

# Corporate peer challenge impact survey

2018/19



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## Summary

This report considers the lasting impact of corporate peer challenge (CPC) on councils that took part 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 46 councils that received a CPC between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 (a total of 93 surveys). 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 63 responses were received (26 leaders and 37 chief executives) – a response rate of 68 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

- **Further LGA improvement support:** Over half of all chief executive respondents (20 in total) said that the peer challenge had acted as a trigger for further improvement support from the LGA.
- **Impact on delivery of council's priorities:** Seventy one 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 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 one 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:** Sixty three 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 eight 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:** Just under half (46 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:** 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:** Nearly all chief executive respondents (35 of 37 chief executive respondents) said that their council had published their corporate peer challenge report.

## Introduction

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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 (37 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 over half of all respondents (54 per cent – 20 respondents) saying that the peer challenge had acted as a trigger for further improvement support from the LGA and nearly half (43 per cent – 16 respondents) reporting that it had not as no further support was needed at the time. One respondent did not know.

**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	20	54
No – but we would have liked some further support	0	0
No – no further support was needed at the time	16	43
Don't know	1	3

Base: all chief executive respondents (37)

### 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 areas where a great or moderate positive impact was most commonly seen were 'delivery of the council's priorities', and 'the council's performance' with 71 per cent saying this. This was followed by the 'the external reputation of the council' (70 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	Don't know or N/A
	Per cent					
Delivery of the council's priorities	71	22	49	19	10	0
The council's performance	71	25	46	14	11	3
The external reputation of the council	70	22	48	19	11	0
Culture and behaviours within the council	68	17	51	24	5	3
Relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders	63	24	40	19	14	3
The way that services are delivered	46	8	38	38	14	2
The financial sustainability of the council	41	17	24	25	32	2
Other impacts	17	14	3	0	19	78

Base: all respondents (63)

Details of other impacts provided, are listed below:

- "Increased positivity."
- "Discussion/agreement on longer term strategic priorities."
- "Next phase of the Transformation Programme"
- "Self-confidence"
- "Self-awareness. Member behaviour"
- "Significant impact in driving change and improvement throughout the council and in particular in assisting members in recognising the need to change."
- "Confidence in the council, given an external authoritative and positive view received from corporate peer challenge."
- "Programme management"

## 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 these. Fifty three responses were received and key themes are provided below. Forty seven respondents were willing for LGA to use their examples as an impact story or case study.



**Endorsing and validating existing work:** Many respondents said that the corporate peer challenge had provided a positive endorsement of their work and progress to date. This confirmation had allowed them to celebrate their successes and appreciate good performance within the council. It also reassured them and gave them with a sense of confidence.

“It gave us external validation of our progress and achievements, which has been a great motivation for the council and our staff. It gave us the confidence to present ourselves on the national stage and to share our successes.”

Chief Executive

“Helped us to feel confident we are doing the right things Got us to think more about the future and less about the past.”

Leader

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

“It enabled the authority to become more self-aware, of its relative performance - what was good and what required some focus for improvement. It was a validation of what we had been doing, but also provided some pointers as to how we could improve.”

Chief Executive

“Enabled us to come up with a plan of improvement to work to. Gave staff and stakeholders reassurance that we were on the right track.”

Leader

**Focus:** Some respondents mentioned that the challenge had given them the opportunity to develop an improved focus on their priorities and also key areas of work that may need improvement (such as scrutiny, financial sustainability and commercialism) in order to deliver the council agenda.

“Provided challenge that supported greater focus on financial sustainability whilst providing assurance of performance in other areas.”

Chief Executive

**Relationship building and joint working:** A few respondents said that challenge had allowed them to consider how to engage more fully with external stakeholders and also other authorities with similar priorities and who were experiencing similar challenges.

“The peer challenge also provided focus on developing improved joint working and ways of working with partners.”

Chief Executive

## Publishing the challenge report

All 37 chief executive respondents were asked if their council had published its corporate peer challenge report. Nearly all (95 per cent – 35 respondents) said that they had done so.

The reasons cited for not publishing the report included delays caused by a major restructure and issues around agreeing the narrative.

<b>Table 3: Has your council published its corporate challenge feedback report?</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Yes	35	95
No	2	5
Don't know	0	0

Base: all chief executive respondents (37)

## 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 responses were received and a summary of key themes are provided below.

**Positive impact:** Rather than giving suggestions for improvement, around a third of respondents who answered said that participating in the corporate peer challenge had been a positive experience which had been helpful in confirming the councils approach and had been well run.

“It was very well run and delivered”

Leader

“Nothing to add as it was considered to be a very effective and helpful exercise.”

Chief Executive

**Shared learning:** A few respondents suggested that it would be useful to share lessons, experiences, actions and common themes from other cohort councils. Some said that sharing the learning from other challenges would be helpful.

“Providing learning from other challenges would be helpful - particularly around our areas of specific focus.”

Chief Executive

“Encourage some shared work, lessons and actions as feedback from cohort councils who have gone through the process at a similar time.”

Chief Executive

**Background preparation:** A small number of respondents said that more advanced preparation could be helpful. Suggestions included encouraging the council to think through what it wanted out of the review in advance and having a joint exercise beforehand between the council and the peer reviewers to ensure all members fully understood the process.

**Timing:** A small number of respondents said that they would prefer a longer peer challenge to allow more time for feedback, discussion and learning.

### Individual responses included:

- More consideration of the make-up of the challenge team.
- Consideration of all council participation.

- Encouraging new chief executives to participate.
- Offering a suite of challenges to enhance continued development.
- Consider applications from those wanting to become new member peers.

## 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

	<b>To a great extent</b>	<b>To a moderate extent</b>	<b>To a small extent</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Don't know/Not applicable</b>
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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