

# Corporate Peer Challenge The Updated Approach

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# Corporate Peer Challenge

- The LGA's peer support offer is the cornerstone of the sector support programme, it includes two distinct, but related programmes: **peer challenge (Including CPC)** and **remote peer support**.
- **Peer Challenge** is an established tool that supports councils to drive improvements and efficiency in specific areas including: Corporate and Finance Peer Challenge, Communications, Housing, Equalities, Health & Care, Children's Services and Culture & Libraries
- **Remote Peer Support** was introduced during the pandemic and provides councils with support and challenge to address specific issues including: Governance & Scrutiny, Finance & Audit and Personal Safety

92% of respondents said the recent peer challenge/remote peer support helped them/their council

# Corporate Peer Challenge

- Is a key part of the LGA's sector support offer, managed and delivered by the sector for the sector.
- They are improvement focused; the scope is agreed with the council and tailored to reflect their local needs and specific requirements.
- Peer teams **identify and address issues and challenge progress** across the core elements of:
  1. **Local priorities and outcomes**
  2. **Organisational and place leadership**
  3. **Governance and culture**
  4. **Financial planning and management**
  5. **Capacity for improvement.**

98% of councils said that corporate peer challenge positively impacted their council's performance.

# Corporate Peer Challenge

- Experienced peers from across the sector spend significant time within a Council. At least **3 days for a district/borough** and at least **4 days for upper tier Councils**
- Participating councils receive feedback on the last day onsite, followed by a **comprehensive report** and **recommendations** from the peer team.
- The Council then identify their own **action plan** to respond. Followed by a **Progress Review** by the peer team to monitor and assess progress made
- **Fully-funded** corporate peer challenges are **available to all English councils** and it is expected that they will have **one at least every five years**.
- it is **not a sector-owned form of inspection**, it does not deliver a scored assessment. it is not a detailed service assessment and it is not driven by external requirements or a standard set of KLOE's
- But it is now becoming a **key part of the Governments performance framework**

98% of respondents were very or fairly satisfied with the knowledge of the peer team

# Corporate Peer Challenge

## Strengthening our approach:

- Regular reviews and sector engagement including a recent stocktake
- Learning from the pandemic to improve our practice
- Consistent in-person and onsite delivery over a 3 or 4 day period
- A strong focus on evidence based approaches to deliver robust recommendations and hard-hitting messages through:
  - Finance – Improved Finance Briefings for the peer team
  - Performance – ( LG Inform) - use of performance metrics, benchmarking and comparative data
  - Governance, Scrutiny and Audit
  - Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion
  - A focus on in-person and onsite engagement
  - Monitoring delivery via Progress Reviews

96% of respondents found the support and advice received to be relevant

# Peers

At the heart of Sector-Led Improvement are local government officers and councillors who offer their time as ‘peers’.

Peers provide a **practitioner perspective** and **critical friend challenge** to help councils and councillors with their **learning and improvement**.

They do this through a range of activities including mentoring, leadership development and **peer challenge**.

# Member Peer Perspective

## Challenged City Council

- has significant financial challenges and a capitalisation directive from government to allow it to balance its budget in 2021/22.
- is in no overall control and is being led by a minority administration
- has shared services with a neighbouring council
- has a new Chief Executive and senior management team

CPC took place in June 2021 one month before DLUHC reviewed the Council's finances and governance and introduced an Independent Improvement & Assurance Panel.

# Providing 'critical friend' challenge

## What do peers need to look out for?

# Member Peer Perspective

- Cross party approach – Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Peers working together
- Engaged all five Group Leaders in the process, built strong relationships and trust
- Focussed on evidence and outcomes – enabling the delivery of hard hitting messages including challenging the:
  - agreed political narrative and advised them on communication and engagement with DLUHC
  - approach and framework for collaboration
  - issues of poor member relationships
  - need for all members to work together and make tough decisions
- Continued and ongoing engagement and challenge through the Improvement and Assurance framework.

