



Co-operative Councils
Innovation Network

**CO-OPERATIVE
PEER CHALLENGE
OFFER**

About the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network

The Co-operative Councils Innovation Network is collaboration of local authorities and is a registered Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association. It is a non-party political group that provides a national voice for co-operative councils and an organisation that is informed by real experience and practice.

About the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network Commission on Developing a Co-operative Peer Review Process

The Co-operative Councils Innovation Network launched a commission to develop a co-operative peer review process in July 2015. The Commission was chaired by Councillor Chris Penberthy (Shadow Cabinet Member for Co-operatives and Housing at Plymouth City Council), and comprised of a mixed group of Members and officers, from Edinburgh, Bassetlaw and Oldham Councils.

The ambition of the Co-operative Peer Review Commission was to develop a flexible Co-operative Peer Review Process to help support co-operative councils in improving their organisations' ability to respond co-operatively to local priorities and issues.

Plymouth assumed the role of lead commissioner carrying out the research and creating the products based on the input from the commissioning group.

Acknowledgements

The Co-operative Peer Review Process has been developed as a result of efforts from many people. Particular thanks are due to the members of the Commissioning Group, especially the Chair Councillor Chris Penberthy and those who organised and supported the commission Giles Perritt, Assistant Chief Exec and Theresa Brooks, Policy and Business Planning Officer from Plymouth City Council, Councillor Burns Leader of Edinburgh City Council, Stephen Brown, Head of Corporate Services at Bassetlaw, Jonathon Downs Principal Officer, Jenni Barker, Strategy, Partnership and Policy Manager in Oldham, Kath Knight Performance Officer Plymouth, Sarah Allred, Project Development Manager and Simon Parkinson, Chief Executive and Principal of the Co-operative College. Thank you to Paul Clark, Principal Advisor at the Local Government Association who provided expert advice and guidance around developing the process.



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INTRODUCTION

What is a co-operative peer review?

Co-operative peer reviews are improvement focused. Peer challenge has been a core element of healthy local government organisations for many years and is considered an integral part of local authorities sector led improvement. The concept of peer challenge is based on the following principles:

- Councils are responsible for their performance;
- Greater accountability leads to greater improvement; and
- Councils have a collective responsibility for performance in the sector as a whole.

The ambition of a co-operative peer review is to help support co-operative councils in improving their organisation's ability to respond co-operatively to local priorities and issues.

Who has developed the Co-operative Peer Review process? And what is the motivation for doing so?

The Co-operative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN) is a group of local authorities who are committed to reforming the way they work through building an equal partnership with local people, based on the values of the International Co-operative Alliance. CCIN strives to ensure that its membership upholds and strengthens co-operative values and principles. As a result, CCIN is committed to providing evidence that the co-operative difference really works.

CCIN has developed a peer review methodology which can be used to reflect, support and challenge councils on their co-operative journey, alongside providing advice and guidance on how they could improve and expand their co-operative journey in the future.

What is a council's co-operative journey?

Each organisation's response to local issues and priorities is unique. Each will have certain 'co-operative' elements to their journey that will be difficult to quantify and measure. However, the network has a number of overarching co-operative principles that should be embedded within any 'co-operative' organisation and guide the progression of a 'co-operative' journey. They will also guide the co-operative

peer review in its assessment of where a council falls within its co-operative journey. The overarching co-operative principles are:

- **Social partnership:** co-operative partnerships between citizens, communities, enterprises and Councils based on a shared sense of responsibility for wellbeing and mutual benefit.
- **Democratic engagement:** Supporting active engagement with a full range of residents in decision making and priority setting.
- **Co-production:** systems in place that enable citizens to be equal partners in designing and commissioning public services and in determining the use of public resources.
- **Enterprise and social economy:** community-based approaches are evident within economic development that focus on supporting the creation of jobs and businesses and providing an environment for co-operative and mutual enterprises to thrive.
- **Maximising social value:** Supporting the development of a framework and criteria for social value, which gives substance to the idea and gives councils the tools to ensure better local social and economic outcomes.
- **Community leadership and a new role for councillors:** Exploring ways for councils to act as a platform to helping the community to contribute to local outcomes, and re-thinking the role of councillors to become community connectors, brokers and leaders.
- **New models of meeting priority need:** In exploring new ways of meeting the priority needs of our communities we will encourage models, such as co-operatives and mutuals, which give greater influence and voice to staff and users.
- **Innovation:** Embracing innovation in how we work with local communities to drive positive change.
- **Learning:** We will capture and 'expand' the experience and learning from individual projects and approaches in order to encourage the broader application of co-operative principles within councils and across our partners.



OVERVIEW

This document outlines the co-operative peer review process. The scope of a co-operative peer review must be tailored to meet the needs of the co-operative organisation being reviewed.

The co-operative peer review team will involve peer reviewers from across the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network with a wide range of experience in the field of co-operative innovation. The ambition is to help each council being reviewed to maximise its co-operative response to local issues in order to have the greatest impact.

Some specific guiding principles of a co-operative peer review are:

- A co-operative peer review is not a substitute for a Local Government Association (LGA) 'Peer Challenge';
- Co-operative peer reviews are an improvement tool aimed at improving council's co-operative responses to local issues;
- It should be undertaken at a time that suits each council and tailored to meet its priorities;
- an initial meeting will be set up with the peer review team to set the outcomes sought from the review and makeup of the peer review team;
- All co-operative peer reviews will be focused on the following core elements - Co-operative Vision, Co-operative Leadership in Public Service, Co-operative Leadership in Place and Communities;
- The co-operative peer review process will focus on maximising benefits from the review and minimising unnecessary burdens.

What does the team of peer reviewers look like?

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected Member and officer peers from the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network. The makeup of the peer review team reflects the requirements and the focus of the co-operative peer challenge. Peers are selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with the participating council.

A typical team would include –

- A lead peer reviewer alongside;
- 2 other Councillors with relevant experience;
- 3-4 Officers (inclusive of an officer from an external co-operative body.)

Once a review is booked what is the process?

Booking an initial scoping meeting is key to a successful review. Co-operative peer challenge is designed to be flexible in order to focus on what is most important for councils.

The Leader and Chief Executive of the council or organisation wanting to participate normally meet with the peer review team (four to six months) in advance of the co-operative peer challenge to discuss and agree:

- the main focus of the challenge;
- the nature and composition of the peer team;
- when it would be best to undertake the peer challenge;
- the value and purpose of any preparatory work/material;
- the nature and form of the feedback at the end of the peer challenge.

Areas of focus?

The co-operative peer review team will consider the following four questions which form the core components looked at by all Co-operative Peer Reviews. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' improving their organisations ability to respond co-operatively to local priorities and issues:

1. Co-operative Vision: Does the council clearly define its co-operative vision in terms of –

- What and how the vision will benefit others particularly customers, partners and staff?
- Is it evident that the vision is understood and shared by customers, partners and staff?

2. Co-operative Leadership in Public Service: Is there effective –

- Governance processes and decision making infrastructure;
- Social Partnerships;
- Democratic Engagement;
- Co-production;
- Maximising Social Value;
- Community leadership and new role of Councillors;
- New models of meeting priority need;
- Innovation;
- Learning.

3. Co-operative Leadership of Place: Does the Council provide effective co-operative leadership of place?

4. Co-operative Leadership in communities: Is the council building on strengths and assets; Connecting people and creating space for change to happen? Building socially resilient communities?

What does a peer challenge involve?

It is important to stress that this is not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The peer team use their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they meet, things they see and material they read.

The peer team prepare for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and with the councils priorities and challenges it is facing.

Traditionally the co-operative peer review team will spend around 4 days onsite, during which they:

- speak to people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders (around 200);
- gather information and views from more than 40 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading;
- collectively determine their findings.

Citizen involvement?

This is a question that is critical in all areas of focus for a co-operative peer review meeting. The extent to which citizen views have informed priorities and the level of co-produced innovations is essential in measuring where councils are in their co-operative journey. Effective engagement of citizens and making the most of customer insight is a key element of successful co-operative councils. So one approach is to use the process to challenge the council to show it has a mandate for the co-operative difference based on true engagement with citizens.

How are results provided?

A discussion and agreement with the council is required so that the approach is the best for them. Classically feedback will take place in a number of different ways: A roundtable feedback discussion on the final day on-site at the council involving an audience of the council's choosing. The team will share its views and offer advice on the main focus of the challenge and key issues.

A feedback report to the council addressing the main focus of the challenge, outlining the main findings and conclusions, recommendations for improvement and innovation, and signposting examples of good practice and case study material.

The offer of an improvement planning session, wider feedback event, or other activity to enable discussion and development of plans to take forward the feedback from the peer challenge.

The peer team will provide continuous feedback throughout the peer challenge process. The intelligence gained from the reviews will be fed back into the CCIN to inform the planning of future support and reviews. Findings will also contribute to our sector knowledge base on co-operative councils.

Will they be published?

It is for the council itself to decide how it uses the feedback provided and if, when and in what form it plans to publish the results of the co-operative peer challenge. CCIN will strongly encourage councils to publish the results to network members to share practice and learning.

What happens after peer challenge?

There is an option that the Councils will commit to a follow up visit 12-24 months after the co-operative peer challenge. The purpose of the visit is to help the council assess and demonstrate the impact of the co-operative peer challenge and the progress made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a smooth, rounded, grey stone. The word "Cooperative" is written on the stone in a black, cursive font. The background is blurred, showing other people's hands holding similar stones. At the bottom of the image, there is a decorative border consisting of a row of colorful squares in various colors including blue, yellow, orange, purple, green, and red.

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