

Corporate Peer Challenge

City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

27th to 30th March 2017

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Bradford is a great city with multiple and diverse communities, major cultural, heritage and historical assets, a good quality of life and some exciting new emerging economic sectors. The Council recognises that as the leader of place and as a provider of many public services it is on a journey of change – from providing an in-house ‘one size fits all’ solution to being a facilitator and co-ordinator of all of the local resources around a set of shared priorities.

Most people we spoke to recognise that the council has started along this journey but that the pace of change needs to be maintained with consistency, and occasionally accelerated, in order for people to continue to be motivated to participate. The Council is ambitious, self-aware and an improving organisation with huge potential. The City is positioned well to benefit from the ambitious goals and programmes set out in the Bradford District Plan and the Council Plan and is increasingly influential within the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

There is growing confidence and optimism in the council and the place that the City is “on the up” with a clear alignment between business and political priorities, with transport and education as the drivers for unlocking potential and growth. We found a strongly articulated approach to community cohesion across the whole City and widespread recognition that, as the youngest city in the country, young people are their biggest asset.

We evidenced strong, connected and highly regarded political and managerial leadership of both the place and the council. The Council Leader and Chief Executive are seen as visible, energetic, inspiring symbols of the improvement journey the council is on. We found effective ward and neighbourhood leadership by elected members, officers and partner organisations and active and committed community leaders and voluntary sector who value the council’s community leadership role. However, ensure that the policy development role for scrutiny adds value to the council.

Exceptionally strong partnership relationships are already established; in particular between the council and the police. We also found excellent examples of partnership working in improving peoples’ lives, for example hospital discharge, neighbourhood work and child sexual exploitation. The recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) by multiple inspectorates cited strong endorsement of multi-agency safeguarding and prevention services.

There is a clear recognition of the financial challenges and increasing demand on services faced by local government and its impact alongside an ambitious approach to re-aligning priorities through a budget shaped by outcomes. The Council has recognised the need and significant activity required to generate income for the future to fund council services.

Staff are loyal, passionate and hardworking and feel valued and trusted to deliver at all levels but resilience needs to be carefully monitored going forward. There is

a growing feeling of permission and empowerment underpinned by effective examples of investing in the future via the Future Leaders programme and the Innovation Hub. Change is embraced with good examples of service improvement, such as the school improvement service through deploying a different model. The 'People Can' approach is already demonstrating impact and has enormous future potential.

The emerging narrative of place needs to more fully reflect the many places that make up the City alongside clarity around the City's role and investment requirements in delivering the Leeds City Region Strategic Economic Plan. Develop a set of simple, clear and consistent messages to challenge those not yet on board with the re-defining of the City and 'People Can' could be the ideal vehicle to unify the vision for the place – it could also be used to develop a council wide demand management plan for Adults and Children's services. Also use staff as ambassadors of the place as the majority live in the area.

There is an opportunity to strengthen corporate oversight with more robust accountability through the newly established role of the Strategic Director of Corporate Services. You also need to ensure that the newly appointed Strategic Director for Health and Well-Being is adequately supported in order to meet future financial and service challenges. Health engagement could be further streamlined and refined to develop stronger partnerships at all levels.

General fund balances are low and there is a potential over reliance on one off compensatory savings when projects do not deliver targeted savings. The Outcomes Based Budgeting (OBB) approach is emerging and the council should be mindful of relying too heavily on this to deliver savings targets which are not linked back to the budget monitoring regime. The transformation fund at £5m appears relatively low given future savings targets and should be reviewed to ensure sufficient resources are allocated. It would also be helpful to establish a more aggressive and structured approach to commercialism to include an income generation strategy.

The 'Big Project' Workforce Development Programme for changing organisational behaviours and culture is inspiring, but it should be fast-tracked and correctly resourced to be completed ideally in one year. In conjunction, review the existing redeployment policy to ensure all candidates are assessed against behaviours and competencies and are not slotted in to inappropriate roles (square pegs in round holes). Consider how to consistently engage on issues with young people and make greater use of apprenticeships to bring new energy and ideas to the council.

