

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Royal Borough of Greenwich

13th to 16th June and 1st and 2nd August 2023

Feedback report





Contents

- 1. Executive summary 3
- 2. Key recommendations 8
- 3. Summary of the peer challenge approach 10
- 4. Feedback 12
- 5. Next steps 35

1. Executive summary


The Royal Borough of Greenwich is a solid council delivering a wide range of services to good effect. Greenwich is an ambitious borough with a proud history and tremendous assets across its communities and geography. Major change has been delivered in parts of the borough over recent years and the council's ambitions are reflected in a range of investments being made in line with its priorities.

There are good examples of the council working jointly with partners to deliver for the people of Greenwich. Partnership relationships across health, adults, children's, Public Health and employment and skills feel particularly strong and are mutually highly valued between partners and the council. The integrated health and care arrangements in the borough are impressive.

The development of 'Our Greenwich', which acts as the council's corporate plan through to 2026, reflects ambitions around a refreshed approach to engaging communities and new ways of working within the council. It provides a clear focus and sense of prioritisation for the borough and the council and its aims and ambitions are increasingly being shared and discussed within the organisation and with partners, leading to them informing service planning and delivery. The 'Our Greenwich Annual Plan' is acting as a baseline against which progress can be measured. This approach provides an opportunity to re-shape performance reporting within the council to provide a more comprehensive and shared overview at the corporate level of how the organisation is delivering and progressing and, crucially, create a link to financial reporting.

There is scope to supplement the challenges and objectives which 'Our Greenwich' outlines with a 'narrative of place' and a 'place vision' for the borough. Amongst the partners that we met there was a desire for the council to facilitate the development of this and, in doing so, to be 'bold and brave' in its ambitions for place – summarised as really seizing the 'place leadership mantle' for the Royal Borough.

There is passionate and strong championing of the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda, which is seen to have progressed significantly in the council in recent




years. The steps that have been made have been driven by a number of key individuals represented in the related networks and steering group within the council. Good work is taking place that is engaging and impacting increasingly widely and this needs to continue in order to ensure greater awareness and ownership of the agenda across the organisation.

This was the first corporate peer challenge that the council has commissioned and reflects an organisation that is beginning to 'look outwards' more. The political and managerial leadership deserve credit for inviting it, which we see being reflective of a recognised need and shared desire at all levels of the council for the organisation to operate differently. Defining and communicating what the ambitions around a changed council mean it will look like, and determining how to get there, are key next steps for the council.

The council's change and improvement agenda is significant in terms of scale; the demands it places upon people to deliver it; and the impact it will have on the way the organisation runs. The many elements within it require drive, greater pace and clear accountabilities in order to be developed and implemented effectively.

There are a variety of appropriate approaches that councils, Administrations and political groups adopt in order to maximise the effectiveness of joint working between elected members and officers; support councillors and political groups appropriately and effectively; aid the work of Cabinet; facilitate collective responsibility politically and corporately; and enhance involvement and engagement amongst their elected members. There are key aspects of this that do not feel to be working effectively in Greenwich currently. These need to be addressed urgently in order to ensure good governance is upheld and the Administration's ambitions for residents are realised:

- The council has a number of arrangements in place that bring some of the senior political and managerial leadership together. Whilst this is positive, there is not the equivalent of the body that exists in many councils which sees their cabinet and corporate management team coming together informally, as complete collectives, on a regular and scheduled basis to consider key



strategic issues that are starting to emerge for the council and the place it serves.

- Political group meetings of the elected members within the Administration in Greenwich operate differently to, and have a different purpose and focus to, the equivalent of such meetings in most councils. Certain approaches have become ‘normalised’ although they are very much out-with the norm for local government and should cease.
- In any council, the earlier officers can receive a clear political steer on issues, the more effectively they are enabled to ensure the approach that is adopted on the issue concerned meets the objectives of the Administration. Shifting the way that things work within the Administration in Greenwich would impact positively on both the efficiency of the council and relationships within it.
- It is vital that elected members and officers have absolute clarity in their understanding of roles, responsibilities and good governance. The council has quite rightly moved recently to address any ‘blurring’ around this. In doing so, however, a ‘vacuum’ has emerged which would seem to be leaving the Leader and Cabinet colleagues with much less support to call upon than would be the norm in many councils.

There is strong leadership being demonstrated within the council’s Overview and Scrutiny Panels and Committee, with the Chairs that we met focused on trying to make a difference and demonstrating drive and determination. It is very positive that the relationship between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny is widely seen to be much improved now compared to recent years. This, though, is vested primarily in the Leader and Chair of the Committee and wider input and ownership could usefully be enabled. The Chair and the Leader have worked jointly with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to undertake a review of the council’s approach to Overview and Scrutiny, the recommendations from which have been received by the council. There needs to be clarity around how this work is now being taken forward


by the authority.

The local elections in May last year saw a 45 per cent turnover in the council's elected membership. We would encourage the council to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the related induction activity in order to inform the approach for the future. In a similar vein, we would recommend that the council considers its approach to identifying and meeting the training and development needs of elected members. This is seen to be 'ad hoc' currently and the approach would benefit from being put onto a different footing in order to ensure it supports councillors in fulfilling their roles to greatest effect. Within this, it is important that elected members maximise their participation in the training and development opportunities made available to them.

There is frustration on the part of ward councillors regarding how elected member casework is progressed. This is raising questions around organisational responsiveness generally. Establishing clarity over realistic timescales for elected members to be responded to would help to manage expectations and thus remove an element of the frustration and tension that exists.

The creation and development of the council's new community engagement team provides the opportunity to build on examples of enhanced engagement delivered by the council recently and amplify further the 'resident voice'. This links to 'Our Greenwich' ambitions around better listening to and hearing communities and developing networks with communities, key partners and businesses to meet need and address challenges together. A key plea from partners was that whilst enhanced community engagement will be beneficial, a focus across the council on 'co-design' and 'co-production' with them and local communities would usefully be developed.

Investment is being made by the council in priority areas both externally and internally. The council is proud of its track record of delivering balanced budgets over the years despite the challenges that have been faced and it has confidence in its overall financial position. However, in the current year there are unidentified revenue savings which are having to be offset by reserves and the council is



currently forecasting a £26m gap in the revenue budget for next year. This includes more than £15m previously attributed to savings around organisational change and improvement that remain to be determined. The council is placing a lot of reliance upon savings being secured through investment in digital yet acknowledges their “realisation may take some time”. Taking these and other elements together, we see the need for greater rigour, both corporately and across Directorates and services, in the council’s financial planning and management in order to manage the risks that we see emerging and to maximise the opportunities available to invest in council priorities.

The council’s senior management structure has evolved over a number of years, generating a unique set of arrangements and ‘spans of control’. At an appropriate point, the current set of arrangements would usefully be reviewed. A clear sense exists of a council that has traditionally operated on a strongly Directorate-led basis. Greater collective senior managerial leadership from the Greenwich Management Team level will be crucial to the council, as a corporate body, maximising its effectiveness going forward; bringing about the change and improvement being sought; and delivering ‘Our Greenwich’.

A recurring theme through the corporate peer challenge has been that of change and improvement being required within the organisation. The scale of what the council is looking to undertake represents a very demanding agenda. The organisation can take confidence from the fact that in virtually all of the areas that change and improvement are necessary, there are good examples that can be drawn upon from across the council of where what is required is already being demonstrated. This also provides the opportunity to the council to expedite progress by drawing upon these pockets of good practice and sharing the knowledge and learning that they offer.

2. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

Recommendation 1

Urgently address ways of working and arrangements in Greenwich in order to aid decision-making; maximise the effectiveness of joint working between elected members and officers at the senior level; support councillors and political groups appropriately and effectively; aid the work of Cabinet; facilitate collective responsibility politically and corporately; and enhance involvement and engagement amongst elected members. This is central to ensuring good governance is upheld and the Administration's ambitions for residents are realised. To inform this, draw in learning around the variety of appropriate approaches that councils, Administrations and political groups adopt in key aspects of how they operate.

Recommendation 2

Develop a more comprehensive approach to identifying and meeting the training and development needs of elected members in order to support councillors in fulfilling their roles to greatest effect.

Recommendation 3

Be 'bold and brave' in leading the development of a place vision for the borough and seize the 'place leadership mantle' – with partners very much encouraging this.

Recommendation 4

Define and communicate what the ambitions around a changed council mean it will look like, in order to enable the ambitions of 'Our Greenwich' to be fulfilled.

Recommendation 5

Develop increased visibility of the senior managerial leadership; reinvigorate management forums at different levels and use them to help shape and drive the organisation; and enable greater staff awareness and engagement generally.

Recommendation 6

Establish greater rigour in the council's financial planning and management in order to manage the risks that we see emerging for the council financially and maximise the opportunities available to invest in council priorities.

Recommendation 7

Develop greater pace and clearer accountabilities in delivering changes in key aspects of how the organisation functions, such as 'Rethinking Corporate Services' and the review of Overview and Scrutiny.

Recommendation 8

Provide the council's communications function with the necessary status and position in order to enable it to deliver against the needs and ambitions that exist around it.

Recommendation 9

Re-shape performance reporting within the council to provide a more comprehensive and shared overview at the corporate level of how the organisation is performing and progressing and link this with financial reporting.

Recommendation 10

Assist and support managers more effectively by addressing the barriers and disproportionate levels of bureaucracy presented by some corporate services and approaches; establishing greater clarity around their responsibilities and accountabilities; and providing the necessary training and development to meet their needs.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

3.1 The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Andy Donald, Chief Executive, London Borough of Haringey
- Councillor Grace Williams, Leader, London Borough of Waltham Forest
- Doug Wilkinson, Director of Environment and Street Scene, London Borough of Enfield
- Camilla Mankabady, Director of Communications, Liverpool City Council
- Heather Greenan, Director of Policy, Insight and Communications, Derby City Council
- Joseph Sloyan, National Graduate Development Programme, Local Government Association (shadowing)
- Chris Bowron, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

3.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all corporate peer challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to

address its financial challenges?

5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, the council asked the peer team to provide feedback on:

- The borough's transport strategy – how collectively the council can best work to deliver the ambitions it contains
- The council's approach to corporate communications and community engagement – highlighting areas for improvement and approaches that could be adopted

3.3 The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and its context, challenges and opportunities. The team then spent six days (four days in June and two days in August) onsite in the borough of Greenwich in total, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 25 meetings, in addition to further research and reading
- Spoke to more than 120 people, including a range of council staff, elected members and external stakeholders

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and elected members.

4. Feedback

4.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Greenwich is an ambitious borough with a proud history and tremendous assets across its communities and geography. The population of nearly 290,000 is estimated to have increased by more than 13 per cent since 2011 – one of the highest percentage increases amongst London boroughs in that time – and features a tremendously diverse mix of communities, cultures and backgrounds. The world-famous sights of Greenwich town centre are complemented by the strong identities and histories of a range of other communities including Woolwich, Plumstead, Thamesmead, Eltham and Greenwich Peninsula and there are hundreds of green spaces in Greenwich, which also features the longest waterfront of any London borough.

The development of ‘Our Greenwich’, which was adopted at Full Council in December 2022 and acts as the council’s corporate plan through to 2026, reflects ambitions around a refreshed approach to engaging communities and new ways of working within the council. The five Themes and twenty Missions it contains provide a clear focus and sense of prioritisation for the borough and the council and the whole approach is generating interest and excitement, particularly internally. The five Themes (communities, people, place, economy and organisation) are deliberately not aligned to Directorate or Cabinet Portfolio structures – which is reflective of the council seeking to develop a more open and non-siloed approach – and ‘Our Greenwich’ places an emphasis on outcomes.

The community engagement that informed ‘Our Greenwich’ included information stands at various locations across the borough, with people being able to indicate what they felt were the key challenges in their lives and their communities and also outline their ideas. A partner engagement event was held at Woolwich Town Hall, during which what had been gleaned from the community engagement activities was fed back and used to stimulate debate and discussion. Some of the partners we spoke to did, though, reflect a lack of involvement in the development of, and

familiarity with, 'Our Greenwich'. Internally, the now much talked about 'Room 21' was given over to councillors and staff being able to share their views and help to develop the Missions, outcome frameworks and success measures.

The engagement that took place between elected members and officers in developing 'Our Greenwich' is seen to have built new connections; constructively challenge the status quo; and reflect the beginnings of a shift to a more 'one team' approach. The council are keen to build on this, leading to five 'Our Greenwich Steering Groups' being set up, with one for each Theme. These groups have commenced meeting in the last couple of months and bring together relevant elected members and officers to discuss and shape the strategic direction. The council explains in the Position Statement it developed to inform our work that the Steering Group approach "represents a significant change in the way in which our political and officer leadership work together".

Major change has been delivered in parts of the borough over recent years, including the Greenwich Peninsula and Royal Arsenal Riverside. The council lobbied and paid for Woolwich station on the Elizabeth Line and the rewards from this are now starting to be reaped. The council's ambitions are reflected in other investments now being made across the borough in line with its priorities. This includes the major ambitions around social housing under the 'Greenwich Builds' programme, with 750 homes already built or in development and aspirations to deliver another 1,000 by 2030. The council is also investing in housing improvements; has completed a new leisure centre in Plumstead and is currently building a replacement for the existing leisure facility in Woolwich which will be in the town centre. A number of new cycle lanes have been built in the borough and 2,500 trees have been planted in the last four years.


The pride, passion and commitment of the elected members and council staff that we met in working for their communities is tangible. The aims and ambitions of 'Our Greenwich' are increasingly being shared and discussed within the organisation, leading to them informing service planning and delivery. Examples of this

engagement and sharing include an away day for around 200 staff in social housing focused on the aims and ambitions of the plan and a similar activity within Public Health. The same effect is now being seen in work with partners too, for example with the Health and Well-Being Plan and the Health Delivery Plan aligning with 'Mission One' which is focused on 'people's health supporting them in living their best life'.

There are further good examples of working jointly across the organisation and with partners to deliver for the people of Greenwich. Within the council, these include the contribution from several services and functions to the design and development of a new learning disability unit in the borough; joint working between children's and adult services around 'transitions'; and the fostering of apprenticeships across the organisation in support of local employment. With partners, the 'Cost of Living Summit' held in the autumn of last year led to the establishment of 'Greenwich Supports', underpinned by 12 pledges, to support those most in need. The establishment of 'Safehaven Superhubs', including in some local eateries, provides safe spaces for people to go to when they need help. The integrated health and care arrangements in the borough are impressive, including the combined teams within adult and children's services, Public Health and aspects of housing.

The council led the borough effectively through the pandemic, which saw the establishment of the 'Greenwich Community Hub' and the 'Community Champions' network of volunteers to share health and well-being information and advice. This network has been developed further since, trialling new methods of community engagement and developing projects to support digital inclusion. Partnership working is also crucial to Greenwich as a 'Borough of Sanctuary', including, in recent times, the work to support 700 Afghan refugees arriving in the UK and more than 500 from Ukraine.

Partnership relationships across health, adults, children's, Public Health and employment and skills feel particularly strong and are mutually highly valued between partners and the council. More generally, partners reflected how much they welcome



and value the continuity that exists in their relationships with key people across the organisation, resulting from the stability that can be seen in many areas within the council's workforce.

Clearly, significant challenges continue to exist in the borough, with some of those highlighted in 'Our Greenwich' including housing availability and affordability; the availability and cost of suitable business space; traffic and congestion; the quality of town centres and challenges with high streets; anti-social behaviour; knife crime; and community cohesion. Nearly 52 per cent of households in the borough are classified as being deprived in one or more of employment; education; housing; and health and disability. The borough's unemployment rate of nearly six per cent is 2.2 per cent higher than the average across Britain although broadly in line with the average for London. The gender pay gap is higher in Royal Greenwich than the average for both London and nationally. Positively, the percentage of residents qualified to NVQ level 4 or above is 15 per cent higher than the national average.

The anecdotal understanding of the needs and priorities of the borough that has been developed through the 'Our Greenwich' engagement can be supplemented with additional use of data, intelligence and insight at the corporate level, which the council recognises and is reflected in the investment that has been made in the organisation's data and analytical capacity under the digital strategy.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is a solid council delivering a wide range of services to good effect. Children's Services have been judged to be 'Good' and recent inspections in the areas of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Youth Offending highlighted positive findings.

