



**Governance and Audit
Committee**

16th April 2024

**Subject: Update on Proposals to hold an LGA Corporate Peer
Challenge in January 2025**

Report by:

Chief Executive

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To update members on the latest position
regarding the Council's next LGA Corporate
Peer Challenge, due by 2025.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That members confirm proposals for West Lindsey District Council to undergo a Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2025.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

No legal implications arising from this report. There is no legal requirement for local authorities to undergo a Peer Challenge, however, member councils of the Local Government Association are required to undergo a full Corporate Peer Challenge every five years; and for the outcome to be published on the Council's website.

Financial: FIN/4/25/SL

There are no financial implications arising from this report. Corporate Peer Challenges are fully subsidised by the Local Government Association and there is no financial cost to the Authority, other than officer time in preparing for, and undertaking the Peer Challenge.

Staffing:

There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:

A Corporate Peer Challenge may include an appraisal of the Council's approach to equality and diversity as part of the scope of the review.

Data Protection Implications:

There are no data protection implications arising from this report.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

Not applicable to this report. A Corporate Peer Challenge may appraise the Council's approach and commitment to tackling climate change.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

Not applicable to this report.

Health Implications:

No health implications arising from this report.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

Outcome of the LGA Follow-up Peer Review, 2022

Report to Council on 22nd July 2022

<https://democracy.west-lindsey.gov.uk/documents/s31349/Outcome%20of%20the%20LGA%20Follow-Up%20Peer%20Review%202022.pdf>

LGA Peer Challenge Update Report

Report to G&A Committee on 26th September 2023

<https://democracy.sharedlincs.net/documents/s37275/LGA%20Peer%20Challenge%20Update%20Report.pdf>

Risk Assessment:

Under the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act 2022, the latest date that the UK Parliament can be dissolved is 17th December 2024 and a General Election must be held no later than 28th January 2025. In the event that a General Election is held in January 2025, it is possible that the planned Corporate Peer Challenge may need to be rearranged. Officers will take advice from the Local Government Association in this scenario, with any new date to be decided by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive in consultation with members and officers.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

x

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

x

Introduction

The Local Government Association (LGA), of which West Lindsey District Council is a member, offers all local authorities a Corporate Peer Challenge once every five years, including a follow-up review to monitor progress against any recommendations made. As part of the refreshed government grant funding offered to the local government sector, it is now a requirement for councils to undergo a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) every five years, rather than an expectation, as was previously the case.

West Lindsey District Council last undertook a CPC in January 2020, with a follow-up review taking place in February 2022; therefore the Council's next CPC is due no later than 2025. The decision on when to hold a Peer Challenge sits with the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Chief Executive.

A report to Council on 4th July 2022 under the previous administration stated that: *"West Lindsey's next, full peer challenge is scheduled to take place in 2024 and officers will begin work to prepare for this in collaboration with key stakeholders and decision makers."*

Following a change in administration in May 2023, the new Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Chief Executive, determined that a Corporate Peer Challenge for West Lindsey should take place in 2025 in order to allow sufficient time for the significant new intake of elected members to settle in to their roles, and so that the new Corporate Plan, adopted in June 2023, would have time to embed. This decision was communicated in a report to this committee in September 2023.

Following further discussion, the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Chief Executive, has determined that the Council's next CPC should take place in January 2025. This report sets out, for information, the Peer Challenge process and asks members to note the decision to hold a CPC in January 2025.

Context

As stated by the LGA, Peer Challenges are *"an established tool that support Councils to drive improvements and efficiency in specific areas."* In agreeing to undergo a Corporate Peer Challenge, Councils are assigned a peer team comprised of experienced and fully trained political and managerial leaders to provide robust and strategic challenge and support. The peer team will reflect the political leadership and senior management structure of the Council. Peer challenges are fully subsidised by the LGA and there is no financial cost to the Council, other than officer preparation time.

In response to increasing financial challenges faced by the Local Government Sector, which has seen a number of local authorities issue Section 114 Notices, the LGA have strengthened their CPC offer. From April 2024, CPCs will have an even greater focus on finance, data and evidence in order to assess each council's performance and productivity. The CPC will continue to focus on the five core areas, these being:

1. Local Priorities and Outcomes
2. Organisational and Place Leadership
3. Governance and Culture

4. Financial Planning and Management
5. Capacity for Improvement

The findings of the peer team will be presented in a new reporting format, which will be more authoritative and direct in content. Councils will now only be able to review the final report in order to address any factual errors and the peer team's published report will be accompanied by a more robust action plan. A follow-up review to track progress against any recommendations must now take place within 10 months.

CPC Timeline

The scope and dates of the CPC are currently being discussed with the LGA and this committee will be kept informed of key information in relation to the CPC process. In summary, preparations begin in earnest approximately 6 – 10 months prior to the CPC taking place, beginning with a meeting between the LGA Principal Regional Advisor, the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to agree the scope of the CPC.

The CPC itself will take place on site at the Guildhall, taking 3-4 full days to complete. As part of the CPC, the Peer Team will meet with officers, cross-party members, partners and other interested representatives, both individually and in workshops, to gain a better understanding of West Lindsey District Council directed by the five core themes. The Peer team may also observe Council meetings as part of their review. The team will have access to Council documents, the vast majority of which will already be in the public domain. The team will also be provided with a short Position Statement which should summarise the main focus of the CPC. A copy of this will be shared with members in advance.

Key dates and timings of the site visit will be diarised with officers and members involved in the process as soon as these are known. Procedural briefings will be given nearer the time so that participants know what to expect from the process. The CPC will be co-ordinated by the Policy and Strategy Team; please contact ellen.king@west-lindsey.gov.uk if you have any queries at this stage.

What Happens After a Peer Challenge?

Feedback will take place in a number of ways that will be agreed as part of arranging the CPC, but may include the following:

- Roundtable feedback discussion on the final day on-site at the Guildhall. Here, the peer team will share its views and offer comments on the five core components and any other areas of focus agreed as part of the scope.
- Feedback report, outlining the main findings and conclusions, recommendations for improvement and innovation, and signposting examples of good practice. The Council is required to publish this report and the LGA will also publish a copy.
- Approximately 10 months after the CPC, the Council will be required to commit to a progress review site visit. The Council will be required to provide an updated position statement, detailing progress against each of the recommendations made. The peer team will provide a progress report, which the Council is also required to publish.

