

CABINET
TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Update

REPORT OF: Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Leader of the Council

COUNCIL PRIORITY: All Priorities;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on progress against the agreed Action Plan that was developed following the November 2024 Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). The Action Plan was approved by Cabinet on 18 March 2025, with an update reported to Cabinet on 23 September 2025 and again on 17 February 2026 (alongside the CPC follow up report from the LGA).
2. RECOMMENDATIONS
2.1. That Cabinet note the progress against the agreed Action Plan.
2.2. That Cabinet agrees no further progress updates are required.
3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS
3.1. As the Action Plan is as complete as it is likely to be, plus the need to focus resource on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), it is recommended that no further updates are provided to the Action Plan. To be clear this does not mean that the Council will now ignore the recommendations, but rather reflects that changes have been embedded in how we work and that these have now become business as usual.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The alternative would be to continue reporting updates from time to time, but that option was discounted for the reasons set out in the report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The current update was taken to the internal Political Liaison Board on 15 July 2026 for discussion and to consult on the proposed way forward. All documents relevant to the CPC process and follow up visit are available on the Council's internal Hub and the Council's external website. The link to the relevant webpage is <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/corporate-peer-challenge>

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 17 July 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. Members will recall the CPC process, which is set out in the previous Cabinet reports as referred to in paragraph 1 of this report. The Action Plan that was developed and agreed following receipt of the peer's recommendations has been regularly updated and reviewed, with approximately six monthly reporting to Cabinet (via Overview and Scrutiny Committee).
- 7.2. The remaining key response to the recommendations has been an updated People Strategy. This has been prepared following consultation with senior managers and Executive Members. The People Strategy, once finalised, will be presented to the Chief Executive (as Head of Paid Service) for approval under delegated authority.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The updated Action Plan is attached at Appendix A, with current RAG ratings against progress. Members will note 8/10 recommendations are Green, 1 is Amber (Prioritise) and 1 is Red (Place Narrative).
- 8.2 The Prioritise recommendation is, put simply, one that will remain ongoing whilst the Council exists. The Council Delivery Plan process has been refined, but the reality of the resource and capacity pressures created by the LGR programme will remain until 31 March 2028 and there will be an ongoing need to prioritise. Therefore it is not possible to complete this action and mark it Green.
- 8.3 Members have previously agreed not to pursue any significant work in relation to the current Place Narrative, due to LGR. Therefore this action will remain Red.
- 8.4 Whilst there is a requirement to produce an Action Plan following the CPC, which is reviewed during the follow up visit, there is no requirement to keep the Action Plan running indefinitely. For reference, following the January 2020 CPC there was no follow up visit (due to Covid) and it was agreed with the then Group Leaders to stop updating the Action Plan in October 2022. This does not appear to have been reported to a committee at the time.
- 8.5 The LGA sets an expectation that a Council will have a CPC every five years. Additionally the LGA can support targeted reviews on particular areas of concern (for example the targeted review of O+S and FAR that took place in January 2023). With the timescales for LGR and the amount of work required to deliver it safely, it is proposed that the Council should not intend to undertake further reviews unless there is a very clear need identified.

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. The adoption of the new People Strategy is important for how the workforce is supported and developed over the next two years.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix 1 – CPC Action Plan September 2026

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 [Agenda Cabinet, 18/03/2025 19:30](#) – Pages 281 – 294
- 18.2 [Agenda for Cabinet, 23/09/2025 19:30](#) – Pages 243 – 256
- 18.3 [Agenda for Cabinet, 17/02/2026 19:30](#) – Pages 19 – 52