Local Government Association

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Three Rivers District Council

10-13 February 2026

Feedback report

Corporate Peer Challenge

Contents

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1. Introduction

A team of local government peers, led by the Local Government Association (LGA) delivered a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) of Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) from 10-13 February 2026. This was the council's second peer challenge, their first was in March 2019, TRDC Corporate Peer Challenge 2019 Report.

CPC is a well-established and respected improvement and assurance tool that provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils. Further details about the CPC process can be found in Appendix A**.**

Our peer team consisted of highly experienced and knowledgeable senior local government councillor and officer peers (see section four). We considered the five core areas for all CPCs: local priorities and outcomes; organisational and place leadership; governance and culture; financial planning and management; and capacity for improvement, in addition to local government reorganisation (LGR).

This report provides TRDC with feedback on the peer team's findings. It provides the council with a set of high-level recommendations alongside further recommendations under each of the CPC's core areas. There is an expectation the council will publish this report and a clear action plan to respond to all the recommendations highlighted.

2. Executive summary

Three Rivers District Council enters this CPC from a position of strength. The council is widely regarded – by officers, councillors, partners and residents alike – as a well-run and financially stable organisation. Staff consistently describe feeling proud to work for the council, pointing to close working relationships and a loyal, long serving workforce that delivers successfully. Councillors across all political groups are passionate, resident focused and understand their locality and communities. There is a strong and stable relationship between the political and officer leadership in the council, which supports consistency of decision-making and a collective and calm sense of leadership to partners and officers. Partners repeatedly referenced their positive, collaborative relationship with the council. Communications with residents and partners stand out as particularly effective. These strong internal and external communications have been a result of focused improvement since the 2019 CPC.

The district benefits from a wide range of opportunities, including strong leisure and creative industries, and Northwood Ministry of Defence Base, combined with its demographic characteristics, this offers a unique advantage for future economic growth. The council's commitment to sustainability is evident and well resourced, with place-based environmental initiatives and organisational actions reinforcing a focus on a greener future, as set out in the Council Plan, and the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy.

TRDC is fortunate to have experienced councillors and the peer team noted some opportunities to further strengthen officer-councillor relationships, thereby making the most of the skills on both sides of the chamber. This will support the TRDC's ambition and effectiveness in continuing to deliver its business as usual and as it transitions during LGR.

The vision of Three Rivers as "a great place to live, work and visit" is widely understood, however the narrative that sits beneath it – particularly regarding people, residents and inclusive communities – is less well defined. The "visit" aspect of the vision appears less prioritised than the "live" and "work" components and could be strengthened, particularly with the strong visitor economy in the area. The peer team noted the overarching story of place for Three Rivers is not immediately apparent. Given the upcoming LGR, there is a risk that Three Rivers' place identity, voice and achievements could become diluted without a clearer articulation of what makes the place unique. Peers reflected on the need to define, articulate and project a strong narrative of the local place as an essential element to preserving legacy and influence.

The council has demonstrated creative, effective approaches to housing delivery, including significant investment through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) and successful collaboration with Watford Community Housing. The redevelopment of garage sites into brownfield homes shows a thoughtful and resource sensitive approach to managing local constraints, particularly the protection of the Green Belt. These examples demonstrate the council's capacity to deliver successfully on its priorities when the strategic framework, resources, and relationships are aligned.

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Partnership working is undoubtedly a strong feature in TRDC. The Healthy Hubs programme stands out as an example of preventative, place-based collaboration, reducing demand on statutory services and supporting residents' wellbeing. Community safety was also an example demonstrating active investment. There is further scope for the council to ensure that relationships with partners are best used to align delivery to achieve joint outcomes in all areas. Strengthening the strategic oversight of partnership delivery so that impact can be measured more widely may be one means to maximise partnerships.

The Local Plan remains a known significant challenge for the council. Recent decisions by government have added complexity, and the council is aware of this and its implications. With a requirement to successfully submit the Local Plan to the Secretary of State (SoS) by December 2026, the council may benefit from further scenario planning in relation to the possible outcomes and consider whether the plan can reflect local and national need alongside local preference.

As the council looks ahead to LGR, internal capacity could become a challenge to the organisation. Specific pressures currently exist in legal, human resources (HR) and planning services, with risks to resilience if not addressed promptly. With approximately 25 months until vesting day for the new council organisations, the peer team also observed that TRDC would benefit from further strengthening its LGR preparedness programme. Workforce development, succession planning and scenario-based resource allocation were identified as important areas for early focus.

More broadly, while the council has service level plans and a project board in place, there is no single, integrated delivery plan that connects the Council Plan to outcomes, resources, milestones and performance. This would be an area to develop to ensure the continued successful delivery of business as usual, strengthening the 'golden thread', whilst also transitioning through the LGR process.

The peer team found TRDC to be an effective, committed and community driven organisation with substantial strengths to build upon. By sharpening its strategic narrative, strengthening delivery architecture, addressing capacity gaps and preparing thoroughly for LGR, the council can protect its legacy, maximise its influence, and position its communities to benefit from future opportunities.

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3. Recommendations

The following are the peer team's key recommendations which have been prioritised on the grounds of urgency and importance.

3.1 Create space to continue to support officer-councillor relationships
Supporting all councillors to take up co-designed training and pre- committee meeting briefings. This will further enhance the community leadership role and passion for place exhibited by all members.

3.2 Strengthen the place narrative of Three Rivers
Building a vision for inclusive growth across the district. Consider how TRDC intend to maximise opportunities to deliver for all communities, both now and after LGR.

3.3 Establish a clear LGR preparedness programme
Create a clear LGR preparedness programme for Three Rivers to ensure the best possible outcomes for the residents of the district and a smooth organisational transition. This should include bringing the preferred unitary proposal to life prior to any decision and planned spending in Three Rivers for lasting legacy impact.

3.4 Ensure organisational capacity and resilience in key areas
Enhance organisational capacity and resilience to enable you to deal with current business as usual AND transition into the new unitary authority, with a particular focus on key areas such as legal, planning, HR and governance.

3.5 Produce a single annual delivery plan and secure critical deliverables
Produce a clear delivery plan from your current strategic frameworks in order to accurately define key resource requirements, actions, deliverables and timescales, which will support the successful delivery of outcomes for Three Rivers and its partners as LGR approaches.

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3.6 Further consider how you are able to successfully submit your Local Plan to the Secretary of State by December 2026

This will require scenario planning in relation to the possible outcomes.

3.7 Sustain motivation and momentum throughout LGR

Sustain the motivation and momentum that has led TRDC to become a financially stable, well regarded, and effective district council. Don't take your foot off the gas!

In addition to the key recommendations section five of this report captures our detailed feedback and additional recommendations within each of the CPC's core areas of focus.

4. Peer team

Peer challenges are conducted by experienced LGA peers, including elected councillors and senior officers. The composition of the peer team was shaped by the specific focus of the challenge, with the LGA selecting peers based on their relevant expertise. The peers for this CPC were:

- **Rob Huntington**, Chief Executive, Rossendale Borough Council
- **Cllr Peter Dunphy MBE,** Chair of Environmental Services, City of London Corporation
- **Cllr Craig Browne**, Member Peer, Cheshire East Council, and Chief Executive Citizen's Advice North Staffordshire
- **George Candler,** Executive Director: Place and Economy and Deputy Chief Executive**,** North Northamptonshire Council
- **Deborah Johnson,** Director Customer Services and Organisational Development, Newark and Sherwood District Council
- **Jasper Chance-Larsen,** LGA Shadow Peer, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
- **Hannah Gill**, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA
- **Onyekachi Abajingin,** Programme Support Officer, LGA

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5. Detailed feedback and recommended actions

This section of the report provides detailed feedback along with additional recommendations related to the five core areas of focus and local government reorganisation.

When developing the action plan (in response to the CPC's findings), the council should consider both the key recommendations presented in section three and the additional recommendations set out below.

5.1 Local priorities and outcomes

Three Rivers District Council's vision is widely understood across the council and residents receive a value for money service. There is strong and effective partnership working reported by partners. Partnership governance through 'Connecting Three Rivers' partnership board is active and well attended. Healthy Hubs was a specific example illustrating the effective partnership working in practise with Hertfordshire County Council alongside other health and wellbeing partners. There is a high proportion of the local area which is green belt, however the council has still been able to demonstrate successes in housing delivery, examples of this include: maximising the use of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) programme; a joint venture with Watford Community Housing; and creative use of underused assets such as garage site redevelopment delivering 16 new homes on brownfield land. There is a clear and well-resourced green and sustainable agenda, which continues to shape the organisation's direction and priorities, as set out in their Corporate Framework 2023-26, 2026-29 Council Plan, and the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy. This can be seen through the council's ecological capability, and its work on the Aquadrome and council asset retrofits.

At the same time, several areas would benefit from further clarity and development. The narrative around people and residents could be further articulated, and the 'visit' element of the council's vision appears less prioritised than the 'live' and 'work' components. Ensuring there is an articulated narrative about how the council maximises its unique opportunities so that inclusive growth across the district supports all communities would address this.

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While partnership relationships are strong, the strategic oversight of partnership impact could be strengthened. Opportunities also exist to formalise joint asset approaches with Hertfordshire County Council and Watford Council as all proposed LGR options under consideration involve these councils. Starting now on how the assets across the wider geography could be best utilised and for what service areas will give all parties a head start on this key part of LGR. The voluntary and community sector would also benefit from clearer and more regular access to senior leadership; the relationship with key officers was frequently commented on as 'excellent'. These gaps are compounded by the absence of a single overarching delivery plan to bring together service plans and strategic commitments into one coherent framework.

Work on the Local Plan continues to pose significant challenges to get it successfully submitted and accepted by the SoS whilst balancing the local priorities and outcomes that communities want. The LGA undertook a Planning Committee Review in April-June 2025 as part of the support from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). This CPC therefore has not focused on planning within TRDC as specific recommendations have been set out in the 2025 review.

In addition to the key recommendations *3.2 Strengthen the place narrative of Three Rivers;* and *3.6 Further consider how you are able to successfully submit your Local Plan to the Secretary of State by December 2026* the council should also progress the following actions:

- Consider a joint asset approach with Hertfordshire County Council and Watford Council (e.g. libraries/high streets) as a blueprint prior to LGR.

Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context?

Priorities are widely understood and articulated through the [Council Plan](#) with a clear vision through the 'great place to live, work and visit'. Furthermore, TRDC understands their local demographic profile and communities as set out in their current Council Plan, and how this influences key services such as waste management and recycling. The regeneration project in South Oxhey has been

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designed and delivered based on local community need and demographic profile. Both internal staff and external partners report understanding the vision and priorities of the council. As discussed in *5.4 Financial planning and management* the council is in a strong financial position, with it able to resource delivery against its priorities. Although the vision and priorities are clearly set out, there is an opportunity to strengthen the narrative around the whole of Three Rivers as a place, with reference to all its various communities, being explicit about how inclusive growth can benefit all communities across the district.

In preparation for LGR there is an opportunity to consider joint priorities with neighbouring councils such as Hertfordshire County Council and Watford Council, not just for assets but also in the wider community space.

The Local Plan remains a known challenge to TRDC. Agreed by Full Council on 27 January 2026, the council received a holding direction by the SoS on 5 February 2026 as it only met 56 per cent of the Government's targets for local housing needs. The council is aware of the ramifications, and the peer team recognises that the council must have sovereignty over any decision regarding the Local Plan. Scenario planning all possible outcomes for submission to the SoS by December 2026 will support TRDC to be prepared for any eventual outcome.

Delivery against priorities and comparative performance and the council's approach to continuous improvement

Peers considered LG Inform benchmarking data which shows how the council compares with the average of their statistical nearest neighbours: LG Inform CPC headline report. Highlights from the report include:

- Consistently high rates of recycling and residual household waste in comparison to nearest CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) neighbours.
- High performance against all non-major development planning applications decided within eight weeks or agreed time in comparison to nearest CIPFA neighbours.

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- Third highest percentage of major planning applications overturned on appeal in TRDC in comparison to nearest CIPFA neighbours.

Significant steps have been taken to improve the performance reporting both as a management tool and as a method of scrutiny. For example, visually digestible charts demonstrating comparable levels of performance over time across selected metrics which now provides an informative tool for decision makers. It is acknowledged that there is still some way to go on this journey to bring the performance metrics to life and ensure they are seen and understood wider than CMT. The development of an annual delivery plan would help tighten the link between strategic intent, resources and measurable outcomes, see *5.5 Capacity for improvement* for further information.

There is a positive culture and approach to continuous improvement within the council. Communications have also been significantly strengthened since the last CPC where it was highlighted as a weakness. This has included bringing in increased communication expertise to the council team. Staff are regularly invested in with leadership courses being provided and a real committment to 'grow your own' workforce with a number of apprenticeships in place.

5.2 Organisational and place leadership

Across the organisation, councillors from all political groups demonstrate a strong sense of dedication to their communities, complemented by officers who describe a values driven, supportive and inclusive culture. There is a stable and longstanding relationship between senior officers and the political leadership and this stability has supported consistency of decision making and a collective and calm sense of leadership to partners and officers. There is a non-hierarchical environment within the council and this is seen positively by staff. The council is enabling and positively responsive to local opportunities for economic growth such as Warner Bros expansion and TRDC have successfully leveraged additional investment into local community amenities from businesses. For instance, investment in the restoration of Leavesden Country Park from Warner Bros Studio alongside National Lottery Funding.

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The wider context of county wide LGR brings new pressures and expectations. The council may wish to take proactive steps to protect and strengthen its place identity, ensuring that the distinctiveness of Three Rivers and the achievements of recent years are not lost within a future unitary arrangement. A strong narrative of the Three Rivers place will support the place identity and could also be used to highlight the council's achievements to ensure a legacy for the council. Preparing effectively for transition will also require dedicated internal capacity so that the organisation can focus on organisational development, workforce planning, training pathways and broader change readiness. At the same time, there is a need for clearer articulation of partnership boundaries – especially with voluntary and community sector partners – to ensure roles, expectations and responsibilities are well understood during a period of structural change.

Against this backdrop, the council faces the challenge of maintaining continuity while preparing its people, governance arrangements, and partnerships for the next phase. Addressing this requires a coordinated and intentional approach and a clear LGR preparedness programme alongside a strong place narrative.

In addition to the key recommendations *3.2 Strengthen the place narrative of Three Rivers*; and *3.3 Establish a clear LGR preparedness programme* the council should also progress the following action:

- Consider strengthening strategic oversight of partnership delivery so that impact can be measured. Alongside this, continue to support strategic and practical buy in with regards to partnerships, especially within the voluntary and community partnership space.

Does the council provide effective local leadership and is it ready for LGR?

Political and managerial leadership is stable and collaborative. There is a golden triangle in place, with all statutory officers on the senior leadership team (SLT), this ensures regular and strong communication. SLT have been able to ensure there is continuity with the monitoring officer function despite the known capacity pressures in legal. There are plans to address these known capacity issues.

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The council is involved in county wide preparations for LGR and staff report feeling informed and calm about LGR. To support a smooth transition, the council may benefit from launching a timebound LGR readiness programme that provides structure and clarity on key tasks, responsibilities, internal capacity and timelines. Alongside this, developing a comprehensive workforce and organisational change plan would help ensure that staff are confident and equipped for the shifts ahead. Clarifying governance arrangements and partnership boundaries, including those with the voluntary and community sector, will help maintain alignment and stability as the council moves through the transition period, this would also ensure that partnerships continue to be positive and well-connected post LGR.

Strengthening the place narrative around Three Rivers will support a local identity past transition. This includes a need to carve out internal capacity to prepare for transition ahead of any final Government decisions and LGR shadow arrangements.

Are there good relationships with partners and local communities?

Partnership working is a strength in Three Rivers, and this was highlighted in the examples such as Healthy Hubs, community safety, use of LAHF, and work with Watford Community Housing. Partnership governance is currently through the *Connecting Three Rivers Board* which replaced the Local Strategic Partnership and Community Safety Board. To maximise the benefit of partnership working the council could consider enhancing strategic oversight of its partnership delivery. This may include agreeing shared outcomes measures that partners are working towards which aligns with the strategic framework for partnership working (Community Strategy). This can assist in understanding performance and outcomes with partners to drive continuous improvement. Any strategic framework, outcomes measures or performance reporting for partnerships will need to align with the council’s internal mechanisms, such as the annual delivery plan.

Alongside this, continue to support strategic and practical buy in with regards to partnerships, especially the voluntary and community partnership space. This may also be assisted by enabling access to senior leadership for external partners to

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enhance the existing great work of officers.

There is good communication with residents (50 per cent signed up to the council newsletter), and councillors are knowledgeable about their localities. A strong place narrative is also a further opportunity to engage with the local community and to ensure that local priorities and stories have legacy.

5.3 Governance and culture

All councillors are engaged and demonstrate strong knowledge of their localities, reflecting a continued commitment to effective representation and community involvement. The council's committee system supports cross party councillor participation in both scrutiny and decision making. Parish councils reported feeling valued and well supported, contributing to local identity and providing an additional route for place-based engagement. Across the organisation, the "grow your own" approach to officer development is visible and effective, with staff development opportunities and organisational values consistently lived and reinforced in day-to-day practice.

Alongside these strengths, several aspects of governance could benefit from focused attention to ensure they remain resilient through the period leading up to LGR. Councillor induction or development programmes and pre-meeting briefings are in place but are not taken up consistently, reviewing this and co-designing them may help to increase uptake. The committee system offers an effective mechanism for embedding scrutiny within the council's decision-making processes, as demonstrated through committee meetings. Lead councillors should remain open to robust scrutiny, with senior officers supporting this process by addressing questions where appropriate. Greater consistency in senior officer attendance and oversight across all committees would further strengthen the effectiveness of scrutiny.

Placing strong emphasis on upholding the Code of Conduct will further support a culture of respect and accountability. TRDC may also wish to consider how its constitution and delegation arrangements can best ensure that governance structures remain fit for purpose over the next two years, particularly during the transition period.

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In addition, capacity pressures – particularly within legal, HR and planning services – may pose risks that will need to be addressed as the organisation prepares for increased demand. At the time of writing this report, a proposed plan is in place to address legal capacity. The SLT has also taken steps to ensure continuity in the role of Monitoring Officer, with the position remaining within the SLT.

In addition to the key recommendations to *3.1 Create space to continue to support officer-councillor relationships*; and *3.4 Enhance organisational capacity and resilience in key areas*, the council should also progress the following actions:

- Induction and councillor development training should continue to be offered to and taken up by all members, this could be co-designed with councillors to increase uptake.
- Evidence-based pre-meeting briefings, with the appropriate level of information, should be taken up by all councillors, this could be co-designed with councillors to increase uptake.
- Across the chamber everyone should understand the roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors, with support and training provided to both officers and councillors when required. A continued emphasis on upholding the Code of Conduct will support a healthy culture of respect and accountability.
- Continue to support parish councils as one of the routes to local place legacy and identity in conjunction with any planned local area arrangements through LGR.

Are there clear and robust governance arrangements?

Governance arrangements are well-established in the council and there is a golden triangle in place, which also forms part of SLT, enabling them to work effectively together with clear and regular communication to review key issues or risks. There are positive reports from both internal and external audit for TRDC. The Audit Committee meets five times a year and receives planned training at each meeting ensuring councillors are supported to undertake their governance responsibilities. As part of the 2025/26 planned work programme the committee reviews progress on the audit plans, treasury management, and risk management.

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Councillor inductions, training sessions and pre-meeting briefings are already available; however, they are not always taken up consistently. Understanding the reasons for this and co-designing training and pre-meeting briefings with councillors may help encourage more consistent participation. The peer team found councillors to be engaged and passionate, so involving them in this co-design process could further strengthen consistency in training and briefings and continue to support robust governance. This will also be important as the council moves towards LGR to ensure that all councillors receive appropriate development and information to ensure that they can continue to represent their constituents and to provide support for those who may go on to be elected within a new council.

There is a positive “grow your own” culture supporting officer development, which has helped build a capable and confident cohort of officers. This is underpinned by a wide range of training opportunities, including manager away days, Myers-Briggs, SUMO (shut up and move on) training, all-staff away days, and participation in the Local Government and Tri-Sector Challenge. It will be important to continue ensuring that all officers are supported and have a clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors in order to further strengthen positive and effective scrutiny.

Across the district, parish councils are well supported and their value is recognised. Maintaining this support could help preserve local place identity and legacy, alongside any planned local area arrangements through LGR.

Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?

The council demonstrates challenge and scrutiny with engaged and knowledgeable councillors. The committee system enables scrutiny by creating opportunities for all councillors – not only those in leadership positions – to participate actively in both challenge and decision making. This inclusive structure supports a broad base of involvement and helps cultivate shared ownership of governance.

Maintaining a culture of respectful, evidence informed challenge will continue to be important. As already discussed, ensuring a consistent senior officer presence at

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committees, alongside the co-designed training and pre-meeting briefs for councillors will further support all councillors to engage confidently and constructively. Supporting all councillors to adhere to the Code of Conduct and values of the council will further support positive scrutiny behaviours, and ensure any breaches are responded to appropriately and in a timely manner.

The council may find it helpful to do a rapid review of its constitution and schemes of delegation to ensure these remain current and proportionate, and continue to enable timely and effective decision making, particularly with the LGR transition ahead.

Taken together, these steps will help councillors continue to undertake scrutiny in a way that reflects the organisation's values and upholds the standards expected throughout the decision-making process.

