

**Appendix B**

**Independent Evaluation of the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge Programme: Recommendations and responses**

Recommendation	Comments and proposed
<b>Before the CPC</b>	
<p>1. Continue to encourage councils to be honest and open in their self-assessment about where the CPC can most usefully help them.</p>	<p>We will ensure LGA Principal Advisers and Peer Challenge Managers continue to do this as part of the liaison re scoping and preparation. We will also ensure that national and regional peers make this clear in their discussions with council leaders. We will also amend the CPC Preparation Guidance Note and provide examples to reiterate this.</p>
<p>2. Provide examples of council's self-assessments that demonstrate how the CPC process can be tightly scoped to target a council's priorities and needs.</p>	<p>Peer Challenge Managers will continue to do this as part of their preparation liaison with councils. We will provide 'top tips' and consider a standard template.</p>
<p>3. Further develop the pre-challenge information provided to peer teams by including performance data from LG Inform in addition to the finance briefing.</p>	<p>A performance briefing for CPC teams is in development and will be rolled out across CPCs during 2017, in addition to the current finance briefing which is valued by peers.</p>
<p>4. Consider introducing greater standardisation of the process including the provision of questions for team members to pose in interviews.</p>	<p>A key principle to date has been that the CPC is proportionate to the issues and challenges facing the council, so the focus needs to be on bespoke and tailored conversations rather than standardised interviews. There are however common areas/topics that are covered in sessions such as staff workshops and we will develop some standard questions/prompts and include in our peer team briefings.</p>

<b>The CPC process</b>	
5. Continue to work closely with councils to scope a CPC which can be delivered in three or four days.	We will continue to do this.
6. Consider offering CPC's to councils where the bespoke element focuses solely on one of the core components (for example the leadership of place).	Given the inter-dependencies of the five core components and their importance in terms of council performance and improvement, all need to be considered as part of a CPC. The current CPC offer allows councils to focus on certain aspects of the core components so that the emphasis is proportionate to requirements and context. We have a Finance Peer Review and other peer challenge offers which can be tailored.
7. Ensure that CPC continues to evolve to meet the future requirements of the sector.	The core components are reviewed regularly. The CPC approach is designed to be adaptable to the context within which the council is operating – eg if it is part of a Combined Authority/Devo deal. We will engage member peers about this at the Member Peer Conference in September.
<b>The CPC team</b>	
8. Try to have a qualified accountant (or at least someone with financial expertise) as part of each team as this will help to provide challenge on council's finances	We will continue to do this. Where there is a particular focus on finance, or where we know finance is going to be a key issue, we ensure the peer team includes someone with a finance role (eg S151 officer and/or cabinet member with the finance portfolio).
9. Not allow any council to select a lead peer that it has had previous significant dealings with	Peer teams are assembled in response to the scope/focus of the CPC agreed with the council. As part of the set up/scoping meeting there is a discussion about the peer team required. Sometimes this involves identifying specific chief executives and leaders that might potentially be approached. This is intended to ensure peer teams are seen as credible by the council, which is an important consideration given the improvement focus of the CPC process. Obviously for second CPCs and follow up visits it is often helpful to have some of the original peer team.

	Those involved in set up/scoping meetings will be asked to ensure this is considered and any concerns registered.
10. Widen and refresh the pool of member peers.	Whilst there has been recruitment of new member peers over the past couple of years, this will be considered further with LGA Political Group Offices.
11. Make it a requirement that all member peers who are council leaders or cabinet members have a CPC in their own council	<p>Political Group Offices have been asked to consider this when sourcing member peers for CPCs.</p> <p>This may not be practicable to implement in reality (e.g. in instances where member peers are part of a coalition administration). It is also likely to adversely impact on the existing peer capacity we have to draw on for other peer challenges (where specific portfolio experience is required).</p>
12. Provide training for all member peers.	<p>Training is currently offered to all new member peers. In addition all peers receive a briefing and guidance from the Peer Challenge Manager before any CPC they are deployed to.</p> <p>More peer training sessions to be arranged, in liaison with Political Group Offices, to ensure that existing and experienced member peers are offered refresher training.</p>
13. Increase the number of non-local government people on CPC teams.	Peer teams are assembled in response to a council's requirements. Several of the CPCs during 2016/17 have had one or more non-local government people on the team.
14. Provide CPC teams with extracts from a best practice database to share with councils.	To be considered further as part of the work to develop a performance briefing for peer teams.

