

Corporate Peer Challenge **Bolton Council**

25th – 28th June 2018

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Bolton has been a successful council previously in delivering good services and managing the budget. The council recognises however that now is the time to change to achieve their ambitions in the face of the deepening financial challenges facing local government.

In recent months, staff, members and partners in Bolton have responded positively to new leadership and management at the council. The new leader and chief executive in particular have been widely credited for bringing an open and engaging style which is giving staff and the 'Bolton Family' of partners optimism for the direction and pace at which Bolton can progress towards the 2030 vision.

Bolton knows itself well, it embraced the Peer Challenge process openly and inclusively with a clear ambition to become match fit to meet future challenges for the good of the borough.

The achievements in children's social care, community cohesion, town centre regeneration and adult social care (as a few examples) are a credit to the willingness and commitment of staff, members and partners. It is however the view of the peer team that the council will now need to change the way it works to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Given the size of ambition and scale of opportunity – the time to act is now.

A key challenge for the council is to ensure they have the right processes and capacity to deliver at pace. Essentially, this will mean reviewing their approach to governance to make it 'fit for purpose' and ensuring the right type of capacity is in place corporately.

The approach to governance must allow the council to deliver core services at pace, whilst enabling strategic transformation to happen effectively. This means key decision makers not being drowned in the minutiae – whilst also ensuring strong, safe and effective decision making.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is a massive opportunity for the council and it is consistently felt that Bolton has not yet benefitted from this in the way that others have. Additional support is required for the leader and chief executive to build on the positive starts they have made here and to begin realising these opportunities. The council must be clear and consistent on its story of place in order to do this. This will mean being clear on what it wants from and can offer to GM – then focussing its efforts on this.

Opportunity also exists within Bolton by utilising the willing capacity of strategic partnerships, which were some of the best the peer team had seen.

To take these partnerships to the next level, the council should agree with partners what role they each now have locally. The 'Bolton Family' is widely used as an expression of how partners locally work together. The time is now for the council to agree what their role in that family is. Partners such as the CVS credit the council for taking a parental role in Bolton, during a period in which the sector needed to grow. They acknowledge the pressure the council is now under and welcome the move to a more facilitative / enabling role, rather than the council continuing as the deliverer, almost by default. Other partners

also welcomed such a move and gave real examples where they could step forward with additional contributions to help achieve the vision they have clearly bought into. This would require a clear delivery plan setting this out with milestones and measures. The council and partners must then embed these commitments into their individual corporate plans to ensure delivery.

Partnership working at a community level is now underdeveloped. The council should address this to release community capacity in line with the 2030 vision. The council should establish what model of area based working it wishes to create and how this could be resourced. As community leaders, members have a critical role in this. Members must therefore be involved from the design stage and supported by a relevant programme of member development.

The council has delivered core services whilst managing an increasingly difficult funding position – equivalent to around £155m less since 2011. This has been achieved whilst maintaining a relatively healthy level of reserves. In this next period the financial position will require the council to make even more difficult decisions. The council will manage the impact of this better if it adopts a longer timeframe for its financial planning. This will also involve developing a reserves strategy which will include centralising reserves and using a corporate transformation approach.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will enable some 'quick wins' and practical actions. These are in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

1. **Commission a full review of governance to ensure the council's decision making is proportionate, streamlined, effective, strong and safe.**
2. **Increase and invest in corporate capacity** to enable the organisation to realise opportunities available regionally and better capitalise on capacity elsewhere in the Bolton Family of partners.
3. **Agree with partners what role the council will now take in the Bolton Family and co-produce a delivery plan for the 2030 vision in light of this.** This should include key milestones and measures to help monitor progress towards this vision. All partners should then embed their commitments to each other in their own corporate/organisational plans.
4. **Review, re-develop and invest in locality based working which has member involvement at its core.**
5. **Look at ways in which capital funding can be used to support development of the townships.**

