Corporate Peer Challenge
London Borough of Brent

19th to 22nd January 2016

Feedback Report
1. Executive Summary

There is a great deal for Brent to be proud of, both as a council and as a place. The borough is one of the most culturally diverse in the UK and very welcoming of different cultures. There is significant physical regeneration taking place, with the council seen as being integral to this, and people spoke of ‘Brent being open for business’ and ‘Brent going places’. The new Civic Centre is seen as one of the regeneration catalysts and also marks the key moment in the council’s recent change and transformation agenda. The financial challenges that the authority has faced to date have been successfully met and the council is in a sound financial position. It has plans to address the financial challenges of the next few years but the challenges remain significant and nobody can afford to become complacent.

So much of what we have heard about Brent is good. The challenge now is taking things to the next level – a question of how effectively the council can capitalise on the opportunities that exist and just how good Brent can become.

A theme emerged for us through the peer challenge of the council needing to be clear about why it is doing something. Integral to this is having a focus on outcomes and impact. The Borough Plan reflects the ambitious nature of Brent but it is widely recognised that there needs to be a clearer focus on a more refined set of priorities. The council has recently instigated the process by which this will happen – culminating in the creation of a ‘Brent 2020 Vision’. The core building blocks that the council needs to underpin the delivery of the Vision are also being looked at to ensure they are fully geared up. The establishment of a corporate narrative for the council, under the umbrella of Brent 2020 Vision, is already being considered. This would enable people within the organisation to tell a consistent and positive story about the council and the borough.

The role being played by both the Leader and Chief Executive, and the approach they are demonstrating, is very much welcomed. They are well engaged with staff and partners, they are visible and they are viewed as approachable and open. There is, though, a challenge of resilience and sustainability when so much rests with two individuals.

There are strong operational and bi-lateral relationships within the council and there are also strong relationships between individuals within the council and individual partner organisations and between the council and partners at the operational level. The challenge and opportunity is moving all of these relationships on to a ‘Team Brent’ footing – to create stronger strategic leadership of the council and the borough. Within the council, this entails ensuring a focus on both individual and collective responsibility – establishing a sense of real shared ownership and absolute clarity around respective roles and responsibilities. With partners, the opportunity is around enhancing relationships at the strategic level.

The council is clearly ambitious and keen to progress further. Integral to achieving this is ensuring there is a culture of constructive challenge and feedback, centred upon having a focus on both individual and collective responsibility. The council needs to ensure that all of the mechanisms available to it are used effectively to deliver challenge constructively within the organisation. Many of the people we met spoke of an organisational culture that
is improving but indicated that there are still undercurrents around the way challenge is delivered and the ‘tone’ of relationships. Some of the behaviour and conduct, across all political parties, at recent Full Council meetings cannot be considered to have represented constructive challenge and has done nothing to enhance anybody’s reputation.

Establishing the Brent 2020 Vision provides the opportunity to consider issues facing the borough more ‘in the round’ – looking at how the greatest possible impact and outcomes can be achieved around the biggest challenges facing the borough. Moving the council to a position where it takes this more joined-up approach provides the opportunity to transform lives and fundamentally change the fiscal base of the council. Being able to consider the cumulative impact of proposals and initiatives will enable the council to better position itself to make the best use of resources, capitalise upon opportunities and minimise the risk of ‘unintended consequences’.

2. Taking it forward

The following are thoughts that the peer team provided at the end of their feedback presentation regarding the key aspects of the team’s findings that we suggest would deliver the greatest benefit if the council were to focus on taking them forward:

- Brent 2020 Vision
- Effective leadership for Team Brent
- The tone of every interaction – taking collective responsibility
- Enhancing capacity
- Developing the corporate narrative

The detail of these is contained within the main body of the report.

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 in Brent were:

- Carolyn Wilkins, Chief Executive, Oldham MBC
- Councillor Lib Peck, Leader, LB Lambeth
- Councillor Sean Anstee, Leader, Trafford MBC
- Councillor Unmesh Desai, Cabinet Member for Crime and Antisocial Behaviour, LB Newham
- Gifty Edila, Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, LB Hackney
- Virginia Ponton, Adviser (Leadership and Localism), LGA (shadowing role)
- Chris Bowron, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association
Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all corporate peer challenges. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils’ performance and improvement:

- **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?

- **Leadership of place**: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

- **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?

- **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?

- **Capacity to deliver**: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

As part of this, the council asked the peer team to consider the following questions:

- Whether it has the right degree of focus on priorities, given the scale of challenges facing local government in general and the borough in particular

- Whether there are any areas in which it can strengthen the effectiveness of its working with key stakeholders

- The extent to which the council’s leadership provides appropriate and constructive challenge and oversight, in the context of the council’s commitment to transparency and concern to demonstrate probity

- Whether the council has, or is developing, the necessary capability to fulfil its role and ambition for 2020 and beyond

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils’ needs. They are
designed to complement and add value to a council’s own performance and improvement focus. 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 onsite in Brent.

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. In presenting the feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and elected 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 the council is already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1 ‘Breakthrough Brent’

There is a great deal for Brent to be proud of, both as a council and as a place. The borough is one of the most culturally diverse in the UK. People from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds make up 64 per cent of the total population, whilst only six per cent of children in schools in Brent are from white British backgrounds. The council is proud of the borough’s ability to welcome different cultures, the diversity that has resulted and the cohesion between its different communities. The authority is strongly committed to having a workforce that is reflective of the population that it serves. There is tremendous diversity across much of the workforce and a desire to increase the diversity at the senior management level.

When asked about what they are proud of about Brent virtually everybody we met, in addition to highlighting the level of diversity, also spoke about the physical regeneration that is taking place in the borough. We saw first-hand what has been delivered in Wembley and South Kilburn, which represent just two of the areas of growth and investment. The council is seen as having been integral to the regeneration and people spoke of ‘Brent being open for business’ and ‘Brent going places’. The new Civic Centre is seen as one of the catalysts for the Wembley regeneration and delivered benefits for the community, in the form of a customer service hub, library and performance space amongst other things, as well as the council itself.

The move to the Civic Centre marks the key moment in the council’s recent change and transformation agenda. Bringing together a large number of people who were previously spread across a number of sites has helped cross-organisational working and improved efficiency. The investment that has been made in technology to complement the move to the Civic Centre has enabled working practices to be transformed – with council staff seeing the opportunities they have now to work more flexibly delivering benefits both for the organisation and their work/life balance. The council is also very proud of the environmentally-friendly aspects of the building. People within the organisation demonstrate a positive attitude to change. Change to date, involving a reduction of around...
20 per cent in the number of full-time employees (FTE) since 2010, as well as the move to the Civic Centre, has been successfully delivered. People have been resilient and morale is largely good.

The council is willing to invest in its staff and elected members and help them grow and develop. There is an extensive elected member development programme in place, with some mandatory elements within it, and the induction programme put in place at the last election, when there was around a 50 per cent turnover in councillors, is felt to have been successful. The council has recently retained its Investors In People (IIP) Silver accreditation. There are a number of leadership and management development initiatives in place, including the ‘Aspire’ programme aimed at developing the next generation of senior managers within the organisation.

The financial challenges that the authority has faced to date have been successfully met. This has seen around £100m being saved in the last five years. The council is in a sound financial position, with healthy reserves and a strong balance sheet. There are also opportunities presented by the council’s position in relation to its capital funding. That said, the challenges are still significant, with £23.5m to be saved in 2016/17 and an amount of up to £55m to be saved in the two years that follow that. The council is well advanced with its savings plans for the next two years but nobody can afford to become complacent and it is important that everyone understands that some cuts will reduce service levels.

Thus, so much of what we have heard about Brent is good. The challenge now is taking things to the next level – hence us coining the concept ‘Breakthrough Brent’. Brent, as a place and a council, is not somewhere that needs to be ‘fixed’ and there is no sense of a managed decline being the order of the day. Rather, it is a case of how effectively the council can capitalise on the opportunities that exist and just how good Brent can become.

4.2 Clarity of purpose

A theme has emerged for us through the peer challenge of the council needing to be clear about why it is doing something. Integral to this is having a focus on outcomes and impact. As an example, the time and effort committed by the council and partners to some overarching/strategic partnership meetings, such as ‘Partners for Brent’ (the Local Strategic Partnership), is significant. However, the value emerging from doing so is seen to be limited. Thus the clarity of focus issue relates to engaging in ‘purposeful partnerships’ at this level rather than ‘partnership meetings’. Another example relates to the regeneration that is taking place in Brent. Whilst everybody we spoke to on the subject is proud of what has been delivered, many also highlighted what they saw as an emphasis having been placed on physical regeneration. There is a recognised need to ensure that social and environmental regeneration has a similar level of focus going forward in order to secure the most positive possible impact for local communities.

Continuing on the theme of clarity of purpose, Brent needs to be clear about its place in, and contribution to, the wider geography of West London, the capital as a whole and the UK. Brent forms part of the West London Alliance of local authorities but seems to struggle to articulate precisely what it is seeking to secure from operating at this level. Whilst it is home to the national stadium and, in the form of the Old Oak Common and Royal Park regeneration area, has arguably one of the most important regeneration areas
in the country over the next 20 to 30 years in terms of homes and jobs, it is also not overtly clear how Brent is looking to position itself within either a London or national context.

The Borough Plan, which covers the period from 2015 to 2019, reflects the ambitious nature of Brent. However, it is widely recognised that the scale of the challenges facing local government and the public sector in general, and the borough in particular, necessitates a clearer focus on a more refined set of priorities that will deliver the greatest possible impact. The council needs to ensure that its purpose is clear when it comes to the refinement of those priorities, including the extent to which it decides to act as a deliverer of services, relative to fulfilling a role of creating and shaping the place.

The council has instigated the process by which the priorities will be refined, which will culminate in the creation of a ‘Brent 2020 Vision’. This is a very recent concept and is acknowledged as ‘a work in progress’ but there are a lot of expectations that have been generated around it because of the recognised need to narrow the focus whilst at the same time plan to achieve the greatest impact. There is a positive view of the concept, which includes undertaking three ‘Outcome Based Reviews’ looking at:

- Employment support and welfare reform
- Housing vulnerable people
- Regeneration (physical, social and environmental)

Three Boards are also being set up to drive forward the council’s approach to shared services and income generation (Civic Enterprise Board), commissioning and procurement (Commissioning and Procurement Board) and the business sector and business growth and development (Business Development Board). The core building blocks that the council needs to underpin the delivery of the Vision are also being looked at to ensure they are fully geared up. These include devising a resource prioritisation plan, a performance management framework that is integrated with finance and resource information and a Medium Term Financial Strategy covering the next five years. There is also preliminary work taking place on a workforce plan. All of this is very positive.

In taking all of this activity forward, we see benefit in the council being clearer about the Brent 2020 Vision process, including the timescale, the role of managers in the organisation below Strategic Director level and the roles of partner organisations. Our understanding is that it is intended that the Vision will be established in around six months’ time but there did not seem to be absolute clarity on this. Devising the Brent 2020 Vision must be a collective endeavour. It cannot simply ‘emerge’ from within the senior echelons of the council and it is therefore encouraging that the council’s leadership are committed to ensuring wider ownership.

4.3 ‘Team Brent’

The role being played by both the Leader and Chief Executive, and the approach they are demonstrating, is very much welcomed by virtually everybody we have spoken to. They are well engaged with staff and partners, they are visible and they are viewed as
approachable and open. There is, though, a challenge of resilience and sustainability when so much rests with two individuals.