Communications and public relations functions need to focus on engaging residents through 'People Can' and positioning Bradford in both the region and nationally as well as responding to media enquiries. Communications and project management approaches need to be aligned to future priorities. Finally, we noted that you currently use two corporate logos' as an identity for the council so suggest you select the more historic crest brand and phase the other logo out to avoid confusion and provide one identity.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations on-site, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

1. Develop a coherent narrative of place and your ambitions:

Much of this already exists in a variety of places but it needs bringing together as a coherent vision for the long term future of Bradford District the place. This will enable all members and managers to articulate that narrative consistently both internally and with external partners.

It will also inform more clearly Bradford's role and investment requirements in delivering the Leeds City Region Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). Developing a localised version of the SEP will form the basis of your economic and investment strategy.

2. Use the narrative to place shape more effectively with partners:

This stronger narrative would help partners understand the council's priorities more clearly and would also enable the council to focus its resources on the partnerships and relationships that are most important in achieving that vision.

In particular, it will streamline engagement with health and strengthen relationships with all health partners.

3. Use the 'People Can' approach in a more systematic manner:

The 'People Can' approach is well regarded and has huge transformative potential and could be a brand around which to build a refreshed narrative of place. It could describe the council's ambition for pride of place through citizen involvement.

It could also be used to develop a council wide demand management plan for Adults and Children's services and there are other transferable options the Council could actively consider.

4. Make best use of newly appointed Strategic Director roles:

Strengthen corporate oversight through the newly established role of Strategic Director of Corporate Services.

Ensure the newly appointed Strategic Director for Health and Wellbeing is adequately supported to meet future financial and service challenges.

5. More robust financial accountability and allocation of resources within the MTFS:

Need for more robust accountability for delivering agreed financial savings and to link outcomes based budgeting to current financial challenges.

Review and align the transformation fund to 'big change' projects with appropriate capacity.

6. Accelerate a Team Bradford approach to using Apprenticeships:

Accelerate a Team Bradford approach to using apprenticeships as a driver for unlocking young people's potential to bring new ideas into the council, plan for future leaders, address issues around hard to fill posts and make the council more representative of the communities it serves.

7. Review Re-deployment Policy:

Review your current re-deployment policy and assess candidates against behaviours and competencies. The strategy should look at the development needs of existing staff as well as assessing skills, knowledge and capacity gaps for the future. This should be done as part of an overall Workforce Strategy for the organisation.

8 Pick one brand for the Council:

Pick one of the two brand logos you are currently using and stick with it to provide one brand identity for the council to underpin the narrative for the place.

3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Bradford Council were:

- Donna Hall – Chief Executive, Wigan Council
- Cllr Nick Forbes, Council Leader, Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council
- Craig Smith, Assistant Director of Education, Luton Borough Council
- Joanna Sumner, Assistant Chief Executive, London Borough of Hackney
- Peter Rentell – LGA Peer Challenge Manager
- Grace Abel – LGA National Graduate, Kingston Council

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges cover. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to provide a critical friend review of Bradford's response to the Louise Casey report "*a review into opportunity and integration*" with focus on social inclusion and opportunities for young people in skills, education and employment.

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. 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 for the peer challenge 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 team then spent 4 days on-site at Bradford Council, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 260 people including a range of council staff together with councillors, external partners, stakeholders and young people.

- Gathered information and views from more than 60 meetings and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 230 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending over 6 weeks in Bradford Council.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (27th to 30th March 2017). In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

Bradford is a place of many communities, some are geographical and some are communities of interest. The Council has a sophisticated understanding of these communities, who are also beginning to be better represented across their workforce. We heard many examples of excellent work in promoting community cohesion that people cite as reasons for Bradford moving on from the riots in earlier years.

There is a recognition that Leadership of Place isn't just the responsibility of the Council Leader and Chief Executive but that everyone in the organisation can play a role. In this regard, the council's workforce is an underdeveloped asset in telling a more positive story of Bradford. As the vast majority of council staff live in the city, they could play a stronger role in tackling the collective lack of confidence that we sometimes heard about culminating in their default statement that "they are in the shadow of Leeds". Bradford needs to be more confident about its role working as a key partner with Leeds in the Combined Authority.

Broadway shopping centre and City Park are physical symbols of Bradford's journey of renewal and we urge you to celebrate the brilliant culture and heritage you have. Moving forward clearly defined priorities will need to be articulated, focused and resourced to continue this improving trajectory.

There is a Council Plan that is clear and coherent and is becoming increasingly embedded across the organisation. Many staff we met were aware of the corporate priorities and the role they play in achieving them. We saw a growing sense of optimism that the council and the place is improving with a widespread recognition that young people are the City's greatest asset now and in the future.

It is clear that there is strong community, faith, business and voluntary sector leadership which is actively engaged in shaping, and is committed to supporting the relatively new political vision set out by the Leader and the Executive. We found a clear alignment between business and political priorities with Transport and Education seen as key drivers of growth and potential. More partners buying into the concept of Civic Enterprise and the potential benefits to both themselves and the city in tackling deprivation and further investing in communities will help to move the vision into reality. Bradford has many large and significant nationally and internationally known businesses who can contribute more to the success of the city and can be key to helping to reduce inequality.

Turning this vision into a compelling, forward looking narrative for Bradford will be the next stage of the journey. It will also provide a reference point to challenge those who do not always speak positively about Bradford's future. There is currently a lack of a coherent narrative that tells the story of the council's ambitions for the metropolitan district into the longer term. This stronger narrative would help partners understand the council's priorities more clearly and would also enable the council to focus its resources on the partnerships and relationships that are most

important in achieving that vision of place. In addition, there is a need to decide how to consistently engage with young people to help shape the future narrative and align skills gap analysis with current and future provision.

4.2 Leadership of Place

The Council Leader and Chief Executive are universally recognised as providing strong, clear and complementary leadership. They work well together and this is recognised across the metropolitan district and beyond with proactive engagement with other councils and partners across West Yorkshire. This solid platform provides an opportunity to lead and further develop the sub-region's approach to wider public sector reform.

The commitment to working within a range of broader partnerships; LGA, Key Cities, West Yorkshire Combined Authority is seen as a very positive step towards challenging some negative external perspectives of Bradford. Bradford is increasingly influential across a wide range of regional and national networks and the Chief Executive is instrumental in networking Bradford as a place. However, the narrative of place needs to better reflect the many local places that make up the District... The peer team coined the phrase "it's not an either/or it's a both and". The City needs a stronger sense of its real identity and role; incorporating the strengths of its different towns, villages and districts. Your great staff are under-used ambassadors for the council and the place and should be utilised as advocates.

We evidenced some strong and excellent local partnership arrangements, particularly with Police and the Voluntary Sector. There are active and committed community leaders and voluntary sector organisations who want to work collaboratively and with the council through co-design of services.

We were shown a draft copy of the recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection by multi-agency inspectorate which was very positive in terms of partnership relationships and leadership and governance. This provides a strong endorsement of current multi-agency arrangements and should be celebrated.

Whilst the engagement of most strategic partners was seen to be positive, enthusiastic and engaged more could be done to streamline health engagement and to develop stronger relationships with health partners. This could include establishment of a Board of non-executive leaders – Chairs of health organisations plus the Council Leader and relevant Executive Members – in order to complement the collaborative work being undertaken by respective senior management teams.

Councillors in Bradford are passionate, committed and fully engaged in the work of the council in a variety of different ways. They are visible in their local communities and there is very good ward and neighbourhood leadership by both members and officers.

'People Can' is a widely recognised approach and a powerful asset-based model which has huge transformative potential. It encapsulates the journey that both the District and the council want to go on; that of empowering people to do more for themselves, and could be a brand around which to build a refreshed narrative of place. Instead of framing the challenges faced by the District as a series of comparisons and competitions, for example between urban and rural Bradford or between Bradford and neighbouring cities, 'People Can' is a simple way of describing the council's ambition for pride of place through citizen involvement. It can be rolled out across departments and partners through place based working linked to a systematic demand reduction plan based on strong business intelligence. Ideally, it needs to become a unifying philosophy of working not just a campaign.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance

We saw evidence of strong and well regarded political and managerial leadership and constructive member and officer working relationships at all levels across the council. The Council Leader and Chief Executive are seen as symbolic of the improvement journey the council is on and are both working well together to achieve future aspirations for the council and the place. Elected members are engaged at all levels and are committed to making a difference.

Regardless of effective current leadership we suggest you review plans and strategies to ensure strategic alignment to the council plan. This will, in turn, require you to ensure correct alignment of politicians and officers around difficult decisions that will need to be taken going forward about what services to stop, what buildings to close. As a current example of ineffective practice member involvement in appeals, through overturning officer management staffing decisions, can undermine effective staff management processes and behaviours and should be reviewed.

Ward plans are a good example of positive involvement of members as community leaders, although there is a danger that they create unrealistic expectations for the council to deliver. Developing them to be plans supporting members as local leaders of communities and place, possibly around the 'People Can' brand, would be a way of ensuring they don't simply become the repository of local complaints about council services.

The corporate governance framework appears to work well, there is mutual respect and understanding for roles and responsibilities, and we didn't hear of any adverse indicators relating to how the council's decision making machinery works. Scrutiny is effectively holding the Executive to account, although this can sometimes present a confrontational image of local politics for staff and the public. Developing scrutiny's role in commenting on emerging policy issues, as well as scrutinising decisions after the event, would lead to a more balanced position. Organisations such as the Centre for Public Scrutiny can provide developmental support in this regard.

Staff we met are loyal, committed and highly motivated to deliver good quality services and there is a very supportive environment evident during challenging times with a 'can do' attitude developing. We saw good examples of investment in your staff with the Future Leaders programme and the Innovation Hub, both of which facilitate a growing sense of empowerment amongst staff at all levels. Ensure a strengths based approach is consistently embraced to meet future challenges. One area the peer team felt could be further developed is around political awareness for officers and LGA could support training in this area.

The Council has a developing organisational culture with staff at all levels starting to reflect new behaviours and values. However, the changing nature of local government and the increased focus on growth and commercialism will require different skills and competencies going forward so leadership development programmes and succession management will be a critical area of consideration. We suggest you push harder and faster on embedding behaviours with confidence. In parallel, you should review your apprenticeship programme and seek to use apprentices proactively to bring new ideas into the council, plan for future leaders, address issues around difficult to fill posts and make the council more representative of the communities it serves.

4.4 Financial planning and viability

There is a recognition, supported by strong political leadership, of the need to ensure the council is well prepared for the new funding arrangements that will be introduced for local government in 2019/20. This includes an explicit intent to grow the numbers of households paying council tax and businesses paying business rates in the District. The scale of the future financial challenge is understood by the council who acknowledge that business as usual is not an option.

Outcomes Based Budgeting (OBB) has been introduced as a model for ensuring effective and efficient use of resources. Staff we spoke to about OBB are optimistic about the potential for a budget shaped by outcomes and these need to be clearly tied into existing budget monitoring arrangements. The energy and capacity required to develop a robust OBB framework should be balanced against the need to ensure service managers and corporate directors have deliverable savings in place.

Previous reductions have been managed sensitively with the council delivering £231m savings since 2011 with a further £32m to be delivered over the next two years. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets a net revenue gap of around £100m to be closed by 2020/21 starting from a current base of £378m. Audit statement confirms the council has a strong track record of delivering savings and generally keeping within budget though there are significant financial pressures within Adults and Children's services. The OBB framework is a significant step towards closing the revenue gap through reflecting the corporate priorities and aligning resources accordingly.

We acknowledge that the council has expressed concern about the low level of its general fund balances and is planning to make further use of them to support the

revenue budget. The peer team were concerned about the potential over-reliance on one off compensatory savings when projected savings aren't delivered (25% of projects last year were not delivered against savings plans). We found anecdotal evidence to suggest that policy around the delivery of savings could be more effectively communicated for example, there is still a culture in which some people believe that reserves can be used to fund under-performing projects but we acknowledge that this is not a corporate policy. It might simply be a case of reviewing the current wording on budget monitoring reports to ensure an explicit rather than implied course of action.

We found some instances where financial and service planning is not always consistently robust, and examples where earlier intervention on under delivery of change projects would minimise long term financial risk. One option is to develop a member led 'Star Chamber' approach which could provide greater Executive challenge and scrutiny of detailed savings plans and targets.

