

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 18 November 2019

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.02 - 7.55 pm

Members Present: C Whitbread (Chairman), S Stavrou (Vice-Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, A Lion, A Patel, J Philip, S Kane and H Whitbread

Other Councillors: J Lea, C McCredie, A Mitchell, D Stocker, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley

Apologies:

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Interim Strategic Director & Chief Financial Officer), A Blom-Cooper (Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy)), S Lewis (Customer Services Manager), T Carne (Team Manager (Corporate Communications)) and A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

56. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Leader of Council made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

58. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

(a) The Strategic Projects Portfolio Holder gave a short update on his portfolio. He noted that the broadband fibre service continued to be rolled out in our area. Also, members of the Leadership team and the digital innovation zone members visited Adastral Park, the BT and IT research facility in Suffolk, to see what the digital future could look like in action and what the potential was to improve services to our residents.

We had also been advised that East Devon District Council had developed an 'Alexa' App. to deal with waste services, providing information on such things as where to recycle and how to recycle. This was something that we were also looking at to develop for ourselves.

(b) The Planning Services Portfolio Holder updated the meeting on an item that had been raised in the past on pre-applications and notifications to members. They were still working on the 'Crystal' reports to run successfully. In the meantime, each Friday they will produce a list manually and email this out to members.

(c) The Community and Partnership Services Portfolio Holder noted that they had recently held a very successful Economic Development Growth meeting,

attended by about 75 people. This would lead on to the Nurturing Growth document and he was looking forward to receiving responses back on this.

59. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

60. LGA CORPORATE PEER REVIEW

The Cabinet received a short presentation from Gary Hughes a Local Government Association (LGA) Principal Advisor on what a Corporate Peer Review was, the benefits and the process involved (a copy of his presentation is attached). He noted that his colleague Kirsty Human would be this council's Peer Challenge Manager, but she was away at another council at present and so could not be here.

Mr Hughes noted that the LGA was the national voice of local government and they aimed to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils. They have a sector led improvement offer that cover what councils do and as they were a demand led organisation they would work with them to deliver improvements. They have three types of offers to members; 1) a universal offer open to all their members; 2) a bespoke offer for councils that need more in-depth support; and 3) intensive offer, where they would help and support council that were working towards significant improvements. They would do this through a range of activities including mentoring, leadership development and peer challenge. They also use lessons learned by councils and share these experiences with other councils that need help. They do this by working with their peers, officers with officers and members to members and providing support and challenges to each council as a critical friend. He emphasised that they were not inspectors or assessors and did not give a score, it was all about support and improvement. The people doing your peer review know what it's like working in local government now, not ten years ago but now. They would know the challenges that you face, the financial issues and demands made on you.

A peer challenge was voluntary, commissioned by a council to aid their improvement. It involves a small team of local government peers spending time in another council to challenge and share their learning to aid improvement. They would engage with a wide range of people connected with the council and work on triangulation, where if someone says something to them they note it, if two people say the same it becomes more interesting and if three people say the same they take it as evidence and investigate it further; three points of evidence. They would spend four days on site and on their final day their findings would be delivered verbally back to the council.

They would like a council to prepare a position statement for their team at the outset along with key documents that were normally produced by the council. Outcomes (the feedback and the report) from this review are for the council, but they would ask that these are also published

Mr Hughes noted that a start date of 27 January 2020 had been agreed upon and he would ask the council to develop an onsite timetable that also listed who to visit and a formal position statement. It should be open and honest and not stage managed. The council should think what it wanted from this challenge. Kelsey Taverner would be acting as the peer challenge co-ordinator and day to day contact. On the final day there would be verbal feedback and after that they would provide a written report. Once the report had been agreed they would like it published on the website.

The meeting was then opened to questions from members.

Councillor Lion thanked him for his presentation and said he was all in favour of this as part of continuous improvement. He asked if this would provide a corporate score card. He was told that they did not use this, this was not for the ranking of performance by external bodies.