There are strong operational and bi-lateral relationships within the council, for example between different services ‘on the ground’ or between a Portfolio Holder and a Strategic Director. There are also strong relationships between individuals within the council, such as Strategic Directors, and individual partner organisations and between the council and partners at the operational level. The ‘breakthrough’ opportunity that we see is moving all of these relationships on to a ‘Team Brent’ footing.

Within the council, this entails ensuring a focus on both individual and collective responsibility, moving at Cabinet and Corporate Management Team level from a ‘team of strategic leaders’ to a ‘strategic leadership team’ to address the challenges facing the council and the borough in a joined-up and cross-cutting way – establishing a sense of real shared ownership of the issues and absolute clarity around respective roles and responsibilities in securing the outcomes and impacts being sought.

With partners, under the umbrella of ‘Partners for Brent’, the ‘Team Brent’ opportunity is around enhancing relationships at the strategic level, in order to complement the good operational relationships that exist and the good relationships between individuals within the council and individual partner organisations, and also ensuring partners are holding each other to account in a constructive way. There is an obvious link here to the theme earlier in this report of ensuring ‘purposeful partnerships’. The objective of the ‘Team Brent’ concept is, to put it simply, creating stronger strategic leadership of the council and the borough.

Given the scale of the ambition in Brent and the constraint on resources, the authority needs to ensure it is fully utilising all of the resources to which it already has access. At present, it feels as though there are some ‘untapped resources’. One example is the acknowledged opportunity for the council, with its healthy reserves and strong balance sheet, to use these more creatively to maximise the opportunities presented by Brent’s growing economy and at the same time make a positive impact on the housing challenge and change the fiscal base of the authority. Linked to this, the council’s move to establish a Civic Enterprise Board and, through this, devise a broader investment strategy, reflects the recognition of a lack of a strategic approach to both capital and revenue investment to date.

As another example, the focus groups that we undertook with Heads of Service and people at a team leader level led us to conclude that there is significant potential within these cohorts that the council can develop – something that the creation of the ‘Aspire’ management development programme for future senior managers demonstrates the authority is responding. Another example is the opportunity that exists for the capacity offered by the wider elected membership of the council to be more fully capitalised upon. Whilst there are issues around the way Overview and Scrutiny functions, which we will come on to talk about later in this report, the work they have undertaken looking at CCTV and ‘fly-tipping’ within the borough has clearly been valued – as reflected by the way their findings and recommendations have been received and adopted by Cabinet.
The establishment of a corporate narrative for the council, under the umbrella of Brent 2020 Vision, is already being considered. We see a real benefit in the creation of this in that it would enable people within the organisation to tell a consistent and positive story about the council and the borough. Doing so currently is a challenge for many, linked to the ‘clarity of purpose’ and ‘Team Brent’ challenges outlined above. At present, too many of the stories that people within the council tell others (including ourselves) are negative and often based a long way in the past. People need to let go of such stories. Establishing a corporate narrative would enable people within the council, who are its representatives, to act as real ambassadors for both the council and the borough.

### 4.4 Developing a culture of constructive challenge and feedback

The council is clearly ambitious and keen to progress further. Integral to achieving this is ensuring there is a culture of constructive challenge and feedback, centred upon having a focus on both individual and collective responsibility. Many of the people we met spoke of an organisational culture that is improving but indicated that there are still undercurrents around the way challenge is delivered and the ‘tone’ of relationships. This has been recognised and, as an example, some people who are invited from time to time to attend Corporate Management Team commented positively on how they now feel more comfortable attending and presenting.

