

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Sefton Council

18th January 2023

Feedback





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1. Introduction

The six month progress review is an integral part of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) process. This stage takes place approximately six months from publication of the CPC action plan. The purpose of a six month progress review is to support councils in implementing their action plan, with an opportunity for:

- Feedback from the peer team on the early progress made by the Council against the CPC recommendations and action plan.
- A sounding board – around the alignment of actions in the action plan to the recommendations and any early impact or learning from the progress made against this action plan.
- Space to discuss or design ways of capitalising or navigating significant changes in the local operating environment since the team were 'on-site'.

A copy of the Council's CPC report can be found in the below link and should be read in conjunction with this note: [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report 2021 \(sefton.gov.uk\)](#).

Alongside this report, the Council published an action plan in response to the recommendations which can be found on the Council's website: [Report to: \(sefton.gov.uk\)](#)

2. Summary of the approach

The progress review at Sefton Council took place remotely on the 18th January 2023. The progress review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge Re-visit, under the following theme headings:

- Vision, priorities and future ways of working
- Localities

- Economic Growth
- Performance Management

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

- Cllr Sir Stephen Houghton (Leader – Barnsley Council)
- Ali Griffin (Chief Executive – London Councils)
- Dan Archer, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

The peer team met virtually via MS Teams over the course of 3 hours with the following representatives from the council:

- Cllr Ian Maher (Leader)
- Dwayne Johnson (Chief Executive)

3. Progress Review - Feedback

Vision, priorities and future ways of working

Under this theme, consideration was given to activity against the following recommendations which were made as part of the original onsite work:

- **Ensure the planned refresh of the vision for Sefton is used as an opportunity to then ensure the underpinning strategies and plans reflect the key priorities of the Council over the next period such as improving children’s services.** This should lead to clear and specific, corporate milestones and metrics that can be performance managed. This refresh can be used to further inform activity to address key capacity and skills gaps also.
- **Inform the above work by taking stock, internally and with partners of the new opportunities, strengths and challenges that the Council will wish to build on, capitalise from and address in the next three year period.**



The Council has now committed to having a Corporate Plan to state the key corporate priorities of the Council which will come into effect from April 2023 and run for a three year period up to 2026. Including the improvement of children's services within the corporate priorities this document sets out will be important for the Council and was part of the recommendation for having a document like this, as referenced in the previous onsite work.

As is the case in all councils, this key document should then be used to shape all other internal plans and strategies, including future Medium Term Financial Plans, organisational and member development and communications (for example) in order to have most effect. There are then plans in place to report progress against the Corporate Plan to Cabinet regularly throughout this period. This is picked-up further in the below section on performance management. Other mechanisms for communicating the key corporate issues and updates for all staff were discussed, with a fortnightly discussion with the Chief Executive for staff in place also. The potential to have the Leader join for some of these sessions was also discussed as something that may help to further engage staff in the key priorities of the Council moving forward.

The Council has now also published a timeline for the development and publication of a new 2035 vision and strategy for Sefton and has begun to develop the approach and timeline towards this. Internal planning for the development of this vision will continue throughout 2023/24 with a 12-18 month period starting in 2024/25 for engaging the workforce, partners, communities, businesses and visitors. The new vision is then planned to be developed in 2025.

Part of the plan for developing the new vision, is to use the council's next LGA Corporate Peer Challenge to help with this work. This CPC has been agreed for November 2023 and fits into the above timescale. It is important to capitalise on this opportunity therefore and think about the specific questions the peer team can assist Sefton with, at that stage. It is naturally essential, for an effective place-based vision that partners are involved in those planning stages and are able to contribute to the design of this shared vision. Doing so can help foster a fuller sense of shared ownership, which has longer term benefits.

The amount of time available for engagement within this timeline was highlighted by the peer team. This is an opportunity to thoroughly take stock with others, as recommended by the LGA team in April 2022. Doing this stock taking work in a way



which properly connects into the strategic direction, priorities and principles across the local system in Sefton is key – and not taking stock of individual services in isolation. In particular where the insights given involve working across perceived organisational boundaries. Doing this well, can increase the chances of an authentic, shared commitment to the findings that emerge, which can then lead to an increased willingness to act. Seeing and highlighting the successes from shared work that this leads to, then creates the conditions for more shared work in future. But a suitable approach to co-designing the approach to engagement is an important starting point not to miss.