As examples, drawn from the 'LG Inform' data and performance information system which the Local Government Association hosts on behalf of the sector, it is feasible to see the following for Greenwich when compared to the 15 other councils in its Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) 'family' grouping of similar authorities, using the most recently available data:

Where the borough of Greenwich is amongst the better performers:

- The percentage of child protection cases reviewed within required timescales
- Vacant dwellings as a percentage of all dwellings in the area
- The number of households living in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households
- The number of affordable homes delivered (gross)
- Processing of planning applications – major, minor and other
- The number of physical visits to libraries per 1,000 population

Where the borough of Greenwich is less high performing:

- Care leavers in education, employment or training
- Total households on the housing waiting list
- New business registration rate per 10,000 resident population aged 16 and above
- Residual household waste per household
- The percentage of adults who are active for 150 minutes or more per week
- The percentage classified as overweight or obese – adults, children in year 6 and children in reception year
- Conception rate per 1,000 women – at ages under 18 and under 16
- The percentage of people that received an NHS Health Check of those offered

Where performance in the borough of Greenwich is around the average:

- The proportion of 16/17 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) or their activity was not known. Data from the Department for Education looking at London reinforces this, indicating a level of 3.3% in Greenwich compared to 3.4% as an average in the capital.
- The percentage of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. Data from the Department for Education for 2021/22 indicates a level of 19.6% for Greenwich, which whilst higher than the London average of 18.4% is significantly lower than the average for England of 23.3%.
- Council tax not collected as a percentage of council tax due

- Non-domestic rates not collected as a percentage of non-domestic rates due
- Overall satisfaction of people who use adults' services for their care and support
- The time taken to process housing benefit new claims and change events
- The percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting

The following is a link to the 'Headline Report' for the Royal Borough of Greenwich in the LG Inform system:

https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/lga-research-report-headline-report-bar-charts?mod-area=E09000011&mod-group=CIPFA_Near_Neighbours&mod-type=comparisonGroupType

The 'Our Greenwich Annual Plan' is acting as a baseline against which progress in delivering the Missions can be measured. This approach provides an opportunity to re-shape performance reporting within the council to provide a more comprehensive and shared overview at the corporate level of how the organisation is delivering and progressing and, crucially, create a link to financial reporting.

Work has started to take place within the Health and Adult Services Directorate to align performance and financial reporting and we would encourage that approach to be adopted corporately. The council indicates in its Position Statement that it has been able to refresh its set of corporate performance indicators, with the key success measures underpinning each Mission now providing the basis of the corporate performance framework. Performance reporting, which currently is largely undertaken within Directorates would usefully shift to being done in a way which enables regular consideration of overall performance at Greenwich Management Team (which comprises the Chief Executive and eight Directors) or Cabinet level. Moving to more corporate and public reporting of performance by the council would be a positive next step.

The Equality and Equity Charter that the council has developed acts as a pledge for

equality across Royal Greenwich and reflects a shared “ambition to create a fairer, safer, accessible and inclusive borough where everyone feels they belong, has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive”. The Charter has now been adopted by around 250 groups and organisations in the borough.

Within the council, five Staff Networks have been established plus an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Steering Group to oversee and support delivery of the Equality and Equity Action Plan. There is passionate and strong championing, specifically from Director level, of the Steering Group and the EDI agenda generally, which is seen to have progressed significantly in the council in recent years. The steps that have been made have been driven by a number of key individuals represented in the Networks and the Steering Group. Good work is taking place that is engaging and impacting increasingly widely and this needs to continue in order to ensure greater awareness and ownership of the agenda across the organisation. This requires whole-organisation discussions, for which there seems to be a strong appetite but some of which may be challenging.

4.2 Organisational and place leadership

‘Our Greenwich’ provides a clear focus and sense of prioritisation for the council and the borough. In reading it, we felt that there was scope to supplement the challenges and objectives that it outlines with a ‘narrative of place’ for Greenwich and its communities that more fully describes the borough’s history, assets and geographies and outlines the borough into the future.

As an example, ‘Mission 7’ focuses on it becoming ‘easier, safer and greener to move around the borough and the rest of London’, which would provide an opportunity to outline some of the ambitions of the transport strategy for the borough and securing the extension of the Docklands Light Railway to Thamesmead. As another example, ‘Mission 12’ reflects ‘town centres, high streets and shopping parades being vibrant, prosperous, well-maintained places that meet the needs of local people’. A narrative might be developed around this which outlines the improvement and investments that have been made and plans for the future, with the £17m of external funding secured

for Woolwich town centre.

The narrative of place could evolve over time, for example in relation to Mission 13 which focuses on the local ‘economy attracting new high value businesses whilst strengthening its foundations’. This would outline ‘the business sectors we want to attract and grow’ once the work in determining them has been completed as one of the outcomes under Mission 13. In turn, there could be a narrative provided around how the links between these growth sectors and the skills agenda and business support offer in Greenwich are developed.

The above examples of the development of a ‘place narrative’ forms part of a higher level and more strategic consideration around the development of a place vision for the borough. Amongst the partners that we met there was a desire for the council to facilitate the development of this and, in doing so, to be ‘bold and brave’ in its ambitions for place – summarised as really seizing the ‘place leadership mantle’ for the Royal Borough.

This was the first corporate peer challenge that the council has commissioned and reflects an organisation that is beginning to ‘look outwards’ more. The political and managerial leadership deserve credit for inviting it, in order to support the ambitions the council articulates in its Position Statement around “delivering meaningful positive change” and informing “the journey we want our council to go on”. These sentiments reflect what we identified as a recognised need and shared desire at all levels of the council for the organisation to operate differently. Defining and communicating what the ambitions around a changed council mean it will look like, and determining how to get there, are key next steps for the council and bringing this about will be important in enabling the ambitions of ‘Our Greenwich’ to be fulfilled. Some of the key characteristics of this different organisation have been outlined already through the Chief Executive highlighting that “collaboration, innovation and empowerment will be crucial going forward”.