Councillor Patel welcomed this process of having a critical friend. The next step on from the review was what the council did with the feedback. He also wondered who, within the council, would agree the position statement and would we have sight of this before it went. The question was also if we had the capacity to deliver on the key performance targets and how we serve our customers after undertaking transformation. The Chief Executive replied that a corporate team had already started work on the position statement. Once substantially completed it would be shared with the Cabinet. Mr Hughes added what you did with the recommendations made by the review team was the most important thing. As part of this they offer an opportunity for a follow up visit 12 to 18 months down the line to see how you were getting on.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked to what extent would opposition councillors be involved in this process, and how would we choose outside people (residents and external organisations) to interview. Mr Hughes said that they would encourage all councillor to participate. They would work with officers and councillors about who they would need to engage with. Feedback would be given to everyone that had participated.

The Leader thanked Mr Hughes for his presentation and responding to the questions raised and said that they would see him and his team on the 27th January 2020.

61. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not present as there had been no meeting prior to this cabinet. However, the Leader noted that there was a major Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19th January with some important reports going to it.

62. ASSET MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CABINET COMMITTEE - 10 OCTOBER 2019

The Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder introduced the minutes from the Asset Management and Economic Development Cabinet Committee meeting held on 10 October 2019.

Decision:

The Cabinet noted and agreed the minutes of the Asset Management and Economic Development Cabinet Committee meeting of 10 October 2019.

63. LOCAL PLAN CABINET COMMITTEE - 17 OCTOBER 2019

The Planning Services Portfolio Holder introduced the minutes from the Local Plan Cabinet Committee meeting held on 17 October 2019.

Decision:

The Cabinet noted and agreed the minutes of the Local Plan Cabinet Committee meeting of 17 October 2019.

64. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Planning Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

The meeting noted that the preparation of an SCI was a legal requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as amended by the Planning Act 2008, the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017. The legislation required the Council to prepare a statement setting out how it would notify and consult the community and other stakeholders in the preparation and review of planning policy which included: the Local Plan; supplementary planning documents; neighbourhood plans; policy such as that contained in master plans; and in the consideration of planning applications. A draft Statement of Community Involvement was considered by Cabinet on 13 June 2019 and it was agreed to publish for a six-week period of public consultation. This took place between Monday 1 July 2019 and 13 August 2019. This report set out the responses to the consultation and proposed final Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for adoption.

Councillor J H Whitehouse remarked that the SCI had a description of notifications and site notices for proposed applications. She noted that she had complaints that not all neighbours received letters and wondered if we could make more use of 'yellow notices' out on the streets. The Portfolio Holder said that he would not want to do that. The Council only used 'yellow notices' when they were really needed. However, applications are advertised in the weekly list of applications which is sent to local newspapers and notified to all Parish and Town councils. There has to be a cut-off point in notifying neighbours and there is now a good balance.

Decision:

The Cabinet agreed that the Statement of Community Involvement be adopted.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To comply with the statutory requirement to review the SCI every five years and to update the SCI to include recent changes in legislation and practice.

Other Options for Action:

Not to adopt a new SCI. This would mean that the Council was not meeting the legislative requirements and was not seeking an up to date, fit for purpose, statement regarding the engagement of stakeholders and the public in the planning service and system.

65. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCAL PLAN - UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Planning Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report updating the cabinet on progress in the implementation of the Local Plan. He stated that the Council is continuing to make progress on the Local Plan to address the Inspector's actions set out in her advice note dated 2 August 2019 and a lot of background work to update the Habitats Regulation Assessment was taking place. He had been asked what the costs was so far for preparing the Local Plan. Going back to when this was started at around 2011, he estimated that by the end of next year the Council would have spent

somewhere in the region of £5 million on commissioning external support to prepare the evidence base, legal costs and the costs of the examination.

The Council has now responded to the advice letter of the inspector but were not expecting a formal response prior to the general election.

As part of the Independent Examination of the Local Plan, the Council had agreed and signed Statements of Common Ground with all the site promoters of the following strategic sites: North Weald Bassett, Waltham Abbey North, South Epping, West Ongar and South Nazeing. In relation to the Garden Town allocations, which consists of Latton Priory, Water Lane and East of Harlow, the Council were able to sign Statements of Common Ground with all of the principle site promoters.

The strategic sites were progressing well and were all on track to meet the delivery of housing noted within the Housing Implementation Strategy Update 2019.

Councillor Bedford noted that a further report on the Epping Forest SAC would be brought to the December Cabinet, which had now been postponed. He was told that it would now be going to the rescheduled January cabinet meeting instead.

Councillor S Kane asked about the Quality Review Panel (Appendix D). He noted that a number of schemes appeared several times in that list but had no indication of change of status as they progressed through, could this be expanded on. He was told that if a developer came forward with a well designed scheme then it probably would not need to reappear on the Quality Review Panel list. If you see a scheme that has appeared multiple times on the panel then you can assume that they have reworked their scheme a number of times. We are a unique district and it may take a number of times to get an application up to scratch with a good quality design that fits in its context. We want any developments to make this a better place to live.

Decision:

The Cabinet noted the progress of the Masterplans and Concept Frameworks, including the use of Planning Performance Agreements and the progress of other proposals at pre-application and application stage.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To ensure that members were kept fully up to date on the progress of Masterplans and Concept Frameworks and other major proposals being promoted within the District.

Other Options for Action:

Not to update members on the progress on the above issues would be contrary to the commitment made by the Implementation Team as noted in the 18 October 2018 Cabinet Report.

66. CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY

The Customer Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the customer service strategy. The report detailed the proposed improvements to customer services for launch in early 2020. It was a two phased approach, firstly by embedding and adopting new approaches to customer services internally before rolling it out externally.

Councillor Philip noted that item 1 of the report gave a target of 45% for increasing first point resolution with customers. Was this just a first year target, as 45% seemed quite low. He was told that this was just a first year only target. Once the first phase had been achieved then they would be looking to achieve better than this.

Councillor Lion asked for more information on item 4, 'new service/phone guide'. The Service Manager, Customer Services, said that one of the customers biggest frustration was that the first person they speak to can't necessarily answer their query and they get passed from officer to officer. With so much change going on in the Council at present not everyone knew what other people did. So, as soon as roles were finalised they would be providing an up to date telephone and guide for each service area. Councillor Lion then asked if it would be made available to members, he was told that it would be.

Councillor H Whitbread asked about point 2 and the reference to "#customer shoes". The Portfolio Holder said that it was about thinking from the customer perspective. The Service Manager added that it was more about how we made the customer feel. This was evolving and building all the time, responding to our customers, and once the staff have settled in their roles, we then want them to put themselves into the customer shoes.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked about the external consultation groups and if older people were represented in them. She was told that the consultation carried out so far was with existing groups such as 'active living' for the older generation. They were also looking to reach out to our partnerships throughout the community. They have also done an initial customer survey on the website, had a few focus groups, and have just joined the Institute of Customer Service after Christmas we will reach out to our partners for more feedback.

Councillor Patel reminded the meeting that they were customers as well. He went on to praise new customer contact forms that he had recently used.

Councillor Bedford made a plea to add in lay residents' services, such as the County Council, as it was not always EFDC that provided these services. And it was good to have staff trained in recognising where to transit people to if not within our council. The Portfolio Holder agreed it would good to do this, but they were not ready as yet, we had to get ourselves organised first before we went on to outside organisations. This was something for the future.

Councillor Wixley asked about item 10 and the use of Artificial Intelligence and how would that work. The Portfolio Holder said that they had nothing as yet, it was just an aspiration, but they were exploring to see how they could utilise new technology.

Decision:

The Cabinet noted and approved the direction and content of the Customer Strategy and its outputs.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Our strategy which supports our focus to put customers at the heart of everything we do will be aimed at external customers, Members and internal customers supporting collaborative working across the Council.

Based on customer research (*) we need to focus on 'fixing the basics' – simplifying processes to ensure customers find us easy to deal with, embracing a 'customer shoes' staff culture and using new technology to improve our service offer.

Other Options for Action:

If we do not embrace a 'customer at the heart of everything we do' culture, we risk the fact we may not be responding to the changing needs of our customers.

(*) Customer research is based on the following:

A customer satisfaction web survey conducted from August to September 2019 plus customer feedback from calls to the Customer Contact Centre.

67. FINANCE REPORT SIX MONTH TO END OF SEPTEMBER 2019

The Business Support Services Portfolio Holder introduced the new format financial report summary report covering the period to the end of September 2019. It was noted that this was the first of the new format of summary financial report, which would be produced and issued monthly. It would report on progress and actions and would develop as circumstances required. The new format had been well received as it was easier to understand.

In revenue terms, the Authority was currently performing £3million to the good with a forecast year-end position of break even.

Decision:

The Cabinet noted and commented on the report and actions in the Financial Performance report for the six months to the end of September 2019.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

This was introducing a new format financial summary report.

Other Options for Action:

N/A.

68. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

69. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Cabinet noted that there was no business which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press from the meeting.

CHAIRMAN

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Sector Led Improvement and Corporate Peer Challenge

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Epping Forest District Council

18 November 2019

Gary Hughes – LGA Principal Adviser
Kirsty Human – LGA Peer Challenge Manager

Minute Item 60

The LGA



Purpose

- The LGA is the national voice of local government and we work with councils to support, promote and improve it
- We aim to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils so they are able to deliver local solutions to national problems

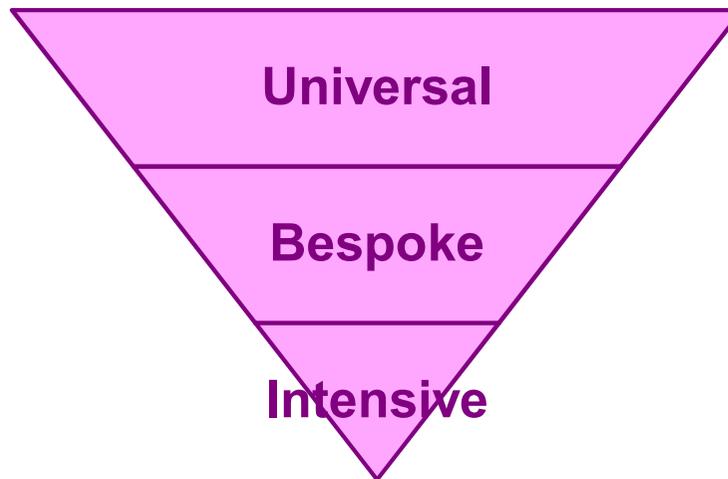
Priorities

- Funding for local government
- Adult social care and health
- Children, education and schools
- Housing
- Inclusive growth, jobs and devolution
- Britain's exit from the EU
- Supporting councils

Sector Led Improvement – the offer

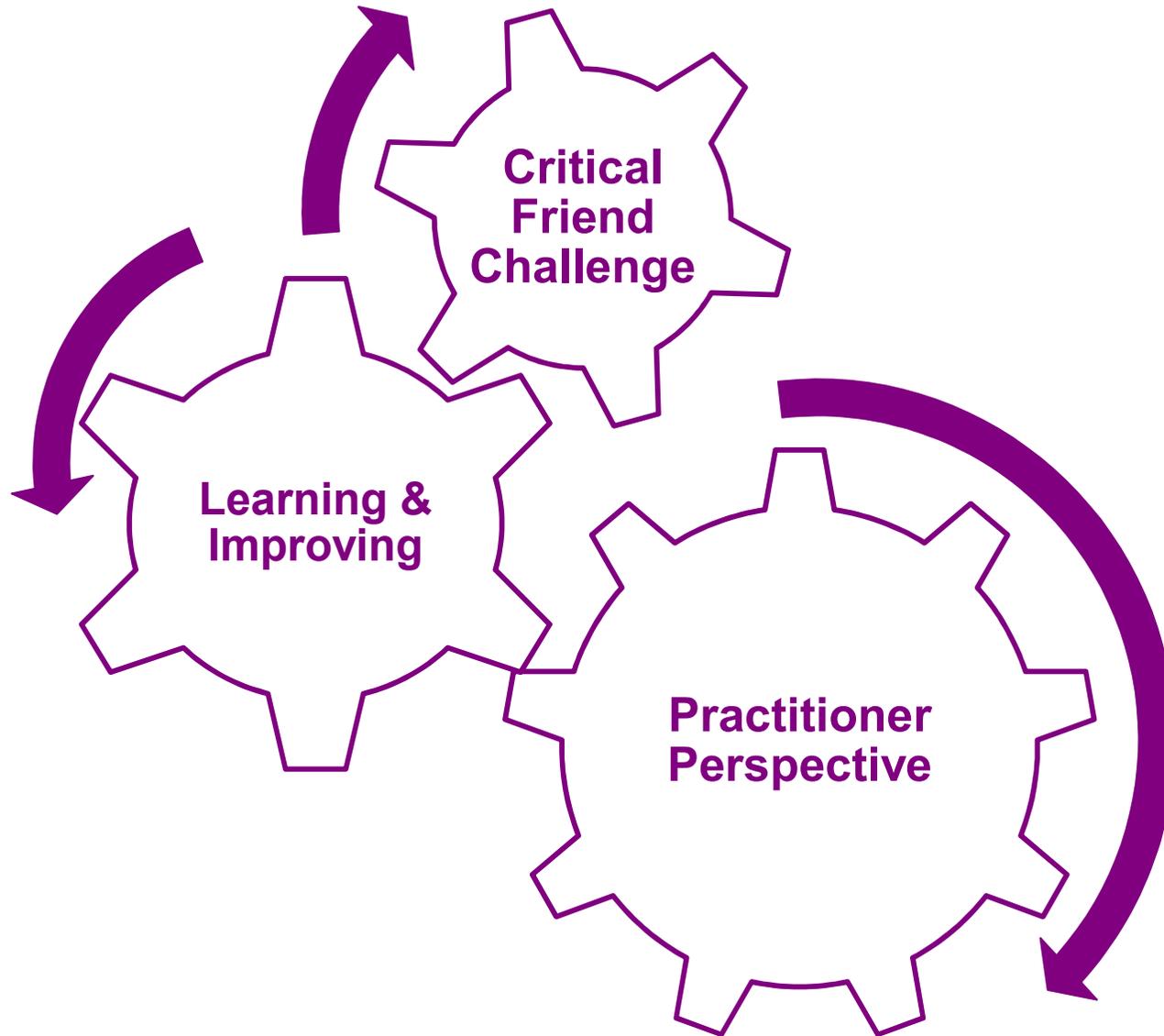
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- Adult Social Care
- Devolution
- Communications
- Innovation
- Children's Services
- Equality & Diversity



- Finance
- Housing
- Planning
- Governance
- Workforce
- Productivity

Peers



They do this through a range of activities including:

- Mentoring
- Leadership Development
- Peer challenge

What is a peer challenge?

A **voluntary** process commissioned by a council to aid their **improvement** and learning. It involves a small team of local government **peers** spending time in another council to provide **challenge** and share **learning** to aid future improvement.

The process involves **engaging with a wide range of people** connected with the council and the **findings are delivered immediately.**

Benefits of Peer Challenge

For the Council

- Peer challenge **drives improvement and acts as a catalyst for change**
- It provides a **mutually supportive** approach to provide practitioner challenge and reality checking
- It builds on a **tried, tested and trusted** approach
- It is a **flexible approach** so that critical friend challenge is timely and tailored to key areas of focus
- It can help **provide assurance** to local people in the absence of inspection and audit
- It helps transfer learning within and across the sector

For the peers

- Recognised and valued way of making an active contribution to sector-led improvement
- Provides an **opportunity to see and experience other places** - personal learning and transferable practice
- Provides opportunities to build **networks, relationships and collaboration**
- Enables **sharing of learning** and practice through peers, and across authorities and the sector

The LGA Peer Challenge programme

- A key part of the LGA support to Sector-Led Improvement
 - Tried, tested, trusted: 750 peer challenges delivered over the past six years
 - That's about 15,000 days of peer support and challenge – an impressive investment by the sector in its improvement
 - Corporate Peer Challenges now make up about half of all peer challenges. We engage with 70 councils per year via the Corporate Peer Challenge process.
-

Corporate Peer Challenge in context

CPC 2018/19

- 71

All Peer Challenges (Including CPCs)

- 145

Target 2019/20

- 110 Peer Challenges (70 CPCs)

Range of Peer Challenges

- Adult Services
- Children's
- Health & Wellbeing
- Communications
- Equalities
- Planning/Building Control
- Highways
- Housing
- Bespoke

The Corporate Peer Challenge offer

- **Delivered at a time of a council's choosing** – recognising there are different drivers and considerations in different places
- It is **flexible and proportionate** – so that the focus of the challenge is agreed with the council to reflect their local needs and requirements
- The results of the peer challenge are fed back to and **owned by the council**. There is an expectation that the council will enter the feedback into the public domain.
- It is **forward looking** and non-bureaucratic (moving away from KLOEs, self-assessments, evidence gathering)

The Corporate Peer Challenge core components

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

Take up and feedback

- Three quarters of councils have had a Corporate Peer Challenge, or are signed up for one
- Councils are using their Corporate Peer Challenge to focus on a variety of different issues
- Feedback from the sector continues to be positive
- Independent evaluations of the programme were undertaken in 2012, 2014, 2017
- Latest evaluation concluded Corporate Peer Challenge:
 - is an effective tool at the heart of the SLI programme
 - is having a positive impact for councils and the sector
 - Provides value for money

Feedback and evaluation

- 94% of Leaders and Chief Executives said that peer challenge is a useful way to get an external view on performance (LGA Perceptions Survey 2017)
 - 93% of Leaders and Chief Executives said the CPC had a positive impact on their council's performance (CPC impact survey 2017)
 - 86% of Leaders and Chief Executives said the CPC had a positive impact on the external reputation of their council (CPC impact survey 2017)
 - 93% of Leaders and Chief Executives said the CPC had a positive impact on culture and behaviours within their council (CPC impact survey 2017)
-

Feedback and evaluation

“Provided assurance on the Council. Identified matters to consider.” Chief Executive

“Very supportive, professional and proportionate.” Leader

“It gives external assurance that the strategic direction of travel is right.” Chief Executive

“Very helpful to have a “stand back” view of where we are and how thinking a bit differently can deliver faster.” Leader

“Do not be afraid to ask for a Peer Challenge. Do not wait until it is too late. It’s like having another pair of eyes helping you.” Leader

“..The process is more akin to a form of coaching rather than something like inspection.” Chief Executive

Epping Forest District Council

Corporate Peer Challenge Preparation

- On-site – w/c 20th or w/c 27th Jan 20
 - On-site timetable – jointly developed over the coming weeks
 - Position statement and other background reading – 2 weeks before
 - Verbal feedback with presentation on the final day
 - Written draft report 4 weeks after
 - Expectation that the council will publish the report and develop an action plan
-

Getting the most from your Corporate Peer Challenge

- Appropriate preparation: ensure buy-in, communications, position statement, timetable of activity
- Open and honest engagement in the process: don't try to stage manage
- Commission with a purpose: consider whether there are specific areas you particularly want peer observations and feedback on

Corporate Peer Challenge Focus?



Peer Team

- Possible Chief Executive Peer: ?
- Potential Elected Member Peer/s: ?
- Two or three senior officer peers with a background in the areas most pertinent to the peer challenge
- Kirsty Human, LGA Peer Challenge Manager
- Gary Hughes, LGA Principal Adviser (not on-site)

Next Steps

- Identify peer challenge co-ordinator who will put the logistical preparations in place and act as a day to day contact – Kelsey Taverner
 - LGA to develop Scoping Email– EFDC to agree
 - LGA to commence sourcing team
 - EFDC to prepare a timetable of meetings and focus groups for the team
 - EFDC to prepare position statement and other background reading
-