

Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Recommendation

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Statement

The council recognises the value of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge (LGA CPC) and very much welcomed the exercise conducted in September of this year. Members, Staff and Senior Managers engaged openly and honestly with the review team over five days of confidential interviews and discussion groups, and found it to be a very positive and constructive experience.

We welcome the findings of the review, which contains many positive reflections of the council and its workforce, and which are affirming to the extent that almost all of the findings are issues that the new management team, under the direction of the Mayor and new chief executive, had identified prior to the review as needing attention.

Many of the issues addressed by the report are typical of local authorities that have just undergone a change of administration. Some are legacy issues from, or are the result of, underinvestment over many years., The report is a clear endorsement of the diagnostic process and the direction of travel that this organisation has embarked upon and helps to re-enforce key messages and further strengthen the focus of the council as it starts its improvement journey.

The 18 core recommendations contained within the LGA CPC report are now the subject of a detailed action plan which the council has published early alongside the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report on the council website. It identifies all of the core recommendations and sets against them key actions that help to address the recommendations. It also sets out those actions that the council has already undertaken relevant to the recommendations or that resolve them altogether.

The council is moving at pace and has now done a significant amount to address some key concerns. Where the council has had to address long standing issues swift action has been taken to rectify the position. For example, there had been a failure to publish Annual Governance Statements. These have now been published for the missing years. There had been a failure to achieve formal sign off of multiple years of accounts. Accounts for 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 have now been concluded and agreed by the council's Audit Committee. We now compare favourably with most local authorities in this respect. The Housing Revenue Account needed a significant and long overdue strategic evaluation. Work on this is now well underway. The council now has a permanently appointed Corporate Director of Resources having had years of interim managers filling this vital role.

In other areas we have already addressed recommendations regarding additional training for Councillors and completed a Skills Audit further informing our already extensive member support programme. Significant progress is being made with the development of the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy ensuring that the council can meet its commitments in a sustainable way whilst finding £40m of efficiencies to realign resources to the Mayor's priorities. Our workforce strategy is being informed by our successful Investors In People Award where the council improved on the previous IIP review securing Silver with 11 'flecks of Gold'. The council will be aiming to secure IIP Gold next time. The council has recently approved a new partnership plan setting out a clear vision for cooperation with our key partners and a shared vision for the community and work is progressing at pace to further improve our equalities action planning and engagement, including enhancing women's representation at all levels. A comprehensive recruitment programme is well advanced to attract talented senior managers to the Borough and fill more senior vacant positions. Corporate Director and Director-level interviews for vacant posts will be completed by January 2024.

The LGA CPC action plan will be further developed as scoping exercises are completed and additional supporting actions are identified. Currently its content addresses every suggestion for review or action that the LGA CPC team raised with the council directly during the Review or that is in the text of their report. All of the resulting actions have been aligned back to the relevant core recommendation. This is a starting point and the plan will evolve to be a key transformation and improvement tool for the council going forward.

The Mayor, Management, and Staff would like to thank the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Team for taking the time to visit us, listen and observe and share their insights with us as we progress on our transformation and improvement journey.

Lutfur Rahman
Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets