

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Fylde Council

9th January 2026

Feedback



Corporate Peer Challenge



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1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during September 2024 and published the full report with an action plan.

The 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 early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated 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

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at Fylde Council took place (onsite) on 9th January 2026. It focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge under four headings, strategic planning, financial management, governance and organisational development. In advance of the Progress Review, the council shared a RAG rated Action Plan (Red, Amber, Green) to update peers on the progress made to date. Out of the CPC's nine recommendations, the council's RAG rated action plan reports that 6 were reported green, 3 as amber and none as red. Recommendations 6, 7 and 9 were reported as amber.

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Lead Peer – David Parr OBE (former chief executive – Halton Council)
- Lead member – Cllr Simon Minas-Bound (Conservative Group Leader – Basingstoke and Dean Borough Council)
- Peer challenge manager – Cath Buckley (Senior Adviser, LGA)
- Shadow peer – Mia Shelton (Joint Acting Head of Improvement Coordination and Strategy, LGA)

3. Progress Review - Feedback

Peers conducted this Progress Review against the backdrop of substantial changes across the local government landscape at a national level, with significant implications in Lancashire. This includes the formation of the Lancashire Combined County Authority (CCA), which held its inaugural meeting in March 2025, as well as the early stages of local government reorganisation (LGR) in Lancashire, following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper. During the review, peers heard how

Fylde Council submitted its proposal in November 2025, expressing a preference for a three unitary model. This proposal if enacted would group Fylde with Blackpool, Lancaster and Wyre into a single new authority from April 2028. Four other proposals have been submitted to MHCLG for Lancashire from the councils involved. The peer team was encouraged by the council's willingness to engage with the challenges of LGR and to think creatively about the future.

In addition to the changing context brought about by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the council has managed significant infrastructure projects (such as the windfarm and securing swimming pool provision). All delivered alongside business-as-usual service delivery. Overall performance data and satisfaction rates for the council are impressive, and a testament to the council's commitment to positive community outcomes.

It was within this context that the peer team considered the progress that has been made by Fylde Council with the implementation of the CPC recommendations.

3.1. Theme 1 – Strategic Planning

This theme related to the following four recommendations from the original CPC report:

- Strategically plan proactively in an inclusive way what the council wants to achieve and convert strategic plans into clear operation plans with SMART action plans and reporting mechanisms to support effective oversight.
- Follow through on previous work to ensure that the council delivers agreed plans and actions –time and effort have been invested, don't let this be wasted.
- Align the corporate plan/ strategic plan with resources (money, people and process) to ensure that it is realistic and deliverable.
- Co-produce a clear narrative and place-based vision on economic growth (in its widest sense) for Fylde with partners and stakeholders

The peer team heard a clear sense of ambition for Fylde from both members and officers. The council's corporate plan sets out a broad list of priorities, which enables work to be strategically planned and provides a framework for aligning resources and priorities, the plan is currently under review and will be updated in light of LGR.

However, the peer team would encourage the council to ensure that their ambitions and priorities continue to be translated through service plans into SMART, deliverable action plans with clear, measurable outcomes. While there is evidence of strategic thinking and a commitment to strong service performance, the next step is to ensure

that all plans are written down, operationalised, actioned and monitored, to maintain a clear focus on outcomes for residents and communities.

The original CPC recommended that the council's corporate plan should be aligned with resources and that a set of delivery plans be developed. On the revisit the peer team heard that plans had been developed with dashboards for all managers which are monitored via six monthly reviews and by members through Scrutiny. The peer team found that plans could be more robust, and while there is a performance monitoring system in place, some reporting could be more transparent to better reflect the good performance that exists and provide assurance to members and the public. Ensuring strong performance and evidence of impact are effectively captured and communicated will be helpful in strengthening Fylde's place narrative and position in future arrangements.

Tourism is a key driver of the Fylde economic offer, and the peer team heard of a range of positive initiatives to support and promote the visitor economy. This is an area of real strength, and one which can be documented and leveraged further as part of any future economic strategy for a larger unitary council. The transformation of St Annes Square was highlighted as a positive example of place-based regeneration, and the council's commitment to partnership working and community engagement is evident. Council officers highlighted a broad range local economic opportunities, which the peer team felt would offer further scope for Fylde to enhance its place leadership role and legacy.

3.2. Theme 2 – Financial Management

The second theme related to the following financial recommendation.

- Revisit the council's approach to spending/borrowing, risk and reward, to ensure ambitions and innovations are delivered, without losing focus on delivery of core services.

Fylde Council has benefited from prudent financial management in recent years, and this was highlighted in the original CPC report which found the council to be comparatively financially robust. To build from this, the peer team recommended that the council revisit its approach to risk and reward to ensure that opportunities for service improvements and innovation are maximised. In essence the risk averse approach of the Council was inhibiting its ability to address pressing needs or innovate. Since the original corporate peer challenge the approach has been reviewed – which included approval of increased borrowing in the capital programme to enable additional public realm improvements and the ambition to deliver two high-quality swim and leisure facilities.

Fylde Council's finances remain in a relatively robust position, and the peer team were impressed with the approach to financial management and found evidence that the council has successfully aligned resources to the ambitions within the corporate plan. Officers have an excellent command of the council's finances and are currently aligning the budget for 2026-27 to meet the council's political priorities.

The peer team felt that the council should quickly determine how it will fund the transitional costs arising from LGR, in the new financial year through to vesting day. This will ensure the council has the resources to play its part in shaping Fylde's position within a new unitary authority. The peer team encourages the council to continue to review its approach to spending, borrowing, and risk management, to ensure that ambitions and innovations are delivered without losing focus on the delivery of core services.

3.3. Theme 3 – Governance

The third theme explored governance arrangements and related to the following two recommendations:

- Recognise the important contribution that members and officers can make operating collaboratively within commonly understood boundaries (member-led strategy and direction, officer-driven operational delivery), clearly define those boundaries and live them.
- Revisit the governance arrangements to ensure that there is clarity about roles, responsibilities and how the governance system works together as a whole and communicate this clearly.

Member-officer relationships have overall, improved, although tensions do exist from time to time. It is recognised this is healthy - if managed constructively and with mutual respect. The peer team heard examples of positive working such as engagement in top teamwork, regular meetings between the Chief Executive and Leader, and a recognition from members of the hard work and commitment of officers. Members reported a consensus amongst members on LGR, with a shared desire to achieve the best for Fylde residents.

Activity to maintain and further develop working relationships between members and officers should continue, so that the council can manage the range of challenges it is dealing with over the next two years, with strong member/officer relationships key to this.

Two new parish councils have been created locally since the original CPC, with significant work undertaken by the council, to support these arrangements and give them the best chance of success, including support with recruitment and drafting constitutions.

Much work has been done to embed scrutiny arrangements, with improvements noted by both the Chairperson and supporting officers. Examples include the development of an executive/scrutiny protocol, in depth reviews and training sessions. A recent review into children's home provision was highly regarded by both officers and members, with recommendations made by the committee at both a local and national level.

Officers praised the Councillor Hub, which is an area of the Council's intranet site to share information with councillors. It was recognised by officers as being an excellent tool for communication and may be a model that a new unitary council could look to adopt in future.

As the council embarks on the busy journey mapped out for the next two years, ensuring strong member engagement in the broadest sense will be vitally important. This includes ensuring a strong level of attendance at training sessions provided, as well as all members ensuring that they are fully prepared for meetings they attend.

3.4. Theme 4 – Organisational Development

The final theme explores progress against recommendations around organisational development.

- Bring a focus to strategic workforce planning by proactively developing a workforce strategy and workforce plan to support it, informed by the overarching strategy and future operating model. Ensure that this also has an equalities lens.
- Define the cultural change you want to see with quick wins and longer-term actions to make it happen and be sustained

There are many positives to be recognised within this theme. The original recommendation to establish a comprehensive organisational development strategy has been impacted by the LGR agenda. As a result, the draft strategy has been paused and replaced by an interim workforce strategy that recognises the need to address workforce issues over the next 18 months. The peer team believe that this interim strategy is a sensible approach, given the circumstances and is addressing the pertinent issues, such as training and development and creating the best opportunities for employees in the new local government environment. It would be helpful for the

new strategy to be supplemented by a clear action plan, setting out timelines and responsibilities.

It was also clear to the peer team that staff wellbeing is taken seriously at Fylde and the team heard that communication to staff regarding the LGR agenda is good.

Recruitment and retention - as for many councils - is an ongoing issue, with a current vacancy rate of 18%. Upskilling staff and ensuring agility within the workforce will support performance across service areas through LGR.

The peer team encourages the council to assess potential risk areas, consider succession planning and act now to record and retain corporate knowledge and organisational memory, to ensure key information is not lost in the transition to unitary status.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

As the council heads into local government reorganisation, it is essential that members and officers work constructively and collaboratively to ensure that Fylde, *the council*, 'ends well'.

There is also a significant opportunity to ensure that Fylde, *the place*, plays a leading role in the new unitary local government environment. This will require sufficient time, resources, and financial commitment, and work should be undertaken without delay to secure this future.

The LGA would like to thank Fylde Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review. We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions 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 several of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Dan Archer is the regional lead for the North West and is the main contact between Fylde Council and the LGA. Dan is available to discuss any further support required, his email address is Daniel.archer@local.gov.uk

Further information, support, and resources on LGR/Devolution, can be found on the LGA's devolution and LGR Hub website.