

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Castle Point Borough Council

18th and 19th November 2025

Feedback



Corporate Peer Challenge



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1. Introduction

Castle Point Borough Council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in September 2024 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

A Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process and is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the 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 Castle Point Borough Council 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 in Castle Point took place on Tuesday 18th and Wednesday 19th November 2025. It focused on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, which were as follows:

Recommendation 1

Clarify quickly the council's strategy and plan for addressing the financial gap of future years. The proposed timetable and process needs to be set out and communicated internally before the budget process commences.

Recommendation 2

Develop a clear business change programme and narrative and establish the related programme management capacity in order to ensure focus and delivery and support benefits realisation

Recommendation 3

Clarify the approach and timescale for developing the Corporate Plan – with there being a need to move quickly in creating it. The proposed timetable and process needs to be set out and communicated within a few months.

Recommendation 4

Invest further the time and effort necessary to develop the relationships and establish greater shared understanding across the senior political and managerial leadership – which, in turn, informs more consistent messages for the wider organisation and stakeholders

Recommendation 5

Strengthen the approach to risk management and performance management in order to ensure a comprehensive corporate overview at the senior managerial level of key issues – which, in turn, informs enhanced reporting to elected members

Recommendation 6

Maximise the opportunities for effective scrutiny and challenge of the Administration that can be seen by the public

Recommendation 7

Address the gap that has emerged for partners in the voluntary and community sector around a council operational lead in engaging and involving them

The following members of the original CPC team were involved in the Progress Review:

- Gordon Mitchell, LGA/SOLACE Associate and formerly Chief Executive of Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Nottingham City Council
- Councillor Jo Beavis, Braintree District Council (Independent)
- Darren Knight, Deputy Chief Executive, Warwick District Council
- Phillip Horsfield, Assistant Director, Legal, Elections and Registrars and

Monitoring Officer, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

- Chris Bowron, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

3. Progress Review - Feedback

The context for Castle Point Borough Council has changed significantly since the corporate peer challenge, including local government reorganisation coming formally onto the agenda and the outcomes and impacts of the Regulator for Social Housing inspection.

In relation to the recommendations from the corporate peer challenge, good progress has been made in the majority of them. This includes the creation and adoption of the Corporate Plan running from 2025 to 2028; the strengthened approach to the undertaking of scrutiny and challenge of the Administration and making this visible to the public; the enhancements in the approach to customer service, risk management, performance management, project management and the use of digital under the 'Fit for the Future' business change programme; and arrangements that have been put in place to strengthen links between the council and the voluntary and community sector.

What has been achieved represents a positive trajectory in key aspects of the functioning of the council, with some elements marking a real 'step change'. The progress made is testimony both to the hard work of officers and the willingness of elected members to make the necessary funding available.

At the same time, some recent officer issues have impacted elected members' trust and confidence in what is referred to as the council's "performance management culture".

3.1. The 'Fit for the Future' programme

The corporate peer challenge recommended the development of a clear business change programme within the council and the provision of the necessary capacity to ensure delivery. It also recommended that the council strengthen the approach to risk management and performance management, with a comprehensive corporate

overview at the senior managerial level of key issues and enhanced reporting to elected members.

In response, the council has established the 'Fit for the Future' change programme, which was launched in April. The formally established areas of focus for this are customer service; digital transformation; performance management; project management; and having in place all necessary policies and strategies. Whilst not explicit within these headings, risk management; health and safety; internal and external communications; and the HR function have also figured in the change programme.

A board, chaired by the Chief Executive and with elected member representation through the Portfolio Holder for Special Projects and Assets, to oversee the programme was established in July and meets every two months. It is undoubtedly the case that solid progress has been made across all the domains that the council has had ambitions around. The necessary capacity to deliver the programme is in place and momentum is building, with the benefits from the investment and efforts made in establishing the 'foundation stones' set to start being realised.

At the time of the corporate peer challenge, the council was embarking upon an extensive programme of detailed service reviews. This has largely been completed. With some of them, the implementation of what has emerged is still 'in train' and, with many, the reality is that some of the anticipated benefits will take time to materialise. Central to this are recruitment processes, currently underway, which will deliver additional capacity for the organisation in due course.

