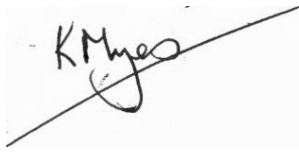


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All Wards
REPORT TITLE Insight, Learning and Impact Report – Corporate Services Directorate - Quarter 4/End of Year 2025-26	
REPORT OF Executive Director, Corporate Services	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee	DATE 2 July 2026
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report focusses on the performance over the year 2025-26 for each division across the Corporate Services Directorate. In this report, Council Directors have been asked to provide a narrative covering key areas of challenge, opportunity, and learning. This report is divided into three main sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary table which highlights key responses from individual services for the year 2025/26 across each of the Corporate Services Directorate. • A more detailed narrative of those service responses • Appendix A contains the data dashboard. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report. Contact Officer: James Coumbe – Insight, Learning and Impact Lead London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG Email: james.coumbe@camden.gov.uk Tel: 020 7974 5965	
RECOMMENDATION: The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report, including the most recent data and trends and the emerging challenges identified.	

SIGNED

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Myers', is written over a horizontal line.

Kate Myers, Executive Director, Corporate Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Insight, Learning and Impact (ILI) Q4/End of Year report covers the period between April 2025 – March 2026.
- 1.2 The ILI report is submitted to all scrutiny committees twice a year (mid-year at Q2 and end of year at Q4). The report will go to all the scrutiny committees but they will no longer receive the full report, instead just the extract from the report relating to the committee's remit.
- 1.3 The ILI report includes both service narratives and the data dashboard. The service narratives (in the body of this report) provide an overview of the key issues identified by officers for each service. The data dashboard (Appendix A) gives Scrutiny Committees the opportunity to view service performance data collected across the year and compared to previous years.
- 1.4 To produce the service narrative, all Camden Council Directors were asked to provide a narrative covering key areas of challenge, opportunity, and learning, looking back over 2025/26 on the following points:
 - What were the biggest challenges to your service delivery i.e. what challenges are going to require the organisation's attention and focus
 - What are the biggest opportunities i.e. where could you most benefit from support to deliver improvement?
 - What have your services learned and what do you need to learn in the future e.g. from data or evaluation, regional or national research.
- 1.5 The main report begins with a tabled summary of service issues for 2025/26 in responses to the three key questions above. That is followed by a more detailed narrative of those individual service responses.
- 1.6 The Corporate Data Dashboard is at Appendix A which provides the latest performance data and previous years for the key measures from the services, and which accompanies this report.

2. OVERVIEW OF KEY THEMES

2.1 Corporate Services response summary

	Challenges	Opportunities	Learning
Finance and Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council is currently developing its medium-term financial forecast to inform the next Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Need to make significant savings via the next MTFS 2025/26 Overspend of £14.4m General Fund and £3.8m Housing Revenue Account (HRA) will further damage the Council's financial resilience Inflationary pressures Ongoing Chalcots costs Pressures across social care and homelessness services due to demographic and complex case demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The multi-year settlement allows for more certainty in our financial planning Lobbying of government to address concerns of the outcome of the fair funding review and to lobby for funding solutions to issues with homelessness and social care costs. Development of a new MTFS is an opportunity to realign resources to priorities. Divisions have produced initial 'long lists' of opportunities for budget changes. Planning to move to a monthly risk report to highlight financial risks and provide greater oversight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep dive into services to understand cost drivers and challenges in individual services. Cross-London collaboration for financial challenges and forecasting of future funding. Working across services and with other boroughs to identify savings opportunities.
People and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of Chief Officer recruitments underway including the Executive Director of Corporate Services, Director of Economy Regeneration and Investment and Director of Development. We are working hard to minimise any disruption from industrial action in a number of Camden schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch of the final stages of our revised pay approach All payroll requests and queries from staff will now be made using an online service portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in agency spend, now below our target of both 10% spend and headcount The Peer Review also gave us some really excellent learning on the Camden Model of Leadership.

	Challenges	Opportunities	Learning
Customers, Technology, Data Services (CTDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber and information security threat landscape following high-profile breaches affecting other London councils • Delivering an unusually demanding portfolio at pace alongside business-as-usual • Operational resilience under live conditions, including a Contact Camden telephony incident that became a real-world test of our disaster recovery arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data - Master Data Management (MDM) is now live and is enabling improved data quality, more accurate addresses, and faster eligibility checks • Citizen Experience - retrieve rent balances through Interactive Voice Response (IVR), • Apply a model—combining data, citizen experience, and disciplined onboarding—across the Housing and Property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our operating model works under pressure e.g. when heating and hot water were lost on the Brunswick Estate • Sustained focus and partnership outperform short bursts of activity • Investing in data as a core capability is starting to pay back visibly e.g. the British Data Awards shortlisting
Law and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To hold a successful Local Government Election in May • Overall complaint volumes have continued to increase significantly. • Facing several new legislative changes • September 2025 High Court case of <i>Mazur v Charles Russell Speechlys</i> continues to have wide-reaching ramifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal working with departments to force closer relations and to encourage early involvement in key council projects • Business support is working with Strategy, Design and Insight to explore opportunities to improve the Council's approach to responding to Complaints • Democratic Services is now rolling out Minute Artificial Intelligence (AI) software across the team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lessons learned report is being developed in Complaints • Legal Services provide opportunities for young local residents - apprentices, internships and work experience
Strategy, Design, and Insight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to sustained and high demand for support across multiple directorates • Balancing immediate organisational priorities with the need to protect longer-term strategic and system-shaping work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Peer Review gave insight to sharpen Camden's strategic grip, clarify priorities and strengthen the link between corporate ambition and delivery • Develop a clearer borough-wide approach to inclusive growth • Strengthen Camden's use of insight, outcomes and lived experience in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy service has greatest impact where support is engaged early, linked to a clear organisational priority and connected to delivery from the outset. • The importance of stronger corporate alignment between priorities, performance, scrutiny and financial planning

	Challenges	Opportunities	Learning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complexity of maintaining coherence across a broad corporate strategy portfolio. 	<p>shaping corporate direction e.g. The State of the Borough Report</p>	
Participation, Partnerships, and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community impact international and national events have had locally on Camden's diverse communities has made the work of our Safer and Stronger Together campaign and Interfaith Network even more important. Longstanding Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) property challenges continue to be a priority area of focus. Supporting the smooth running of the 2026 Local Elections and Member Development Programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We Make Camden Summit and partner inclusive economy business breakfast hosted by the Leader of the Council and the Prime Minister supported the We Make Camden partner movement to deliver impact for Camden residents. Communications research has been used to develop an evidence-based approach to our channel strategy. The Camden Advice Network (CAN) has supported over 59,000 residents with advice on welfare benefits and advice and our Cost of Living communications campaign has enabled us to reach deep within our communities to sign post support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large scale mass participation on the future of adult social care (Who Cares) and the Community Wealth Fund has enabled us to develop our approach to participatory decision making. Our Community Response Fund and area-based community partnerships have enabled VCS-led, place-based collaboration alongside elected members and community leaders. Successfully delivered Systems Thinking and leadership apprenticeships for VCS leaders.

3. CORPORATE SERVICES

3.1 Finance and Audit

3.1.1 Challenges

The government has recently concluded a consultation on Fair Funding 2 and issued the first multi-year financial settlement in ten years. The Council will see a 'flat cash' position for its core spending power over the next three years with reductions in grants being equal to the estimated ability of the Council to raise Council Tax each year. This will impact on the Council's next Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) budget gap and the level of savings the Council will need to deliver. The savings needed over the medium term will provide a challenge to the Council's financial resilience and will be the highest level of savings the Council has had to deliver via an MTFS.

The Council has set balanced budgets for 2026/27, this includes contingencies against known high risk areas such as temporary accommodation and Children's Social Care, the financial and operating context for the Council remains challenging.

The Council has a draft outturn position in 2025/26 of an overspend of £14.4m in the General Fund and £3.8m in The Housing Revenue Account. The overspend will require the Council to further use reserves to fund expenditure in year, which will mean fewer resources for the Council to deliver the aims of We Make Camden and also reduce the Council's ability to provide additional support to residents and businesses across the borough, by limiting any new investment in services. This structural pressure will need to be addressed during the Council's next Medium Term Financial Strategy along with all other known pressures and the impact of any new funding reforms.

The worsening financial position means that the Council will need to consider a range of actions to control expenditure including tighter control on recruitment and use of agency staff and monthly monitoring and reporting of high-risk areas with a monthly risk report to CMT highlighting the latest position for high budget pressures such as homelessness services and Children's Social Care. In addition, the Council will establish additional checks in the quarterly monitoring process to address overspends and any new financial pressures through delivering agreed action plans. The Council will need to match its resources to the needs of existing services and so it is vital that there is a clear picture of the level of expenditure expected in these services over the next year before the Council agrees its next Medium Term Finance Strategy.