As another example, officers at all levels of the organisation saw elected members bringing forward large amounts of casework for people in their wards, which is seen as a reflection of their level of commitment and engagement, but at the same time demonstrating variability in councillors’ levels of understanding, approach and appreciation of respective roles and responsibilities. Overview and Scrutiny represents another example. The good work that has been done regarding CCTV and ‘fly-tipping’ contrasts with the extremely negative experience that some people have had when presenting at meetings. There is a fundamental difference between being ‘assertive’ and being ‘aggressive’, between being ‘challenging’ and being ‘rude’ and between providing ‘critique’ and ‘criticism’. As already touched upon, Overview and Scrutiny has demonstrated it can play a constructive challenge role but must do so on a much more consistent basis. Integral to this is a need for all elected members on the Committee to demonstrate an approach that is open-minded and positive rather than one that assumes people shouldn’t be trusted and seeks to ‘catch people out’.

The council needs to ensure that all of the mechanisms available to it are used effectively to deliver challenge constructively within the organisation. This includes the wider elected membership within the Administration, although this relates not just to providing constructive challenge but also to ensuring that the capacity offered by more than fifty people is fully utilised in contributing to the achievement of the Administration’s ambitions and enhancing the reputation of the council. The Opposition clearly have a role to play in providing appropriate challenge and, in so doing, looking to enhance their own standing and reputation.

Some of the behaviour and conduct, across all political parties, at recent Full Council meetings cannot be considered to have represented constructive challenge and has done nothing to enhance anybody’s reputation. The Audit Committee is thought to be able to provide greater challenge than it currently does and should not be used politically.
In setting its ambitions and challenging itself, we would encourage the council to extend what it has been doing around starting to look externally more and benchmark itself more widely. People have welcomed the Chief Executive bringing an approach that both demonstrates a direct knowledge of what ‘good’ looks like in wider local government and encourages others to seek it out. When we were talking with people in the council about benchmarking, or observing meetings where comparisons with other authorities or places were being made, there was a very ‘London-centric’ feel to things. This is not unique to Brent and is a completely logical thing to do. What we would encourage, though, is more benchmarking generally and an extension of people’s horizons when doing so in an attempt to ‘raise the bar’ by comparing with, and learning from, ‘the best in class’.

4.5 Cumulative impacts

Establishing the Brent 2020 Vision provides the opportunity to consider issues facing the borough more ‘in the round’. The council’s recognition of this is reflected in the commissioning of the three Outcome Based Reviews, where the focus will be on how the greatest possible impact and outcomes can be achieved around the biggest challenges facing the borough.

People spoke of very positive activity by the council across many spheres but that there is a risk of them sometimes being too narrow. We have already cited the example of the recognised need to ensure physical regeneration is complemented with social and environmental regeneration. Another example, which again is already recognised, is the opportunity to link together performance and finance reporting. A further example is the opportunity to place at the heart of the work on the investment strategy thinking around how the council’s own resources can be utilised to both help address the housing challenges in the borough and assist the authority’s revenue position. Moving the council to a position where it takes this more joined-up approach provides the opportunity to transform lives and fundamentally change the fiscal base of the council.

Being able to consider the cumulative impact of proposals and initiatives will enable the council to better position itself to make the best use of resources, capitalise upon opportunities and minimise the risk of ‘unintended consequences’. This applies to the social and economic challenges facing the borough, which we have already touched upon at various points in this report and which the council fully recognises. It also applies to the council’s approach to change and addressing the financial challenge. As an example, with the number of staff employed by the council having reduced significantly, and much of this having been concentrated in the corporate support provided to the organisation, the entirely logical concept of ‘self-serve’ for managers was put in place for the likes of HR and finance issues. The anecdotal feedback we have received, and we encourage the council to look at the matter further to identify if there really is an issue, is that what is happening now is that a good proportion of the time of managers is being taken up doing simple administrative tasks such as setting up purchase orders. If this is the case then the unintended consequences of the changes mean the council isn’t always making the best use of its resources.

As another example, the council’s approach to budget savings to date has been departmentally-focused, with each service or function being required to come up with options from within their own area against certain percentage levels of savings. This is
common to many councils but is not sustainable with the financial challenges ahead. Whilst there has been an element of prioritisation around this, reflected in the focus on minimising the impact on frontline services, the opportunity hasn’t fully been taken to look at savings on a ‘cross-cutting’ or thematic basis and apply real prioritisation reflecting the Administration’s political ambitions.

