

# **LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review**

North West Leicestershire District  
Council

1-2 April 2025

Feedback



**Corporate Peer Challenge**



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# 1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during June 2024 and published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peers' 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 North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress 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 North West Leicestershire District Council took place (onsite) on 2-3 April 2025.

The Progress Review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, under the following theme headings:

- Governance and finance
- Communications
- Transformation
- Housing
- Looking forward

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were

involved:

- Cllr Abi Brown OBE, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
  - Larissa Reed, Swale Borough Council
  - Paul Bellotti, East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- And Judith Hurcombe, Local Government Association

### 3. Progress Review - Feedback

Out of the CPC's 7 recommendations, the council's RAG rated action plan reports progress on all of those recommendations and the peer team could see evidence of that progress.

#### 3.1. Governance and finance

Since June 2024, the council has paid close attention to raising the profile of good governance across the organisation, clearly led by the chief executive. This has included mandatory governance training for all managers and the introduction of an annual governance month, originally piloted in November 2023 but a more detailed face-to-face training programme was delivered in November 2024.

The peer team was told that the council has a good level of reserves of circa £30m. Whilst the council is projecting an overspend for 2024/25, there are contingencies in place to offset this and outturn with a balanced budget.

The Audit and Governance Committee has received intensive training, and a working group of members has focused on updating the council's arrangements for dealing with code of conduct complaints and the council's constitution. The Annual Governance Statement has been updated to reflect revisited risks ahead of the next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee in April 2025.

Attention is also being given to developing the member development programme and will include guidance on the member-officer protocol and a refresher on the councillors' code of conduct. A Debate Not Hate working group has also been formed.

The council has taken steps to ensure its financial transactions and contracts are

more robust. This includes updating NWLDC's contract procedure rules, which were agreed at Full Council in February 2025. The corporate risk register has been revised to make it easier for stakeholders to understand the risks and mitigations, and membership of the corporate risk group has been reviewed. Procurement training for officers to reflect compliance with the Procurement Act 2023 is underway.

There is widespread concern about the ongoing implementation of the council's finance system. Difficulties were mentioned about reconciling budgets effectively across departments, however, the peer team was told that the director is managing the contract well and holding regular progress meetings with the supplier. Staff told us they welcomed the director's clarity and honesty about frustrations with the system: there is positivity that its functionality will improve.

Over the past two financial years, the audit opinion has resulted in limited assurance. However, active measures are being taken to address the issues identified. An internal audit action plan is being actively implemented, with monthly reporting to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). CLT is self-aware of these governance issues and gave the peer team the sense that the council is on top of things and motivated to improving controls even further across finance, procurement, capital investment, housing and fleet management.

Work is ongoing to support the new external auditors, including on the 2023/24 statement of accounts. However, in common with some other councils, NWLDC did not meet the backstop dates for the publication of the accounts for 2023/24.

The East Midlands Freeport Board has now been constituted. Active contributions are being made by NWLDC's officers to a variety of sub-groups, including for transport, sites and infrastructure; an operational forum; for the Freeport's vision; and for the S.151 sub-committee.

### **3.2. Communications**

Much attention has been paid to communications over the past few months across a variety of mechanisms including live streamed events via Teams; the first knowledge exchange in December 2024 which focused on a day in the life of the customer services team; and an ideas pathway which encourages staff to submit proposals to



be considered by CLT. Efforts have been made to improve dialogue so that staff feel they not only receive information but can also channel views upwards. This was widely welcomed by the workforce, along with the ongoing opportunities to give their views. Staff roadshows led by the chief executive and with directors attending have taken place and have been welcomed by attendees, with 98% attending stating that they felt communication and engagement has improved. Further work is planned for front line staff including events focusing on men's health for those working in the depots.

### **3.3. Transformation**

The transformation programme appears to be well thought out and well-led, supported by a budget of £500,000 for new initiatives. It is supported by new key appointments who bring energy, robust monitoring and a cohesive strategic view across the array of projects in the delivery plan, as well as bringing in good practice and reflection from external networks and other councils. The council has committed to undertake the LGA's transformation and innovation exchange self-assessment. It will be important to ensure that the responsibility and accountability for delivering transformation is widely owned across the organisation, utilising the support and expertise available, rather than expecting the small transformation team to achieve it on behalf of services.

