

Appendix 1

Peer Challenge: Feedback and Evaluation

1. Leaders' and leading members' sounding board

Set out below is an extract from the notes of the meetings on 17 and 29 February, chaired by Councillor Peter Fleming detailing the suggestions put forward for developing the approach to peer challenge

a) Adding extra value to the receiving authority

In terms of adding extra value to the peer challenge model from the receiving authority's perspective it was proposed:

17 February meeting:

- ensure that there is always an opportunity for a discussion between the council leader and member peer during the preparation stage;
- get the message over the new tailored and forward-looking approach is not a rehash of CPA and that the burden on participating councils is small for the added value offered;
- timetable 1-2-1 sessions for the leader and member peer to provide for an on-going dialogue throughout and the opportunity for candid advice;
- capture good practice from all councils participating in peer challenges;
- ensure that follow-up activity e.g. peer team to assist with action planning and in a follow-up review is offered in all cases; and
- encourage councils to share their reports internally e.g. via scrutiny to encourage council-wide and cross-party engagement and (at the appropriate time) publicise the outcome to local people alongside the council's action/ improvement plan.

29 February meeting:

- look at the possibility of using questionnaires to survey staff views and those of partners in advance to inform the scope and help to frame the peer challenge;
- make sure council leaders (and where there is multi-party control) group leaders as well as chief executives are involved in agreeing the focus for the peer challenge;
- create opportunities before the peer challenge for a pre-discussion between the peer team and their counterparts in the authority, including the opportunity for the leader to speak with the member peer;

Item 1: Appendix 1

- offer follow-up activity in all cases including support with action-planning; to cascade messages to other stakeholders; or a follow-up peer challenge day to review progress; and
- encourage councils to share their reports internally to encourage council-wide and cross-party engagement and (at the appropriate time) publish them.

b) Strengthening and promoting the programme

A number of other potential actions to consider to strengthen and promote the overall programme were identified, as follows:

17 February meeting:

- promote the value of peer challenge to participating councils (worth approx £10,000 to a district) and this being at no cost to the council - rather than it being 'free';
- identify some of the practical ways in which peer challenges have already helped councils to demonstrate its value to the sector as an improvement tool;
- feedback on the quality of peers who have delivered so far has been very good, which is key reputationally for LGA and sector-led approach as a whole. We therefore need to review and refresh the peer pool to maintain this standard for the future;
- use leaders to promote the value of peer challenge to other leaders in the sector e.g. via LGA Conference and county and district leaders meetings;
- draw up a longer-term strategy to engage the 'less-willing' – using leaders and member peers to promote messages to counterparts in their regions;
- use the interview with the leader to sound out what is going on with neighbouring authorities and where appropriate feed this in to the 'detect and prevent' framework; and
- arrange a press briefing with LGC and MJ to ensure they understand how the new model and how this has been positioned (not a replacement for CPA) and the positive feedback from councils that have had one.

29 February meeting:

- publicise the value of peer working, in particular being part of a peer challenge team, as a learning opportunity for peers and their own authority;
- maintain and enhance the quality of peer teams by ensuring the peer pool is actively managed and kept up to date – reflecting the changing needs of the sector;

Item 1: Appendix 1

- emphasise the importance of the preparatory stages in agreeing the focus, securing political engagement and developing effective relationships between the council and peer team;
- promote the value of peer challenge as a future orientated tool able to provide insight, advice and supportive challenge to help councils move forward and to tackle the issues that lie ahead (not as a means of measuring past achievements); and
- encourage councils to think and plan ahead to ensure they decide when the peer challenge will have the most impact for them, and to book this now (so that they get the timing they want).