

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Ealing Council

Thursday 2nd July 2026

Feedback



Corporate Peer Challenge

Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Summary of the approach.....	3
3.	Progress Review - Feedback.....	4
4.	Final thoughts and next steps	14

1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during 13 – 16 May 2025 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately fourteen months after Ealing Council's original CPC, 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 recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were '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 Ealing Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at Ealing Council took place (onsite) on 2nd July 2026.

The Progress Review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, under the following theme headings:

- Connected Communities - driving transformation and managing demand
- Financial Resilience and Housing
- Place Strategy and Organisational Capacity
- Assurance, Governance and Risk

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Althea Loderick, Chief Executive of London Borough of Southwark

- Peter Marland, former Leader of Milton Keynes City Council (joined this progress review virtually).
- Cllr Emily Davey, Portfolio holder for Housing, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
- Becky McIntyre, Director of Resources and Transformation, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
- James Winterbottom, Director of Strategy and Innovation, Wigan Council
- Cindy Lowthian, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

3. Progress Review - Feedback

Summary

In response to the nine recommendations arising from the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), Ealing Council developed a RAG-rated action plan containing 30 actions. The council reports that 73 per cent of these actions have been completed, with positive progress being made against the remaining 27 per cent.

During this Progress Review, we found that the strong political and managerial leadership highlighted in the original CPC remains evident, and the council continues to be a confident, well-run organisation with a clear sense of direction, underpinned by its Connected Communities approach.

This approach focuses on how the council works with residents and communities to strengthen social connections across the borough, increasing choice and control, supporting prevention and early intervention and promoting greater independence and wellbeing. Through this, the council aims to develop and test new models of service delivery and ways of working that improve outcomes for residents.

We saw clear evidence of progress in the implementation of the CPC recommendations, alongside a strong self-awareness of the future challenges faced to maintain this positive momentum. This was particularly evident in the council's drive to embed Connected Communities (as defined above) as the overarching transformation programme for improving outcomes for residents.

The original CPC highlighted the council's strong focus on financial resilience, including reducing reliance on reserves and rebuilding them through planned budget contributions. During this Progress Review, we found this focus has continued into 2025/26, with the council closing the financial year with an overall underspend of £0.7m after the budgeted £3.5m contribution to reserves.

However, we heard how this underspend masked significant service demand challenges in adults and children's social care and homelessness services. During this Progress Review, we were encouraged to see the council's continued focus on managing these demand challenges while improving outcomes for residents and ensuring value for money.

Whilst the council has gained some additional funding through the Fair Funding Review (see below), senior political and managerial leaders demonstrated a clear commitment to using this both in support of council priorities and to ensure the council's long-term financial sustainability. We encourage the council to maintain this disciplined approach whilst continuing to recognise the importance of the Connected Communities model in helping to manage future demand pressures, improve outcomes for residents and support long-term financial sustainability.

The original CPC highlighted the need for the council to maintain a sustained focus on addressing significant housing challenges, including rising demand for temporary accommodation and improvements to landlord services following its self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) regarding potential building safety compliance issues. Peers found evidence of progress in this area which are outlined below. This includes the council securing a C2 grading from the RSH in November 2025 and work being undertaken to address the remaining areas for improvement identified by the Regulator. The council is also implementing the findings of an external homelessness review, and we encourage this work to continue.

Overall, looking ahead, we believe Ealing is well placed to build on the progress made through Connected Communities, while maintaining focus on demand pressures, housing improvement and ensuring that the fundamentals of service delivery continue to meet residents' needs.

We also believe there is an opportunity for Ealing to share its learning and emerging

evidence of its relational practice (Connected Communities) more widely, contributing to the sector's understanding of prevention, demand reduction and improved outcomes for communities.

Feedback

3.1. Connected Communities Vision, Driving Transformation and Managing Demand

This theme related to the following recommendations from the original CPC report
Recommendation 3.1- Vision for Connected Communities – moving decisively into delivery to ensure expectations, pace and drive are clear and widespread.

