

# **LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review**

Wyre Council

Thursday 8 May 2025

Feedback



**Corporate Peer Challenge**

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## 1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) between 18 – 20 June 2024 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the CPC process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs.
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.

The LGA would like to thank Wyre Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

## 2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at Wyre Council took place on Thursday 8 May 2025.

As outlined in section three of this report, the Progress Review focussed on each of the recommendations from the CPC under the following theme headings:

- **Vision/Priorities and Communication**
- **Financial Management/Planning**
- **Transformation and Capacity**

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Bill Cullen, Chief Executive, Hinkley and Bosworth Council
- Peter Fleming OBE, former Leader, Sevenoaks Council

- Councillor Jewel Miah, Leader, Charnwood Borough Council and county councillor at Leicestershire County Council
- Cindy Lowthian, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

### 3. Progress Review - Feedback

Peers conducted this Progress Review against the backdrop of significant changes across the local government landscape in Lancashire. This includes the formation of the Lancashire Combined County Authority (CCA), which held its inaugural meeting in March 2025, as well as proposed local government reorganisation following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper. It also includes a change in the political leadership at Lancashire County Council where the new administration will be setting its own policy direction for the county.

Wyre Council have used this Progress Review to obtain feedback on progress against the CPC recommendations, within this changing context. In particular, on key issues that should be considered - in the on-going implementation of the recommendations - as the council engages in LGR discussions.

In preparation for this Progress Review, the council provided the peer team with supporting evidence which included a short position statement and RAG rated action plan detailing progress against each of the CPC's recommendations. The peer team then spent one day at the council to meet with officers and councillors to explore the progress made.

Overall, the peer team were impressed with the level of progress made against each of the recommendations. The peer team also concurred with the council's own self-assessment of progress, through the RAG ratings recorded by the council against its action plan (details shown below).

It is a clear reflection of the council's strong leadership and focus on improvement that 89 per cent of the CPC's recommendations have been advanced. Out of the CPC's nine recommendations, the council's RAG rated action plan reports that 56 per cent are rated as 'green' – signifying that the council is delivering against them. A further 33 per cent are rated as 'amber' – meaning that plans are developed and some additional work is required. The council have reported that just one

recommendation is still in its very early stages and is RAG rated as 'red'.

### **3.1. Vision/priorities and communication**

Recommendation 3.1 - *Articulate the council's vision and priorities for the borough and bring councillors, officers, residents and partners on your journey* (RAG rated as 'green' by the council).

Positive progress has been made against this recommendation with a clear focus on engagement with officers, councillors and partners on the council's priorities.

From a strategic leadership perspective, the peer team were pleased to see the proactive leadership role that the leader and chief executive have taken on the Fylde Coast strategic regeneration plans including engagement with partners. This includes the council's commitment to develop a business case, working with specialists, to attract investment to revitalise the seafront at Fleetwood. It also includes participation, as part of the Fylde Coast partnership with Blackpool and Fylde Councils, at the United Kingdom's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF) in May 2025, to highlight the region's investment potential and regeneration ambitions.

The council have also progressed initiatives such as staff listening days, engagement on the refreshed Wyre Council Plan, a new cross-cutting communications and engagement group and partner involvement in shaping the Economic Development and Visitor Economy Strategy for Wyre.

The peer team were particularly impressed by efforts to involve staff in the co-design of the transformation programme and new workforce strategy, including the appointment of 'transformation champions', a monthly transformation blog and the sharing of 'quick wins'.

Staff who met with the peer team reported a clearer understanding of the council's future direction and noted the emergence of a more positive "can-do" culture. However, some staff noted further opportunities to broaden and deepen engagement with some teams across the council. It is therefore important that this approach and level of engagement are sustained moving forward.

*Recommendation 3.7 - Develop a clear plan to strengthen how you communicate your achievements to enhance your external reputation (RAG rated as amber by the council)*

The council commissioned a communications peer review led by two neighbouring councils following this recommendation. The outcome of this work is being used to strengthen the council's work on this recommendation including the new 'Building Pride' transformation project, which is aligned to the Wyre Council Plan and the development of new web-based content. This work has in turn informed an internal review of the communication team's structure to ensure capacity within the team to improve the responsiveness, reach and impact of the council's social media content. Next steps following this work now include procuring a relevant social media scheduling tool, to help strengthen the council's social media presence and communication with residents and businesses. It is encouraging that the council has welcomed additional external peer support and challenge to help guide the next steps it is now taking in this area.

