

Corporate Peer Challenge **London Borough of Camden**

20-22 January 2020

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Camden is a very special place, with a strong, individual and rebellious identity. This attracts brilliant people; the quality of council staff and councillors, partners, local institutions and organisations is exceptional. The peer team found huge amounts of ambition, goodwill and talent within the organisation and a dedication from all for the council to succeed and continue to strive for social justice and delivering for residents. The council has developed an ambitious vision for 2025 that captures the heart and soul of what the borough represents and stands for.

The council, both politically and managerially, has shown widespread leadership through challenging times. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive are consistently cited by staff, partners and residents as providing visible and accessible leadership to the organisation. In the face of financial challenges, the council has continued to deliver good services for its residents at the same time as taking bold steps to shape and improve Camden as a place. Despite this outstanding leadership, Camden still faces substantial demographic and economic challenges that will impact on the ability of the council to successfully deliver Camden 2025 and beyond. These include significant child poverty, large health inequalities and a lack of sufficient affordable housing for residents.

The council is pursuing innovative approaches to citizen participation on a widespread scale, including Citizens' Assemblies, co-design and co-production, community champions, and sharing residents' voices across the borough. The most prominent of these are the Citizens' Assemblies which have begun to ensure that priorities are genuinely shaped collaboratively with communities across several areas. A lot of energy has been created amongst officers and elected members to take this new approach and look for ways to embed this further as a model for the council. The council needs to ensure that it matches this energy with appropriate capacity to ensure learning from new approaches is understood thoroughly and that scaling up is deliverable, and that the residents' voice continues to be heard.

The Community Investment Programme (CIP) has provided excellent results since its launch in 2010 and is ambitious in its efforts to deliver new homes, schools and community buildings through a 15-year, self-funded model underpinned by the council. However, the CIP is not a single solution for the complex housing challenges that the council faces and the scale of the challenge is so significant that CIP alone will not solve the borough's housing problems. In order to meet these challenges, the council should consider how it can be innovative with partners who are like-minded in their approach to place-shaping.

Innovation is actively encouraged at all levels and is a core component of how Camden Council operates, and energy and enthusiasm are evident from councillors and officers. Whilst the council is taking innovative approaches to service delivery and solving new challenges, it should ensure that credible evaluation and measurement is more consistently built into the process – not just for outcomes but also for the approaches taken. This will help the council to prioritise without losing the enormous amount of energy that has been created for taking new approaches to tackling challenges.

As Camden 2025 moves from planning to implementation the council needs to ensure that partners, including organisations and communities, understand the priorities for delivery, and continue to feel connected and involved in the process of shaping delivery. Further consideration should be given to exploring how all staff can participate and be involved, particularly those delivering day to day services and where their scope or remit for innovation is more limited. The approach also needs to include how the council will align its financial strategy to deliver the outcomes it is intending to achieve in its plans. A balancing act needs to be developed that ensures the council continues to learn from what works and what doesn't and has a focus on sustaining impact without stifling the innovation, energy and enthusiasm for which Camden is known and is rightly proud of.

The feedback given in this report is in the context of a high performing, high added value council that is well placed to deliver more, and which has much to share with its peers.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, 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:

- a) **Continue being ambitious, innovative and authentically Camden – because it's working.** Camden the council and the place have a strong history of being unorthodox and challenging the status quo, and this is evident in the council's delivery and its plans. The approach provides flexibility and reflects the dynamism and eclectic nature of Camden the place
- b) **Use next year's council business planning process to highlight and target priorities for Camden 2025 delivery.** Although the vision is broadly understood the current lack of detail needs to be addressed so everyone involved can work towards delivery, and as part of that, core priorities are clearly articulated internally and with residents and partners. This will help stakeholders to understand what will be delivered and their role(s) going forward
- c) **Accelerate work on the development of the council's outcome and performance framework to shape the delivery of Camden 2025 and its specific workstreams, ensuring to connect this to budget and service delivery.** There is some exciting work underway and due to conclude later in 2020, which needs completion to support the delivery of the vision, and which needs to link to financial performance
- d) **Use agile techniques to reassess the end user experience of council services (e.g. businesses, members and residents), including Contact Camden and digital services.** Although there are some exciting plans, ensure that the council continues to do some of the basic services well, for example enabling small businesses to easily engage with day to day transactions

