

Corporate Peer Challenge

City of York Council

30 October 2023

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. 100 per cent of respondents indicated that the process of preparing for and participating in the peer challenge has had a positive impact on their council. The survey also showed that 98 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the CPC or FPC that their council received.

The CPC offer considers the challenging context in which councils are operating. The refreshed CPC process also provides a greater focus on key issues such as financial sustainability, governance, assurance, and performance.

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 City of York Council.

Mark Edgell

Phone number: 07747 636910

Email address: mark.edgell@local.gov.uk

Scope and focus

It was good to meet you, on 26 September 2023 to discuss the Corporate Peer Challenge for City of York Council. 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 core framework for any Corporate Peer Challenges. These are forward looking. The 5 are:

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? Does the vision for the council build on its potential as an innovator and thought leader for the Yorkshire and the Humber region, as well as for local government more widely?
2. **Organisational and place leadership:** Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities? Is it making the most of the strong range of partners and their assets across the city? Could the council do more to utilise those assets on behalf of its communities, businesses and stakeholders? Is it realising its ambition to become a fantastic city, delivering the 10-year vision for everyone?
3. **Governance and culture:** As with any Council, are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge and scrutiny? Does the council have the mindset and capacity to deliver?
4. **Financial planning and management:** As with any Council does CYC 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?

Within this, you wanted the team to focus on how well the council is doing in providing a positive experience for City of York's customers in keeping with the

aspirations of York to establish the conditions that would make York a healthier, fairer, more affordable, more sustainable and more accessible place, where everyone feels valued.

You would also welcome reflections on how well the city is positioned to maximise opportunities for developing the local economy utilising among, other factors, the Local Plan and emerging Local Transport Strategy. This includes effectiveness in securing standalone external funding for the City as well as accessing additional resources in the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority arena – how ready is York structurally to fully benefit from future opportunities?

Timing and duration

A peer challenge takes around 6 months lead-in time, including time required to secure time in peers' diaries. We discussed a duration of 4 days onsite commencing on 6 February 2024 and finishing on 9 February 2024.

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). We will work with you and the Labour Political Group Office to identify a potential councillor peer.
- A Chief Executive Officer peer, probably from a council of the same tier and ideally reflecting an area with a similar context.

- A senior officer peer, with a strong track record on economic development and regeneration.
- A senior officer peer possibly with a strong track record in leading on council's providing positive customer service excellence.
- LGA Peer Challenge Manager – Ernest Opuni (Senior Regional Adviser)
- LGA Project Support Officer – To be confirmed

The peer team's composition will be informed by the final agreed scope, including whether there will be a focus on transformation or place-based working.

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 City of York Council 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.

Progress Review

At least 12 months after the CPC, City of York Council are required to have a Progress Review and to have published the findings. This will be a 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 the Progress Review, the LGA will produce a short report which reflects the council's progress and provides examples of any good or innovative practice.

The date for the Progress Review in at City of York Council X will be finalised as part of the ongoing preparation for this Corporate Peer Challenge.

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 three months of the CPC taking place, with the subsequent action plan published within five months of the CPC taking place. We do ask that the council commit to this principle at the outset. The LGA will require a copy of the action plan and will 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. We look forward to your confirmation as to who will undertake this at City of York Council.

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. Ernest Opuni would be happy to meet with the City of York Council Coordinator to discuss the practical arrangements.

I hope this has been helpful and please can you confirm the approach by return of email.