The council is also exploring how it can utilise artificial intelligence (AI) to improve service effectiveness, delivery and outcomes for residents. A proof-of-concept project using Microsoft CoPilot is underway with plans to roll out training and then conduct the trial during spring and summer of 2025. In addition, an AI officer group has been created to exchange ideas and understanding of how it is already being used and to explore its potential across the organisation.

### **3.4. Housing**

The council is working with the Social Housing Regulator to address the levels of complaints and other historic issues identified in its housing repair service.

There are good signs of improvement in housing despite continuing difficulties recruiting and retaining housing staff including gaining a better understanding of the

repairs and maintenance backlog and the accuracy of the 7,000 items logged, including addressing duplication and incomplete records. The council's appointed external contractor is working on addressing long standing repairs. Members of staff are clearly ambitious to get repairs undertaken at the right time, to a good standard of quality and to achieve residents' satisfaction. They are clearly keen to have the repairs function wholly back in-house whilst recognising the necessity for additional external help at this time.

Damp and mould works have been undertaken by reallocating staff from other within the housing service. Going forward the council plans to establish a full team to ensure it is meeting new legislative requirements that come into force later this year. The peer team was told that the number of properties requiring remedial attention was initially around 10 percent of the council's housing stock. Although more cases are being reported, the backlog is being cleared and training for operatives has helped improve the quality of remedial works.


The peer team is satisfied that progress is being made across the wide range of the recommendations arising from the CPC in June 2024.

### **3.5. Looking forward**

The government's devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR) intentions announced in December 2024 will challenge all councils affected, including NWLDC. The council's executive is continuing to show signs of stability in their alliance across two political groups and two independent councillors in leading the council's business. The chief executive is working closely with other councils on the LGR developments in North West Leicestershire. Staff told us they particularly value the reassurance she is providing, and they feel the information about LGR is communicated well and with honesty about the future.

As there will not be a further revisit on this CPC, there are a few issues which the council needs to think about for the short and medium term:


- Progress is being made in housing repairs, but there are some staff capacity issues which could hinder delivery. The peer team was told about the age and reliability of some of the council's fleet vehicles which could jeopardise the



achievement of targets and ultimately tenants' satisfaction, as well as sometimes incorrect allocation of jobs to multi-skilled operatives. The council is currently assessing the operational effectiveness of electric vehicles prior to making any major investment decisions on its future fleet, and is starting work on remodelling the first point of contact and management of repairs. Ongoing attention needs to be given to both the performance management of the external housing contractor and its directorate communications with staff and tenants.

- A consistent approach to staff engagement from directors and heads of service should be considered to ensure that staff feel they are supported and there is a clear flow of information throughout the organisation.
- The approach to transformation is good but the wider organisation needs to ensure it plays its role in delivering, led by directors. Impact will be aided by more ownership, benchmarked initiatives and the ongoing strong focus on customer experience and outcomes.
- More clarity would be welcomed from councillors about their vision and ambition for the new councils in Leicestershire and what they want for the residents and stakeholders of the district taking into account the opportunities and its financial constraints, and the potential for a legacy given by the council to the new organisation, including its assets.
- The approach to LGR has been mature and collegiate from members and officers. Over time the new council arrangements will emerge, and everyone will be dealing with a period of uncertainty as the council balances its stewardship role for the existing organisation as well as preparing for the future. Capacity will be stretched further and in different ways as the details of the new councils evolve. It will be important to continue to share information with staff and keep an eye on personal and service resilience through this period of change and uncertainty, and to maintain the highest standards of behaviour and integrity from members and officers, so that there are minimal distractions for everyone involved. Further engagement with staff, members, partners and stakeholders is





planned over the summer to inform the final proposals to be submitted in November.

## 4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank North West Leicestershire District Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political 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.

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