

Corporate Peer Challenge: what's it all about?

Introduction

The LGA, in partnership with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), is able to offer the opportunity for larger parish and town councilsⁱ to benefit from a corporate peer challengeⁱⁱ (CPC).

By bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of member and officer peers, a peer challenge provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils. The LGA's CPC offer is effective and well regarded by the sector. A recent survey found that every council that had received a corporate peer challenge was very or fairly satisfied.

To date, the LGA and NALC have worked together to deliver Corporate Peer Challenges at Chippenham Town Council in Wiltshire, Falmouth Town Council in Cornwall, Cirencester Town Council in Gloucestershire and, more recently, Morecambe Town Council in Lancashire.

You may find at this stage that you have a number of questions about the CPC process and what to expect. The purpose of this document is to help prepare you for the next stages of the process by providing a 'Who?', 'What?', 'When?' and 'How?' of the CPC.

Who?

The CPC will be conducted by a team of peers - both councillors and officers from the parish and town council sector. This team will typically include representatives from NALC and representatives from parish and town councils e.g., an experienced/senior town councillor and a town clerk. An LGA Peer Challenge Manager will manage the CPC and form part of the team.

An integral part of the CPC offer is that it is bespoke to the needs and priorities of your town council, and you will be invited to give your input as to the skills and experience required of those who make up the peer team.



During the CPC the peer team will engage with a broad range of councillors, officers, key partners and stakeholders across your town council area.

The CPC itself is organised and conducted by the Local Government Association (LGA) - the national membership body for local authorities, working closely with NALC – the national membership body representing the interests of local (parish and town) councils.

What?

The [Corporate Peer Challenge](#) is a cornerstone of the LGA's sector support programme. It involves peers from the town council sector spending time with your town council to provide challenge and share learning. It aims to highlight areas of good practice, as well as identify areas for improvement and ongoing support.

The focus of a CPC revolves around the following five themes. Importantly though, through on-going engagement with your town council, we will scope and shape these themes to ensure they meet the specific requirements of your town council. This will include an agreement about any areas of specific focus that your town council would welcome.

1. **Understanding of the local place and priority setting:** Does the town council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. **Leadership of Place:** Does the town council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders?
3. **Financial planning and viability:** Do the town council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
4. **Organisational leadership and governance:** Are there effective political and officer leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
5. **Capacity to deliver:** Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the town council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?



When?

Ahead of the peer challenge, you will meet with your LGA Peer Challenge Manager and NALC to discuss these themes and your council's particular areas of focus. These will then be reflected in the approach of the CPC. There is usually a three-to-six-month lead in time from this scoping meeting to the actual on-site delivery of the CPC (to allow for preparation and planning).

Following the scoping meeting, a follow up 'scoping document' will be shared with you which will outline the agreed scope and focus of the CPC. The LGA will also share a more detailed guidance note with you which will help you prepare for the CPC.

The on-site Corporate Peer Challenge will usually take place over **2 – 3 days** on-site – depending upon the scope of the peer challenge.

How?

You will be required to share some background documentation ahead of the CPC and this will be informed by the finalised agreed scope and focus.

This will include a Position Statement structured around the themes of the CPC, which should be used to provide a steer to the peer team on the local context.

The town council will also need to arrange a timetable of activity organised for the peer team in advance. Meetings should provide an opportunity for discussion which explores issues and ideas as much as evidence gathering.

At the end of the final day, the peer team will share initial feedback (verbally), followed by a comprehensive written report (shared within three weeks of the CPC) highlighting the town council's areas of strength and areas of potential improvement. In the spirit of openness and transparency, the LGA require you to publish this report, alongside an action plan, on your website no later than three months of the original CPC. The LGA will also publish the report on their website. If you do not publish the action plan as the same time as the report, we do require you to publish an action plan within five months of the original CPC.

Eight to ten months later, you will also undergo a Progress Review, whereby members of the CPC peer team will meet with you to discuss the progress that you



have made in relation to the Action Plan and identify any areas requiring support e.g., through NALC.

FAQ

Is this an inspection?

- No, CPCs are not inspections, and the Peer Team is here on the invitation of your town council. The Peer Challenge process exists solely to support you in your on-going improvement.

Is this conducted by central government?

- No, Peer Challenges are conducted by the local government sector, for the local government sector. Though, central government is highly supportive of the Peer Challenge model and sector-led improvement more widely.

Will this cost the Council?

- Corporate Peer Challenges are offered at no charge to councils. Peer Challenges and wider sector-led improvement is funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The LGA will also cover any logistical cost to Peers over the course of the Challenge.

Next Steps

If your council would like to be considered for a Corporate Peer Challenge then please contact:

Cindy Lowthian, Senior Regional Adviser

Email: cindy.lowthian@local.gov.uk and

Anders Hanson, Member Services Manager at NALC

Email: Anders.hanson@nalc.gov.uk

ⁱ E.g. super (town) councils with an annual precept of c£1m or an annual turnover of c£1.5m.

ⁱⁱ The LGA and NALC are looking to deliver up to 5 CPCs for larger parish and town councils (April 2023 to March 2024).

