

Report title: Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge – Kirklees Council Action Plan

Meeting	Cabinet
Date	8 April 2025
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	Cllr Carole Pattison, Leader of the Council
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	Yes Yes
<p>Purpose of Report The Local Government Association (LGA) came to Kirklees Council in November 2024 to carry out a ‘Corporate Peer Challenge’, which is a key part of the LGA’s improvement and assurance framework. The LGA produced a report, which outlines feedback following the visit. The report contains eight key recommendations for action and improvement. This report is available to read on the council’s website here: LGA (Local Government Association) Corporate Peer Challenge Kirklees Council, and is appended to this paper for context at Appendix B.</p> <p>This Cabinet report presents an action plan for approval. The action plan aims to deliver a range of corporate, and service led improvements in response to the key recommendations provided by the LGA, and is provided at Appendix A.</p>	
<p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Cabinet to note the LGA’s report, provided for context at Appendix B. • For Cabinet to consider the contents of this report and approve the action plan as presented in Appendix A. • For Cabinet to consider and approve the proposals for ongoing reporting against the action plan, taking into consideration any feedback provided by OSMC on the 4 April, provided in section 2.8 of this report. • For Cabinet to agree to present the action plan to Council on 23 April 2025 for noting, so that Members are aware of the LGA’s recommendations, and the associated actions the council will be taking in response. <p>Reasons for Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kirklees Council is a member council of the LGA. The LGA require all member councils to undertake a ‘Corporate Peer Challenge’ at least once every five years. • As part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process, councils are required to develop and publish an action plan to deliver improvements based upon the recommendations provided by the LGA following the visit. Following the November 2024 visit to Kirklees, we are required to publish an action plan by the 29 April 2025. • The action plan sets out some important next steps for the council and builds on recent work to improve and strengthen our position for delivering on our priorities into the future. It will support the council to deliver on the priorities set out within the refreshed 2025/26 Council Plan, which was agreed by Council on the 5 March 2025. 	

Resource Implication: The action plan will mostly be delivered with resources already existing within the council. Where additional/external resources are required to deliver specific actions within the plan, relevant council process and procedure rules will be followed, with value for money clearly demonstrated.

Date signed off by Executive Director & name

Rachel Spencer-Henshall – Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for Public Health and Corporate Resources
28.03.2025

Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?

Kevin Mulvaney
28.03.2025

Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?

Samantha Lawton
28.03.2025

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: Not applicable

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? No personal data is included in this report.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) came to Kirklees Council between 26 - 29 November 2024, to carry out a 'Corporate Peer Challenge'. The Corporate Peer Challenge is a key part of the LGA's improvement and assurance framework.
- 1.2 The LGA requires every member council to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge at least once every five years. During the visit, local government peers provided feedback to the council on a range of corporate issues, based on evidence and information provided to them, and conversations that took place with a range of staff, councillors, partners and other key stakeholders.
- 1.3 The LGA have produced a report, which outlines feedback following the visit, and contains eight key recommendations for improvement. This report is available to read on the Council's website here: [LGA \(Local Government Association\) Corporate Peer Challenge | Kirklees Council](#), and is appended to this paper for context at **Appendix B**.
- 1.4 This report presents an action plan to Cabinet, which aims to deliver a range of corporate, and service led improvements in response to the key recommendations provided by the LGA. This action plan is provided at **Appendix A**.
- 1.5 The action plan sets out some important next steps for the council and builds on recent work to improve and strengthen our position for delivering on our priorities into the future. It will support the council to deliver on the priorities set out within the refreshed 2025/26 Council Plan, which was agreed by Council on the 5 March 2025.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) came to Kirklees Council between 26 - 29 November 2024, to carry out a 'Corporate Peer Challenge'.
- 2.1.2 The Corporate Peer Challenge is a key part of the LGA's improvement and assurance framework. As described by the LGA, the process provides "robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils, bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of Member and officer peers".
- 2.1.3 The LGA requires every member council to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge at least once every five years, and by doing so, this process is recognised by the LGA as a way to assist councils in meeting their Best Value Duty. The Best Value Duty is a statutory requirement contained within Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. It requires authorities to "Make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised".
- 2.1.4 During the visit, local government peers provided feedback to the council on a range of corporate issues, based on evidence and information that is provided to them, and interviews and focus groups that took place with a range of staff, councillors, partners and other key stakeholders.
- 2.1.5 The Peer Challenge is available at no cost to the Council. The Peer team undertake a review of key finance, performance and governance information and spend up to four days at the council to assess that information to provide challenge and support.

2.2 About the Corporate Peer Challenge process and requirements from the LGA

- 2.2.1 Following a Corporate Peer Challenge, a report outlining the key findings and recommendations from the peer team is shared with the council. In the spirit of openness and transparency, councils are required to publish this report within three months of the visit. The council is also required to publish an action plan, setting out key actions in response to the recommendations contained within the report, no later than five months following the visit.
- 2.2.2 All Corporate Peer Challenges now include a progress review which takes place approximately ten months after the original visit. The progress review provides space for a council's senior leadership to report to the peer team on the progress made against the corporate peer challenge recommendations, discuss early impact or learning and received feedback on the implementation of the action plan.
- 2.2.3 Following the progress review, a report outlining the peer team's findings is shared with the council. Again, in the spirit of openness and transparency, the council is required to publish this report, no later than 12 months after the original visit.
- 2.2.4 From April 2024, the LGA have implemented an improved and refreshed approach to delivering Corporate Peer Challenges. As part of this new approach, the LGA have improved the overall rigour and robustness of the approach, with an increased focus on governance, finance, performance and assurance, alongside investments and improvements made to the training and development of Member and officer peers, and improved robustness and consistency of reporting.

