

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Knutsford Town Council

23 October 2025

Feedback



Corporate Peer Challenge



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1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) from 5th – 7th November 2024 and published the report in January 2025 with an action plan agreed in March 2025.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date

The LGA would like to thank Knutsford Town Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at Knutsford Town Council took place (onsite) on 23rd October 2025.

The Progress Review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, as well as a number of other key areas such as accommodation, key assets, project management and councillor visibility

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

- Mark Williams -Town Clerk – Falmouth Town Council
- Councillor Steve Walker – Chair - Waddesdon Parish Council

- Anders Hanson – Member Services Manager – NALC
- Jill Scarr, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

The peer team met face to face in Knutsford Town Council over one day with the following representatives of the council:

- Adam Keppel-Green, Town Clerk
- Mayor and Chairs of Committees
- Senior Leadership Team
- Staff Focus Group
- Community Representatives
- Representative of the BID Working Group

3. Progress Review - Feedback

Knutsford Town Council (KTC) has made some progress across each of the recommendations since the CPC in November 2024. The Action Plan agreed in March 2024 had 36 separate actions which addressed not only the 9 main recommendations but also the suggested areas for improvement contained in the report. 11 actions (30%) have been completed by their target date, 4% are partially complete due to actions being related to forthcoming events, 30% are on track and 36% are overdue.

A position statement and evidence to support the recommendation was provided to the peer team prior to the visit. The peer team used this information along with the outcome of meetings during the day to share the following comments and feedback to Knutsford Town Council's Town Clerk, Mayor and Chairs of Committees in relation to the original recommendations, which are highlighted below in bold.

There has been good progress in some areas of the action plan, particularly the completion of the Market Hall refurbishment, the staffing restructure and internal and external communications. Going forward KTC needs to stay focussed on what it needs to achieve in the Strategic Plan and the CPC Action Plan. Capacity has been increased since the CPC, but this was to address delivering the Strategic Plan

objectives.

The accommodation issues remain, and it will be important to continue with planned improvements to improve the working conditions for staff and also to take into account the findings of the health and safety inspection.

The visibility of councillors in communities (with a small number of exceptions) continues to be a challenge for KTC and collaborative and creative solutions are needed to give councillors confidence in their place leadership role.

Recommendation 1 - Review the Strategic Plan, its priorities and effective duration

The Town Council's Strategic Plan for 2023-2033 is ambitious. The Strategic Plan was divided into three delivery phases in March. This prioritised a number of objectives for the next four years (2025-2028). A number of existing actions were deleted from the previously agreed 2025/26 action plan. There are now 49 actions for the year. Work on developing the 2026/27 action plan has condensed this further to 22 actions. There is a recognition by KTC that the delivery phases need further prioritisation to meet the capacity of the council. It will be important to stay focused on the priorities to ensure the resources available are not overstretched. Consideration should also be given to providing updates on delivery of the plan to residents on a regular basis to keep them informed. The monthly newsletter would be a good way of doing this and gives the council the opportunity to celebrate its success.

Recommendation 2

Consider a complete staffing review to ensure the council has the capacity and skills to meet its current and future aspirations

Recommendation 3

Enhance the resilience of the council with regard to the role of the Town Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)

A new staffing structure has been implemented increasing the number of posts from 14 to 17. This is a combination of new posts, increased hours and changes in responsibilities. The introduction of posts at a senior leadership level is seen as positive by staff and managers are supportive of each other. There is now a Deputy Town Clerk, Corporate Support Manager, Town Centre Manager and Events Manager. All these posts have responsibility for staff. The roles could be expanded to further empower managers by devolving budget responsibilities and operational decision making. This would have the added benefit of enhancing the resilience of the council regarding the Town Clerk's role. The introduction of a Scheme of Delegation will help. Clarity of delegations are necessary for the effective day to day running of the Council, with defined delegations for Committees, Proper Officer, and Senior Managers. Managers are keen to develop their skills in new areas and time should be taken to look at individual learning styles and how training can be provided to them. The production of videos, process maps and other visual aids could all be considered.

Staff are willing to be involved in cross service working, particularly in supporting the delivery of events. Discussions need to take place on how this can be facilitated either through paid overtime or how time off in lieu can be managed.

There has been some recent staff turnover and newly appointed staff feel supported in their role and are positive about their work. KTC has also appointed an Apprentice Town Ranger who started in July 2025.

Recommendation 4

Continue the dialogue with Cheshire East Council regarding service standards and future joint working

The CPC identified that as a result of financial issues with Cheshire East Council, there are difficulties around service standards and the possibility of services being reduced. It was suggested that the Town Council at both political and officer level should seek to engage constructively with Cheshire East Council to look at potential solutions. Since the original CPC the financial position at Cheshire East remains challenging, which has limited progress in changes to service delivery and

devolvment of services and assets. There has however been a positive meeting with the Leader and Deputy Leader at CEC and they seem agreeable to working with parish and town councils.

Recommendation 5

Develop an Asset Management Strategy for the council and each individual asset to ensure the council's assets are managed and maintained

Work to develop an Asset Management Strategy has begun but has been delayed due to planned staff absence. KTC needs to recognise that for each asset there will be costs involved in on-going maintenance. It will be helpful for Councillors to have some involvement in the development of the strategy as it progresses.

Recommendation 6

Support the creation of the Business Improvement District (BID) which complements the town centre management function

Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside has been appointed to lead the work and a BID steering group has been set up. A 5-year business plan has been developed which covers 3 themes;

- Destination Knutsford – making Knutsford the place people want to visit, explore and enjoy.
- Experience Knutsford - Creating a cleaner, safer and more enjoyable town centre for everyone.
- Connected Knutsford - A thriving Knutsford depends on strong, supported businesses and the BID will give businesses a stronger voice.

The BID postal ballot for all eligible businesses takes place from the end of October until 27th November.

The Town Council's involvement in the BID preparations has been seen as supportive by businesses in Knutsford. The Town Council should create a partnership working relationship with the BID so that joint and enhanced services can be delivered.

Recommendation 7

Revisit internal and external communications and develop a Communication Strategy

The Communication Strategy is still in development. A review of communications (both internal and external) has been completed and will feed into the strategy. However, communications have already improved both internally and externally. Staff and councillors held the 'Week in Brief' e-mail in high regard in informing them what is happening in the council. Public Notice Boards are also updated regularly and a monthly newsletter is produced for residents.

The publication of the annual events listing and Christmas brochure have been combined and will be issued to businesses and at upcoming events.

Recommendation 8 Develop a strategic approach to procurement to ensure that all purchases are fit for purpose and replaced in a timely manner

A procurement strategy is still in development but is progressing. A 'fit for purpose' review of existing equipment has taken place in the Town Council offices but this is still outstanding for operational services. There continues to be concerns around fitness for purpose of equipment impacting service delivery and a lack of acknowledgement that costs have risen and commercial machinery can be expensive. Existing plant and machinery budgets may need to be reviewed because of this.

Recommendation 9

Review Health and Safety throughout the council

Peninsula HR carried out a Health and Safety review of the council offices on 5th September 2025. A small number of health and safety issues were identified as needing immediate and urgent attention. 36 issues were identified as needing further action to improve safety management. The council needs to ensure there is

compliance and that there is budget provision to ensure actions highlighted are addressed.

In light of the review for the council offices it would be advisable to carry out health and safety inspections for the external operations of the council e.g. Cemetery and Town Ranger services.

Other Areas Identified in Knutsford Town Council CPC Action Plan

Accommodation

Following the CPC, the council has identified the need to improve the working environment for staff, councillors and visitors. The roof has been prioritised and needs urgent attention. Funding for this has been agreed. Further work needs to be carried out to look at how the building can be reconfigured and the council are looking at the costs involved in seeking professional guidance on this. A working group has been set up to look at the Town Council's office accommodation.

Town Centre including Market Hall and 60 King Street

The renovation of the Market Hall has been completed with the second phase of work undertaken in September which involved work on the roof. The building now has solar panels. The space is also available for evening events which will in time, produce an income stream for the council. The Peer Challenge Team visited the Market Hall as part of the CPC and as part of this Progress Review. The improvements were clearly visible, and the peer team were impressed by the renovations.

The future of the iconic 60 King Street is still unresolved. The council is waiting for a final submission from Bruntwood on their proposal to support improvements to the building. It is expected that a decision will be made in November 2025.

Councillor Visibility

The CPC identified a need for councillors to be more visible and pro-active to demonstrate their place leadership role noting that this will require support to build

confidence. There is a responsibility to residents for councillors to engage with them through a variety of channels including attendance at events or joint surgeries with other partners. ([What parish and town councils and councillors do](#)) However, whilst there is a small group of councillors who actively engage with the communities in Knutsford, the overall capacity of councillors to support this type of interaction is limited. The peer team advise the council to continue to work collaboratively and creatively to explore mechanisms to free up time for this type of engagement and give confidence to councillors in their place leadership role.

The council does have a plethora of committees and working groups and may wish to consider a rationalisation of meetings in their widest sense to release capacity.

Project Management

The council has invested in some project management training for the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and Corporate Support Manager.

There is still a need to invest in professional project management for major projects which is beyond the skill set of the operational teams and managers. Investment in this will prevent delays, revisiting work and resulting in sustainable development.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA and NALC would like to thank Knutsford Town Council for undertaking a CPC Progress Review.

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

The National Association of Local Councils is well placed to discuss any further support that you may require building on this progress review. Please email: anders.hanson@nalc.gov.uk