The enhanced HR function has supported these recruitment processes but, additionally and amongst other things, has implemented a training skills matrix which identifies the development needs of the workforce; supported the creation of a number of entry level apprenticeships; and developed a scheme that sees individual employees and teams within the council being able to undertake volunteering days benefiting local communities. A series of 'lunch and learn' sessions themed around 'Fit for the Future' has also been provided within the organisation, helping support staff and managers in the approach to appraisals; the council's style guide; customer care improvements; report writing and equality impact assessments.

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Chair: Councillor Louise Gittins

Chief Executive: Joanna Killian

President: Baroness Grey-Thompson

Enhanced functionality within the software system for performance and risk management has enabled related information, such as a corporate performance scorecard and the corporate risk register, to emerge from it and this is being reported to Cabinet and Audit & Governance Committee respectively. The system also tracks progress against recommendations made by Internal Audit, with these also reported to Audit & Governance Committee. The council has ambitions around the full integration of information across risk, performance and finance but recognises this is very much a work in progress.

The organisation's approach to project management has been relaunched and an officer board overseeing all major projects has been established. A new customer services strategy is in place, with a revised set of customer service standards and a programme of customer services training having been established. A new process for the recording and reporting of customer complaints has been created and a new customer relationship management (CRM) system is being launched imminently.

An audit of health and safety management practices was undertaken in 2024 and identified significant gaps in arrangements for the control of both general health and safety and fire safety matters. Of the recommendations made through this review, thirteen were reported in August as 'green' and the remaining nine as 'amber' – a shift from seven as 'red' and fifteen as 'amber' in the space of a year.

A previous change programme had identified the need for a more pro-active and consistent approach to the council's internal and external communications. The strengthened communications function that is now in place has supported community consultation and engagement in a number of spheres, including local government reorganisation; the Castle Point (Local) Plan; the return to street lighting through the night in the borough; and changes to the recycling service.

The council has a good presence on social media with over 6,000 people following it on Facebook, a slightly smaller number on X and more than 1,000 via LinkedIn. There is a twice-yearly publication, 'Castle Point Together', that goes to all households and a magazine for social housing tenants was introduced in February this year. A new council website is due to be launched in the coming weeks.

As the 'Fit for the Future' programme moves forward, we would encourage

continuation of the developing focus on the council's approach to procurement. This will be helpful in facilitating the council's ambitions – emphasised to us by elected members – to derive increased social value locally and benefit the Castle Point economy more through the way the council undertakes its expenditure. Examples of progress here include procurement opportunities now being shared with local businesses via a newsletter and main housing contractors engaging more local organisations as sub-contractors.

Also, our discussions with staff indicated they would welcome a collective effort in identifying and addressing ways in which the 'bureaucracy' and complexity of key corporate processes might be reduced. This is in a context of the council understandably having introduced clear and robust processes in a range of areas, such as recruitment and procurement, in response to the lax approach seen in the organisation until two or three years ago. What we are outlining here is a difficult challenge for the council to strike a balance around and we recognise the risks of 'rolling back' arrangements that were established to ensure the necessary rigour. At the same time, fulfilling the urgency with which the council is seeking to recruit staff or commission work, such as in housing in response to the social housing inspection judgement, is also paramount.

3.2. Local government reorganisation

Local government reorganisation (LGR) in Essex has come formally onto the agenda since the corporate peer challenge was undertaken. The capacity demands being placed on the council, across both officers and elected members, around this are significant and growing – mirroring the picture being seen nationally.

Inevitably, change of the sort of magnitude being anticipated under LGR has an unsettling effect on an organisation. Whilst there are very few concrete answers to anything at this stage, staff are appreciative of the efforts that have gone into communication with them to date and they are keen to see the flow of information, including on important milestones and approximate timescales for key developments, being maintained and the council is committed to this.

3.3. Governance, scrutiny and challenge

The corporate peer challenge recommended that the council seek to maximise the

opportunities for effective scrutiny and challenge of the Administration that can be seen by the public. That was in a context of the elected membership at the time comprising only of councillors in the Administration. Whilst there is now one Opposition councillor, the principle remains.

Part of the council's response to the recommendation has been the appointment of a total of five Independent Persons to the Overview and Scrutiny, Audit & Governance and Standards Committees. Another aspect is the active promotion via the organisation's social media channels of the livestreaming of council meetings as part of the council's commitment to openness and transparency.

