

Corporate peer challenge impact survey

2017/18



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Summary

This online survey looked at the extent to which corporate peer challenge (CPC) has had a lasting impact on those councils that received one during 2016/17. 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 50 councils that received a CPC between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 (a total of 102 surveys in total). The survey was sent to respondents around a year after their CPC, and contained a small number of questions looking at the extent to which the peer challenge has had a lasting impact on the authority.

A total of 61 responses were received (26 leaders and 35 chief executives) – a response rate of 60 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 2016/17, 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

- **Further LGA improvement support:** Half of all chief executive respondents (16 respondents) said that the peer challenge had acted as a trigger for this.
- **Impact on delivery of council's priorities:** Eighty per cent of all respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had a positive impact on the delivery of council priorities, to either a great or moderate extent.
- **Impact on the external reputation of the council:** Seventy-two per cent of respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had a positive impact on the external reputation of the council, to either a great or moderate extent.
- **Impact on council's performance:** Seventy per cent of respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had a positive impact on council performance, to either a great or moderate extent.
- **Impact on relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders:** Seventy per cent of respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had a positive effect on partnerships with external stakeholders, to either a great or moderate extent.
- **Impact on culture and behaviours within the council:** Sixty-two per cent of respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had a positive effect on culture and behaviours within the council, to either a great or moderate extent.
- **Impact on the way that services are delivered:** Around half (fifty-one per cent) of respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had a great or moderate positive effect on the way that services are delivered.
- **Impact on the financial sustainability of the council:** Just under half (forty-one per cent) of respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had had a positive impact on the financial sustainability for the council to either a great or moderate extent.

- **Publishing the peer challenge report:** All chief executive respondents (32 respondents) said that their council had published their corporate peer challenge report.

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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.
- Where the response base is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore where this is the case in this report, absolute numbers are reported alongside the percentage values.

Corporate peer challenge impact survey

This section outlines the full set of survey results.

All chief executives (32 respondents) were asked if the peer challenge had acted as a 'trigger' for any further improvement support from the LGA.

Responses to this question were fairly evenly split with half of all respondents (50 per cent – 16 respondents) saying that the peer challenge had acted as a trigger for further improvement support from the LGA and nearly half (47 per cent – 15 respondents) reporting that it had not as no further support was needed at the time.

Table 1: Did your peer challenge act as a 'trigger' for any further improvement support from the LGA? This could be targeted support, or simply making use of existing improvement tools offered by the LGA.

	Number	Per cent
Yes	16	50
No – but we would have liked some further support	1	3
No – no further support was needed at the time	15	47
Don't know	0	0

Base: all chief executive respondents (32 respondents)

Impact of the corporate peer challenge

All respondents were asked the extent to which the corporate peer challenge had had a positive impact on various areas. The area where a great or moderate positive impact was most commonly seen was 'delivery of the councils priorities', with 80 per cent saying this. This was followed by the 'the external reputation of the council' (72 per cent).

Table 2: To what extent if at all, do you think that the corporate peer challenge (including any further improvement support it triggered) had a positive impact on...

	Great or moderate	Great extent	Moderate extent	Small extent	Not at all	DK/ Not applicable
	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent
Delivery of the council's priorities	80	21	59	13	7	0
The external reputation of the council ¹	72	30	43	18	10	0
The council's performance	70	20	51	23	7	0
Relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders	70	21	49	20	10	0
Culture and behaviours within the council	62	16	46	31	5	2
The way that services are delivered	51	10	41	38	11	0
The financial sustainability of the council	41	7	34	34	23	2

Base: all respondents (61 respondents)

¹ Please note that whilst it appears the individual 'great' and 'moderate' extent categories sum to 73 per cent, this is actually due to rounding.

Seventeen respondents provided details of other impacts, and a summary of the key themes are listed below:

Long term vision/strategy: Some respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had allowed them to reflect on their long term priorities, strategy or vision and in some cases to revise or rethink these.

“...this exercise allowed the senior management team time to stand back and reflect on a number of key priorities.”

Chief Executive

Validation: Some respondents explained that the corporate peer challenge had provided them with validation for the work they were undertaking and confirmation that they had the right general approach. It had also provided external perspective and insight.

“Validation of and challenge to our own perspectives.”

Chief Executive

Relationships and communication: A few respondents mentioned that they had seen improvements in member/officer relationships as a result of the challenge and that they also now had strengthened and more constructive communications with internal teams, key stakeholders and residents.

“Made us try to better communicate with residents about delays in delivering certain projects.”

Leader

Positive impact examples

Respondents who said that the corporate peer challenge had one or more positive impacts on their council were asked to provide an example of this. Fifty-seven responses were received and key themes are provided below.

