

Brent Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan 2025



Introduction

In Brent, as a borough, we want to be constantly improving and delivering for our residents, making the borough a great place to live and work. In our Borough Plan, residents told us that they want a prosperous borough, where people feel happy, allowing people from all backgrounds to flourish and be seen and heard. They want a clean, safe borough that we can all be proud of, reducing health inequalities and making sure our services are open and accessible for all. As an organisation, we are changing the way we work, as we know that current models of local government delivery are unsustainable in the current environment. Though financial challenges and the ongoing cost of living crisis continues to challenge our residents and staff, Brent remains an ambitious, forward-thinking organisation with an unwavering commitment to serve our residents and communities as an honest and transparent organisation who are always eager to learn.

With this in mind, we invited the Local Government Association to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2025.

The team spent 4 days on site, getting to know the borough, speaking to more than 130 people including council staff together with members and external stakeholders. Alongside this, the review team had access to all the council's key strategies and documents, using this and their time on site to come to their conclusions outlined in the feedback report, which was shared with Brent in February 2025. Overall, the review found that Brent is a well-performing council with a positive organisational culture and a good track record of delivery across key service areas. The council's stable political leadership was identified as a strength, contributing to effective working relationships between the Cabinet and Senior Managers. However, we know that there is more to do; the Peer Review team noted that the council could do more to break down siloed working across the organisation, as well as reiterating the pressures the council faces around Temporary Accommodation, a picture which

is unfortunately familiar to councils across London.

The team's feedback is invaluable as we progress on a journey of change as a council, with the team's recommendations echoing the efforts we are already making as an organisation and serving as a guide to make sure that we are continuously improving. We have developed an action plan in response to the team's recommendations, which serves as a whole organisation product, where all staff will work together to deliver the recommendations. We are confident that the recommendations from the LGA will help us to improve as an organisation, and we look forward to welcoming the team back to Brent for a progress review in November 2025.



Cllr Muhammed Butt
Leader of the Council



Kim Wright
Chief Executive



Delivery of the Plan

The timeframe for the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) actions is as follows:

Short Term (within 3 months, ongoing work)

Medium Term (within 6 months)

Long Term (A year or over)

Delivery of this action plan is the collective responsibility of all council officers. It is designed to create and raise awareness of opportunities for all staff to collaborate in progressing the actions we will take in response to the Local Government Association's CPC recommendations.

Many of the CPC recommendations relate to work already underway across the council. The action plan will help to increase visibility of this work and further align existing work programmes and initiatives. Where applicable, progress will be driven and monitored through these existing governance structures.

Key milestones have been developed for each CPC recommendation and strategic owners assigned to them.

Strategic owners are responsible for ensuring progress of actions, including through wider staff involvement, and reporting against achievement of milestones through established quarterly corporate performance monitoring arrangements. Members will have oversight of the plan and an opportunity to provide challenge and steer through this process. Reporting on the action plan as a whole will be through the Council Management Team (CMT), with an update on progress in early 2026.

In the longer term, the LGA will return to Brent in November 2025 for a progress review visit, including opportunities for council officers and Members to share successes and challenges with peers, and fully review progress against the CPC recommendations.



Recommendation	Key Milestones and Detail	Owner	Timeline
<p>1. Medium Term Financial Strategy</p> <p>The council should develop a longer-term MTFS that is fully aligned with its corporate priorities and change and transformation programme. It is important that this is owned across the organisation. The peer team agrees with the immediate need to establish a five-year MTFS, it is essential to integrate the financial benefits of the planned change and transformation programme into this strategy.</p>	<p>Milestone 1. Future budget process to be launched in April 2025 across the council.</p> <p>Milestone 2. First iteration of refreshed MTFS reported to Cabinet in July 2025.</p> <p>The Council's refreshed longer term MTFS will be informed by the council's local ambitions and strategies as well as the planned reforms of Local Government Finance due in the Spring/Summer of 2025</p> <p>We are introducing OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) within the Change Programmes and as part of this process we plan to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all savings proposals to ensure the financial impact of change programmes are reflected or captured as Key Results, including expected efficiencies • Align programme Objectives with financial goals such as cost reduction, income generation etc <p>We will also map savings proposals against Change Programmes to track and manage interdependencies and ensure finance leads sit on the change programme boards to oversee financial decisions. Progress of outcome delivery and financial impacts will be reported to the CMT Portfolio Board.</p>	<p>Corporate Director, Finance and Resources, CMT, SLT, SMG</p> <p>All Staff, including Corporate Leadership Team (CMT), Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Senior Managers Group (SMG) CMT, SLT, SMG</p>	<p>Short term</p> <p>Medium term</p>

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<p>2. Breaking down Silos</p> <p>The council is aware of the need to break down silos. The change and transformation programme rightly targets this issue, but the scale of the transition required should not be underestimated. Collaborative behaviours with a genuine sense of curiosity need to be modelled by the CMT, Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and all managers. To effectively break down silos, the council needs to foster greater strategic collaboration across all departments, sharing the knowledge and expertise held within the organisation. Officers need to adopt more of a corporate mindset recognising that challenges in specific directorates are shared, council-wide responsibilities.</p>	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>Ensuring that Managers are leading efforts to break down silos and foster a more collaborative environment across services. Key steps in this process include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLT and SMG sessions • Staff engagement around change programme and new values, e.g. collaborate proactively • Cross-council work on strategic change portfolio initiatives e.g. INT development • Ensuring that managers attend values training, followed up by assessing impact on collaborative working. <p>Milestone 2:</p> <p>Reset the Change Portfolio to include Council wide transformation programmes, with cross cutting enablers. Joint ownership and collaboration will be encouraged by Senior Responsible Officers (SRO)s and Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) sitting on the same governance board enabling cross-functional decision making and shared accountability.</p> <p>Milestone 3: Change Champion Feedback</p> <p>Develop a toolkit for SMG to hold and support conversation about change and directly work with teams to develop discussion and ideas. Feedback will be captured on what the organisation could do differently to improve the way the council works and identify areas to make savings.</p>	<p>CMT, SLT, SMG and all Managers</p>	<p>Medium-Long term</p> <p>Short-term</p> <p>Medium term</p>

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<p>3. Change and Transformation Programme</p> <p>Recognise the urgency of advancing the change and transformation programme and develop evidence-based business cases that deliver the spending reductions required by the MTFS. To achieve this, the council should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Quickly define and set the name, scope and contents of the change and transformation programme, and consistently communicate this across the organisation. Bolster communications supporting staff to understand, engage with and embrace the transformation journey. Develop SMART delivery plans for each element of the programme. Support these plans through the use of the programme management office (PMO) governance to oversee and co-ordinate their delivery. Accelerate the pace of delivery of the change and transformation programme by ensuring that it is owned and led by SLT with the required grip to ensure delivery. Establish the programme as a cross-council initiative, corporately owned by all directors, to foster collective accountability. Focus the organisational development programme on building the capabilities and behaviours required to deliver the change and transformation programme at pace and scale. Ensure the change and transformation programme is fully integrated with the council's digital transformation agenda and the operating model for customer services. 	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>The Change Programme will be re-scoped in line with the specific suggestions within the recommendation, using the new Council Value of "Embrace Change" as the portfolio name and increasing the breadth of the programmes contained into the portfolio.</p> <p>Milestone 2:</p> <p>The portfolio governance will also be refreshed to have programme boards reporting to CMT as the Portfolio Board. We will ensure governance reflects new objectives, reduces bureaucracy, and ensures the right information flows to CMT at the right time.</p> <p>As part of the refreshed portfolio, we will position OD as a cross-cutting enabler to ensure all programmes and transformation initiatives are supported by the necessary skills, culture, and structures for sustainable change.</p> <p>Milestone 3:</p> <p>In addition, having digital and data as enablers will ensure that every programme is driven by technology, automation, and insights that support decision-making and better understanding of customer needs.</p> <p>Milestone 4: Change Champions Feedback:</p> <p>Ensure Change Champions have a stronger voice across the organisation, going forwards a representative will have a place on the internal SRO Board and Change Board.</p>	<p>Corporate Director, Service Reform and Strategy</p>	<p>Short term</p> <p>Short-medium term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Medium-long term</p>