5.4 Financial planning and management

Three Rivers District Council is in a strong financial position and general fund balances was forecast to be at £3.8 million by end of March 2026, well above the recommended £2 million minimum. The council has also now reserved £1 million from the collection fund to specifically place towards LGR. In 2024/25, the total reserves as a proportion of 'net revenue expenditure' for TRDC was 38.1 per cent, which was above the CIPFA nearest neighbours median proportion of 23.6 per cent. The Council's Property Investment Board was allocated up to a total of £20 million in 2017 to invest in acquiring property with a specific remit of achieving a 10 per cent return (yield) on the investment. The total rent due on properties interests acquired is forecast to be £871,000 which will achieve an average yield of 5.72 per cent, above the 5 per cent target. TRDC has an income strip agreement for a property in Wimbledon, London. The Council receives an annual income of £1.9 million annual passing rent from occupational tenants, with the rental income received index-linked to RPI, subject to a 1- 4 percentage cap and collar, compounded every five years. As based on the 2025 auditors report this has not been identified as a significant risk to the council at this current time. The medium-term financial strategy illustrates how grants and income is higher than originally planned, and with a planned deficit of

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£92,357 in 2026/27 and £110,434 in 2027/28, both are well within the existing council reserves.

TRDC benefits from strong financial leadership supported by robust budget monitoring, comprehensive financial reporting and effective risk management arrangements, providing confidence in the council's financial control environment. The council's medium term financial planning is well embedded, and its disciplined financial culture has positioned it effectively for the demands and opportunities associated with a future unitary arrangement. This shared understanding of the council's financial position – anchored by clear oversight from the Section 151 Officer and the Audit Committee – creates a firm foundation on which to guide decisions during a period of sector uncertainty.

Continuing on with the culture of strong fiscal responsibility, the council should consider how its planned spending during LGR transition can best contribute to long term impacts across the district based on community and residents' needs and priorities as well as providing the right skills and organisational resilience for its workforce.

As substantial change approaches through LGR, the council faces a twin track challenge: continuing to deliver high quality business as usual services while also preparing for LGR transition. Existing capacity gaps, particularly in areas such as legal, HR and planning, risk constraining the council's ability to move at pace and maintain resilience. The current financial position of the council should allow the council to ensure it is adequately resourced to maintain the pace during the transition period ahead.

In addition to the key recommendation *3.3 Establish a clear LGR preparedness programme*, the council should also progress the following actions:

- Consideration on how planned spending during transition can best contribute to long term impacts across the district based on community and residents' needs and priorities.
- Consider whether known capacity gaps have been adequately resourced to deal with the twin track of business as usual and LGR.

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There is an opportunity for the fiscal discipline and strong financial management culture within TRDC to provide a positive blueprint for future organisations as part of LGR, providing a lasting fiscal legacy.

5.5 Capacity for improvement

The council benefits from a clear commitment to organisational improvement from its political and senior leadership, demonstrated through a range of service reviews and initiatives that have already led to tangible service enhancements. This commitment is reinforced by an experienced, motivated and loyal workforce that consistently shows a willingness to go the extra mile. Staff are not only capable but also display a strong sense of dedication to the organisation, the annual staff wellbeing survey shows that 86.2 per cent agree that they find work fulfilling or rewarding and the council recently had an employee mark their 50 year work anniversary. Annual staff turnover was 11.26 per cent which is lower than the average for its CIPFA neighbours at 12 per cent. This dedicated workforce positions TRDC well to deliver improvement between now and Vesting Day in April 2028.

There is an officer project board with a clear vision and programme for major capital schemes, including significant work on the Aquadrome and South Oxhey Phase Four. There are good financial foundations, with an adequate budget allocated, to ensure that Three Rivers can be well prepared for LGR within the same timeframe.

Alongside these strengths, the council has made notable progress in improving the quality, frequency and visibility of performance reporting. To further strengthen strategic organisational performance insight and maximise the capability to deliver there is an opportunity to align existing service plans and performance reporting into a single delivery plan.

Sustaining the level of ambition required to successfully transition through LGR and beyond will need a continued focus on workforce development, succession planning, and scenario-based resource planning. Ensuring teams have the skills, leadership continuity and capacity to deliver during a period of transition will be critical.

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In addition to the key recommendations on *3.3 Establish a clear LGR preparedness programme; 3.4 Ensure organisational capacity and resilience in key areas;* and *3.5 Produce a single annual delivery plan and secure critical deliverables*, the council should also progress the following actions:

- Consider workforce development, succession planning, delivery plan, scenario and resource planning as part of the LGR preparedness programme.
- Further strengthen and collate council performance reporting with effective use of data by aligning the corporate plan and overarching strategic framework to a clearer annual delivery plan.

Is the organisation able to bring about the improvements it needs, including delivering on locally identified priorities?

The organisation has demonstrated it can deliver improvements and is positively delivering on locally identified priorities. This can be demonstrated through its continuous improvement work on communications since the 2019 CPC, this included bringing in dedicated communication expertise into the council and a clear plan of activity, which has seen positive internal and external communications. This has been positively reported on from staff, the peer team spoke to, who feel informed about the organisation and LGR, externally this is demonstrated through approximately 50 per cent of residents being signed up to the council e-newsletter. This was achieved through actively marketing the e-newsletter through their customer service colleagues.

Capacity across the organisation remains broadly positive, but pressure points in key areas, such as legal, HR and planning, mean it will be important for the council to address critical gaps if it is to maintain service quality while simultaneously delivering change. These pressure points in capacity are known and there are plans being put in place to mitigate and address these.

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Does the council have the capacity to improve?

Three Rivers District Council has illustrated its ability to improve and deliver against key priorities, such as the work delivered within the green and sustainable agenda which includes the Aquadrome and asset retrofits.

Council performance reporting has significantly improved, using visual data and there are further plans to strengthen this. Peers suggest formalising the golden thread that connects strategic priorities to operational activity and introducing an annual delivery plan would be a practical and effective way to achieve this. An annual delivery plan can offer staff, managers and councillors a shared view of the actions, milestones and measures required to deliver the council's ambitions up until April 2028, further supporting accountability and transparency. By aligning a clear strategic place narrative, annual delivery plan, and performance reporting, this would support a more consistent understanding of progress, resource requirements, risks and outcomes across teams, departments and partners.

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6. Action plan and progress review

The senior political and managerial leadership of the council should review and reflect on the findings and recommendations from this CPC.

To promote the principle of transparency, it is a requirement of the CPC process that the final report of the peer team is published in-full within three months of the review being completed. In this instance, this requires the report to be published no later than 13 May 2026.

There is a requirement for TRDC to develop and publish an action plan within five-months of the peer team being onsite, no later than 13 July 2026. This action plan should provide clarity on the activity, milestones, and timelines that the council will work to in responding to the team's findings.

The action plan will also be central to the peer team's re-engagement with TRDC through a progress review which is due to be completed and published by February 2027.

7. Contact details

In the meantime, Rachel Litherland, Principal Adviser for the East of England, is the main contact between your council and the Local Government Association. As outlined above, Rachel Litherland is available to discuss any further support you require and can be contacted on

Rachel Litherland, LGA Principal Adviser for the East of England

Email – rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk

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

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Appendix A – What is CPC?

CPC is a valued improvement and assurance tool that is delivered by the sector for the sector. It involves a team of senior local government councillors and officer peers undertaking a comprehensive review of key information and spending three days at the 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 (SLI) put in place by councils and the LGA to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector. These principles state that councils are responsible for their own performance; accountable locally, not nationally; share a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector; and rely on the LGA to provide the tools to support them. CPC is also key to councils in meeting their Best Value duty. UK Government expect all councils to have a CPC at least every five years.

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five areas which form the core components of all CPCs. These 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?

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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 areas outlined above, every CPC has a strong focus on financial sustainability, performance, governance, and assurance

This peer challenge also included a focus on local government reorganisation.

The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are designed to support improvement, not inspection. They are not intended to provide a detailed or technical assessment of plans and proposals. Instead, the peer team uses its experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information shared with them, the things they observe, and the material they review.

To prepare, the peer team looks at a range of documents and information to understand the council and the challenges it is facing. This includes a position statement prepared by the council before the visit, which sets out the local context and highlights areas for the team to focus on. The preparation also involves reviewing an LGA Finance briefing (based on public reports from the council's website) and an LGA performance report that shows benchmarking data across a range of measures. The performance report is produced using the LGA's local area benchmarking tool, LG Inform.

The peer team then spends three or four days at the council. During this time, they gather evidence, information, and views by meeting with council staff, councillors, and external stakeholders. This helps them build a rounded picture of the council's strengths and areas for improvement.

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