

Corporate peer challenge feedback survey

2017/18



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Summary

This online survey looked at views of corporate peer challenge (CPC) amongst those councils that received one during 2017/18. The results will help the Local Government Association (LGA) improve and develop the peer challenge programme.

An online survey form was sent via email to the leader and chief executive in 65 councils that received a CPC between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 (a total of 127 surveys in total). The survey was sent to respondents once they had signed off their CPC report, and contained a number of questions looking at views on the process, team and initial outcomes from the CPC.

A total of 87 responses were received (44 leaders and 43 chief executives) – a response rate of 69 per cent. Whilst these results should strictly be taken as a snapshot of the views of this particular group of councils, rather than representative of all councils who had a CPC during 2017/18, this level of response means that the results are likely to provide a good indication of the views of those who had a CPC more widely.

Results

- **Overall satisfaction with the CPC:** Most respondents (98 per cent) said that they were either very or fairly satisfied with the Corporate Peer Challenge.
- **Increased confidence in council delivering priorities as a result of the challenge:** Ninety-three per cent said that this was the case to either a great or moderate extent.
- **Objectives:** The highest number of respondents (40 per cent) identified getting an independent view on their current plans and strategies as their main objective.
- **Achieving objectives:** Ninety-three per cent said that their objectives for taking part in the CPC had been either fully or largely achieved.
- **Quality of peer challenge team:** Most respondents (99 per cent), said that this was either excellent or good.
- **Providing advice and ways to improve:** Most respondents (94 per cent) said that the feedback from the peer team provided useful advice and ways to improve, to either a great or moderate extent.
- **Feedback channels:** All the feedback channels were identified as helpful by the majority of respondents. When asked which was the most helpful, the most popular was informal daily catch ups, selected by 38 per cent.
- **Benefits and costs:** All respondents were asked whether overall they would agree or disagree that the benefits of CPC outweigh the costs (for example staff time). Nearly all (98 per cent) either strongly or tended to agree.
- **Recommending the corporate peer challenge:** Nearly all (99 per cent) of respondents said that they would be either very or fairly likely to recommend having a CPC to other councils, if asked about it.

Introduction

This online survey looked at views of corporate peer challenge (CPC) amongst those councils that received one during 2017/18. The results will help the Local Government Association (LGA) improve and develop the peer challenge programme.

Methodology

An online survey form was sent via email to the leader and chief executive in 65 councils that received a CPC between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 (a total of 127 surveys in total). The survey was sent to respondents once they had signed off their CPC report, and contained a number of questions looking at views on the process, team and initial outcomes from the CPC.

A total of 87 responses were received (44 leaders and 43 chief executives) – a response rate of 69 per cent. Whilst these results should strictly be taken as a snapshot of the views of this particular group of councils, rather than representative of all councils who had a CPC during 2017/18, this level of response means that the results are likely to provide a good indication of the views of those who had a CPC more widely.

Please note the following when reading the report:

- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.
- Throughout the report, percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.
- The following conventions are used in tables: '*' - less than 0.5 per cent; '0' – no observations; '-' – category not applicable/data not available.

Corporate peer challenge feedback survey

This section outlines the full set of survey results.

All respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the CPC that their council received. Nearly all (98 per cent) said that they were either very or fairly satisfied.

Table 1: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the corporate peer challenge your council received?	
	Per cent
Very or fairly satisfied	98
Very satisfied	75
Fairly satisfied	23
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0
Fairly dissatisfied	2
Very dissatisfied	0
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

Respondents were then asked to what extent, if at all, they felt more confident about their council delivering its priorities, having participated in the CPC. Ninety-three per cent said that this was the case to either a great or moderate extent.

Table 2: To what extent, if at all, do you feel more confident about your council delivering its priorities, having participated in the corporate peer challenge?	
	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	93
To a great extent	56
To a moderate extent	37
To a small extent	5
Not at all	2
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

All respondents were asked to identify their main objective in taking part in the CPC. The highest number (40 per cent) identified getting an independent view of their current plans and strategies as their main objective. Following that, getting an external challenge on their way of doing things and informing their future strategic thinking and direction were each identified by 26 per cent of respondents.

