

Cabinet – 4 February 2026

Corporate peer challenge feedback visit final report

Purpose	For Information
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	The report presents the Local Government Association's (LGA) progress update report following the initial December 2024 Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) and associated action plan. The progress review is an integral part of the CPC process and took place on 6 November 2025 with all the original peer team returning after a period of significant change for local government following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper. Peer team feedback included recognition of the many achievements since the original visit and acknowledgment that the council has made good progress against the CPC recommendations. The team noted that staff continue to enjoy working at the council with comments that they feel appreciated.
Recommendation(s)	Cabinet is asked to: 1. Note the LGA's feedback report
Reasons for recommendation(s)	Recommendations support the continuous improvement focus of the corporate peer challenge, including the council's key strategic priorities within the Corporate Plan.
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Jill Cleary – Leader of the Council
Strategic Director(s)	Kate Ryan – Chief Executive

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Introduction and background

1. In December 2024 NFDC invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to carry out a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). Over three days, a team of peers from other authorities and representatives from the LGA visited the council to gather evidence, information, and views on the council's performance.
2. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive with the peer team making ten recommendations for improvement which formed the basis of a CPC action plan reported to Cabinet in March 2025.
3. Integral to the CPC process is a progress review within twelve months of the original visit. This was undertaken on 6 November 2025 by the original peer team and included 16 meetings and speaking to over 40 people to assess progress against the recommendations and approved action plan.
4. A final follow up report assessing the councils progress towards the recommendations is presented at Appendix 1.

Current context

5. The follow up review provided an opportunity to reflect on progress since the original CPC visit and to considered emerging challenges and opportunities.
6. The review was conducted against a backdrop of significant change for local government, with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Hampshire and Solent's inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme shaping the council's strategic context.
7. The report acknowledges that NFDC has engaged proactively in these discussions, with senior leadership playing leading roles, while maintaining focus on internal priorities.

Achievements and success

8. Despite the challenging environment, the peer team acknowledged many significant achievements and good progress against the

recommendations and action plan.

9. The waste-service roll out was recognised as the most significant operational transformation in the organisation's history, supported by the opening of a new depot at Hardley, the culmination of a decade long project.
10. Preparations for the forthcoming housing regulatory inspection have been robust, with improvements in tenant satisfaction, increasing by 3% from the previous year, and revisions to compliance processes.
11. The adoption of the People Strategy and the establishment of a Programme Management Office (PMO) demonstrate a commitment to organisational development and delivery assurance. The review also highlighted improvements in internal communications and staff engagement, which have included the appointment of an Employee Engagement Officer, development of a staff framework, and wellbeing initiatives such as an away space quiet room and planned all-staff celebration in summer 2026.
12. The appointment of a new Deputy Chief Executive / Chief Operating Officer was welcomed by the peer team, acknowledging greater pressures on strategic management brought by LGR.
13. Transformation remains a central strategic priority for the organisation, with the reviewed transformation strategy gaining approval in August aligned to new LGR objectives and organisation development initiatives such as the Behaviours Framework and Growth and Goals guidance recognised by the report.
14. Climate action progress was highlighted, with a review to the Climate Change and Nature Emergency Action Plan underway and £1.49m secured to upgrade homes to EPC C+ standards. The report encourages the council to remain focused in this area to achieve improved outcomes for the district. It acknowledged that the refresh of the action plan is being supported by a member task and finish group with recommendations expected in April 2026.
15. Member development has strengthened through enhanced training offers, a dedicated SharePoint resource hub, and joint EMT / Cabinet development sessions. Continued focus on officer development has also been recognised with a new cohort of managers undertaking management development training and a leadership team away day in December 2025 focusing on LGR implications.
16. The council's three-year Asset Strategy and Action Plan was approved by Cabinet in July 2025 following scrutiny by the Resources

and Transformation Panel. The CPC review welcomed this approval and the commitment to provide regular Cabinet updates and maintain alignment with strategic priorities. Peers also noted early engagement with town and parish councils and advised careful management of expectations during implementation.

17. The follow up review highlighted and confirmed that all action plan items are either completed or on track, reflecting strong progress.

Areas for continued focus

18. While the council can report positive progress, the CPC follow up review highlighted several areas for continued focus.
19. Ongoing review of the revised Corporate Plan deliverables remains critical, ensuring a renewed awareness and clarity on what is achievable within current capacity and the demands of LGR.
20. Work towards a draft corporate narrative began in May 2025 but postponed reflecting LGR developments. Peers encouraged the council to publish this corporate narrative at an appropriate time to provide a clear message for staff, members, and residents. This will be framed in the context of the new organisation following the Government's decision.
21. The review emphasised the importance of strengthening the overview and scrutiny function, enabling it to act as a constructive 'critical friend' in shaping policy and preparing for regulatory expectations, particularly the forthcoming housing inspection.
22. Finally, the council must maintain momentum on transformation and asset strategy implementation, while managing expectations and ensuring alignment with LGR objectives.
23. The final report will be published on the council's website and these observations and delivery of any remaining original actions will now be progressed through existing arrangements and governance.

Corporate plan priorities

24. The CPC Progress Review considered how the council's Corporate Plan priorities align with current capacity and the challenges of LGR.
25. In response to the recommendation to review priorities a full review of deliverables and adjusted Key Performance Indicator targets was carried out and received appropriate approval.

Options appraisal

- 26. No alternative options were considered.
- 27. The council remains committed to maintaining and building on the progress highlighted in the CPC Progress Review report, particularly within the context of LGR.

Consultation undertaken

- 28. The CPC follow-up visit primarily consisted of a series of focus groups, bringing together a broad range of council staff and elected members.
- 29. Feedback and evidence gathered through these sessions formed the basis of the final observations and recommendations from the CPC peer team.
- 30. The report is supported by EMT. The Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered and supported the report at its meeting on 22 January 2026. A member highlighted the role of scrutiny as a critical friend, and the fact that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels were not held by opposition members.

Financial and resource implications

- 31. There are none arising directly from this report although observations are made regarding capacity needed to deliver priorities and LGR and this will need to be kept under review, supported by the introduction of the PMO.

Legal implications

- 32. There are none arising directly from this report.

Risk assessment

- 33. A formal risk assessment is deemed not to be required.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

- 34. There are none arising directly from this report although the feedback report encourages the council to maintain focus in this area.

Equalities implications

- 35. Although there are no direct equalities implications from this report the CPC action plan included actions to strengthen our approach to

equalities and diversity through the introduction of equalities assessments within service planning and leadership development.

Crime and disorder implications

36. There are none arising directly from this report.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

37. There are none arising directly from this report.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review (6th November 2025)

Background Papers:

Cabinet – 2 April 2025 – Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan

Cabinet - 1 October 2025 – Corporate Peer Challenge Follow-Up Report