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<p>4. Addressing the temporary accommodation crisis</p> <p>Addressing the temporary accommodation crisis requires whole-organisational ownership and a collective response to tackle both the immediate pressures and the underlying systemic issues. The council should review all the levers it has to impact positively on this crisis. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Developing a dedicated Temporary Accommodation Improvement Plan reporting into a structured governance framework to co-ordinate actions across the council. b) Looking outwardly, as this is not a pressure unique to Brent, and working in collaboration with partners including other local councils. c) Build on initiatives that have already started e.g. Find a place you can afford. d) Explore creative opportunities presented by the council's new build and acquisitions programme. 	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>Preventing Homelessness Project (including Temporary Accommodation Improvement) added to the Housing Transformation Programme, under the Embrace Change Portfolio. The Director of Housing Needs and Support is the SRO reporting into the SRO Delivery Board and Change Portfolio Board.</p> <p>Milestone 2:</p> <p>Continue working with pan-London and sub-regional groups - as well as local and internal groups, such as the Brent Homelessness Forum - to tackle homelessness through collaboration and learning.</p> <p>Milestone 3:</p> <p>Continue reviewing the 'Find a Place you can Afford' campaign to adapt to new opportunities and needs. Frontline officers will be given the space to suggest new initiatives and ways of working within their teams.</p> <p>Milestone 4:</p> <p>Opportunities will continue to be explored through a project group to ensure that a proportion of new build properties and properties acquired through I4B are primarily being used to end the homeless duty, as well as having flexibility to be used as Temporary Accommodation for families with particular needs.</p>	<p>Director, Housing Needs and Support</p>	<p>Short term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Medium term</p> <p>Medium term</p>

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<p>6. Financial processes and organisational grip</p> <p>The council should prioritise enhancing its financial processes to secure income, improve productivity and drive efficiencies. Key areas of focus include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improving debt recovery effectiveness. b. Increasing council tax collection rates. c. Optimising procurement and commissioning practices. d. Consistent approach to business case development to support the delivery of change and ensuring that the change and transformation programme quickly identifies savings proposals of sufficient assurance to incorporate in the MTFS e. Conducting detailed unit cost analysis and benchmarking to identify cost-saving opportunities. <p>To effectively address the financial gap, the council should also invest in improving financial awareness, literacy and ownership across the organisation, ensuring both members and officers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge and reducing the overreliance on the finance function.</p>	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>A new business case was approved in January 2025 to invest in debt recovery and improve collection rates. The progress of this investment and impact on collection rates will be reported to Cabinet in future budget reports.</p> <p>Milestone 2:</p> <p>Develop and implement an improvement plan in response to an Independent Procurement Review – this includes optimising processes, structures and targeted savings initiatives.</p> <p>Milestone 3:</p> <p>A consistent approach to business case development will be addressed as part of the 2026/27-2028/29 budget setting process. All savings and growth proposals will be subject to a business case process. Introduce gateway process for business cases to ensure projects are thoroughly evaluated, risks are mitigated, and investments are aligned with council priorities (and those that are not, stopped). This process will also be integrated into the change portfolio for savings proposals to be incorporated into the MTFS.</p> <p>Milestone 4:</p> <p>Budget Challenge meetings are due to commence in April 2025 in the lead up the 2026/27 - 2028/29 budget setting process. As part of this process an assessment on financial literacy will be undertaken to ensure that appropriate training and tools can be deployed to support officers in managing and owning their budgets.</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Corporate Director, Finance & Resources</p> <p>Director, Strategic Commissioning, Capacity Building & Engagement</p>	<p>Long term</p> <p>Medium-long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Medium term</p>

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<p>7. VCS</p> <p>Consider a refresh of the Compact with the VCS and health to strengthen collaboration and align priorities. A co-developed engagement strategy, building on the enthusiasm for the Radical Place Leadership approach, would provide a robust framework for fostering deeper partnerships. Additionally, the council should continue its efforts to engage with the full breadth of the VCS sector in Brent.</p>	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>Co-create a refreshed Compact / Partnership Strategy (Participation & Partnerships) with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and partners to align shared priorities, values, foster collaborative working and capacity building.</p> <p>Milestone 2:</p> <p>Review and recommission, in partnership with VCS, a social infrastructure capacity building offer.</p> <p>Milestone 3:</p> <p>Use Commissioning Community of Practice to extend participation across VCS to develop new approaches to shared challenges</p> <p>Milestone 4:</p> <p>Explore the opportunities to develop, grow, and attract new social infrastructure in the borough.</p>	<p>Director, Strategic Commissioning, Capacity Building & Engagement</p>	<p>Short term</p> <p>Medium term</p> <p>Medium to long term</p> <p>Short to medium term</p>

