

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

By e-mail PSRobertJenrick@communities.gov.uk

19th March 2021

Dear Mr Jenrick,

Liverpool City Council – Report of Best Value Inspection.

Local Government Act 1999

Following receipt of the letter dated 17th December 2021, I have led a Best Value Inspection at Liverpool City Council, addressing all those issues set out in the correspondence. I am pleased to attach my report for your consideration.

I was grateful that you appointed Vivienne Geary and Mervyn Greer as Assistant Inspectors. Their assistance, together with their knowledge and insights have been invaluable. To meet the timetable so that this report could be with you before Local Authority Election Purdah has required intensive effort. I want to place on record my thanks and appreciated for their contribution.

Undertaking this Inspection during the COVID crisis and lockdown has been particularly challenging. In my judgement, it was essential to be present in Liverpool for much of the Inspection period. Much of the documentation reviewed is not, and could not easily be made, available electronically and would not have provided the necessary contemporaneous evidence. The presence of the Team on site has acted as a 'lightening rod' resulting in people coming forward to speak to us that we could not have identified from the outside. It would be my normal practice to include in the report a complete list of people to whom we spoke or received documentation from. However, the number of individuals who spoke to us as 'whistle-blowers' or who did not want to be identified, because of concerns about their safety, but who provided information that could be separately verified meant that I concluded that it was safer to not include this information at all.

This is the first time that I have undertaken an Inspection whilst a live police investigation was underway covering some of the same areas of interest. Merseyside Police were very easy to work with. It was possible to finalise a memorandum of understanding setting out how we would both work together, early on in the process. We held weekly coordination meetings and, notwithstanding our different legislative backgrounds and different objectives, found sharing practical without compromising the integrity of either parties' processes. Perhaps the most pleasing thing was the Police noting that our activity had encouraged more potential witnesses to come forward to them and be more open in assisting their enquiries.

Liverpool City Council itself, under the officer leadership of Tony Reeves, has started to make some of the improvements necessary. However, the burden of the police investigation, the pandemic, and the legacy of past actions by the Council has prevented speedy progress. At political level, the Council needs a reset, until that happens and the work that is currently being undertaken is continued at pace and

embedded, I cannot be confident about continued progress. That is why the report proposes the package of measures that it does, to ensure the Council gets into the habit of choosing from a range of correct and lawful options and to support those good officers who want to support them in delivering quality local services to improve prospects for local residents.

I am always happy to answer any questions you or your officials might have or to explain in more detail the reasoning and justification for the conclusions and recommendations.

I have sent a copy of this letter and the report to your officials, Catherine Frances, and Maxwell Soule. I will, in due course, as required by the Act, send a copy of the report to Liverpool City Council.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a long horizontal stroke, with a shorter horizontal stroke underneath.

Max Caller CBE

Lead Inspector