Table 3: What was your main objective in taking part in the corporate peer challenge?	
	Per cent
To get an independent view on our current plans and strategies	40
To get an external challenge on our way of doing things	26
To inform our future strategic thinking and direction	26
To get challenge, support or advice on a specific issue	7
Other	0
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

Seven per cent said that they were hoping to get challenge, support or advice on a specific issue. Examples given included governance, partnership working, change management, regeneration and communications.

All respondents were asked if the objectives that they had for taking part in the CPC had been achieved. Ninety-three per cent said that these had been either fully or largely achieved.

Table 4: Were the objectives that you had for taking part in the corporate peer challenge achieved?	
	Per cent
Fully or largely achieved	93
Fully achieved (met all goals)	49
Largely achieved (met most goals)	44
Partially achieved (met some goals)	6
Not achieved (met none of the goals)	1
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

Respondents were then asked how they would rate the quality of the peer challenge team. As Table 5 shows, nearly all (99 per cent) said that they would rate the quality of the team as either excellent or good.

Table 5: Overall how would you rate the quality of the peer challenge team? Please consider, for example, the team's knowledge and experience, their conduct, the quality of their judgements, and whether they provided appropriate advice and support	
	Per cent
Excellent or good	99
Excellent	72
Good	26
Not very good	0
Not good at all	0
Don't know	1

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

All respondents were asked to what extent the feedback from the peer team provided useful advice and suggested ways to improve. Ninety-four per cent said that this was the case to either a great or moderate extent.

Table 6: To what extent did the feedback from the peer team provide useful advice and suggested ways to improve?	
	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	94
To a great extent	66
To a moderate extent	29
To a small extent	5
Not at all	1
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

All respondents were asked which channels of feedback they found helpful. They were able to select multiple feedback types. Whilst all the methods of feedback were highly rated, the highest number (85 per cent) of respondents said that the feedback report was helpful.

Table 7: Which channels of feedback did you find helpful?	
	Per cent
Feedback report	85
Feedback presentation on final day	82
Informal daily catch-ups	80
Other	3
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

Note: Percentages total to more than 100, since respondents could select a range of channels.

Three per cent of respondents mentioned other channels of feedback that they found helpful and these are provided below:

- one to one meetings
- informal email from lead chief executive
- direct feedback to leader and deputy leader.

Those respondents who said that more than one channel of feedback was helpful were then asked which was the most helpful. Table 8 below combines these answers with the answers of those respondents who only said that one channel was helpful, to show overall which was considered the most helpful channel of feedback. As the table shows, respondents most commonly said that informal daily catch-ups were the most helpful channel (38 per cent selected this option).

Table 8: Which of these was the most helpful channel of feedback?

	Per cent
Informal daily catch ups	38
Feedback presentation on final day	31
Feedback report	30
Other	1
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

Respondents were then asked whether overall they would agree or disagree that the benefits of CPC outweigh the costs. Ninety-eight per cent either strongly or tended to agree.

Table 9: Overall, would you agree or disagree that the benefits of corporate peer challenge outweigh the costs (for example, staff time)?

	Per cent
Strongly or tend to agree	98
Strongly agree	82
Tend to agree	16
Neither agree nor disagree	0
Tend to disagree	2
Strongly disagree	0
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

All respondents were asked, taking everything into consideration, how likely they would be to recommend having a CPC to other councils if asked about it. Nearly all (99 per cent) of respondents said that they would be either very or fairly likely to recommend having a CPC to other councils, if asked about it.

Table 10: Taking everything into consideration, how likely would you be to recommend having a corporate peer challenge to other councils, if asked about it?

	Per cent
Very or fairly likely	99
Very likely	86
Fairly likely	13
Not very likely	1
Not at all likely	0
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents (87 respondents)

Respondents were asked to provide any comments that could be used to help promote CPC to other councils. Responses included:

“The team came across as true critical friends. We did not feel intimidated, yet they were free to outline those areas where we deserved to be challenged.”

Leader

“Our preparation for the peer challenge was almost as helpful a discipline as the peer challenge itself. It forced us to review our strategies, priorities and partnerships with a deadline to hasten our work.”

Leader

“The whole experience of the peer challenge was extremely useful and informative. The peer challenge team were very helpful and engaging and this was of particular benefit to ensure members and staff were comfortable with the process.”

