

Council

23 February 2023



Title	Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) Feedback Report
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	Daniel Mouawad – Chief Executive Lee O’Neil – Deputy Chief Executive Terry Collier – Deputy Chief Executive
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	N/A
Corporate Priority	Community Affordable housing Recovery Environment Service delivery
Recommendations	Council is asked to: a. Note the contents of the LGA CPC report (as attached at Appendix A) and the recommendations contained within that report, and b. To agree to the development of an Action Plan to address those recommendations and for this to be reported through the Corporate Policy Committee.
Reason for Recommendation	To ensure that the Council fully addresses the findings and recommendations made by the LGA’s CPC Team which are designed to assist this authority in responding to local priorities and in driving further improvements and efficiency in the way the Council operates.

1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 This report provides feedback on the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken from 15-17 November 2022, and outlines a range of key findings and recommendation made within the CPC Team’s report (‘the CPC Report’).
- 1.2 The CPC Report provides useful feedback outlining areas of good practice found within the Council and areas where improvements could be made. It is proposed that the Council takes forward the recommendations through an

Action Plan to be developed and reported through the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 The Corporate Policy and Resources Committee (CPRC) previously agreed, in line with local government sector best practice, that the Council would participate in a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2022.
- 2.2 Peer challenges are designed to support councils to drive ongoing improvements and efficiency and to assist local authorities to respond to local priorities and issues in their own way to the greatest effect. Equally peer reviews are also meant to reflect back good practice already in place. Spelthorne's CPC, as with all such challenges, covered the five standard core elements:
- a. Local priorities and outcomes
 - b. Organisational and place leadership
 - c. Governance and culture
 - d. Financial planning and management
 - e. Capacity for improvement

In addition, Spelthorne requested that the CPC team also focus on one cross-cutting area of specific relevance/importance to the Borough, i.e.:

'How can Spelthorne ensure that it can continue to deliver sustainable, affordable housing developments for the borough?'

- 2.3 The CPC Team visited Spelthorne between 15-17 November 2022 and consisted of a number of senior officers and councillors from other local authorities (details of the team are outlined on pages 7-8 of the CPC report attached as **Appendix A**). During their visit they met with a wide range of stakeholders, including staff, Councillors and external partners, conducting more than 40 meetings involving over 125 people. The team also undertook a walking tour of Staines-Upon-Thames and visited some key locations and Council assets across the borough. All Councillors were given the opportunity to engage with the process through hybrid meetings with the CPC Team. If they were unable to make those sessions, they could also provide the Team with any feedback/comments through a dedicated email box.
- 2.4 The CPC Team provided a summary of their findings at a feedback session held in the Council Chamber on 17 November to which all staff, Borough Councillors and all other stakeholders taking part in the process were invited. A transcript of that feedback is attached as **Appendix B**.
- 2.5 The CPC Team's report contains a number of observations and suggestions covering such areas as:
- a. The positive work undertaken by the Council, including our 'brilliant' response to COVID.
 - b. The strength of cross-service working and the friendly and caring staff culture.
 - c. The strength of partnership working and how this could be further enhanced.

- d. How a cohesive functioning Councillor cohort and the development of a clearer strategic vision for the future could help the Council to deliver more, and the effects the poor behaviour of a small number of Councillors is having on the organisation.
- e. The need to clearly define and respect how the roles of officers and Members interrelate, in order to create trust and a more effective working environment.
- f. Issues with the Council's current committee system, and the opportunity for this to be reviewed.
- g. How delays in decision making by Members, particularly on some key issues, affects the Council's ability to unlock the value of its own development sites, deliver the required homes and may ultimately risk service delivery.
- h. The need to recognise that the current lack of cohesive working is affecting the Council's reputation, is costing the Council money, is affecting staff morale, and could ultimately affect the delivery of Council services for local residents and businesses.

2.6 Based on their findings the CPC team made 12 key recommendations to the Council within their report:

1. *All Members need to identify what they have in common in terms of shared priorities and objectives for your Borough and your residents and use them to progress the delivery of your shared ambitions for Spelthorne.*
2. *Then share your agreed political ambitions for the Borough to create a longer-term vision embodied in a broadly agreed Corporate Plan.*
3. *Take the opportunity you now have to reset the officer / Member working relationship and agree how it will work differently going forward for the benefit of your residents.*
4. *The discrete but complementary roles of officers and Members need to be better understood by all to improve working relationships.*
5. *Take the time today to plan for tomorrow. Do not put off the 'non-urgent strategic' work you need to do.*
6. *Members need to respect officers' roles and give them the time and space to focus on delivering the important priorities you have agreed.*
7. *Recognise the risk of continued poor behaviour by some Members and the likely impact on the organisation and your reputation as a Council and a place. Take steps to address it.*
8. *Continue your efforts to address the issue of outstanding audits of the financial accounts.*
9. *Review the working of the committee system by looking at best practice elsewhere to consider how to create a system that is fit for purpose.*
10. *Engage in financial training for Members to promote a better understanding of financial implications, project viability and creating robust business cases.*

11. Improve the balance between communication and meaningful engagement whereby people feel listened to and heard. Use this in the context of evidence and need, to drive priorities and take people with you.

12. Consider how the LGA can continue to assist with the above recommendations on this reset journey.

- 2.7 Measures are already in train to address a number of the issues outlined in the CPC Team's comments/recommendations, such as a review of the current committee system, the development of a Member training programme for successful candidates in this year's May election, and an ongoing Establishment Review, which will cover issues such as staff recruitment and retention. An Action Plan will be developed which will outline these measures and any additional actions to be taken to address all 12 of the recommendations made by the CPC Team. Where appropriate these will be cross-referenced with other planned actions, for example where similar feedback was received from recent employee and Councillor surveys. Progress with this Action Plan will be reported through the Corporate Policy and Resource Committee.
- 2.8 As part of the standard LGA CPC process it is normal for the CPC Team to revisit the Council around six months after publishing their findings, to review progress with addressing the issues raised within their report and offer any further assistance. The Action Plan will therefore assist in that process, which is likely to be scheduled for a date in July 2023.

3. Options analysis and proposal

Option 1 (preferred option): Council is asked to:

- a. Note the contents of the LGA CPC report (as attached at **Appendix A**) and the recommendations contained within that report, and
- b. To agree to the development of an Action Plan to address those recommendations and for this to be reported through the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

Option 2: Council may wish to agree an alternative approach.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 There are no additional costs for the LGA undertaking a CPC or for the subsequent 6-month review, as the Council pays an annual £10,000 LGA subscription.
- 4.2 There may be financial implications associated with addressing (or not addressing) the recommendations outlined in the CPC Report. These would be outlined in the proposed Action Plan and reported to CPRC.

5. Risk considerations

- 5.1 The CPC report makes a wide range of comments and recommendations which are designed to assist the Council in understanding its strengths and where improvements could be made. Failure to recognise those strengths and address some of the key issues raised, could potentially have significant financial, reputational and organisational implications for the Council (including risks to future recruitment and retention of staff). It is proposed that

a risk analysis forms part of the proposed Action Plan to assist in understanding and addressing those issues.

6. Legal considerations

- 6.1 There are no direct legal considerations relating the consideration of the CPC Report. Any legal considerations relating to the Council following up on the CPC recommendations made will be outlined in the proposed Action Plan.

7. Other considerations

- 7.1 There are none.

8. Equality and Diversity

- 8.1 Any equality and diversity considerations relating to the Council following up on the CPC recommendations made will be outlined in the proposed Action Plan.

9. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 9.1 Any sustainability/climate change considerations relating to the Council following up on the CPC recommendations made will be outlined in the proposed Action Plan.

10. Timetable for implementation

- 10.1 If agreed by Council, the proposed Action Plan will be developed and presented for consideration by the CPRC on 17 April 2023, with progress updates provided at subsequent meetings of that Committee.
- 10.2 As outlined within the report, the CPC Team are scheduled to revisit the Council to undertake a six-month review around July 2023, with the exact date to be confirmed.

11. Contact

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Background papers: There are none.

Appendices:

Appendix A – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report

Appendix B – Transcript of LGA CPC Team verbal feedback presented on 17 November 2022