- e) **Convene health and care partners to chart next steps in tackling health inequalities as part of Camden 2025, alongside the 2020 Health and Wellbeing Citizens' Assembly.** Health inequalities are significant across the borough. With major national and international health organisations on the doorstep, the council could explore different ways that these stakeholders could add value to its future and drive benefits for people and place
- f) **Building on existing approaches, consider how to make it easier for key stakeholders to continue to have strategic conversations with the council: consider introducing key account management for the top 100 partners, led from the Chief Executive's office.** Taking a more strategic step will help partners and the council to engage more on the big strategic issues and provide further clarity on what the council is asking of its partners
- g) **Seek out like-minded councils and partners to develop radical solutions and devolution powers on social housing and climate change.** The council is very well placed to apply its innovative working style to work with others and find some new solutions which would benefit its residents and add broader value across the local government family. This might mean exploring alliances with as yet unthought of partners, but which could bring about step change
- h) **The council is well-placed to step up to take a London-wide and national role to augment Camden 2025, and advocate for new powers, more flexibility and better solutions for large scale and difficult issues facing local authorities and their partners.** The council is at the cutting edge of innovation and could play a more visible role in developing answers to the wicked issues facing the public sector

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 LB Camden were:

- Tom Riordan, Chief Executive, Leeds City Council
- Mayor Philip Glanville, London Borough of Hackney
- Carol Culley, Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, Manchester City Council
- Deirdra Armsby, Director of Place Shaping and Town Planning, Westminster City Council
- Steve Skelton, Director of Strategy and Innovation, Government of Jersey
- Tom Hook, Assistant Director, Planning, Performance and Engagement, East Sussex County Council

- Monica Needs, Head of Engagement and Participation, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
- Judith Hurcombe, Programme Manager, Local Government Association
- John Tench, Programme Manager, Local Government Association

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 consider/review/provide feedback on:

6. Camden 2025: Are the plans making the most of community and material assets in the borough to maximise the benefits for communities over the next five years?
7. Is Camden's participation model effective in being inclusive and innovative in its approach to engaging with citizens on issues that matter to them and where, together, they can make a difference?

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, including short videos focusing on stakeholder views, in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days onsite at Camden, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 170 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 45 meetings, visits to key sites in the area, a walking tour of Euston and additional research and reading.
- Attended Full Council and conducted a range of workshops with external partners and stakeholders
- Collectively spent more than 350 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 9 weeks in Camden.

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 (20 – 22 January 2020). 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.

4. Feedback

4.1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting

Throughout the peer challenge the peer team consistently found an excellent understanding of community need and challenges in Camden that could be readily and accurately articulated by both officers and elected members. Particularly striking is how integral elected members' community knowledge is to setting priorities and outcomes. The borough faces some significant demographic and economic challenges, with 43% of children living in deprived households, health inequalities and high levels of mortality linked to pollution; challenges such as these are understood and readily articulated by members and officers.

There is extensive use of data and intelligence which also inform priorities and outcomes. Two examples that stood out were the sophisticated mapping techniques used to understand the extent of the climate challenges that the borough faces, which drill down to very specific localities; and the intelligence used as part of the council's inclusive economy work to understand which Camden residents are furthest from the labour market. The council should ensure that it is learning from leading practice across the organisation to

ensure that the same level of sophistication is applied to other services, and projects being delivered as part of Camden 2025.

Building on this, the council can evidence a multi-faceted approach which uses data, intelligence and qualitative inputs from community participation to develop outcomes. One example is how the council used intelligence, the Citizens' Assembly and the Climate Action Board to establish its priorities under the announced Climate Emergency. A 'think and do' pop up community space on Kentish Town Road ran a six-week programme of events to encourage residents to develop action for climate change. New initiatives planned for 2020 include developing a data sharing charter with partners, and a new wellbeing index for Camden. The latter is intended to provide more granular detail about the impact of Our Camden Plan and Camden 2025.

The challenges and opportunities that face Camden are understood internally and externally to the extent that the peer team heard much feedback from officers actively seeking out careers at the council to be part of the solution. A consistent message from staff is that they actively choose to work at Camden Council rather than in other local authorities, irrespective of whether they live within the borough's boundary.

