

Peer induction pack

Getting started as an LGA peer

Contents

Introduction	2
Our database of peers	3
Time commitment	4
Accommodation, travel and expenses	5
The peer placement process	6
Participating in peer challenges and other peer support projects	7
Peer challenge ground rules	8
Peer competencies	9
Appendix 1: Peer charter	10
Appendix 2: Expenses policy	12

Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to be part of the pool of people we can call on as 'peers' to support and deliver sector-led improvement (SLI).

The Local Government Association (LGA) offers a range of practical SLI support on a free of charge and/or subsidised basis, to enable local authorities to exploit the opportunities that the sector-led approach to improvement provides. This includes support of a corporate nature, such as leadership programmes, peer challenges, LG Inform (our benchmarking service) and programmes tailored to specific service areas such as children's, adults', health, and finance: www.local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement

At the heart of the SLI approach are local government officers and elected members who voluntarily contribute their time and expertise as 'peers' to help deliver support to councils, particularly through activities such as peer challenge, member development and political mentoring/coaching support.

Peer-led support to councils represents a considerable investment by the sector in its own improvement and provides a range of benefits to all involved.

For the individual it can support personal and professional development. For the organisation 'donating' peers it can help bring new knowledge and practice. For local government as a whole it can help share learning across the sector.

This pack is intended to be a generic introduction to being a peer. It provides some useful information about the time you will need to commit, payment of expenses and the peer placement process. More specific and tailored guidance and/or training will be provided if and when you are deployed as a peer.

All peers are asked to read and observe the Peer Charter attached (Appendix 1). The charter provides a summary of the key expectations and requirements of being a peer. It covers:

- our relationship with you as a peer
- what we expect and require of you in your role as a peer
- what you can expect from us to support you as a peer.

You are also asked to read the full **Peer Support terms and conditions** which we expect peers to work in accordance with.

A peer challenge team on location



Our database of peers

We have added you to our peer database as someone we know we can call on as a 'peer' to deliver SLI activity (peer challenge, peer support, political mentoring, etc). We have done that on the basis of the information you have provided in the Expression of Interest form or CV and/or following your completion of a Peer Eligibility and Assessment (PEA) event, a Peer Briefing/Induction event or similar.

We adhere to our obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 when managing the information we hold on the database. We will use the information we hold on your knowledge, expertise and experience to match you with potential peer challenge and support projects. We may also share your information with other organisations such as local authorities, fire and rescue services and other partner organisations we work with for these purposes.

Please let us know if any of the information which you provided becomes inaccurate or there are any changes in your circumstances. To review or update your information at any time:

- officer peers – contact the peer placement team: peersupportenquiries@local.gov.uk
- member peers – contact your relevant LGA political group office.

We reserve the right to remove people from the peer database and we will consider doing so if:

- we discover that information you have provided is or becomes inaccurate
- you receive a criminal conviction
- we receive an unsatisfactory evaluation/feedback on your performance as a peer
- your circumstances change resulting in you no longer being a serving officer or councillor in local government
- the experience and expertise you offer are no longer in demand
- you are a member peer and have not been a local authority councillor for more than 12 months.

Time commitment

The time required from peers varies across the different SLI activities – for example ranging from 1-2 days to help design and deliver a councillor development module, through to 6-8 days for peer challenges. The time we are asking you to commit will be made clear when we contact you to ascertain your interest and availability for a peer challenge or peer support project.

Peer challenges

The main component of an LGA peer challenge is a block of 3-5 days spent onsite at the council receiving the peer challenge (the exact number of days varies depending on the type of challenge and client needs), plus some time for preparation and follow-up. During on-site work the peer team will stay in a hotel near to the challenge venue.

There are also shorter follow up exercises that may be one or two days long. Follow-up visits generally have smaller teams and will be arranged separately at a later date by the LGA peer challenge manager. All peer challenges will involve some preparation time, including the reading of background information, and discussions with the challenge manager and other members of the peer team (often via a phone conference).

Peers will be required to meet in their hotel the evening before an onsite visit for a pre-meeting and dinner together as a peer team. This provides an opportunity for the peer challenge manager to cover any emerging issues, re-iterate the ground rules, and for the team to get to know each other and do some final preparations.

A typical example for a corporate peer challenge is:

Preparation activity (including pre-reading, telephone briefing/conference call, desktop research and pre-meeting)
Onsite activity at the council
Post onsite activity (read and comment on final report, provide feedback on your experience of the process)
Follow-up visit/challenge (12-24 months later)

Peer support (mentoring and coaching)

This will typically be a number of days to be delivered over a specified period of time – for example five days over a period of five months. The exact configuration and number of days of the arrangement in terms of activities (eg balance of onsite/face-to-face engagement and remote support) will almost always be left for the peer to determine with the recipient of the support, particularly when it is a one-to-one mentoring arrangement.

A typical example of peer support to a new council leader

Preparation activity (discussion with LGA principal adviser (PA) re context setting, introductory session with leader)
Delivery (four onsite, half day, mentoring sessions, email and phone contact throughout, host visit at own council, regular verbal progress reports to PA)
Post-delivery (de-brief and evaluation discussion)

Other peer work

Particularly for member peers, this may include the co-design and facilitation of councillor development modules and top team events, which will usually be 1-2 days per event/module.

The peer placement process

Most SLI activity is voluntary and demand-led. Peers are sourced and deployed in response to a client/council's requirements, and ultimately they select from the peer options we put forward. So we cannot guarantee if and when peer opportunities will be offered.

We search our database of peers to identify peers with relevant roles and experience that match the requirements and needs of the client council and then approach them about their interest and availability before putting names forward to the council. We work on the basis of only suggesting peers we know are interested and available. We will always contact you before putting you forward to a council for their consideration.

Officer peers

Our usual placement process for officer peers will involve contact from an LGA peer placement coordinator, local government support adviser, programme manager or principal adviser. They will ask you whether or not you are interested in the assignment and available for the dates. If you are not available then a note will be made to that effect on our database.

If you are happy to be considered the next stage will be to put your details forward as a potential peer to the client council. This is where we use your peer profile (which we have developed and agreed with you using the information you have provided in your Expression of Interest form and/or CV). Your peer profile should be accurate and up to date. So if this has not been updated for a while we may ask you to review and suggest updates at this point.

The LGA peer challenge or project manager will discuss the proposed peers with the client council and agree who best meets their requirements for the peer challenge/peer support. Client councils often ask for a number of options to consider, so a number of names may be put forward for consideration.

Once that decision has been made you will be informed of the outcome. This stage can sometimes take a while to resolve, so if you haven't heard for a while (we'll update if we can) and your diary is under pressure do check back with us. If you are confirmed for the team we will let you know who the LGA peer challenge/project manager is, and the name of the project support officer who will also be a key contact for you. They will make contact with you accordingly to brief you further.

Member peers

Member peer placements follow a similar process, but are handled in the first instance by the relevant LGA political group office (PGO), who will make first contact about interest and availability. Contact to confirm a placement will usually come from one of the placement coordinators and the relevant PGO contact will inform unsuccessful peers.

Travel, accommodation and expenses

All reasonable travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses incurred while engaged in peer support work will be paid for by the LGA in accordance with our expenses policy (relevant extracts of which are attached in Appendix 2).

The LGA project team will organise and pay for hotel accommodation for any onsite work. For peer challenges, the project support officer will send out an administration email 4-6 weeks before the onsite work starts, containing hotel information, asking for your emergency contacts and any needs you may have, such as dietary requirements or mobility restrictions.

Evening meals will be paid for by the LGA peer challenge manager and lunch will be provided by the client council. We expect peers to organise their travel to and from the location of the peer challenge/other peer work and claim that back via our expenses form, which will be sent to you. **Please note that the LGA does not provide travel insurance.**

Please remember to retain tickets and receipts and/or make a note of mileage as these will be needed to make a claim. If you are issued with a purchase order for fees (members) and expenses you should include that on your claim form.

A copy of the LGA expenses policy is available on request, and LGA project support staff will be able to help if you have any queries about expenses.

Member peers

It is important that member peers ensure the project support officer working on a relevant project are aware if they are on the LGA payroll as board members or in other roles, as different payment arrangements are in place and a purchase order is not issued.



Participation in peer challenges and peer support projects

Peer challenges tend to follow a process along the lines of:

Pre-onsite preparation

- Peers will need to read some background information in advance of the peer challenge. A set of documentation will be sent to the peer team in advance along with a timetable of meetings and other activity arranged by the client council.
- An initial peer team meeting is scheduled for the evening prior to the peer challenge. Peers are required to attend to share initial impressions and views from the pre-reading, and prepare for the onsite phase of the process.

Onsite at the council

- The peer team will spend 3-5 days onsite at the client council. Peers will meet with a wide range of people including officers, councillors and others connected with the council. The process is a dynamic one and requires a high degree of flexibility throughout.
- The peer team will collate, analyse and triangulate the key messages from these meetings which will then be used to develop and deliver feedback to the council. Notebooks are normally used to record discussions and sticky notes are often used to record/ summarise messages under key headings.
- The onsite phase will finish with a feedback presentation where key findings are discussed with senior people from the council.

Post-onsite

- A draft feedback report will be prepared by the LGA peer challenge manager on behalf of the team. Peers will be asked to comment on the draft before it is sent to the council. This is normally within 5-10 days of the onsite visit. Peers will also be asked to contribute to any signposting to practice and people that can support the key suggestions made by the peer team.
- Many of the LGA peer challenges include a follow up visit involving some or all of the original peer team. For example the corporate peer challenge process includes a follow up visit (1-2 days onsite) that takes place within two years of the original peer challenge.

The peer challenge ground rules

1. Prioritise a positive experience for the council

Peer challenge is a people focussed process. It is vital that people the team come into contact with see us as friendly, courteous and as having listened. The questions posed by the team may be challenging at times, but it is important to ensure people we meet do not feel this challenge is directed against them personally. The impression the team makes is very important. This will make a difference to how they receive and respond to our feedback. The purpose of the peer challenge is to inform further improvement and learning. It is not a form of inspection. We are there at the invitation of the council.

2. Valuing each others input

People on the team come from different walks of life and professional backgrounds, and will have been recruited to the team by virtue of the different views, perspectives and knowledge they have to offer. It is important to respect and value these. Assimilating the views of several people into a feedback presentation at the end of the process can be challenging in the tight timescale available. Achieving it will require everybody to listen and engage in constructive debate, to be prepared to challenge and be challenged, and to feel they can be open.

3. Confidentiality

It is vital for our credibility to establish a climate of trust in which people feel they can be open and honest. All of the information we glean from discussions with people during the course of the peer challenge process is non-attributable to individuals. This must be emphasised at the start of every meeting and respected at all times. (Further specific guidance on data protection is provided below). One of the key motivations for being a peer is the opportunity to learn from others. People are encouraged to return to their own organisation at the end of the process and talk about their experiences. But in doing so, we need to respect that some of the information we come across may be sensitive in nature and, with the world of local government being a small one, it is important that it is not used in any way to undermine the integrity of the peer challenge programme.

Other peer support projects

In most cases an LGA programme manager or principal adviser will brief a peer on what is required and pass on any contact details needed (for example for mentoring projects). In the case of co-facilitating work for member development events, a programme manager or other member of LGA staff will provide the initial briefing on the event and how to organise the facilitation or presentation role. There are a range of other activities that peers may be approached about, for example providing input to our national leadership.



Peer competencies

In carrying out the roles and responsibilities outlined above, peers are expected to display the following competencies and behaviours:

- 1. Developing others** – by sharing learning, providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment, and demonstrating a personal commitment to continual development and learning.
- 2. Work effectively with others** to achieve a common purpose through valuing the contributions of others and recognising and including diverse viewpoints.
- 3. Providing challenge** by being able to positively and constructively challenge individuals and groups in an effort to help them to improve. Peers should be able to perform the role of a 'change agent' sensitively and inclusively.
- 4. Planning and communicating** effectively by analysing requirements, coordinating activity and priorities, and providing evidence to support ideas.
- 5. Political and organisational awareness** by understanding the local context and overcoming political and organisational differences to work collaboratively with different stakeholder groups.

Using Social Media (Twitter)

Tweeting is always best done in response to the 'host' council's tweets so we are certain they are happy to have it known there is a peer challenge or peer support work taking place. On peer challenges we also ask that peers check with all members of the peer team to ensure they are happy to be referenced in any tweets. We ask that peers do not tweet opinions about the client council or anything that might be considered confidential or otherwise sensitive. The client council often tweets about an upcoming peer challenge or its outcomes, and it is of course perfectly acceptable to retweet those posts. Please include a reference to: @LGAPeers and @LGAComms

Further information

Sector-led improvement:

www.local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement

LGA peer challenges:

www.local.gov.uk/our-support/peer-challenges

Highlighting Political Leadership offer:

www.local.gov.uk/councillor-development

If you have any queries about the information in this guide, or have any feedback about the contents, please contact: alison.gover@local.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Peer Charter

We value the important and vital contribution peers make to sector-led improvement. Peers volunteer their time to provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge to help organisations and their people learn and improve. To help maximise this experience, this charter clarifies some of the key expectations and requirements of being a peer. It summarises:

- our relationship with you
- what we expect and require of you in your role as a peer
- what you can expect.

Our relationship with you

As a peer you are not an employee of the Local Government Association (LGA). If you are an officer of a local authority then you will continue to be engaged under the terms and conditions of your existing contract of employment and you will continue to be paid by your existing employer.

The organisations we work with specify the skills, expertise and experience of peers they require. The peers we suggest to them will reflect these requirements. We cannot therefore guarantee that any, or any amount of, services will be sought from you as a peer. We regularly review our pool of peers to ensure we can offer peers with the experience and expertise required by the organisations/local authorities we work with.