One of the biggest immediate risks facing the financial position of the Council is the financial stability of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is reporting an overspend by £3.8m in 2025/26.

This overspend is being driven by high interest rates on debt and significant inflationary pressures on repair costs along with emergency action to tackle damp and mould. In January 2023 the Council agreed MTFs savings for the HRA but the ongoing inflationary pressures mean that the HRA will need to identify further savings or cost control measures over the medium term to protect its financial stability. The relatively low reserves held by the HRA mean that overspends are a challenge to its financial sustainability. The current MTFs is looking to address this by delivering cost savings and increasing the level of reserves held by the HRA.

In addition to the current inflationary pressures, the HRA has faced a number of challenges in recent years that have significantly impacted its financial resilience including the impact of the pandemic that saw no specific government support for the HRA, government legislation that resulted in reduced rents for four years and more recently capped rent increases below the rate of inflation. It has been estimated that the HRA has lost £168m of rental income since 2016 and rental income is £32m lower in 2024/25 compared with what it would have received if the policy had been kept consistent at Consumer Price Index (CPI) + 1%. This position has become more challenging with the government's decision to delay the reintroduction of rent convergence which would allow social landlords to increase rents towards a target rent and provide much needed additional resources.

The government have recently announced that there will be an opportunity to increase rents by an additional £1 per week from 2027 to help address some of the pressures across the HRA.

In addition, the Council has had to find capital funding for fire and building safety works most notably for the Chalcots estate. While the Council has received some funding from the government to address capital costs for the Chalcots and a financial settlement from the contractor, this does not fully cover all the costs associated with the Chalcots evacuation and subsequent capital expenditure required on the Chalcots estate.

The Council's financial position is extremely challenging with significant overspends last year and forecast overspend this year placing strain on the council's finances and reserves. This will impact the council's ability to invest in services and will require the council to take action across the General Fund and the HRA to address the overspends and support the Council's financial sustainability.

3.1.2 *Looking Forward*

The Council will need to update its medium-term financial forecast to take into account known pressures and risks over the medium term. The multi-year settlement has

given a level of certainty to the Council's resources but it will still need to work to develop a forecast of cost pressures across services over the medium term to forecast its expected budget gap.

In both the HRA and General Fund there is a continued challenge to forecast the medium-term financial position to ensure the Council can take action to address financial pressures. Increasing demographic and service demands across the Council as well as uncertainty regarding the wider economic situation are going to continue to drive cost pressures for the Council. The cost-of-living crisis will continue to impact residents and businesses in the borough and influence the level of support the Council will need to provide. Outside of social care and homelessness the Council is also seeing cost pressures across services driven by inflation on salary costs and in some contracts.

Once established the forecast medium term budget gap will inform the Council's next MTFS. Directors have produced initial 'long lists' of opportunities for savings to be considered as part of the next MTFS. This will form the basis of discussion and decisions over the coming months on the development of a new MTFS.

It is important that services continue to work to deliver services within budget and continue to identify emerging cost pressures as early as possible. Continuing financial pressures and budgetary overspends will significantly reduce the Council's ability to invest in new services to support the borough and to help support the delivery of the We Make Camden Missions.

3.1.3 Opportunities

The development of a new MTFS will be an opportunity for the Council to realign its services with available resources with a three-year settlement bringing more certainty to resource levels for the Council and allowing more certainty over the period of the new MTFS.

The Council needs to take action to bring overspends under control across the HRA and General Fund to support the Council's financial stability over the medium term. Directors need to continue to work with finance colleagues to understand and forecast medium term pressures facing their services including pressures caused by changes in demographics, national and local legislative and policy changes and inflationary pressures. Doing this and continuing to develop a deep understanding of the long-term financial pressures facing the Council will allow us to make sound decisions to invest in early intervention in the right services to control and avoid costs on future service delivery.

To support the understanding of the financial pressures facing the Council officers have established a number of Resource and Oversight Panels to review and discuss key financial pressures. This is being followed up with focused meetings with the Chief Executive, 151 Officer and each Executive Director each quarter to agree plans to address areas of overspend and pressure. This high level of scrutiny across service budgets will need to continue over the medium term to ensure the Council remains focused on working within budget and protecting its financial stability and resilience.