However, despite the clarity of the challenges faced and the energy that the leadership injects into solving these, staff and partners are not all clear on what the priorities are in the year ahead. The peer team recognises that many of the priorities for Camden 2025 are still in development as part of sub-strategies. Some of this lack of clarity can be linked to the extensive track record of innovation, which necessarily sees many initiatives begin, and which has brought benefits to the council: at the same time broad based innovation can make it harder to present a clear narrative about priorities to partners. Taking stock now and providing some clarity about core principles, developing a clear focus on what matters the most, and then communicating this with all relevant staff and partners is needed to support the next development phase of Camden 2025. In turn this will support the start of effective service planning and clarity about delivery. Equally, looking for ways to incubate and scale-up innovations within mainstream funded services could simplify the landscape and accompanying narrative, and provide a route to sustaining new ways of working.

Although the borough experienced considerable economic growth in the last decade, how to get the best out of that growth for all residents is a recurring theme for the council, especially when in some parts of the borough – for example Gloucester Avenue and Juniper Crescent – deprivation and wealth coexist almost side by side. At the time of the peer challenge the redevelopment around the council's main office at St Pancras Square, Euston and the Knowledge Quarter was widely talked about. Going forward consideration should be given to need and aspiration for the whole borough. Some residents also reflected that whilst it was positive that addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged is a clear council priority, care should be taken to continue to engage with those who are not the most disadvantaged, but still have needs to be addressed.

4.2. Leadership of Place

Camden has mature and visible political and managerial leadership which is forged by a sense of shared purpose and values. Strong leadership was evidenced in the borough in its response to the evacuation on the Chalcots estate due to fire safety concerns following the Grenfell Tragedy in 2017; this was a seminal moment for the council, which took quick and decisive action in the best interests of residents. The Grenfell Inquiry describes the evacuation of the estate as probably the largest evacuation in the country since World War II and cites the availability and presence of senior councillors (including the Leader) and senior officers to meet residents face to face as receiving 'almost universal praise'.

The peer team was struck by the engagement, knowledge, strategic focus and inclusive leadership of frontline councillors, who are playing a key role in ensuring that communities are included in the direction of travel of the council and its initiatives. There is both strength and depth in the understanding and actions of councillors across the patch. This was particularly seen in the council's role in responding to HS2, where it has stepped up and campaigned with the community to ensure that genuine social gain is built into the plans being developed in Euston, as well as securing nearly 150 commitments to reduce the impact of HS2 on Camden on issues such as noise and insulation packages for properties affected during the construction stage.

The council, through both political and managerial leadership, engages proactively with partners, for example during 2018 through the Camden Youth Safety Taskforce, co-chaired by Keir Starmer MP and the Cabinet Member for Young People and Cohesion. Partners recognise the strong leadership that comes from the council and are enthused by the potential of even closer working in the future. This willingness to work with the council should be harnessed. The peer team feels that there are massive opportunities for the council to use its convening power to bring partners together more across the third sector, health and businesses and to affirm the core contribution these partners bring in delivering Camden 2025.

Camden Learning is a joint venture company between local schools and the council, with the aim of driving school improvement. It is an excellent example of how the council uses its convening powers to bring about improvement. The venture provides a range of services including traded services to schools, and coordinates the supply of pupil places, and the recruitment and training of teachers. To date 98% of the schools within the partnership are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. The approach has significant impact with Camden ranking in the top 9 nationally for all measures at Key Stage 2 and at the end of Key Stage 4 disadvantaged pupils are achieving standard passes in English and maths at higher levels than the London and national averages.

The strength of the leadership in Camden, alongside respect and trust from partners, provides it with a huge opportunity to play a greater convening role in the borough. to leverage capacity and skills to solve local challenges, building on existing initiatives such as the Strategic Partnership Fund 2017-2024 which supports voluntary sector organisations to flex on changing patterns of need.

In order to do this the council needs to ensure that it has the capacity to engage where partners offer to act, and a clear approach to enable partners to understand what role they can play and what outcomes they are contributing towards achieving. Developing a key account management approach which enables strategic conversations and relationships to be developed further, will help partners and other stakeholders to engage with the council consistently, and enable the council to better understand their needs and aspirations too. Exploring how Leeds City Council undertakes this would be beneficial for Camden.