4.6 From strategy to implementation

The devising of effective strategy – with the Brent 2020 Vision central to this – is integral to enabling the key ‘breakthroughs’ for Brent that we have highlighted. In planning the Brent 2020 Vision, it is important that this is done on ambitious yet realistic timescales. The six months timescale that has been mooted would fit with this.

Translating agreed strategy into reality through effective implementation, with the rigour, effective resourcing and clear accountability that this entails, is then required. The ‘whole system’ of the council needs to be geared to enabling this. At present, a review of the council’s Constitution is taking place, looking at, amongst other things, the role and functioning of Full Council and Overview and Scrutiny and the effectiveness of the Scheme of Delegation. The thinking behind the review of the Scheme of Delegation is to try and reduce the level of bureaucracy within the organisation and the risk of ‘bottlenecks’ at the senior-most levels of the organisation. We noted, for example, the extensive agendas for Cabinet meetings and the proportion of items that involved matters which probably wouldn’t feature on equivalent agendas in many other similar councils where there are greater delegations to Lead Members and senior managers.

The issues we highlighted earlier regarding undercurrents around the way challenge is delivered and the ‘tone’ of relationships, despite an improving organisational culture, and some of the behaviour witnessed at recent Full Council meetings, suggests the need for the Code of Conduct, ‘rules of engagement’ within the organisation and the understanding of, and adherence to, respective roles and responsibilities to be reinforced. Linked to this, the level of political astuteness amongst officers of the council needs to be enhanced. The level of ‘political nous’ generally within the organisation was less than would be the norm in many similar authorities and this needs to be addressed. Effective officer/member relationships are vital in being able to translate political ambitions into successfully delivered outcomes.

The council’s workforce planning activity needs to continue to move forward and really gain some momentum. This should be assisted by the work on it now being done in tandem with the development of the Brent 2020 Vision. The way the council thinks about and utilises its capital and assets, including to generate revenue streams, is now progressing and will aid delivery of the council’s ambitions. As an example within this, the council recognises that it needs to do better to make sure that it achieves the highest possible standards in relation to the public realm and is now looking at how best to balance between revenue and capital investment when it comes to highways, pavements and other infrastructure. As another example, discussion of ‘invest to save’ initiatives has started to take place in the council in recent months in a way that it seemingly wasn’t before.

Finally on this theme of translating strategy into implementation effectively, as we highlighted earlier the council is well advanced with its savings plans for the next two years.
and there is a lot of confidence around the council’s financial position. However, nobody can afford to become complacent, with the challenge still existing of translating the plans into a reality.

**Following on from the peer challenge**

Through the peer challenge process we have sought to highlight the positive aspects of the council and the area but we have also outlined some difficult challenges and potential ways to address them. It has been our aim to provide some detail on them through this report in order to help the council understand and consider them. The council’s senior political and managerial leadership will therefore undoubtedly want to reflect further on the findings before determining how they wish to take things forward.

Members of the team would be happy to contribute to any further improvement support in the future and/or to return to the authority in due course to undertake a short progress review. Heather Wills, as the Local Government Association’s Principal Adviser for the region within which the council sits, will continue to act as the main contact between the council and the Local Government Association, particularly in relation to improvement and access to the LGA’s resources and packages of support going forward.

All of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish Brent, both as a council and a place, every success in the future.

