

## **LGA Resilience Peer Challenge: proposal for resuming the peer challenge process**

### **Context and background**

Following the launch of the LAP's Assurance Framework the LGA was commissioned to provide external peer challenge to all London Boroughs using the Resilience Standards as a framework for the challenge.

Between September 2019 and April 2020 the LGA was to conduct five Resilience Peer Challenges (RPCs) as pilots and then use learning from these to review the methodology and roll out 28 peer challenges from 2020-2023. Three peer challenges were carried out in four London Boroughs: Brent, Ealing, Richmond & Wandsworth (joint) before the programme was put on hold due to the covid-19 pandemic as it became inappropriate to continue the programme. This was the same for all LGA peer challenge and improvement activity.

The LGA is intending on re-establishing its corporate peer challenge offer from November 2020. However, given that the ongoing risks over the winter period this paper recommends that the Resilience Peer Challenge offer aims to restart with on-site peer challenges from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

### **RPC to-date**

#### Peer challenges– include peer training

As part of the initial pilot stage of the RPCs between January and March 2020, the LGA delivered a three-day onsite RPC to four councils. One pilot RPC was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Peer teams were comprised of five peers:

- Chief Executive/Senior Officer Peer
- Senior Officer Peer
- Member Peer
- LGA Peer Challenge Manager (PCM)
- A shadow Peer

The reports for three of the delivered RPCs have been signed-off and published by the respective councils, the fourth RPC occurred in March at the start of the pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, the LGA paused all peer challenge activity, including the sign-off and publishing of reports and has just resumed this process. The report for the fourth RPC is now in the process of being signed-off.

The RPCs have been very popular with 24 officers and 39 elected members having signed up to attend training for peers interested in participating in the RPCs. A further 50 officers have completed an expression of interest.

#### Feedback

1. Positive feedback from both the pilot councils and peers was received:
  - A senior officer peer: "It was my first ever peer review and I found it hugely rewarding."

- Member peer: “Having just [been a peer on a] resilience peer challenge, it has been invaluable for learning as we move into virus emergency planning.”
- Pilot council: “At the beginning of March, the Council was subject to an intensive peer review process, over a period of three days, which assessed our preparedness and ability to deal with any major emergency situation. The timing of the [RPC] helped to focus officers’ attention on how best to respond to any critical situation that may arise.”

Further feedback was given around the participants of the interviews, during the pilots a number of changes were made to timetables to include a wider range of senior officers and politicians in the process. There was also feedback from peers that the background reading was heavily focused on the resilience standards and the emergency management process and did not include enough wider corporate information from the council.

Based on this feedback amendments will be made to the guidelines for delivering the peer challenge to support councils with incorporating wider organisational input into the interview process and background materials for peers.

### **Proposed approach to restart the process**

We recommend that the resilience peer challenge process resumes with on-site peer challenges from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. This can be reviewed as boroughs continue to respond to the covid-19 pandemic.

There are a number of barriers to resuming the process before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021:

- The availability of peers (as they will still be responding and implementing recovery plans in their own local authorities)
- Prioritisation from the LGA to resume the corporate peer challenge process
- Risks around the continued need for emergency management throughout winter in response to COVID19

There is an opportunity to provide support in the period between September 2020 and April 2021 for boroughs who wish to have a peer challenge in the 21/22 financial year. Our intention is to build a ‘Covid-19 learning workshop’ into the preparation process for the peer challenge. This would be a facilitated session by the LGA which would allow senior leaders from boroughs to reflect on the boroughs covid response and their Resilience self-assessment. The benefit of this will be that the boroughs will be able to take actions from the workshop to implement ahead of the peer challenge, meaning that the peer challenge focus whilst on-site will remain on resilience as a corporate culture as well as reflections on covid response.

The workshops will be half-day workshops and can be facilitated online whilst social distancing guidelines are still in-place. If possible these would be carried out before the 20/21 start date for the peer challenges however this will be flexible depending on the boroughs circumstances. The workshops will be led by an LGA programme manager as well as a senior peer from the peer team.

The rest of the peer challenge process and preparation will continue as normal. We will be able to provide peer challenges for nine boroughs in the 21/22 financial year.

### **Resourcing**

For 21/22 financial year the costs remain the same as in the original MoU with the LAP and the LGA. However resourcing will be needed during the 20/21 financial year for preparatory work for peer challenges as well as the facilitation of the covid learning workshops as part of this process.

We are proposing for 20/21 that the costs for provision will be:

LGA Programme Management £10,000

Covid 19 learning workshops – up to £1000 per borough (£300 x2 peers plus travel expenses)

The maximum amount of workshops delivered would be nine however based on previous experience it is unlikely that all nine boroughs will be able to commit to a peer challenge in the timescales.

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