Chief Executive

“It gives external assurance (or otherwise) that the strategic direction of travel is right. It can also really help with specific areas that are critical and maybe problematic.”

Chief Executive

Respondents were asked if they had any further comments about CPC. Forty responses were received and a summary of key themes are listed below:

The team: Several respondents praised the peer challenge team saying that they were professional and that there was good interaction between team and officers and senior members of the council.

“The team were very professional and honest in their feedback which gained the respect of both members and officers at the council.”

Chief Executive

Positive experience: Several respondents noted that participating in a CPC was a positive, challenging and rewarding experience, which had had a beneficial effect on their council.

“The members of the Peer Challenge team were enthusiastic, helpful, knowledgeable and approachable and whilst one is obviously nervous when an external team is invited into the authority to undertake any form of challenge the team quickly put to bed any staff/participant nerves by their positive and engaging approach.”

Chief Executive

The report and recommendations: A few respondents mentioned the report, some praising its timeliness and the efficient way it was produced while others suggested that report recommendations could have been improved.

“Agreeing the final written report has taken longer than expected...Elected members raised concerns about the lack of specific evidence in the final report - and that this didn't reflect the time given by staff, partners, members or the volume of supporting material that had been provided/requested by the team in preparation for the review.”

Chief Executive

“...Very efficient turn-around of the report.”

Chief Executive

The role of member peers: One or two respondents mentioned the role of member peers in the process, offering both praise and suggestions.

“Member peers need support to understand their roles – [on the] first day our peer spent a lot of time telling us how he did it in his council, rather than listening more actively to understand the local context...”

Chief Executive

“The willingness of the lead peer and member to have joint de-briefs at the end of each day with the city mayor and chief executive was appreciated.”

Chief Executive

Suggestions: A small number of respondents made comments which suggested possible improvements for future peer challenges. These were varied but included extending the length and depth of the challenge, ensuring timely delivery of the report, and ensuring the makeup of the peer team is appropriate to the council.

“With only three days to interact with the Council, it would always be a very limited exercise as shown by some of our feedback.”

Leader

Annex A: Questionnaire

1. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the corporate peer challenge your council received?

Very satisfied
Fairly satisfied
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Fairly dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied
Don't know

2. To what extent, if at all, do you feel more confident about your council delivering its priorities, having participated in the corporate peer challenge?

To a great extent
To a moderate extent
To a small extent
Not at all
Don't know

3. What was your main objective in taking part in the corporate peer challenge?

To get an independent view on our current plans and strategies
To get an external challenge on our way of doing things
To inform our future strategic thinking and direction
To get challenge, support or advice on a specific issue (please specify)
Other (please specify)
Don't know

To everyone apart from those who selected 'don't know':

4. Were the objectives that you had for taking part in the corporate peer challenge achieved?

Fully achieved (met all goals)
Largely achieved (met most goals)
Partially achieved (met some goals)
Not achieved (met none of the goals)
Don't know

5. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the peer challenge team?

Please consider, for example, the team's knowledge and experience, their conduct, the quality of their judgements, and whether they provided appropriate advice and support

Excellent
Good
Not very good
Not good at all
Don't know

6. To what extent did the feedback from the peer team provide useful advice and suggested ways to improve?

To a great extent
To a moderate extent
To a small extent
Not at all
Don't know

7. Which channels of feedback did you find helpful?

Please tick all that apply

Informal daily catch ups
Feedback presentation on final day
Feedback report
Other (please specify)
Don't know

To those who selected more than one feedback channel above:

8. And which of these was the most helpful channel of feedback?

Please tick one

The answer options selected above will be fed through

Don't know

To all:

9. Overall, would you agree or disagree that the benefits of corporate peer challenge outweigh the costs (for example, staff time)?

Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

10. Taking everything in to consideration, how likely would you be to recommend having a corporate peer challenge to other councils if asked about it?

Very likely
Fairly likely
Not very likely
Not at all likely
Don't know

11. We would welcome any comments that we could use to help promote corporate peer challenge to other councils. Please use the space below.

12. Finally, if you have any other comments about the corporate peer challenge you received, please use the space below.

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback will be used to improve and develop the corporate peer challenge process.



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