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	August 2025	Service Director, Finance

	challenge and ensure a shared understanding of service budgets across the council.		
1.4	Within the next MTFS (Medium-Term Financial Strategy) update: • 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	Further develop our council-wide approach to resourcing, connecting, and communicating about transformation initiatives, including: • 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: • 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