2.3 Our last peer challenge in Kirklees

2.3.1 Our last Corporate Peer Challenge took place in July 2019. In the period since then, we have experienced and dealt with some significant challenges, including responding to and recovering from the global coronavirus pandemic, and dealing with the cost-of-living crisis and global economic turbulence that has endured since then. The council has since been dealing with some significant financial challenges, as costs and demand for council services continued to grow following these events.

2.3.2 Our last Corporate Peer Challenge included recommendations around strengthening strategic communications, resident engagement, place-based working, and strengthening the corporate centre to develop its capacity. It also provided recommendations around prioritising a decision around the long-term future of the ALMO (Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing) and pushing for the establishment of a single Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Recommendations related to streamlining decision-making and bringing clarity around roles and responsibilities of Members and officers were also provided, plus a recommendation around reviewing the electoral cycle to support a more stable electoral pattern.

2.3.3 Looking back, we've made good progress against delivering on those recommendations:

- We've successfully brought the ALMO back in-house – now 'Kirklees Homes and Neighbourhoods'.
- We have a clear communications strategy, made improvements to citizen engagement and we now routinely work in a 'place-based' way.
- Since the previous Peer Challenge, we've increased capacity in our corporate centre, for example by providing additional resources for improvement and transformation activities.
- Following the last Peer Challenge, we worked closely with our partners to help establish one Clinical Commissioning Group – NHS Kirklees CCG – which helped to simplify and strengthen partnership working arrangements within the health and care sector.
- We've also worked to streamline our decision-making processes, and to ensure there is greater clarity between the role of officers and Members.
- We still however operate a staggered election system held by thirds, as there was no local appetite at the time to review the electoral pattern.

2.3.4 Five years ago, the council also embarked upon the development of plans for a substantial and unprecedented programme of regeneration and development for all our major towns and villages. In July 2019, Council agreed our vision for the future regeneration of Kirklees, and in 2020, the Huddersfield and Dewsbury blueprints were approved by Cabinet. Fast forward to now, this vision is starting to become a reality, and works have commenced for several of our most significant projects.

2.4 Scope and focus for the Corporate Peer Challenge

2.4.1 All Corporate Peer Challenges focus on five core elements, as well as any additional local areas of focus or specific challenges requested by the council. The five core elements are:

- Local priorities and outcomes
- Organisational and place leadership
- Governance and culture

- Financial planning and management
- Capacity for improvement

2.4.2 Considering our story so far, and the challenges we were grappling with at the time, we asked the peer team to focus fully on the five core areas of inquiry, as these were the areas where we felt we would get the most useful insights. At the time of the visit, we understood our most critical task was to be able to confidently deliver on our budget, at the same time as continuing to deliver on our outcomes and not losing sight of the longer-term regeneration and place shaping ambitions for our future. We understood that we had difficult decisions ahead, and to support those decisions, we wanted to ensure we had the right priorities, structures, culture and corporate enabling services in place.

2.5 Feedback provided in the report

2.5.1 Following an extensive period of planning and preparation for the visit, including a rigorous self-assessment process, there was nothing unexpected in terms of feedback presented in the report. The LGA were complimentary about our planning and preparation for the visit and stated that the 'position statement' prepared for the team was well written and an honest reflection of the challenges facing the council.

2.5.2 The Council's Executive welcomes the findings in the LGA report and accepts the suggested key recommendations. The findings will help to inform and shape our ongoing improvement journey and builds on recent work to improve and strengthen our position for delivering on our priorities into the future. It will support the council to deliver on the priorities set out within the refreshed 2025/26 Council Plan, which was agreed by Council on the 5 March 2025.

2.5.3 Alongside the key recommendations for improvement, the report contains some helpful positive feedback on the council's overall current position. The LGA outlined how the council:

- Is now in a more stable position, following recent changes to political and officer leadership.
- Has a clear vision and priorities set out in the council plan, underpinned by a clear range of annual deliverables.
- Is tackling its financial issues in a thorough and strategic way and is seeking external support. The budget position is improving and normalising.
- Can point to some real successes in delivering both savings and improved outcomes, for example in both adults and children's social care (with strong performance and leadership visible across these services).
- Has performance reporting that is presented well, is accessible and timely, and has links to budget reporting.
- Has stakeholders and public sector partners who report positive working relationships with the council and plays an active role in the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.
- Has an established Executive Leadership Team which is widely respected across the organisation.
- Has council staff that generally feel valued. There is a clear sense of commitment to the council as an organisation, as well as to Kirklees as a place.
- Has governance arrangements that are working well. The Cabinet is collegiate and prepared to take tough decisions, scrutiny is taken seriously, and the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee is engaged and well supported.

2.6 Key recommendations provided by the LGA

2.6.1 The full feedback report provided by the LGA is provided at **Appendix B** to this report. Within the report, 8 key recommendations for improvement were provided, and these have been included below:

- **Recommendation 1:** Continue to keep a grip on the council's budget. The financial challenges continue to be significant and require ongoing focus to deliver planned savings and replenish reserves. A longer-term plan needs to be developed to deliver a more sustainable financial situation for the council.
- **Recommendation 2:** Apply successes and learning from transformation across the council more widely. There is a range of good projects and approaches from transformation, but they tend to remain within services. There are successes in children and adults social care and the learning from these approaches could be better understood by wider council services to help drive their improvement.
- **Recommendation 3:** The council has some large-scale regeneration plans agreed with delivery underway. Revisit the plans to ensure they are affordable, viable and deliverable in the current financial context. Part of this consideration should include the balance of housing provision.
- **Recommendation 4:** Explore planning in a more expansive and strategic way, including the role it can play in delivering the housing aspects of the new local plan, nationally determined local targets and how the council will deliver much-needed new homes.
- **Recommendation 5:** Work more closely with businesses and economic partners to define potential growth, skills and investment opportunities in Kirklees.
- **Recommendation 6:** At the political level there has been some instability over the past 18 months. Given the position of no overall control, Members need to be mindful of their roles, responsibilities and work collaboratively to put communities and residents first. The council needs to keep working at good governance across a range of issues, including clarity of reports, Member development programmes and councillors' behaviours.
- **Recommendation 7:** Considerable progress has been made in some service areas, with tangible progress, for example in children's services. Maintain this focus so that performance continues to improve.
- **Recommendation 8:** Use this peer challenge as an opportunity to pivot towards a longer horizon for key decisions.

2.7 Process for developing the action plan

2.7.1 Once the LGA report was received, a draft set of actions were produced, based on conversations with key officers who have expertise and experience related to the thematic areas of focus for the key recommendations. These draft actions were then discussed and further refined with the Executive Leadership Team and Cabinet.

2.7.2 The suggested areas of focus for actions were then also discussed and shared with members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, and Political Group Leaders. The plan will also then be discussed at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the 4 April, to seek feedback and engagement with delivery and reporting against the action plan once it is approved. Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, and feedback from Group Leaders, has been included in section 5 of this report.

2.7.3 Once Cabinet has approved the action plan presented at **Appendix A**, it is recommended that this then be presented to Council on 23 April 2025 for noting, so that Members are aware of the LGA's recommendations, and the associated actions the council will be taking in response.

2.8 **Proposed ongoing delivery monitoring and reporting**

2.8.1 Once the action plan is approved, ongoing internal delivery monitoring and reporting will commence. The action plan provided at **Appendix A** has included specific timescales associated with each action, and a responsible Service Director.

2.8.2 Detailed information on progress with delivery will be collated against each action on a regular basis. Reporting will utilise a RAG (Red, Amber Green) rating approach to provide an 'at-a-glance' overview in terms of success and progress against delivery in accordance with the stated timescales.

2.8.3 In September 2025, the Local Government Association will come back to Kirklees to undertake a progress review. Following the progress review, a report outlining the peer team's findings is shared with the council. The council is then required to publish this report, no later than 12 months after the original visit.

2.8.4 In advance of the LGA progress review, it is proposed that a full update against delivery of the actions is provided to Cabinet, and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in the Summer (specific committee meeting dates currently to be confirmed).

3. **Implications for the Council**

3.1 **Council Plan**

The action plan sets out some important next steps for the council and builds on recent work to improve and strengthen our position into the future. It will support the council to deliver on the priorities set out within the refreshed 2025/26 Council Plan, which was agreed by Council on the 5 March 2025. Within the 2025/26 Council Plan, the development and delivery of the LGA Peer Challenge action plan has been included as a 'Area of Focus' within the 'Getting the basics right – a balanced budget and a modern organisation' priority, and delivery of the action plan will be reported via regular progress and delivery reports relating to the 2025/26 Council Plan.

3.2 **Financial Implications**

One of the five core areas of focus for the Corporate Peer Challenge is around 'Financial Planning and Management'. The first recommendation provided in the LGA report outlines how the council should develop a longer-term plan to deliver a more sustainable financial situation. As such, the action plan provided at **Appendix A**, includes some key actions to deliver upon this recommendation.

3.3 Legal Implications

The LGA requires every member council to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge at least once every five years, and by doing so, this process is recognised by the LGA as a way to assist councils in meeting their Best Value Duty. The Best Value Duty is a statutory requirement contained within Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999.

3.4 Other (e.g. Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)

The action plan presented at **Appendix A**, relates to a wide range of different areas of activity that the council delivers.

Integrated Impact Assessments for individual changes and projects referred to within the actions will be developed as required.

The council maintains a corporate risk register, and risks for individual areas of activity within the action plan will be managed accordingly and as part of the established corporate process.

Some of the actions within the action plan, relate to making improvements to ways of working for council employees. Most notably, the 'Our Council' culture reset initiative (included as an action against recommendation 8) will support positive changes in the way that all council employees work, for example by supporting an improved focus on the needs of our customers, encouraging better budget management, and further work to embed our corporate values of kindness, inclusion and pride.

4 Consultation

Corporate Peer Challenges involve extensive consultation, which is carried out by the Peer Team during the week of the visit. This is so the team can gather evidence and formulate their feedback. The LGA Peer Team spent four days onsite at Kirklees Council during which they:

- Gathered evidence, information, and views from more than 35 meetings, in addition to further research and reading. Most of these meetings were face to face, and some were conducted via MS Teams.
- Spoke to more than 140 people including a range of council staff together with Members and external stakeholders.
- Attended meetings at Dewsbury Town Hall.

5 Engagement

5.1 Relevant council officers (including Service Directors and the Executive Leadership Team) and the Cabinet, have been engaged in the development of the action plan.