The impact of the Independent Persons is being seen in the improvements in the standard of questions and challenge being posed by them and councillors at meetings. The experience and insight that the Independent Persons bring can be used to augment further the governance of the organisation. We noted, however, that they have not received an induction to the organisation. This forms part of a wider question for us around the effectiveness and impact of training and development for councillors to help them in their role. As an example, we gleaned a desire on the part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for training for them plus we see a specific need for the council to ensure it has the ability to scrutinise the borough's approach to social housing in a context of the improvements being driven in that sphere. At the same time, however, training has been delivered in the last year and a half for councillors on Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Audit and Governance Committee and the Housing Improvement Programme Board but take-up has been variable.

Overview and Scrutiny activity includes an annual review of the Constitution. The committee's work programme is heavily informed by its elected members and, whilst the process by which they determine what they probe should not in any way be fettered, we would encourage the council to ensure where the committee focuses its efforts is informed by the increasing insights being gleaned by the organisation through its enhanced approach to understanding performance and risk.

We would also encourage increased senior officer support 'in the round' for Cabinet and each main committee. As an example, whilst there is good engagement between Portfolio Holders and Directors and their Assistant Directors over reports for

forthcoming meetings of Cabinet, it was difficult for us to see where the programme and Forward Plan of future meetings was being shaped overall to ensure the most relevant and appropriate flow of information and decisions to that forum. We see the same principle applying to other committees and feel the answer may lie with a senior officer, for example at Director level, being identified to act as key liaison and 'sponsor' for each main forum.

3.4. Project delivery

People across the council are working intensively and at pace and it is easy in this context for the organisation to develop a habit of moving on from one project to the next without taking stock of the progress being made. We therefore thought it opportune to highlight some of the areas of delivery by the organisation in recent times. This is neither an exhaustive list nor an attempt to reflect all the areas that the council is engaged in but hopefully it provides a flavour of some of the important achievements.

The Paddocks community hub has now re-opened following a £2.3m investment delivering extensive renovations and upgrades. This includes a new roof; electrical rewiring; a new ventilation system; refurbished stage; new toilets; and dedicated office and community space. The project is seen to have concluded successfully and resulted in a renewed sense of purpose and usage, with many new bookings. This includes over 200 people per week participating in active wellbeing sessions there.

The council and other Sport England partners in the locality have been awarded well over £1m to improve physical activity levels in Canvey Island. The organisation also secured nearly a quarter of a million pounds through a Public Health Accelerator Bid for Essex, kick-starting the transformation of leisure centres into active well-being hubs as part of the drive to increase physical activity with residents from deprived areas. Investment through both this and more widely has contributed to an increase in the number of health and fitness memberships in council leisure centres over the last two years, from 3,500 to 5,500, and the number of people undertaking swimming lessons more than doubling to 1,700.

Street lighting through the night has now been reintroduced to the borough. A new council-owned but independently run cafe on the seafront opened in November and

we understand it is proving very popular. Also, the council has purchased a new workshop for its vehicle fleet which will provide greater scope in the types of vehicles that it can operate and increase maintenance capacity.

The above is merely a partial snapshot. All of this, and much more besides, has been achieved over and above the undertaking of 'business as usual', the driving forward of the 'Fit for the Future' programme and related improvements and preparations for the delivery of further key projects.

3.5. Housing

In December 2024 the Regulator for Social Housing undertook an inspection in Castle Point and judged it as C4 – the lowest possible rating. In response, a review of the whole housing service review was initiated. A related improvement plan has been established and an improvement board to oversee progress has been put in place. It is important to ensure the board retains independence, including the input of perspectives and experiences by tenants, and has access to the necessary expertise and insight to enable it to provide specialist 'check and challenge'. Improved reporting of housing data and performance to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny is now taking place, in addition to the improvement board.

The improvement plan has seen the establishment of a new staffing structure, including new roles to support tenant and resident engagement and enhance customer relations. Experienced additional senior officer capacity has also been brought in. A new housing management system has been procured and is currently being implemented. This will enable customers more easily to report repairs and monitor progress on their delivery and will also provide ease of access to their rent accounts.

The importance, demanding nature and cost of driving improvement in social housing cannot be underestimated. A sustained corporate effort is required. It is important for the council to 'stress test' its assumptions around the Housing Revenue Account and the risks being carried there and it is confident in the approach it has adopted to doing so. The inspection outcome means that the council and the drive for housing improvement has a high profile and attracts a significant level of scrutiny, not least

from government. Ensuring that the necessary improvements can be funded and are delivered will be crucial.

The corporate peer challenge recommended that the council address a gap that had emerged for partners in the voluntary and community sector around an operational lead in the organisation for engaging and involving them. Revisions to the organisational structure as part of the housing structure changes have seen the development of an Assistant Director post with a remit including partnerships, providing capacity to enhance links with that sector. The voluntary and community sector has established a presence in the main council offices. At the time of our visit work was taking place, as part of wider office accommodation changes, to facilitate additional external partners being able to operate from there too.

3.6. Finance

The corporate peer challenge recommended that the council clarify quickly the strategy and plan for addressing the financial gap of future years, with the proposed timetable and process needing to be set out and communicated.

The background information that we received to inform the progress review suggested that the council has established a balanced budget for three years to 2027/28 and agreed a medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) covering the same period.

In probing the in-year budget position; the extent to which the budgets for future years are balanced; the approach to budget-setting; and the strength of the MTFS we gleaned much scepticism from officers and elected members around the robustness and effectiveness of the processes and approaches in place.

The in-year revenue budget position is a projected £1.1m overspend on temporary accommodation, partially offset by £300,000 of underspends elsewhere but still leaving a gap of £800,000. The intention would appear just to be to utilise reserves to address this situation. Whilst we recognise that the provision of temporary accommodation is a demand-led responsibility and that Castle Point is far from being alone in experiencing overspends in this area, it does raise a question around whether the situation could have been better forecast and appropriate measures woven in to supporting a balanced budget when setting it in the early part of this

year.

The process for setting the budget appears to run on a relatively late timescale compared to other councils. It would be common by mid-November for councils to have a clear and shared sense of the proposed measures for addressing any gap in the budget for the following year and for plans around seeking elected member approval and undertaking any public consultation to be well advanced. At the time of the progress review in Castle Point, there was not a consistent narrative on the measures being adopted to balance the budget for next year, nor the key stages in the process or their timescales. There was also a sense that the process could operate more in a way that facilitates and enables shared understanding and endeavour across a wider cohort of officers and elected members.

There also doesn't appear to be a robust corporate process for monitoring the achievement of agreed budget savings or increased income objectives. That isn't to say that individual services and directorates don't have an awareness of how their savings and income targets are progressing – rather there isn't a collective overview that provides for delivery being tracked, corrective actions being determined where appropriate and people being held clearly to account.

The approach to finance is an area in which progress against the corporate peer challenge recommendations would appear to be limited. We see a need to develop more robust, collective and transparent approaches to forecasting and managing the authority's financial position.

3.7 Senior level relationships

The corporate peer challenge recommended that the senior political and managerial leadership invest further the time and effort necessary to develop the relationships and establish greater shared understanding at that level.

A set of arrangements has now been put in place to enhance communication and engagement between senior officers and councillors, including Cabinet members. This includes the Cabinet Briefing forum plus pre-meetings with the Leader and Deputy Leader looking at the agenda and reports for forthcoming Cabinet meetings; Political Leadership Team; briefings for Committee Chairs ahead of meetings of their body; as well as the regular dialogue between Cabinet Members, Directors and their

Assistant Directors focused on specific portfolios. The Leader and Deputy Leader also meet regularly with the Chief Executive and Directors.

This is all positive and represents a direct and concerted response to the initial corporate peer challenge recommendation. However, relationships at the senior level remain an area where further focus is required to achieve the desired outcomes, not least in a context of certain tensions emerging in recent months on the back of some officer issues linked to the organisation's "performance management culture".

One of the key reflections from our work in undertaking the progress review is how much stands to be lost, in terms of both organisational culture and relationships, if these tensions aren't alleviated. There are a number of important and interwoven factors that we see as being central in responding positively to the situation that exists. We endeavour to outline them through this section of the report and encourage the council to explore them over the coming weeks and months.

It is clear to us that elected members are steeped in and passionate about their communities and that officers care very deeply about what they are delivering and feel both the responsibility and pain when things go awry. An enhanced mutual appreciation of these perspectives and drivers is an important starting point for strengthened relationships.

Also we have outlined in this report that there are many areas where good progress and a positive response from the council can be seen, whether that is in relation to the corporate peer challenge recommendations; the social housing inspection judgement; or delivery of a number of key council projects – all of which is over and above 'business as usual'. Officers at all levels have worked incredibly hard to deliver this and we would encourage a greater recognition on the part of elected members of the effort involved and what has been achieved, with a 'thank you' going a very long way.

A culture has clearly been developed in the organisation which values and demonstrates openness and transparency much more than was the case a few years ago. Things that have gone awry are nowadays admitted and acknowledged, enabling corrective actions to be undertaken proactively where possible. In this culture, elected members are likely to become more fully and quickly aware of things

going amiss but, whilst this is difficult for them, it is a positive measure of the organisation.

It is inevitable that the nature of some of the issues experienced by the council in recent months has impacted elected members' trust and confidence. However, in order to avoid the risk of the council going 'backwards' in terms of its culture and relationships, it is important that there is a focus on having clear accountabilities and reinforcing respective roles and responsibilities between elected members and officers. Also, the way issues are responded to is crucial, with a risk of people retrenching around openness and transparency if any sense of a 'blame culture' emerges.

Creating additional space and time for more informal collective engagement across the senior political and managerial leadership on key strategic issues would also likely be beneficial. An option here might be increasing the frequency with which the Political Leadership Team, comprising Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team, meet, which they currently do quarterly. This time could usefully be dedicated to open, and where necessary more robust, 'in the round' discussions centred on priorities, risk, delivery capacity and potential impacts and consequences – focused on enhancing things for residents and managing the council's financial position. As an example, we understand thinking has been taking place recently regarding social housing rent levels moving forward. This is the type of issue that we could see usefully sitting at the heart of a discussion across the collective senior political and managerial leadership going forward, with the very significant financial, delivery and reputational considerations at the heart of it in a context of the social housing inspection and improvement agenda. Another example of an issue that might be considered in this type of forum is the myriad views and considerations that exist in relation to car parking charges and options around them for the future.

The corporate peer challenge recommended that the approach and timescale for developing the Corporate Plan be clarified, with there being a need to move quickly in creating it. At its meeting in March 2025, Full Council adopted the new Corporate Plan. This is a significant undertaking that has been successfully delivered and forms another part of the picture of the council delivering well against many of the corporate peer challenge recommendations. It should provide a clear steer to the organisation

on priorities. However, with local government reorganisation coming onto the agenda, the issue of additional key elected member priorities for delivery as part of the council's 'legacy' has come into the equation. In this context, undertaking the timely identification of such priorities, inevitably expanding the remit beyond what is outlined in the Corporate Plan, and the agreement of the means to resource them to guarantee their implementation, becomes an imperative. On the back of this, elected members should provide officers with the time and space to focus on delivering the set of agreed priorities under the Corporate Plan and LGR.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank Castle Point Borough Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

We appreciate that the 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 for the Eastern Region in the LGA, 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

Further information, support, and resources on LGR/Devolution, can be found on the [LGA's devolution and LGR Hub website](#).

Appendix 2 – Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Action Plan

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
1	<p>3.1 Fit for the Future programme</p> <p><i>p.7 The council has ambitions around the full integration of information across risk, performance and finance but recognises this is very much a work in progress.</i></p>	<p>Continue the reporting of risk, performance and finance at the management Quarterly Business Review (QBR).</p> <p>Introduce a process of escalation from QBR to Senior Leadership Team and then into Political Leadership Team meetings.</p>	<p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Assistant Director – Policy, Performance & Customer</p> <p>Assistant Director - Finance & Procurement (S1510)</p>	<p>Ongoing, QBR takes place in February, May, August, November.</p> <p>Escalation process to be introduced by end February 2026.</p>
2	<p>3.1 Fit for the Future programme</p> <p><i>p.7,8 ...we would encourage continuation of the developing focus on the council’s approach to procurement. This will be helpful in facilitating the council’s ambitions – emphasised to us by elected members – to derive increased social value locally and benefit the Castle Point economy more</i></p>	<p>Build on the work already being undertaken in this space - procurement opportunities now being shared with local businesses via a newsletter and main housing contractors engaging more local organisations as sub-contractors – to drive social value and benefit to the local economy</p>	<p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Assistant - Director Finance & Procurement (S1510)</p>	<p>In place, ongoing review and improvement over 2026/27.</p>

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
	<i>through the way the council undertakes its expenditure.</i>			
3	<p>3.1 Fit for the Future programme</p> <p><i>p.8 ...our discussions with staff indicated they would welcome a collective effort in identifying and addressing ways in which the 'bureaucracy' and complexity of key corporate processes might be reduced.</i></p>	<p>Organisation to “recalibrate” its governance to ensure sufficient rigour around decision making balanced with the need for speed of decision making, in exceptional circumstances.</p>	<p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Services (MO)</p> <p>Assistant Director - Finance and Procurement (S1510)</p>	<p>Review governance processes and consider changes as part of the review of the Constitution in 2026/27.</p>
4	<p>3.2 Local government reorganisation</p> <p><i>p.8 The capacity demands being placed on the council, across both officers and elected members, around this are significant and growing – mirroring the picture being seen nationally.</i></p>	<p>Recognise these capacity demands and plan for where there may be a need for additional capacity to be brought in to support or backfill to officers who are spending a substantial proportion of their time on LGR.</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p>	<p>Initial review by end March 2026 (following ‘minded-to decision).</p> <p>Ongoing as new demands emerge.</p>

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
5	<p>3.3 Governance, scrutiny and challenge</p> <p><i>p.9 The experience and insight that the Independent Persons bring can be used to augment further the governance of the organisation. We noted, however, that they have not received an induction to the organisation.</i></p>	<p>Provide induction training to the organisation for all Independent Persons</p>	<p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Services (MO)</p>	<p>By end Q1 2026/27.</p>
6	<p>3.3 Governance, scrutiny and challenge</p> <p><i>p.9. This forms part of a wider question for us around the effectiveness and impact of training and development for councillors to help them in their role.</i></p> <p><i>[Related to observation 5]</i></p>	<p>Organise further training for Audit & Governance and Overview & Scrutiny committees.</p> <p>Provide additional training to support Councillors on proposed new Housing Sub-Committee of Overview & Scrutiny (when established)</p>	<p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Services (MO)</p>	<p>Training provided for Audit & Governance and Overview & Scrutiny Committees in January 2026.</p>

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
7	<p>3.3 Governance, scrutiny and challenge</p> <p><i>p.9,10 [Overview &Scrutiny] work programme is heavily informed by its elected members – we would encourage the council to ensure where the committee focuses its efforts is informed by the increasing insights being gleaned by the organisation through its enhanced approach to understanding performance and risk.</i></p>	<p>Use the planned refresh of Political Leadership Team, or alternative mechanism such as meeting with Leader, Deputy Leader and Overview & Scrutiny Chair, to have open discussions about performance and risk that might be considered for further scrutiny by O&S.</p>	<p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Services (MO)</p> <p>Assistant Director – Policy, Performance & Customer</p>	<p>End April 2026 (in time for the new municipal year).</p>
8	<p>3.3 Governance, scrutiny and challenge</p> <p><i>p.10 ...it was difficult for us to see where the programme and Forward Plan of future meetings was being shaped overall to ensure the most relevant and appropriate flow of information and decisions to that forum.</i></p>	<p>Use the planned refresh of Political Leadership Team to have open discussions about performance and risk that might be considered for future item to be added to the Cabinet's Forward Plan.</p>	<p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Services (MO)</p> <p>Assistant Director – Policy, Performance & Customer</p>	<p>Escalation process to be introduced by end February 2026.</p>