Recommendation 3.2 – Transformation – Connected Communities must be the core framework for the council's transformation, addressing the council's most significant operational and financial challenges.

Recommendation 3.8 – Demand Management – continued focus on the quality of practice and sustainability of key demand led services.

Since the CPC, the council has worked hard to drive forward the vision for Connected Communities and embed this work within the council's transformation framework.

Progress includes the adoption of the new Council Plan (post the May 2026 election) which sets out the council's priorities for the next four years. It is structured to reflect the three guiding values of the council, all expressed internally by the Connected Communities vision and approach: Community for all, Growth across all Seven Towns and Power in your Hands. A delivery plan is in place which outlines the priority actions for the first year of the plan.

Following the development of the new Council Plan, peers heard how the council has reviewed and refreshed transformation governance arrangements to support the delivery of improved outcomes through the Connected Communities approach. A copy of the overarching framework was shared with the peer team. We heard that, while these arrangements continue to be refined, the framework aims to ensure clear

senior officer and member oversight, effective decision-making and accountability. The framework involves the creation of a new Connected Communities Transformation Board, and cross-cutting transformation priorities have now been agreed. Work is taking place to ensure all directorate change programmes report into this new board.

Peers were particularly impressed with the council's organisational development programme which has involved 72 per cent of officers participating in immersive Connected Communities training. Staff we met with during this Progress Review fed back positively on this, particularly the opportunity to connect and build networks across different services and teams in support of the Connected Communities ethos. The council's position statement outlines other workforce initiatives taking place to further embed the approach, including work to ensure an objective related to Connected Communities is included within all staff appraisals.

It is positive that the council is now taking steps towards strengthening engagement with external partners and stakeholders to collectively define how the approach is further developed. We consider this an important area of focus. Partners reflected to us that greater awareness of Connected Communities amongst the council's workforce is starting to create ripple effects in strengthening awareness and understanding amongst partners, particularly across the VCFSE sector. Partners pointed to the positive impact of approaches such as Your Voice, Your Town in convening hyper-local connections and decision-making. There was an understanding amongst community sector partners that this is long-term change and experiences can still be variable across the broad range of council services whilst the approach deepens and spreads. There is a great deal of energy amongst partners to be fully engaged and included in the ongoing movement making of Connected Communities to ensure it transforms responsiveness and engagement and offers deeper opportunities for all communities to influence delivery of what matters to them. There is also a recognition that there are opportunities, post-election, to offer further training to councillors focussed on their community leadership roles.

As referenced in the summary above, it will also be important for the council to ensure it continues to get the basics right for residents in relation to day-to-day service delivery, while progressing its Connected Communities approach.



During this Progress Review, we were also encouraged to see the council's continued emphasis on managing demand challenges while maintaining a focus on the quality of practice and improving outcomes for residents and families. This is particularly within adult social care, children's social care and temporary accommodation. The position statement provides examples of a range of improvement and transformation initiatives, underpinned by the Connected Communities approach, which have residents at their heart and are aimed at supporting prevention and early intervention. Staff who met with us during this Progress Review spoke proudly about these initiatives. We encourage the council to continue this work to understand demand growth trends and test new ways of working, underpinned by the Connected Communities ethos.

3.2. Financial Resilience

This theme related to the following recommendation from the original CPC report.

Recommendation 3.3 – Financial Resilience – the council's 'burning platform' is the urgency to transform in line with Connected Communities as well as longer term plans to maintain financial resilience.

As outlined above, the original CPC highlighted the council's strong focus on financial resilience, including reducing reliance on reserves and rebuilding them through planned budget contributions. This approach continued into 2025/26, with the council closing the financial year with an overall underspend of £0.7m after the budgeted £3.5m contribution to reserves. But this underspend masked significant service demand challenges in adults and children's social care and homelessness services.

Again, as already referenced above, during this Progress Review, we were encouraged by the council's determination to respond to these growing demand pressures while progressing a range of initiatives designed to deliver better outcomes for residents through the Connected Communities approach.

We also met with senior political and managerial leaders who demonstrated a clear commitment to using the additional funding received through the Fair Funding Review (£60m covering the three-year period from the 2026/27 to 2028/29) strategically both in support of council priorities and to ensure the council's long-term

financial sustainability.

This focus on financial sustainability is also demonstrated through the establishment of a Medium-Term Financial Strategy Board. We heard how this brings together technical workstream leads from each directorate. Areas of focus include assets, contracts, commissioning, digital and automation. Savings of £4.5m were included in the 2026/27 budget and the board intends to both monitor progress and identify further savings.

Since the original CPC, the council has also implemented a new financial planning and analysis tool, supported by budget holder management training and tailored training for the senior leadership team. This is clearly positive progress in further embedding a culture of financial accountability and ownership across the organisation.

3.3. Housing

Recommendation 3.7 – Housing – the council must assure itself of the immediate action needed and that lines of accountability, governance, prioritisation and decision making are sharp and purposeful.

The original CPC in May 2025 highlighted the council's housing challenges in relation to both rising demand pressures for temporary accommodation and in the delivery of its landlord functions ((having self-referred to the Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH) over potential breaches of required safety standards).

In November 2025, the Regulator of Social Housing issued a C2 rating. This means that some weaknesses in delivering the required standards were identified and further improvements are needed. The council's position statement highlights progress made since the council's self-referral to the regulator to achieve the C2 grading and its commitment to working with the regulator to implement an improvement plan that addresses the remaining gaps. Peers were pleased to see the council's focus and determination in responding to these challenges and would encourage the council to continue this focus, ensuring strong governance, accountability and oversight remain in place as improvements are delivered.

Peers were encouraged to note the council's decision to commission and progress

an independent review of its homelessness service during 2025/26, providing greater insight into demand and expenditure pressures and identifying opportunities for improvement. We saw how this review identified three priority areas for action: managing demand through a focus on prevention and the front door, optimisation of the existing temporary accommodation portfolio; and accelerating delivery of the Temporary Accommodation (TA) acquisition programme. The review highlighted a need to strengthen governance and management oversight, including risk management and record keeping/reporting. The position statement shows the council is responding to this through a strengthened governance and management framework. It will be important for the council to sustain its focus on implementing the review's recommendations to help address ongoing demand and expenditure pressures within the homelessness service and to ensure improved outcomes for residents.

3.4. Place Strategy and Organisational Capacity

This theme related to the following recommendations from the original CPC report.

Recommendation 3.5 – Place Strategy – develop a Place Strategy that clearly articulates the transformative impact of Connected Communities and the council's growth ambitions.

Recommendation 3.6 – Organisational Capacity - the scale of ambition needs to be matched with the capacity and focus needed for whole system transformation. Move with pace in developing a system-wide digital transformation programme and a significant and aligned Organisational Development (OD) programme for Connected Communities.

Since the original CPC, the council has adopted a phased approach to the development of a place strategy. The first phase has been to agree a framework for delivering Connected Communities in practice across Ealing's seven towns. This was referred to as Ealing's 'Place Model' and a copy of this model was shared with the peer team. It covers a range of thematic areas of focus including connections, networks, support and early help.

The position statement shows how a range of initiatives are being developed and

tested as part of this Place Model. These include work on homelessness prevention, community engagement work in Greenford, Family First Partnerships and the Your Voice, Your Town initiative (a community-led engagement and decision-making model) and more. We understand that this test and learn phase will be used to inform the next phase of work to build a longer-term strategy for place-based working across the borough.

As referenced earlier in this report, we believe there is an opportunity for Ealing to share its learning and emerging evidence of its relational practice (Connected Communities) more widely, contributing to the sector's understanding of prevention, demand reduction and improved outcomes for communities.

Positive progress has also been made in establishing a clearer direction for the council's digital transformation programme. Since the original CPC, the council has appointed a new Assistant Director for Digital, ICT and Information and Data Management, and has developed a Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) vision and target operating model that has been agreed in principle by the Senior Leadership Team. A copy of this was shared with the peer team. Early priorities include strengthening the council's approach to data, digital, automation and the safe use of artificial intelligence (AI). Staff who met with peers spoke positively about the rollout of AI licences and the opportunities this is creating to improve productivity, streamline routine tasks and support more efficient ways of working.

There is an opportunity for Ealing, given the strength of Connected Communities, to be very purposeful about how technology, including AI and data capabilities, can be developed and implemented to enhance connections and humanity in public services - not simply as a tool to improve productivity and efficiency. The theory of change at the heart of Connected Communities demonstrates that strengthened connections and person-centred approaches reduces demand and the costs of service intervention at a greater and more sustainable level than a more traditional view of efficiency and service improvement.

Since the original CPC, positive progress has been made in implementing an organisational development programme aligned to Connected Communities. As referenced earlier, 72 per cent of staff have completed the foundational Connected

Communities training programme. We heard how the programme has been designed and delivered internally, reflecting Ealing's ways of working, and has received positive feedback.

3.5. Assurance, Governance and Risk

This theme related to the following recommendation from the original CPC report.

Recommendation 3.4 - Accountability – Embed a clearer focus on accountability (for Connected Communities) to deliver on the scale of transformation required.

As referenced in 3.1, since the original CPC, governance arrangements have been refreshed to strengthen accountability for delivering Connected Communities outcomes. It includes the establishment of a new Connected Communities Transformation Board, chaired by the council's chief executive with senior officer representation from all directorates to drive cross-cutting change and delivery. This new board is aligned to wider council governance and political oversight. This includes the council's overarching Transformation Board which holds the strategic and political overview of transformation activities and associated progress and outcomes. It also includes the MTFs Board referenced in section 3.2 of this report. We heard how the governance arrangements continue to evolve and will include the establishment of a 'Community of Practice' to bring together delivery staff working within agreed transformation workstreams.

3.6. Governance and Scrutiny

This theme includes the following recommendation from the original report.

Recommendation 3.9 – Assurance, Governance and Risk – the council should:

- Strengthen the line of sight on the performance of its trading companies and key partnerships.
- Review and strengthen the overview and scrutiny function in support of Connected Communities. Overview and scrutiny should play a key role in encouraging the conditions for the success of Connected Communities.
- Build clarity and consistency in relation to briefings and engagement with opposition groups by developing a protocol in support of this.

The council took the decision to review its overview and scrutiny procedure rules following the local election in May 2026. This work is progressing, and we understand the revised procedure rules are currently moving through the council's governance processes.

While this represents positive progress, the original CPC recommendation was broader in scope and invited the council to consider how the contribution of overview and scrutiny to the delivery of the Connected Communities agenda could be further enhanced. During the Progress Review, some members reflected that there remains scope to further develop the scrutiny function.

The post-election period now provides a timely opportunity to re-visit this CPC recommendation. Building on the procedural review, the council should consider whether a wider review of overview and scrutiny could help maximise its role in providing effective challenge, supporting continuous improvement and contributing to the successful delivery of the council's priorities, including Connected Communities.

We were pleased to see progress in relation to the council's work to strengthen the line of sight of the performance of its trading companies. It is positive that the council has scheduled regular meetings of the new share holder committee which has now met a total of six times since April 2026. Details of the committee, schedule of meetings and published papers are included on the council's website.

During the original CPC, the peer team heard from some councillors and officers that there was an opportunity to bring greater clarity and consistency to briefings and engagement with opposition groups through the development of a protocol. During this Progress Review, we learned that a protocol was developed and shared with all political groups during the summer in 2025. We also heard that it is currently being reviewed following the recent local elections.

While this represents positive progress, the councillors we met with during the Progress Review were not aware of the protocol or the work undertaken to develop it. As the post-election review work progresses, the council has an opportunity to strengthen awareness and engagement across all political groups, helping to develop a shared understanding of the protocol and maximise its effectiveness in supporting constructive political engagement and communication.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank Ealing Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

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

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 improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Mona Sehgal, LGA Principal Adviser (London) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA) and their e-mail address is mona.sehal@local.gov.uk