Chris Bowron  
Programme Manager – Peer Support  
Local Government Association
Annex – Contents of the feedback presentation delivered to the council on Friday 22nd January 2016

‘Breakthrough Brent’

- There is a great deal for Brent to be proud of – both as a council and as a place
- The diversity of the borough and the council and the physical regeneration that is taking place have been widely highlighted
- People within the organisation demonstrate a positive attitude to change – change to date has been successfully delivered, people have been resilient and morale is good
- The new Civic Centre has delivered benefits for the community and the organisation
- The council is willing to invest in its staff and elected members and help them grow and develop
- The financial challenges to date have been met successfully
- The council is in a sound financial position – although the challenges are still significant
- So much of what we have heard about Brent is good
- The challenge now is taking things to the next level – ‘Breakthrough Brent’

Clarity of purpose

- The Borough Plan reflects the ambitious nature of Brent
- A theme has emerged for us around the council needing to be clear about why it is doing something – a focus on outcomes and impact:
  - ‘Purposeful partnerships’ relative to partnership meetings
  - Social and environmental regeneration to complement the physical

- Brent needs to be clear about its place in, and contribution to, the wider geography of West London, the capital as a whole and the UK
- The council needs to ensure its purpose is clear – the extent to which it acts as a deliverer of services relative to fulfilling a role of creating and shaping the place
- Brent 2020 Vision is a very recent concept and ‘a work in progress’ – there are a lot of expectations around it
- There is a positive view of the concept – the Vision, the Outcome Based Reviews and the core building blocks needed to underpin it
- There would be benefit in being clearer about the process and timescales for developing the Brent 2020 Vision – crucially, ensuring it is a collective endeavour

‘Team Brent’

- The role being played by both the Leader and Chief Executive, and the approach they are demonstrating, is very much welcomed by people we have spoken to – challenge of resilience and sustainability
- There are strong operational and bi-lateral relationships within the council and between the council and partner organisations
• The ‘breakthrough’ opportunity is moving these relationships on to a ‘Team Brent’ footing:
  • Within the council – a focus on both individual and collective responsibility
  • With partners – enhancing strategic relationships, ensuring ‘purposeful partnerships’

• Through this, creating stronger strategic leadership of the council and the borough
• Given the scale of the ambition in Brent and the constraint on resources, the authority needs to ensure it is fully utilising all of the resources it has access to – ‘untapped resources’
• Establishing a corporate narrative, under the umbrella of Brent 2020 Vision, will help people tell a positive story of the council and the borough – council representatives as ambassadors

Developing a culture of constructive challenge and feedback

• The council is ambitious and keen to progress further – a culture of constructive challenge and feedback is integral to achieving this
• People spoke of an organisational culture that is improving but that there are still undercurrents around the way challenge is delivered and the ‘tone’ of relationships
• It is important to have a focus on individual and collective responsibility
• The council needs to ensure that all of the mechanisms available to it are used effectively to deliver challenge constructively within the organisation – Opposition, Overview and Scrutiny, Audit Committee
• In setting its ambitions and challenging itself, we would encourage the council to extend what it has been doing around seeking to look externally more and benchmark itself against ‘the best in class’

Cumulative impacts

• Establishing the Brent 2020 Vision provides the opportunity to consider issues facing the borough more ‘in the round’ – impact and outcomes
• People spoke of very positive activity by the council across many spheres but that there is a risk of them sometimes being too narrow – the opportunity to transform lives and fundamentally change the fiscal base of the council
• Being able to consider the cumulative impact of proposals and initiatives will enable the council to better position itself to make the best use of resources, capitalise upon opportunities and minimise the risk of ‘unintended consequences’
• This applies both to the social and economic challenges facing the borough and the council’s approach to change and the financial challenge

From strategy to implementation

• The devising of effective strategy – with the Brent 2020 Vision central to this – is integral to enabling the key ‘breakthroughs’ we have highlighted
• This needs to be done on ambitious yet realistic timescales
• Translating agreed strategy into reality through effective implementation – rigour, effective resourcing, clear accountability – is then required
• The ‘whole system’ of the council needs to be geared to enabling this:
  • Constitution, Scheme of Delegation, Code of Conduct and ‘rules of engagement’
  • Political astuteness of the organisation
  • Understanding of, and adherence to, respective roles and responsibilities
  • Workforce planning
  • The way capital and assets are utilised – revenue streams, invest to save

• The council has done well in its planning of its finances for the next two years – the challenge is successfully implementing those plans