4.3. Organisational leadership and governance

The working relationship between the Leader and Chief Executive and the leadership and enthusiasm they bring is readily and consistently cited as a positive by internal and external stakeholders, and their visibility and passion for improvement is evident. Cabinet Members know their portfolios and communities in depth and reflect the complexities of their roles well. They are also able to challenge each other constructively and hold each other to account. They too reflect pride and passion for Camden and its achievements

Working relationships between councillors are also good and even if there are differences of opinion on what policies should or could be, members from across the groups engage constructively and share a common and authentic purpose of wanting the best for their residents. This is aided by several informal, cross-party meetings which enable members to discuss issues outside of formal decision-making structures, for example the Democratic Review Group and the Town Hall Refurbishment Steering Group. Working relationships between councillors and officers are positive, and across the organisation people speak of mutual respect and engagement, and shared values.

A council-wide review of performance management is anticipated to be completed later in 2020. As part of this review there are several pilot projects underway and being evaluated to assess their value and impact. For the start of the new municipal year 2019/20 the council introduced new performance reporting which moved away from a traditional framework of reporting on services within directorates and introduced six cross-cutting themes. These in turn report on the delivery of the Our Camden Plan 2018-22.

Although this was the first LGA corporate peer challenge of the council, the organisation is open to regular challenge, including through ADASS for adult social care, and through commissioning external scrutiny for example the Chalcots Evacuation Independent Review report, the STEAM Commission and on technology and digital through the Digital Future challenge.

Despite some in-depth scrutiny panel activity which focuses on issues which matter to residents, such as rough sleeping, and schools' exclusions, overall there are mixed views on the council's scrutiny function and its effectiveness. Some of this is about differing views on what scrutiny is for and how it should work in Camden. It could play a more central role in both the council's place-leadership and participation priorities. Whilst the current system is clearly focused on accountability and service delivery challenge, it has

yet to fully exploit the borough and issue-wide remit it could claim. The administration's desire for a transparent participative system, combined with an ambitious agenda for place making and shaping should allow for the scrutiny function to be at the centre of innovation and change.

However, to grasp this opportunity scrutiny will need to become organisationally neutral, looking at issues, not organisations, and welcome into the traditionally member-dominated arena a range of external stakeholders, including residents and representatives from relevant local organisations. There is a wealth expertise and assets within the borough, whether national or international organisations, those with lived-experience or delivery partners who could add further value to what the council is trying to achieve. Taking a step back to explore what the council wants from scrutiny, and how the function relates to other aspects of how the council works, including its participation model, might help to bring a different focus.

Communication channels to staff include listening exercises conducted by the Chief Executive, quarterly atrium briefings delivered by her and the Leader, and the use of Yammer to share information. Communication with staff has been identified by the council as an area for improvement and action is being taken to address this. Consideration needs also to be given to how to reach staff outside of 5 St Pancras Square, including those who are not desk based or do not use ICT in an extensive way, so that the ethos of inclusion applies to them too.

Extensive innovation is undoubtedly a key factor in the council's success to date, and in the enthusiasm of staff about their roles and the pride they have in Camden. There was a degree of reluctance from some of the staff we spoke to about acknowledging where the council could continue to improve, and to more readily discuss where performance in projects or services wasn't as good; this is despite evaluation taking place across the council. This reluctance is somewhat at odds with what staff are achieving and innovating, and given levels of achievement and enthusiasm one might expect there to be more confidence about talking about what hasn't worked, and how this is disseminated.

This might reflect striving to achieve the best for residents, or of being enthused about the next project, but some staff felt that it can be 'hard to voice' difficulties and that 'bad news doesn't travel'. This is despite some mechanisms being in place to share learning and continuous improvement, for example through different approaches such as 'lunch and learn' sessions and more widely through the overall approach to learning and development. Taking some time to disseminate formal and informal evaluation and challenge of what has and hasn't worked and why, can only be beneficial to the organisation. This needs to be incorporated more systematically, and involving a wider range of people, so that everyone becomes more comfortable with challenge. Camden 2025 is exceptionally ambitious, and the council needs to be prepared to learn from successes and failures along the way.

4.4. Financial planning and viability

The peer team found strong strategic leadership of the council's finances by councillors and officers. Cabinet and senior managers recognise the financial challenges that the council faces and show clear ownership and commitment to resolving them. Camden has a good track record of managing with the constraints of the council's budget and a good understanding of the financial risks the council faces. Whilst the financial climate remains challenging the approach overall is calm and measured and compared to some other councils, there was an absence of the budget being consistently at the forefront of the peer team's discussions with the council, although this may simply be because the peer challenge took place at a particular point in time.

Camden remains relatively financially resilient and has a strong track record of delivering on the savings it has committed to and 97% of proposed savings set out in the MTFS to 2020 have been realised. Progress on the delivery of the MTFS is supported by a series of deep dives which examine progress on projects and proposed savings.

For 2019/20 Camden Council has a gross budget of £909.327m and a net budget requirement of £231.337m. Like most local authorities they have faced significant reductions since 2010/11 with an average reduction spending power of 21% or £311.46 per head of population, compared to an average of 21% for Inner London Boroughs and 11% nationally. This has led to the delivery of £169m of budget reductions since 2010/11 with an associated 23% reduction in the workforce of 1,140 FTE. Further savings of £35-40m need to be made between 2019/20 and 2021/22, based on £12.4m for 2019/20 rising to £28.4m in 2020/21.

In 2018/19 the council's underspend of £300k was added to reserves, bringing the unearmarked general fund reserve to £13.98m, which is 3.3% of revenue expenditure. The policy is to retain general reserve balances between 3-10% of expenditure. Useable general fund reserves are currently forecast to be £65m at the end of 2019/20 having reduced from £84m in 2018/19 (excluding the unearmarked general fund reserve). They are held for a range of reasons including to fund the cost of change of delivering the budget strategy, a budget smoothing reserve and to manage business rates volatility. In the context of an uncertain financial outlook, the council is acutely aware of the need to maintain financial resilience and is working towards increasing reserve balances in the medium term.

The relatively strong financial position has been attributed to the previous track record in delivering savings largely on target, the proceeds from the London Business Rates pilot has given some flexibility and the council has utilised resources such as the social care precept. The authority has avoided taking short term measures such as maximising MRP to deliver the budget or taking undue risks to chase a financial return. During 2018/19 council tax collection rates were at 96% and business rates collection was at over 99%, the latter making Camden one of the highest performers in the country.

An unusual and significant factor when compared to its peers, has been not overspending on children's and adults social care, which in turn has not resulted in

overspending on the council's overall budget. The council has reported maintaining investment into prevention for children's social care, and the establishment of the Transformation Board for Adult Social Care has overseen savings delivery and the underlying strong service performance in both areas. The current Ofsted rating for Children's social care is 'good' and is a positive reflection of the work of the Resilient Families Programme 2014-17 introduced to tackle growing need and reducing resources.

Camden has taken a long-term approach to financial planning and some of the more recent investment by the council has been enabled by the decisions made in the earlier years of austerity. The 2019/22 Medium Term Financial Strategy has a strong outcome focus with the identification of key areas for investment and how to maximise the use of the reduced available budget as opposed to a focus on the delivery of a savings target. The focus on the former perhaps takes precedence over some of the finer details of what is publicly reported on savings targets and progress against them. A shortfall of £28.4m has been identified for 2021/22, of which £12m remains to be identified following the announcement of the government's Spending Review. Whilst the updated budget for 2020/21 had not been published by the time of the peer challenge, it is understood the position for 2020/21 will be a balanced budget, achievable in part due to the additional income for social care as part of the One-year Spending Round and Finance Settlement. The report is due to go to Cabinet in February 2020.

The approach to the budget and the development of Camden 2025 are outcome focused which fits with the council's broad ethos, as does medium term financial planning which helps to avoid the 'noise' of an annual budget process. Camden 2025 is undoubtedly ambitious and has a wide scope, and although there is broad awareness of it at headline level, there is less uncertainty about what it will deliver and how much it will cost. The output from the extensive resident engagement activities can help shape this service and financial planning.

The new cloud-based Oracle system is bedding in without any major issues and objective is to delivery greater transparency around reporting. There is an opportunity to strengthen the quarterly financial reporting cycle by more closely linking the financial reporting with progress on the delivery of key priorities, key underlying activity trends and the developing outcome measures that will be developed in the new performance management framework.