London boroughs are seeing significant cost pressures across services especially social care and homelessness. Developing a deep understanding of what is driving these costs in Camden will support the Council to make informed investment decisions in early intervention and prevention. The established approach to long term financial planning ongoing financial resilience and stability will allow the Council to continue to invest in support and early intervention across the borough, however overspending on existing services may limit the level of investment that the Council is able to make in future years.

The Council can continue to lobby to ask the government to address the long-term structural issues facing Council's for services such as homelessness and social care.

3.1.4 *Learning*

Officers have been working with peers cross London has help to identify common financial challenges across London boroughs, this will help to support lobbying efforts to government for a fair financial settlement for the Council and show the true level of funding required to deliver Council services. This work has included the sharing of forecasts and assumptions about future funding and cost pressures as a sense check to ensure the Council's financial planning assumptions are reasonable and broadly in line with the Council's peers. This work will continue over 2025 to support the development of the Council's medium-term forecast and the next Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Learning from across the local government sector and from key national indicators have helped officers develop a robust section 25 note for the budget setting report summarising the work the Council is carrying out to ensure it remains financial resilient. There is an opportunity to continue and expand this work to test the Council's medium term financial forecast assumptions and to learn from best practice across the sector.

Officers will also work to learn from the service overspends to ensure that the Council fully understands the cost drivers in services and is able where possible to address them to reduce costs and to ensure the Council has robust medium-term forecasts.

Developing a deep understanding of the cost drivers that services are facing represents an opportunity to drive efficiencies across the Council.

3.2 People and Inclusion

3.2.1 *Challenges*

The last quarter of the year has been extremely busy for People and Inclusion with a number of Chief Officer recruitments underway including the Executive Director of Corporate Services, Director of Economy Regeneration and Investment and Director of Development. We have also been recruiting for colleagues to work at the election, both on polling day and the count alongside planning for member induction.

An increasing challenge has been industrial action in a number of Camden schools. The Council is working hard to minimise any disruption associated with this.

3.2.2 *Opportunities*

This quarter saw the launch of the final stages of a revised pay approach. Camden has a long history of leading the way on fair pay and equality and we have a set of terms and conditions and pay arrangements. This is significantly different from the majority of other local government organisations that are often still tied to national pay, terms and conditions. The latest stage of these changes will help the Council respond to recruitment challenges as well as ensure their pay approach is fair and equitable.

In order to improve access to the Council's services, People and Payroll Operations have changed the way colleagues get support. All requests and queries are now made using an online service portal - the same system we use to log IT requests. This change will make it easier to get help when colleagues need it and will also improve the information and insight we hold, helping us make further improvements

3.2.3 *Learning*

Over the last year we have successfully supported the organisation in its efforts to reduce agency spend across the board. This has resulted in £8million projected full year spend with a 21% reduction in agency usage across the Council. We are now below the target of both 10% spend and headcount and will continue this work into the next financial year.

The Peer Review also gave us some really excellent learning on the Camden Model of Leadership. We have now reached 460 leaders in the organisation since launch. This includes the Senior leadership Group (SLG), Heads of Service and Level 5s. We will reach a further 300 between May and Sept this year. Extract from the Peer Review on Leadership approach:

“the peer team regards as one of the most distinctive and impressive features of the organisation’s culture. This is not a bolt-on programme but a deliberate philosophical choice that shapes how leaders at every level behave day-to-day. It is rooted in values and a shared sense of core purpose that staff articulate with striking consistency. The team repeatedly heard how this relational style, characterised by curiosity, deep listening, vulnerability and trust, is transforming relationships both within the Council and with partners and communities”.

The Peer Review also positively commented on the Council’s inclusion work stating that:

“representation in senior leadership is noticeably better than in many comparable authorities, and the team heard multiple examples of lived-experience stories from staff who feel genuinely seen, valued and able to bring their whole selves to work. This creates a powerful sense of belonging that directly supports retention, wellbeing and productivity. The Council should feel immensely proud of what it has achieved here; this is sector leading practice that deserves to be celebrated loudly and confidently”.

3.3 Customers, Technology and Data Services (CTDS)

3.3.1 Challenges

2025/26 has been a year of sustained delivery against a backdrop of heightened external pressure, and three challenges in particular have shaped how CTDS has had to operate.