There is limited evidence of robust scoping of savings prior to budget setting alongside an under-performance in, and lack of clarity on who is responsible for delivering savings. There is scope to develop the infrastructure of OBB further by implementing it into the performance measures and by creating outcome based directorates, instead of services. This would support the delivery of savings and introduce meaningful culture change. There is also potential to develop a cross-cutting approach to the outcomes so that interdependencies are captured and worked on.

Given the significant change you need to tackle we felt the level of transformation funding was currently too low at circa £5m. We suggest you review the level of transformation funding and how it will be deployed to implement and deliver necessary change.

The council should also consider establishing a more aggressive and structured approach to commercialism, to include an income generation strategy. You will need to consider whether this can be delivered with existing capacity and resources. Work will be required to articulate exactly what this means to staff and what is expected of them and whether new skills need to be developed or bought in. There is a growing body of practice and examples from across the public sector that can inform the debate, including a range of information and case studies on the LGA website at: <http://www.local.gov.uk/commercialisation>.

4.5 Capacity to deliver and resources

Staff clearly enjoy working for the council and they feel that their contribution is highly valued. This is supported by a high level of staff retention. We met and heard of some real star performers who are highly regarded and respected in their roles. Overall staff told us that change is generally managed well and there is a broad recognition that the role of the council needs to change going forward. An example of this starting to happen with tangible impact is with school improvement.

There are many good examples of the council working effectively in partnership to deliver improved outcomes for residents, such as neighbourhood work, hospital discharge, child sexual exploitation and community cohesion. These skills are transferable to other areas and more effective partnership working will serve to build capacity and target further efficiencies through co-creation. The 'People Can' approach is already demonstrating impact and has greater potential. Alongside partners and local communities, young people are willing and ready to go on the change journey with the council so be sure to include them.

There is clear leadership of change at the top layer of the council, the Council Plan sets out clear priorities and staff and partners are "up for" the challenge. However, ensuring change, appropriate behaviours and the vision for Bradford are consistently embedded at every level of the organisation will take additional effort.

The 'Big Project' Workforce Development Programme recognises the pivotal role of middle managers in achieving this and accelerating this programme of support, development and challenge will reap dividends and should be actioned. Whilst people talk about 'business as usual' no longer being an option in terms of the financial challenges faced by the council, more could be done to demonstrate there is a critical mass of improved outcomes so that people can see the benefit of expending time and energy in leading change.

Achieving change requires the council to tell a compelling narrative of the need for things to be done differently; to be clear about governance with the right people (political and managerial) fully signed up and to ensure there is capacity to deliver through appropriate alignment of transformation resources, management accountability and staff engagement. It will require a wholesale re-assessment and re-alignment of current available resources to ensure you take staff with you on the journey. Staff resilience will be a key issue to carefully monitor as pace of change increases.

We could not see an overarching programme management approach, or a structure in place to take an overview of all corporate projects from project initiation, business case through to monitoring successful delivery. The Council will need to ensure that arrangements are put into place to enable the linkages, sequencing and inter-dependencies between the various projects and activity to be clear. Robust monitoring and accountability will need to be a key feature of the Council's programme governance to ensure the contribution to the budget strategy. Such an approach is necessary to consider the linkage of key work streams in any transformational change programme, such as asset rationalisation with agile working and channel shift; and should inform more effective cross-Directorate working.

The council needs to adopt a consistent approach to digital transformation. It would be beneficial to automate as many tasks as possible and introduction of enhanced mobile technology for staff would increase efficiency and reduce use of paper. There should be one IT system for all members of staff to access to ensure interface between all channels of communication and residents including, but not limited to housing, adult social care, children's social care, neighbourhoods and

finance. This would help to provide good knowledge and infrastructure around the person.

Use data to inform intelligent decision making as well as tracking performance as currently you appear to be data rich but could deploy a more intelligence-led approach. Given your majority annual spend on Adults and Children's services we suggest a targeted approach to Demand Management across the organisation in conjunction with your early help offer in order to reduce demand on the care system at the front door for adults and children's services. Similarly, explore opportunities for greater structural alignment with health to support joint commissioning, for example Data/IT/Risk Stratification.

