

efficiency matters

IDeA efficiency peer reviews – what's in it for your authority?

For the new CPA criteria, could you provide evidence to demonstrate that your council was making the best use of resources and delivering value for money?

Are you on track with the Government's Efficiency agenda (Gershon Review) to release resources for redirection into front line services?

efficiency

An IDeA efficiency peer review will help you to answer these questions and many more. The IDeA's offering of an efficiency peer review is built on the success of the agency's flagship peer review programme successfully delivered over 300 times as well as over a hundred procurement health checks. In terms of efficiency and value for money an IDeA efficiency peer review will help you to assess where you are, and where you need to go next.

The IDeA has been a key partner in developing a programme of support to councils on the efficiency agenda. The Local Government Association's performance partnership as a whole has built up a portfolio of services to meet councils' needs. The centrepiece of the IDeA's offerings is an efficiency review, which is a constructive and supportive process with the central aim of helping you to improve. It will help authorities assess how they are managing the pressures from the new CPA process on the use of resources judgement and the efficiency agenda.

Peer review is not inspection. It is constructive challenge delivered by 'critical friends', experts and respected peers. The aim is to recognise and share good practice and bring focus to areas for improvement. Peer reviews have proved to be important catalysts in changing the way people think and feel about issues and helping to build a consensus on priorities.

- the efficiency review model has been built on a successful pilot review in the London Borough of Lewisham
- a further review is being carried out in Aylesbury Vale to refine the benchmark and the overall process
- we are confident that this offering will make a big difference to your authority's approach to efficiency.

a new approach to peer review

review

As well as being a new peer review the efficiency review includes a new approach to the recruitment of peer expertise. We intend to recruit, train and develop peers from participating authorities to the review process itself. The initial programme will involve 20 authorities and peer recruits will:

- be trained and accredited in the process of peer reviews
- be briefed and trained on the use of the efficiency benchmark
- will share as a group the lessons that emerge from the peer review programme
- will be involved as a group in the development of the IDeA's efficiency services and products
- will be able to provide feedback to other stakeholders, including the Regional Centres of Excellence, the Audit Commission and government departments on what works and does not work around efficiency.

So, you would provide suitable peers for peer reviews in other authorities whilst also receiving the benefit of advice from accredited peers and national experts about your own council's plans to deal with efficiency.

The IDeA believes that this represents a significant step in the sectors ability to develop its own improvement mechanisms.

We are planning to roll out the reviews to a first phase of 20 local authorities in 2005/2006 .

Indications are that initial interest is high.

The subsidised price of the IDeA efficiency peer review has been set at £6000 (plus expenses)

Participating authorities will need to offer the services of either one or two peers.

In the event of the programme being oversubscribed we intend to favour those authorities who provide two peers.

We will also be looking closely at the level and expertise of the Peers being offered.

what does an IDeA efficiency peer review team **look like?**

vision

The efficiency peer review is conducted by a team of three :

- the team will be led by a serving senior officer, e.g. Director of Resources, Head of Finance, Head of Corporate Planning etc. Ideally the team leader will have experience of finance as well as other key resource aspects such as human resources.
- an IDeA consultant with expertise in either process improvement (e-government) or procurement and will also act as the review manager and first point of contact for the authority.
- the third member of the team will be chosen to supplement the skills either in process improvement or procurement, which are not already represented in the review team

As stated above, we would prefer two members of the review team to come from local government but at least one member of the team will be a serving local authority officer. All lead peers will be trained in the benchmark and accredited to having undertaken efficiency peer reviews by the IDeA's Peer Clearing House.

At the end of the third day on site, the team will feed back the key messages from their visit in an informal session with the council's managerial and political leadership. This will be followed within three weeks by a detailed written report providing recommendations for change.

how does an IDeA efficiency peer review work?

An efficiency peer review is an opportunity to stand back and assess your achievements to date, and where you now need to focus to drive improvement. It involves an assessment against the IDeA's resource management benchmark exploring:

- leadership of the efficiency agenda
- the council's strategy and action plan for efficiency
- arrangements for the efficient use of resources (finance, people and assets)
- how resources are being released through process improvement (people, process, property, technology) and smarter procurement
- mechanisms for successful delivery of change programmes and projects.

To ensure the peer review provides added value in the areas of greatest importance to the council, your review manager will agree with you, the particular issues you would like the team to focus on. Each review will focus on these key underlying issues for the authority, and produce solutions and suggestions for resolving them.

before the review

interest

Before the review we will ask you to complete a short self-assessment against the benchmark - an ideal opportunity to collectively take stock. The Review team will then spend three days on site talking to a range of internal and external stakeholders including senior officers, members, managers, staff, unions and partners. Other issues around the authority's involvement and organisation, both prior to, and during the review are set out in the attached guide to local authorities on the Efficiency Review process.

timetable

We are anticipating high demand to be one of the first authorities to host IDeA efficiency peer Reviews in the Autumn. Our regional associates will be your first point of contact and the initial recruitment route. Enquiries from interested authorities who would like to have a review conducted over November/December 2005 should be sent to: navaz.buhari@idea.gov.uk

We anticipate the first roll out of the efficiency peer reviews to be in the Autumn with a subsequent phase after Christmas. Two learning events, designed to capture and share the knowledge gained, will be held at appropriate intervals during the programme.

what you need to do next if you are interested

We will be scheduling in efficiency peer reviews on a first come, first served basis. We appreciate that Autumn is a very busy time for local government, so would encourage you to get your expression of interest in early. You can do this by speaking to your regional associate or by emailing gareth.clear@idea.gov.uk.

We hope you will take up this opportunity to support change, promote new ideas and promote best practice within an areas of key importance and interest to local government.

For further information about the entire performance partnership offering, please see the IDeA's blue booklet 'efficiency matters'. A copy can be sent to you by contacting gareth.clear@idea.gov.uk.