6. **Develop a high quality and relevant organisational and member development programme.** This should be shaped by the council's role in Bolton, the Corporate Plan and the emerging organisational behaviours and values.
7. Be proud and tell the Bolton story. Proactive and consistent messaging is key to this. **Review how communications and marketing is used to help the council achieve its priorities.** Communications staff and senior management should form an approach as to how they can work together to proactively highlight success and progress at a local and borough wide level.
8. **Develop a regular corporate financial and performance monitoring report** to share with cabinet, CLT and Scrutiny on at least a quarterly basis. This should bring together the corporate finance and performance picture and support effective decision making.
9. **Continue to progress a 'Bolton First' approach to local politics to support effective and efficient decision making.** This will include the establishment of a Group Leader's Meeting as an informal opportunity for cross-party members to discuss issues for Bolton.
10. **Develop a Medium Term Financial Plan over a longer time frame and develop a reserves strategy which includes moving reserves centrally.** This will help manage the use of this money and ensure it is consistently targeted at the key priorities for Bolton.
11. **Develop a clear plan for how the council will become digital by design.** This plan should be clearly owned and lead to increasingly efficient, productive and relevant services.

3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Bolton Council were:

- **Jo Miller** (Chief Executive - Doncaster MBC).
- **Sir Steve Houghton** (Leader - Barnsley MBC).
- **Cllr Robert Light** (Kirklees MBC)
- **Stuart Reid** (Finance Director at South Tyneside MBC).
- **Jessica Crowe** (Assistant Director - Customers, Commissioning & Governance - London Borough of Sutton)

- **Wendy Lowder** (Executive Director – Communities - Barnsley MBC).
- **Erica Ballmann** (Assistant Director, Strategy & Communications at the London Borough of Haringey)
- **Dan Archer** (LGA Programme Manager)

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges cover. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to /provide feedback on:

- The way in which the council engages with the community and how it utilises the communities own capacity locally.
- The approach to decision making at the council; and,
- The capacity locally to deliver public service reform of the type and pace required to achieve the 2030 vision.

Given the close alignment of these bullets to the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges, feedback for each of these is shown under each of the relevant core components.

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 4 days onsite at Bolton, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 250 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 50 meetings as well as conducting additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 380 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 10 weeks in Bolton.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (25th - 28th June 2018). In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

Feedback

3.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

The Council has a good understanding of the strategic challenges facing Bolton. This is evidenced through the work done to arrive at the 2030 Vision, which was consulted on widely with local partners. This document identifies an ambition for Bolton to be a welcoming place where people choose to study, work and put down roots.

In order to benefit from this understanding, the council should ensure a clear relationship exists between the strategic priorities for Bolton and their own Corporate Plan. This should lead into commissioning and service plans with clear milestones and measures throughout to help track progress. Partners consistently welcomed this next step – telling the peer team that if the council *“Sticks to the vision and gives it some structure, then collectively we can make it happen (sic)”*.

Local strategic partners broadly accept the vision as being the right one and speak about the document with confidence and understanding when asked. The council is taking steps to engage more widely which has been welcomed by partners. This work should continue so that a robust delivery plan can be arrived at which utilises the capacity wherever it exists in the system.

The team found some inconsistencies amongst staff internally as to how familiar they were with the 2030 Vision. The steps being taken to communicate this internally should continue to ensure all staff can help move the organisation towards the ambitious 2030 vision. Equally, residents do not have a consistent understanding of the vision and what this means for Bolton. Residents spoken to by the peer team felt that *“We have a lot to say, a lot to contribute – but no means to do it”*. This is an opportunity the council should look to capitalise on.

The CVS and VCS organisations locally have a strong, live knowledge of issues at a community level. They also generally welcomed the way in which the council worked with them – preferring to refer to this positively as *“a relationship more than a partnership”*. They believe opportunity exists by involving them earlier – at the discussion, rather than decision point – to share knowledge and build creative and effective local solutions.

By their own admission the council feel like they are on a journey in how they bring together information to inform commissioning with the self-assessment highlighting plans to develop an integrated data hub locally. The peer team endorse this move but would ask the council that in doing this they do not become data heavy whilst intelligence poor. How the council co-produces and communicates relevant intelligence around the partnership locally has an important role in delivering the vision, as well as supporting the VCS to access funding from sources elsewhere – bringing more additional capacity into Bolton.

3.2 Leadership of Place

In Bolton, strategic partnership working is strong and was seen by some members of the peer team as the best they had seen. This sentiment was also echoed by partners working in Bolton who work in other council areas. Big strategic events and programmes had been delivered and continued to be. Examples of which included town centre regeneration, the development of the university offer, the Winter Festival and Food and Drink festival.

Key to these strategic partnerships is an identity referred to as the 'Bolton Family'. Both council and partner representatives talked about this concept freely and confidently as a means of describing how they work together. It is the view of the peer team and a number of local partners that given the pressures on the council and the scale of their ambition, the council should now consider what their role in that family needs to be. Partners described the council as having taken an understandable paternalistic role in previous years, but now welcomed a change to a more enabling/facilitative role. This will require a move to consistently co-producing and co-designing solutions with partners and communities involving members appropriately as community leaders.

The above transition is more natural for the council due to the willing support it receives from partners, the strength of the local CVS and the relationships the council has built with the local faith sector. Local faith leaders in Bolton continue to play an important role and the council should continue to engage with them such is the importance of their contribution locally.

Partners welcome the open and engaging approach that new leadership has brought to partnership working in Bolton during the last six months. Some partners question the resilience of partnership working, at an officer to officer level and stated how it could sometimes be difficult to access the right people in the council. Given all of the above, the council may wish to embed the prioritisation of partnership working into an emerging staff behavioural framework. This would help bring resilience to the way in which the council engages with partners – making this a consistent approach that involves relevant partners at the right stage in an open and engaging style. The amount of willing capacity available to the council means that working in tandem with partners in this way would bring significant benefits to the Bolton Family in reaching the 2030 vision.

Once arrived at, the council should use this to inform the actions it will take in delivering the 2030 vision and those it will look to others to lead. These should be set out in a clear delivery plan with relevant milestones and measures to ensure progress is kept on track. Each partner including the council must then ensure these actions are built into their organisational or corporate plans and resourced accordingly.

On a number of occasions during the peer review, the peer team were impressed by the strength of wider social value present in the work of the VCS and other strategic partners. The step the council is now taking to develop a Social Value Framework is therefore an important one. Based on the examples shared with the

peer team from organisations like Bolton at Home, building a thorough understanding of what partners can do – not what we think partners do - is an important step. This particular organisation is holding an event in September to help develop this understanding which presents a further quick win locally.

The need to be clear on what the council wants from and will do for partners applies equally to how the council represents Bolton as a place leader at the GMCA.

A consistent message back to the peer team was that the council has not yet formed a clear message about what their big asks of and offers to GM are. Partners in GM have seen a welcomed step up in Bolton's presence during GM discussions in the last six months with increased challenge coming back to the combined authority from Bolton. Now is the time to bring clarity on what Bolton wants from this and focus efforts around this. Another important step towards harnessing more from GMCA is in accelerating the integration of health and social care. Key to making this happen is effective place leadership. The council should ensure that system leaders across the partnership have the space to have the right level of discussions around integration to bring about the pace required.

Whilst partnership working at a strategic level has proven to be strong, at a local level this is now underdeveloped. There is a willing commitment at a local level to do more but this would require a review of the way in which area based working currently operates. The council should re-establish area based working which will require resourcing. As community leaders, members must have a central role from the design stage, supported by an effective ongoing programme of member development. Communicating this alongside the vision for Bolton – and critically, what this means at an individual township level, would help to get this consistent message across and align community level capacity to the ambitions for Bolton.

Whilst the move to prioritise investment in the town centre is acknowledged as an important step for Bolton – and seen as a big step forward by GM partners - this should not be done at the detriment of local townships. The council should therefore consider how through capital investment it could support its townships to thrive economically thereby ensuring inclusive growth for all.