There are opportunities to be explored for further co-located working based on the effective work currently in the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub along with further consideration of shared service arrangements across neighbouring local authorities where a business case stacks up. Joint and integrated commissioning also needs to be further enhanced. We saw many positive things happening within the council and we would urge you to ensure you celebrate this success both internally and externally. This will impact positively on staff morale and ensure the buy-in to meet the future challenges.

4.6 Young People, Education, Skills and Employment

School Improvement

All stakeholders, including Head teachers, spoke positively of the changes in the last few years and directly related this to key personnel, namely the Strategic Director of Children's Services and Deputy Director responsible for education. The relationship between schools and the Council has been re-engineered to ensure a focus of resources where they are most needed and this is leading to improved outcomes for learners. The relationships are also improved and better calibrated between the Council and the non-maintained school sector, with a real sense of focus on learner outcomes, this has been achieved against a backdrop of significantly reduced staff resource within the Council.

Social Cohesion

There was a real sense of Bradford understanding its role of leader of place and working to ensure all sections of the communities served by the local authority were involved and integrated into a sense of belonging. This was evident in the neighbourhood working and how it has improved, in the Prevent and social cohesion activity in education settings and was backed up by young people in the focus group and by key stakeholders such as the police and the Voluntary Sector.

Link between young people, skills and future employer demand

There were many examples of impressive activity to ensure that young people in Bradford are learning relevant skills which are required for the modern workplace. These were developing to meet identified need and in many cases linked to the comprehensive post 16 education review and forward plan. As standalone activities they are likely to have impact

and support young people as they move forward. There are also a range of activities within the economic development and growth sphere of activity with good attempts to engage local employers in developing Bradford and its employment opportunities. However, there could be more done to link the development of young people's skills and the future needs of employers – the Area Based Review of 2016 has some detail on future economic need but more could be done at a local and sub-regional level to link broadly 'education / skills' supply side activity and 'employer / economic growth' demand side activity. Within the council there could be more joint planning between relevant teams and the Chairs of the Relevant Scrutiny Committees could work together to more effectively support this join up.

Apprenticeship Strategy

Whilst the council is clearly aware of the Levy and Duty which came into force in April 2017 there is still work to be done to ensure this is embedded within the council. There is an understanding of the likely cost of the Levy but there was no apparent plan to ensure the Levy could be utilised to increase the number of apprentices within the council. This is linked to a wider issue of how apprentices are viewed – there is almost a sense of a paternalistic role of seeing apprentices as one year positions to provide a solid start to a career before moving on (as there is an assumption that there will not be opportunities for permanent positions within the council). This needs reviewing and as staff move on there could be a real sense of using apprentices to bring new ideas into the council, plan for future leaders, address issues around hard to fill posts and make the council more representative of the communities it serves. The council should also be using its leader of place role to model good practice and set the standard for other local employers (public and private sector) to strive towards. Furthermore there is an opportunity to pull all this together to ensure a coherent approach to apprentices, both as an employer and as a leader of place.

Young Peoples' Views

The young people who were part of a focus group during the peer challenge were positive and gave their views freely. They were a real credit to Bradford and gave real cause for optimism about the future in Bradford. They articulated views and concerns that you would expect to find in any area, for example what does the future hold for them, will there be enough jobs, and will there be quality opportunities for them in the future. They clearly saw education as the pathway to future opportunities. They were keen on more apprenticeship opportunities especially as there was a concern about the quality and range of jobs that might be available locally in the future.

Specific concerns that they highlighted were: the rise in visible homelessness on the streets especially in the city centre (and showed concern for the welfare of these people and wondered if empty homes could be used to support them), the attractiveness of Bradford as a place to live and work in relation to Leeds and a lack of out of school spare time activities to engage in. We would also suggest you consider re-establishing a 'Youth Council' within the council as they have proved to be a real asset to other local authorities across the region.

5. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate that the political and senior managerial leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Mark Edgell Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: Email mark.edgell@local.gov.uk Mobile No. 07747 636910.

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

Thank you to everyone involved for their participation and for engaging so constructively with the peer challenge. In particular, please pass on thanks from the peer team to Alison Riley, David Greenwood and their colleagues for their help and sterling support prior to the peer challenge and during the on-site phase.

Follow up visit

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.