**CSIT**

A toolkit to help the culture, sport, green space & tourism sectors to

***re-group, survive & re-grow the services for the community***

Document 3.14

**Summary of Peer-Led Challenge & Validation**

**Assessing & understanding your organisation’s, or partnership’s, current strengths & areas for improvement**

***“He who asks the questions cannot avoid the answers”***

A Cameroon proverb!

Version 2, July 2011

**Introduction**

Self-Assessment and improvement planning are now the ‘direction of travel’. Self-Assessment potentially leads to increased ownership - and therefore implementation of - the improvement activity, helps to develop continuous improvement habits and involves many people and partners. External challenge is still seen as important for ensuring that the organisation or partnership acts on accurate and incisive areas for improvement. Therefore the sector has developed two Self-Assessment challenge tools: Peer-Led Challenge & Validation.

**What is Peer-Led Challenge?**

**A Peer-Led Challenge is a reciprocal review & challenge of a sample of the organisation’s Self-Assessment findings (i.e. strengths, areas for improvement and ratings) conducted by a trained peer (or more than one peer), normally from similar organisation(s) within an Improvement Network.**

This is recognised as a viable & valuable approach, especially where ***improvement can be achieved without significant external challenge*** and where the Self-Assessment is part of a Peer-Supported Improvement programme. It provides a cost-effective, credible & robust challenge of your Self-Assessment, at the same time leading to joint improvement working, sharing of knowledge, experience & practices & other cross-boundary collaborative activity. More specifically it achieves the following:

* accurate and incisive Self-Assessment findings and therefore an enhanced improvement plan
* improved future Self-Assessments (the organisations learn about their Self-Assessment process and methods, and apply this learning to future Self-Assessments)
* improved understanding of the chosen excellence criteria (e.g. the CSIT Benchmark), for the organisation being challenged and the peer, which assists future Self-Assessment and improvement activity for both organisations
* an insight into the value and habits of continuous improvement in your organisation (for example, what has led to an inaccurate judgement?)
* a relationship between the organisations to assist future sharing of practices & knowledge and joint working
* a sound basis for best practice benchmarking within the Improvement Network and potentially across the country.
* learning & development opportunities for the peers, which develops the capacity for future improvement
* recognition and confidence from internal or external partners that Self-Assessment has been carried out comprehensively, with enough objectivity and transparency

Peer-Led Challenge takes place after the Self-Assessment has been completed. The peer gathers objective facts and information about the way the organisation operates in relation to key excellence criteria, through discussions with key staff members, on a one-to-one or group basis, and by reviewing documentation. These facts and information are then analysed and compared with the Self-Assessment findings. The results are presented back to the organisation’s management or Self-Assessment team constructively, enabling them that they can review their own judgements and amend them if required. The costs are relatively small and come in training people to be effective peers. LGG can help you identify appropriate trainers.

**Validation**

Validation is a similar process to Peer-Led Challenge, but is conducted by expertise from outside your organisation or partnership. In the past this external validation has been provided by a consultant and a accredited peer provided through the Local Government Group (formally IDeA and LGID). The advantage of this is that it is a more robust & comprehensive process with a strong degree of independence. The disadvantage is that it doesn’t provide the same opportunities for peer learning & Peer-Supported Improvement and it also costs more in terms of direct payment.

Validation takes place at three stages of your Self-Assessment and improvement planning process:

* Stage one –scoping & planning, to ensure you are starting in the right place
* Stage two –Self-Assessment, to ensure you have been rigorous and honest with yourself
* Stage three –improvement planning. To ensure you are heading in the right direction to improve

As a result of the Validation, an organisation or partnership agrees adjustments to its Self-Assessment findings and improvement plan with the Validator (as opposed to acting on findings imposed by an external inspection, assessor or review team). This approach means that the people who will be taking the actions can maintain ownership of the strengths, areas for improvement and improvement actions.

**Peer-Led Challenge & Validation are not…**

* giving advice
* criticism
* a value judgement
* taking a ’because we do it better’ approach
* compliance audits
* staff performance reviews (it is about the way the organisation works, not the way individual people work)
* a trophy hunts (although the hunt is for the trophy of improvement!)
* paper-chases!
* negative or a threat