Localities

Under this theme, consideration was given to activity against the following recommendation which was made as part of the original onsite work:

- **Given how much change the world has seen in the last two years and how the localities model has been required to react, work with partners to review the localities model.** This may include how it should and could be adapted looking ahead and in light of the strength of partnership will, the amount of community interest reported and the next set of challenges for the Council. This should also look again at ways in which all members can be engaged with the model looking ahead.

The Council agreed to review the localities model locally following the April 2022 peer challenge re-visit. At the time of this progress review, the Chief Executive of the Council was able to update the peer team that some services (including early help, youth justice and short break services for disabled children) were “on the cusp of transferring to children’s services”. This is to support the improvement of children’s services through more direct lines of accountability to the Director of Children’s Services. The Council rightly communicates that despite lines of accountability changing within the Council, the accessibility for residents who need these services, must not diminish.

The wider review of the localities model is due to take place in the Summer and will include looking at the opportunities for enhanced neighbourhood working, to ensure interventions that impact most on the wider determinants of health are optimally

positioned, to ensure suitable signposting and advice and also looking at themes such as co-location and 'multi-agency huddles' with partners. The above review will lead to a clear, refreshed statement about the localities model and how it will operate in this next stage. The sequencing of the above review and the agreed changes and actions it leads to should align with the next budget planning period and relate to the existing partnership vision for Sefton and the priorities that emerge in the Corporate Plan.

Economic Growth

Under this theme, consideration was given to activity against the following recommendation which was made as part of the original onsite work:

- **Continue to build on the significant progress seen in regards to economic growth.** Further grow the improved relationship with the Combined Authority and look at how business leaders can be routinely engaged strategically, routinely as a collective, with a role across the wider priorities for Sefton, as well as how the learning from strong engagement with young people can be a feature of other, future funding bids. There is now also an opportunity available to more closely connect the health challenges and opportunities available locally to Sefton's economic direction.

The Council highlighted how relationships continue to strengthen between the Council and Combined Authority (CA) in regards to economic growth. The CA are engaged with the Southport Town Deal Board but have also taken a place on the project development team, with CA officers also members of the Strand repurposing project development team.

Since the peer team were onsite in April 2022, the Council have led work to establish a Local Partnership Group in Southport which is chaired by the Chief Executive of the Council and includes a range of public and private sector partners. Three priority areas for 2023 have been identified as transport/connectivity, skills and employment and equality and diversity. The group meet bi-monthly with an agenda based on those key

themes. A similar approach is now also being taken in Bootle chaired by the Principal and CEO of the local College.

The above partnership working is in addition to existing dedicated work with local businesses, youth engagement (with shadow boards of young people continuing in Southport and being now replicated in Bootle as one example). All of the above, present mechanisms the Council will be keen to use when engaging partners and local stakeholders in the development of the 2035 vision for Sefton.

Performance Management

Under this theme, consideration was given to activity against the following recommendation which was made as part of the original onsite work:

- **Embed the service level improvements in performance management made recently and establish regular, collective and cross-cutting performance discussions at Cabinet.** This should be supported with a performance scorecard which tracks progress against the Council's key corporate priorities. Also then ensure that similarly routine performance information is provided to Scrutiny and all wider members.

The Council have now established Cabinet level performance reports which were taken to Cabinet in November with the next one due in May 2023. These have been put in place to support members to have cross-cutting performance discussions as a collective leadership team. As the Council develops its new Corporate Plan for April 2023, this document will state a small number of key corporate priorities, which the performance report can then align to, with the metrics used to measure progress against the corporate priorities of the Council as well as overall organisational health.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

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.

In-line with the approach to the CPC report itself and in the spirit of openness and transparency, the Council are asked to publish this note.

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.

Claire Hogan (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the council and the Local Government Association (LGA). Claire's email address is claire.hogan@local.gov.uk.