<b>Feedback and reporting</b>	
15. Continue to be clear that a CPC is not an inspection but rather a tool to support sector-led improvement and that the team are invited to be 'critical friends'.	We will continue to do this through Principal Advisers, regional peers, and others.
16. Consider ways in which CPC reports can more closely align with the verbal feedback so that all messages received are clear and consistent.	We will consider this further. The key alignment is with the feedback presentation delivered onsite.
17. Provide sufficient information in reports to enable all councillors and the public to hold the council to account on the areas for improvement.	Peer feedback, and the reports that summarise that feedback, are written for the council receiving the CPC and designed to inform and support improvement. We will consider further when reviewing the current report style and template.
18. Outline clear recommendations for improvement in all reports.	All CPC reports include recommendations. We are providing report writing training to all peer challenge managers supported by the Plain Language Commission.
19. Provide follow-up support to those councils in greatest need and consider different ways in which they could assess progress in other councils	We will continue to do this. A follow-up visit is currently part of the standard CPC offer and a range of other follow up activity occurs where it needs to. Follow up support is agreed with the LGA Principal Adviser to ensure activity is proportionate to need and risk.
<b>Impact of the CPC</b>	
20. Put greater emphasis on assessing where CPC leads to improvement and consider how they can re-design the process to capture impact	To be considered further with LGA Principal Adviser and Peer Challenge Managers. We will consider how the current evaluation survey carried out with chief executives and the CPC follow up visit can be developed to better incorporate this.

<p>21. Ask councils to write a short summary (1-2 pages) on where CPC has directly led to improvement. These should feature in the LGA's portfolio of good practice examples.</p>	<p>We propose to try out this approach on a number of forthcoming CPCs which will inform consideration as to the best timing for this activity. We will also consider how the current evaluation survey carried out with chief executives and the CPC follow up visit can be developed to include this.</p>
<p>22. Consider how to ensure greater public understanding of the value of CPC.</p>	<p>To be considered further.</p>
<p>23. Place greater emphasis on sharing good practice within the CPC process and across the sector.</p>	<p>To be considered further. We will reiterate the emphasis on peers being ready to share experience, knowledge and examples as part the peer training and peer team guidance and briefing.</p>
<p>24. Continue to support councils in their financial planning, which will be particularly important in the light of changes to Revenue Support Grant in 2020.</p>	<p>We recognise the importance of this and will continue to do this. Financial management and viability will remain a core component of the CPC. The Finance Peer Review will also remain part of the offer.</p>
<p><b>The value for money of CPC</b></p>	
<p>25. Try to capture data on the costs of CPC as part of the feedback survey conducted with each council.</p>	<p>We ask about whether the preparation is proportionate in our CPC evaluation survey with chief executives. We are considering how the current survey can be adapted further.</p>
<p><b>The voluntary nature of the process (increasing take-up)</b></p>	
<p>26. Consider publishing a list of councils that have not yet engaged with CPC nor appear to have used other similar processes, so that the sector can see the extent of non-engagement with sector-led improvement</p>	<p>CPC take-up is currently monitored and there is a narrative/intelligence on all councils that have not yet had a CPC and the reasons/rationale behind that. CPC is one part of the wider SLI offer, so including take-up of other parts of the offer would need to be considered.</p> <p>Views of members on this recommendation are required as it may have impact for LGA membership.</p>

<p>27. Reiterate a clear policy statement that it expects all councils to have a CPC (or Finance Peer Review) every four to five years unless there are exceptional circumstances.</p>	<p>We will reiterate this as part of publishing and promoting the independent evaluation report. LGA Principal Advisers will continue to make this clear in their liaison with council chief executives and officers. We will also ensure that national and regional peers make this clear in their discussions with council leaders.</p>
<p>28. Continue to target efforts on those councils that have not yet signed-up for a CPC.</p>	<p>We will continue to do this and work closely with members. We monitor take-up and demand. More than half of the CPCs delivered during 2016/17 were first time CPCs.</p>
<p>29. Discuss with member peers the reasons why some have not had a CPC in their own authority.</p>	<p>We know from our close monitoring of take-up and demand that there are a number of different reasons why some councils have not yet committed to a CPC. Members' views are sought on whether it should be a requirement for being a member peer.</p>
<p>30. Conduct a marketing campaign featuring 'impact stories' from those who have had a CPC to show how the process can help councils to improve.</p>	<p>To be considered further. The evaluation report contains examples of impact and this will be published. A CPC Programme Annual Report 16/17 is planned.</p>