LGA Corporate Peer Challenge - Progress Review

Telford & Wrekin Council

11 September 2026

Feedback report



Contents

1. Introduction 3
2. Summary of the approach 4
3. Progress Review - Feedback 6
4. Final thoughts and next steps 13

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1. Introduction

Telford & Wrekin Council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge from 14 to 17 October 2025 and subsequently published the full CPC report and a CPC action plan setting out its response to the peer team's recommendations.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. The virtual review took place approximately eleven months after the CPC and provided an opportunity for the council's senior political and managerial leadership to:

- update peers on progress and receive feedback on how the action plan responds to the CPC recommendations
- consider learning, new opportunities and challenges that have emerged since the original peer team was on site
- discuss the early impact of the work and the next steps needed to embed and sustain improvement

The LGA would like to thank Telford & Wrekin Council for its constructive engagement and continued commitment to sector-led improvement. The review took place in an open and positive spirit, with members and officers willing to reflect on progress and identify where further work will add value.

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2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review took place virtually on 11 September 2026. The council provided its July 2026 action plan and supporting evidence in advance. The action plan sets out the council's response to the eight key recommendations in the original CPC report.

The action plan was the foundation for the review. The peer team tested what had changed since October 2025, whether new arrangements were operating consistently, what early impact could be demonstrated and where activity was continuing to develop.

The original CPC made eight key recommendations across the five core CPC themes. These formed the principal framework for the council's action plan and the virtual progress review:

2.1. Key recommendations

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.

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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.

The peer team met the Leader and Cabinet members, senior officers, non-executive councillors and employees through a series of virtual focus groups. The programme concluded with feedback to the council's senior leadership.

The Progress Review team included:

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- Samantha Mowbray - Chief Executive, Swindon Borough Council and lead officer peer
- Anthony Burns – previous Leader, St Helens Council
- Amy Oliver - Director of Finance, Leicester City Council
- Rajpreet Khera - Local Government Association
- Sarah Sprung - Corporate Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

3. Progress Review - Feedback

The council's July 2026 action plan reports that all actions are complete - a self-assessed completion rate of 100 per cent. The peer team was heartened to see the confidence behind that assessment and the pace and ownership with which the council has responded. The review gave peers clear evidence of strong progress across the five original CPC themes and of several new arrangements already operating in practice. Looking ahead, the peer team reflected that the council has a strong foundation from which to demonstrate the longer-term impact of the improvements made. Maintaining a clear focus on outcomes through its established improvement arrangements will help sustain this progress.

The peer team was pleased to find that Telford & Wrekin continues to be an excellent council. The strengths recognised in the original CPC remain clearly evident: strong political and managerial leadership, an ambitious delivery culture, sound financial management and a committed workforce. Peers felt the council had used the CPC as constructive external challenge and made tangible progress without losing the confidence, pace or pride that characterise Team Telford.

Peers were impressed by the clear golden thread from Vision 2032 through the emerging Council Plan, service plans, performance conversations and individual objectives. They heard how senior leaders show collective ownership of performance and how directors lead discussion of their outcomes and improvement action. In the peer team's view, this strengthens accountability and supports a more consistent organisation-wide approach.

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The peer team also heard strong Cabinet ownership. Members described how the CPC has influenced the questions they ask about policy, investment and delivery, particularly whether activity reflects political priorities and benefits communities experiencing inequality. Peers reflected that the council's response therefore extends beyond completing an action plan and is becoming part of its wider improvement approach.

In the peer team's view, the next phase should focus on demonstrating the measurable impact of these changes and ensuring they remain embedded across the organisation. This applies particularly to workforce development, digital projects, communications campaigns, scrutiny and investment governance.

3.1. Local priorities and outcomes

The two key recommendations under this theme focused on strengthening strategic alignment, making equality and inclusive growth more explicit and measurable, and sharpening the borough's economic positioning.

Vision 2032 continues to provide a clear partnership framework for the borough. Relationships between the council and strategic partners have matured and support open challenge as well as joint delivery. The peer team heard how partners are using the framework to consider whether the system is investing sufficiently in prevention and early help, demonstrating that it is operating as a forum for collective place leadership rather than information sharing alone.