The first has been the cyber and information security threat landscape. The high-profile breaches affecting other London councils drove additional sector scrutiny and reinforced the importance of Camden Council’s own security posture and assurance work. We absorbed that external pressure without losing momentum, but it has meant continually balancing control and pace, and it raises the bar going into 2026/27 for how we approach Identity and Access Management, supplier assurance and resilience.

The second has been delivering an unusually demanding portfolio at pace alongside business-as-usual. Across the year we have stood up a new Master Data Management (MDM) infrastructure, a new gov.uk-aligned forms framework, Hazards and Leaseholder case management ahead of Awaab's Law, the ROCC Gas solution to support the in-sourcing of Gas Engineers, the Support Needs App, the Keys and Fobs journey and the MTFs Data Packs - while continuing to upgrade core line-of-business systems (Civica Revs/Bens, Elector8, ModernGov, ChildView, Abacus, Impulse Nexus) and run the day-to-day services the organisation depends on. Sustaining this volume of change without adding risk to live services has been the year's defining operational challenge.

The third has been operational resilience under live conditions. Q4 in particular saw a number of major incidents, including a Contact Camden telephony incident that became a real-world test of the Council's disaster recovery arrangements. Issues were proactively managed, downtime minimised, and continuity maintained, but the year as a whole has underlined that resilience now needs to be treated as a permanent capability, not an exception.

Looking ahead to 2026/27, the challenges that most need organisational attention are: a successful Local Government Election in May and onboarding of the new administration; landing the next wave of citizen experience tools (Converse CX in particular) so the benefits actually reach Camden residents; and continuing to absorb a heavy legislative and regulatory pipeline (Awaab's Law, the updated Mental Health Act, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill) into the digital, data and case management platforms.

3.3.2 *Opportunities*

The biggest opportunity for the organisation in 2026/27 is to convert the foundations CTDS has built this year into widely realised value. The platforms are now in place; the focus needs to shift to adoption.

In data, MDM is live, and the Camden Resident Index (CRI), the old legacy MDM, has been decommissioned. Data professionals are using MDM to drive measurable data quality improvements, OS Places API (Application Programming Interface) integration is strengthening address accuracy, and the Residency Checker bulk API is unlocking faster eligibility checks. We have completed Data Maturity Pathways with Neighbourhoods and Leaseholder services, deployed MTFS Data Packs and a Gen AI Cycle 1 evaluation to support evidence-led decision making, and seen a 25% increase in users of MDM in Q4 alone. External validation has followed: Camden has been shortlisted for three British Data Awards, including Data Management Solution of the Year for their new MDM. The opportunity now is for services across the council to lean into these capabilities - prioritising use cases, freeing data owners' time, and trusting the new tooling.

In citizen experience, the team have launched a new accessible forms framework (used for the new Adult Social Care referral form), expanded webchat into Parking, and given residents the ability to retrieve rent balances through Interactive Voice Response (IVR), freeing Contact Centre staff for more vulnerable residents. Procurement and preparatory activity for Converse CX has progressed and will materially strengthen the Council's omnichannel offer in 2026/27. There is an opportunity for service directorates to actively co-prioritise the next wave of journeys with us so that benefits compound rather than land in isolation.

In housing and property, we have delivered the Hazards case management solution ahead of Awaab's Law, a new leaseholder solution in Liberty Create, the Support Needs App, the Keys and Fobs journey, and the ROCC Gas solution underpinning the in-sourcing of Gas Engineers - the latter delivered with onboarding feedback that singled out the team as "simply brilliant". The opportunity is to keep applying this model - data plus citizen experience plus disciplined onboarding - to the rest of the housing estate.

Finally, in digital inclusion and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Digital Inclusion Network reached its first anniversary having delivered 88 community sessions, supported over 500 residents to build essential digital skills, and convened 85+ local stakeholders. Two cycles of the GenAI Launchpad have now run, with 21 workshop sessions and 140 participants in Cycle 2 alone. Resident Wi-Fi continues to roll out across hostels. The opportunity for the organisation in 2026/27 is to back these as strategic capabilities rather than pilots.

3.3.3 *Learning*

Three things stand out from the year.

First, the CTDS operating model works under pressure. When heating and hot water were lost on the Brunswick Estate, Contact Camden stood up an emergency response line within an hour with a priority IVR and fully briefed staff, handling more than 300 calls in a single week. The Q4 telephony incident tested the disaster recovery arrangements and they operated as designed. The lesson is that the joined-up, resilient model we have invested in is real and is now showing up in the moments that matter most for residents.