# Delivery since 2021

It was agreed during the early part of the pandemic that CPCs require an on site presence therefore no CPCs took place between March 2020 and July 2021

21/22 Peer Challenge & RPS	21/22 Corporate Peer Challenge	22/23 Peer Challenge & RPS – Dec 22	22/23 CPC – Dec 22
<b>134</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>37</b>

2021/22 Progress Reviews	2022/23 Progress Reviews – Dec 22
<b>4</b>	<b>35</b>

# Emerging Themes

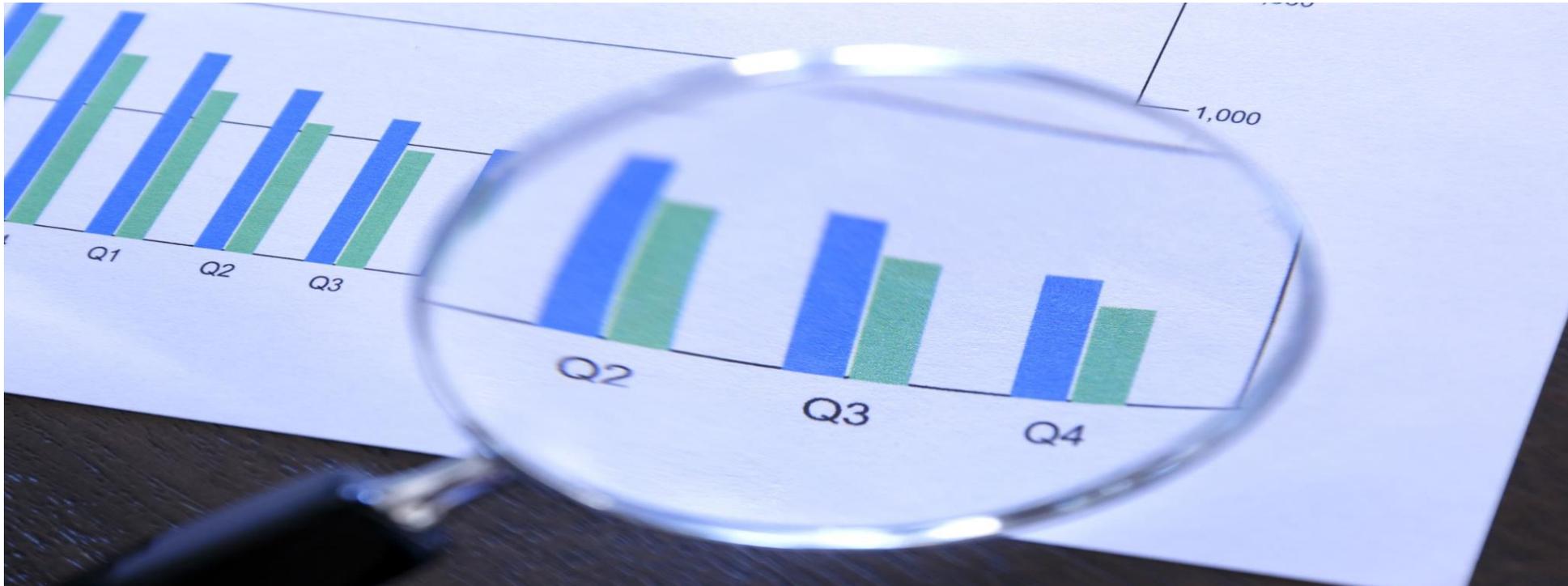
- **Resilient Councils** – Despite capacity challenges, councils have shown great resilience and commitment, demonstrating highly effective approaches to supporting their communities, including those most vulnerable, through agile working.
- **Community engagement** – COVID-19 encouraged councils to rethink how they deliver services to and engage with communities, including approaches to messaging. Strong commitment to improvement in this area.
- **Partnerships/shared services** – multiple examples of where this has supported more efficient and improved service delivery as well as helping investment in certain areas..
- **Going the extra mile** – Every CPC has seen evidence of Members and Officers going the extra mile – how to continue to harness that in the future?
- **Receptive to change** – Councils have demonstrated that they are receptive to recommendations from peer teams and committed to improving delivery of services.
- **We're all in it together** – Councils role in coordinating and leading place delivery with partners

# Emerging Challenges

- **Financial Management and Sustainability** – Many Councils are facing significant budget gaps
- **Priorities and Delivering Services** – There is an increasing need to focus on core priorities and deliver high quality services
- **Transformation and Organisation Development** – Are Councils able to deliver further transformation?
- **Workforce Capacity and Capability** – Linked to above, capacity is stretched
- **Strong and Effective Governance** – Examples of poor governance and delayed decisions
- **Place Leadership** – Linked to finances and priorities, Councils need to be clear about their role in place leadership

# Improving Performance – LG Inform

## LG Inform Demonstration - LGA Local Area Benchmarking Tool



# The Future

- Continuing to strengthen our standards, approach and expectations
- Ensuring on-site delivery, whilst not losing the benefits of remote working
- Focussing on reviewing progress, impact and outcomes – Progress Reviews
- Targeting those few remaining Councils that have still not had a Corporate Peer Challenge
- Continuing to build a diverse pool of officer and councillor peers from across local government and beyond
- Anything else?