Many of the investments and changes planned in the MTFs have a longer-term timeline for example the annual £1.5m investment in employment support from 2020/21 onwards, and the ongoing investment in preventative measures in Children's social care. There needs to be a balance between the council holding its nerve to deliver the ambition and identifying when there is a need to step in and take corrective action and deliver a 'Plan B'. This is particularly important if there are unexpected events or outturns which are outside of the council's control to deliver such as delays on significant capital projects, which in turn affect cashflow or the return on investment, as well as broader changes to finances which may arise from the national Spending Review, the Fairer Funding Review and changes to the Business Rates Retention

formula. The further development of the performance management framework linked to outcomes will provide more intelligence to inform when such action is required.

4.5 Capacity to deliver

The culture of the council is energetic and can-do, and the commitment to deliver with and for residents has been an established way of working for several years. The approach continues to broaden and accelerate through a wide range of current and planned future activities.

The council has a proven track record of innovative delivery, for example the Somers Town Energy project, where the council leveraged investment from partners (£3.8m from Francis Crick and £1m from government) to support their own £1m investment. Camden the place is known for innovation and this is reflected in the types of business it is attracting to the borough, including Google, Facebook and the recently opened Vagina Museum, the first of its kind in the UK.

Effective demand management has been achieved in both children's services and adults through a consistent and long-term approach to prevention. This is a significant area of success which not only impacts on the quality of residents' lives but also is instrumental in the council's financial viability. The broader local government community would benefit from the council sharing this good practice more widely with others.

Residents who are council tenants told the team that they quality of repairs to council properties can be very good, but that it can be hard to get non-essential repairs done, particularly if the tenants are not regarded as vulnerable. They reflected that this is a responsive council with good members of staff at frontline service levels who are caring about service users.

The council's strong ethos of fairness and equality for residents also extends into the employee arena. The range of support available to employees is extensive and includes Rainbow Camden, Black Workers' Group, Inclusive Innovation Network and a Menopause Support Group. The council has recently entered the Stonewall 100 Index for the first time.

The approach to inclusivity is underpinned by a Statement of Inclusion and led from the top with a focus on 'bring your whole self to work', which staff told us is regarded as progressive and helps them to deliver better services for the public. There is also a new sponsorship and mentoring scheme for colleagues from different ethnic backgrounds, and two council directors who are LGBT+ champions have featured in videos on the council's intranet about what inclusion means to them. On a practical basis a recent small scale but welcomed improvement has been to allow staff to participate in employee networks in work time, rather than in their own time. As might be expected, the council is restless to drive further improvement on equality for employees, particularly with an emphasis and commitment to participation and inclusion.

Staff morale appears to be good overall, and many members of staff told the peer team that they are proud to work for the council. There were some concerns raised that morale has the potential to become more fragile, particularly as the council continues to deliver at pace, budget cuts will continue to be a feature of council business, and the organisation is delivering more with less. The peer team was not onsite long enough to determine how much or if staff morale is becoming a significant issue, but the council needs to keep a close eye on it.

The team heard some concerns about issues of variable performance across the council, particularly at middle manager levels. Now would be a good time to ensure that there is consistent practice from managers across the council, that there is enough structure in place to ensure that the standards the council expects of its staff and managers is clearly articulated, and that there are mechanisms in place to address less than ideal performance. Although the absence of formal appraisal systems is a deliberate feature of the council's way of doing things, care needs to be taken to ensure that this approach achieves consistency and is equitable and enables effective management interventions take place where required. Will this approach continue to support the levels of achievement that the council aspires to, particularly when the occasion arises to deal with individuals who don't deliver to the council's high standards? Under the current arrangements it is difficult to see how such assurance could be consistently achieved across the organisation.

Innovation is such a strong feature of how the council works that it would be difficult and counter-productive to stifle it but introducing some clearer priorities would enable activities continue to be focused on the areas of most impact. This is because staff capacity is a finite resource and needs to be matched to workloads and what is achievable. Whilst some members of staff told us that they would work long hours because they are enthused and committed to achieving, this creates pressure and is unsustainable in the longer term and could have a negative impact on organisational culture. Staff workloads need to be more closely aligned to capacity to deliver. Creating a culture where every employee can influence and contribute to innovating frontline service delivery is a journey that has begun, and should be continue to be pursued, and will be enhanced by further clarification of the council's priorities. The recently created internal Inclusive Innovation Network and its test pilots on social value and growth, climate change, and connective communities inclusive will be an interesting way to explore new ways of doing things, connecting staff capacity and outcomes for the community.

Councillors and officers talk extensively about values and understanding them, yet despite this there is an overall absence of a values statement, so it is difficult see what exactly these values are, and whether they are the same for everyone. Undoubtedly the council has a very positive vibe, and the people the peer team met were committed and enthusiastic but taking some further steps to describe what it stands for, so that everyone can see where and how they belong and may help nurture further cohesiveness. The draft employee values proposition statement is a positive step in addressing this.

4.6 Camden 2025

The vision for Camden 2025 is widely talked about and at the headline level is understood and stakeholders are energised by it. Active steps are being taken to spread awareness of the vision, for example, it is part of the council's induction process for new staff, but as mentioned elsewhere in this report, the next stage needs to be some detail about delivery.

Continuing to learn from the Citizens' Assembly and feeding this into Camden 2025, as well as adding granular detail will help to further embed the strategy within the council. It will also help to address concerns from some partners that understanding of the vision and how it will be delivered is variable amongst council staff and partners themselves. Some partners felt that the vision needs stronger and more prominent 'wiring' through the organisation.

Partners too need to better understand how they contribute to delivery, both in terms of current plans and future. This is important because there is so much intellectual, financial and social capital available to the borough which can add significant value to deliver the plan for 2025, ready and waiting to be utilised. Working with partners to help shape delivery will enable them to work out their roles and plan alongside the council.

An example of the importance and potential value of strong partnerships with clear shared priorities is the current work supported by FutureGov, to re-imagine the council's role in supporting residents into employment, and to re-design the associated multi-agency service based on the experiences of users. This is a challenge that many local authorities are actively addressing, and it was notable that the council is committed to 'doing this for the sector' and were conscious of the untapped potential to learn with other boroughs and institutions nearby. The council is well placed to explore opportunity for collective learning more widely, both sharing what it is doing but also learning from others. This might in turn create income generation opportunities through delivering on behalf of others or achieving collective economies of scale.

The Community Investment Programme (CIP) is an ambitious investment programme which is directly financed and managed by the Council and shaped in partnership with the community. Its targets are to provide 3,050 new homes, of which 1,100 will be council homes and 300 will be affordable homes for rent, and to invest in 53 schools and children's centres. To date it is delivering well with the creation of over 865 homes so far, a new community centre at St Pancras for independent living, and it has driven investment in local school and sixth form provision. However, the scale of the housing challenge in Camden is so significant that the CIP alone will not solve the borough's housing problems: the council is aware of the scale of the challenge. Applying its approach to innovation the council could continue to work to attract like-minded partners to ensure the delivery of enough homes to meet the borough's ongoing and rising needs, particularly if it is to keep lower income families from leaving the area for more affordable housing.

The non-CIP General Fund programme accounts for 20% of the capital investment programme for 2018-20 and £22m of this is funded from the Community Infrastructure

Levy. It is anticipated that the programme will be funded from planned use of government grants and capital reserve, the CIL at £4m per annum and no further prudential borrowing is planned. However, there is a potential mismatch between the funding need and the resources available, and this needs further consideration.

4.7 Camden's Participation Model

Camden's approach to participation and engagement is widespread and impressive. It is becoming increasingly embedded across the council's business to try and ensure that residents can be heard and contribute views about the issues which matter to them. This is an area of real strength and good practice and deserves to be shared more widely across local government.

There are numerous examples of projects which illustrate the different methods and techniques the council is using, some of which are being trialled. Approaches are thorough and well thought through, and there are too many of these to provide a comprehensive list, although some illustrative examples include:

- The community champions project working with citizen-led approaches at estate level by recruiting local volunteers to help tackle health inequalities. This is being part funded until May 2020 by the UCL Innovation and Enterprise Fund.
- Neighbourhood-based pilots on co-design and co-production on health matters in Kilburn, Swiss Cottage, Fortune Green and West Hampstead, using a neighbourhood assembly model
- Five Citizens' Assemblies were held in 2017 and 2018 and provided a citizens' vision for the future of Camden, which has been fed into the Camden 2025 vision. An assembly was also held in 2018 on the future of the Euston station area, including the proposed introduction of the HS2 high speed railway; this fed into a new Euston Station Area planning brief.
- Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis in July 2019 was the first citizens' assembly on the issue in the UK, and its results have fed into the new Climate Action Plan which will be published during 2020
- Co-production is a key feature of a new qualitative outcome framework being developed with residents in Adult Social Care, alongside colleagues from the voluntary and community sector. Its aim is to develop new ways of measuring outcomes which matter to local people, focusing on their understanding of a good life. Of note is the intention for those with lived experience of adult social care in Camden to have a role in measuring and checking performance
- We Make Camden is a communications campaign aimed at sharing stories and citizens' voices across the borough
- Using conversations with residents in Kentish Town as part of the landlord services review, which fed into a set of principles for the new landlord service launched in June 2019
- How to use technology to further reach residents at scale. An example being explored at Camden is the use of apps such as Co-operate, a community engagement platform launched nationally by the Co-op, which enables residents