3.3 Organisational leadership and governance

Staff, members, strategic partners and GM partners consistently spoke highly of the new leadership and management of the council as bringing a *“breath of fresh air”*. This positive change has been attributed in particular to the open and engaging style now in place which is seen by the peer team as the right approach for Bolton going forward. Trade Unions in Bolton have also welcomed the new approach thus far and can see change is coming. They welcome being more engaged in future decision making.

The changes to a new cabinet structure have also been welcomed in line with this style and it is now a challenge from the peer team that this should continue. As

mentioned elsewhere, within core services the council has managed to achieve a lot in recent years but at this crucial point the challenges of tomorrow are very different. The challenges of tomorrow require a governance approach which is fit for purpose and capacity in key corporate functions. Whether this is in achieving the 2030 vision, bringing about effective and safe transformation, or in attracting additional capacity from elsewhere.

Staff and senior management spoke with real passion for Bolton the place and communicated a sense of *“getting our mojo back”*. Alongside this enthusiasm however was a frustration that the governance arrangements (including scheme of delegation) in place locally created delay and drained capacity. This is impacting on the way the Council delivers core business and is restricting progress on transformation work.

The team observed evidence of fairly routine decisions entrusted to officers in most councils being taken at member meetings. This results in officers producing reports that would not be expected of them elsewhere. This leads to a disproportionate amount of senior officer capacity being spent on routine business and also means that members receive a level of information on the minutiae. This is time which would be much better spent engaging with the key strategic issues and opportunities for Bolton. The team have also observed that this was leading to members being involved in decision making on individual licensing issues which is considered poor practice. This was communicated to the council during the peer review, who have identified work happening at a GM level which will now bring this particular issue in line with elsewhere and help ensure decision making is both strong and safe.

The peer team recommend that the council commissions a full governance review to ensure the council is supported by effective, streamlined, strong and safe processes. This will help the council act at the pace required to both meet the vision for Bolton and ensure core business continues to be delivered. Critical to this will be ensuring that the cabinet, senior management team, scrutiny and all other members receive an appropriate corporate performance and financial dashboard on a regular (at least quarterly) basis. This will support all members to bring effective challenge to decision making in light of the wider corporate picture. This would then help the local scrutiny arrangements become more challenging and more effective – further enabling good governance. To achieve the above the council should commission a governance review that is Member led and with independent advice. This will seek to ensure:

- Member and officer roles are being appropriately fulfilled.
- Decision making is appropriate, streamlined, inclusive and timely.
- Members have the right information to enable effective decision making, scrutiny and challenge.
- Schemes of delegation are fit for purpose.
- The council has a framework for standards, behaviours and values.
- Member scrutiny is reviewed and strengthened.

All of the above requires a member development programme to help members play an increasingly effective and challenging role as part of #TeamBolton. This programme should include universal aspects as well as specialist aspects for those in senior positions. Training for staff and officers should have a line of sight with the vision for Bolton and the clear roles the council takes in Bolton and GM.

The role the council now has in GM presents a significant opportunity. The GMCA have seen a step up in involvement in the CA under the new leadership but the demands of engaging with Greater Manchester are significant. It is the view of the peer team that the scale of opportunity available means that the council must now structure support under the chief executive and leader to cope with these demands. This should be structured to reflect that engagement with the GMCA in these roles *“is now part of the day job and not an addition to it”*.

Members have broadly welcomed the approach of the new leader and would like to see the engaging style this has brought taken further. The council should consider additional changes to the governance arrangements that can be made to further this way of working. The leader was credited during the review for the changes to cabinet arrangements as well as the regular scheduling of policy development groups as an informal discussion for members across parties to engage in policy development at the discussion stage. It is the view of the peer team that these are important steps and with the latter, this should take the form for which it is valued – an informal, open discussion not unnecessarily weighed down by formal bureaucracy.

The leader and a number of members across political groups speak favourably about a *“Bolton first, politics second”* approach which had previously been in place. To support effective decision making, members across parties welcomed getting back to this. This would help members across parties to find their common ground and listen to their differences. This is not about reducing public political debate, but about gaining a collective understanding of the key issues. As such a common set of values and principles may be required which all members work to. A symbol of a return to “Bolton first” may be the establishment of a regular, informal group leader’s discussion meeting where key strategic issues can be considered. This would require trust on all sides but could help a great deal in ensuring cross party discussions on strategic issues has taken place. This would support a decision making process which is considered, effective and streamlined.

To better support effective corporate working and enable the council to move more quickly on the big opportunities for Bolton, additional investment may be required. The benefits of genuine cross thematic transformation as well as the potential for drawing in capacity from the Bolton Family and from GM make this change worthwhile. Corporate capacity should be strengthened in order to:

- Ensure safe and sound governance;
- Achieve key priorities;
- Maximise impact in GM;
- Support effective managerial leadership; and,
- Support effective political leadership across all groups.

3.4 Financial planning and viability

Since 2011 the council has had to find savings and efficiencies of around £155m due to the combination of increased demand on services, cost pressures and funding cuts. Whilst the council has engaged with the 100% business rates retention pilot and has raised Council Tax to take in the additional 3% for adult social care, the budget challenge remains substantial. A significant proportion of savings have come from the need to replace central government funding which reduced from £147m in 2011/12 to £43m in 2017/18.

In 2017/18 actual spend was £223.7m with an approach taken in the 2017/19 budget strategy to utilise reserves on a one-off basis to manage a large part of the savings requirements. The council has a relatively healthy level of reserves when compared to similar councils elsewhere. However, the council recognises that this means that more difficult decisions will be required in future years. In the following financial year (2019/20) the council expects to require savings of up to £30m – or 13% of the controllable revenue budget. The council acknowledge the scale of this challenge and have committed to steps in the draft Corporate Plan to develop appropriate savings options to meet this challenge, avoiding an ongoing reliance on reserves.

The council maintains an extensive range of departmental reserves as well as those held corporately. The high level of departmental reserves compared to those held corporately is unusual within the sector. A greater proportion of reserves should be held and applied corporately in line with practice elsewhere in the sector. This encourages additional challenge in how reserves are used, presents a more transparent picture of financial performance and also allows for reserves to be targeted towards the key priorities for the council.

It is the view of the peer team that all financial planning must align to the 2030 vision and the priorities in a corporate plan. This will ensure capacity and investment is targeted towards areas of strategic importance. It is a positive that the council has traditionally planned beyond a one year financial horizon. However, longer term planning covering a period up to five years will allow for difficult decisions to be considered with effective implementation plans. Whilst financial forecasting over a longer period is challenging, this will help deliver realistic and robust savings options and minimise where possible some of the potentially negative impacts on local communities.

Aligning a Medium Term Financial Plan to the corporate priorities will help clearly map this position out. This should be underpinned by a detailed transformation plan to ensure the necessary rigour is in place to ensure savings and priorities are achieved in a timely way and avoiding potential drift. Performance of this should then be monitored and reported to members including cabinet and scrutiny on a quarterly basis. Financial and performance reporting should be joined together and include both capital and revenue spend. This should be reported to all members to further aid openness and transparency.

In any environment a robust and appropriate approach to risk management is essential and during a period of change this is even more important. Officers who spoke with the peer team identified that this had been in place previously but that recently this had work had stopped and/or stalled. This should be re-instated with a view taken for whether it gives timely reassurance to cabinet and audit committee over how effectively the council is managing risks.

Elsewhere in this report the need for additional capacity centrally has been highlighted. This additional central capacity should also be able to identify other funding available to the council on a regional or national basis which can support the council and partners in achieving the vision. Examples were shared with the peer team during the review of funding opportunities which the council has been unable to capitalise on in the past. A slicker governance approach alongside more capacity centrally would allow the council to access these opportunities in future. Whilst this may take some investment, the potential scale of return warrants such an approach.

3.5 Capacity to deliver

Like many councils, the budget reductions quoted above have led to a significant reduction in staff numbers in recent years and subsequently a reshaping of the workforce. There are now around 1,600 fewer posts at the council than was the case in 2011. As the council prioritised the protection of key frontline services, this has had a disproportionate effect on corporate and back officer function which have taken a much bigger reduction in staff numbers than elsewhere.

In light of this, a number of the council's achievements over this period are even more impressive – including a 'good' children's services inspection outcome, high quality adult care homes as well as the support for community cohesion. The team gained a clear sense that these would not have been achieved without the willingness, commitment and passion for the area shared by its workforce, partners and members. The workforce in particular gave a sense of feeling empowered to bring about change. The main challenge from the peer team here is harnessing this enthusiasm – as well as that of partners - in meeting Bolton's ambitious plans. Current capacity will not sufficiently deliver change or meet the Council's ambitions. Investment and reprioritisation are essential. Internally staff also highlighted a strong desire for the senior management restructure to be completed at pace to bring permanence and further confidence that key personnel were committed to the journey they were on together.

One common challenge that came up during the review was a question about Bolton's story of place. This was how the council as an effective place leader was effectively communicating the story about Bolton – how it got to here, where Bolton is heading and what this looks like. This is an important narrative for sharing with all stakeholders locally – as well as those in GM and should fit with the 2030 vision. At a GM level this should lead to a consistent and clearly communicated set of asks and offers to GM, thereby increasing the chances of success.

The team clearly observed a marketing function which had been successful in promoting big town centre based events such as the food and drink festival, winter festival and Ironman UK. This left a question about how capacity could be brought to promoting the events taking place in the individual townships – as well as in communicating how the vision for 2030 relates to each of these localities in practical terms. Partners in Bolton were clear on how highly they valued the council and could see the work it was doing – but this did not necessarily get the attention of the press locally.

The council should further support the review of its communications function to ensure that an appropriate story of place can be developed which is communicated effectively. This review should also identify how the organisation can be more proactive with multiple communications channels in getting across the positive work of the council and partnership both at a community, borough wide and regional level. This will help the council both in its discussions in GM and in attracting and targeting community capacity towards the 2030 vision.

Staff spoke with pride at the way in which the recent “Good” OFSTED outcome had been communicated and celebrated internally. Staff had been invited to full council for the item, as well as had thank you cards which had also gone out to staff and foster carers. Staff felt clearly valued by this which has no doubt further fuelled the enthusiasm the council has already benefited from to date. The council may wish to think about how it builds on this when celebrating and highlighting other achievements.

Whilst the council has transformative ambitions around digitalisation and customer interactions in line with much of the sector, a clearer message around where this sits within the corporate priorities is required. The council should also continue to learn the lessons of how other councils regionally have advanced their digital journey. Examples of this included the potential in the contact centre for channel shift, and in social care from the use of mobile technology. Both examples had yet to advance significantly or had only recently begun doing so.

During the peer review, progress was demonstrated on the integration of commissioning between health and social care. The role of strategic commissioning and how this is done should continue to be reviewed to find the best model to suit Bolton. Feedback from some providers and partners felt that this was a little muddled at times and could be better joined up. This would help capitalise on opportunities for social value and more connected thinking between the traditionally place based and people based disciplines. This would also help further avoid potentially negative unintended consequences of commissioning decisions.

Lastly, the passion, strength and willingness of the workforce left a lasting impression on the peer team and is a real asset for the council. In this next phase for Bolton, the challenges they face will be different to those they have faced before and as such will require a suitable organisational workforce development plan that takes staff on this journey. This will allow the council to continue to benefit from the passion and capability of #TeamBolton on their journey to 2030.

4. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate the 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.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Claire Hogan, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). Her contact details are Claire.hogan@local.gov.uk.

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

Follow up visit

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.

Next Corporate Peer Challenge

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the Council will commission their next Peer Challenge before June 2023.