

# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Havant Borough Council

2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026

Feedback



**Corporate Peer Challenge**



# Contents

- 1. Introduction ..... 3
- 2. Summary of the approach..... 3
- 3. Progress Review - Feedback..... 5
- 4. Final thoughts and next steps ..... 14

# 1. Introduction

Havant Borough Council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in June 2025 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

A Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process and is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's 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 Havant Borough Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in a growing relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

The peer team were pleased to see the seriousness with which the organisation had taken the CPC report and the good progress that has been made in relation to the recommendations.

# 2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review in Havant took place on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026. It focused on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, which were as follows:

## Recommendation 1

Test the approach to the Local Plan through external expert advice

## Recommendation 2

Establish a set of key performance measures and report these regularly politically and managerially to ensure a focus on what really matters

### **Recommendation 3**

Ensure a clear and consistent political direction, focused on the strategic and around which there is collective Cabinet ownership and responsibility

### **Recommendation 4**

Invest further in 'top team' working across the Cabinet and Executive Leadership Team to aid decision-making and further develop relationships

### **Recommendation 5**

Address what we have highlighted in relation to the Planning Committee and Planning service

### **Recommendation 6**

Establish urgently a single savings (or increased income) programme that is robust, has clear accountabilities and appropriate officer and elected member governance

### **Recommendation 7**

Consider the options and opportunities around the £9m capital funding that is ringfenced for 'regeneration' but currently unallocated to projects

### **Recommendation 8**

Continue the investment in training for managers at the Operational Leadership Team level to develop understanding at that level around corporate responsibilities and collective working and include closer engagement with the Executive Leadership Team

### **Recommendation 9**

Reassure yourselves in relation to the level of risk being carried in relation to the quantum of change activity being undertaken over the coming months and the effectiveness of the council's key corporate processes and systems and the capacity to support this

The following formed the peer team for the Progress Review:

- Jon McGinty, Managing Director, Gloucester City Council
- Councillor Jewel Miah, Leader, Charnwood Borough Council and member of Leicestershire County Council (Labour)
- Councillor Richard Keeling, Leader, Teignbridge District Council (Liberal Democrat) and Cabinet Member for Adults Services, Devon County Council
- Councillor Caroline Jackson, Leader, Lancaster City Council (Green)
- Councillor Linda Robinson, Wychavon District Council (Conservative)
- Jan Guyler, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, Canterbury City Council
- Chris Bowron, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

## 3. Progress Review - Feedback

### 3.1. Leadership and governance

The corporate peer challenge highlighted Havant Borough Council as having experienced significant change in the previous three years, including the disaggregation from East Hampshire District Council; the recruitment of a virtually entirely new senior management team; half of the elected membership being new to local government when elected in 2024; and a coalition of Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Parties forming the Administration after many years of Conservative control.

This theme of change has continued since the corporate peer challenge, including the then Chief Executive retiring and his successor commencing in role – both in November last year; local government reorganisation (LGR) moving forward and gathering pace; changes in the political make-up of the council following movement between political parties; imminent local elections (in May 2026) involving a third of council seats; and a challenging and changing financial context.

A rigorous internal recruitment process was undertaken to appoint the new Chief Executive. He is held in high regard in the organisation and is having a tangible and positive impact, being visible and accessible and demonstrating a clear set of values and expectations around ways of working in the organisation.

A new managerial leadership structure was created late last year in a context of the Chief Executive changes and vacancies arising at the senior management level. This saw the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) coming into being, replacing the Executive Leadership Team and featuring five Directorates:

- Coastal Partnerships – focussing on growing and evolving the partnership in an LGR context
- Neighbourhoods – themed around people, communities and the lived experience of the borough
- Growth and Place – themed around planning, infrastructure and physical aspects of the borough
- Finance and Resources – themed around strategy, delivery, finance, efficiency and innovation
- Legal and Governance – themed around people, welfare, organisational effectiveness and development, communications and engagement and all aspects of governance and compliance

SLT comprises the Chief Executive, five Directors (including the statutory positions of Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer) and the Assistant Directors for People and Culture and Strategy and Performance. There is a designated Deputy Chief Executive. The changes have both delivered savings and created a revised management team that is more collegiate and strategic, with a conducive atmosphere that enables robust discussion and constructive challenge.

Senior officers are working with their teams to embed the new managerial structure and related arrangements below the SLT level. It is recognised by the senior leadership – informed at least in part by the feedback from the 2025 staff survey – that there is a need to develop wider organisational understanding of the revised structure. Staff are keen to understand more clearly the rationale, objectives and

practical functioning of the revised arrangements.

