

REPORT TO:		Cabinet	
DATE:		22 January 2025	
PORTFOLIO:		Councillor Munsif Dad BEM JP - Leader of the Council	
REPORT AUTHOR:		Kirsten Burnett, Head of Policy and OD	
TITLE OF REPORT:		LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Planning	
EXEMPT REPORT (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A)	No	Not applicable	
KEY DECISION:	No	If yes, date of publication:	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To agree a process for developing an action plan addressing the recommendations of the recent Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet agrees the proposed process ([set out in 3.10, below](#)) to develop an action plan based on the CPC recommendations.
- 2.2 That a cross-party working group (Terms of Reference outlined in Appendix 2) is established to oversee the development and implementation of the action plan.

3. Reasons for Recommendations and Background

Note: the information below repeats that set out in a report to full council on 16 January 2025.

- 3.1 The Council invited a team of senior local government councillors and officers to undertake a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge, including a visit to Hyndburn between 29 and 31 October 2024.
- 3.2 A CPC is a comprehensive review of key finance, performance and governance information and forms a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. CPC assists councils in meeting part of their Best Value duty, with the UK Government expecting all local authorities to have a CPC at least every five

years. Peer challenges are improvement focused, not inspections, and the process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals.

The Peer Team

3.3 Peers, who are experienced elected members and officers, are at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge. Peers take time away from their busy "day job" to contribute to improvement within the local government sector. The peer team for Hyndburn Borough Council comprised:

- Member Peer – Cllr Tricia Gilby, Leader, Chesterfield Borough Council
- Member Peer – Cllr Simon Minas-Bound, Group Leader, Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
- Chief Executive Peer – Ian Miller, Chief Executive, Wyre Forest District Council
- Officer Peer – Artemis Ansell, Director of Planning & Regeneration, Lichfield District Council and Lichfield West Midlands Traded Services
- Officer Peer – Dominic Bradley, Director of Resources, Horsham District Council
- LGA Peer – Alex Howell, Adviser - Devolution, Local Growth and Digital
- Peer Challenge Manager – Anne Brinkhoff, LGA Associate
- Project Support Officer – Kristel Whittaker, LGA

3.4 The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information and then spent three days on site at Hyndburn Borough Council, during which they spoke to more than 110 people including a range of council staff, members and external stakeholders. They toured our Accrington Town Square regeneration projects, visited the Raza Jamia Masjid mosque, and attended a meeting of HBC's Cabinet.

Findings and Recommendations

3.5 The team presented their main findings and recommendations verbally to the Council on their final day here and have now provided a formal report.

3.6 The report includes a number of recommendations, listed below, which are designed to help the Council improve and build on the many positive findings of the peer team. Some of these positive findings are outlined in the report and include:

- Strong progress on key projects, such as Accrington Town Centre Regeneration, Huncoat Garden Village, and Leisure Transformation.
- Leveraging cultural and industrial heritage to drive economic growth and community engagement.
- Positive relationships with partners, including police, businesses, and the voluntary sector.
- Strong focus on improving health and well-being through partnerships and innovative projects.
- Successful initiatives to reduce carbon emissions and address climate change.

- Loyal, committed staff with high retention and a friendly, collegiate culture.
- Robust audit arrangements and a commitment to modernisation.
- Improved reserves, better financial systems, and effective management.
- Investments in training and development, internal promotions, and effective apprenticeship schemes.
- A more constructive and collaborative political environment.
- Willingness to embrace external peer reviews and share learning.

3.7 The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

1. Conduct the planned review of the corporate strategy and align the organisational structure accordingly.
2. Engage in top team development to develop effective relationships within Cabinet/CMT as a group to create agreed ways of working and clarity of roles and responsibilities.
3. With partners, lead the development of a clear and well understood vision for the whole borough (Place Strategy).
4. Consider what capacity and skills the council needs to develop and address this as part of the review of organisational structure, including options for collaboration with partners and the use of consultants.
5. Design a transformation & digital strategy and action plan.
6. Develop a strategy for income generation, including commercial income, fees & charges and council tax.
7. Review and implement new plans for internal and external communication, aligning it with the new corporate strategy.
8. Create and implement a well understood and effective process for forward planning of Council decision making which engages Cabinet members and Scrutiny.
9. Promote the Council's approach to climate change and decarbonisation and play a key role in leading the Borough on this agenda.
10. Continue and broaden your engagement with local government and beyond in order to learn from others and offer your experience and learning.

Next steps

- 3.8 The Council is required to develop an action plan to address the recommendations within 3 months. A separate report on the proposed process for developing this will be brought to Cabinet for agreement. It is proposed that a cross-party working group is established to support and oversee this work and proposed Terms of Reference are set out in Appendix 2.
- 3.9 A progress visit will be arranged for some or all of the peer team. This is likely to take place in September or October 2025.

Proposed action planning process

3.10 The following steps are proposed:

- **January / February** - Management Team and Service Managers consider recommendations and develop draft action plan.
- **January / February** – cross-party working group established.
- **February** - Discussions with relevant portfolio holders about proposed actions (e.g. recommendation 6 relates to finance portfolio).
- **Early March** - Draft action plan brought to working group for discussion.
- **26 March 2025** - Final draft to Cabinet for formal agreement.
- **April onwards** – Implementation / reporting.
- **September / October 2025** – review visit by LGA peer team.
- **Post visit** – review action plan based on any further feedback and continue with implementation, building into service plans or strategies where appropriate.

3.11 The proposed principles to be applied in developing the action plan are as follows:

Clarity and timescales	We will clearly outline short, medium, and long-term actions with specific deadlines.
Alignment with recommendations	We will directly link actions to the 10 recommendations, ensuring each is fully addressed.
Actionable steps	We will break down each recommendation into specific, practical steps that can be implemented.
Responsibility and oversight	We will assign a senior lead officer to each action and identify the relevant Cabinet portfolio for accountability. We will establish a cross-party working group of elected members to support and have oversight of this work.
Resources and collaboration	We will identify where additional funding, external support, or partnership working is required. We will actively involve relevant staff and members in developing actions to enhance engagement and cross-team collaboration.
Support effective relationships	We will aim to foster cross-party cooperation

	and strengthen member-officer working relationships.
Performance and monitoring	We will define or reference performance indicators to track progress and measure success.
Risk management	We will highlight potential risks for each action and outline mitigation measures.
Review and communication	We will specify how, when, and by whom the action plan will be reviewed. We will ensure regular updates are shared with all stakeholders.

4. Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 In agreeing to the CPC process, the Council has committed to developing an action plan based on the recommendations.

5. Consultations

- 5.1 A large number and range of people spoke to the peer team, in addition to written information. The next steps are likely to involve a similar range of people in terms of developing the action plan.

6. Implications

Financial implications (including any future financial commitments for the Council)	A number of the recommendations are relevant to the management of the Council's finances and resources and any actions identified may bring financial implications. At this stage however, Cabinet is simply asked to agree the process for developing an action plan for the CPC report recommendations.
Legal and human rights implications	None
Assessment of risk	The CPC report will be published openly and the peer team will conduct a follow up review in visit later this year and produce a further report, which will again be published. There are therefore potential reputational risks based on how the Council responds to the recommendations.
Equality and diversity implications	None specifically for this report. The CPC

A [Customer First Analysis](#) should be completed in relation to policy decisions and should be attached as an appendix to the report.

report details some observations / suggestions regarding equality and diversity and this will be picked up as part of the action plan.

7. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985: List of Background Papers

- Appendix 1 – CPC report
- Report to Council, 16 January 2025

8. Freedom of Information

- 8.1 The report does not contain exempt information under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and all information can be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.