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<p>8. Shared vision for the future of Brent</p> <p>Work with partners across the public sector, VCS and private sector to co-create a shared, medium- to long-term vision for Brent that goes beyond the council's immediate priorities. This vision should reflect a collective ambition for the borough, setting shared priorities and intended outcomes for both Brent residents and Brent as a place.</p>	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>Continue developing provisional vision/brand/Brent identity through existing Radical Place Leadership and Public Affairs activity. This includes recruiting a Strategic Change Comms lead to work with residents, partners, and Brent staff to communicate vision for Change Portfolio.</p> <p>Milestone 2: Develop a new Borough Plan</p> <p>The council agrees with the LGA's recommendations that establishing a shared vision for Brent is a positive next step and aligns with organisational focus around Radical Place Leadership – working collaboratively with our partners and communities to establish localised support that will enable residents to live their best lives. The current Borough Plan spans 2023-27 so the council will seek to adopt a shared vision approach once the process of establishing new strategic ambitions has been initiated.</p> <p>Milestone 3: Establish a strategic culture approach</p> <p>Brent Culture Service has engaged a specialist consultant to map the existing assets of Brent's cultural and creative landscape in order to better understand Brent's existing and potential audiences and identify baseline data sets. This would help to then understand Brent's creative and visitor economy and inform the future strategic planning.</p>	<p>Chief Executive /SMG</p>	<p>Medium - Long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p>

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<p>9. Community and Tenant Engagement</p> <p>Refresh the council's approach to community engagement by conducting a comprehensive review of all existing engagement methods. This review should ensure that all approaches are aligned and complement each other.</p> <p>There is also a need to embed the new Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy to enhance tenant involvement in shaping the service. The new Housing Management Advisory Board will have an important role in scrutinising the implementation of this. This strategy should consider areas for improving the service culture and responsiveness to tenants.</p>	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>Undertake a rapid review, consolidation and alignment of the council's existing engagement methods.</p> <p>Milestone 2:</p> <p>Launch an Engagement Network and develop a focused work programme, alignment of resource and supporting good practice toolkits.</p> <p>Milestone 3:</p> <p>Co-develop, design and deliver a series of engagement pathfinders that test out new approaches that increase resident voice and influence. This includes proposing and testing the feasibility of alternative approaches to the Brent Connects forum.</p> <p>In line with linked work to build VCS capacity, explore new social infrastructure approaches and models that offer potential to attract additional funding, develop greater capacity and resilience across VCS and more effectively work with and alongside Council and partners on shared priorities, for example around Place Leadership work.</p> <p>From a housing perspective, this includes a focus on tenant engagement and innovating through Brent's new Housing Management Advisory Board.</p> <p>Milestone 4:</p> <p>Relocate the Strategic Housing Partnerships and Engagement Service into the Housing Services Department so that engagement is better aligned to Housing engagement priorities and the requirements/ expectations of the Regulation for Social Housing.</p>	<p>Director, Strategic Commissioning, Capacity Building & Engagement</p> <p>Corporate Director, Residents & Housing Services</p> <p>Director Housing Services</p>	<p>Short term</p> <p>Short term</p> <p>Medium to long term</p> <p>Short term</p>

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<p>10. Housing allocations and waiting list</p> <p>Review and update the council's Housing Allocations Policy and undertake a re-registration exercise for households on the waiting list to obtain an accurate, up-to-date picture of housing needs across Brent.</p>	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>Review current Allocations Scheme to identify updates required, including Statutory consultation with key stakeholders before the publication and implementation of the new Allocation Scheme including re-registration exercise for households on the housing register</p>	<p>Corporate Director, Residents & Housing Services</p> <p>Director, Housing Needs and Support</p>	<p>Medium term</p>
<p>11. Adults and Children's Services</p> <p>Seize the opportunity for service transformation within both Adults and Children's services, leveraging the current position of below average overspends.</p>	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>Key Adults and Children's transformation programmes to be incorporated into the refreshed scope of the Change Portfolio (see rec 3).</p> <p>Milestone 2:</p> <p>Use medium term financial strategy work to develop business cases for wider transformation where financial pressures still exist, with a focus on prevention and demand management.</p> <p>Adult Social Care and Children, Families and Young People Departments have transformation programmes in place with project plans tracked through Directorate governance structures. Going forward, these will also be part of the Embrace Change Portfolio to ensure greater ownership and visibility at a Corporate Leadership level through the CMT Change Board.</p> <p>As part of the next budget process, referenced in recommendation 1, the council will look at opportunities to go further or faster in the transformation of adult social care and children, families and young people, including looking at where taking a test and learn approach within neighbourhood teams can help identify the most effective preventative approaches, using a community development approach with the VCS, as well as considering how best to deploy digital solutions to support residents more effectively and automate processes where appropriate.</p>	<p>Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Community Development</p> <p>Corporate Director, Service Reform and Strategy</p> <p>Director Adult Social Care</p>	<p>Short term</p> <p>Short term</p>

