

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

Meeting	Cabinet
Date	2 December 2025
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	Cllr Carole Pattison, Leader of the Council
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No No

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. Based on their findings, the LGA produced a report, containing eight key recommendations for action and improvement. On 8 April 2025, Cabinet then agreed an action plan which sets out improvement activity in response to those recommendations. An initial progress report against this action plan was received by Cabinet in July 2025.

On 23 September 2025, the LGA returned to Kirklees to carry out a progress review. The LGA produced a report outlining their findings following this visit, a summary of which is included in this report with the full version appended to this report (Appendix B). This report also provides Cabinet with another progress update against the actions in the action plan.

Recommendations

That Cabinet are asked to:

- Note the most recent progress update produced by Kirklees Council officers, against the LGA’s recommendations from the first visit in November 2024, and the associated action plan (see section 2.3). The full list of actions has been included at **Appendix A**, along with delivery status ratings for each action.
- Note the progress review report produced by the LGA after their second visit in September 2025, provided at **Appendix B**. A summary of the feedback has been included in this report.

Reasons for Recommendations

- As part of the LGA 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.
- Councils are also required to host a progress review visit from the LGA and publish the resulting progress report no later than 12 months following the original Corporate Peer Challenge visit.
- On 8 April 2025, Cabinet approved an action plan which sets out improvement activity in response to the recommendations provided by the LGA. This report provides

Cabinet with a progress update against the actions in that plan (see section 2.3) and the LGA's report following the progress review visit on 23 September 2025 (Appendix B).

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
14 November 2025

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

Kevin Mulvaney
14 November 2025

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

Samantha Lawton
14 November 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 in November 2024 to carry out a Corporate Peer Challenge, which is a key part of the LGA's improvement and assurance framework. Based on their findings, the LGA produced a report, containing eight key recommendations for action and improvement. On 8 April 2025, Cabinet then agreed an action plan which sets out improvement activity in response to those recommendations.

1.2 An initial progress report against this action plan was received by Cabinet in July 2025.

1.2.1 On 23 September 2025, the LGA then returned to Kirklees to carry out a progress review. The LGA then produced a report following this visit which has been published on the council's website and appended to this paper at Appendix B. A summary of this feedback has been included within this paper at section 2.2. The LGA's report acknowledges the progress the council has made on delivering the recommendations made by the LGA in November 2024, and the action plan subsequently agreed. The LGA report highlights that "[w]orking relationships between the Leader and Cabinet, and the Chief Executive and Senior Management team have matured further and collectively they have brought stability, clarity, grip and more energy to the council". The peer team also "noted greater confidence, tempered with realism, from the collective senior political and managerial team about how they will address current and future challenges".

1.3 This report also presents a progress update against the action plan approved in April. The action plan aims to deliver a range of corporate and service-led improvements in response to the key recommendations provided by the LGA. The progress update is

summarised in section 2.3 of this report. Out of 42 actions, 14 have been completed (blue), 27 are ongoing and on track (green), and one has slipped (amber). The full list of actions has been included at Appendix A, along with delivery status ratings for each action.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 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.
- 2.1.2 During the visit, local government peers provide 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.
- 2.1.3 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.
- 2.1.4 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 receive feedback on the implementation of the action plan. 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.
- 2.1.5 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
- 2.1.6 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 in their initial visit in November 2024.
- 2.1.7 During the four-day visit, the peer team reviewed extensive amounts of council documentation and 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, with some were conducted virtually. As part of these meetings, the team also spoke to more than 140 people including elected members from across political groups, staff from all directorates (leadership, management, and frontline), partners (both local and regional across the public, private, and third sector), and other key stakeholders (e.g. auditors and trade unions).

2.1.8 The LGA's original feedback report outlined significant strengths and opportunities for the council. The report noted that 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
- is tackling its financial issues in a thorough and strategic way and is seeking external support, and 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, with 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, a collegiate Cabinet that is prepared to take tough decisions, scrutiny that is taken seriously, and a Corporate Governance and Audit Committee that is engaged and well supported.

2.1.9 The report also provided eight recommendations on how to build on these strengths and progress so far. The findings complemented our ongoing improvement journey, building on recent work to improve and strengthen our position for delivering on our priorities into the future.

2.1.10 Early in 2025, council officers produced an action plan to respond to the recommendations. The suggested areas of focus for actions were discussed and shared with members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) and political group leaders to help develop the plan. The plan was also discussed at an OSMC meeting on 4 April 2025, seeking feedback and engagement on the delivery and reporting against the action plan.

2.1.11 Cabinet approved the action plan on 8 April 2025. Following this, the action plan was then presented to Council on 23 April 2025 for noting. A progress update was then provided to Cabinet and OSMC in July 2025.

2.2 **Feedback from the LGA Progress Review Visit (23 September 2025)**

2.2.1 On 23 September 2025, the Local Government Association came back to Kirklees to undertake a progress review. The LGA's report outlining their findings from this progress review can be found at Appendix B and has also now been published on the council's website here: [LGA \(Local Government Association\) Corporate Peer Challenge | Kirklees Council](#).

2.2.2 The Council welcomes the feedback and the findings from the most recent visit by the LGA on 23 September 2025. This report has been included at Appendix B.

- 2.2.3 The LGA's report acknowledges the progress the council has made on delivering the recommendations made by the LGA in November 2024, and the action plan subsequently agreed to support delivery of improvements against the recommendations.
- 2.2.4 The LGA report highlights that "[w]orking relationships between the Leader and Cabinet, and the Chief Executive and Senior Management team have matured further and collectively they have brought stability, clarity, grip and more energy to the council". The peer team also "noted greater confidence, tempered with realism, from the collective senior political and managerial team about how they will address current and future challenges".
- 2.2.5 The updates contained with this paper, and specifically within section 2.3, provide a more recent progress report since the visit, including the completion of one extra action.

2.3 Overview of delivery progress against the action plan (November 2025)

- 2.3.1 In total, there are 42 actions included in the action plan against the LGA recommendations.
- 2.3.2 Progress updates for each action were sought from services in November 2025, so the following updates provide a snapshot of progress at that point in time. Within Appendix A, ratings which reflect the delivery status have also been provided against each action. This reflects current confidence levels in completing delivery against the timescale agreed in the action plan. Colour codes are as follows:
- Blue (Fully completed)
 - Green (on track for delivery)
 - Amber (delivery may slip)
 - Red (delivery has slipped)
- 2.3.3 14 actions have now been fully completed (blue) within planned timescales. Key successes include:

Maintaining a grip on the budget

- Produced and published a 'budget book', which contains a breakdown of all service budgets and a summary of the 2025-26 budget to improve transparency around how the council manages its finances.
- Updated the Medium-Term Financial Strategy in September 2025 – which included a prudent approach to the impact of the Government's Fair Funding Review, and identified pressures of £56m over five years, with £18m of pressures identified for 2026/27.
- Produced guidance for carrying out benchmarking activities. This has also been communicated and integrated into the ongoing budget development process.

Communicating and sharing learning from transformation successes

- A new approach for resourcing transformation activity to support better outcomes and further efficiencies was launched in April, and business cases for accessing transformation funding are currently being considered for the 2026/27 budget period.
- A new plan for providing more effective support and engagement with the third sector was developed and approved in July 2025.

Regeneration plans and affordability

- In September, Cabinet approved the next steps for Our Cultural Heart, the ambitious culture and leisure centrepiece for Huddersfield and the whole of Kirklees. Following a recent review of Phase 5, the paper included updated costings for service delivery and implementation associated with preceding phases of the plan.

Working more closely with business and economic partners

- We agreed the Inclusive Economic Strategy at Council in August, which is designed to address economic challenges while promoting inclusivity and sustainability. It outlines a vision for the economy from 2025 to 2030, emphasising the importance of social justice and environmental responsibility alongside economic growth.

Good governance and member development

- To support collaboration between elected members and officers in running council services, an updated member-officer protocol was approved at the Annual General Meeting of Council on 21 May 2025. Work to improve awareness of the protocol amongst members and officers continues and we are reporting to our Standards Committee every six months on progress.
- To support clarity of decision-making, report writing guidance for council officers have now been reviewed and refreshed along with changes to report templates. We have also developed and launched online training courses and governance officers are attending various senior leadership team meetings to raise awareness and reinforce and promote good governance.

Maintaining focus on performance

- We have produced an overview of external inspections and associated improvement plans. This will help us to maintain corporate oversight across all inspections and help us to maximise the benefits of these inspections for our services by ensuring lessons learned can be shared and embedded. We have also developed support and guidance for services around service planning, which will support service delivery against the priorities set out within Our Council Plan and budget.
- We have continued with the revised approach to corporate quarterly performance monitoring and reporting. This is complemented by the internal 'check and challenge' sessions where directorates and the Chief Executive consider risks and issues around resourcing our priorities as well as service performance and improvement. The check and challenge sessions have recently been reviewed to include an improved focus on performance, continuous learning, and benchmarking.

Planning for a longer-term horizon

- In April we launched 'Our Council', a culture refresh initiative setting out seven principles for growing our organisational culture now and over the longer-term. The principles describe areas where we already have existing strengths across our services and where we need to focus further development. Since launching in April, we've worked to embed these principles through internal events, leadership conversations and internal communications. Teams in the council are holding conversations about what the principles mean to them. We're now working to

extend and deepen this engagement and integrate the principles as part of wider internal processes, for example through new employee induction.

- Over the summer, we engaged strategic partners and key strategic partnership boards on a refresh of our Partnership Framework, which encompasses the vision for the borough, our eight shared outcomes describing the impact we're looking to achieve, and the overview of highest-level partnership strategies. Partner engagement on the framework continued in November at the annual Picture of Kirklees event, held at Dewsbury Town Hall. Now that the initial phase of engagement is complete, next steps for developing a new framework will be discussed and agreed with partners. Discussions will include what collaborative actions will need to take priority, how the framework will be supported, and what governance arrangements could be established to support implementation of the framework. This will also include discussions around potential shared leadership and management development programmes to support more efficient leadership development and connections across organisations.

2.3.4 27 actions are ongoing and on track (green) for completion within specified timescales. Progress on ongoing actions includes:

Maintaining a grip on the budget

- Improvements have been made to quarterly financial monitoring, including the inclusion of monitoring around capital budgets, and the quarterly 'check and challenge' process for directorates. This will continue to be reviewed over the course of this current financial year.
- The Cross-Party Budget Working Group has continued and has a forward plan to structure meetings. It continues as a way of keeping members from all political parties informed on budget developments. Changes to the public budget consultation process are also being developed with the consultation on the 2026/27 annual budget due to commence on 3 December.

Communicating and sharing learning from transformation successes

- Work is progressing on developing a more effective way of sharing learning around transformation initiatives more widely across the council. A transformation knowledge hub will be launched by the end of December 2025.
- Our assets transformation programme is progressing well. Robust, consistent, effective and transparent processes are now in place for property disposals, aligned to council priorities. In July, Cabinet considered a report on progress in disposing of surplus property. Assurance and progress continue to be monitored, with risks and issues managed by exception by the Assets Disposal Board. A report from an external review was produced and considered by our Assets and Benchmarking Board in the summer. Next steps and actions following the review will be developed by the end of December 2025.

Regeneration plans and affordability

- Work is ongoing to analyse the direct and indirect costs and implications of all our major regeneration projects, and a 'cultural heart mobilisation plan' to manage risks and opportunities and coordinate delivery has been established.
- We've completed an initial review of all our Capital programme governance arrangements, and the results of that review are now being put into place, with actions being undertaken to simplify, consolidate and strengthen arrangements.

- We've conducted a review of key council priorities to support corporate coordination of external funding, and a report to summarise these will be produced and communicated in the new year. This will support greater prioritisation of which external funding opportunities we apply for and help to focus our resources.
- We are developing a longer-term strategy to increase residential provision across our town centres, considering the balance of housing provision alongside other types of development and investment. This will be linked to the update of the Local Plan, which is underway, as well as future refreshes of our town centre blueprints and smaller centre regeneration plans. These plans will be refreshed as needed to ensure they are fit for the future and ready for changes in society, transport, technology, and the economy.

Planning and the balance of housing

- Work to monitor and analyse the impact of national policy changes related to planning continues, and to understand how the workforce needs to change and develop to ensure we have sufficient capacity and skills to support implementation.
- To ensure we can provide the right types of housing to meet future housing needed over the long-term, work is underway to decide a new Housing Strategy. A draft has been produced, and the strategy is on track for completion in advance of the stated deadline, by Spring 2026. The strategy will support the work of our Specialist Accommodation Board, considering the housing type needed over the next 10–20 years to ensure people with care and support needs have access to affordable accommodation.

Working more closely with business and economic partners

- Work to engage with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority on engagement mechanisms and key areas for further strengthening the voice of the third sector across the region is ongoing. Proposals have now been developed around a new voice and representation group, and these are now subject to consultation with the local community sector with the support of Third Sector Leaders Kirklees.
- We have continued delivery of a programme of events for local businesses helping them to connect to local third sector organisations. These events are supporting businesses with their aspirations for corporate social responsibility, social value, volunteering and mentoring. Events delivered so far have included two sessions in South Kirklees, which 21 companies attended, and two sessions in North Kirklees with 18 attending.

Good governance and member development

- We have drafted a new Member Development Framework (MDF) and have consulted members to input into its development, so it can be ready for implementation ahead of the May 2026 all-out elections, when there could be a high number of new members elected. The framework sets out a programme of events, a forward plan of development opportunities, and resources. We are also looking at how we can support individual training needs as they arise, and we will establish member development champions. Alongside consulting with members, we are now also considering how best to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the new framework. We have also begun work to review and improve existing officer training and development initiatives for working alongside members.

Maintaining focus on performance

- In children's social care, we are increasing capacity to support more effective audit and quality assurance processes as well as more timely service decision-making. This will help us undertake a wider range of auditing process across key thematic areas to help inform continuous learning and improvement. To improve recruitment and retention of children's social workers, we are also working to develop a wide range of routes into social work, including social work apprenticeships.
- We have continued to work on performance in Homes & Neighbourhoods. We are continuing to drive full compliance with all regulatory standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. As a result of this focus, we are ahead of our targets across all areas. As reported in the 6-month regulatory progress report to Cabinet in July, we expect the regulatory notice in place to be lifted by the end of the calendar year. We achieved business as usual levels for damp, mould and condensation ahead of our August target date. We are on track to give assurance on fire safety by December, and water quality testing is now on track to be 100% complete within the year. As part of driving performance up in Homes & Neighbourhoods, we continue to strengthen our governance arrangements. We have already made some changes and have begun a further review to assess the effectiveness of these structures and identify opportunities for improvement, including the integration of external independent oversight.

Developing a longer-term horizon

- We are continuing to monitor the impact of changes in our external context on our current models of service delivery, and the impact of government policy change. For example, changes in the local, regional, and national capacity and governance of health services and the increasing role and powers presented in the English Devolution Bill are key policy issues we continue to monitor and respond to as required.
- Delivery of the Customer & Access Programme continues. This programme aims to: develop a customer-focused culture by improving communication, service design and operations; deliver targeted improvement activity to enhance the information provided to customers, reduce failure demand and avoidable contact, and improve the overall customer experience. It is complemented by a range of targeted pieces of work, such as the development of a fly-tipping strategy to help clear backlogs in the face of increasing reports of fly-tipping.
- Work is underway to develop a new longer-term Council Plan, which is due for consideration by Cabinet and Council in February. Due to the increased certainty provided by the government with new three-year financial settlements, this plan will cover the period 2026-29.
- A new Digital Transformation Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, has been established to drive the pace of change and support the development of a new strategy for digital transformation and a three-to-five-year implementation programme. The new strategy will set out how we will maximise digital opportunities across all these factors over the longer term. External support and challenge, as well as input from multiple stakeholders, is informing the work, including extensive engagement with other local authorities to learn from their successes and challenges.

2.3.5 One action has slipped (amber) due to external factors:

Action number 3.1: “Review the capital programme, to make sure we have affordable plans, including considering an externally led capital plan review.”

We regularly review our Capital Plan, and reprofile schemes within it to ensure affordable capital borrowing. The Council approved the rollover Capital Plan in July 2025, which reprofiled over £100m of investment from 2025/26 into future years of the plan. The Capital Assurance Board meets monthly to provide strategic oversight of our capital plan and maintains a tight control on additional capital spending proposals, ensuring they are affordable and aligned to our priorities. However, despite the progress we have made, we have rated this action as amber as we await the outcome of allocations from Government funding, and as we develop better clarity on digital transformation and investments that may be required in the short-to-medium term. We expect to have a better understanding of what’s needed from the Capital Plan in the second half of the next financial year.

2.3.6 Two actions have had their timescales reprofiled in terms of their delivery timescales:

Action number 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.

To deliver this action in the collaborative way required that reflects the range and diversity of opportunities in the borough, we decided to work alongside partners on a series of business and investor engagement events and meetings. We have therefore reprofiled the timescale to February 2026 (from December 2025).

In October we worked with Huddersfield Unlimited at the first of these. Huddersfield Unlimited works with businesses, investors and communities in Huddersfield. The event in October was aimed at encouraging greater awareness and partnership working around key investment opportunities within Kirklees. As part of this, we presented and promoted several investment opportunities which form part of the delivery of the new Inclusive Economic Strategy.

To widen the reach of work already underway to strengthen engagement work with key business and economic partners, a second event will take place in Dewsbury in the new year to highlight further investment opportunities across the north of the borough. As part of this, we are planning to highlight the significant benefits of the transport, housing, and skills investment in North Kirklees and identify ways to progress our work further with partners. This will support tangible action in delivery of the ambitions of the Inclusive Economic Strategy.

Action number 5.3 Review the economic partnership arrangements, including engagement mechanisms, identifying any areas for improving collaboration and communication, and decide actions to progress these.

The revised plan around engagement will inform the delivery of this action, therefore requiring an extended timescale to deliver properly. Following the engagement and events underway, we will be able to conduct a wider review of economic and business partnership arrangements and agree some next steps for increasing opportunities for collaboration. This action has therefore been reprofiled to May 2026 (from December 2025).

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 5 March 2025. Within the 2025/26 Council Plan, the development and delivery of the LGA Peer Challenge action plan was included as an '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.

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.

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 main 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 the first visit in November 2024, and one day on site during the second visit on 23 September 2025. As part of both visits, they gathered evidence, information, and views from meetings, workshops and research and reading. They spoke to a range of council staff, councillors, and external stakeholders.

5 Engagement

- 5.1 Relevant council officers (including Service Directors and the Executive Leadership Team) and the Cabinet, were 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 20 March 2025. Group Leaders were also engaged and were asked for feedback on development of the actions. Feedback from Scrutiny and Group Leaders was received and considered by the Executive.
- 5.3 This update report will also be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 5 December for feedback and comment.

6 Options

6.1 Options considered

Our recommendation to Cabinet is to note the progress update contained within this paper, specifically within section 2.3 of this report.

6.2 Reasons for recommended option

As part of the LGA 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.

Councils are also required to host a progress review visit from the LGA and publish the resulting progress report no later than 12 months following the original Corporate Peer Challenge visit.

On 8 April 2025, Cabinet approved an action plan which sets out improvement activity in response to the recommendations provided by the LGA. This report provides Cabinet with a progress update against the actions in that plan (see section 2.3) and the LGA's report following the progress review visit on 23 September 2025 (Appendix B).

7. Next steps and timelines

Further updates will be provided to Cabinet and Scrutiny on progress against the action plan as required.

8. Contact officers

Stephen Bonnell, Head of Policy, Partnerships, and Corporate Planning

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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 reports following the visit in November 2024, and their return visit in September 2025, are available on the Council's website here:

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

The Cabinet paper which contains the approved action plan is available here:

[Peer Challenge Action Plan - Cabinet Paper - 8 April 2025 v2.pdf](#)

10. Appendices

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

Appendix B: Kirklees Corporate Peer Challenge – LGA Progress Review Report following the progress review visit on the 23 September.

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.

Actions agreed by Cabinet on 8 April 2025

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director	Delivery status
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	Green
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	Green
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	Blue – completed, Aug 25
1.4	Within the next MTFS (Medium-Term Financial Strategy) update: <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	Blue – completed, Sept 25
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	Blue – completed Sept 25

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.

Actions agreed by Cabinet on 8 April 2025

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director	Delivery status
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	Blue – Completed April 25
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	Blue – completed July 25
2.3	Further develop our council-wide approach to resourcing, connecting, and communicating about transformation initiatives, including: <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	Green
2.4	Identify opportunities for partnership-led transformation in Kirklees and ensure these are being effectively managed.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation	Green
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	Green
2.6	Deliver the Assets Property Transformation Programme, using external advice to support implementation.	March 2026	Service Director, Development	Green

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.

Actions agreed by Cabinet on 8 April 2025

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director	Delivery status
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	Amber
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	Blue Completed Set 25
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	Green
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	Green
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	Green
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	Green
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	Green

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.

Actions agreed by Cabinet on 8 April 2025

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director	Delivery status
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	Green
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	Green
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	Green

Recommendation 5

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

Actions agreed by Cabinet on 8 April 2025

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director	Delivery status
5.1	Building on partner engagement, begin delivery of the Inclusive Economy Strategy.	August 2025	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration	Blue Completed July 25
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.	Reprofiled Timescale: By February 2026	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration	Green
5.3	Review the economic partnership arrangements, including engagement mechanisms, identifying any areas for improving collaboration and communication, and decide actions to progress these.	Reprofiled Timescale: By May 2026	Service Director, Skills and Regeneration	Green
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	Green
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	Green

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.

Actions agreed by Cabinet on 8 April 2025

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director	Delivery Status
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	Blue Completed May 25
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	Blue Completed July 25
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	Green
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	Green

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.

Actions agreed by Cabinet on 8 April 2025

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director	Delivery Status
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	Blue Completed Sept 25
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	Blue Completed Sept 25
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	Blue Completed Sept 25
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	Green
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	Green

Recommendation 8

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

Actions agreed by Cabinet on 8 April 2025

Ref.	Action	Timescale	Responsible Service Director	Delivery status
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	Blue Completed Sept 25
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	Blue Completed Nov 25
8.3	Ensure we continue to monitor national policy changes and implications across all council directorates (e.g. devolution, local government finance, and planning) to maximise the benefits for Kirklees residents.	March 2026	Service Director, Strategy and Innovation	Green
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	Green
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	Green
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	Green
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	Green