


LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

LB Lewisham Council

19th January 2023

Feedback





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1. Introduction

LB Lewisham undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during 15th-18th November 2021 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

This progress review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately two months after the Council published the CPC action plan, it is designed to provide space for the Council's senior leadership to:

- Update peers on the early progress made and to receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns to the CPC's recommendations
- Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date

The LGA would like to thank the London Borough of Lewisham for their commitment to sector led improvement. This review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the Council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The progress review at LB Lewisham took place in-person on Thursday 19th January 2023. The progress review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge:

Recommendation 1: Continue to capture learning from the Council's excellent Covid-19 response and do not miss the opportunity to capitalise on the partnerships and innovation put in place.

Recommendation 2: Develop a more formalised approach to partnership working outside statutory partners, building on the great work engaging with black-owned businesses, and the strong work on one public estate. Lewisham has more capital outside the organisation than it thinks.

Recommendation 3: Look for opportunities for the council's energetic directly elected political leadership to take an even stronger leadership of place role,

convening residents and partners around key challenges for Lewisham.

Recommendation 4: Ensure that the council is focussing externally as much as internally, think about how to build on the local assemblies to ensure that residents are front and centre in policy/strategy and service decisions. Could there be more clarity about where this sits in the organisation and better links to member priorities? There is an opportunity to build on strengths such as the health inequality work, the devolving of NCIL and work on Catford regeneration.

Recommendation 5: Lewisham has great practice that should be shared outside of the borough and 'Borough of Culture' is a huge opportunity to tell the story and contribution of Lewisham's diverse community and create a jointly developed legacy. Lewisham has an important contribution to make to the debate in London and nationally.

Recommendation 6: Develop the Council's communications strategy and plan such that opportunities to build on and celebrate success; amplify great work and ensure residents, partners and staff are always clear about next steps and action to be taken following consultation or engagement exercises.

Recommendation 7: Review the constitution to align it to the ambition of the Mayor and his Administration regarding senior appointments, scheme of delegation, scrutiny and member officer working and roles.

Recommendation 8: Ensure that there is a strong leadership and management plan to provide mentorship/ coaching for those who are stepping into larger roles with broad portfolios. The Council should consider a refreshed employee wellbeing programme that is clearly communicated to recognise impact of service delivery demands, Covid recovery and change fatigue.

Recommendation 9: Review the Council's relationship with Lewisham Homes and the options for bringing them more in line with the new culture and resident focused practice in the Council.

Recommendation 10: Post May provides the opportunity to engage with 3-year budget planning and plan to transform the large service areas in the borough such as adults and children's services. The council as part of this may want to consider whether it could benefit from a zero based or outcome-based budgeting exercise to ensure spend is aligned with priorities. In setting those future year budget's the council will want to jointly plan its longer-term sustainability with elected members, external partners (statutory and non-statutory) and communities.

Recommendation 11: New projects or initiatives over a financial threshold across the organisation should follow a consistent programme management approach that clearly articulates cost, risk and potential benefits before proceeding.

In addition to these recommendations, LB Lewisham asked the peer team to comment on how the Council is leading and embedding a shift in workforce culture, engaging and motivating staff across the organisation to deliver corporate priorities at pace.

For this progress review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- **Althea Loderick**, Chief Executive, London Borough of Southwark
- **Councillor Georgina Gould**, Leader of Camden Council
- **Anisa Darr**, Executive Director of Resources, Barnet Council
- **Marcus Coulson**, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

The peer team met at the Council over the course of four and a half hours with the Mayor, Chief Executive and Executive Management Team. The agenda was:

i) Welcome back to Lewisham

The Mayor, Chief Executive and Executive Management Team shared an overview of the changes locally since the team were last on site that included changes in the corporate and strategic operating environment, with relevance to the recommendations from the previous CPC work. This was followed by an opportunity for discussion and comment.

ii) Progressing *Partnership Working outside Statutory Partners*

There was a discussion based on the recommendations relating to the Council's approach to partnership working, in particular, the creation of Lewisham Council's Strategic Partnership.

Break

iii) Leading and embedding a shift in workforce culture, engaging and motivating staff across the organisation to deliver corporate priorities at pace

A discussion took place based on the above theme, focused on the work undertaken by LB Lewisham since the November 2021 Corporate Peer Challenge to engage with staff and to embed a shift in workforce culture.

iv) One to one meetings

A number of one-to-one meetings took place, these were:

The Chief Executive of LB Lewisham met Althea Loderick 1:1 to discuss progress since the November 2021 Peer Challenge.