Work on the 2027 to 2031 Council Plan is well advanced. More than 12 community events have been held, employees have been engaged and emerging priorities have been discussed with strategic partners. The planned route includes joint Cabinet and senior management discussion, all-member scrutiny engagement, consultation alongside the budget and adoption in February 2027. Aligning the Council Plan and budget through the same route will help ensure commitments are deliverable and funded.

Peers were particularly encouraged by the strengthened golden thread from Vision 2032 through service plans, performance conversations and individual objectives. Directorate plans identify outcomes and measures, senior management collectively

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reviews performance, and directors lead discussion of their areas. The latest staff survey reinforces this positive picture: 93 per cent of respondents understood how their role contributes to council priorities, based on a response rate of almost 50 per cent.

The peer team welcomed the way inclusive growth is becoming more visible in investment decisions. The strengthened Major Projects Board brings the council's main regeneration schemes together and enables Cabinet members and senior officers to consider delivery, budget, risk and intended community benefits in one place. Sutton Hill Hub illustrates this developing approach by connecting physical regeneration with skills, education, health, community activity, safety and pride in place.

The economic review and development of inclusive growth measures provide a sound platform for attracting higher-value employment and ensuring growth benefits communities across the borough. As the Council Plan is finalised, the council can build on this by agreeing a focused set of outcome measures showing how investment improves health, education, employment and housing.

The peer team reflected that, once the Council Plan is agreed in February 2027, the council and its partners will be well placed to begin shaping the longer-term vision for Telford & Wrekin beyond 2032. Vision 2032 is moving into the medium-term planning horizon, so beginning this work early will support broad political and partner ownership of the borough's next chapter.

3.2. Organisational and place leadership

The key recommendation under this theme focused on telling Telford & Wrekin's story consistently so residents understand who is delivering for them.

Peers welcomed how the communications team has translated the recommendations into practical and repeatable controls. A review of more than 600 design jobs found strong use of council branding and led to specific corrections. Place-based audits now check signage and public-facing material across borough centres. Cross-service campaign planning and the continuing Protect, Care and Invest narrative are helping the council present a coherent story, with greater use of residents and frontline

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employees to make technical or contested issues accessible.

The peer team thought the latest residents' survey result was a fantastic achievement: 70 per cent of respondents felt well informed, compared with the quoted national benchmark of 47 per cent. Peers were impressed by the scale of that lead and felt it speaks powerfully to the council's sustained recognition of the importance of communications and the strength of its relationship with residents. This gives the council a strong platform from which to test how branding and storytelling further improve recognition, trust and understanding across different communities.

More broadly, the peer team reflected that the strong, visible and collaborative leadership recognised in the original CPC remains a defining strength. Cabinet and the senior management team demonstrate shared ownership of performance and improvement, and members described how the CPC has sharpened the questions they ask about policy, investment and delivery. Peers felt the council's response is becoming part of its wider approach to improvement rather than standing apart as a separate action plan.

3.3. Governance and culture

The two key recommendations under this theme focused on strengthening governance, transparency and scrutiny of capital investment, and developing robust governance for the commercial portfolio.

The council retains strong governance foundations and constructive relationships between statutory officers, senior management and members. The peer team was encouraged by evidence that scrutiny is becoming involved earlier, before decisions are finalised. Peers heard how Environment Scrutiny has considered policy during its development, while cross-party work is giving non-executive councillors a more active role in shaping options.

The review of legacy garage sites on new town estates is a useful example of pre-decision scrutiny. Scrutiny is considering residents' views, housing potential, legal and practical issues and wider regeneration benefits before Cabinet reaches a decision. Business and Finance Scrutiny has also received more detailed information and challenged areas including adult social care expenditure, supported by input

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from other councils and external contributors.

The peer team considered these developments to be an important step forward in strengthening the influence of scrutiny. There is an opportunity to build on this progress by sharing effective practice across committees, supporting more member-led examination of budget priorities and demonstrating how scrutiny has influenced decisions.

The peer team was impressed by how the Major Projects Board has strengthened oversight, bringing major schemes into a single forum where delivery, finance, risk and community benefit can be considered together. Alongside the Housing Investment Board, Treasury Board and established statutory officer arrangements, this provides a more coherent framework for capital and commercial assurance. Peers also welcomed the additional challenge provided by the external review of the property investment portfolio and benchmarking of delegation arrangements.

The council can build on these improvements by setting out clearly how the different boards and assurance routes connect, where independent expertise is brought in and how member challenge influences significant decisions. Continued development of corporate contract management and proactive communication with non-executive councillors will reinforce transparency and consistency.

3.4. Financial planning and management

The key recommendation under this theme focused on financial resilience and enhanced scenario-based stress testing.

The peer team remained impressed by the council's strong record of financial management and the close working relationship between finance and services. Peers heard how scenario planning supports the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and how management is actively considering ways to address the forecast budget gap in 2027/28. At the time of the review, external audit and value for money work were progressing without significant concerns.

The council is using prevention and service redesign to respond to continuing pressures in adults' and children's services. Interest-rate assumptions are considered within financial planning and the council receives regular advice from its treasury

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advisers. These arrangements provide a sound basis for navigating a challenging and uncertain financial environment.

Building on these established strengths, the peer team encourage the council to continue developing its approach to financial scenario testing, particularly given the scale of its capital programme and borrowing. This would provide further assurance to members by illustrating the potential impact of changes in interest rates, refinancing costs, demand and investment income, alongside the management actions available.

3.5. Capacity for improvement

The two key recommendations under this theme focused on sustaining the council's continuous improvement culture and accelerating innovation and digital transformation.

Peers saw a deeply rooted culture of continuous improvement. Leaders do not regard delivery of an initiative as the end of the process and expect services to evaluate what worked, identify learning and improve the next phase. The peer team heard practical examples from service delivery, events and partnership activity, alongside stronger collective ownership of performance by the senior management team.

Digital work is moving confidently from governance and planning into practical delivery. Strategic oversight for artificial intelligence and data transformation includes consideration of ethics, risk and external challenge. The peer team welcomed the focus on better outcomes and more efficient practice rather than viewing digital change solely as a savings programme.

The peer team was particularly encouraged by Resilience In-View, which is live and has helped identify vulnerable households during flooding. Peers felt this provides a tangible example of improved data infrastructure supporting earlier and more targeted intervention. Child in View, due to launch in 2027, should give practitioners a fuller picture of a child and their household as partner data is incorporated within appropriate assurance arrangements.

The peer team reflected that the planned review in early 2027 is a valuable

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opportunity to assess user experience, data quality, outcomes and professional time saved. Using clear baselines and measures will help the council demonstrate the benefits of digital investment, decide where the approach should be extended and maintain momentum in the next stage of transformation.

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4. Final thoughts and next steps

The peer team was pleased to see how Telford & Wrekin Council has responded to the CPC with energy, openness and clear ownership. Peers saw visible changes in practice across all five original CPC themes and a council that remains confident, ambitious and committed to continuous improvement. They particularly recognised the stronger golden thread, collective ownership of performance, broader workforce development, practical digital delivery, greater communications discipline and improved oversight through the Major Projects Board.

The council's next phase is about building on this strong progress, embedding the changes consistently and demonstrating sustained impact. The peer team's key considerations are to:

- Complete and embed the 2027 to 2031 Council Plan.
- Begin developing a longer-term place vision beyond 2032 once the Council Plan is agreed.
- Use the Major Projects Board and related governance arrangements to track delivery, financial risk, social value and benefits for communities.
- Apply effective pre-decision scrutiny consistently and show members how their challenge has influenced decisions.
- Continue to strengthen councillor financial literacy and make complex financial and investment information easier to engage with.
- Evaluate the impact of workforce programmes, digital products and communications campaigns using clear baselines and outcome measures.
- Develop a focused regional and national influencing proposition with clear ownership, audiences and priority asks.

The LGA would like to thank Telford & Wrekin Council for undertaking the virtual Progress Review and for the openness of everyone who contributed. Senior political and managerial leaders will now want to reflect on the findings and determine how the council takes the next phase forward.

The LGA's ongoing sector support offer remains available. Helen Murray, Principal

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Adviser for the West Midlands, is the main point of contact between the council and the Local Government Association and would be pleased to discuss any further support.

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