5.2 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee were also engaged in the development of actions for the action plan, at a meeting on the 20 March 2025. Group Leaders were also engaged and asked for feedback on development of the actions. Areas of focus for actions against each of the recommendations were provided to Members and feedback was received and considered by the Executive. Feedback from Members includes:

Recommendation 1 (Budget)

- Support for further development of the cross-party working group focused on the budget.
- Suggestion to compare best practice from other local authorities to ensure we are able to develop a clear strategy for replenishing reserves.

Recommendation 2 (Transformation)

- Support required for the third sector to enhance transformation opportunities.
- Suggestion around the need for improved external communication around transformation initiatives, including the need to balance this with transparency around reducing service provision.

Recommendation 3 (Regeneration plans)

- Question around how the capital programme review and outcomes will be communicated, and how stakeholders / Members will be engaged with as part of that review.
- Request for Elected Members to be engaged in any revisions / refreshed plans for regeneration.
- Regeneration plans should focus not just on the larger, capital funded schemes, but also support to smaller, local businesses.
- Consideration should be given to how we ensure our fair share from funding from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Recommendation 4 (Planning)

- Support for inclusion of the new Housing Strategy as an action, and a suggestion to ensure this strategy will cover delivery of a range of different housing needs and that it addresses sustainability, affordability and local demographics.

Recommendation 5 (Working with business and economic partners)

- Support for a stronger role for local businesses in shaping policy and strategy, through a range of engagement forums.
- A question around how we will better integrate with WYCA on growth, skills and investment.
- A suggestion around ensuring there is a focus on engaging with locally owned and managed businesses so that we can maximise opportunities and benefits for local communities and the Kirklees economy.

Recommendation 6 (Member roles and development)

- Support for an improved offer around Member training and development, and a request to ensure Members are involved in the development of the offer.
- Suggestions for things to include in the Member development offer, including mentoring / peer support, and making training mandatory for being on a committee.
- A suggestion to ensure we focus on the promotion and communication of the member-officer protocol, as this will help ensure it is used and adhered to.

- A point highlighting the importance of the new member induction, and support provided to new committee members.

Recommendation 7 (continuing to improve performance)

- Further detail required around how performance will be monitored in Children's Social Care.
- Ensure that scrutiny has a robust role in monitoring implementation of any improvement plans.
- Important that Adult Social Care has similar levels of monitoring as Children's Social Care, and Homes and Neighbourhoods.

Recommendation 8 (developing a longer-term horizon)

- Inclusion of Digital Strategy as an action supported and noted the need for this to be ambitious. Request for further information around the priorities and implementation of this. Linked to the Digital Strategy, a suggestion to consider more innovative app-based solutions for citizens to report issues or request a service. Ensure the Digital Strategy takes improvements to accessibility into consideration.
- Support for improved communication and clearer expectations with regards to our customers.
- Support for review of existing strategic partnership agreements to ensure long-term co-operation with our partners.
- A suggestion around having a clearer, more consistent voice as a council when it comes to what our ask is from a regional / West Yorkshire perspective. We need to be clearer about what it is we need from the region, and the outcomes from regional working we want to achieve.

Members also:

- Noted the required next steps of the LGA in terms of progress reporting.
- Agreed with the need for ongoing reporting and engagement with Scrutiny around delivery of the action plan and were supportive of the inclusion of timescales against the actions.
- Supported the suggestion to return to OSMC on the 4 April to review the final action plan, and to provide further feedback on next steps and reporting.

Based on the feedback provided by Members, we will:

- Ensure we engage with locally owned and managed businesses as part of the action around delivering the Kirklees Economic Summit, so that we can maximise opportunities and benefits for local communities and the Kirklees economy.
- Consider the development of key messages / development of a consistent voice as a council when working at a regional level, as part of work to develop a new Partnership Framework.

The feedback from Members on the action plan, demonstrates support for the actions that have been included, with helpful suggestions and further things to consider as part of implementation related to specific actions, and in terms of ongoing reporting that will be required. Points of feedback in this section will be fed back to lead officers to be considered when implementing related actions, following approval of the action plan.

6 Options

6.1 Options Considered

Cabinet may either choose to approve the plan as presented or indicate any amendments or changes they may wish to make.

Our recommendations to Cabinet are:

- For Cabinet to note the LGA's report, provided for context at **Appendix B**.
- For Cabinet to consider the contents of this report and approve the action plan as set out in **Appendix A**.
- For Cabinet to consider and approve the proposals for ongoing reporting against the action plan, taking into consideration any feedback provided by OSMC on the 4 April, provided in **section 2.8** of this report.
- For Cabinet to agree to present the action plan to **Council on 23 April 2025** for noting, so that Members are aware of the LGA's recommendations, and the associated actions the council will be taking in response.

6.2 Reasons for recommended Option

- Kirklees Council is a member council of the LGA. The LGA require all member councils to undertake a 'Corporate Peer Challenge' at least once every five years.
- As part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process, councils are required to develop and publish an associated action plan to deliver improvements based upon the recommendations provided by the LGA following the visit. Following the visit to Kirklees, we are required to publish an action plan by the 29 April 2025.
- The action plan sets out some important next steps for the council and builds on recent work to improve and strengthen our position into the future. It will support the council to deliver on the priorities set out within the refreshed 2025/26 Council Plan, which was agreed by Council on the 5 March 2025.

