develop that strategy with partners and residents so it is felt to be owned by all.

The Council acknowledges the need for more work in building trust, especially in

certain project areas. Recognising the significance of sustained community involvement, the Council is taking steps to be more accessible and available when needed, fostering ongoing collaboration even after project completion. There are good examples of authentic community engagement across the borough, where solutions are driven by communities and their need. This includes the Wood Green Voices project, as well as the ballots and the sustained community-engagement at Broadwater Farm and High Road West. Similarly, the Haringey Worx financial support team actively engages with residents to understand their feelings and concerns about regeneration/renewal projects, demonstrating a commitment to inclusive decision-making and community involvement.

The visit by the peer team to Rising Green, a local, recently opened new youth centre, provided more opportunities to hear from residents about their experiences of living in Haringey. The space is valued and appreciated by the young people, who recognise the Council's efforts to make spaces available to them and provide initiatives to support them. However, there is still much work to be done to help young people feel safe on the streets of Haringey and enable them to meaningfully contribute to how their area looks and feels and influence how services are provided to them. The Council is aware of these issues and is working with statutory partners to bring about the change needed so residents, especially young people, can thrive.

These projects demonstrate strong involvement with local people and showcase the potential for successful service user and community engagement. However, there are areas where the Council's response adversely affects the excellent work done in these engagement projects, including the day-to-day customer service, and service failures in housing services. Work has started to address the concerns and build trust and confidence with residents and must continue at pace.

Relationships between members of the Council and residents, particularly in the context of children's services, can be challenging. Acting as intermediaries, the Council seeks to strike a balance between the needs of their communities and regulatory requirements. Further efforts to tap into volunteering and leverage the expertise of individuals with first-hand experience could enhance service delivery.

Haringey should prioritise building trust and confidence with residents by ensuring a positive and consistent experience when interacting with the Council. There are clearly

pockets of excellence in community engagement within departments and projects; these should be used to show members and staff throughout the Council how to achieve consistency in this area.

4.7. Getting the Basics Right

The Council's efforts to focus on getting the basics right to improve the quality of services provided to residents are commendable, and there is a lot for the Council to be proud of in its service delivery. A desire to measure the success of *The Haringey Deal* further underscores the Council's commitment to transparent and accountable governance.

The Council have invested in its staff, recognising the importance of investing in their leaders and managers to navigate the complexities of managing multiple programmes in challenging times. This focus on workforce improvement highlights the Council's dedication to upskilling their workforce and providing the necessary support to achieve their goals and priorities. The appraisal process has been refreshed and is praised by the majority of the staff team.

While the Council is making strides in improving services, there are still areas that require attention, particularly in communication with residents. The peer team have heard of examples of poor customer service, with issues related to responsiveness and engagement. It is evident that there is a need for skill development and a culture shift to improve customer care.

The peer review team heard a mixed understanding of the Haringey Deal within the Council and with partners and residents, including regarding the overall vision for initial contact with residents. There appears to be a disconnect between what the council aims to achieve (the Deal) and how it is perceived and impacts frontline customer services. There is also confusion about whether the Deal is a 'one off' or an evolving opportunity to collaborate. This highlights the importance of aligning goals and ensuring effective communication within the organisation. To ensure continuous improvement, it is important that the Council understands the significance of getting the basics right with a clear and engaging narrative available to be shared with staff and partners on what success in this approach looks like. The Council should actively engage key statutory partners, embracing their expertise and insight to drive positive change. By correctly phasing and allocating resources, significant improvements can

be swiftly achieved, benefiting all involved. The peer team found the enthusiasm among the staff for the messages delivered to date inspirational and felt this signalled a hunger among staff for more inspiration and guidance.

There is a strong awareness that key business systems – such as customer relationship management (CRM), procurement, and portfolio management – require investment and specific plans. By addressing these areas, the Council can optimise efficiency, streamline operations, and deliver an even higher standard of service delivery.

Implementing new systems in the Council should be complemented by thorough training and constant monitoring to address any behavioural or attitudinal challenges that may arise. Given the importance the Council places on participation and interacting effectively and thoughtfully with communities in Haringey, the Council might want to consider prioritising 'engagement' as a skill within the Workforce Strategy to further enhance the ability of the workforce to connect and resonate with the communities.

Setting high standards for responsiveness and customer service is necessary to enhance the Council's reputation and trust. This includes having good complaints processes, without diverting resources from resolving existing backlogs and working to facilitate timely and efficient communication with members, through the members enquiries process. Critical to success is ensuring clear response guidelines and expectations are established, leaving no room for ambiguity. That said, to strengthen the Council's response on getting the basics right, it is crucial to strike a careful balance between perfection and progress, and appreciate that by adopting an incremental approach, steady advancement can be achieved while avoiding overwhelming changes.

Effective programme and project delivery require cohesive capacity and a portfolio that reflects strategic, cross-cutting thinking. Given the breadth of the change happening in the Council, it is important that attention is given to project delivery risk, emphasising the assessment of interdependencies, and focusing on the ultimate benefits they will yield. There was some evidence of an appreciation of the interdependencies between the projects and the need for cohesive capacity for delivery. By categorising projects based on Directorate, cross-Directorate, cross-Council, and cross-organisational

efforts, the service can maximise its potential and ensure a holistic approach to achieving goals.

The Council is still on a journey to achieving getting the basics right, and to their credit they appreciate the task in hand and have a wide-ranging programme to achieve this.

5. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss, and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month check-in session, which provides space for the Council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

In the meantime, Kate Herbert, Principal Adviser for London, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association, and is available to discuss any further support the Council requires (Kate.Herbert@local.gov.uk).