During the progress review, the peer team heard that the Environment Agency is currently investigating possible contamination on land at the Hillhouse Technology Enterprise Zone, as well as significant odour issues from an adjacent landfill site at Jameson Road. This has sparked significant public interest. The peer team understand the council are working with relevant partners to ensure updates are being shared, including on the council's website. It will be important for the council to maintain close collaboration with partners to ensure clear and effective communication with residents about these issues.

The positive steps being taken by the council now to enhance internal and external communications will have an important role in how the council engages key stakeholders, throughout the LGR process. As LGR negotiations progress, clear and consistent messaging with staff, residents, councillors and partners will remain crucially important.

### **3.2. Financial Management and Planning**

*Recommendation 3.2 - Increase the frequency and visibility of financial and performance reporting by providing published quarterly budget and performance*

*reports as part of formal meetings of the cabinet (RAG rated as 'green' by the council).*

During the original CPC, the peer team had seen limited evidence of in-year revenue budget performance information being shared on a regular basis with councillors. At the time of the CPC, published finance reports comprised of the annual budget report, a Medium-Term Financial Plan update twice a year and capital monitoring and treasury management reports. The peer team urged the council to introduce published quarterly revenue and capital budget monitoring reports to cabinet at pace. Peers also encouraged members of the cabinet and the Corporate Management Team to monitor the financial health of the council on a regular basis between published reports.

During this Progress Review, the Peer Team saw greater visibility in financial and performance reporting. Quarterly revenue and capital monitoring reports, along with updates on the council plan, are now formally presented to the cabinet. We met with councillors and senior officers who expressed support for this approach and the increased public transparency. The council's position statement outlines further work being undertaken in support of this recommendation including enhanced briefings and training for councillors and officers. Next steps include the introduction of a dashboard outlining quarterly progress on the council plan, which will be made accessible to residents on the council's website.

It is encouraging that the council's leadership have been open to external support, through the LGA, to further advance this recommendation. This includes LGA training for councillors in July 2025. This training will cover local government finance, financial governance and decision-making, councillor roles and responsibilities, the role of the section 151 officer, risk management and scrutiny.

*Recommendation 3.3 - Consider how you could develop your medium-term financial planning approach in light of your strong financial position. Consider the ability this gives you to mitigate risk associated with uncertainty about future funding levels. (RAG rated a 'green' by the council).*

*Recommendation 3.5 - Ensure internal decision-making processes enable the*

*council to respond swiftly when seeking to take advantage of new opportunities. (RAG rated as 'green' by the council).*

Following these two recommendations, the latest Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), approved by cabinet in February 2025, now includes a new policy on reserves and balances, reflecting a re-basing and prioritisation exercise aligned with the priorities in the Wyre Council Plan. The Transformation Reserve has been increased to £1m in 2024/25 and £8m is to be allocated across existing and a new Investment Projects Reserve in 2025/2026. The peer team heard that work is taking place, through the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and an External Funding Working Group, to identify priority investment projects. Overall, the peer team were able to observe a stronger focus and appetite now, for identifying and delivering on key Wyre Council Plan projects and priorities in the context of LGR discussions across the county. Looking ahead, agreeing clear timelines for project development and delivery will be essential within this context.

*Recommendation 3.4 - Implement a clear strategy to maximise the potential of your assets (RAG rated as 'amber' by the council)*

The council's position statement highlights initial capacity challenges in progressing this recommendation. This followed the departure of the Assistant Director of Property and Development in November 2024. During the Progress Review, the peer team were pleased to hear how this post had been subsequently filled, and that a draft asset management strategy has now been developed which is aligned to the council's priorities. This has been agreed by the Corporate Management Team and Management Board and was considered by the council's Overview and Scrutiny in April 2025 as part of the consultation process, with submission to full council for approval in July 2025.

As discussions on future LGR across Lancashire continue, it is crucial for the council to ensure adequate capacity (staff, budget, technology) to support future change and transformation whilst delivering services. It is positive that the council has identified up to £1m in a ring-fenced transformation reserve. Additionally, the council's work on the strategic asset review should also help by providing a clear understanding of



asset utilisation and any future opportunities for efficiency and collaboration.

### **3.3. Transformation and Capacity**

Recommendation 3.6 - *Prioritise, sequence and resource the transformation programme to support the council in achieving the commitments set out in the council* (RAG rated as 'green' by the council).

Peers were impressed with the progress made in engaging staff in the co-design of the council's new transformation strategy, road map and work programme (2024 – 2028) which was approved in April 2025. This has included workshops with senior leaders, engagement through the Transformation Champions Network, staff listening days, a transformation blog and staff surveys. The approach to governance includes the establishment of the Transformation Board and the implementation of a new project management framework. The council has invested in project management capacity, with eight officers trained in Prince2 and Agile. Two additional roles have been created in the Policy, Data Intelligence and Change function, to support this work. Plans are in place to recruit a 'transformation' graduate and (as outlined above) the transformation reserve has been increased to £1m to support the pump priming of projects.

While much of this work has focused on defining the vision, priorities, behaviours and building capacity for transformation, the council's position statement also shows a number of reviews have started or been completed. These include a new workforce strategy, Learning Hub, systems technology review in legal services and a review of external signage. As outlined above, the peer team recognise it is too early to see the full outcomes of the council's transformation strategy and associated projects, many of which are still in the early stages of being progressed. Looking ahead the council will need to maintain focus on demonstrating the benefits, impact and outcomes of transformation projects.

The Transformation Strategy recognises the evolving landscape driven by the English Devolution White Paper and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), with the goal of "*enabling the council to move forward with confidence while continuing to serve local residents.*" The strategy highlights the importance of staying adaptable to both emerging opportunities and challenges. The Transformation Board have a

crucial role in this, providing strong corporate oversight in prioritising and delivering projects within the context of LGR. As LGR progresses, it will place increasing demands on the council's programme management capacity and capability which should not be underestimated.

The peer team were pleased to see that 'workforce' is a key priority in the new strategy, which is especially vital in the context of LGR. As referenced above, the council has made progress in the development of a new workforce strategy including agreed values and behaviours. All of this work will be essential in helping keep staff engaged, informed and reassured about the future plans for LGR and transformation. It should help ensure clear messaging regarding operational delivery (ensuring residents receive a seamless service), organisational transformation and the future of LGR. The council's 'transformation champions' will be important advocates too, helping to facilitate two-way engagement and feedback to the transformation board.

*Recommendation 3.8 - Set a timeframe to evaluate the Senior Leadership Team re-structure to ensure it is meeting its aim of ensuring sufficient strategic capacity to lead across all service areas (RAG rated as 'amber' by the council).*

The peer team were told that this evaluation has begun. Initial feedback is being captured through the annual appraisal process. Consideration is being given to holding a future SLT workshop to inform the evaluation beyond this - it will be important for you to be clear on the agreed timeline for this. SLT members are also participating in a leadership development programme which includes 360-degree feedback and one to one coaching.

In the context of LGR, this investment in leadership development will help to support the SLT in leading and navigating change, building their confidence in managing the process efficiently. It should support the SLT in addressing the anticipated challenges ahead, to help maintain staff morale and help guide the council through the changes to come.

*Recommendation 3.9 - Review opportunities for closer working, service delivery and*

*place shaping with parish and town councils* (RAG rated as 'red' by the council)

While the council continues to engage with town and parish councils, including through Town Centre Partnership delivery boards, this recommendation has not fully progressed with the council deciding to phase its activity against this recommendation in the context of LGR discussions that have started since the original CPC.

The Devolution White Paper emphasises the need for stronger community engagement during reorganisation, particularly in reshaping the relationship between town and parish councils and principal local authorities. We saw how clarity on this has been sought in Lancashire's response to the 'statutory invitation letter' about LGR (signed by all leaders across the county) and shared with peers in advance of this Progress Review.

In this context, we heard how the council are committed to developing a parish and town council framework later this year to outline the approach for working together. The peer team encourage the council to accelerate this work, even before further guidance is issued. Doing so can help strengthen the collective local position and future prospect for place, in the context of future LGR.

## 4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank Wyre Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review. It is clear to us that the council have embraced the CPC and associated recommendations with clear progress made.

As outlined throughout this report, this progress has been made against the backdrop of LGR discussions following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper. Throughout this progress review, we have sought to share peer reflections on the implementation of our CPC recommendations within this changing context.

During the progress review, we also offered some additional points for consideration as you navigate this evolving context, as outlined below.

- Consider how you can accelerate internal preparations for LGR. This could include adapting the strong model of staff engagement developed to inform your

transformation strategy. Keeping your staff engaged, informed and reassured about future plans for LGR including clear messaging to councillors and residents will be critical.

- You may want to consider opportunities to establish an internal LGR member working group to help drive forward your preparations (in addition to an existing officer working group that has already been established).
- Keep working on ensuring Wyre Council's voice is heard in LGR negotiations – continue leveraging this in your external work with fellow council leaders.

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

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss. This includes the [Devolution and LGR support hub](#) which brings together information and resources to support councils. This hub includes an outline of the LGA support offers available to councils relating to LGR.

Dan Archer (LGA Senior Regional Adviser) is the regional lead for the North West and, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. As outlined above, Dan is available to discuss any further support the council requires, his email address is [Daniel.archer@local.gov.uk](mailto:Daniel.archer@local.gov.uk).