There are many aspects crucial to any organisation's success that the council indicates it is currently working on and will be emerging imminently. One example is that of the 'Rethinking Corporate Services' activity which includes:

- Rethinking finance – a widescale review of the vision, people, systems and processes central to this key support function
- Reform of the HR function and approach and development of a new workforce strategy
- Delivery of the digital strategy which has been agreed and seen £5m investment made in digital and change and improvement capability

Another example is a strategic assets review of the council's non-housing property portfolio to determine how it will meet the priorities of the Royal Borough, including supporting the move to carbon neutrality by 2030; ensuring safety and compliance; identifying capital receipts and revenue opportunities; and identifying land and housing opportunities. A further example is the review of Overview and Scrutiny which is currently taking place, with this anticipated to see the development of recommendations over the summer for implementation in the next financial year. There is a Financial Management Control Board planned to come into being and the council is adapting its approach to medium term financial planning to support more effective strategic management of the council's finances – which links to the 'Rethinking' work. The council's financial planning approach is to be aligned with service planning in order to provide greater oversight of changing demand and, as we urged earlier in this report, ideally also link to reporting on council performance. The council is also intending that a complete set of service plans is developed across the organisation by the end of the summer.

The above represent just a proportion of the council's overall change and improvement agenda, given other work taking place in such areas as adults and children's social care and housing repairs. However, they are, just by themselves, significant in terms of scale, demands they place upon people to deliver them and the

impact they will have on the way the organisation runs. They require drive, greater pace and clear accountabilities in order to be developed and implemented effectively.

4.3 Governance and culture

There are a variety of appropriate approaches that councils, Administrations and political groups adopt in order to maximise the effectiveness of joint working between elected members and officers; support councillors and political groups appropriately and effectively; aid the work of Cabinet; facilitate collective responsibility politically and corporately; and enhance involvement and engagement amongst their elected members. This includes elements such as:


- The level and nature of the officer support provided to the Leader, Cabinet and political groups
- The frequency and nature of informal meetings of Cabinet members and how interaction at that level takes places with the wider Administration
- The extent to which Cabinet members and the managerial leadership of the council meet collectively and where the emphasis of those discussions is placed
- The investment that is made in leadership development at the senior-most levels politically and managerially, including ‘top team development’ and mentoring

Key aspects of the above do not feel to be working effectively in Greenwich currently. There are some examples that it is perhaps helpful to outline:

- The council has a number of arrangements in place that bring some of the senior political and managerial leadership together. There is widespread engagement on a bi-lateral basis between Portfolio Holders and individuals within the Greenwich Management Team. The ‘Risk and Delivery’ forum is convened at intervals, bringing together the Cabinet and senior officers as appropriate to consider a key strategic issue being faced. The emerging ‘Our

Greenwich' Steering Groups have been designed to change the way in which the political and officer leadership work together. Informal Political Cabinet exists to enable consideration of reports destined for the next Cabinet meeting and brings Cabinet members into contact with members of the Greenwich Management Team as appropriate. These are all positive aspects of engagement across the political and managerial leadership but do not mirror the body that exists in many councils which sees their cabinet and corporate management team coming together informally, as complete collectives, on a regular and scheduled basis to consider key strategic issues that are starting to emerge for the council and the place it serves. As the authority embarks upon driving and implementing the ambitions of 'Our Greenwich'; the council seeks to develop a more strategic approach to its financial challenges; and the extent of the collective endeavour and resolve required to implement the transport strategy and other key ambitions becomes apparent, the importance of investing the time, effort and resource in the necessary collective engagement and endeavour across Cabinet and the Greenwich Management Team is emphasised.

- We learnt of the way in which political group meetings of the elected members within the Administration consider the drafts of reports destined for forthcoming meetings of Cabinet. This would seem to be different to the purpose and focus of the equivalent of such meetings in most councils. We also learnt of the practice that has emerged over the years of senior officers attending the Administration's political group meetings on a very regular basis – to the extent that it sounds as though this has become 'normalised'. Such practice is very much out-with the norm for local government, contrasting with the possible attendance at such a meeting by a council's chief executive, or other senior officer, on an absolutely exceptional basis. We are very clear that the practice that has emerged in Greenwich should cease.
- We gleaned that the consideration of reports at the political group meetings of the Administration is impacting the speed and efficiency of decision-making.



In any council, the earlier officers can receive a clear political steer on issues, the more effectively they are enabled to ensure the approach that is adopted on the issue concerned meets the objectives of the Administration. Shifting things to work within the Administration in Greenwich in a way that the relevant steer can be provided before any detailed work is embarked upon by officers, and certainly before the detail of reports is worked up, would impact positively on both the efficiency of the council and relationships within it. It should also enable smoother passage of draft reports through the appropriate stages of development and consideration.

- It is vital that elected members and officers have absolute clarity in their understanding of roles, responsibilities and good governance. We noted the findings of a recent internal audit probe highlighting an ‘inadvertent blurring of the boundaries between political activities and council business’ and the way this blurring has emerged through historic practices. It is absolutely right that any such blurring should be addressed. At the same time, it is important that elected members, particularly at the level of the Leader and Cabinet, are adequately supported in their roles. We gleaned that job descriptions for a small number of officers who link closely to elected members within the democratic services and governance sphere have been revised in the last couple of months in order to reduce the risk of blurring. Whilst clear demarcation in respective roles and responsibilities is vital, there are inevitably some areas of ‘grey’ when it comes to officers supporting the Leader and Cabinet members in such activity as helping to facilitate engagement across the Administration; develop policy thinking; and prepare speeches. The changes that have taken place to job descriptions have generated a nervousness amongst officers in this space around what they can and cannot provide support on, meaning they are reluctant to act until the go ahead has been provided by a more senior officer. There is also a ‘vacuum’ that has emerged as a consequence of the changes, which would seem to be leaving

the Leader and Cabinet colleagues with much less support to call upon than would be provided, absolutely appropriately, in many councils.

The above examples hopefully help to highlight ways of working and arrangements that need to be addressed urgently in order to maximise the effectiveness of joint working between elected members and officers at the senior level; support councillors and political groups appropriately and effectively; aid the work of Cabinet; facilitate collective responsibility politically and corporately; and enhance involvement and engagement amongst elected members. This is central to ensuring good governance is upheld and the Administration's ambitions for residents are realised. The LGA can assist Greenwich in exploring the types of approach that exist across different councils in order to help the authority consider revisions or adaptations to its current approaches that might be beneficial.

The council operates five Overview and Scrutiny Panels plus an over-arching Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Based on what we gleaned from our discussions with some Chairs of these and other council fora, there is strong leadership being demonstrated within the Committee and Panels. This includes joint and shared endeavour amongst the Chairs in shaping the work programme of Overview and Scrutiny and leading on key matters such as the scrutinising of Southeastern Trains in relation to their timetable changes which have impacted people and businesses in the borough. The Overview and Scrutiny Chairs that we met are focused on trying to make a difference and are demonstrating drive and determination. Some of the Chairs have had to get up to speed quickly with the role and to do so at the same time as having to adapt to becoming a councillor, having been elected for the first time just a few weeks prior.

The council indicated that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Leader have worked jointly with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to undertake a review which includes a focus on the scope of the Panels; work programme development; and the structure and flow of reports. The recommendations from this


review have been received by the council and are currently being considered. There needs to be clarity around how this work is being taken forward.

In considering how things may adapt in relation to Overview and Scrutiny, it is very positive that the relationship between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny is widely seen to be much improved now compared to recent years. This, though, is vested primarily in the Leader and Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and wider input and ownership could usefully be enabled across the collective of the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny members. This would help to, for example, further develop the thinking around work programming and increase the level of pre-scrutiny and policy development undertaken, including work that might be delivered through dedicated 'task and finish' groups.

The council's considerations around the future of Overview and Scrutiny also present an opportunity to reflect upon how the Chairs and members of the Committee and Panels generally can be supported more effectively in their roles. The elected member Induction Booklet referred to earlier highlights the support Overview and Scrutiny can expect from officers in Corporate Governance, including the undertaking of research. The sense we developed from our discussions was that the Chairs would welcome being able to draw upon the available support to a greater extent moving forward.

The local elections in May last year saw a 45 per cent turnover in the council's elected membership, which was followed by the delivery of an induction programme and the provision of an induction booklet outlining key aspects of the council and how it works. We would encourage the council to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of these in order to inform the approach for the future.

In a similar vein, we would recommend that the council considers its approach to identifying and meeting the training and development needs of elected members. This is seen to be 'ad hoc' currently, operating on what would seem to be almost a 'first come first served' basis and one which assumes that people know what their development needs are and what is available. The whole approach would benefit



from being put onto a different footing in order to ensure it supports councillors in fulfilling their roles to greatest effect. Within this, it is important that elected members maximise their participation in the training and development opportunities made available to them.

There is effective corporate officer support for the Opposition to enable them to fulfil their role, which is not something that happens as a matter of course in every council. A primary example is the support provided to them to help inform the development of an alternative budget for presentation at Full Council.

There is frustration on the part of the ward councillors we met regarding how elected member casework is progressed. This is raising questions around organisational responsiveness generally and a 'task force', chaired by the Director of Housing and Safer Communities and involving the Cabinet member and another councillor, has recently been established to probe this area. The situation with casework is compounded by a lack of clarity around the timescales on which elected members and the issues they are highlighting can reasonably be expected to be responded to by officers – ranging from acknowledgement of the receipt of an enquiry through to a final outcome being determined. Establishing clarity over realistic timescales would help to manage expectations and thus remove an element of the frustration and tension that exists.

As we outlined earlier, enhanced engagement by the council can be seen to have taken place to inform the development of 'Our Greenwich' and the same applies to the development of the borough's transport strategy. The creation and development of the council's new community engagement team at the corporate level provides the opportunity to build on this progress and amplify further the 'resident voice'. The investment that has been made seeks to aid the council in fulfilling the following 'Our Greenwich' Missions:

- Our council is better at listening to communities and communities feel they are heard
- We develop networks with communities, key partners and businesses to meet

- need and address challenges together
- We design our services around the needs of our residents

It is clear that there is a wide range of external engagement activity that is undertaken from different places across the council, including adult social care and regeneration. The philosophy around the new corporate community engagement function is one of supporting and enhancing this existing activity and our sense is that the work of the emerging team could most effectively be focused in the following areas:

- Sharing good and innovative practice – such as the ‘town centre living rooms’ utilised by the regeneration function
- Providing frameworks, guidance and tools that support engagement
- Co-ordinating engagement activity across the council to maximise opportunity and impact
- Setting and maintaining the standards to be attained in the way engagement is undertaken

Having enhanced the approach to engagement in developing key strategies such as the transport strategy, there is the opportunity for the council also now to consider the approach to engagement at the levels that are about relationships with communities and place-shaping. Councillors have a crucial role to play here, as representatives of their local communities, and this needs to be thought through and developed further in order to capitalise fully upon the insights, experience and capacity that they offer. There is scope also for the council to link in further with what partners, for example within the voluntary and community sector, are involved in in the way of engagement – which could also come within the scope of the corporate community engagement team. The activities, roles and insights that can be tapped into at the level of council services and staff deployed in localities, including housing, street scene and highways, and the opportunities and capacity they offer, also needs to be woven into

the thinking.


It is important to ensure that engagement activity which helps to shape strategy and future direction is supplemented with on-going engagement as implementation happens. A primary example here is that of the transport strategy which, having been adopted as council policy through Cabinet, now sees elements being turned into a reality. This brings things into sharp focus in localities, in a context of what the council highlights in its Position Statement as “strong and opposing views on the value and effectiveness of bold policy measures”. This highlights the crucial role ward councillors have to play and it is essential that they are provided by the council with the information and tools they require to fulfil the related leadership and engagement roles in their communities. Our sense is that the importance of the above point is demonstrated by the increasing number of potential Call-ins linked to the transport strategy that the council is currently experiencing and having to manage, many of which relate to Controlled Parking Zones.

A key plea from partners, particularly within the voluntary and community sector, was that whilst enhanced community engagement will be beneficial, a focus across the council on ‘co-design’ and ‘co-production’ with them and local communities would usefully be developed.

4.4 Financial planning and management

The council’s accounts for 2020/21 have been closed and Full Council in March this year both approved the 2021/22 accounts and considered the related External Audit report for that financial year. That report indicated that the Auditors expect to issue an unqualified audit opinion and that they have not identified any risks of significant weakness in the council’s arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. However, the process for 2021/22 has not yet formally concluded due to national technical issues in relation to external audit.

Investment is being made by the council in priority areas both externally and internally. Examples of the former that we have previously outlined include the building of social housing; the new leisure centre developments; and the move to



implement initial elements of the transport strategy. Investment in internal aspects of the council include those around digital, change and improvement and communications and engagement. In addition, the council has acted recently to address some of the structural deficits in the revenue budget, for example around children's and adults' services, although others appear to continue to exist including in relation to waste and transport. The establishment of 'Our Greenwich' and the council embarking upon developing a more strategic approach to the council's finances represents an appropriate juncture to 'take a step back' and consider opportunities for developing increased alignment between the two.

The council is proud of its track record of delivering balanced budgets over the years despite the challenges that have been faced and it has confidence in its overall financial position. Whilst it is correct that the revenue budget overall has been balanced year on year and very significant overspends have been moved away from, the council indicates in its Position Statement that "modest overspends [are] now the norm".

A 'Summer MTFS Update' is emerging and the council is currently forecasting a £26m gap in the revenue budget for next year. This comprises over £11m in pressures around funding, inflation and demand plus more than £15m previously attributed to savings around the 'Rethinking' work that remain to be determined. Even in the current year, there are unidentified revenue savings which are having to be offset by reserves.

With regard to the 'Rethinking' savings, the council is placing a lot of reliance upon them being delivered through the investment in digital yet acknowledges their "realisation may take some time" – which we see as representing a risk to the council's financial position. This example serves to highlight the importance of addressing what we gleaned as business case development for revenue investment needing to have greater rigour applied to it. People highlighted the extent to which business case development for capital investment is seen to be significantly stronger than that for revenue investment.

The council highlights in its Position Statement the need for the “identification of medium/longer term savings, in addition to short-term tactical” ones. This is positive but would benefit from being expedited and driven hard. The strategic assets review, with part of its remit being around identifying revenue opportunities, is an example. This review has been underway for two years. It needs to come to fruition soon if it is to be able to make a meaningful contribution during the budget-setting process starting soon. It is also important that the review is reflective of the ambitions and approach of ‘Our Greenwich’.

The council indicated that savings proposals – although it is not clear across which time horizon they are being considered for – were being developed for discussion by the Cabinet and Greenwich Management Team in July and August. Those given the go ahead at that stage will be worked up later in the summer for more detailed consideration in the budget-setting process in the autumn. In identifying appropriate savings opportunities and working up the detail of these, we would encourage the council to take action, wherever it may be feasible, on early implementation in order potentially to secure in-year savings and/or maximise the potential of full year savings being achieved in 2024/25.

In conclusion, whilst there may not yet be a stark situation for the council financially, we see the need for greater rigour, both corporately and across Directorates and services, in its financial planning and management in order to manage the risks of one emerging and to maximise the opportunities available to invest in council priorities.

4.5 Capacity for improvement

The council features an interesting mix between staff with tremendous length of service and significant levels of turnover. Based on the ‘Human Resources – Performance Monitoring 2021/22’ report to the Corporate Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel in March this year, the council’s overall turnover rate was 10.8% in 2021/22. The average length of service in the council was 12.3 years, although

based on those we met it would seem to be not uncommon for people to have worked for the council for 20 to 30 years or more.

The council's senior management structure has evolved over a number of years, generating a unique set of arrangements and 'spans of control'. Some Director level roles currently hold responsibilities for a slightly unusual mix of services and functions. At an appropriate point, the current set of arrangements would usefully be reviewed. With the Director of Legal and HR moving on to another role elsewhere in local government in the coming months, the opportunity for this may be emerging.

In meeting staff at a range of levels, we asked them to describe the culture of the organisation. A recurring theme was that of different cultures existing across different parts of the council – what was aptly described by one individual as approaches being very much "localised". A clear sense exists of a council that has traditionally operated on a strongly Directorate-led basis. Greater collective senior managerial leadership from the Greenwich Management Team level will be crucial to the council, as a corporate body, maximising its effectiveness going forward; bringing about the change and improvement being sought; and delivering 'Our Greenwich'.

In a context of the pride, passion and commitment that staff have, there is much that the senior managerial leadership can do to enable the greater collaboration, innovation and empowerment being sought. This includes:

- Ensuring the increased visibility of the senior managerial leadership
- Reinvigorating management forums (such as 'Corporate Senior Leaders' and 'Middle Leaders') at different levels and using them to help shape and drive the organisation
- Enabling greater staff awareness and engagement – requiring internal communications capacity that currently doesn't exist in order to lead on the enhancement of mechanisms such as the 'Ask the Leadership' staff forums, the 'Talk Greenwich' e-mails and the Intranet and develop a range of additional mechanisms that facilitate more two-way engagement

- Encouraging the drawing in and capturing of learning – enabling people to ‘know what good looks like elsewhere’ in local government through engagement with other councils and key networks across the region and nationally
- Ensuring knowledge transfer from external organisations providing support to the council – as has been seen in adults’ services in their work with the external company Newton, with the approach having been designed to develop skills and capacity internally
- Promoting the showcasing of what Greenwich does well at a national level and raising the borough’s profile – building on the example of the ‘Excellence in Enforcement’ accolade the council secured at the ‘Keep Britain Tidy’ Awards this year

The council needs to assist and support its managers more effectively by addressing the barriers and disproportionate levels of bureaucracy presented by some corporate services and approaches. It was clear from our discussions with managers that the wider organisation feels strongly that key elements of the council’s corporate infrastructure need to operate in a much more enabling way, with finance and HR particular cases in point. The need for ‘Rethinking’ corporate services has clearly been identified and this programme can act as the mechanism for delivering the necessary changes, but, as we highlighted earlier, such change and improvement has to be driven hard.

It is a two-way street, however, and establishing greater clarity around the responsibilities of managers – the ‘non-negotiables’ such as managing within budget and undertaking 1-2-1s with their staff – and holding them to account for delivering accordingly is also key to the future progress and delivery of the council. Crucial to arriving at this position is the provision of the necessary training and development to ensure that managers have the necessary clarity on what is expected and the development requirements they have in order to fulfil their roles to full effect are met.

The corporate offer around training and development, for staff generally as well as for managers, could usefully be re-considered in a context of the 'Our Greenwich' approach, whilst the emerging workforce strategy will also need to reflect the skills that the new approach requires. Importantly within all of this, the council needs to ensure officers are supported in maintaining their professional development and accreditation in key domains, such as Planning. We would also encourage the council to consider the establishment of a leadership development programme to aid both current and future leaders.

Focusing on outcomes; working in collaborative and innovative ways with communities and partners; empowering others; and challenging existing ways of working are just some of the requirements that the 'Our Greenwich' approach will make of people in the council. Within the existing workforce, some people will already be operating in these ways and others will be able naturally and easily to make the transition required. Others, however, will require support to do so – linking to the earlier point regarding the training and development and leadership development offers. Additionally, ensuring recruitment is aligned, through the workforce strategy, with the skills requirements of 'Our Greenwich', will enable the current skills and potential of the existing workforce to be supplemented to the greatest effect.

As the council's Position Statement outlines, the organisation is "at the start of the journey of rethinking our approach to corporate communications". This sits alongside the work we have already touched upon aimed at enhancing the approach to community engagement. The council seems already to be experiencing success in relation to the extent of its social media following and there is the opportunity to now build on this and enhance the effectiveness and impact of communications more generally.

In relation to social media, partners indicated they had a perception that the imagery that tends to feature most prominently in what the council does is reflective of the 'traditional' aspects of Greenwich, such as the Cutty Sark. Analysis by the council


indicates that a shift has been made here recently, aimed at better reflecting the richness of the variety and diversity of the borough.

Based on our experience, the fundamental requirement for fulfilling the needs and ambitions that exist around the council's communications is giving this function the necessary status and position within the council. Communications, if they are to be effective in any organisation, need 'to be in the room' at all of the critical junctures and the insight and input of communications professionals with the necessary background, skills and standing need to be enabled to contribute to the thinking and planning of the organisation.

Our impression is one of the council already having an external communications function that is effectively resourced and featuring staff who possess the necessary skills and creativity. What is required is the empowering of them by ensuring they have the appropriate opportunities to engage; are given a voice; and have the backing in their work of the senior leadership politically and managerially. Within this, there is also an issue around a lack of 'permanency' in the employment arrangements of the team. Crucially, the council as an organisation also needs to have a clearly established and consistent 'narrative' that it is seeking to convey.

A recurring theme through the corporate peer challenge has been that of change and improvement being required within the organisation. The scale of what the council is looking to undertake represents a very demanding agenda. The organisation can take confidence from the fact that in virtually all of the areas that change and improvement are necessary, there are good examples that can be drawn upon from across the council of where what is required is already being demonstrated.

In addition to giving confidence, this also provides the opportunity to the council to expedite progress by drawing upon these pockets of good practice and sharing the knowledge and learning that they offer. Examples include developing the joint reporting of performance and finance which is emerging in Health and Adult Services; managing change, as demonstrated with the SEND transformation; enhancing performance management of services and individuals as seen with



Parking plus what is being embarked upon in relation to the Housing Repairs function; facilitating and enabling staff growth and progression as seen in Waste; community engagement approaches in Adults and Regeneration; and improving how corporate functions operate and become more enabling, as seen with Procurement.

5. Next steps

It is recognised that the council's senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The corporate peer challenge process includes a six-month follow-up visit, which provides space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

In the meantime, Kate Herbert, Principal Adviser for the London region, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Kate is available to discuss any further support the council requires and can be reached via kate.herbert@local.gov.uk