Cabinet remains strongly committed. Change has also been seen at that level recently, including a switch in Deputy Leader and activity currently underway to adapt some of the portfolios to achieve a greater alignment with the new management structure.

The corporate peer challenge recommended (recommendation 4) that the council invest further in 'top team' working across the Cabinet and Executive Leadership Team (now SLT) to aid decision-making and further develop relationships. Cabinet and SLT are dedicating time fortnightly at Cabinet Briefing but this meeting is largely a 'business-focused' one that is centred on preparing for the next Cabinet meeting. Some development activity at that 'top team' level has taken place but we would encourage such work to be viewed as a priority commencing in the period following the elections. We see this taking the form of a series of externally facilitated sessions for the Cabinet and SLT collectives, both separately and jointly, and coaching sessions for individuals. The emphasis could beneficially be placed upon developing greater strategic focus, exploring mutual expectations, enhancing joint working and establishing agreed values and behaviours.

The corporate peer challenge recommended (recommendation 2) that the council establish a set of key performance measures and report these regularly politically and managerially to ensure a focus on what really matters and (recommendation 3) ensure a clear and consistent political direction, focused on the strategic and around which there is collective Cabinet ownership and responsibility.

The next Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan, with a set of refreshed metrics to enable effective reporting of progress, is currently being finalised and is set for consideration by Cabinet in June 2026. Cabinet has identified the key priority areas for the council as part of the process of developing the Delivery Plan. These priority areas are social housing, town centre regeneration, coastal projects, environmental services and climate. These priorities are widely recognised within the council and easily cited by people.

Bold leadership by Cabinet can be seen in such areas as the creation of the masterplan for the regeneration of Waterlooville; continuing the approach, instigated

by the previous Administration, to alleviating the cost pressures around temporary accommodation through investment in the purchase of additional property; and the development of the Local Plan. Continuing this approach and ensuring a united front in doing so will be important in reinforcing and demonstrating a strengthening Coalition and Cabinet. Also important will be ensuring Cabinet is 'on the front foot', delivering clear, consistent and shared narratives linked to Administration priorities; not diverted by the 'noise' from the likes of social media; and keen to profile council achievements in order to demonstrate both impact and delivery for local communities and elected members' appreciation of the efforts and endeavours of the organisation.

There are significant decisions facing elected members in the immediate post-election period. The prime examples are Community Governance Reviews for Emsworth and Hayling Island and determining the Local Plan. With the elected membership likely to change to some extent through the forthcoming elections and all councillors needing to be in informed positions to take decisions of this type of magnitude and importance, the council is seeking to gear up, through the induction process in May and the summer, to ensure things can move forward on them speedily and effectively.

The corporate peer challenge highlighted that it is important that Cabinet and the Administration demonstrate unity once a decision has been made, with evidence of a tendency for people within the Administration to want to re-visit decisions once they have been taken. There has been some further 'revisiting' of decisions by Cabinet in the period since the corporate peer challenge, with the prime example being the review of car parking charges. Given the significance of this issue both to the borough and the council's budget position, it is important to arrive at a position that is appropriately informed, adhered to and effectively implemented. Taking this example, we see merit in the council looking at adapting certain aspects of its governance. This might involve Cabinet being invited to decide on an issue only after consultation has been undertaken, in order to avert a self-imposed requirement to revisit decisions sometimes.

The behaviours and approaches of a small number of councillors across the wider elected membership are having a detrimental impact on the organisation. Whilst this would be seen to be 'low level' in nature when viewed from a Standards or legal

perspective, the quantum of what is being seen and the consequential cumulative impacts should not be underestimated and, indeed, is becoming debilitating. Public criticism of officers, whether in meetings or via social media, is utterly inappropriate and is impacting the health and well-being of staff. The added value of submitting large numbers of artificial intelligence-generated questions on reports for elected member forums, relative to the capacity it absorbs, would seem to us to be debatable. Regular 'knee-jerk' criticism of the organisation that 'plays to the gallery' – relative to measured and fully-evidenced observations as part of holding the organisation to account – is damaging its' morale and reputation. This is supplemented with a continuation of 'additional demands' being made by some councillors, at all levels of the elected membership, which risks diverting capacity from agreed priorities and places officers in invidious positions.

Staff we spoke to are appreciative of, and encouraged by, the organisational response being seen to these behavioural issues and approaches. The instances in which the Chief Executive has 'intervened' in matters, followed by talking openly about them with staff, is helping develop understanding of where boundaries lie and how officers can respond appropriately. This, and the leadership and 'backing' it demonstrates, is boosting organisational confidence and resolve. The Leader is also interceding in this space in lower profile but equally impactful ways and this will be enhanced if combined effort with other political group leaders can grow. Political awareness training is starting to be rolled out more extensively and this will be helpful in ensuring officers are clear on their responsibilities in their interaction with councillors and how key aspects of governance operate in the council.

The corporate peer challenge encouraged (recommendation 8) the council to continue the investment in training for managers at the Operational Leadership Team (OLT) level in order to develop understanding within that tier around corporate responsibilities and collective working and facilitate closer engagement with the Executive Leadership Team (now SLT), including through regular joint forums.

Under the recent structural changes, the Operational Management Team (OMT) has been created (replacing OLT) in a way that, commendably, goes beyond the corporate peer challenge recommendation. In doing so, a smaller, more cohesive and focused body has been created. It now meets every two weeks, discussing

operational matters, service performance and cross-organisational issues and agreeing key messages to cascade to teams. Although it has only taken place once so far, the commitment is for this body to come together on a quarterly basis with SLT.

The expectations on officers at the OMT level are being made clearer, focused on accountability; devolved decision-making; adherence to corporate processes and systems; and modelling values and behaviours. This is helping to instil the values and ways of working in the organisation that the Chief Executive has been driving. A first wave of leadership development activity, focused on OMT, is set to roll out in the coming weeks.

The corporate peer challenge highlighted the peer team's view that key corporate processes and systems appeared to be under-developed in the organisation. This included project and programme management; asset management; contract management; and procurement. Work has been taking place to strengthen things in this sphere. The in-sourcing of procurement has been completed, work is underway to finalise an updated contracts register and a property asset management system has been established. An officer-led Corporate Governance Board and the creation of a Head of Compliance role is helping strengthen governance and assurance. Also, a corporate training budget has been established and provision is being planned for managers around, for example, information governance, HR processes, procurement and contract management. The council recognises that certain contract management risks are still being held by the organisation and will require careful consideration.

### **3.2. Financial planning and management**

The corporate peer challenge highlighted an emerging pattern of overspends in the revenue budget, with reserves being called upon to achieve a balanced budget. In this context, the council acknowledged a risk to financial sustainability and the need for "significant action". The 'Fair Funding Review' has proved beneficial to the council and the budget that was recently set includes a commitment to rebuild the council's reserves by £600,000 in 2026/27, with nearly £300,000 of this being in the General Fund.

Whilst the pattern of overspends can be seen to be continuing this year, with the council currently forecasting a revenue budget overspend in 2025/26 of £900,000, a significant proportion of this is attributed to 'legacy' issues that are being addressed and to temporary accommodation demands that the council is acting to alleviate. It is, however, acknowledged that income levels from commercial property present a continuing financial risk to the council.

At the time of the corporate peer challenge, the projected budget gap for 2026/27 was just over £1.5m and the peer team recommended (recommendation 6) that the council establish urgently a robust single savings (or increased income) programme with clear accountabilities and appropriate officer and elected member governance, oversight and monitoring. Work to identify savings and efficiencies commenced in the summer of 2025, with proposals considered by a cross-party elected member working group. This group appears to be becoming an established part of the council's approach to budget formulation and is highly valued by all. Cabinet considered the proposals that emerged from this in December and these have been included in the budget for 2026/27. Core aspects of this include increased income of £700,000 through fees and charges (including a review of parking charges across the borough) and efficiencies of £300,000.

A 'savings and efficiencies programme' has been established which breaks down an overall figure of £1.7m into specific initiatives. Robust governance arrangements will be required to ensure effective implementation of the savings and efficiencies as part of good financial management and sustainability – with this echoing the recommendation from the corporate peer challenge but now really needing to be responded to.

The corporate peer challenge also recommended (recommendation 7) that the council consider the options and opportunities around the £9m capital funding ringfenced for 'regeneration' but unallocated to projects at that time. Cabinet and Directors worked together in the early part of 2026 to develop a revised capital programme for 2026/27. This has seen £7m of the previously 'unallocated' £9m being dedicated, respectively, to regeneration projects (£4.5m), waste vehicle replacement (£1.5m) and LGR processes (£1m – via the capital receipts flexibility scheme).

### **3.3. Strategic commissioning programme**

The corporate peer challenge recommended (recommendation 9) that the council reassure itself in relation both to the level of risk being carried through a significant quantum of change activity and the effectiveness of the council's key corporate processes and systems and the capacity to support it. Delivery of what was being embarked upon, in very demanding circumstances, has been undertaken through the 'strategic commissioning programme' and is seen to have been very successful in the main.

This activity has included all staff being migrated to a new IT infrastructure and issued with new laptops and the new in-house customer services team and customer case management system going live in October. Some significant issues were encountered with changes to the system for Planning, land charges, licensing and environmental health and people have been working hard to rectify them. Internal review activity, involving Internal Audit and Overview and Scrutiny, is taking place to draw out the related lessons around this – reflecting an organisation that is keen to learn.

### **3.4. Local Plan and the Planning function**

Planning featured regularly in our discussions during the corporate peer challenge. The peer team recommended (recommendation 5) that the council address what we highlighted in relation to the Planning Committee and Planning service. In response, capacity in the Planning service has been enhanced through the creation of a new Head of Planning role which is currently being recruited to on a permanent basis but is filled on an interim basis in the meantime. However, capacity challenges remain and SLT are seen by the service to have been very supportive of them both generally and in relation to backing solutions to these challenges that have been proposed to them.

An internal review of key aspects of the approach to the Planning Committee, guided by the Planning Advisory Service's toolkit, is underway and expected to report soon. Revisions have already been made to the undertaking of site visits by Planning Committee members.

The council is seeking to submit a new Local Plan by the end of this calendar year.

As the corporate peer challenge highlighted, there is a significant difference between the 6,000 or so additional homes proposed in the draft plan and government requirements for around 17,000 new dwellings in the borough. In this context, we recommended to the council during our discussions in June last year that this approach be tested through external expert advice and we were pleased at that point to glean that it was already committed to this course of action. Indeed, two pieces of work providing expert external analysis and advice have been undertaken subsequently and the findings reported back to the council. These have been considered in detail and the intention is to continue as planned, with the current Development Strategy (strategic allocations) being supported by Cabinet.

### **3.5. Local government reorganisation**

LGR is inevitably absorbing increasing amounts of time for the organisation, with a government decision expected soon. Current timescales indicate the Structural Changes Order being placed later this year, with shadow authority elections in May 2027 and vesting day on 1 April 2028.

Preparation work is underway with likely future LGR local authority partners and officers are welcoming of the relationship-building opportunities this is providing. This has also been prompting thinking and action around increased sharing in certain services, such as food waste collection, building control, environmental health and staff training and how this may help both to ease capacity pressures in such areas and smooth the LGR path.

LGR activity is underway across wider Hampshire but with input only from some councils. External consultancy support has been commissioned by some of these councils, including Havant. However, this is starting to feel to senior officers like the 'cart driving the horse' in terms of the extent and timescales of the information demands, with an emerging desire on the part of those officers to take stock of where this is heading.

The council leadership in Havant is committed to being open with staff about devolution and LGR and what it means. This is welcomed and the staff survey results from both June and December emphasise the importance of getting this right:

- I am concerned about the impact of LGR on my job security – 50% (June) and 53% (December)
- I feel optimistic about my future following devolution and LGR – 42% and 33%
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns about devolution and LGR – 68% and 64%

There is a shared desire from the council and staff for people to be placed in the strongest possible position for LGR. Central to this is ensuring a clear narrative around staff development being encouraged and supported, with increased access to training and development opportunities enabled by the creation of the corporate training budget.

There is also a consideration around elected member interest and involvement in LGR both now and into the future. Currently, there is little that elected members beyond the Leader are needing to dedicate time to and it is clear from our discussions that LGR isn't disproportionately absorbing councillors' focus and attention. However, the coming months can be anticipated to see an increasing set of demands being placed on senior elected members. Also, briefing and training and development activity will need to be put in place to keep the elected membership informed and support councillors in Havant's transition to becoming part of a unitary authority. As an example, with the emergence of the shadow council it will be important for all Havant Borough Council elected members to be clear on the respective remits and responsibilities of the two bodies as they twin-track.

## 4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank Havant Borough for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

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.

Will Brooks, Principal Adviser for the South East Region in the LGA, is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA) and his e-mail address is [will.brooks@local.gov.uk](mailto:will.brooks@local.gov.uk)