Second, sustained focus and partnership outperform short bursts of activity. The Digital Inclusion Network's results, the steady year-on-year improvement in Contact Camden performance (a 19% reduction in abandoned calls year-on-year in Q4), and the recognition the Registrars Team received from the Mayor and local MP for citizenship ceremonies all point in the same direction: keeping a clear strategy, sticking with it, and bringing partners with us is what produces durable outcomes.

Third, investing in data as a core capability is starting to pay back visibly. The British Data Awards shortlistings, the migration off CRI, the active use of MDM by data stewards, and the way data is now being built directly into MTFs and policy decisions all show that data has moved from a back-office concern to a strategic asset for Camden. The learning for 2026/27 is to keep the emphasis on adoption, value realisation and continuous improvement, rather than chasing more new builds.

3.4 **Law and Governance**

3.4.1 *Challenges*

Local Elections 2026: One of the current Corporate Services key focus areas is the holding of a successful Local Government election on Thursday 7 May 2026. This year, a day count will be held at 5 Pancras square the following day. The Officer Election Group has been meeting regularly to ensure readiness for this election.

The pre-election period began on 23 March 2026 when the Notice of Election was published. Officer pre-election guidance was circulated well in advance by the Borough Solicitor and there continues to be a high level of engagement by council officers with pre-election queries.

Nominations for councillors opened on 23 March 2026 and closed on 9 April 2026. The council received 270 candidate applications - an increase of 83 from the previous local government elections in 2022. Over 600 staff will be involved in the election. We are providing 90 polling stations this election, an increase from 72 previously.

The induction programme for newly elected and return councillors is scheduled to take place starting on Saturday 9 May 2026 at Judd Street with a comprehensive induction programme currently being finalised; ensuring all councillors feel supported in undertaking their important democratic roles in the borough for a four-year term.

Complaints: The sheer volume of Stage 1 complaints continues to rise year on year - a 28% increase on last year - and in year as well. In 2025/26 most complaints have related to repairs and Property Services received 51% of all stage 1 complaints with Housing another 21%. Stage 2 Complaints volumes have significantly increased in line with the Stage 1 volumes. Additional resources were put in place in December 2025 to respond to a downturn in performance. At the end of Quarter 4 100% of Stage 2's were being responded to within the timeframe.

Sector-wide shortages of independent investigators is proving challenging for children's statutory complaints. The Complaints Team has been proactive and has sought additional investigators to progress the Statutory Complaints by having a list of approved suppliers.

The team continue to review response times and performance against targets set by the Ombudsman. There continues to be an industry-wide increase in referrals driven by the Ombudsman's active promotion of services and compliance with Ombudsman requests continues.

Legal: The team continue to consider the implications of upcoming new legislative changes, in particular the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and ongoing discussions about the impact of the currently stayed Public Accountability Bill. The updated

guidance on the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), post the April 2025 Supreme Court For Women Scotland judgement, is expected to be published at some stage after the May elections.

The September 2025 High Court case of *Mazur v Charles Russell Speechlys* has been overturned by the Court of Appeal in their March 2026 judgement. This has provided more clarification of ensuring proper supervision and oversight takes place by authorised persons (certain Barristers, Solicitors and Fellows of CILEX) when undertaking reserved legal activities. The team are reviewing the conduct of litigation and attendance at court across the council.

3.4.2 *Opportunities*

Legal Services continue to work with client departments to force closer relations and to encourage early involvement in key council projects and risk areas. The team is looking to set up some workshops for staff to feed into themed improvement and development areas across Legal.

Business support is working with Strategy, Design and Insight to explore opportunities to improve the Council's approach to responding to Complaints. The project is exploring resourcing models, service improvements and developing an improved learning model. There is temporary additional resource to ensure Stage 2 complaints are responded to in a timely manner, exceeding performance expectations.

Further to a successful trial during its participation in the Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) pilot, Democratic Services is now rolling out Minute AI software across the team, to assist with the production of meeting minutes, and this is expected in due course to result in some small time saving on this particular task. Other possible uses of AI will continue to be explored.

3.4.3 *Learning*

Legal Services are continuing to provide opportunities to young local residents to learn about the law by having apprentices, an intern and offering ongoing work experience opportunities to those who live or go to school in the borough. They are also continuing to encourage colleagues to attend free legal seminars being offered by the London Borough Legal Alliance and also consider what further development and training programmes they can set up to open opportunities for staff to qualify to practice in law.