The Mayor of LB Lewisham met Councillor Georgia Gould 1:1 to discuss progress since the November 2021 Peer Challenge.

LB Lewisham's Director of Finance met Anisa Darr 1:1 to discuss progress since the November 2021 Peer Challenge.

v) Working lunch

There was then an opportunity for the peer challenge team to discuss and craft their feedback on what they had heard and discussed with colleagues.

vi) Key feedback from the session

The peer team summarised and feedback on what they'd heard. This letter builds on that feedback.

vii) Closing remarks – taking it from here

The Mayor and Chief Executive of LB Lewisham.

3. Progress Review – Feedback

After a fruitful and interesting conversation with colleagues at LB Lewisham the peer team met to offer some thoughts and comment which are outlined below for the consideration of LB Lewisham colleagues:

Peer Team feedback:

As a general comment the peer challenge team would like to reiterate that the peer team recognise that the Council continues to be reflective and open to feedback and, in that sense, has been a good client in this LGA CPC process. This is evidenced by the fact that the Council has taken the peer team's recommendations from the full CPC seriously and made real progress in a number of areas. These areas are:


1. There has been clear progress made on the Partnerships Boards and the partners involved on those Boards are taking leadership on different priority areas. The creation of a Local Strategic Partnership, aimed at tackling borough-wide issues and supported with additional capacity and governance that focuses on: Cost of Living, Race and Equality, Opportunities and Inward Investment and Climate Emergency. The Cost of Living crisis being tackled through a partnership response which includes the creation of 'Warm Welcomes', a project to map all available support alongside Lewisham Local, and a number of practical support initiatives being developed with Citizens Advice Lewisham.
2. The staff survey work suggests that a genuine shift in engagement and energy has been realised and the Council has made the effort to recognise staff successes through the revitalised staff awards process and event. The Council has utilised its existing staff networks to create a working group for the staff awards with a target date for holding the awards ceremony of May 2023.
3. Your diversity work is a positive strength as the work of the Borough of Culture Legacy Programme has been tied into the workstreams of Lewisham's Strategic Partnership. This will ensure that local organisations and delivery partners play a key role in supporting, and maximising the benefits from, the Borough of Culture Legacy Programme.
4. The Council has taken action to respond to the CPC team's concerns with Lewisham Homes and the approach to bringing the ALMO back 'in-house' has been done in a systematic and planned way with the minimum of risk.
5. The Council has been able to demonstrate clear improvements in Children's and Adults Services. This is a commendable effort as these are two key areas of risk for the Council and where many people experience the quality of

services delivered by the authority.

6. There have been improvements made in approaches to longer term financial planning. This is evidenced by the fact that there is greater evidence of an understanding of financial management in some services. However, there is more work to do to ensure a culture of financial accountability and that the delivery of savings is consistent across the organisation.
7. The joint visible leadership of the Mayor and Chief Executive has been really strong, and it is important that there is a joint message of reassurance over the coming weeks as the Chief Executive prepares to take up a post at another London Borough. Indeed this may be a good opportunity to think about what the next phase of joint leadership should look like and how the recruitment process enables this.
8. Although steps have been taken since the peer team's previous visit in November 2021 there is still room to better define and action how the organisation best supports the democratically accountable Mayor. To this end we suggest that the Council take steps to seek to make the most of the Mayoral democratic mandate, and the leadership capacity that brings, as the voice of the Borough. This includes how political priorities are fully reflected in Corporate and Borough plans.
9. Further to the above the peer team suggest the Council seek to ensure that there are clear relationships between different plans and that they explicitly relate to each other and are seen to do so by staff, elected members and the community at large. Given the ambition of the Council there still feels like there is a need to invest in policy and performance of the organisation so that you can transparently demonstrate how the Council is progressing.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank LB Lewisham for undertaking an LGA CPC progress review. We appreciate that the senior political and managerial leadership will want to



reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Kate Herbert, LGA Principal Adviser for London, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Kate is available to discuss any further support the council requires through her email address:

kate.herbert@local.gov.uk or Telephone: 07867 632 404.

On behalf of the CPC Revisit Team, January 2023:

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