

Helping Councils prepare for corporate Assessments – through Peer Challenge or Modular Support

A range of easy in – easy out support packages using open ended, day rate call-down contracts, plus enhanced Peer Challenges.

SOLACE Enterprises has consistently provided high quality Peer Challenges and reviews for Corporate Assessments. It has recently improved these services to address the needs of high performing authorities awaiting their Corporate Assessments in 2007-08 and to meet the needs of District Authorities.

In addition, it provides flexible help through a range of modular corporate assessment support packages, tailored to meet the individual needs of authorities.

SOLACE Enterprises offers:

Peer Challenge

A peer based assessment mapped against the Audit Commission key lines of enquiry which also applies to Unitary and County Councils. The peer teams consist of experienced Chief Executives, Senior Members, and Serving Directors and are led by a SOLACE Enterprises Associate who acts as facilitator (team leader).

Mock Inspection

An assessment mapped, against the Audit Commission key lines of enquiry, which also applies to Unitary and County Councils. The structure of the assessment is aligned to the procedure relating to an Audit Commission inspection.

CA Support Modules

Our Corporate Assessment support modules can be delivered as fixed elements in a contracted support package or, for authorities wishing to retain local discretion and flexibility, as options that can be drawn down as part of an open ended call down contract 'for up to X days CA support.' The organisation pays the day rate, expenses and VAT for the days taken up, mixes and matches the support that suits changing circumstances and pauses or stops the contract as desired.

SOLACE Enterprises provides the following modules:

1. **Taking stock** – covers selective discussions which deliver a baseline assessment

This includes a visit to the authority, talks with key managers about the status of their preparations, the progress of the self assessment programme, a review of the project plan, member involvement and engagement and staff participation.

Normally conducted over two days and finishing with a wrap up discussion on the second afternoon, this module is often followed by hands on assistance.

2. **Project planning** – ensures a robust approach to setting up and managing the process up to and through inspection

This involves drawing up a detailed project plan and is usually centred round discussions and meetings with the authority's CA co-ordinator and his/her team. It may also include Directors or the Chief Executive and can extend to the construction of a tactical plan for those areas which have been identified for improvement.

3. **Document review** – includes a detailed analysis and a report on strengths and weaknesses

A review of the complete list of CA documents required by the Audit Commission (plus additional SOLACE Enterprises requests). This identifies strengths and other issues which need to be considered, comments on content, consistency of strategic direction across documents, risks; and other aspects likely to attract the attention of the inspectors. Analysis and a written document will be provided and the module can be extended to include a discussion on the findings.

4. **Staff focus groups** - engages staff with the development of a self assessment/ submission

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Facilitates staff focus groups to obtain information and engender ownership in themed sessions. 'Homework' for attendees, three x nominal three hour focus groups and a written report are all part of the module.

5. **Partner focus groups** - involves partners with the development of a self assessment/submission

Facilitates partner focus groups to obtain information and engender ownership on themed sessions. 'Homework' for attendees; four x nominal three hour focus groups and a written report are all part of the module.

6. **Challenging organisational self awareness** – tests the facts against Audit Commission expectations and grading perceptions

Reviews the evidence collected and compares this against the expectations for a high performing authority. This review is followed by a bullet point list of challenge issues which is discussed at seven or eight individual thematic challenge sessions for directors or other responsible groups. These challenge sessions are time managed to around 2 hours and are conducted as a rigorous dialogue with an exchange of views, opinions, and reasoning; rather than being confrontational.

7. **Self Assessment review** - focuses on a critical appraisal of a draft self assessment

Reviews an advanced version of the authority's own assessment and provides a commentary on possible changes and improvements. This module looks at coverage against the KLOE, impact, omissions, issues arising, risks, wording, impression, and anything that may catch the attention of the inspectors. A copy of the authority's self assessment, marked with tracked changes and comments, is produced.

8. **Tour preparation** - constructs a tour, runs a mock session and links the story together

Provides support for the development of the introductory tour by exploring, with the authority, the way in which it structures its approach, the basis of the tour and its purpose and content. It also covers suggestions which include presentation and delivery. This may extend to a mock run through, and suggestions for improvement.

9. **Reality checking** – includes a final sweep up concentrating on both soft and hard issues

Reviews final arrangements and assists in preparations for the inspection covering visual and other 'reality checks.' This is centred round a one day visit to the council and includes proposals for accommodating the inspection team, initial presentation to inspectors, image projection, and the management of the inspection process.

10. **Member/Officer coaching** - prepares staff and members for the inspectors' discussion

These sessions will help attendees prepare for the corporate assessment, understand how inspections are conducted and include interviews and group discussions. One to one and group sessions also take place.

The content will be tailored to address the specific issues raised by attendees at each session. It focuses on providing attendees with the confidence to represent the authority in the best possible light.

11. **On demand support** - provides a continuous link for advice and support

From the beginning of the contract, staff preparing the authority's CA approach will have 'on demand' telephone and e-mail access to the appointed Associate for support and advice. This support is offered to resolve specific issues which take less than 30 minutes to answer. Past experience has shown this to be invaluable in reducing stress as well as saving time.

For further information, please contact our Resource Centre on

**0845 601 0649 or email
resource.centre@solaceenterprises.com**

**You can find out more about
SOLACE Enterprises, including details of our
full range of consultancy services, at
www.solaceenterprises.com**