to connect with events, find volunteers and access advice on how to become more engaged and make a difference to where they live

- Recruiting parent champions for particular targeted communities where there are gaps in the take up of the early years offer

The council's approach continues to evolve and has included robust external evaluation of the Climate Change Citizens' Assembly. This evaluation found that assembly members were energised about their involvement, and not just about the subject matter but more broadly on how they might further engage with other residents and participate in civil society, as well as reflecting growing pride in the area.

Some stakeholders involved in the peer challenge reflected that the opportunity to be involved in the business of the council was profound but were less clear about what had happened with the views they had shared, and whether they had or would be acted upon. Taking some steps now to design the pathways through which individuals, communities and partners will continue to be involved, and taking care about how feedback is given about not only what residents said but also what happened next, including outcomes, needs further action, and partners are keen for the council to follow through on consultation. This is important because the participation model is successful so far and is expanding, and as visibility increases and more people become involved their expectations will need to be managed, and the council will need to follow through on those expectations.

Partners are enthusiastic about the Community Infrastructure Levy, but some felt the process to date could have been clearer. Although it features on the council's website, they felt it should have more prominence. Partners also felt that overall the council is good at galvanising neighbourhoods and calling people to action, but that it could be better at using its own and partners' resources to deliver. This was at two levels: gaining a better understanding of what partners could contribute, as well as ensuring overlaps and duplication are minimised.

There are many actors across the participatory system in Camden, including residents, voluntary and community sector organisations, and statutory partners. Furthering the depth of insight they can all bring to the 2025 shared vision and its deliverables will enable even greater learning and impact with, and for residents.

Those residents engaged with it appear to recognise the change in the council's approach and are excited by it. Expectations on what the council can do and engage residents with, are likely to grow given the success of the engagement strategy so far, but the next steps of this growth need more consideration. The overall approach is intended to share power in order to build agency and strengthen social capital, both of which are significant aspirations. As the overall approach to engagement continues to grow, the council needs to consider how it will manage potential increased expectations from residents and their communities. Given one of the council's aspirations is to bring citizens closer to decision making, a reasonable expectation from residents might be that their influence will continue to grow. But has the council considered how to handle this, and would such expectations eventually translate into sharing resources and

delivery responsibility with communities, through a degree of local devolution? How would this work alongside councillors' officers' and partners' current roles? And has the council given sufficient attention to how relationships with residents who have engaged in participatory processes are concluded to the satisfaction of all? Further consideration could be given to mainstreaming the opportunities for participation by exploring how to create mechanisms to facilitate ongoing participation after "events or assemblies" will add significant depth to an already impressive participation approach.

5. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on the findings within this report in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

To support you in your improvement, journey the Peer Team have identified several key recommendations, some of which you may already have in hand. We welcome your response to these recommendations within the next three months through the development of an action plan.

Your LGA Principal Adviser Kate Herbert (kate.herbert@local.gov.uk/ 07867 632404) will be in contact to assist the council going forward and to provide additional support, advice and guidance on any areas for development and improvement and she will be happy to discuss this.

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 January 2024.

Examples of good practice

How Camden engages with its communities through its participation model merits further description and dissemination, including the Community Assemblies, and how residents are involved in co-producing services.

The council's approach on climate change and its action plan will also be of interest to other local authorities, not least for how the council involved local people in discussing and identifying priorities for action.

The £1bn Community Investment Programme is delivering results across housing, schools and community facilities. Areas of interest include how this is managed through the CIP Programme Board and CMT/Cabinet, financed through self-funding by the council, and how it links with the Intermediate Housing Strategy created in 2016.