

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

3 FEBRUARY 2026

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FOLLOW UP

REPORT OF: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Council undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) between 4 and 7 November 2024, where we were visited by a peer team supported by the Local Government Association. The peer team produced a feedback report, which was reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2025. Subsequently an Action Plan was developed to respond to the recommendations and was approved by Cabinet on 23 March 2025, with an update on progress reported to Cabinet on 23 September 2025. The peer team undertook a one day follow up visit on 15 December 2025 and have issued a follow up report, which is attached at Appendix A.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the findings of the CPC follow up report be noted.
- 2.2. That the progress against the CPC action plan be noted.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the CPC follow up report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The 'do nothing' option of not following up on the agreed action plan has been discounted, as the Council committed to undertake the CPC and should therefore seek to gain benefit from that process.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 A number of staff and councillors met with the peer team during the follow up visit on 15 December 2025. All those who took part were invited to attend the feedback session on the day. The Leader and the Leadership Team received the feedback report and had the opportunity to raise any questions or clarifications.

5.2 This report will be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2026, prior to the Cabinet's consideration.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The process for the CPC in November 2024 was set out in previous Cabinet reports and the LGA's CPC final report can be found on our website at [Corporate Peer Challenge | North Herts Council](#). Progress Reviews are a core component of all CPCs and every council that has a CPC is required to have a Progress Review and publish the findings from this within 12 months of the CPC. The progress review at North Herts took place just outside of these timescales to avoid pressure in the run up to submission of LGR proposals in November 2025. The LGA will also publish the Progress Review report on their website.

7.2. The Progress Review provides space for a council's senior leadership to share with peers the progress made against the CPC recommendations, discuss early impact or learning and receive peer feedback on the implementation of the council's CPC RAG rated Action Plan. The peer challenge manager produces a short report following the Progress Review, including the peer team's key observations against each recommendation, and as outlined above, the council are required to publish this. In advance of the Progress Review, the council are required to provide a RAG rated CPC Action Plan (Appendix C) and short position statement (Appendix B) which clearly set out the progress made in relation to each of the CPC's recommendations. During the progress view, peers reviewed the Action Plan, and the progress made against each recommendation.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. It should be noted that the original CPC took place prior to the publication of the Devolution White Paper in December 2024, which significantly redrew the future landscape for local government including North Herts Council. The CPC follow up visit took place on 15 December 2025 during the short period of time that the Council had an Acting Leader, between the Full Council meetings of 4 December 2025 and 13 January 2026. This is referenced within the report.

8.2. Members will be aware that for the majority of 2025 a significant amount of senior leadership time was spent working on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals. Despite these demands the position statement at Appendix B shows a wide range of achievements during this period across all of the Council's priorities. The Action Plan at Appendix C (updated since Cabinet last reviewed it in September 2025) also shows the progress made in responding to nine of the ten recommendations in the original report, with an explanation as to why recommendation three was not being pursued.

8.3. The CPC follow up visit on 15 December involved a number of meetings with staff and councillors, with sessions covering the themes in the original CPC report of strategic

alignment and delivery, driving organisational growth and performance-led modernisation. Additionally there was a session discussing LGR and devolution, covering both the Hertfordshire experience and experiences of the peers in their areas. The peer team have provided a follow up report, attached at Appendix A, which recognises the good progress made since November 2024 and where work is still ongoing.

- 8.4. The follow up report is the end of the formal LGA led CPC process, but the Council will continue to progress the actions on the Action Plan whilst they remain relevant. Assuming LGR takes place on the timelines anticipated this will almost certainly be the last CPC that North Herts Council undertakes as they typically take place every five years or so. Any new Unitary Authority that replaces the Council will undertake CPCs (or its future equivalent) in due course.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference include at paragraph 5.7.13 "To consider the reports of external review bodies on key aspects of overall service delivery".
- 9.2 The CPC is a voluntary process and therefore there is no legal obligation to either host a CPC or act upon the recommendations. However, it is best practice to undertake a CPC every five years and having done so, to act upon the issues identified. By doing so, this process is recognised by the LGA as a way to assist councils in meeting their Best Value Duty. The Best Value Duty is a statutory requirement contained within Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 for local authorities to "*make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.*"

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The original CPC report identified a need to better align the financial strategy with organisational priorities, ensuring that there was a real balance between income and expenditure and that there was no longer a reliance on the use of reserves to produce a balanced budget. The CPC follow up report identified there had clearly been progress in aligning service plans with the corporate plan, budget and transformation objectives.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. The CPC process helps to reduce risk by providing a different perspective on the Council. All the five themes of the CPC process can support specific and strategic risk management.
- 11.3. The CPC report identified areas where we can utilise our performance management framework more effectively, which could help with risk mitigation. The follow up report recognised the progress made, but that there was more to do.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. Where relevant the Council has (and will) consider the equalities implications of actions set out in the Action Plan.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1. There were staffing resource implications within some of the recommendations in the original CPC feedback report, particularly organisational development and ways of working, which were considered in the development of the action plan. The CPC follow up report identified the good progress made in this respect and the ongoing work, including the emerging new workforce strategy.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report January 2026
- 16.2 Appendix B – Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Statement December 2025
- 16.3 Appendix C – Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan December 2025 update

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 NHDC Peer Review Position Statement
- 18.2 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report
- 18.3 Cabinet reports 14 January 2025, 23 March 2025, 23 September 2025