
Liverpool City Council Commissioners

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Dear Secretary of State

In our recent update report to you on Liverpool City Council (LCC), dated 15 March 2024, we noted that the Council's Property service had not made sufficient progress towards stability and achieving a well-set improvement trajectory since the start of the intervention.

We committed to providing you with an additional update on Property, with particular focus on three objectives we set for the service to achieve by mid-May. These objectives were:

- To prioritise Property improvement and invest in capacity to support the new Property Director.
- To approve, at Cabinet, a robust, realistic, and resourced improvement plan, which sets out how the Council will meet the requirements of the December Property Instructions.
- To demonstrate improvements in the quality of delegated decision reports, showing that they can independently and consistently make decisions that are legally compliant, in accordance with Council policy, and demonstrably Best Value.

Since our report, the Council has substantially met the first two objectives, but it has not yet provided sufficient evidence that it can consistently provide high quality reports on delegated Property decisions. It has now put aside necessary funds to continue its improvement journey, we have confidence in the new Property Director, and a property improvement plan was agreed at Cabinet on 8 May. The plan sets out how LCC will meet the instructions in our 4 December 2023 Property letter. The Council still needs to strengthen its staffing resource but can draw on the capacity and capabilities of their newly appointed strategic partner. Therefore, we stand by the recommendation in our March report and support both your 8 May 2024 'minded-to' announcement, and the accompanying Directions, that would allow the intervention to move forwards with a Statutory Improvement and Assurance Board.

To maintain proper oversight, we recommend the Board's Terms of Reference allow Members to fully engage in the improvement of the Council, particularly in the Property function. When meeting to discuss progress in Property, we suggest the Board focuses on:

- The delivery of the property improvement plan - the plan sets out new timescales for achieving the instructions from the Property letter. It will be important for the pace of improvement that the new timings are met.
- Ensuring the service continues to build on its long-term capability and capacity.
- The quality of reports for Property decisions. We suggest the current schedule of monthly review is initially continued to monitor this.

We recommend the Board report to you in the Autumn on progress in Property.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Cunningham, Deborah McLaughlin and Stephen Hughes