7. Next steps and timelines

Following approval by Cabinet, and subject to any additions or changes:

- The action plan will be submitted to Council on the 23 April 2025 for noting, so that Members are aware of the LGA's recommendations, and the associated actions the council will be taking in response.
- Monitoring and reporting against delivery of the action plan will commence, with reports to Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, and to Council as set out in **section 2.8** of this report.
- The LGA will visit the Council in September 2025, to carry out a progress review. This progress review will enable the council to report to peers on the progress made against the recommendations, discuss early impact or learning, and receive feedback on the implementation of the action plan.
- The Council and the LGA will then publish a progress review report by the end of November 2025, which must be within 12 months of the initial Corporate Peer Challenge visit.

8. Contact officers

Stephen Bonnell, Head of Policy, Partnerships, and Corporate Planning
Stephen.bonnell@kirklees.gov.uk

Michelle Hope, Corporate Planning and Coordination Manager, Policy, Partnerships and Corporate Planning
Michelle.hope@kirklees.gov.uk

9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

The LGA's feedback report, has been published on the Council's website here:

[LGA \(Local Government Association\) Corporate Peer Challenge | Kirklees Council](#)

Previous Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan (Approved at Council, 15 January 2020):

[Agenda for Council on Wednesday 15th January 2020, 5.30 pm | Kirklees Council](#)

[CPC Feedback and Action Plan Report - Full Council - 15 January 2020.pdf](#)

10. Appendices

Appendix A: LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Kirklees Council Action Plan

Appendix B: LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Kirklees Council Feedback Report

11. Service Director responsible

Andy Simcox, Service Director Strategy and Innovation

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Kirklees Council Action Plan

Recommendation 1

Continue to keep a grip on the council's budget. The financial challenges continue to be significant and require ongoing focus to deliver planned savings and replenish reserves. A longer-term plan needs to be developed to deliver a more sustainable financial situation for the council.

Current position and next steps

As we emerged from the pandemic, the global economic challenges began to escalate, which resulted in some significant financial challenges for the council. Rising costs and demand for services became an increasing, significant problem. Initially, the council was able to manage the emerging financial challenge by utilising reserves to address the deficit. However, as the impact worsened, and as reserves continued to be depleted, the council quickly moved to put in place an approach to help support effective decision making around the development, delivery and monitoring of budget savings and our overall financial position.

We now have robust financial monitoring arrangements in place and have strengthened public and Member engagement around the development of our budget. These arrangements will help us to ensure we can keep a grip on the council's budget, and monitor the delivery of savings, pressures, and related service budgets. Overall, our budget position has now significantly improved, and we are looking ahead to a period of greater financial stability. As we now enter the new 25/26 financial year, we have a balanced budget agreed by Council, which sets out the starting point for achieving that stability.

The council welcomes this recommendation and acknowledges the importance of moving towards a place where reserves are replenished back to a more stable level, and we have a longer-term plan for our finances to enable more effective planning. This will help put us in a stronger position to be able to deliver on our outcomes into the future, and the actions to support this recommendation will help us move forward towards delivering this.

Actions

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director
1.1	Ensure monthly and quarterly financial monitoring to officers and Members continues to be clear, accurate and enables responsive and timely decision-making to support effective service delivery and planned savings.	April 2025 – March 2026	Service Director, Finance
1.2	Continue to strengthen and develop our cross-party working group and budget consultation to support ongoing financial monitoring and the development of the next budget.	April 2025 - March 2026	Service Director, Finance

1.3	Publish a 'budget book' – which provides a breakdown of all service budgets to support greater transparency and challenge and ensure a shared understanding of service budgets across the council.	August 2025	Service Director, Finance
1.4	<p>Within the next MTFFS (Medium-Term Financial Strategy) update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a detailed 3-year budget for each service, to support longer term financial planning and stability for services across the council. • Continue to sustainably increase reserves over the coming years, including unallocated reserves. 	September 2025	Service Director, Finance
1.5	Implement an annual benchmarking exercise to help with the identification of further opportunities for transformation and efficiencies.	September 2025	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation

Recommendation 2

Apply successes and learning from transformation across the council more widely. There is a range of good projects and approaches from transformation, but they tend to remain within services. There are successes in children and adults social care and the learning from these approaches could be better understood by wider council services to help drive their improvement.

Current position and next steps

The council has a dedicated corporate transformation service as well as several change hubs across the organisation. Senior officer oversight of our corporate transformation programme comes via the Executive Leadership Team and four directorate-specific Change Boards.

Transformation efforts focus on both cross-council and individual service areas. We have seen some key transformation successes over recent years, including:

- Being seen as a leader on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), through, for example additionally resourced provision, and working with the Department for Education to bring down costs and improve some of our most important services
- Continuing to deliver our Access to Services Strategy, increasing the accessibility of services and improving how we work with people when they contact us - achieving a 17% reduction in calls on Council Tax from 2022/23 to 2023/24.
- Reforming our local planning application process, with the aim of making it more modern and efficient.
- Embedding a succession planning process, with the aim of mitigating the risk of our most critical posts being left vacant through employees leaving the organisation.

We have a clear, effective, and well-established approach to delivering, reporting and decision making around transformation initiatives, and we acknowledge the LGA's recommendations in relation to needing to share successes and learning more widely across the council, to help drive improvement across wider council services. The actions within this plan will build on our approach to transformation.

Actions

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director
2.1	Implement a new approach for resourcing transformation activity, with a focus on better outcomes and further efficiencies, including tracking the benefits and impacts of the initiatives which are delivered.	April 2025	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
2.2	Develop and begin delivery of a new plan for more effective support and engagement with the third sector working closely with our local infrastructure and voice organisation (Third Sector Leaders) to identify ways to enable communities to do more for themselves.	July 2025	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation

2.3	<p>Further develop our council-wide approach to resourcing, connecting, and communicating about transformation initiatives, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening connections and coordination between transformation initiatives. • Sharing more widely the learning, methodologies, and approaches. • Communicating our transformation successes to Members and officers, to help build a culture of ongoing transformation and support shared learning. 	September 2025 (develop) December 2025 (implement)	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
2.4	Identify opportunities for partnership-led transformation in Kirklees and ensure these are being effectively managed.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
2.5	Develop and describe a council-wide transformation vision for long-term transformation across the whole council connected to the next, longer-term Council Plan.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
2.6	Deliver the Assets Property Transformation Programme, using external advice to support implementation.	March 2026	Service Director, Development

Recommendation 3

The council has some large-scale regeneration plans agreed with delivery underway. Revisit the plans to ensure they are affordable, viable and deliverable in the current financial context. Part of this consideration should include the balance of housing provision.

Current position and next steps

Five years ago, the council embarked upon the development of plans for a substantial and unprecedented programme of regeneration and development for all our major towns and villages. In July 2019, Council agreed our vision for the future regeneration of Kirklees, and in 2020, the Huddersfield and Dewsbury blueprints were approved by Cabinet. Fast forward to now, this vision is starting to become a reality, and works have commenced for several of our most significant projects. Our regeneration plans for our towns and villages, are starting to take shape.

Our Capital Strategy outlines over £1.29bn of investment in Kirklees over the next five years, and we recognise that such a significant level of ambition and investment will naturally take time to start to demonstrate the benefits and outcomes for the future, and for the people and places of Kirklees. We accept the LGA's recommendation to revisit our regeneration plans, because we understand that as these plans span such a long period of time, that the external environment and wider context can change. The recent financial challenges facing the council has certainly meant changes to the wider context for these plans. We acknowledge that our plans must remain affordable, viable and deliverable, and the actions contained within this plan will help provide the necessary assurance moving forward.

Actions

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director
3.1	Review the capital programme, to make sure we have affordable plans, including considering an externally led capital plan review.	September 2025	Service Director, Finance
3.2	Complete the review of phase 5 of Our Cultural Heart to ensure we maximise value for money whilst maintaining our ambition of long-term benefits for people, businesses and the local economy.	September 2025	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration
3.3	Analyse the direct and indirect costs and implications for our major regeneration projects across all council services and directorates and continue to deliver a 'Cultural Heart mobilisation' plan to manage associated risks and opportunities in a cross-directorate coordinated way.	March 2026	Service Director, Finance/ Service Director, Strategy and Innovation/ Service Director, Skills and Regeneration

3.4	Conduct a governance review to ensure the right governance mechanisms are in place to support ongoing, effective delivery monitoring of our capital plans and programmes. Implement refreshed governance arrangements.	March 2026	Service Director, Finance
3.5	Decide priorities for securing further external investment funding - including considering the balance of housing provisions alongside other types of development and investment – and proactively monitor external funding opportunities to support these priorities.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation / Service Director, Skills and Regeneration
3.6	Develop a longer-term strategy and plan to support the development of residential provision in our town centres, linked to the update of the Local Plan.	March 2027	Service Director, Development
3.7	Refresh all our town centre blueprints and smaller centre regeneration plans to reflect the current financial context and consider future plans beyond the current timescales, ensuring they are fit for the future and ready for changes in transport, technology, and the economy.	March 2027	Service Director, Development

Recommendation 4

Explore planning in a more expansive and strategic way, including the role it can play in delivering the housing aspects of the new local plan, nationally determined local targets and how the council will deliver much-needed new homes.

Current position and next steps

The current Kirklees Local Plan was first adopted in 2019. At the time, the council committed to reviewing the plan within five years, to ensure it was still fit for purpose. The Kirklees Local Plan sets out the planning policy framework for the district, guiding future growth and change over a longer-term planning period. It includes a vision and strategic objectives for development within Kirklees, how and where different levels of development will be located, and a suite of planning policies to guide decisions on planning applications.

On the 25 November 2024, the council launched the Kirklees Local Plan Early Engagement, to help shape an updated local plan for the future. The new plan will account for wider environmental and economic changes, and ensure the Local Plan is in keeping with emerging national planning policy changes.

The national planning policy landscape is changing, with new, emerging government guidance and legislation, and new mandatory housing targets for local authority areas. Ensuring the council continues to monitor and analyse changes to policy and understands how this should be reflected in local plans and strategies, will be important for shaping local planning delivery moving forward.

The council recognises that as well as delivering mandated house building targets, having the right balance of housing provision is also important, which includes market rate, affordable, and social housing. The new housing strategy for Kirklees aims to understand and deliver the right balance of housing Kirklees will need for the future.

The council proposes that through continued monitoring of national policy changes, delivery of a new Housing Strategy, and continued work to refresh and review the Local Plan, we will sufficiently address the LGA's recommendation in this area.

