

2012 Tourism – role of local government in “welcome”

Summary

This report details the key role that local government has to play in 2012 tourism and the tourism and welcome agenda for the 2012 Games, and outlines the major issues and challenges for local government on this issue in the run up to the Games.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree that the key 2012 tourism issues for local government outlined in the report continue to inform the LGA's on-going lobbying of DCMS, and other partners through regular meetings and membership of relevant groups.

Action

Officers to take forward agreed recommendations.

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Background

1. Councils are the largest public funder of the visitor economy, investing £120m per year in tourism support. They also support major cultural, business and sporting events; all of which are key attractions for tourists. Many tourism offices are owned or managed by councils and provide a vital source of information for visitors.
2. The profile and scale of the Olympic and Paralympic Games is a once in a generation opportunity to boost domestic and international tourism. It is estimated that 50 – 75% of the economic benefits of the games will accrue to tourism. Local authorities have a key role to play in staging the Olympic and Paralympic Games and spreading the tourism benefits across the whole of the UK, not just where competitions are taking place.

The 2012 Welcome

3. For overseas visitors their first impression of the UK in 2012 will be when they disembark from the plane or train and are faced with making transport connections, finding their accommodation or finding information about the local area. Getting the welcome right for international and domestic visitors alike will be critical if the UK is to reap legacy benefit in the form of return visitors.
4. We know that we need to improve our welcome so hosting the Games is the ideal opportunity to address this challenge. Despite being the 6th most visited destination in the world, Britain has a poor reputation for welcome. In 2007 the Anholt –GfK Roper Nations Brand Index placed Britain 16th in a league table of 35 top international destinations for its ‘welcoming people’.
5. Local authorities are central to improving welcome. They provide the core infrastructure essential to the tourist experience, such as transport facilities and clean, safe and attractive public spaces. Above all they have the local knowledge essential to people unfamiliar with a place.
6. Welcome is also a priority for central government. It is a core objective in the DCMS strategy *Winning: A Tourism Strategy for 2012* and VisitBritain has a group dedicated to welcome. Engaging with the tourism industry is vital too and this is achieved through the Tourism Advisory Council, at which the LGA is also represented. The Nations and Regions Group is working on a ‘Tourism Opportunities Network’ which will bring together all 2012-related tourist information in one place for the tourism industry. This will also be a valuable resource for local government.

7. Plans for the welcome in 2012 are most advanced in London where there is work underway to create “city volunteers” who will be stationed at transport hubs and other prominent places during the Games to welcome visitors and provide essential local information.
8. The LGA is closely following developments in London and has already raised the possibility of a UK wide corps of Games-time “city volunteers” to Tessa Jowell MP, Minister for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. As well as helping to ensure we provide a quality welcome to visitors, it will also help to secure a volunteering legacy from the Games. The City Volunteers should wear the same kit as LOCOG volunteers and should receive similar training in order to create a seamless visitor experience.

Key Issues for Local Government

9. Some local authorities are already positioning their destinations to benefit from 2012 tourism and an important focus for the LGA Group is to share good practice, especially about the welcome. For example, the beacon councils in the Olympic and Paralympic theme are half way through a year-long programme of activity to share learning on a range of legacy issues including tourism. Dorset County Council will shortly be hosting an Open Day, with input from the other beacons, on 2012 tourism. 2012 tourism and welcome will be a key theme at the LGA’s Annual 2012 Games Conference on 25 January 2010. A new LGA / LOCOG publication about local government and the 2012 Games will highlight the importance of a tourism legacy. We have also approached DCMS about learning from the experience of Liverpool’s Welcome programme during its Capital of Culture 2008 work. The programme covered volunteer engagement, working with taxi drivers and similar businesses and running workshops – such as foreign language initiatives – for front line staff.
10. Feedback from local authorities suggests there are a number of common issues which risk limiting the value of the tourism legacy to our communities and the LGA has regularly called for a much more joined up approach to the 2012 tourism legacy.
11. 2012 tourism is also inextricably bound up with our on-going work to simplify the overall tourism landscape, to clarify the role of local government and our programme of work to enthuse more local authorities about the Games in general. If a council isn’t fully supportive of the 2012 agenda it’s highly unlikely they will be thinking about the potential tourism legacy.
12. The key 2012 tourism issues for local government are summarised below. Members are asked to consider these and agree that they inform our on-going lobbying of DCMS and other partners through regular meetings and membership of relevant groups:

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- **Partnership working**– we encourage RDAs who lead on 2012 tourism in their areas to fully engage with local authorities on welcome.
- **Welcome / City Volunteers** - the Beijing Games showed that the city volunteer model works (although there were some lessons to be learnt). We need to build on the London City Volunteers model, which in turn should visually reflect LOCOG Games-time volunteers, and all should receive training of an equal standard.
- **Welcome / Public transport** - Local authorities want the ticketing for the Games to be integrated with local transport as far as possible. This has already been agreed for London but discussions are ongoing with transport providers about arrangements for the rest of the country.
- **Accommodation accreditation** – it's vital that the majority of accommodation is captured by some form of accreditation by 2012 so that visitors to the Games have an objective tool on which to base decisions on where to stay. Otherwise, there is a risk that low accommodation standards will undermine work to promote English tourism and lead to poor impressions of English accommodation internationally. All national tourist boards are currently reviewing accommodation accreditation. What follows these reviews must be a modern, cost-effective and visible rating system that complements online information provision.
- **Accommodation for disabled visitors (mobility and sensory)** – we are concerned that there will be a shortage of suitable accommodation for disabled people which must be addressed if we are to offer a world class welcome to all of our visitors.
- **National media / marketing strategy** – destinations will punch above their weight if they can be a part of national marketing and media strategies. LOCOG has recently appointed Thomas Cook as official tour operator. They will be developing Olympic and Paralympic tour packages for events across the country.

Financial Implications

13. None.

Implications for Wales

14. Welsh councils are part of the LGA's 2012 networks.

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