

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Broxbourne Borough Council

17 January 2023

Feedback





1. Introduction	3
2. Summary of the approach.....	3
3. Progress Review – Feedback	4
4. Final thoughts and next steps	11

1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during December 2021 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 six 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 Broxbourne Borough Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This six-month 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 Broxbourne Borough Council took place remotely on 17 January 2023.

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

- Communication and Community Engagement
- Service Improvement
- Organisational Development and Human Resources
- Financial Management and Governance
- Partnership Working

For this six-month progress review, the following members of the original CPC team

were involved:

- Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen, Leader of Breckland Council
- Alan Goodrum, LGA Associate
- Ami Beeton, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

The peer team met virtually via MS Teams with the following representatives from the council:

- Jeff Stack, Chief Executive
- Alison Knight, Director of Place
- Sandra Beck, Director of Finance
- Peter Linkson, Director of Environmental Services
- Lewis Cocking, Leader of the Council (Chairman)
- David Holliday, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment
- Paul Mason, Cabinet Member for Finance
- Siobhan Monaghan, Cabinet Member for Housing and Community
- Dee Hart, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Health
- Steve Wortley, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth
- Anthony P Siracusa, Cabinet Member for Planning

3. Progress Review – Feedback

Introduction and overall reflections

In preparation for the progress review, the Council provided peers with an updated RAG rated action plan with supporting evidence for each of the recommendations and a summary of progress made.

It was recognised by both the council and the peer team the environment that councils were operating in had changed since the CPC. It was clear that the council were mindful of current challenges e.g. cost of living and rising inflation as well as changes in national government and uncertainty around government policy.

The peer team welcomed the information and progress updates from the council and reflected that the council had tackled the recommendations and provided a thorough update to the peer team. It was evident that a lot had been achieved since the peer team had been on site and the council should be proud of this. The peer team welcomed the news that engagement with staff, residents and partners had increased. It was clear that firm foundations has been built in terms of place leadership. The council had a great ambition and delivery had started for the community in terms of skills, education and jobs for local people. It appeared that the addition of the Director of Place has enabled some of these positive changes.

The council appeared to be in a resilient position aided by their location and approach to growing their own. There was a focus on recruitment and retention which is picked up later in the report and the council were keen to be more strategic on this across the county. The peer team felt that the council were aware of financial challenges and cliff edges but were in a good position and doing what they could to stay relevant. The peer team felt that it was essential for the council to keep up the momentum and pace within the council over the next 2-3 years to meet the challenges it faced.

The report will now look at the progress the council has made under each of the themes.

Communication and Community Engagement

The council shared information with the peer team on the work that had been carried out on creating place narrative. Initial thinking had led the council to reflect about the value of having an organisational narrative in place first to support this. A combined officer and members group met with support from the LGA on the 10 January 2023 to discuss an organisation narrative and what this would look like. Next steps were still being developed when the progress review took place. Feedback from the initial meeting had been positive and the peer team were pleased to hear that the council

were underway with this recommendation.

The council had engaged a consultant to carry out a piece of work to assess the carbon footprint of the council. This highlighted both good practice and what actions would be needed to achieve carbon neutral but also with a focus on reducing energy costs and use of investments. The Sustainability Strategy Action Plan is under review to ensure it remains current. Whilst some actions would be ongoing for a while, others had been completed e.g. reduction in office space at the council offices.

In terms of a communication and consultation strategy the peer team noted that the chief executive was meeting with all new members of staff and both he and the leader were holding all staff briefings to address staff jointly to set out their respective roles. These sessions had been well received by staff who also heard about the joint vision for the council and the borough. Staff had also been advised of the work carried out around pay and how grading systems had been brought up to market value and were appreciative of this.

An Ipsos residents survey had been carried out in May-July 2022 and this had illustrated residents' concerns were mainly focused on street cleanliness, pot holes, street lights and health services. The council is planning on investigating the street cleanliness issue with the citizen's panel for a fuller understanding and will then consider what actions are needed. The other concerns will also be referred to the relevant authorities, namely the county council and the Integrated Care Board.

Organisational Development and Human Resources

The council explained that good progress had been made on this theme despite the delay in recruiting a new HR manager. The delay was as a result of considering a shared service with a number of other local authorities. The shared service arrangement was trialled but did not provide Broxbourne with the support and skills a dedicated HR Manager would. Therefore a new HR Manager has been recruited and

will be starting at the council at the end of February and will pick up any remaining actions.


The peer team heard that service planning had been reviewed and relaunched and that there were clear links to the corporate plan and individuals' objectives. This was seen as an integrated plan and not just a budget book.

A new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working group has been set up. The council explained that this had been slow to start with but that key issues had been identified and objectives for the group were due to be agreed at the next meeting.

Recruitment and retention had been identified as one of the actions that the new HR manager would pick up but the council noted that to retain staff an improved and more bespoke on-boarding process was needed to ensure that staff had the right support and start at the council. The organisational development plan which would include a training and development programme for the senior manager group of staff would be picked up once the post holder started. The council advised they were using schemes such as refer a friend and Golden Hellos and staff retention initiatives to aid with recruitment and retention.

The peer team welcomed the update on the values work that the council had carried out. The team heard that a member and staff working group has been set up to agree the values for the organisation in a post covid world. The council reported lots of engagement in this process with the proposed values being tested at various staff and member meetings before being agreed by Cabinet in July 2022. The final values were launched with members and officers on 31 October 2022:

- Teamwork
- Innovation
- Effectiveness
- Respect



As well as being included on walls in the council offices and lanyards the values and behaviours associated with them were to be integrated into inductions, appraisals, team meetings, job descriptions and the on-boarding process.

Service Improvement

One of the key actions under the service improvement theme was implementing a council wide customer service programme. The council explained a number of initiatives that had already taken place including training staff members to deliver the Customer Experience programme, Customer Experience Champions and the reopened reception area that had a workable space for Citizens Advice, Revenues and Benefits, some of the housing team and meeting space for other services. Chat bots were to be rolled out on the Council's website in the coming weeks and these would capture questions and the website would be updated following this data capture to ensure there was continual improvement to customer self-service through the website.

The next phase of the transformation plan for the organisation will be linked to the Customer Care Strategy and Action plan so that customers are at the heart of the way services are accessed and delivered. Through the creation of a Corporate Performance Manager, the council were planning to make better use of data to inform services improvements and be targeted to where they will have the biggest impact.

In response to questions from the peer team the council updated the team on the revenue and benefits position. The service is currently a shared service agreement with Welwyn and Hatfield council but this would come to an end in March 2023. A new contract was about to be entered into with a private contractor.

Financial Management and Governance

The council advised that they were making good progress on the actions under the financial management and governance theme. The Constitution was in the process of being reviewed and updated to ensure that there was the appropriate balance between the speed of decision making and effective governance. Social values have been looked at regarding procurement and the skills agenda which was an important part of the council's economic development agenda.

A number of briefings and financial training sessions had taken place for members and staff on vital issues such as budget training, statement of accounts and wholly owned subsidiary companies.

The Broxbourne development programme board has met three times since it was established and is overseeing the project management for all major projects in Broxbourne including the council's projects. Membership includes representatives from the council; the leader, cabinet member, planning and economic development as well as the county council, B3 living, local enterprise partnership and the UK innovation corridor. Developers have been invited to speak and take questions and this has been well received. The programme board has brought more rigour to the process with project initiation documents and regular tracking and monitoring. The council's Internal Audit team were positive about the methods and procedure in place. The council noted that the Brookfield programme would be considered at the March board meeting. The planning applications have been submitted and a date for the planning committee to consider the applications is yet to be agreed.

Partnership Working

The peer team had previously recommended that the council keep up the momentum on shared services partnerships and suggested developing the council's role as a valued strategic partner. The peer team heard that the council had taken a report on the work to date on exploring shared services to the council's employment panel and

this would be kept under review.

Work had been undertaken to review the remit of the council's partnership meetings including Ambition Broxbourne and its ability to oversee projects and hold partners accountable for delivery. It was agreed that Ambition Broxbourne would be a place for consultation and enabling business. For example, Sunset Studios had attended an Ambition Broxbourne Board to discuss the development, but the Broxbourne Development Programme Board is the forum that would provide the accountability. Ambition Broxbourne and the LSP had worked together to deliver a session on skills needs in the future, with actions being passed to the Broxbourne Strategic Partnership for Skills to implement. The session was positive with representatives from university, college and the new studios discussing employment of local people and the skills framework and strategy needed to embrace this. The council has plans to develop a supplementary planning document to ensure developers are aware of the council's expectations regarding skills. Reviews were also taking place on all partnerships to look at how the council would engage and where change was needed.

The Broxbourne Community Partnership had worked well in the pandemic and was continuing to support the community with cost of living and had created a directory of warm spaces for those that needed them.

The peer team heard that the Waltham Cross Renaissance was a key priority for the cabinet with a focus on public realm improvements. A levelling up bid was submitted with a focus on health and well-being, education and skills. The bid proposed to make a big difference to the area in terms of modernisation and access for pedestrians and cyclists as well as improvements to the community hub, playing fields and other refurbishments. The team have since learned the council were successful with their bid which is great news for the council. Alongside this the council advised that the UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan had been approved

with the regeneration of Waltham Cross highlighted as a priority. A Town Centre Manager has been recruited to take a lead on business engagement and town improvements across Waltham Cross and Cheshunt.

Future challenges

The council shared their key future challenges with the peer team and demonstrated that they both understood them and the potential impact and that they were planning ahead.

Economic Development

The council was one of three districts in Hertfordshire that had more new companies starting versus those that were closing. Whilst this is positive it could cause more challenges for the council competing with other organisations locally for staff in a tight labour market.


Inflation and cost of living

Like all councils, Broxbourne shared their uncertainty around the future of inflation levels and energy prices. They noted that they were building this inflationary pressure into their budget for 2023/24 but it would be under constant review. The council said that they had not seen an impact on the services yet e.g. increase in homelessness but would be keeping an eye on it. The council had a low council tax rate and said they were therefore used to dealing with less money than some other councils.

Government Policy

The council were keen on keeping up their own ambitions but were aware of potential impacts of business rates reforms and other government policy and would again be watching and waiting for any insight in this area.

4. Final thoughts and next steps



The LGA would like to thank Broxbourne Borough Council for undertaking an LGA CPC progress review. The peer team found the council to be both effective and ambitious with a willingness to adapt and change.

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.

Rachel Litherland (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA) and her e-mail address is rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk