

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

London Borough of Redbridge

15 – 18 July 2025

Feedback report

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1. Introduction

Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a highly valued improvement and assurance tool that is delivered by the sector for the sector. It involves a team of senior local government councillors and officers undertaking a comprehensive review of key finance, performance and governance information and then spending four days at a 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 put in place by councils and the Local Government Association (LGA) to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector. These state that local authorities are responsible for their own performance, accountable locally not nationally and have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector.

CPC assists councils in meeting part of their Best Value duty, with the UK Government expecting all local authorities to have a CPC at least every five years.

Peers remain at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

This report outlines the key findings of the peer team and the recommendations that the council are required to action.

2. Executive summary

Redbridge is a diverse and fast-growing borough in northeast London. The council is ambitious for the place and has a record of delivering valued services. Members and officers are deeply committed to the borough and to improving outcomes for residents. This CPC took place at a time of significant change and opportunity; it follows changes in the political and managerial leadership and comes amid growing financial and service pressures. The CPC also coincided with the early stages of an organisation-wide modernisation programme.

Despite operating with some of the lowest per-head levels of service spend in London, Redbridge continues to deliver strong outcomes in many areas. Children's

social care, for example, was recently rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted for a second time. The council has one of the most active enforcement teams in London and runs a well-regarded selective licensing scheme to support standards in the private rented sector. Redbridge also has a strong record on housing delivery and is currently on track to exceed its London Plan housing targets.

The council's level of ambition is commendable. However, given rising demand, constrained resources and limited organisational capacity, delivering this ambition is becoming increasingly difficult. The peer team consistently heard that the council had, at times, tried to *"do everything and ended up doing less."* Going forward, the council will need to adopt a more disciplined and deliberate approach to prioritisation. This will involve making difficult choices, focusing effort and resource on a smaller number of achievable goals. This approach should guide both the remainder of the current Redbridge Plan and the development of the next plan for 2026-2030.

Underpinning the Redbridge Plan should be a clear and compelling long-term vision for the borough - one that articulates Redbridge's unique strengths, ambitions and future direction. During the CPC, the peer team did not hear a distinctive or widely understood vision. Developing this vision, communicating it effectively, and embedding it across the organisation and its partnerships will be critical. This vision should act as the reference point for Redbridge, to guide planning and decision-making, and be readily associated with the council.

Recent changes in political and managerial leadership are bringing renewed energy and much-needed stability. The Leader, now over a year into the role, has set a constructive tone with a collaborative and inclusive leadership style. The appointment of a permanent Chief Executive - following a period of four Chief Executives in five years - is having a positive impact. The Chief Executive has restructured the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), and a major recruitment campaign is underway to appoint around 30 senior managers. This presents a significant opportunity to reset the organisational culture, move towards more of a distributed leadership model and foster more collaborative working across services.

Partnership working in Redbridge is strong in some areas, particularly in health and community safety, but remains inconsistent elsewhere. The Redbridge Borough

Partnership, for instance, has lost momentum and its current plan is due to expire this year. This provides a clear opportunity to refresh and renew the partnership. A new borough partnership plan should be co-developed and built around shared thematic priorities across statutory, voluntary and community partners. This can help bolster partnership working and relationships to focus collective efforts on improving outcomes for residents.

The borough has significant regeneration potential, particularly in Ilford which is supported by strong transport connectivity and a pipeline of development opportunities. However, delivery has slowed in recent years, due in part to economic conditions and in part to the absence of a clear strategic vision for the area. The council should co-develop a bold and exciting masterplan for Ilford, supported by an inward investment strategy that paints a picture of the future, showcases opportunities and signals Redbridge's commitment to delivery. Strengthened relationships with strategic partners - such as the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Homes England - will be crucial to unlocking regeneration and supporting scheme viability.

Historically, Redbridge has been perceived as relatively inward-facing and understated. Promisingly, this is beginning to change with alignment between the political and executive teams. The peer team encourages the council to build on this progress to raise its profile, build strategic relationships and actively seek out external investment. To assist in doing this, the council would benefit from developing an organisation-wide communications and engagement strategy, aligned with the new Redbridge Plan.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is a stated priority for Redbridge, reflecting the borough's rich diversity. The council has developed an Equity and Inclusion Strategy (2024-2028), a three-year action plan and established a Corporate EDI Board. While there are pockets of good practice, significant scope remains to strengthen leadership, visibility and momentum in this area. The council should look to bolster the Corporate EDI Board, with involvement from the very top of the organisation. Look to empower and raise the profile of the staff networks and integrate EDI outcomes into the council's performance framework and corporate scorecard.

The council faces a substantial and growing financial challenge. These pressures are both immediate and systemic. As with many other councils, rising demand and complexity in social care, alongside sustained pressures from temporary accommodation, are placing considerable strain on the budget. At period two, the council was forecasting a £45.8m in-year overspend for 2025/26, with a projected funding gap of £55m in 2026/27. A cumulative budget gap of £91.6m was forecast over the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period. The continued drawdown of reserves to cover overspends in recent years is unsustainable and all usable General Fund reserves may be exhausted in balancing the 2025/26 budget.

The scale of the financial challenge and a continuation of the current spend trajectory will mean the council will have to ~~seek~~consider seeking Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) in the near future. There is a growing understanding of this within the organisation, and an emerging acceptance that difficult decisions will be necessary. In preparing for EFS negotiations, the council will need to demonstrate that all available options have been considered. This includes bringing forward all savings and income generation proposals, reviewing all service delivery models and being willing to deprioritise or stop some areas of activity. The decision to invite CIPFA to undertake a resilience review was sensible and the peer team urges the council to take their advice and recommendations very seriously.

If secured, EFS should not be viewed as a solution in itself but as a catalyst for reform. It offers a time-limited opportunity to accelerate the council's modernisation programme and undertake demand management and service redesign. To do so, the council will need to continue to tighten its front door and eligibility criteria, and conduct regular, dedicated unit cost and care package reviews. Political commitment to this will be essential, both across Cabinet and the political groups. The council may wish to consider the best way to equip members to be able to undertake this task through focused training and mentoring.

Redbridge has made a strong case for change through its ambitious, organisation-wide modernisation programme. The modernisation programme is appropriately wide-ranging and reflects the recognition that the changes which are being sought are not simply structural or financial but driven by the need for culture change and

service improvement.

However, the programme remains in its early stages. During the CPC, the peer team found that understanding of the modernisation programme - its purpose, direction and scope - was limited among staff and members. There is a need to establish a stronger identity to the programme, tighten delivery planning and step up staff and member engagement with clear, consistent communication. Visible leadership of the programme, with a robust delivery roadmap and a clear benefits framework will all be essential to building trust and momentum. To succeed, the modernisation programme must be genuinely cross-cutting, with collective ownership and accountability embedded across the entire organisation.

3. Recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

3.1 Recommendation 1: Vision for Redbridge

Co-develop a clear and ambitious vision that captures the borough's unique strengths, ambitions and future direction, acting as a consistent reference point for the organisation and its partners. This vision should guide decision-making, align priorities, and be widely recognised by residents, businesses, and stakeholders as *"the language of Redbridge."* The council should:

- a) Co-design the vision – Engage members, staff and partners to shape this vision.
- b) Align with strategic plans – Ensure the vision directly informs new Redbridge Plan (2026-2030) and is embedded as the "golden thread" through service plans, team objectives and individual appraisals.
- c) Communicate the vision - Develop and implement a communications and engagement plan to promote the vision consistently and widely.
- d) Basis for external engagement - Use the vision to frame external messaging, partnership working, and investment strategies, demonstrating a clear,

confident and unified direction for the borough.

3.2 Recommendation 2: Rebuild the Borough Partnership

Rebuild the Redbridge Borough Partnership around a shared long-term ambition for the borough, with co-owned thematic priorities and outcomes for all partners:

- a) Co-produce a refreshed Borough Plan. Use this as the basis for deeper collaboration with health, education, business and the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS).
- b) Health and social care - Bring the health and care system partners together to agree a bold Redbridge systems strategy and model of integrated working and the benefits this will enable for residents and partners.
- c) Education – More proactively engage with the 16+ and adult education sector on skills pathways and ensure a continued focus on SEND recovery.

3.3 Recommendation 3: Prioritisation

Adopt a more disciplined and deliberate approach to prioritisation, ensuring that resources and organisational capacity are concentrated on a smaller number of clearly defined, achievable priorities. This approach should guide both the remainder of the current Redbridge Plan and the development of the next plan (2026-2030).

The council should:

- a) Focus on agreed core priorities - Deliver the refined set of corporate priorities through to 2026, avoiding the addition of new priorities unless lower-priority activity is stopped or scaled back.
- b) Align resources to priorities - Review current programmes and projects, reducing or ceasing lower-priority activities to free up capacity and funding for the most critical objectives.
- c) Test future priorities for deliverability - As part of preparing the Redbridge Plan 2026-2030, assess all proposed priorities against available financial and organisational capacity to ensure they are realistic and achievable.

3.4 Recommendation 4: Financial sustainability and organisational grip

Address the immediate and systemic financial pressures through decisive action, stronger organisational grip and improved financial discipline. This should be underpinned by robust demand management, improved commissioning and procurement and strengthened budget ownership. The council should:

- a) Savings and income generation - Ensure all savings, income generation, and service delivery model options are considered. Be prepared to deprioritise or stop unaffordable activities, supported by a clear rationale and impact assessments.
- b) Demand management - Develop and implement targeted strategies in high-pressure areas, particularly temporary accommodation, adult social care and Children's services. This should include regular unit cost and care package reviews.
- c) Budget ownership and literacy - Improve financial awareness and accountability across members and officers, supported by organisational development, better budget visibility and the successful implementation of the new finance system.
- d) Commissioning, procurement and contract management - Act promptly on the corporate commissioning review, finalise and maintain a centralised contracts register and ensure robust business case discipline for all major projects.
- e) Independent reviews and audit - Take the advice and recommendations from the CIPFA resilience review very seriously. And improve the implementation of accepted internal and external audit recommendations within agreed timescales.
- f) Capital programme - Undertake a comprehensive review of the capital programme to ensure it is both affordable and deliverable, with realistic timelines and robust governance.

3.5 Recommendation 5: Regeneration

Develop an inward investment strategy, aligned with the council's vision and

regeneration plans. Create a clear masterplan for Ilford and use council assets and partnerships to attract developers, businesses and investors. Promote Redbridge with greater confidence at a pan-London level with Local London, London Councils and the GLA, target investment forums and national level conversations with bodies such as Homes England.

3.6 Recommendation 6: Modernisation Programme

Ensure the modernisation programme has clear objectives, robust governance, defined delivery milestones and strong staff engagement. Build confidence that modernisation is not purely structural but is equally focused on cultural and service improvements. The council should:

- a) Define the destination – Set out and communicate a high-level vision and desired future state for the modernisation programme, ensuring alignment with the refreshed vision and the new Redbridge Plan.
- b) Prioritise and phase delivery – Develop a clear roadmap that sequences delivery across the programme’s workstreams.
- c) Develop and establish a robust benefits framework – Quantify expected financial and non-financial outcomes, link them to the MTFS, and ensure they are tracked, reported and reviewed regularly.
- d) Strengthen accountability - Ensure the programme is a genuinely cross-council initiative, with collective ownership at ELT, Operational Directors and Head of Service level, supported by clear roles, decision-making protocols and escalation routes.
- e) Embed communication and engagement – Implement a structured communications and engagement plan so staff, members and partners understand the programme’s purpose, progress and their role in delivery.
- f) Build enabling capacity – Ensure enabling functions (Digital/IT, HR, Finance) are fit for purpose and sufficiently resourced to support delivery at pace and scale. Invest in upgrades or replacements where necessary.
- g) Learn from past change – Incorporate lessons from previous transformation

programmes, fostering a culture of openness and psychological safety so staff feel confident to contribute ideas and challenge constructively.

3.7 Recommendation 7: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Strengthen and elevate the council's EDI approach. Key actions should include:

- a) Strengthening the EDI Board by ensuring representation from the very top of the organisation.
- b) Empowering and raising the profile of staff networks with ELT/Director level sponsorship and protected time for staff to participate in network activity from all parts of the council.
- c) Introducing targeted training and development programmes such as a diverse leaders programme.
- d) Integrating EDI outcomes into the corporate scorecard and business planning.

3.8 Recommendation 8: Improve HR service provision with a focus on organisational development and appraisals

Ensure the HR service is fit for purpose, able to meet organisational needs and aligned to strategic priorities. This should include modern systems, clear processes and the capability to provide high-quality advice and support to managers. As immediate priorities:

- a) Strengthen organisational development by investing in staff learning, leadership and progression. Develop a dedicated Organisational Development Strategy, aligned to an overarching People Strategy.
- b) Prioritise improving appraisal completion rates by setting clear corporate expectations and holding managers accountable for delivery. Implement a digital system to record, manage and monitor appraisal objectives, ensuring they are consistently linked to organisational priorities and used to drive performance.

3.9 Recommendation 9: Member development

Refresh the council's member development offer ahead of the 2026 elections. Reflect on feedback from members and officers. This refreshed programme should include a robust induction programme, tailored training for key roles (e.g. Cabinet members, committee chairs), with senior members encouraged to take up external peer mentoring and other leadership opportunities, such as the [LGA's leadership programmes](#). The council should also consider establishing a cross-party member development working group to oversee and champion ongoing personal development.

3.10 Recommendation 10: Communications and promoting Redbridge

Develop an overarching Communications and Engagement Strategy to clearly articulate the council's vision, ambitions and priorities - both internally and externally. Use this strategy to raise the borough's profile as a place to invest.

4. Summary of peer challenge approach

4.1 The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected by the LGA on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Will Tuckley, Managing Director Commissioner, Slough Borough Council
- Cllr Shantanu Rajawat, Leader, London Borough of Hounslow
- Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer (S151 Officer), Medway Council
- Sam Dennis, Strategic Director of Place, Derby City Council
- Mike Barker, Deputy Chief Executive – Health and Care, Oldham Council and NHS Place Director of Health and Care Integration
- Nohaila Alavi, Director of Strategy, Transformation, Equalities and Performance, London Borough of Lewisham
- Cllr Fran Belbin, Deputy Leader, Sheffield City Council (Shadow Peer)
- Harry Parker, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

4.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas 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 like?
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 elements outlined above, every Corporate Peer Challenge includes a strong focus on financial sustainability, performance, governance, and assurance.

In addition to these themes, the council asked the peer team to provide feedback on:

- Organisational Leadership
 - Roles and responsibilities of members and officers
- Place Leadership

- Strategic partnerships
- Regeneration plans
- The effectiveness of the council's relationship with health partners.
- To review the plans and approach to update and refresh the council's Section 75 arrangements with the NHS.
- Capacity for Improvement
 - Modernisation programme

4.3 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 in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The peer team then spent four days onsite at the London Borough of Redbridge, during which they spoke with a range of council staff, members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

5. Feedback

5.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Redbridge is a growing and diverse borough in northeast London, bordered by Waltham Forest, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Essex. It is the 11th largest London borough and the fourth fastest growing in the UK, with its population increasing by 11 per cent between 2011 and 2021 outpacing both London and national averages. Redbridge is also one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse boroughs in the country, with 47.3 per cent of residents identifying as Asian

or Asian British, and 23.2 per cent as White British in the 2021 Census. This rich cultural mix is a defining feature of the borough.

The borough benefits from excellent transport connectivity, with 14 rail and Underground stations providing strong links across London and beyond. Nearly half of the borough is designated green space, contributing to its attractiveness as a popular and desirable place to live. Redbridge is polycentric in character, with distinct neighbourhood centres such as Ilford, Gants Hill, Wanstead, South Woodford and Barking. Barking.

Redbridge is however a borough of contrasts. While delivering high educational attainment – 96 per cent of schools are rated Good or Outstanding - around 30 per cent of residents live in poverty. Tackling inequality is a clear priority for the council. Through the Redbridge Plan, the council has set an ambitious goal: to eradicate child poverty and ensure that, by 2040, no part of the borough is classified as deprived.

The Redbridge Plan sets out the council's corporate priorities for 2022 - 2026, framed around four themes: Safe and Healthy, Clean and Green, Jobs and Skills and Homes and Neighbourhoods. These themes are underpinned by a broad set of objectives intended to guide the council's activity.

Throughout the CPC, the peer team observed a considerable level of ambition across the council. However, this ambition now needs to be underpinned by more deliberate and disciplined prioritisation. Like many councils, Redbridge faces acute financial pressures, rising service demand and limited organisational capacity. The peer team heard that the council has, at times, sought to *“do everything and ended up doing less.”* This reinforces the need to focus attention and resources on a smaller number of clearly defined, deliverable priorities.

Some positive steps have already been taken. Cabinet and the ELT have started to identify and agree the council's core priorities for the remainder of the current corporate plan. Looking ahead to the development of the new Redbridge Plan for 2026-2030, the council should ensure that prioritisation is at the forefront. This will require difficult decisions about where to scale back or stop activity, in order to better align resources and capacity with the organisation's highest priorities.

Underpinning the Redbridge Plan is the need for a clear and compelling vision that articulates the borough's unique strengths, ambitions and future direction. The peer team found that, while ambition was evident, a unifying and well-communicated narrative for Redbridge was currently lacking.

A strong borough-wide vision should act as a consistent reference point for the organisation and beyond. It should clarify what Redbridge stands for and guide decision-making at all levels. The vision - alongside the council's corporate priorities - should form a "golden thread" running from the Redbridge Plan through to service planning, team objectives and individual appraisals.

Work to define this vision was underway, with focused sessions involving the political and officer leadership. The vision needs to be commonly understood and something which partners, residents and businesses readily associate with Redbridge.

Like other London boroughs, Redbridge has a challenging housing landscape, a growing population, high housing costs and a growing reliance on the private rented sector. Around 36 per cent of households now live in privately rented accommodation - one of the highest rates in London - while social housing accounts for just nine per cent of total stock, the lowest of any London borough.

Given the high proportion of households living in the private rented sector, the council has implemented a well-regarded selective licensing scheme. Redbridge has one of the most active enforcement teams in London, demonstrating a commitment to holding landlords to account and addressing poor housing conditions. Plans are in place to further expand this enforcement capacity.

Despite the difficult market conditions, Redbridge has a good record of housing delivery, having already exceeded its Redbridge Plan targets for 2022-2026. The council has delivered 752 new council homes to date, including large schemes at Clements Road and Loxford, and is on course to exceed its target of 1,000 affordable homes by 2026. A healthy pipeline of major schemes puts Redbridge on track to exceed its London Plan housing targets. This strong performance highlights Redbridge's credentials as a pro-growth, pro-housebuilding borough.

Redbridge provides landlord services to approximately 4,500 council-owned homes.

Following a self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) in June 2022, a Notice of Improvement was issued in relation to statutory health and safety compliance. Since then, the council has worked with the regulator to implement a programme of improvements, with good progress acknowledged. The proportion of homes failing to meet the Decent Homes Standard has reduced significantly - from 17.5 per cent at the end of 2023/24 to 5.4 per cent by July 2025.

Continued work is needed to embed a council-wide ownership of the council's corporate landlord responsibilities, improve the quality of housing data and strengthen resident and tenant engagement. An inspection from the RSH is expected, and maintaining focus on priority actions will be essential. Encouragingly, Redbridge performs above the London average on the majority of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM), including satisfaction with landlord services, repairs and how well the council listens and responds to tenant views.

Redbridge faces a significant and persistent pressure from temporary accommodation, which continues to be a major driver of overspend. At the end of 2024/25, approximately 2,830 households were living in temporary accommodation - a slight reduction from 3,011 the previous year, but still a very high number. This pressure is projected to continue into 2025/26, with the council forecasting an £18.6m overspend in the Communities Directorate, the majority of which is attributable to temporary accommodation costs.

Addressing this challenge requires a sustained, whole-council approach. The council is taking steps to strengthen its approach, including tightening 'front-door' processes, improving the discharge of homelessness duty into the private rented sector and launching the 'Home Truths' campaign, which supports residents in accessing housing they can afford, including out-of-borough options where appropriate.

A recent review of the council's housing needs function identified key areas for development, including enhancing early intervention and prevention services and increasing the acquisition of affordable housing stock – including out of borough. Reducing reliance on expensive nightly paid accommodation and accelerating the pace of sustainable move-ons will be essential to both improving resident outcomes and achieving a more financially sustainable position.

Tackling climate change is a key theme of the Redbridge Plan. The council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has committed to becoming a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, with a borough-wide net zero target by 2050. Positive steps have been taken, including Redbridge hosting London's largest adapted solar-panel vehicle fleet. However, while the ambition is clearly stated, climate action is not yet fully embedded across the organisation or consistently reflected in all service planning and delivery.

A refreshed Climate Change Strategy is in development, building on the existing action plan and setting out 135 actions aligned with national net zero objectives. Given the council is directly responsible for only a small proportion of borough-wide emissions (2.4 per cent), progress will depend heavily on Redbridge's ability to influence and convene wider partners. There are promising signs, the Redbridge Climate Forum brings together over 100 residents, businesses and CVS organisations, to engage and further net zero initiatives.

However, limited financial resources and capacity remain a constraint. This means that there is an increasing need to secure external funding to help deliver the next phase of the council's climate ambition.

Creating a safe and healthy borough is a key theme of the Redbridge Plan. While recorded crime levels are not unusually high, perceptions of crime remain a significant concern for residents. Ilford town centre benefits from a visible police and community safety presence, though some anti-social behaviour hotspots persist.

The council has shown strong leadership on community safety, particularly in its work to address violence against women and girls. In partnership with Social Engine, Redbridge co-produced the [award-winning ThisHasToStop campaign](#), which has delivered tangible outcomes, including a 21 per cent reduction in reported harassment, over 500 trained bystanders and online reach of more than 100,000 people. Redbridge also led the way nationally by introducing the UK's first public space protection order targeting sexual harassment - an approach since replicated elsewhere.

Alongside efforts to improve community safety, the council has recognised the

importance and need to develop work to strengthen community cohesion across the borough. Redbridge is a diverse borough and residents generally coexist well, however, national and global events can have a significant local impact. Redbridge secured £575,000 through the national Community Cohesion and Resilience Programme (CCRP) – the largest award to any local authority – to support the co-development of a borough-wide Community Cohesion and Resilience Strategy. A new Cohesion Partnership Board is being established to oversee delivery, bringing together statutory partners, the CVS and faith groups. This approach presents a valuable opportunity to deepen collaboration and strengthen partnership working.

5.1.1 Performance

Redbridge continues to perform well across a range of services, often achieving good outcomes despite operating with one of the lowest levels of expenditure per head in London. For example, in 2023/24, Redbridge had the lowest total spend on Children's social care per head (aged 0-17) in London at £767.98, significantly below the London borough average of £1,357.77¹. Similarly, in adult social care, Redbridge's total expenditure per head (aged 18+) was the lowest in London at £486.07, compared to the London average of £604.47².

Given this comparatively low level of spend the outcomes achieved - particularly in Children's services - are notable. Redbridge's Children's social care was rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in both 2019 and again in June 2024.

However, this positive picture is not mirrored across the full spectrum of Children's services. In May 2025, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) gave the Redbridge Local Area Partnership the lowest possible rating for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), identifying systemic weaknesses across education, health and care. An improvement plan is now in development and will require urgent, whole-system leadership to ensure change is delivered at pace.

Redbridge has a performance management framework underpinned by a corporate

¹ https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=1030&mod-area=E09000026&mod-group=AllBoroughInRegion_London&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup#chart-5

² https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=1029&mod-area=E09000026&mod-group=AllBoroughInRegion_London&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup#chart-5

scorecard comprising 113 key performance indicators (KPIs). Performance is reviewed monthly by the ELT alongside financial monitoring reports, and quarterly by Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Positively, the council has recently introduced performance clinics to take deep dives into a small number of red-rated KPIs, exploring root causes, reviewing current interventions and agreeing improvement plans. The clinics have, for example, helped develop action plans on temporary accommodation and placement stability for Looked After Children.

As the council begins to develop its new Redbridge Plan for 2026-2030, there is a timely opportunity to refresh the performance framework. The current framework remains largely activity-based and would benefit from a stronger focus on outcomes and impact. Performance reporting is also heavily reliant on manual input, which limits efficiency and the ability to have real-time data. Introducing a digital performance management system and making fuller use of tools such as Power BI would help to streamline processes and enable access to live, organisation-wide performance data.

5.2 Organisational and place leadership

Organisational leadership

There have been significant recent changes in the political and officer leadership of the council, with the Leader in post for just over a year and the new Chief Executive appointed four months prior to the CPC. The peer team heard consistently positive feedback from officers, members and external partners about the fresh energy and constructive tone they have brought. The Leader's collaborative and inclusive style has been particularly well received, and changes that reflect this approach - such as creating space for Cabinet members to lead their portfolios - have helped to foster a stronger sense of collective ownership and team ethos.

As the Leader continues to establish his leadership, there is an opportunity to sharpen the council's strategic focus and more clearly articulate the vision for Redbridge. By further building his profile as a visible and confident ambassador for the borough - regionally, nationally and with the private sector – he can help

strengthen Redbridge's position, enhance relationships with partners and attract the investment needed to deliver regeneration ambitions. The peer team heard positive feedback on the Leader's visibility across London. His role as Chair of the Greater London Provincial Council for over a year has also strengthened relationships with both the Trade Unions and London Councils.

The recent appointment of a permanent Chief Executive has already made a positive and noticeable impact, bringing stability, clarity and energy to the organisation. This marks an important turning point for Redbridge following a period of considerable churn at the top of the organisation, with four Chief Executives in five years. The absence of consistent senior leadership has impacted the council, affecting the organisational culture with a general sense of instability.

Upon joining the organisation, the new Chief Executive has taken steps to rebalance and restructure the ELT. This has included the creation of a new Executive Director role for Place, Communities and Enterprise, and the introduction of a Deputy Chief Executive role. A decision has been taken to reintroduce dedicated ELT roles for the Executive Director of Children's Services and Executive Director of Adult Social Services, replacing the previous combined Executive Director for People model.

The peer team heard that recent instability at the ELT level - marked by a high turnover and a reliance on interims - has contributed to a sense of disconnection and uncertainty among staff, particularly below the Head of Service level. A major recruitment campaign is now underway to appoint around 30 senior managers, which presents a significant opportunity to reset the organisation's culture and establish a more empowered and distributed leadership model.

The council is rightly placing a growing emphasis on devolved leadership, with a clear intent to rebalance levels of delegation and strengthen collective accountability. As part of this shift, Operational Directors and Heads of Service should be supported to lead with confidence while being held accountable for delivery. Not all decisions should escalate to ELT, and establishing the right level of delegation will be essential - particularly to help deliver the modernisation programme.

There is also a need to foster greater strategic collaboration across services, with a

stronger corporate mindset that recognises that complex challenges - such as temporary accommodation and delivering regeneration - require a whole-council response. Structures like the Place and Growth Board are positive developments for this, supporting more joined-up working.

Relationships between members and officers in Redbridge are generally positive and constructive. An officer-member protocol is in place within the council's Constitution, helping to support mutual understanding of roles and respect. Similar to all councils, there remains an ongoing need to reflect on roles and responsibilities - ensuring that the right balance is maintained between members setting strategic direction and officers leading on operational delivery.

The council has taken positive steps to strengthen its external communications, with a recently developed communications and campaigns plan running to May 2026. This includes a series of focused campaigns known as the 'Six for 2026', examples include the council's zero-tolerance stance on fly-tipping and rogue landlords, helping to promote the council's enforcement work.

The Redbridge Plan identified the need to raise the profile of the borough and the council. The peer team strongly supports this ambition. A clearer and more confident external narrative - targeted at regional and national government and the private sector - will support Redbridge in bidding for resources, building relationships and attracting inward investment.

To support this, the council would benefit from developing a comprehensive, organisation-wide Communications and Engagement Strategy in alignment with the new Redbridge Plan 2026-2030 to help enhance both internal and external communications.

Redbridge's internal communications would benefit from modernisation. Current channels include fortnightly email bulletins from the Chief Executive and bi-monthly virtual all-staff meetings, which are important but are limited in reach and interactivity. The council's intranet was consistently highlighted to the peer team as an area in need of significant improvement - described as a "*digital landfill*", which contains outdated information and is difficult to navigate.

The council should look to refresh its internal communications approach by adopting more imaginative and inclusive methods that genuinely engage staff. This includes ensuring communication reaches those without regular digital access, such as frontline staff based outside of Lynton House. As the new senior leadership team takes shape, improving the visibility of senior leaders and strengthening two-way engagement with staff will be vital to building trust and supporting cultural change.

EDI

Redbridge is the third most ethnically diverse borough in the country, and the council rightly recognises the importance of EDI. The council has developed an Equity and Inclusion Strategy (2024-2028), a three-year action plan and established a Corporate EDI Board. However, progress on implementing actions has been slow. The peer team felt that the council needs to step up its delivery and active leadership to embed EDI consistently across the organisation.

There were examples of strong EDI practice in individual services - for example, the Revenue and Benefits team's targeted support for residents facing language and access barriers, and the Civic Pride team's focus on staff wellbeing. The council should build on this good practice and look to share and scale approaches across the organisation. The current senior leadership recruitment campaign presents a valuable opportunity to improve representation at the top of the organisation and better reflect the diverse communities Redbridge serves.

The council's use of workforce data is underdeveloped. It is not currently meeting its statutory duty to publish annual equality data, with the most recent dataset published in 2023. To support improvement, the council should commit to regularly publishing gender, ethnicity and disability pay gap data and develop clear processes to act on insights.

The EDI Board could be strengthened with representation from the very top of the organisation and across services. Targeted initiatives such as reverse mentoring, a diverse leaders programme and integrating EDI outcomes into corporate scorecards and service plans should all be considered. There is also scope for Redbridge to demonstrate public commitment to EDI by signing up to the Race at Work Charter

and pursuing Stonewall accreditation, working in partnership with staff networks. Encouragingly, the new Chief Executive is viewed as a visible and committed ally on equity and inclusion - creating momentum that the council can build on.

Redbridge has seven established staff networks, each playing a valuable role in promoting EDI, providing peer support and amplifying employee voice. The networks contribute positively to raising awareness and celebrating key events. Each is supported by an annual budget of £1,000, which provides a helpful foundation for activity.

There is, however, scope to further elevate the profile and impact of the staff networks. The council should ensure there is active ELT or Director-level sponsorship for each network and that all staff are consistently supported to participate. The peer team heard instances where staff had to use annual leave to attend network events - highlighting the need for a clear corporate message that recognises the value of these networks and enables time for participation within working hours,

Place leadership

Redbridge benefits from several well-established and effective partnerships, particularly in areas such as health and community safety. These relationships have enabled constructive joint working and are valued by partners. However, the strength and maturity of partnership working varies across the system, and there is scope to broaden and deepen collaboration more consistently.

The Redbridge Borough Partnership brings together statutory partners and the CVS to support co-ordinated action across the borough. In 2018, the partnership published a joint plan outlining shared priorities through to 2025. As this plan nears its conclusion, momentum within the partnership has waned. The absence of a permanent council Chief Executive in recent years has contributed to a lack of strategic direction at the chief officer level, and currently there is limited evidence of a shared, strategic partnership ambition for Redbridge.

The timing is now right to reset and reinvigorate the Redbridge Borough Partnership, supported by a new and co-produced Borough Plan that sets out an ambitious long-

term vision with a small number of shared thematic priorities. This new co-developed Borough Plan should articulate clearly defined, resident-focused outcomes, underpinned by collective ownership and accountability across sectors.

Partners told the peer team they are ready to work more closely with the council and are keen to support its role as a place leader and convener of strategic collaboration. Refreshing the Borough Plan presents an opportunity to strengthen engagement with key partners including in the business community and across the breadth of the CVS and faith groups.

Redbridge has an active CVS, made up of more than 350 organisations. CVS representatives the peer team engaged with felt opportunities were being missed in not fully harnessing the insights, capacity and reach into communities they can provide. There is scope for the council to build a more collaborative and strategic relationship with the sector. The council should consider co-producing a local Compact to provide a framework for partnership working and clarify mutual expectations. To demonstrate commitment and strengthen engagement with the CVS, the council may want to appoint a CVS member champion – potentially through expanding a Cabinet portfolio.

Redbridge does not currently have an up-to-date Local Plan, which limits the council's ability to shape growth strategically and increases the risk of piecemeal development. A refreshed Local Plan would provide clarity to the market, demonstrate that the borough is open for business and reinforce Redbridge's commitment to housing and regeneration. The council has set an ambitious timeline to adopt a new plan by early 2029. To achieve this, a dedicated budget, cross-council co-ordination and sustained focus will be essential.

The borough has significant regeneration potential, particularly in Ilford, with strong transport connectivity and considerable development opportunities. There is widespread recognition within the council, among partners and in the private sector of the scale of opportunity. The council leadership has expressed a clear ambition to *"take regeneration to the next level"* and is ready to take the necessary steps.

However, regeneration delivery has stalled in recent years. Economic uncertainty,

viability challenges and the absence of a clear, shared vision for Ilford town centre has impacted market confidence. A compelling regeneration narrative, supported by an exciting and deliverable masterplan, is now needed to galvanise partners, engage communities and attract investors. To deliver the regeneration significant private sector investment will be needed. To support this, the council should consider developing an inward investment strategy that demonstrates the council's commitment to regeneration, sets out the vision and showcases the opportunities available to investors and partners.

The council also has an opportunity to lead by example through the strategic use of its own land holdings for development. Unlocking council-owned sites for catalytic schemes can help build momentum to stimulate wider development and attract further private sector interest. The peer team supports the view shared by partners that the council may need to take on a degree of calculated risk - through joint ventures or other innovative delivery models - to help bring forward wider development.

Redbridge is well-positioned, with considerable goodwill from developers, anchor institutions, the GLA, Local London and others who are keen to support the borough's regeneration journey. To fully harness this support, the council will need to be more outward-facing and proactive in promoting its ambitions. Refining the borough's investment narrative and targeting key investment forums - alongside building relationships with government agencies such as Homes England - will be crucial to attracting funding and delivering major schemes.

Historically, the council has been seen as relatively inward-facing, which may have contributed to a credibility gap with some regional and national stakeholders. Encouragingly, this is beginning to shift. More active engagement with the GLA is underway, and continued investment in building strategic relationships will strengthen Redbridge's influence and improve its ability to attract the investment needed.

Partnership working between the council and health partners is long-standing and well established. Redbridge and the North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) have operated under a Section 75 agreement for over a decade. During this time, the health and social care landscape has changed considerably, with increased

complexity and rising demand pressures. Both the council and NELFT have agreed to formally review the Section 75 arrangements to reflect current demand levels and explore opportunities for closer working.

As the review progresses, the council has a timely opportunity to clarify the strategic purpose of the partnership with health and define the outcomes it seeks to achieve. While the scope for immediate financial benefit may be limited, the review offers a chance to strengthen the integration of health and social care and help progress a move to a more preventative approach and better align with the NHS's shift towards more neighbourhood and locality-based delivery models.

The peer team would encourage the council to use the Section 75 refresh and the appointment of a new Executive Director - Adults and Social Care as an opportunity to enhance its role as a place leader and seek to be more influential at the ICB level. The council should look to leverage its relationships with local MPs and influential Ministers to provide opportunities and funding for Redbridge.

The council has recently developed the Community Voice forum to enhance modes of engagement with residents. This is a promising model, which has been well received and offers a foundation for more meaningful dialogue with communities. However, during the CPC the peer team heard only a few examples of genuine co-production or co-design across services. There are lots of opportunities being lost as a result. This was a strong theme in the recent SEND inspection, which identified this priority area for development. Embedding a more consistent approach to co-production across all services is needed.

5.3 Governance and culture

The council has taken recent steps to strengthen its internal governance arrangements. On arrival, the new Chief Executive initiated a review of corporate governance, resulting in a rationalisation of the internal boards beneath the ELT structure. These changes have been positively received in a move to streamline decision making.

In parallel, the council is undertaking a review of its Constitution, supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. A cross-party working group has been

established to oversee this process, which includes revisions to standing orders and the scheme of delegations. This work is important in supporting the stated ambition to increase autonomy and accountability among senior officers and ensure that decision-making takes place at the appropriate level, with proportionate oversight from both officers and members.

The council's scrutiny function is developing, with signs of recent improvement. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is seen as proactive and engaged. There has been a positive shift in Cabinet member attendance at committees to present reports and respond to questioning - though consistency remains important. Going forward, there is an opportunity to enhance the strategic focus of scrutiny - prioritising areas of high risk where member oversight can add the greatest value.

In 2023, Redbridge introduced Policy Development Committees (PDCs) designed to engage backbench members and broaden participation in policy shaping. The PDCs are generally well regarded and have generated useful contributions. However, limited officer capacity to take recommendations forward has caused frustration and is limiting their overall effectiveness. There would be value in reviewing how PDC outputs feed into formal decision-making processes. Also worth reviewing are areas of duplication across committees, for example, between the Health and Care PDC and the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

With all major committees and the PDCs being chaired by members from the majority group, the council should consider following best practice and having a chair from outside the majority group.

Ahead of the May 2026 local elections, the council should look to refresh its member development offer. This should include a comprehensive induction programme for new and returning councillors and tailored training for those holding key roles such as Cabinet members and committee chairs. Senior members in particular should look to take up external training opportunities such as the [LGA's Leadership programmes](#) and peer mentoring. The council should also consider establishing a cross-party member development working group to oversee and champion ongoing learning. In line with best practice, the council should also consider developing individual personal development plans for members, supported by proactive engagement from

group leaders and whips to encourage participation and ownership of learning.

The council has received disclaimed external audit opinions for three consecutive years (2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24), reflecting serious and persistent concerns raised by the external auditor. These include significant weaknesses in the preparation of the annual statement of accounts, underpinned by longstanding issues with the council's financial systems - described to the peer team as "*not fit for purpose*" - including ineffective capital and general ledger systems. The council plans to implement a new financial system to improve oversight and support timely and accurate account preparation. It will be important to ensure that lessons are learned from the troubled implementation of the existing system.

Further concerns have been identified around the valuation of the council's property portfolio, including the accuracy of underlying data and the evidential support for year-end valuations. This is not helped by the lack of a functioning assets register. The external auditor has also flagged financial sustainability as a significant weakness, given recent recurring budget overspends and the scale of the financial challenge facing the council.

Internal audit shares many of the same concerns, issuing limited assurance opinions for the last three years. This is unusual for a council of Redbridge's size and is indicative of underlying control and governance issues that require attention. These concerns have included weaknesses in project and contract management, risk management and service planning. While the internal audit function itself is operating effectively, with a risk-based audit plan in place, implementation of agreed recommendations remains a persistent issue. Only around half of accepted recommendations are delivered within agreed timescales, highlighting a need for stronger organisational ownership, clearer lines of accountability and a greater emphasis on follow-through.

It is essential that the council responds comprehensively and promptly to the internal and external auditor's findings, demonstrating tangible progress in addressing the underlying issues and strengthening financial governance. The Governance and Assurance Committee plays a key role in this. Positively, the committee has taken steps to strengthen follow-through on overdue actions, including inviting

recommendation owners to attend meetings where actions remain incomplete beyond 12 months.

The committee has also reflected on its own development needs and introduced an improvement action plan. The membership of the committee includes one independent co-opted member, and in line with sector best practice, the council may wish to consider increasing this to two, with one acting as the independent chair, to further strengthen the committee's independence and effectiveness.

The council has several wholly owned companies, including Redbridge Civic Services (RCS), which delivers waste collection, and Redbridge Living, a housing delivery company that was established but not activated due to challenging market conditions.

Governance and oversight arrangements are well established, with a dedicated Shareholder Reference Group (SRG) - a Cabinet subcommittee - exercising the council's role as shareholder. The SRG meets regularly to review performance against agreed KPIs and ensure company business plans align with council priorities, while maintaining operational independence for commercial effectiveness.

This balance appears to work well, with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. The council recently reviewed RCS, through commissioning a benchmarking exercise and exploring alternative service delivery models to assure performance and cost-effectiveness. This good practice should continue, with periodic independent reviews of company performance and governance. The council should also consider reviewing current governance arrangements against the [Local Partnerships 'local authority company review guidance'](#).

Impressively, the council has also developed a suite of governance documents to support oversight of its companies. This includes a governance handbook that consolidates best practice and established ways of working, covering key issues such as managing conflicts of interest and providing a clear reference point for those involved in the management and oversight of council-owned entities.

During the CPC, officers and members found it difficult to define the culture at Redbridge. While there is clear pride in working for the borough and a strong

commitment to public service, morale in parts of the organisation appeared low. The council's modernisation programme presents a valuable opportunity to reset the culture and the organisational values.

The council's values, last refreshed in 2017, were not widely known or embedded in day-to-day practice. As part of the modernisation programme, the council is developing a new People Strategy and plans to co-design a refreshed set of organisational values with staff. This work will be important in imagining the council of the future and setting clear, shared behavioural expectations. The council's Annual Governance Statement had already highlighted the need to embed these expectations into staff competencies. The refreshed values should be consistently reinforced through recruitment, organisational development and appraisal processes.

The council is fortunate to have passionate and dedicated staff who take pride in their work. During the CPC, the peer team heard a clear message that staff would welcome more consistent recognition of their achievements. There is an opportunity to bolster this through a staff awards scheme, a visible way to acknowledge outstanding performance and reinforce the council's values. It is critical that this recognition is coupled with meaningful development and progression opportunities to help boost morale and support retention.

5.4 Financial planning and management

Redbridge, like many councils, is facing significant and systemic financial pressures, driven by rising demand, increasing complexity of need and increasing costs. The most acute challenges are in adult social care, Children's services and temporary accommodation, which are the primary drivers of persistent overspending.

Redbridge has experienced large service-level overspends in recent years. In 2023/24, this amounted to £42.2m, with a final net drawdown from reserves of £15.7m after contingencies and corporate mitigations were applied. In 2024/25 there was a service overspend of £41.2m and a further drawdown of £15.3m from reserves. These pressures were not one-off and are forecast to continue. At period two, the council was projecting a £45.8m in-year overspend for 2025/26 and a funding gap of £55m was projected for 2026/27. Across the MTFS period to 2029/30

a cumulative budget gap of £91.6m was forecast.

Balancing the 2025/26 budget will be extremely challenging. This will require the delivery of planned savings plus the identification of new mitigations to manage the in-year pressures. Another significant draw on reserves is likely. While the council currently holds sufficient general fund reserves, standing at £24.3m at 31 March 2025, the pattern of steady depletion seen in recent years is unsustainable. The council has used up the entirety of its Business Risk Reserve. This is a concerning position, with all usable general fund reserves potentially exhausted in balancing the 2025/26 budget - underlining the need to [consider](#) [initiating](#) EFS negotiations as a matter of urgency.

The council's MTFs appropriately recognises the need to rebuild financial resilience by replenishing reserves. The ambition is to restore reserve balances to their 1 April 2023 levels - equivalent to 20 per cent of the net budget requirement (£48.6m) - with 10 per cent held in both the General Fund Balance and the Business Risk Reserve. Achieving this will depend entirely on the council remaining within its 2025/26 budget envelope and securing further savings and income to close the significant future gaps. However, given the current financial trajectory, this looks increasingly unlikely. Any further draw on reserves to fund overspends before replenishment occurs would further weaken the council's financial resilience.

Redbridge currently adopts an unusual approach of holding large corporate risk and contingency budgets within the revenue budget - £12m for 2025/26. While prudent to maintain a degree of contingency to manage uncertainty, the scale and purpose of these centrally held budgets should be reviewed. The peer team agrees with both CIPFA and the external auditor that this approach risks undermining budget discipline within services with an expectation that a degree of overspends can be absorbed corporately. It can also signal a lack of confidence in services' ability to manage within their budgets. The peer team would encourage the council to consider whether this model remains appropriate.

There is growing understanding across the organisation of the scale and seriousness of the financial situation and that a continuation of the current spend trajectory means the council may have to seek EFS in the near future. This recognition is an important

foundation from which to take the necessary bold and strategic actions. In preparing for [any](#) EFS discussions, the council will need to demonstrate that all available options have been considered. This will mean putting every aspect of service delivery, income generation and discretionary activity under review, and being prepared to deprioritise or stop unaffordable work. Difficult political choices will have to be taken.

Encouragingly, the council has commissioned a financial resilience review from CIPFA. The peer team strongly supports this move and urges the council to take their advice and recommendations very seriously.

If [taken forward and](#) secured, EFS should be viewed not as a solution in itself, but as a one-off opportunity to accelerate the council's modernisation plans. It should provide the council time to take forward reforms, particularly around demand management and service redesign. It is important EFS is accompanied by a financial sustainability strategy, setting out how Redbridge will cease reliance on this support within two to three years.

A central pillar of achieving financial sustainability will be the council's ability to manage rising demand across key services. While the council currently operates with comparatively low social care unit costs, the scale and pace of demand growth presents a serious risk. For example, adult social care has seen a 57 per cent increase in supported living needs since 2020, and Children's social care is managing a disproportionately high number of complex cases, with 31 per cent of children in need presenting with a disability, compared to the national average of 14 per cent. The council will need to continue to tighten its front door and eligibility criteria, and conduct regular, dedicated unit cost and care package reviews to help manage demand and reduce cost where possible.

Redbridge has a good recent record in delivering planned savings, achieving 93 per cent (£22.4m) of its savings target in 2024/25. This performance will need to be sustained over the MTFS period, including meeting the challenging savings requirement of £21.8m for 2025/26, which includes £1.7m of undelivered savings rolled forward from the previous year.

As highlighted elsewhere in this report, there are strong examples of high-performing services at Redbridge. The Revenues and Benefits service is a good example of this. Council tax collection rates are high at 98.5 per cent, benefit claims are processed swiftly within an average of three days and direct debit uptake is above average at 72 per cent. In addition to this strong operational delivery, positive steps are being taken to strengthen the council's wider approach to debt recovery, including work to establish a more integrated 'single view of debt' across the organisation.

Strengthening financial literacy and budget ownership across the organisation is a necessary step. Historically, there has been an over-reliance on the finance team, with limited engagement from services in budget setting and monitoring. The peer team heard that while budgets and savings were agreed at senior levels, before being taken these decisions were not always clearly cascaded to those responsible for implementation. Increasing the visibility of budget setting and savings proposals, and reinforcing clear lines of accountability, will be important.

To support this, the council should invest in organisational development focused on improving financial literacy and strengthening ownership among budget holders and Cabinet members. The recent appointment of a permanent and experienced Section 151 Officer offers a timely opportunity to embed a stronger culture of financial accountability and reset expectations across the organisation.

Redbridge has a sizeable capital programme totalling £830m through to 2028/29. Delivery of this programme however has been persistently affected by significant slippage. In 2024/25, slippage totalled £190m, and at period two of 2025/26, £66.3m is forecast to slip against a revised capital budget of £248.8m.

The peer team heard that slippage has been driven by several factors: insufficiently robust business cases, limited project and programme management capacity and over-optimistic assumptions around timelines and cash flow. A byproduct of this non-delivery has been reduced borrowing costs, for 2024/25 due to slippage debt charges were £7m lower than budgeted, which has been helpfully used to offset revenue budget overspends. This does therefore call into question whether the current scale of the capital programme is truly affordable and deliverable within the current financial and organisational capacity.

Crucially, though, slippage does have wider consequences beyond the financial impact. Delays undermine the delivery of service improvements, impact on residents' experience and reduce confidence in the council's ability to deliver major projects. The peer team would recommend the council undertakes a comprehensive review of its capital programme to ensure it is both affordable and deliverable.

Redbridge has recently developed a Strategic Asset Management Plan (STAMP) and will be progressing a wider strategic asset review as part of the modernisation programme. These developments are timely, particularly given changes in working patterns post-pandemic that have provided opportunities to consolidate the operational estate. The STAMP identified the potential to generate significant capital receipts, estimated upwards of £65m, which in part could be used flexibly to support the modernisation programme or help finance any EFS borrowing requirement.

Developing a comprehensive and overarching asset register is essential for Redbridge to adopt a more coherent and strategic approach to asset management. The absence of such a register limits the council's ability to effectively understand, monitor and plan the use of its estate. Improving asset data will be critical to assessing performance, identifying opportunities for rationalisation or repurposing and aligning assets more closely with organisational priorities.

The Dedicated Schools Grant in Redbridge is currently in a near-balanced position. However, rising demand, particularly the increasing number of Education, Health and Care Plans, is placing growing pressure on the High Needs Block. This pressure is likely to intensify following the recent joint SEND inspection, which will require targeted investment and support to address identified weaknesses.

5.5 Capacity for improvement

Redbridge has made a strong case for change through its ambitious, organisation-wide modernisation programme. The programme comprises of several interdependent workstreams: service modernisation, customer experience, operating model redesign, workforce and People Strategy and a strategic asset review. The scope of the programme is wide and reflects the organisation's recognition that fundamental change is needed. The changes which are being sought are not simply

structural or financial but driven by the need for cultural and service improvements. Positively, there is a consensus among members and officers on the need to modernise, break down siloes and embrace digital innovation.

However, the programme is still in its early stages. During the CPC, the peer team found that understanding from both members and officers of the programme was limited. There is a need to establish a high-level vision for the programme describing the future state it is working towards and how transformation will be phased. A structured communications and engagement plan, with regular updates and opportunities for two-way dialogue, will be essential to build momentum, ensure alignment and secure staff and member buy-in.

For the modernisation programme to succeed it needs to be a genuinely cross-council endeavour which is owned collectively - not just by the centre or the Programme Management Office. Responsibility for delivery needs to be shared across the ELT, Directors and Heads of Service - with accountabilities established. Senior managers have a particularly important role in communicating, modelling and championing the programme to their teams.

The programme will also need a clear delivery roadmap and a robust benefits framework. While the groundwork for change is being laid, further detail is now needed - particularly around expected outcomes. Financial and non-financial benefits should be clearly defined and tracked, with savings aligned to the MTFS. Prioritisation and phasing of the programme will be crucial to maintain focus and ensure delivery remains achievable.

This is not the first major change programme Redbridge has undertaken, and staff bring valuable insight from previous experiences. It is important that lessons are learned from past initiatives and recognise that change can evoke anxiety and uncertainty. The peer team heard that traces of historic organisational pain still resonate. Creating a culture of psychological safety where staff feel heard, respected and supported through change will be essential.

Digital transformation will be a key enabler of Redbridge's modernisation programme. The council has committed to refreshing its 2020 digital strategy and aligning it with

the wider IT strategy. Bringing digital and IT functions together under the new senior management structure is a positive step toward greater integration of the services.

The peer team heard several examples of legacy systems that were no longer fit for purpose. The council has commissioned Ignite to undertake a technology assessment, which will include a system-wide audit of functionality. The recommendations from this work should be carefully considered, including where investment is needed to upgrade or replace systems.

Procurement processes for new IT systems should also be strengthened. The peer team heard examples where systems were procured by services without adequate engagement with the IT service. This has led to issues around implementation, integration of systems and compliance. Stronger governance is needed to ensure a consistent, co-ordinated and strategic approach to IT across the organisation.

There is also significant untapped potential for Redbridge to explore emerging technologies such as AI and automation. These tools are not yet used strategically but could offer opportunities to drive innovation, efficiency and improved resident experience. The council should look to learn from other local authorities that are further ahead in this space.

Alongside digital and IT, it is essential that all enabling services operate effectively to support high-quality service delivery and act as strong foundations for the council's modernisation programme. The HR function requires urgent improvement to fulfil this role. The service is currently operating with limited capacity, below the London average, which impacts both the transactional and strategic support it can provide. An external review of the service has been undertaken; recommendations should be carefully considered with action taken promptly.

The organisation lacks a People Strategy, helpfully this has been identified as a core workstream of the modernisation programme. This will be important in setting out the plans to undertake culture change to build the workforce and working environment for the future. It should also include clear plans for recruitment, retention and organisational development and build on areas where the council is already making progress. Notable strengths include the significant expansion of the council's

apprenticeship programme, which has grown from 10 in 2021 to 129 staff currently developing their skills through apprenticeship programmes.

Redbridge is also missing a dedicated Organisational Development Strategy, with investment in organisational development limited in recent years. Staff the peer team spoke with reported constrained access to development opportunities, and the absence of a consistent corporate induction was highlighted as a concern. The council should strengthen and invest in its training provision focused on building the capabilities and behaviours required to deliver the modernisation programme. This should include developing a dedicated Organisational Development Strategy, aligned with the forthcoming People Strategy, embedding development throughout the employee lifecycle and linking clearly to performance and appraisal processes.

The council needs to improve its approach to staff annual appraisals. In 2024/25, just 53.8 per cent were completed. Appraisals are a fundamental tool for aligning individual objectives with organisational priorities, supporting development and embedding a performance culture. To support making improvements, the council should introduce a digital system to record, manage and monitor appraisal objectives more effectively. It should also set clear expectations for routine completion across all services, underpinned by appropriate accountability expectation for managers.

Commissioning, procurement and contract management are recognised areas for development at Redbridge. The council is aware of the need to adopt a more strategic, market-aware and forward-looking approach. The absence of a centralised contracts register has limited corporate oversight and constrained the council's ability to align commissioning cycles with financial and service planning. This has, at times, led to reactive or last-minute commissioning, reducing opportunities to drive efficiencies and secure additional social value.

Positively, the development of a centralised contracts register is now underway as part of the council's corporate commissioning review. This review aims to map all commissioning activity across the organisation, identify duplication and establish clear, strategic commissioning priorities.

To strengthen contract management and clienting, the council will need to establish

clearer ownership of contracts, set consistent expectations for contract managers, improve the use of performance data, and embed more robust monitoring arrangements to drive contractor performance and manage risk. This will be particularly important as several major contracts including those covering parks, leisure, libraries, heritage and arts services are due for re-procurement in 2026/27. The council will need to ensure the procurement of these services aligns with council priorities and delivers value for money.

6. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings. The LGA will continue to provide ongoing support to the council. Following publication of CPC report the council will produce and publish an Action Plan within five months of the time onsite. As part of the CPC, the council are also required to have a progress review and publish the findings from this within twelve months of the CPC. The LGA will also publish the progress review report on their website.

The progress review will provide space for a council's senior leadership to report to peers on the progress made against each of the CPC's recommendations, discuss early impact or learning and receive feedback on the implementation of the CPC action plan. The progress review will usually be delivered onsite over one day.