3.5 **Strategy, Design and Insight**

3.5.1 *Challenges*

The Strategy function came together as a consolidated function during 2025/26 – bringing together a multi-disciplinary team of strategists, policy specialists, designers, researchers, data analysts and programme and delivery teams. These are organised

around both Directorate-facing teams and specialist capability teams. During 2025/26, the principal challenge for this new combined Strategy service was responding to sustained and time-critical demand across a wide range of corporate and directorate priorities within a constrained resource envelope. The team supported major cross-council activity including Camden's Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Review, preparation for and follow-up from inspection and regulatory activity, housing transformation and landlord service improvement, development of the borough's inclusive growth approach, support to We Make Camden missions, scrutiny reporting, the State of the Borough report, continued development of the Good Life Camden measurement framework, and early preparation for the next Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). This breadth of activity required continuous prioritisation and difficult choices about where finite strategy capacity could have the greatest impact.

A particular challenge through the year was balancing immediate organisational priorities with the need to protect longer-term strategic and system-shaping work. Significant capacity was required at short notice to support the peer review process and coordinate engagement across the organisation, while in parallel the team was helping services prepare for inspection and regulatory scrutiny around the organisation. At the same time, increasing financial pressure meant strategy resource was increasingly drawn into work on prioritisation, organisational focus, performance reporting and the conditions needed to support the next MTFS. This highlighted the continuing tension between providing intensive delivery support in the present and investing in the strategic frameworks, evidence base and organisational learning needed for the future.

The year also reinforced the complexity of maintaining coherence across a broad corporate strategy portfolio. The team was not only supporting individual programmes, but also helping to connect them through stronger strategic framing and performance architecture. This included using the Insight, Learning and Impact reporting and prioritisation processes, scrutiny reporting, State of the Borough and Good Life Camden to strengthen the organisation's line of sight between priorities, delivery and impact. At the same time, the Peer Review and wider organisational reflection highlighted that Camden continues to focus on a clearer and more integrated approach to prioritisation, performance and evidence-led decision-making.

3.5.2 *Opportunities*

Alongside these challenges, 2025/26 created important opportunities for the Strategy service to strengthen its role as a corporate enabler of transformation, improvement and evidence-led decision-making. The LGA Corporate Peer Review provided an important moment for organisational reflection, challenge and learning, while also surfacing opportunities to sharpen Camden's strategic grip, clarify priorities and

strengthen the link between corporate ambition and delivery. The review process also created a platform to bring together evidence about Camden's operating model, mission-led approach, design practice, use of insight and commitment to inclusive growth.

The year also presented a significant opportunity to develop a clearer borough-wide approach to inclusive growth. Building on the peer review, the Strategy team supported development of a strategic statement of intent, internal engagement across directorates, and external engagement through the Inclusive Business Growth Breakfast, the We Make Camden Summit and wider work with residents, partners and businesses. This work has created the basis for a more coherent inclusive growth offer for Camden, linking economic development, missions, place, participation and fairness more clearly than before.

A further opportunity has been to strengthen Camden's use of insight, outcomes and lived experience in shaping corporate direction. The State of the Borough report has become an increasingly important vehicle for bringing together data, stories and partner insight across the We Make Camden ambitions, while the Good Life Camden framework continues to provide an outcomes-based foundation rooted in what matters most to residents. Together with scrutiny reporting and the quarterly ILI process, these tools create an opportunity to move towards a more coherent corporate performance and accountability framework, supporting stronger management conversations and clearer organisational prioritisation in advance of the next MTFS period.

3.5.3 *Learning*

A central learning from 2025/26 is that the Strategy service has greatest impact where support is engaged early, linked to a clear organisational priority and connected to delivery from the outset. Across the year, the strongest examples of impact were where strategy, design, insight, policy development and organisational coordination were brought together around a live issue, including the peer review, inclusive growth, housing transformation and preparation for future financial and performance challenges. This reinforces the value of a multidisciplinary strategy function that can both support immediate delivery and help shape longer-term direction.

The year also highlighted the importance of stronger corporate alignment between priorities, performance, scrutiny and financial planning. Work through the ILI process, State of the Borough, Good Life Camden and wider performance development has shown that Camden has strong existing products and frameworks, but that these need to be better connected if they are to support sharper decision-making and clearer accountability. A recurring lesson from the year is that the organisation benefits most where there is a stronger golden thread between what matters strategically, how

progress is measured, and how challenge and learning are fed back into decision-making.

Finally, 2025/26 reinforced the need for continued discipline in prioritisation and portfolio management. The scale of demand across the year demonstrated both the value of the Strategy service and the limits of trying to respond everywhere at once. As the organisation prepares for its next MTFs, there is a clear lesson that strategy capacity must be used deliberately - focused on the areas of highest corporate value, aligned to agreed priorities, and supported by a stronger evidence base on delivery, outcomes and impact. This will be essential if the service is to help Camden respond to immediate pressures while also building the foundations for longer-term organisational and system change.

3.6 **Participation, Partnerships and Communications**

3.6.1 *Challenges*

Safe and Stronger Together. This year the team have prioritised Camden's Safe and Stronger Together communication campaign and the work across the voluntary community sector and our Interfaith Network. This has provided support where members of our communities may feel vulnerable or scared, following terror attacks outside of Camden, such as the Manchester synagogue attack, the Bondi Beach shooting which happened in the last year and the more recent and closer to home, Golders Green arson and knife attacks. Key to this has been reinforcing our message to residents and staff that Camden is no place for hate.

Local Election 2026. As Camden moves towards local elections, colleagues across the directorate have played a central role in preparing the council for the ballot and for any potential change. Communications to ensure that the electorate have the information and guidance needed to vote has been delivered and plans put in place to host media interest in the count. A new Cabinet post election will require similar strong forward planning and support, training and guidance as they communicate their priorities and a comprehensive member induction programme has been developed.

Breadth of Delivery. The directorate supported a wide range of organisational priorities, including Operation Lanark, the LGA Peer Review, Youth Justice Service Inspection, Euston/HS2, Raise Camden, cost of living pressures, community cohesion and reassurance, the Camden Community Wealth Fund, Camden Challenge Prize, Who Cares? (Adult Social Care), and Health and Wellbeing priorities such as loneliness and alcohol reduction. This broad programme of work will continue into the coming year, requiring significant resource and expertise.

VCS Property challenges Longstanding VCS property challenges and the need for a borough-wide Community Spaces strategy has presented a significant challenge – especially around affordability, condition, repairs and capital investment. Significant progress has been made, including progress towards an Asset Strategy, which will continue to be a priority.

3.6.2 *Opportunities*

We Make Camden Summit. The Council held its fifth We Make Camden Summit, uniting the borough around Camden's missions as well as taking a wider focus on Inclusive Growth. Work continues to consolidate and develop relationships and capitalise on the opportunities highlighted at these events. An inclusive economy business breakfast hosted by the Leader of the Council and the Prime Minister supported the We Make Camden partner movement to deliver impact for Camden residents.

Channel Strategy. The team are using channel research carried out across the year to update their channel strategy, following key principles of positioning local leadership, strengthening trust by communicating through community networks, creating shareable, multimedia content, accessible communications and empowering residents to take action.

VCS. Significant progress has been made to deepen trust-based partnership and collaboration with the voluntary sector – with the Full Council debate highlighting the impact of this work. There is a good opportunity to go further in shifting to 'power with' relationships.

The Camden Advice Network (CAN) provides residents with access to independent debt, housing and welfare benefits advice. It supports around 10,000 residents each year, secures £10 million in benefits, and operates across 36 sites with the support of 150 volunteers. Current funding is due to end in March 2027, with a proposed extension to be considered by Cabinet as part of a new advice model aligned with Inclusive Growth priorities. There is a significant opportunity to strengthen collaboration between CAN and council services.

3.6.3 *Learning*

Data from refreshed channel research, campaign evaluations, surveys and other sources across the directorate provides valuable, ongoing insight into how we can effectively engage and communicate through local networks to reach Camden's diverse communities.

The team will build on learning from large-scale digital participation projects and continue to develop both digital and in-person participation opportunities in the coming

year. This includes insights from the Community Champions programme, the We Make Camden Kit, and the Citizen Scientist initiative (in collaboration with UCL).

The Community Response Fund and area-based community partnerships have enabled VCS-led, place-based collaboration to address social isolation and cost of living pressures. This approach offers a strong foundation for Camden's neighbourhood-based work with the VCS.

4. Finance Comments of the Director of Finance

4.1 The Director of Finance has been consulted on this report and has no additional comments.

5. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

5.1 The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

6. Environmental Implications

6.1 There are no proposals with environmental implications made in this report.

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: Corporate Data Dashboard 2025-26 - RCP Scrutiny

REPORT ENDS