Endorsing existing work: Many respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had provided a positive endorsement of their work and progress. This confirmation and encouragement had created confidence, pride and positivity within the council.

“Generated a positive vibe within the organisation and set a new benchmark for moving forward.”

Chief Executive

Reflection, review and challenge: Many respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had helped them to review current activity, consider further areas for development and had highlighted areas for improvement.

“Providing external “critical friend” rigour and endorsement for our chosen course...”

Leader

Focus: Some respondents mentioned that the challenge had given them the opportunity to develop an improved focus on their priorities, identify any changes that needed to be made and focus on their longer term work.

“The peer challenge helped solidify the council’s direction and provided a focus on the changes the council knew it needed to make.”

Chief Executive

Relationship building: A few respondents said that the challenge had allowed them to engage with external stakeholders and also other authorities with similar priorities and who were experiencing similar challenges.

“Created the impetus for the council to focus on a narrative of place and identification and relationship with key partners.”

Chief Executive

Publishing the challenge report

All 32 chief executive respondents were asked if their council had published its corporate peer challenge report. All said that they had done so.

Table 9: Has your council published its corporate challenge feedback report?		
	Number	Per cent
Yes	32	100
No	0	0
Don't know	0	0

Base: 32 chief executive respondents

Suggestions

All respondents were asked if they had any suggestions for how the corporate peer challenge process could be improved or developed to increase the positive impacts for participating councils. Thirty-three responses were received and a summary of key themes are provided below.

Positive impact: Rather than give suggestions for improvement, around half of respondents who answered said that participating in the corporate peer challenge had been a positive and helpful experience which had led to supportive and constructive suggestions for improvement.

‘It was a very positive experience all round.’

Leader

“Peer review has been invaluable for both the authority and me, a new CEO.”

Chief Executive

Background preparation: Several respondents said that more advanced preparation could be helpful. Suggestions included having a pre-meeting or dinner in order to circulate information in advance to ensure the nature of the challenge was fully understood within the council. It was also suggested that background work could be undertaken by the team in order to grasp key issues within the council before the challenge began and that feedback should be given on the programme arranged by the council for the peer team, prior to the first morning of the challenge.

“Circulating information in advance so that those participating understand that the peer challenge approach is more open and isn’t an inspection – we received

feedback that too many felt at times that the focus group came across as an inspection.”

Chief Executive

“Perhaps a little more background work on what can be seen as a quite major problem for the council you are visiting...”

Leader

Improved reporting: A few respondents requested clearer report recommendations and asked to receive the report in a timelier manner after the challenge was completed. A small number would have liked more challenging feedback.

“...there were significant gaps in time before a final report was issued.”

Chief Executive

Timing: One or two respondents said that they would prefer a longer peer challenge to allow more time for discussion and learning.

“...there may be a case for the challenges to be extended by one day to gain greater insight and provide added value.”

Leader

Follow-up: One or two respondents suggested a follow-up meeting with the peer challenge team in order to review progress made.

“I appreciate resource constraints but some regular contact from the team, particularly the peers, (e.g. a phone call every three months with leader and chief executive) might help to support maintaining the impetus and setting a review date in the diary early (albeit for perhaps 18 months hence) might also keep everyone focused!”

Chief Executive

Annex A: Questionnaire

To chief executives:

1. Did your peer challenge act as a 'trigger' for any further improvement support from the LGA?

This could be targeted support, or simply making use of existing improvement tools offered by the LGA

- Yes
- No – but we would have liked some further support
- No – no further support was needed at the time
- Don't know

To all:

2. To what extent, if at all, do you think that the corporate peer challenge (including any further improvement support it triggered) had a positive impact on:

Please select one answer for each row

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To a small extent	Not at all	Don't know/Not applicable
The council's performance					
Delivery of the council's priorities					
The external reputation of the council					
Culture and behaviours within the council					
Relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders					
The way that services are delivered					
The financial sustainability of the council					
Other impacts (please specify)					

To those who answered a great or moderate extent to at least one of the options above:

3. Please provide a couple of examples of how the corporate peer challenge has had a positive impact on your council.

4. Would you be happy for us to use this information as an 'impact story' or case study as part of our wider promotion of the programme?

We would contact you for sign off before publishing anything, and may ask you for more information

Yes
No

To chief executives:

5. Has your council published its corporate peer challenge feedback report?

Yes
No
Don't know

To those who answered 'no':

6. Please use the space below to explain why your council decided against publishing its feedback report:

To all:

7. If you have any suggestions for how the corporate peer challenge process could be improved or developed to increase the positive impacts for participating councils, 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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