Actions

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director
4.1	Monitor and analyse the impact of national policy changes related to planning (including more powers for Combined Authorities), and ensure we are prepared to benefit, including through further workforce development to ensure we have sufficient capacity and skills.	December 2025	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration/ Service Director, Strategy and Innovation

4.2	Develop a new Housing Strategy for Kirklees, setting out a long-term approach for the types of housing Kirklees will need in the future, including the balance across market, affordable, and social housing.	December 2026	Service Director, Development
4.3	Continue to progress work associated with the implementation of the next refresh of our Local Plan ('Local Plan 2'), including local engagement and cross-party working.	December 2027	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration

Recommendation 5

Work more closely with businesses and economic partners to define potential growth, skills and investment opportunities in Kirklees.

Current position and next steps

We are currently working on finalising the Inclusive Economy Strategy with an expectation to take it to Cabinet in July and Full Council in August. The final version will incorporate views from recent partnership engagement. The strategy will focus on place, businesses, people, skills and employment within Kirklees, and will form the basis of strategic partnership working with business and economic partners to define potential growth, skills and investment opportunities in Kirklees going forward. The strategy will help deliver on the government's ambitions for growth and will be aligned with the West Yorkshire Growth Plan.

The business and economic partnership landscape in Kirklees is complex, and there are several partnership forums which exist that support the delivery of our economic development ambitions. We acknowledge the LGA's recommendation that there is more work to do to build on existing partnership engagement mechanisms in this area, and to work closely with partners to deliver the economic strategy once it has been agreed.

In response to this recommendation, the council proposes the delivery of an economic summit, which will bring together a wide range of businesses and economic partners, to develop tangible actions for delivering the economic strategy, and for responding to economic opportunities across Kirklees. We acknowledge the important role that locally owned and managed businesses have to play as part of this engagement and will ensure there is sufficient representation from local businesses as part of our approach to this. The event will also inform the shape and focus for ongoing partnership engagement, which will be supported by more effectively mapping out the forums and mechanisms which already exist in this area. We also recognise the role of the third sector as part of responding to this recommendation and will develop a programme of activity which more effectively links the sector to wider economic development work at both a local and regional level.

Actions

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director
5.1	Building on partner engagement, begin delivery of the Inclusive Economy Strategy.	August 2025	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration
5.2	Deliver a Kirklees economic summit, bringing together key businesses and economic partners to develop tangible actions for delivering the Inclusive Economy Strategy and responding to economic opportunities across Kirklees.	By December 2025	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration
5.3	Review the economic partnership arrangements, including engagement mechanisms, identifying any areas for improving collaboration and communication, and decide actions to progress these.	December 2025	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration

5.4	In the context of increasing powers and flexibility at a West Yorkshire level, support better connections between the Combined Authority and local third sector organisations with a role supporting economic growth, skills, and investment. This includes organisations indirectly supporting the economy through improving health and wellbeing.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
5.5	Deliver a programme of events for local businesses helping them connect to local third sector organisations to support their aspirations for Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Value, including volunteering and mentoring.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation/ Service Director, Skills and Regeneration

Recommendation 6

At the political level there has been some instability over the past 18 months. Given the position of no overall control, Members need to be mindful of their roles, responsibilities and work collaboratively to put communities and residents first. The council needs to keep working at good governance across a range of issues, including clarity of reports, Member development programmes and councillors' behaviours.

Current position and next steps

Kirklees has robust and effective systems and relationships in place which support the council to be effective, well run, and accountable. The council uses a strong leader model, with a Leader and Cabinet, supported by a corporate governance, audit and scrutiny process. Our operational practice under this model is assessed against our local code of corporate governance.

For much of our history, we have been under no overall control, and majorities are often small. We also have elections three in every four years, meaning that political power has changed more often than in some neighbouring authorities. This means that officers have been required to effectively engage with councillors across parties, especially through our scrutiny functions, to ensure decisions – especially difficult or longer-term decisions, are sustainable.

We welcome the recommendation from the LGA, as we understand that maintaining good governance practices is critical for our success moving forward, and how collaborative working across members and officers help to establish the fundamental building blocks for good governance, particularly because of our local political context.

We will continue to work on reviewing our Member Development Framework and officer training and development initiatives, which help councillors and officers develop their knowledge and skills, so all councillors feel confident in their role supporting and challenging council services, and officers feel confident in their role working with and alongside members. We will also refresh and review our member-officer protocol, which sets out standards for collaborative working across members and officers.

To support these actions, and to ensure the foundations for ensuring good governance are in place, we will also make further improvements in the clarity of decision-making reports, including improving templates, processes, and guidance.

Actions

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director
6.1	Update and improve awareness of the Member-officer protocol across both Members and officers and continue to identify issues and required action through reports to standards committee every six months.	May 2025	Service Director, Governance and Commissioning
6.2	Make further improvements in the clarity of decision-making reports, including improving templates, processes, and guidance.	July 2025	Service Director, Governance and Commissioning

6.3	Review and improve existing officer training and development initiatives for working with and alongside Members, to help develop a shared understanding of what working together looks like.	January 2026	Service Director, Governance and Commissioning
6.4	Develop and launch a new Member Development Framework, and associated action plan, which aims to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bring together existing support • identify opportunities for further support • This will support new and existing Members. 	January 2026	Service Director, Governance and Commissioning

Recommendation 7

Considerable progress has been made in some service areas, with tangible progress, for example in children’s services. Maintain this focus so that performance continues to improve.

