


LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Manchester City Council

2 September 2022

Feedback





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1. Introduction

Manchester City Council (MCC) undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during December 2021. Once they received the final report, the council promptly published it with an accompanying action plan detailing how they planned to address the peer teams' recommendations.

The progress review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process, taking place around six months from when the council published the CPC action plan. It is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Update peers on the early progress made and receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns with the CPC's recommendations
- Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team was '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 Manchester City Council for welcoming this progress review and for their commitment to sector-led improvement.

2. Summary of the approach

The progress review at MCC took place in person on 2 September 2022. During the day the peer team met with nearly 30 key internal stakeholders.

The review was used as an opportunity to reflect on the progress that the council had made since the Corporate Peer Challenge, specifically against the overall recommendations the peer team made as part of that process. The council also wanted the peers to give feedback on the progress being made in the approach to neighbourhood working and the council's change programme named the 'Future Shape' of the Council'.

For the progress review, the following members of the original CPC team were

involved:

- Cllr Georgia Gould – Leader, LB Camden
- Pat Ritchie - ex Chief Executive, Newcastle City Council
- Paul Clarke – Principal Advisor, LGA

The peer team were also joined by Dan Archer – Senior Regional Advisor, LGA. Dan joined the peer team as a North West LGA team member.


The peer team had a range of meetings with key stakeholders over the course of the morning of 2 September and then fed back their findings to the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council in the afternoon. This report summarises the findings from that day.

3. Progress Review - Feedback

The council fully embraced its first Corporate Peer Challenge which took place in early December 2021. MCC's preparation for, engagement with, and learning from the CPC was very positive. The speedy publication of the report and the development of a robust action plan to address the recommendations from the report, (aspects of which are already being delivered) are evidence of this.

Since that time, MCC has regularly reviewed its progress against the action plan and welcomed engagement and support from the LGA's regional team. This report does not aim to list all of the actions locally that this has led to – which is extensive but to summarise the key points feedback to the Council by the peer team.

From both peer engagement ahead of this return visit in September 2022 and the position statement the council produced in advance of the progress review; it was again clear that significant progress had been made in several areas. A good example of this is the work the council is doing on equalities – this work has been enthused and is now more strongly focussed on the delivery of actions, with oversight from a new corporate equalities group in place. The translation of what is still currently a draft plan, into a set of tangible outcomes will be the key to



demonstrating success and impact going forward. Importantly, just 6 months or so on we could see that equalities were much better embedded in service planning, and with the council recently being awarded 'Best Inclusion and Diversity Programme/Initiative' at the Public Sector People Managers awards, this really did feel like good progress was being made.


The peer team was keen to see some of the key political leaders at the council during the progress review and had the privilege of meeting the Council's Executive Members. The peer team was struck by the vibrancy of this welcoming and engaging group, who under the leadership of Cllr Craig, are shaping and influencing the council's future plans. The focus on inclusive growth and ensuring neighbourhoods and communities across the whole of Manchester are being supported and moving forward shone through our discussions with them, as did that 'Our Manchester' mantra of working in partnership.

The focus on inclusivity, growth, and partnership referenced will especially help the council in the medium term, given the current context. The narrative surrounding the pandemic - the story of 2020-21, was now being amplified by new challenges in 2021-22 in relation to the cost-of-living crisis. Typically, the council is working closely with its partners and its communities in that 'Our Manchester' way, to help tackle this and provide support to communities and businesses, which has been the hallmark of its success.

The associated consequences for the council's budget and spending within this cost-of-living context, with issues such as inflationary costs for commissioning services or capital spending, are very significant. It is clear that dealing with these matters brings a degree of urgency and focus that are bound to limit the council's capacity.

Thankfully, the council's track record has shown it has been, and is now, a good financial steward.


The financial challenges all councils are now facing are highly significant. MCC is moving onto the 'front-foot' and is taking planned action to ameliorate the impact of the cost-of-living challenges, primarily for its residents but itself too as a council, ensuring it remains focussed on delivering the ambitions within the 'Our Manchester' strategy. Lead officers at the Council were able to share with the team, the local analysis it has done, to understand the impact at a neighbourhood level, which is



being used to target the local response to where it can have most impact in local communities.

This is building on an approach to neighbourhood working which the CPC identified as a significant strength. The recommendations in this area were focussed upon capitalising on such strengths and embracing the concept right across everything the council and its partners do. In respect of this, the team was very pleased to hear that the neighbourhood approach is now starting to be pushed further, deeper, and becoming more pervasive. Indeed, since the CPC the Council has welcomed in visitors from across Great Britain to share MCC's good practices in this area, actively contributing to wider sector support and shared learning. Furthermore, the Council's Chief Executive is now the Place-Based Lead for Health and Social Care across Manchester, which offers a great opportunity to further build on the shared sense of value and leadership that already exists across the system locally as the NHS reforms are further embedded. From those the team spoke to, officer relationships across the health and social care are positive and pragmatic having been brought closer together than ever throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There are examples of particularly strong practices from partnership working – such as in discharge-to-assess, which the Council has been able to share with others in the sector. The plans to ensure health infrastructure drives the city-wide economic regeneration and that the focus on reducing inequalities through the delivery of the Marmot action plan are absolutely the right ones and the council is again 'on the front-foot' here too. The Council is looking to learn from others also in this regard, including a planned visit to the London Borough of Camden, who will be able to share their learning from the 'Work Local' approach. Furthermore, it was good to hear that the internal leadership/sponsorship for 'Our Year', the year-long programme of activities, events, opportunities, and experiences for children and young people living in Manchester, was coming from the Neighbourhood Directorate, a clear sign of cross-council ownership and 'corporate parenting' in action.

In turn, we saw and heard about how the renewed focus and additional capacity being given, in terms of housing, is starting to bear fruit. Witness a new Housing Strategy this year with a focus on delivering 36,000 new homes by 2032, 10,000 of which are affordable. Witness too, the significant work through the pandemic, but that has carried on in respect of homelessness. Of note here was how Manchester has



successfully secured additional national funding (£10m+) through the Rough Sleeper Initiative and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme.

The council has clearly been creating the capacity in some of the key priority and challenged areas to ensure it drives improvement. Its drive for evidence and strength-based work and practice shone through the CPC, and that strong data-driven focus will continue to be at the heart of everything the council does – it is a strength the council continues to build upon. This includes having evidence of the impact, that a preventative approach has had in Adult Social Care and how this grows over time (such as through strength-based reviews). That focus on city and ward-level data mean the council knows all too well what impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on communities and means it can target its support and interventions where they can generate the best impact and value – this is so valuable.

That evidence base approach is also being applied to the council's internal change programme 'Future Shape' and underpinning the building blocks of strengthening the corporate core, digital-first, channel shift, and process efficiency. In truth, the peers saw this as good practice for an organisation that in several respects knew it needed to improve its systems and approaches to technology and change. What struck us more, was that the council could now very usefully develop a strong narrative for describing how these various component elements resonate together to modernise and transform the way the council operates. When we heard about the Better Outcomes, Better Lives Programme that drives the transformation of adult health and social care across the city, we were impressed by the way in which system partners could evidence real change and the drive for further, continuous improvement. When we heard about the time that is now being taken to work with staff to instill a culture of co-design and co-production in driving service change, we instinctively knew from the explanation that the council was really using this core approach to drive cultural change. Yet, we struggled to hear a compelling view of how all these key drivers of change coalesce together to drive fundamental change. It is something that the council should attend to, especially given the changing financial landscape and the ambitions it has.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

As a council and as a place Manchester is at the leading edge of public service reform and change. The council does not rest on its laurels, and we could clearly see it used the opportunity of the Corporate Peer Challenge in 2021 to embrace the recommendations the peer team left them with. As such, its aims for inclusive growth, its political leadership's ambition and vibrancy, and its focus on building senior officer leadership capacity in terms of neighbourhoods, housing, and performance are all bearing fruit. We could see that the various elements of the council's 'transformation' agenda are contributing towards these improvements. However, now is the time to draw the collective benefits of this into a clear and compelling overarching narrative and see how further improved outcomes and efficiencies can be driven from this.

The LGA would like to thank Manchester City Council for undertaking an LGA CPC progress review, and for the peers who took part. We would encourage the council to share the findings of this progress review; it is a testament to the fact that the council embraces challenge and sector-led improvement.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an ongoing offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice, and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Claire Hogan, LGA Principal Advisor claire.hogan@local.gov.uk is the council's main point of contact with the LGA and would be happy to discuss further support to the council, following this progress review.