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
	<i>[Related to observation 7]</i>			
9	<p>3.3 Governance, scrutiny and challenge</p> <p><i>p.10 We see the same principle applying to other committees and feel the answer may lie with a senior officer, for example at Director level, being identified to act as key liaison and ‘sponsor’ for each main forum.</i></p> <p><i>[Related to observations 7 and 8]</i></p>	<p>Give consideration to this principle to determine if this approach is appropriate for the Council as there are already examples of senior officers as the liaison point for committees – Cabinet by Chief Executive; Audit & Governance by Head of Internal Audit</p>	<p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p> <p>Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Services (MO)</p>	<p>Consideration and decision on approach by end March 2026.</p>
10	<p>3.5 Housing</p> <p><i>p.12 It is important for the council to ‘stress test’ its assumptions around the Housing Revenue Account and the risks being carried there and it is confident in the</i></p>	<p>Continue to review the Housing Revenue Account through the process of agreement with the Regulator of Social Housing and socialisation with tenants.</p> <p>Further develop the Business Plan from draft to a final version over</p>	<p>Director - People & Communities</p> <p>Director - Corporate & Customer</p> <p><i>Supported by:</i></p>	<p>Approved in February 2026 by Cabinet.</p> <p>Ongoing quality assurance has been secured.</p>

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
	<i>approach it has adopted to doing so.</i>	2026/27, with annual review as part of the budget setting process.	Housing Improvement Programme Lead Assistant Director - Finance & Procurement (S1510)	
11	3.6 Finance <i>p.13 The process for setting the budget appears to run on a relatively late timescale compared to other councils.</i>	Adjust the budget setting timetable to address the points raised around timing, clear shared sense of proposed measures to address any gap in the budget.	Director - Corporate & Customer <i>Supported by:</i> Assistant Director - Finance & Procurement (S1510)	Budget setting timetable and process agreed by end Q1 2026/27.
12	3.6 Finance <i>p.13 [Re budget setting] There was also a sense that the process could operate more in a way that facilitates and enables shared understanding and endeavour across a wider cohort of officers and elected</i>	Revised budget setting process that allows for open exploration of all ideas – from service areas as well as from Finance – but has a clear and early cut off point for ideas that are to be given serious consideration by Cabinet.	Director - Corporate & Customer <i>Supported by:</i> Assistant Director - Finance & Procurement (S1510)	Budget setting timetable and process agreed by end Q1 2026/27.
13	3.6 Finance <i>p.13 There also doesn't appear to be a robust corporate process for monitoring the</i>	Use Fit for the Future board as the forum where budget savings and increased income is tracked.	Director - Corporate & Customer <i>Supported by:</i>	From April 2026 Fit for the Future Board onwards.

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
	<i>achievement of agreed budget savings or increased income objectives. That isn't to say that individual services and directorates don't have an awareness of how their savings and income targets are progressing – rather there isn't a collective overview that provides for delivery being tracked, corrective actions being determined where appropriate and people being held clearly to account.</i>		Assistant Director - Finance & Procurement (S1510)	
14	3.6 Finance <i>p.13 We see a need to develop more robust, collective and transparent approaches to forecasting and managing the authority's financial position.</i>	Develop more robust, collective and transparent approaches to forecasting and managing the authority's financial position.	Director - Corporate & Customer <i>Supported by:</i> Assistant Director - Finance & Procurement (S1510)	Linked to budget setting timetable and process – end Q1 2026/27.
15	3.7 Senior level relationships <i>p.15 Creating additional space and time for more informal</i>	Engage with an independent facilitator to run such a session.	Chief Executive	End February 2026.

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
	<i>collective engagement across the senior political and managerial leadership on key strategic issues would also likely be beneficial.</i>			
16	3.7 Senior level relationships <i>p.15 It is inevitable that the nature of some of the issues experienced by the council in recent months has impacted elected members’ trust and confidence. However, in order to avoid the risk of the council going ‘backwards’ in terms of its culture and relationships, it is important that there is a focus on having clear accountabilities and reinforcing respective roles and responsibilities between elected members and officers.</i>	Continue to value a culture of transparency and openness and provide a space for candid discussion between Members and Officers about performance and risk issues.	Chief Executive	Ongoing.
17	3.7 Senior level relationships <i>p.16 ...undertaking the timely identification of such priorities,</i>	Finalise priorities for delivery over remainder of 2025/26 and over 2026/27.	Cabinet	End January 2026.

	Observation	Action	Lead	Timescales
	<i>inevitably expanding the remit beyond what is outlined in the Corporate Plan, and the agreement of the means to resource them to guarantee their implementation, becomes an imperative.</i>			