What we ask of you

You will:

1. (As an officer peer) seek permission from your employing organisation/local authority for you to be released as a peer to volunteer your time. This will indicate to us that your employer has agreed for you to be released and will continue to cover your salary (including any tax, national insurance and pension costs) for the period of the peer project.
2. Display and advocate the peer competencies and behaviours and perform your role and responsibilities in accordance to the relevant peer role description. As a peer you will carry out your role and responsibilities with the highest level of skill, care and diligence.
3. Inform us of any changes in your circumstances including role and employment status so that we can update the information we hold on you to help ensure it remains accurate and up to date.
4. Respond promptly to confirm your interest and availability when we contact you about a potential peer project. This allows us to respond quickly to the requests and requirements of local authorities and the other organisations we work with. We ask that you advise us of any political activity or other issue that may cause a conflict of interest with your involvement with the peer project.

5. Commit to a peer project by taking reasonable action to ensure you can remain available for the duration of the peer project assignment. We understand that on occasion there will be unforeseen circumstances and legitimate reasons for having to withdraw from a peer project. When this happens we ask that you provide us with as much notice as possible. This provides us with the opportunity to identify a replacement peer.
6. Respect the confidentiality and sensitivity of the information that you come across during the course of a peer project. We also ask that you check with the LGA project manager before you publicly disclose the peer projects you are involved or have been involved in.
7. Act as a champion for sector-led improvement by positively advocating and promoting the role of peers. We ask that peers be willing to provide feedback following a peer project to summarise their experience. From time to time we will ask some peers to be involved in peer development sessions to promote the role of peers.
8. Self-assess your performance after each peer project you undertake as part of our evaluation of our peer led support to the sector.
3. Provide you with a purchase order, guidance on any expenses and relevant and appropriate guidance that specifies key dates, your fees (if any) and deliverables required, prior to each peer project.
4. Cover all reasonable out of pocket expenses such as travel, food and drink and hotel accommodation which have been approved by the LGA project manager, provided these are submitted promptly and supported by relevant receipts and are in accordance with our expenses policy.
5. Provide peers with professional liability insurance cover. On occasions we may require peers to arrange their own public liability insurance. We will advise peers if this is required.
6. Provide as much notice as possible on the limited occasions that peer projects are cancelled or postponed. If we have to cancel a peer project and your involvement in it, we will do so without any liability to peers for any compensation or payments.
7. Adhere to our obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 when managing the information we hold on our peer database. We will use the information we hold on your knowledge, expertise and experience to match you with potential peer projects. We may also share your information with other organisations such as local authorities, fire and rescue services and other partner organisations we work with for these purposes.
8. Provide regular communication and information about our offer to the sector so that you are kept up-to-date with developments and where possible have an opportunity to inform how it develops.

What you can expect from us

We will:

1. Ensure that you are offered relevant and proportionate training, development or briefing activity to enable you to undertake your role as a peer effectively.
2. Provide as much notice as possible of potential peer projects to maximise the chance of you being available. We will always check your availability and willingness to do the peer project before we pass your details onto the organisation we are working with.

Appendix 2

LGA expenses policy – summary of sections relevant to member and officer peers

Expenses policies are available in more detail for officer and member peers – please contact the LGA for copies.

1. The expenses include all necessary, proper and reasonable travel and other expenses incurred by the member/officer peer in accordance with this agreement subject to the production of receipts or other evidence verifying such expenditure and provided that all significant expenses contemplated by the member/officer peer shall be approved by the LGA before they are incurred.
2. LGA reserves the right to limit the reimbursement of expenses.
3. Arrangement of any accommodation and travel shall be the responsibility of the officer/member peer unless the project team have informed them they will make those arrangements.

Maximum expenditure for meals: overnight stay with lunch/evening meal, up to £36 per night.

Accommodation

Hotel on a bed and breakfast basis
£90 per night (£150 per night in London)

ALL of the above payments will be based on actual expenditure, subject to the maximum amounts shown and to the production of original receipts.

Rail travel

Train fares will be refunded up to open standard on production of original ticket or receipt.

Air fare

Might be considered only if there are substantial savings to be made. Only Economy Class fares will be refunded by previous agreement with the LGA.

Mileage

Business mileage will be refunded at the HMRC rate currently set at 45 pence per mile for the first 10,000 miles and 25 pence per mile thereafter (for cars).



Local Government Association

Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000
Fax 020 7664 3030
Email info@local.gov.uk
www.local.gov.uk

© Local Government Association, August 2017

For a copy in Braille, larger print or audio,
please contact us on 020 7664 3000.
We consider requests on an individual basis.

REF 4.37