Current position and next steps

Even though addressing our financial situation continues to be challenging, we also continue to manage services well and make good progress on our improvement plans. Our recent Children’s Services assessment by Ofsted of ‘Good’ – demonstrates the improvement journey we’ve been on since 2016 when these services were deemed ‘Inadequate’.

Our Housing Improvement Board is now making good progress on addressing issues around fire safety, and damp and mould from the recent Regulator for Social Housing notice. We self-referred ourselves to the regulator, as we knew we had specific challenges we should make them aware of, and by actively engaging with the regulator, we knew we’d get the right support to help us tackle these issues. We’ve got significant transformation programmes in place for Adult Social Care, for SEND, and Kirklees Homes and Neighbourhoods. We are also implementing plans to tackle some of the issues we’re experiencing around temporary accommodation and homelessness.

The council has improved its performance monitoring processes to ensure it is more transparent and supports effective management and decision-making. We produce a quarterly Council Plan and Performance monitoring report, approved by Cabinet, detailing progress and key performance measures. We have also introduced a quarterly corporate reporting cycle, which consolidates key quarterly reports and aligns them with organisational decision-making structures. This includes budget monitoring, transformation programme reporting, risk reporting, and performance updates, fostering coordinated and strategic decision-making.

Moving forward, we will ensure that we can maintain an effective, ongoing approach to monitoring and reporting on performance across all council services, ensure there is a continued focus on specific areas where improvements have recently been made to maintain that, and a focus on specific areas where it is important to maintain robust monitoring to deliver the improvements we require. The actions included for this recommendation will support a corporately coordinated approach to the maintenance and delivery of our continuous improvement journey.

We are encouraged to see the LGA acknowledge the improvement journey we are on, and the good progress we have made over the last few years. We support the recommendation that we must focus on ensuring we are able to maintain these improvements moving forward.

Actions

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director
7.1	Develop an overview of external inspections, and any associated improvement plans to ensure there is sufficient planning and coordinated follow up. This includes inspections related to CQC, SEND, and the Regulator for Social Housing. Develop a set of principles for engaging with inspection regimes.	September 2025	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation

7.2	Ensure an effective, ongoing approach to monitoring and reporting performance across the council, that effectively informs decision making around improving performance.	September 2025	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
7.3	Support and guidance provided to services around service planning, supporting service delivery against the priorities set out within the Council Plan and associated annual budget.	September 2025	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
7.4	Ensure effective delivery and performance monitoring across children's social care, to ensure recent progress and improvements are maintained over the long-term.	Review by December 2025	Service Director, Child Protection and Family Support
7.5	Ensure effective delivery and performance monitoring across Kirklees Homes and Neighbourhoods, to ensure required improvements are delivered over the long-term.	Review by December 2025	Service Director, Homes and Neighbourhoods

Recommendation 8

Use this peer challenge as an opportunity to pivot towards a longer horizon for key decisions.

Current position and next steps

The Council's vision and supporting outcomes have been in place for nearly 10 years – and have continued to provide us with a long-term framework for planning and delivery, working together alongside our partners. The council's vision and priorities are detailed within our 2025/26 Council Plan, which is aligned with our annual budget. Both were approved by Council on the 5/6 March 2025.

In response to this recommendation, and other feedback we've received, we are proposing that we review these key commitments alongside our partners, to ensure they are fit for purpose, relevant in the current context, and provide a clear basis for what it is we want to achieve together for the longer-term benefit of the places and people who live and work in Kirklees. Linked to the LGA's recommendation around having a longer-term strategy for the budget, we support this recommendation and agree that it is time to review our longer-term strategic approach. Alongside the review of our main partnership commitments, we also propose to develop a longer-term Council Plan, which will set out key priorities and areas of focus beyond the next financial year.

To support delivery of the peer challenge action plan, the 'Our Council' culture refresh initiative is underway, building on our existing approach to support positive changes in the way that all council employees work. The initiative will help support the council to have an improved focus on the needs of our customers, encourage better budget management, and ensure we continue to embed our corporate values of kindness, inclusion and pride.

The actions we have included against this recommendation, will support the council in positioning itself towards a longer-term horizon, and support effective decision-making, partnership working, and service delivery that is focused on outcomes and a clear vision for the future for the people and places of Kirklees.

Actions

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director
8.1	Launch and begin delivery of the 'Our Council' culture refresh in support of the peer challenge action plan and other improvements.	April 2025 – September 2025	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
8.2	Review current strategic partnership commitments as set out within the current Council Plan, with a view to developing a refreshed Partnership Framework for a longer-term period. This will include engagement across key partnerships, and potentially the development of a supporting action plan.	By November 2025	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
8.3	Ensure we continue to monitor national policy changes and implications across all council directorates (e.g. devolution,	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation

	local government finance, and planning) to maximise the benefits for Kirklees residents.		
8.4	Deliver the customer expectations programme, which aims to deliver a customer-focused culture, shared customer expectations, and make it easier for residents and customers to engage with the council.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
8.5	Develop a new longer-term Council Plan, supported by the implementation of multi-year local funding settlements and more flexible West Yorkshire funding, to maximise the benefits for Kirklees residents.	By March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
8.6	Develop a new Digital Strategy, setting out how we will maximise the opportunities for technology and data to support our outcomes over the longer-term, including through considering the skills and capabilities we need in the organisation and the role of artificial intelligence.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation
8.7	Work with partners on shared leadership and management development programmes for more efficient leadership development and support connections across our organisations.	September 25 - March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation