

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Telford & Wrekin Council

14 to 17 October 2025

Feedback report



Contents

- 1. Introduction 3
- 2. Executive summary..... 4
- 3. Recommendations 7
- 4. Peer team 9
- 5. Detailed feedback and recommended actions 9
- 6. Action plan and progress review 26
- 7. Contact details 27

1. Introduction

A team of local government peers, led by the Local Government Association (LGA) delivered a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) of Telford and Wrekin Council from 14 to 17 October 2025. The Council had a [Remote Corporate Health Check](#) from 7 to 10 June 2021. At the time CPCs had been suspended due to the covid pandemic, and this offer had been developed to continue to support the sector. Telford and Wrekin Council has demonstrated strong and consistent engagement with the LGA, regularly supporting our work, including participation in the planning graduate programme, regional initiatives, and national events such as the annual conference.

CPC is a well-established and respected improvement and assurance tool that provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils. Further details about the CPC process can be found in Appendix A.

Our peer team consisted of highly experienced and knowledgeable senior local government councillor and officer peers (see section four). We considered the five core areas covered by all CPCs: local priorities and outcomes, organisational and place leadership, governance and culture, financial planning and management and capacity for improvement, in addition to a focus on place.

This report provides Telford & Wrekin Council with feedback on the peer team's findings. It provides the council with a set of a high-level recommendations alongside further recommendations under each of the CPC's core areas. There is an expectation the council will publish this report and a clear action plan to respond to all the recommendations highlighted.

2. Executive summary

Telford & Wrekin Council is a confident, high-performing authority with a strong track record of delivery, civic pride, and innovation. The council's leadership is widely recognised for its approachability, ambition, and commitment to "brilliant basics." Staff are proud to work for the council, and there is a clear sense of shared purpose across the organisation and its partners. This collective ethos - often described as "Team Telford" - was evident throughout the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), which took place from 14 to 17 October 2025 and engaged over 120 individuals across 30 meetings.

The council's achievements have been nationally recognised, including winning the LGC Council of the Year award in 2025. This accolade reflects the strength of leadership, the quality-of-service delivery, and the deep civic pride that permeates the organisation. Children's services are rated Outstanding by Ofsted, adult social care is rated Good by the CQC, and frontline services demonstrate efficiency and responsiveness – housing benefit claims are processed in just four days, and planning application timeliness is among the highest nationally.

Telford & Wrekin's commitment to delivering "brilliant basics" is evident in its relentless focus on clean streets, responsive services, and visible leadership. Initiatives such as the "1-mile test," "SMT on Tour," and "Ask Me Anything" sessions led by the chief executive were praised by staff as effective tools for engagement and responsiveness.

The borough itself is a place of contrasts and opportunity. The legacy of the new town vision remains strong, with green spaces and cultural assets such as Ironbridge Gorge and Southwater contributing to quality of life. Alongside these strengths, the council is acutely aware of persistent inequalities and is committed to addressing them through inclusive growth and targeted regeneration. The development of Station Quarter and strategic land deals with Homes England demonstrate ambition

and readiness for investment.

Economically, Telford is viewed as a regional powerhouse, with a visible pipeline of investable schemes and a reputation for being ready when funding opportunities arise. The council's entrepreneurial mindset has enabled significant investment and market intervention. There is now an opportunity to strengthen governance and transparency around commercial and capital investment decisions, building on existing structures such as the Housing Improvement Board and Treasury Board, and to ensure alignment with inclusive growth objectives.

The council is seen as a trusted and proactive partner, with effective collaboration across sectors including the NHS, education, town and parish councils, and the voluntary and community sector. Its convening power is recognised and valued, and its ability to lead place-based initiatives is a clear strength. There is also potential for Telford & Wrekin to play a stronger role in shaping regional and national agendas. Opportunities exist to engage more actively in system change - particularly in health and care integration - and to influence policy through regional networks and devolution pathways.

While the council's delivery is impressive, the pace and scale of activity present challenges in sustaining strategic oversight, workforce wellbeing, and long-term resilience. Staff spoke of the need for more space to reflect and consolidate learning, and for continued investment in training and development. Building on the council's strong culture of continuous improvement, there is scope to embed structured mechanisms for reflection and learning across all services.

There is an opportunity to strengthen the alignment between the Corporate Plan and Vision 2032 by making commitments to equalities, inclusive growth, and long-term outcomes more explicit. While the council's regeneration work is a visible strength, the narrative can be enhanced by highlighting the human impact of these investments. Using case studies and consistent messaging across platforms will help

5

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk Telephone 020 7664 3000 Email info@local.gov.uk

Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577

Chair: Councillor Louise Gittins

Chief Executive: Joanna Killian

President: Baroness Grey-Thompson

residents understand who is delivering for them, why it matters, and how these actions improve lives.

Scrutiny and governance arrangements are collegiate and transparent, and there is an opportunity to further strengthen their effectiveness - particularly in relation to financial and investment decision-making. Like all councils, scrutiny members bring a breadth of experience but may not always have specialist commercial or financial expertise. Introducing additional technical support or involving non-executive experts could help review investment cases, assess returns and risks, and provide constructive challenge, complementing the strong foundations already in place.

The council's performance culture is a notable strength, underpinned by a clear commitment to continuous improvement sustained over many years. Senior managers have a strong line of sight on improvement, and this was consistently reflected in feedback from staff and stakeholders. To build on this strength and respond to suggestions raised in focus groups, there is an opportunity to embed more structured mechanisms for progress tracking, reflection, and shared learning across all services. These enhancements would support resilience and ensure the council continues to lead improvement across the organisation.

Challenges remain in educational attainment, health inequalities, infrastructure pressures, and workforce sustainability in social care. The council is aware of these issues and is actively working to address them and continued focus and strategic coordination will be essential. There is also scope to accelerate innovation by identifying priority areas for the use of AI and digital improvements, building on early successes such as Magic Notes.

Overall, Telford & Wrekin Council is a well-led, ambitious, and resilient organisation with a strong foundation for continued improvement and impact. The recommendations set out in this report aim to support the council in sustaining its strengths, addressing key risks, and unlocking its full potential.

3. Recommendations

The following are the peer team's key recommendations which have been prioritised on the grounds of urgency and importance.

3.1 Strengthen Strategic Alignment

Strengthen alignment between the Corporate Plan and Vision 2032 by embedding clearer commitments to addressing inequalities, inclusive growth, and long-term outcomes. Make equalities explicit and measurable across all service areas to ensure a consistent approach.

3.2 Economic Positioning and Inclusive Growth

Commission an independent economic review to assess Telford's positioning in attracting jobs within emerging growth sectors of the UK economy. Alongside this, develop a targeted strategy to attract higher-value businesses to the borough, aligned with population and housing growth to support inclusive economic development.

3.3 Governance and Investment Oversight

Ensure governance and communication processes are robust and transparent for capital investment decisions. Strengthen scrutiny's role in strategic decision-making by ensuring earlier and more consistent involvement, particularly in relation to commercial aspirations. Consider introducing non-executive expertise to support scrutiny and provide technical challenge on complex investment cases. Review delegation thresholds for capital programme decisions to align with best practice. Ensure consistent contract management across the council to improve efficiency and accountability.

3.4 Commercial Portfolio Governance

Build on and strengthen the council's commercial portfolio by developing a dedicated

business plan and governance structure to manage risk and maximise social value. This governance structure should include non-Executive expert oversight to provide additional assurance and strategic input.

3.5 Continuous Improvement Culture

Continue embedding continuous improvement as a cultural norm across all services, building on the council's strong track record. Introduce structured mechanisms for progress tracking, reflection, and shared learning to sustain resilience and improvement.

3.6 Innovation and Digital Transformation

Build on existing innovation successes, such as Magic Notes, to accelerate digital transformation and identify priority areas for AI and digital improvements.

3.7 Telling Your Story

Standardise your presence and messaging across all platforms so that residents understand who is delivering for them in their area. Use case studies to make your message real and relatable.

3.8 Financial Resilience

Continue and enhance scenario-based financial stress testing to assess the impact of economic shocks, interest rate changes, or funding reductions on the council's financial sustainability.

In addition to the key recommendations section five of this report captures our detailed feedback and additional recommendations within each of the CPC's core areas of focus.

4. Peer team

Peer challenges are conducted by experienced LGA peers, including elected councillors and senior officers. The composition of the peer team was shaped by the specific focus of the challenge, with the LGA selecting peers based on their relevant expertise. The peers for this CPC were:

- Paul Simpson – Chief Executive, Derby City Council
- Cllr Anthony Burns – Leader, St Helens Council
- Cllr Gareth Barnard – Leader of the Conservative Group, Bracknell Forest Council
- Amy Oliver – Director of Finance, Leicester City Council
- Charlotte Benjamin – Director of Legal and Governance, Middlesbrough Council
- Paul Lakin – Executive Director – Place, Bury Council
- Sarah Sprung – Corporate Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

5. Detailed feedback and recommended actions

5.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Telford & Wrekin Council's strategic priorities are clearly articulated through its Corporate Plan and Vision 2032, reflecting a strong commitment to inclusive growth, community wellbeing, and regeneration. These priorities are widely understood across the organisation and among partners, supported by strong stakeholder engagement and a shared ethos often described as "Team Telford."

The council's strategic framework is grounded in local context and shaped by its identity as a post-war new town. It has a good understanding of current and future demand, supported by data infrastructure and insight-led planning. Initiatives such as the Homes England land deal (a strategic partnership that enables the disposal of public land) and the development of Southwater and Station Quarter demonstrate readiness and ambition.

Delivery against priorities is strong in many areas. Learn Telford offers adult education pathways from pre-entry to higher education, helping residents access new opportunities and improve life chances. NEET (not in education, employment or training) rates have halved over the past five years, reflecting targeted interventions and strong partnership working. Recycling rates stand at 49.2 per cent, above the comparator average of 41 per cent, and housing benefit claims are processed in just four days, compared to seven nationally - demonstrating the council's commitment to efficient, resident-focused services.

Challenges remain in GCSE attainment, adult qualification levels, and health inequalities. For example, the proportion of adults with Level 3+ qualifications is below the national average, and gaps in life expectancy persist between the most and least deprived areas. Infrastructure pressures are evident, with above-average road maintenance needs and lower transport investment. These issues reflect national challenges faced by many local authorities but continued strategic focus and targeted investment will be essential to ensure inclusive growth reaches all communities.

There is also an opportunity to make equalities more explicit in the council's strategic planning. While Vision 2032 prioritises inclusion and tackling inequality, the Corporate Plan could more clearly reference inequality, and measurable equity outcomes. A dedicated section or cross-cutting theme on equalities and inclusion would help embed this commitment across all service areas.

While the Corporate Plan acknowledges deprivation, it could go further in showing how regeneration and investment will directly benefit the most deprived communities. The council already has priority actions for specific neighbourhoods, such as those highlighted through the South Telford Challenge, which targets education and skills, health and employment inequalities, and anti-social behaviour in the three most deprived areas. Building on this, the narrative could make these commitments more visible and explicit, reinforcing how Vision 2032 translates into targeted action for

inclusive growth and for creating connected, safe, and clean neighbourhoods.

The link between economic growth and social outcomes could also be strengthened. The Corporate Plan highlights economic growth and inward investment, whilst Vision 2032 calls for inclusive prosperity. Strengthening the narrative around inclusive economic development - such as how job creation, skills, and business support will reduce inequality and improve life chances - would reinforce the council's commitment to tackling entrenched disadvantage.

To support inclusive growth, the council might wish to consider developing a targeted strategy to attract higher-paid employment. This would align with population and housing expansion and help address persistent inequalities in income and opportunity. Commissioning an independent economic review could also help ensure that future housing growth is matched by job creation and inclusive economic development, strengthening the evidence base for long-term planning.

In addition to the key recommendations detailed in section 3 of this report, we recommend the following actions:

- **Strengthen the link between investment and reducing inequality:** Ensure future investment plans clearly demonstrate how they will improve outcomes in health, education, employment, and housing.

Delivery against priorities and comparative performance

Telford & Wrekin Council demonstrates strong performance across a range of service areas, with evidence of effective delivery against its strategic priorities. The council's commitment to "brilliant basics" is reflected in high-quality frontline services and a culture of continuous improvement.

- Children’s Services are a standout area of performance. Rated outstanding by Ofsted consecutively the service has made significant progress from since a previous rating of requires improvement. Inspectors praised the council’s strong leadership, effective early help, and commitment to co-production with families. In 2023/24, 100 per cent of child protection cases were reviewed within required timescales - well above the national average of 89.8 per cent.
- Adult Social Care is also performing well. The council’s services are rated good by the CQC, and satisfaction levels among users (66.5 per cent) and carers (38.8 per cent) are above national and comparator averages. Additionally, 71.8 per cent of users find it easy to access information and support, indicating strong communication and accessibility.
- Planning services are delivered efficiently, with 98.9 per cent of major applications and 98.4 per cent of non-major applications processed on time - significantly above national benchmarks. The council’s performance in this area contributes to its reputation for being “*on the front foot*” when it comes to investment readiness.
- Housing Benefit claims are processed in just 4 days, compared to 7 nationally and 8 among statistical neighbours. This reflects a well-managed and responsive service.
- Waste and Recycling services are another area of strength. Recycling rates stand at 49.2 per cent, above the comparator average of 41 per cent. The council also invests more per head in cultural and leisure services (£113.86) than its peers (£76.21), supporting community wellbeing and civic pride.
- Education and skills present a more mixed picture. While the council invests more per head in education services than its peers (£805.10 vs. £699.13), GCSE attainment in English and Maths remains below the national average (38.8 per cent vs. 46.2 per cent). The proportion of adults with Level 3+

qualifications (50.8 per cent) also lags behind the comparator average (56.6 per cent).

- Health indicators suggest ongoing challenges. Smoking prevalence (14.5 per cent) and child obesity rates (11.4 per cent) are higher than national averages, and 6.1 per cent of residents report being in bad or very bad health. These figures point to persistent public health inequalities that require continued attention.
- Infrastructure and Transport are areas where investment is needed. In 2023/24, 7% of A roads in Telford & Wrekin were assessed as requiring maintenance, compared to a mean of 3% across its CIPFA nearest neighbours. Spending on highways and transport services is also lower than peers, at £55.92 per head compared to £119.16 among CIPFA nearest neighbours.
- Workforce sustainability in adult social care is a concern, with a turnover rate of 30.7 per cent compared to a comparator average of 23.4 per cent. While satisfaction levels among service users remain high, maintaining continuity and capacity will be critical to sustaining performance. It is important to acknowledge that the council operates a number of in-house provider services, which can contribute to higher turnover rates compared to authorities that rely more heavily on external provision. This reflects wider market trends in provider services rather than an isolated organisational issue, but it reinforces the need for robust workforce planning and retention strategies.

Peers considered [LG Inform benchmarking data](#) which shows how the council compares with the average of their statistical nearest neighbours.

5.2 Organisational and place leadership

Telford & Wrekin Council benefits from strong, visible, and collaborative leadership. The senior management team (SMT) and Cabinet operate with a unified voice, which was consistently described by staff and partners as a key strength. The leadership culture is approachable and proactive, with regular engagement mechanisms such as ‘SMT on tour’ and ‘ask me anything’ sessions helping to maintain visibility and responsiveness across the organisation. These initiatives were cited by staff as effective in surfacing issues and driving action - for example, a question raised during an ask me anything session led to a more strategic approach to equalities and inclusion.

The chief executive is well-regarded across political groups, and the council is described as “member-led,” with the Leader empowering Cabinet members and promoting a team ethos. This approach has fostered a culture of trust and shared ambition. One officer reflected, *“It feels like a family here - there’s a real sense of belonging and pride.”* This view is also backed up by stakeholders with one local business owner stating that the Council had a *“strong Cabinet”*.

Governance arrangements are robust. The monitoring officer is part of the senior leadership team and meets regularly with the chief executive and section 151 officer, forming a well-established ‘golden triangle’ that provides effective oversight of organisational risks. Cabinet engagement in policy development is supported by structured processes including business briefings and policy development groups.

The council’s leadership is outward-facing and business-friendly, with stakeholders describing its approach as *“agile, responsive, and delivery-focused.”* This has contributed to Telford’s reputation as an economic powerhouse in the region. Building on this strong position, there is an opportunity for the council to increase its

visibility in national and regional policy discussions and to showcase its achievements more proactively to government and sector partners. Doing so would help amplify Telford's influence and share its successes more widely.

The peer team observed inconsistent branding across the borough's towns, which may dilute the visibility and recognition of the council's services and assets. A clear, consistent, and recognisable brand is essential to reinforcing the council's identity and ensuring residents and stakeholders understand which services and facilities are provided by the council. Strengthening brand coherence across physical assets, digital platforms, and communications will help build trust, enhance civic pride, and support the council's ambition to be seen as a unified and responsive organisation. This is particularly important in a borough with diverse communities and geographies, where a consistent visual identity can help foster a stronger sense of place and connection. Using case studies and clear branding will help residents understand who is delivering services and how they can engage.

Staff consistently described the organisation as inclusive and supportive, with a strong emphasis on development and a shared sense of pride in their work. They valued the collaborative culture but highlighted three areas for improvement: (1) the need for more consistent leadership practices across departments to ensure clarity and alignment; (2) improved cross-team communication to strengthen coordination and reduce duplication; and (3) greater access to external development opportunities to complement internal training. Feedback from workshops also emphasised the importance of structured planning sessions to support operational delivery and strategic outcomes, helping staff balance the fast pace of work with opportunities for reflection and learning.

The council's convening power is recognised and valued. Relationships with town

and parish councils, the voluntary and community sector (VCS), and external agencies such as the NHS and police are strong. The council works effectively to build a shared narrative of place, though there is an opportunity to strengthen cohesion across the five towns. The development of Southwater was described as giving Telford a “heart,” but further work is needed to unify the borough’s identity. The council’s ethos of co-production is evident in initiatives such as 10x10 (ten things to do before you're ten) and 5x5 (five things to do before you're five), which promote early development, enrichment, and inclusion for children and families. These programmes are widely recognised and valued by partners and residents and reflect the council’s commitment to shaping place through inclusive and preventative approaches.

Partners expressed a desire for more consistent visibility of capital investment plans and a clearer articulation of the human impact of development. As one stakeholder noted, *“It’s all well building stuff, but it needs to have a purpose.”* A publicly available investment plan would provide significant benefit by explaining not only the commercial objectives but also the potential regeneration returns and social outcomes. This would help demonstrate how physical development contributes to inclusive growth and improved quality of life for residents.

Strategic positioning and influence is an emerging opportunity. The council’s leadership and delivery track record position it well to contribute meaningfully to wider system reform and to shape its future within the regional governance landscape. As national and regional devolution discussions evolve, there is a pivotal opportunity for Telford & Wrekin to influence which strategic authority it aligns with, ensuring its voice is heard and its priorities are embedded in future governance arrangements. Alongside this, the council could strengthen its visibility and impact by engaging more actively in regional forums such as the West Midlands Combined

Authority and Integrated Care System leadership groups. These steps would help secure influence over future devolution deals and regional infrastructure strategies while reinforcing Telford & Wrekin's role in shaping policy and driving system change.

In addition to the key recommendations detailed in section 3 of this report, we recommend the following actions:

- **Publish a clear and publicly accessible capital investment plan:** setting out both commercial objectives and anticipated regeneration benefits. This should include measurable social outcomes - such as improvements in housing, employment, and community wellbeing - to demonstrate how physical development supports inclusive growth and enhances quality of life for residents.
- **Strengthen external development pathways:** Expand access to external leadership and professional development opportunities across the organisation, with a particular focus on areas where recruitment is more challenging and where staff turnover is higher. This approach will support talent retention, succession planning, and build resilience in critical service areas, while ensuring opportunities are available for officers at different levels to develop and progress.
- **Celebrate and strengthen borough identity through inclusive engagement.:** Telford is a place of contrasts, and local towns play an important role in shaping community identity. The council has already taken positive steps, such as initiating Telford Day and adopting a borough flag, to celebrate this diversity. Building on these initiatives, there is an opportunity to further reinforce a shared sense of place and purpose while continuing to respect and promote the distinct identities of individual towns.

- **Amplify national and regional influence:** Proactively position the council in regional and national policy forums to showcase achievements, share learning, and shape wider system reform.

5.3 Governance and culture

Telford & Wrekin Council benefits from a well-established governance framework and a positive organisational culture that supports openness, collaboration, and continuous improvement. The council's leadership is described as approachable and responsive, and there is a strong sense of pride and commitment among staff. A culture of respect and transparency is evident, with staff feeling empowered to raise concerns and challenge constructively. One officer shared, *"we're trusted to speak up and be heard – it's not just lip service."*

The council's statutory officers - the chief executive, monitoring officer, and section 151 officer - work closely together, forming a well-established 'golden triangle' that provides effective oversight of organisational risks. Their regular rhythm of formal and informal meetings ensures statutory compliance and supports joined-up decision-making. Cabinet agendas are well-structured, and the policy development process includes early engagement through business briefings and policy development groups, enabling informed and collaborative decision-making.

The council's annual governance statement presents a clear and honest assessment of governance arrangements, with a strong emphasis on learning from experience. The response to historic issues, such as child sexual exploitation (CSE), was described by partners as *"commendable"*, with the council using lived experience to rebuild trust and improve services. This approach reflects a wider organisational commitment to doing the right thing for residents.

Scrutiny is collegiate and increasingly transparent, supported by live streaming and strong public engagement. A new generation of scrutiny chairs is emerging, with a clear commitment to listening and learning. As one councillor reflected, *"We're here to ask the difficult questions - but also to help improve."* While scrutiny is a strength,

there remains scope to deepen its role in financial oversight and strategic decision-making. Some councillors raised concerns about being briefed too late on major investment proposals, which limited opportunities for effective challenge. Earlier and more detailed engagement would support stronger accountability and more informed debate. As one councillor noted, *“We’re supportive, but we need to be better informed - especially when the stakes are high.”*

It is also important to recognise that the Audit Chair demonstrated a strong understanding of her role and felt well supported by senior officers. This provides a solid foundation on which to build a more commercially aware scrutiny function, capable of engaging with complex investment decisions at an earlier stage.

The council’s Member Development Programme is co-produced and highly regarded. Planning is already underway for the next induction cycle ahead of the 2027 all-out elections, demonstrating a proactive approach to member support. Officers are proud of the programme’s relevance and accessibility, and councillors described it as *“genuinely useful and empowering.”* Political awareness training is embedded in officer induction, helping to foster political acumen across the workforce.

The corporate risk register is regularly reviewed and owned by senior leaders, with risks clearly articulated and actively managed. Audit Committee plays a key role in overseeing risk, in line with good practice set out by CIPFA guidance. While scrutiny should not duplicate Audit’s responsibilities, there is an opportunity for scrutiny to use the risk register as an informative tool to shape its work programme and strengthen its role in interrogating investment decisions earlier in the process. This would enhance transparency and provide additional assurance without overlapping statutory functions.

In addition to the key recommendations detailed in section 3 of this report, we recommend the following actions:

- **Enhance Scrutiny’s Role in Risk and Investment Oversight:** Introduce

earlier and more structured engagement of scrutiny committees in capital investment planning and risk assessment. Develop a protocol for briefing scrutiny councillors on major investment decisions before formal Cabinet consideration.

- **Strengthen Governance Communication Pathways:** Build on existing reporting arrangements by introducing a more structured and proactive communication framework between statutory officers and non-executive councillors. This could include agreed protocols for timely updates on strategic risks and compliance matters outside formal reporting cycles, ensuring clarity and consistency.

5.4 Financial planning and management

Telford & Wrekin Council has a strong track record of financial discipline and budget management. The peer team found evidence of robust financial planning and a clear understanding of the council's financial position across both political and managerial leadership. The council is seen as proactive in identifying and pursuing funding opportunities, supported by a visible pipeline of investable schemes and an entrepreneurial mindset that enables it to leverage external investment effectively, one stakeholder reflected *"Telford is always on the front foot. They always have skeleton proposals prepped and can react quickly. They will deliver."*

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is well-developed and aligns with corporate priorities. The scale of the capital programme and the level of borrowing require continued close monitoring by both officers and councillors. The Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is forecast to be £592.5m in 2024/25 and rising, with debt servicing costs representing 8.7 per cent of core spending power - above the comparator average of 6.2 per cent. While the council's reserves are healthy at 44.8 per cent of net revenue expenditure, the long-term sustainability of borrowing should remain a key focus. The peer team recognises that the council has robust monitoring arrangements in place, including a dedicated finance team and a Treasury Board supported by external advice. It also acknowledges that borrowing is only undertaken when required and that significant investment, such as NuPlace and the Growth

Fund, is designed to generate returns. Given the scale of borrowing and associated risks, continued close oversight remains essential to safeguard financial resilience and maintain confidence in delivery.

There is a shared understanding of the financial position across the organisation, and senior leaders and Cabinet members are well-briefed. The section 151 officer plays a central role in financial governance, supported by effective internal and external audit arrangements. The most recent value for money assessment raised no concerns, and the council's revenue position is stronger than many peers.

The council's commercial portfolio, which includes housing and industrial assets, generates approximately £15 million in income annually. This supports both the revenue budget and contributes to place-shaping across the borough. The council is at an important point in balancing its investment strategy between generating commercial returns and regenerating its most challenged estates. Commercial development has enabled visible transformation, and the peer team recognises the strong business planning behind these investments. At the same time, given the council's significant role as a landlord, it will be important to remain mindful of market dynamics when setting commercial rents. Ensuring that interventions continue to complement, rather than constrain, private sector investment will help maintain confidence and encourage external capital to support economic growth. The council's proactive approach to addressing market failure is a strength, and continued careful oversight will safeguard this positive impact.

To ensure long-term social and economic impact, the council would benefit from a clearer articulation of how investment decisions align with inclusive growth and regeneration objectives. Governance and oversight of the commercial portfolio could also be strengthened. The peer team recommends the development of a dedicated business plan and reporting structure, including annual scrutiny of performance and risk. The current delegation of capital programme responsibilities to the Director for Prosperity and Investment - who also oversees NuPlace, the council's wholly owned

housing company - may benefit from clearer role separation and enhanced governance, potentially through external expert input at board level.

The council has strong governance foundations in place, which provide a solid basis for managing its ambitious capital and commercial investment programme. Building on this, improving transparency, accountability, and communication around investment decisions will help maintain confidence and ensure strategic alignment with the council's broader priorities. The Peer Team noted that some significant commercial property decisions have been taken without an investment committee providing external challenge, relying instead on agent reports. Partners also expressed a desire for more consistent visibility of investment plans and clearer articulation of their social and economic impact. Introducing additional mechanisms for earlier scrutiny and non-executive expertise would strengthen assurance and reinforce the council's commitment to inclusive growth objectives.

Contract management is currently devolved across directorates, and there may be benefits in adopting a more corporate approach to improve consistency and efficiency. Feedback during the review highlighted that while processes are in place, there is scope to strengthen oversight and ensure alignment across the organisation. A more standardised approach could help reduce duplication, enhance accountability, and provide greater assurance on risk management and compliance.

The council's MTFs sets out a clear strategy for managing financial pressures, including demand-led services such as adults' and children's social care. The Homes England land deal has enabled strategic investment and market intervention, and the council continues to explore opportunities for external funding. Strengthening governance around commercial activity and improving cross-organisational integration will be key to sustaining financial resilience and delivering on strategic priorities.

In addition to the key recommendations detailed in section 3 of this report, we

recommend the following actions:

- **Introduce scenario-based financial stress testing focused on borrowing:** While the council already uses scenarios within its MTFs and updates the budget model regularly, the peer team recommends extending this approach to include detailed stress testing of borrowing. This should assess the potential impact of interest rate changes, economic shocks, or variations in investment returns on the council's long-term financial sustainability. Strengthening this focus will provide additional assurance given the scale of the capital programme and associated risks.
- **Strengthen councillors' financial literacy and engagement:** The council already provides financial training as part of the member induction programme, alongside annual sessions on the statement of accounts and treasury management for the Audit Committee, and regular briefings for Business & Finance Scrutiny on the MTFs. Building on these strong foundations, there is an opportunity to offer more tailored and advanced training for scrutiny and non-executive councillors to further enhance confidence and capability in challenging complex investment and budget decisions.
- **Establish a cross-departmental investment coordination group:** Create a formal mechanism to align capital investment decisions with workforce, asset, and service strategies, ensuring joined-up planning and risk management.
- **Review delegation thresholds for capital programme decisions:** Reassess the levels of delegated authority for capital spending to ensure appropriate oversight and alignment with governance best practice. The peer team suggests that significant capital decisions are best taken by councillors rather than officers who also hold roles within council-owned companies. This approach would strengthen transparency, reinforce accountability, and provide assurance that governance arrangements remain robust as the scale of investment grows.

5.5 Capacity for improvement

23

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk Telephone 020 7664 3000 Email info@local.gov.uk

Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577

Chair: Councillor Louise Gittins

Chief Executive: Joanna Killian

President: Baroness Grey-Thompson

Telford & Wrekin Council is a confident and capable organisation with a strong track record of delivery and a culture of pride and commitment among its workforce. It has demonstrated its ability to improve services - most notably in children's services, which achieved consecutive Outstanding ratings from Ofsted - and is now applying that learning to other areas, including adult social care.

Staff consistently describe the council as inclusive, engaging, and a place they are proud to work. One member of staff noted, "*We're not just employees—we're part of something bigger.*" There is a clear sense of purpose and alignment with the council's priorities, and staff understand how their roles contribute to the wider mission.

The council is investing in data infrastructure to support early intervention and prevention, particularly in high-cost areas. This proactive approach is improving outcomes and managing demand. Feedback from staff highlighted three related points: the fast pace of delivery, the need for structured opportunities to consolidate learning, and the importance of organised planning sessions to support operational improvements, workforce wellbeing, and strategic thinking. While staff consistently described the organisation as supportive, these suggestions reflect a desire to create more space for reflection and planning alongside the council's ambitious delivery programme.

Workforce indicators reflect both strengths and areas for development. While staff turnover is low in many services and the council's "grow your own" approach is well-regarded, adult social care experiences higher-than-average turnover (30.7 per cent vs. 23.4 per cent). Staff identified succession planning, enhanced training, and cross-council knowledge sharing as priorities to support workforce sustainability.

Although the council does not have a formal transformation programme, it demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous improvement. This is underpinned by a performance management framework that is increasingly embedded across the organisation. Senior leaders regularly conduct deep dives into service areas, using performance analytics to inform proactive responses to emerging issues. Staff described the performance culture as open, supportive, and focused on learning.

The peer team heard consistent reflections on the pressures of delivery and the reliance on goodwill, with concerns about burnout. Senior leaders emphasised the need for space to pause and reflect, particularly following major projects. Embedding structured opportunities for strategic reflection and learning will be essential to sustaining the council's improvement culture and supporting staff wellbeing.

The council's ability to deliver on locally identified priorities is clear. The transformation of children's services is a strong example, and the application of that learning to adult services reflects a deep commitment to improvement. Staff are aligned with the council's mission and demonstrate a strong sense of ownership and pride. To maintain this momentum, the council must continue investing in its people and systems to ensure sufficient strategic capacity and support.

The council's high spend per head on key services reflects its commitment to tackling persistent challenges in outcomes such as healthy life expectancy, smoking prevalence, and childhood obesity. Continued investment in prevention and targeted interventions will be vital to improving these indicators.

Innovation presents an ongoing opportunity for the council. Building on successful initiatives such as Magic Notes, there is scope to accelerate the use of AI and digital tools to further embed technology into service delivery and enhance efficiency.

Identifying priority areas for digital transformation will help sustain momentum and maximise impact.

Continuous improvement is clearly embedded as a cultural norm, as demonstrated by the council's strong track record of delivery and positive inspection findings sustained over many years. Building on this, the council might wish to consider introducing additional mechanisms to track progress, capture learning, and coordinate improvement activity across services. Creating space for strategic thinking and reflection could further strengthen resilience and maintain high performance over the long term.

In addition to the key recommendations detailed in section 3 of this report, we recommend the following action:

Strengthen workforce resilience and organisational learning by building on existing continuous improvement culture. This includes succession planning for leadership continuity, promoting cross-council knowledge sharing, and embedding structured reflection mechanisms—such as 'pause and reflect' sessions—to consolidate learning and support staff wellbeing.

6. Action plan and progress review

The senior political and managerial leadership of the council might wish to consider this review report and reflect on the findings and recommendations from this CPC.

To promote the principle of transparency, it is a requirement of the CPC process that the final report of the peer team is published in-full within three months of the review being completed. In this instance, this requires the report to be published no later than 17 February 2026.

There is a requirement for Telford & Wrekin Council to develop and publish an action plan within five-months of the peer team being onsite, no later than 17 March 2026. This action plan should provide clarity on the activity, milestones, and timelines that the council will work to in responding to the team's findings.

The action plan will also be central to the peer team's re-engagement with Telford & Wrekin Council through a progress review which is due to be completed by 17 August 2026.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have published the Best Value Standards for Local Authorities. These standards expect every council to engage in a Corporate or Finance Peer Challenge at least every five-years. It is expected that Telford & Wrekin Council would commission their next Corporate Peer Challenge no later than 17 October 2030.

7. Contact details

In the meantime, Helen Murray, Principal Adviser for the West Midlands is the main contact between your council and the Local Government Association. As outlined above, Helen is available to discuss any further support you require and can be contacted on

Helen Murray, LGA Principal Adviser for the West Midlands

Email – helen.murray@local.gov.uk

Tel – 07884312235

Appendix A – What is CPC?

CPC is a valued improvement and assurance tool that is delivered by the sector for the sector. It involves a team of senior local government councillors and officer peers undertaking a comprehensive review of key information and spending three days at the council to provide robust, strategic, and credible challenge and support.

CPC forms a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. It is underpinned by the principles of Sector-led Improvement (SLI) put in place by councils and the LGA to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector. These principles state that councils are responsible for their own performance; accountable locally, not nationally; share a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector; and rely on the LGA to provide the tools to support them. CPC is also key to councils in meeting their Best Value duty. UK Government expect all councils to have a CPC at least every five years.

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five areas which form the core components of all CPCs. These are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. Local priorities and outcomes - are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities? Is there an organisational-wide approach to continuous improvement, with frequent monitoring, reporting on and updating of performance and improvement plans?
2. Organisational and place leadership - does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. Governance and culture - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. Financial planning and management - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges? What is the relative financial resilience of the council?

5. Capacity for improvement - Is the organisation able to bring about the improvements it needs, including delivering on locally identified priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

As part of the five core areas outlined above, every CPC has a strong focus on financial sustainability, performance, governance, and assurance.

The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. This included a position statement prepared by the council in advance of the peer team's time on site. This provided information on the local context at the council and what the peer team should focus on. It also included a comprehensive LGA Finance briefing (prepared using public reports from the council's website) and a LGA performance report outlining benchmarking data for the council across a range of metrics. The latter was produced using the LGA's local area benchmarking tool called LG Inform.

The peer team spent three days onsite at the Telford & Wrekin Council during which they gathered evidence, information, and views from more than 30 meetings, in addition to further research and reading and spoke to over 120 council staff together with councillors and external stakeholders.