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<p>12. EDI</p> <p>Refresh the council's EDI priorities to ensure that activity is aligned with cultural competency/appropriateness and improving outcomes for residents. Ensure that there is a broader focus on EDI across all underrepresented groups. The council should also reset its relationship with the staff networks to maximise their contribution in shaping organisational strategy and outcomes. The CMT should play more of an active role in sponsoring and supporting these networks, demonstrating a genuine commitment to enhancing their visibility and influence.</p>	<p>Milestone 1:</p> <p>Relaunch the staff networks including a reinvigorated role for CMT to sponsor and support the networks.</p> <p>The staff networks were relaunched in February 2025 as an opportunity to strengthen the networks, improve membership and reset approaches. As part of the refresh, the organisation is exploring the creation of additional networks to support other staff groups. This also includes finalising the appointment of new Equity Champions.</p> <p>To strengthen the role of sponsors, the staff network terms of reference have been updated to better define their roles and responsibilities which has helped establish greater clarity and support.</p> <p>Directorates will also be provided with comprehensive EDI insights through detailed narratives highlighting key data and specific areas where disparities exist between the directorate and the wider organisation. These tailored reports will help CMT understand their unique EDI landscape and provide opportunities for them to raise awareness of EDI matters both as sponsors and as leaders of their directorate.</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development</p> <p>Director Communications, Insight and Innovation</p>	<p>Short term</p>
	<p>Milestone 2:</p> <p>Extend the council's leadership and drive around anti-racism across the borough and public sector.</p> <p>Across the borough there is activity underway that will help drive the anti-racism agenda, this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming Brent – an 18+ month initiative aimed at understanding and documenting the impact of the British Empire on Brent, picking up themes of decolonisation and multiculturalism. • Brent Schools' Race Equality Programme – a programme in collaboration with Leeds Beckett University that aims to embed anti-racist policies in schools, increase attainment among underperforming ethnic groups, and reduce exclusions. • Anti-racism training will be delivered to the whole workforce. 		<p>Short-long term</p>

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	<p>The council is also in the process of refreshing our Black Community Action Plan which seeks to tackle the persistent disproportionality experienced by the Black community. This will be a significant next step in the council's broader anti-racism journey.</p> <p>Beyond this the organisation is exploring ways to establish a more structured approach to demonstrating leadership around anti-racism, while ensuring our approach across all protected characteristics is equity (as aligned with milestone 4).</p> <p>Milestone 3:</p> <p>Tailor policies and engagement to reflect the strengths and challenges of different communities, avoiding a one-size-fits-all model.</p> <p>Engagement will continue with specific communities through existing forums, such as the Disability Forum, Pensioners Forum, Brent Youth Parliament, Brent Multi Faith Forum and Brent Care Journeys 2.0. Insights from such forums will be used to better equip services to understand our communities, particularly those that are new and emerging. To support this, 'community cards' will be developed that will capture data and insights around different communities that can be used to help tailor policies and engagement.</p> <p>Progress around this milestone will also link to our Radical Place Leadership activity which seeks to embed a more localised council delivery approach that is tailored to different communities and localities.</p>		<p>Medium-long term</p>

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	<p>Milestone 4:</p> <p>Apply the council’s approach and progress around anti-racism to promoting equity across all protected characteristics.</p> <p>A deep dive approach is being adopted to determine solutions and support for protect groups that experience significant disproportionality in Brent. This will ensure that trends and gaps in insights are identified and can be addressed accordingly. The EDI Board will also examine progress and activity across departments to understand what is underway and explore any challenges or gaps.</p> <p>The council is also in the process of reviewing the approach to EDI events, i.e. how the council marks and celebrate occasions centred around culture, identity, religion and faith. The new approach will focus on empowering our diverse communities, supporting them to mark and celebrate the occasions that matter to them.</p>		<p>Long term</p>

