



Corporate Peer Challenge

Borough Council of King's Lynn and
West Norfolk

13th December 2022

Agreement of scope of peer challenge



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Introduction

The Local Government Association offers all councils a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) at no cost every 5 years. CPC is a tried and trusted method of improvement; it provides councils with a robust and effective improvement tool which is owned and delivered by the sector, for the sector. Peers remain at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge. In a recent survey, 98% of councils receiving a Corporate Peer Challenge said that it had a positive impact on the delivery of the council's priorities.

The challenges faced by councils in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic are unprecedented. The CPC offer takes into account the challenging context in which councils are operating. The refreshed CPC process also provides a greater focus on key issues such as equality and diversity and community engagement.

Thank you for agreeing to be part of the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge programme. This note provides details of the approach, scope and focus at the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk (KLWN).

Scope and focus

It was good to speak with you Lorraine on 13th December 2022 to discuss the Corporate Peer Challenge for the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk. As we discussed, to get the most value out of your corporate peer challenge, the council needs to consider carefully the scope and focus.

The five high-level themes we have adopted for all LGA Corporate Peer Challenges provides the initial framework:

1. **Local priorities and outcomes:** Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership:** Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture:** Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management:** Does the council have a clear understanding of its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement:** Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

We discussed the organisational changes that have taken place at KLWN and the implementation of a new management structure. It is important to allow time for the restructure to land and become more established. However, there is a need to review certain aspects of the council's corporate governance, transparency and scrutiny functions following a request from the Independent group.

The timing of the CPC will need to take account of all out elections in May 2023. Whilst not pre-judging the outcome, there is always the possibility of change, so it would be sensible to complete the CPC post-election to maximise the benefits. Allowing time for the inaugural council meeting and new member inductions would

ensure better understanding of the process, engagement and outcomes for all members, new and existing.

The report and recommendations will provide a baseline for the council, identifying what is good about KLWN and where there is best practice as well as delivering a helpful platform from which the administration can shape priorities, drive improvement and deliver better services to residents.

This is a live scoping document and it is intended to serve as a draft, to be shaped over the coming weeks with the input of members and officers to ensure it focusses on the most important issues for the council. The peer team will then be recruited based on their skills and experience in these areas.

Timing and duration

A peer challenge usually takes around 6 months lead-in time, including to secure time in peers' diaries.

Given the elections in May 2023 and the points raised above, we would suggest looking for a date in September 2023. This will provide time for the council to settle post-election, prepare the position statement and timetable and avoid the summer holiday period.

Once fully scoped we can agree on the number of days required and how best to deliver. At present we have a preference for onsite delivery but can pivot to hybrid or online if circumstances outside our control suggest this.

Corporate Peer Challenge team

The LGA will source and agree a team of officer and member peers informed by the skills and experience required. There is also the opportunity to include peers from outside of local government, such as team member(s) with a community sector, central government or private sector experience. The LGA is committed to diversity and inclusion and it is important that peer teams reflect the diversity of local councils and the communities they serve.

We would suggest a peer team of:

- A Leader peer, ideally a Leader from a council with a similar context to your Council (although not from the vicinity). In your case we could expect to source a District Council Leader. We will work with you and the LGA Political Group Offices to identify a potential councillor peer to match your administration.
- A Chief Executive Officer peer, from a district council ideally reflecting an area with a similar context, such as a large rural area with coastal/tourism.
- A senior officer peer, with experience of governance, transparency and scrutiny.
- A senior officer peer possibly with a strong track record of regeneration and partnership experience.
- LGA Peer Challenge Manager – Kirsty Human
- LGA Project Support Officer – TBC

The peer team's composition will be informed by the final agreed scope

Process

The peer team will meet with a range of officers and members over the course of the peer challenge, as well as a range of external stakeholders. There will be informal feedback to the Leader and CEO at the end of each day.

On the final day the peer team will deliver headline feedback and recommendations to a selected audience which should include as a minimum: the corporate leadership team, cabinet members and, as appropriate, opposition members. During this feedback there is opportunity for clarification and questions.

This will be followed by a report detailing the strengths of the council, the issues considered, areas for further improvement and key recommendations. The council will receive the draft report within 3 weeks of the CPC. We will then agree the final report with you for publication. The council should then develop a detailed action plan

that responds to the report's findings.

In addition, to get the most out of the onsite CPC activity some preparatory and post-CPC engagement will be beneficial.

Peer preparation and engagement

To help the peer team gain an in-depth understanding of the local issues before their onsite activity, we will work with KLWN to develop an Information & Data Pack. The most important aspect of the pack is the 'Position Statement' prepared by the council. This provides a clear brief and steer to the peer team on the local context and what the peer team should focus on. It is an opportunity to set out the key issues, challenges and current thinking in relation to the CPC.

The peer team will also undertake some pre-onsite conversations with key officers and members. We will confirm the dates and times for this earlier engagement, which will typically take place remotely.

Six-month progress review

Six months after the CPC, the LGA will organise a CPC progress review. This will be a short-facilitated session which creates space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

Following this, the LGA will produce a short note which reflects the council's progress and provides examples of any good or innovative practice.

Publication of corporate peer challenge report

To promote openness and transparency and share learning across the sector, the corporate peer challenge offer is made on the expectation that each council will publish both the CPC report and its subsequent action plan in response to the peer challenge's findings.

We expect the council to publish the CPC report within six weeks of its finalisation,



with the subsequent action plan published within eight weeks of the report's publication. We do ask that the council commit to this principle at the outset. The LGA will also publish the CPC report on its website.

Practical arrangements and next steps

The council will need to identify a peer challenge co-ordinator who will act as a day-to-day contact and oversee the practical arrangements.

The council will need to prepare a timetable of meetings and focus groups for the team. The attached Preparation Guidance Note provides further details on preparing for the process, including the timetable.