

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Royal Borough of Kensington and
Chelsea

Tuesday 2 July 2026

Feedback



Corporate Peer Challenge



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1. Introduction

The council received an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (FPC) in July 2025 and then published its report with an accompanying action plan.

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

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC's recommendations and the council's CPC action plan.
- Consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'onsite' including any further support needs.
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.

The LGA would like to thank RBKC for its commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea took place primarily through an onsite visit on 2 July 2026. It focussed on the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge.

The peer team for the Progress Review:

- Cllr Kevin Bentley – LGA Senior Vice-Chairman and Colchester City Councillor
- Cllr Anthony Okereke – Leader of Royal Borough of Greenwich
- Sharon Kemp – former Chief Executive of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Megan Hermes – LGA Regional Adviser
- Kevin Kewin – LGA Peer Challenge Manager



3. Progress Review - Feedback

The Grenfell tragedy is a defining factor in the council's work and its relationship with residents. This Progress Review is not about the tragedy nor the council's response to it; those matters are examined by other inquiries and investigations. This report is about the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and how it functions today, with the impact of the Grenfell fire ever present in that context.

Since the Corporate Peer Challenge was undertaken, the council has been subject to a cyber security attack, which occurred in November 2025 and has significantly disrupted services and operations. Despite this, the peer team found that the council has made good progress across a number of areas in implementing the recommendations from the original review.

The council is developing its long-term vision for the borough through the refresh of its corporate plan. Public consultation has commenced and the council is proposing a co-designed resident pact, setting out more clearly what residents can expect from the council and what the council can expect in return.

RBKC has begun work to develop an integrated approach to place stewardship and neighbourhood working. Initial diagnostic activity has been undertaken, including an assets review. The council now needs to build on this by engaging with ward councillors and setting a timetable for decision-making that is linked to its target operating model work.

The council has published a refreshed Charter for Public Participation. Positively, staff reported feeling supported to implement the charter and the peer team heard examples of it being put into practice. However, the residents' oversight group, which has recently been established to support and monitor implementation of the charter, could be better supported to fulfil its role effectively.

The council recognises the need to accelerate its independent review of organisational culture, which will help shape its work on values and behaviours. This review, one of the council's Grenfell commitments, is behind schedule. The council's initial timeline anticipated completion by summer 2026. At the time of the Progress Review, the independent lead for this work had not yet been appointed, although the council was taking steps to progress this work.



The council has made some progress on other aspects of its organisational culture activity. The peer team heard evidence of increased cross-organisational collaboration and greater visibility of the Executive Management Team (EMT). The council has also completed a co-designed end-to-end review of complaints. In addition, staff network representatives highlighted positive engagement with senior leaders and reported that concerns are being carefully discussed.

The council has made strong progress in developing a more corporate approach to transformation, underpinned by a clear strategic framework. There remains some uncertainty, however, about whether it has the capacity and capability needed to deliver the programme at the desired pace. Greater clarity on this is expected in the autumn, when final policy and savings decisions are taken.

RBKC has made some progress in considering how key council processes can support innovation and the timely delivery of priorities. Positive developments include its progress with digital transformation. Initial steps have also been taken to streamline internal decision-making processes, but the council recognises that further work is required to translate plans into tangible outcomes.

Recommendation 1: Develop a long-term future vision for the borough

Feedback

The council is developing its long-term vision for the borough through the refresh of its corporate plan, which is due to be published in the autumn. The peer team was pleased to see its consultation underway, including asking residents for views on what they most value about the borough and how they would like it to change.

The council is proposing that the corporate plan will be underpinned by a co-designed resident pact, setting out more clearly what residents can expect from the council and what the council can expect in return. As part of this process, the council is seeking residents' views on where communities could play a greater role and where additional council support would be most beneficial.

The peer team observed a strong consensus that the new corporate plan will be sharper and more focused on a core set of priorities. Given the council's financial challenges, strong prioritisation will be more important than in previous years. The



council is projecting a budget gap of £127m by 2030/31, driven by funding reform, inflation and rising demand. Addressing this challenge is likely to require the council to review some of its policy choices and service levels. For example, the council continues to provide twice-weekly residual waste collections when most authorities have moved to less frequent arrangements, and RBKC maintains a dedicated warden officer in each ward.

It is important that the new corporate plan sets out how the council will change as an organisation alongside its vision for the borough. The council has undertaken considerable work to develop its new target operating model (TOM), with a structured focus on community support, customers, core services and the enablers of delivery. The peer team welcomed the positive engagement with staff on the TOM, including through dedicated staff sessions.

The corporate plan will also be shaped by further transformation activity and the delivery of the council's commitments following from the Grenfell tragedy, including the findings of the forthcoming review of organisational culture. There would be value in the corporate plan clearly articulating to staff, partners and residents how the organisation is changing, alongside its refreshed priorities for the borough.

Recommendation 2: Consider an integrated approach to place-stewardship and neighbourhood working

Feedback

The council has undertaken work to consider a more integrated approach to place stewardship and neighbourhood working. Initial diagnostic activity has included mapping existing RBKC place-based visions and ways of working, reviewing good practice from other councils and undertaking an assets review. The council is also considering the development of a new Place Strategy to provide a shared framework for long-term stewardship. Alongside this, the council has delivered significant programmes of work to support development at Earl's Court and Kensal Canalside.

The peer team's view is that the council now needs to build on its diagnostic and baseline activity by engaging ward councillors and establishing a clear timetable for further development and decision-making. These arrangements should align with the council's emerging target operating model and forthcoming budget decisions.



RBKC recognises that there are potential benefits to the council taking a stronger convening role but remains uncertain about how effective a formal partnership body would be. The peer team considers that there may be value in a forum that brings together organisations operating across the borough. Such an arrangement could focus on both people and place issues and take the form of a relatively informal gathering, enabling key stakeholders to build relationships and network around areas of common interest.

Recommendation 3: Use the review of the Charter for Public Participation to continue to build relationships and trust

Feedback

The council has published a refreshed Charter for Public Participation. It clearly sets out the council's approach to public participation, including when RBKC will use different methods such as consultation, co-design and co-production. Positively, a recent survey found that staff feel supported to deliver the charter and the peer team found strong awareness of it among the officers they spoke to. The peer team was also pleased to hear examples of the charter being put into practice, including recent work on the council's culture strategy and in the development of the charter itself.

Importantly, the council has created a residents' oversight group to support implementation of the charter. The group will monitor its delivery and oversee an annual report setting out progress and improvements. The council will also work with the group to co-design performance measures. The peer team was pleased to meet with members of the oversight group, who bring a diverse range of valuable experience and perspectives to this work. The peer team believes that the group could be given greater support to fulfil its role. This may involve reviewing the frequency of meetings, providing further information about RBKC and its engagement activity and offering wider assistance to ensure the council gets maximum value from residents' experiences and insights.

RBKC's most recent annual residents' survey produced generally positive results. Interviews for the next survey were being conducted during the progress review period using a face-to-face methodology. The council should benchmark these results against those of councils using the same methodological approach to



understand how its performance compares with that of its peers.

Recommendation 4: Focus on a single set of values and behaviours supported by an implementation programme and a way to measure that they are being consistently applied

Feedback

RBKC recognises it needs to move quickly on its independent review of organisation culture, which will help shape its work on values and behaviours. The council acknowledges a lack of trust in the organisation persists among some bereaved family members, survivors and residents. The review of culture was one of the council's Grenfell commitments following publication of the Inquiry's Phase 2 report in September 2024.

The review will be informed by feedback from some residents who have raised concerns about discrimination and poor service experiences. It is expected the review will examine staff and member behaviours, ways of working, systems and decision-making and identify practical recommendations for improvement. An Independent Advisory Panel of 12 residents to oversee the work has been set up and has helped to shape the design of the review.

The peer team note that the council's review of organisational culture work is behind schedule. At the time of the initial CPC (July 2025), the review lead was to be appointed by December 2025 but this was still outstanding at the time of Progress Review in July 2026. The council intends to appoint a person to lead the review in August 2026 with a final report and recommendations to be published in January 2027.

RBKC has made progress on some other aspects of its organisational culture work. The council has also recently completed a co-designed end-to-end review of complaints. The peer team also heard from staff network representatives of positive progress with the council's approach to equality and diversity with concerns being carefully discussed and strong engagement from senior leaders. Staff highlighted that the delay to the culture review need not prevent progress on other work to support organisational values and behaviours.



The initial CPC identified the benefits of increased cross-council collaboration. Given this, the peer team was pleased to note that the council's most recent staff survey found a 10 percentage point increase in the 'Teamwork and Collaboration' theme score compared with the previous year's survey. This included a significant increase in staff saying that they can easily collaborate with other teams. In addition, the peer team noted greater distributed corporate leader leadership, with Executive Management Team members prominent in the council's engagement work with staff on the new target operating model.

Recommendation 5: Articulate and deliver a more strategic and corporate approach to transformation

Feedback

The council's financial position is materially worse following the recent Local Government Finance Settlement. The council is currently forecasting a cumulative budget gap of £127 million by 2030/31, including a gap of more than £32 million in 2027/28 alone. The council will need to consider all options to close the budget gap, including the relative balance between transformation and efficiencies, service delivery policy choices and council tax increases. The council's aim is to maximise the financial impact of transformation and efficiencies while maintaining delivery of its key priorities. The impact of the work currently underway to develop savings proposals will become clearer later this year.

The government's funding assumption for RBKC is that council tax increases above the national average will play a part in managing the transition to its new funding level. The council is one of a small number of authorities that has the flexibility to increase council tax above 5% in 2027/28 and 2028/29 without the need for a referendum. The council has historically prioritised low council tax, with its current Band D charge standing at £1,133. In addition, RBKC estimates that around half of its properties will be liable for the High Value Council Tax Surcharge, sometimes referred to as the 'mansion tax', although this income will not be retained locally.

Over the past six months, the council has made significant progress in advancing its corporate transformation programme. The council's approach is underpinned by a clear strategic framework that supports a coordinated approach across digital



strategy, customer services, property, procurement, commercialisation, workforce development and service redesign.

The council has developed a productivity and demand programme to identify opportunities for savings, prevention and productivity improvements. It has also worked in partnership with an external provider to undertake a comprehensive review to develop a consistent, costed baseline catalogue of all services. In August and September, Lead Members will be presented with a series of structured, costed options relating to service levels. These will inform decisions on deliverable savings to be taken forward through the transformation programme.

The council's ability to deliver savings on the scale required is untested. RBKC is taking steps to strengthen its internal capacity and capability, including the recruitment of business analysts, but it is not yet clear whether this will be sufficient to deliver the programme at pace. The position should become clearer in the autumn, when final policy and savings decisions are taken.

The peer team also considered the council's approach to financing transformation. RBKC is taking a cost-neutral approach, with transformation implementation costs expected to be offset by savings with no net impact on the budget. While the council is permitting some flexibility in terms of phasing, with offsetting savings required over the whole MTFS period (2027/28 to 2030/31) rather than in the same financial year as the investment, it is not currently planning to use reserves to fund transformation activity. This approach may need to be kept under review as the programme progresses, particularly if it constrains the scale or pace of change.

RBKC has a range of shared services, including bi-borough arrangements with Westminster City Council (WCC) for adult social care, children's services and public health. These services are high performing: RBKC is one of a small number of councils to be rated Outstanding for both adult social care and children's services. Shared service arrangements can, however, make 'one council' transformation approaches more challenging. For example, WCC and RBKC use different digital platforms. However, both authorities are now politically aligned and share an imperative to deliver financial savings. RBKC recognises the need both to reduce costs and to maintain its high levels of performance.

Recommendation 6: Given the organisation's progress, consider how key council processes can support innovation and the timely delivery of priorities

Feedback

There has been some progress against this recommendation. A notable development has been RBKC's progress in advancing its digital transformation agenda. The council was subject to a significant cyber attack in November 2025 that has affected service delivery and operations. Since then, it has worked closely with the National Cyber Security Centre, the Metropolitan Police and specialist advisers to contain the attack and support recovery. While recovery remains ongoing, the council has sought to use the incident as an opportunity to accelerate its adoption of digital platforms and AI.

The peer team was pleased to note both the progress made and the council's commitment to using digital investment to release capacity for more relational work and support for vulnerable residents. The council has also used its digital focus to improve processes, including through a recent hackathon focused on problem-solving and service improvement. In addition, practical agile tools are now included within the learning resources available to staff.

More broadly, the council recently convened a Governance Innovation Roundtable, bringing together colleagues from across the organisation to help develop a more proportionate and risk-based approach to decision-making. Initial steps have also been taken to streamline and improve internal processes. However, the council recognises that further work is needed to translate these ambitions into sustained changes in practice.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review. We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings.

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 we would be





happy to discuss this.

Mona Sehgal (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA).