

7 March 2011

**Item 4**

**LG Group Fire Conference 2011 and 2012**

**Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction.

**Summary**

Planning for the 2012 LG Group annual Fire Conference will begin shortly. This planning will take into account not only delegate feedback from the 2011 Conference, but will also have to consider more broadly the increased financial strains on the Group.

FSMC Members' views are therefore sought at this early planning stage to consider how the costs associated with the staging of the annual Fire Conference could be reduced to the benefit of delegates and to the LG Group.

**Recommendation**

Members are asked to comment on the possible options for the 2012 Fire Conference as set out within the report.

**Action**

Officers to reflect Members' comments in conference planning.

**Contact officer:** Jane Marcroft  
**Position:** Events Manager, LG Group  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3080  
**E-mail:** [jane.marcroft@local.gov.uk](mailto:jane.marcroft@local.gov.uk)

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**LG Group Fire Conference 2011 and 2012**

**Background**

1. Now in its 14<sup>th</sup> year, the LG Group annual Fire Conference has attracted an average of approximately 240 paying delegates and a range of exhibitors and sponsors in recent years. The event is considered to be an important part of the annual fire industry calendar, one of the showcase events organised by the LG Group and an important income-generator.
2. In this tough economic climate the majority of commercial conferences organised by the LG Group and our competitors are suffering from reduced delegate numbers. Though paying delegate numbers are marginally down on last year, a strong marketing strategy and Members' assistance in promoting the Conference has ensured that numbers have held up reasonably well.

**Possible options for the future**

3. In thinking about how to continue to offer an event that remains attractive to the sector in a challenging economic climate, officers have considered the following possible options for the 2012 Fire Conference:
  - 3.1 Continue with a residential event over two days at the same standard of venue (typically a four star standard hotel)
  - 3.2 Continue with a residential event over two days at a lesser standard venue (typically a three star standard hotel)
  - 3.3 Consider other types of venue including, bespoke conference centres where accommodation could be off-site, university campuses, the Fire Service College
  - 3.4 Consider limiting the conference to a one day event (in either a four star or three star hotel)
4. In light of the conference taking place in 2010 and 2011 in Manchester and Gateshead respectively, there is an argument for holding the conference further south next year. Among the possible locations lined up are: Bournemouth; Brighton; York; Bath; Reading; Nottingham; and Harrogate.

**Further considerations**

5. Further to the above, officers have considered a series of proposals that aim to help drive further reductions in cost for future conferences and, at the same time, make those conferences more viable and attractive to delegates.

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6. Members are asked for any comments they may have on the below proposals, which range in terms of savings achieved and in terms of how easily these changes can be implemented:
  - 6.1 Future conferences could only feature a drinks reception if a sponsor can be found - which is the case at this year's event.
  - 6.2 The conference dinner be removed from the programme. Though this would realise a significant saving (as detailed below), the dinner has historically been regarded by many as an integral part of the event.
  - 6.3 Possibilities for securing further sponsorship be examined as a way of subsidising the delegate fee. There are concerns however that this would be difficult to achieve in the current economic climate.
  - 6.4 Timing – some periods of the year can be more cost effective than others. Traditionally the first two weeks of January can be cheaper and if considering a one day option Mondays and Fridays are generally cheaper days on which to hold events.
  - 6.5 Potential may exist to negotiate a more competitive rate if for example a one day event such as an emergency planning event were to be merged with the fire conference. For example, the audio visual costs would certainly be reduced.
  - 6.6 Are there any other elements that could be added to the conference programme as a way of increasing delegate take-up? Would the introduction of study tours for example be appropriate?
  - 6.7 Limit the number of workshops being run concurrently. At this year's conference there are seven separate workshops. Looking at the sample the price of workshop rooms varied from £100 at one of the three star venues to £600 per room at the other extreme.

**Technological considerations**

7. Selected LG Group conferences and events will be available to view on the internet, either live or on demand for a fee, meaning that councils will save the time, travel and cost usually associated with physically attending an event. A new web channel – LG Intel – has been set up by Policy Review TV, which has won a three-year franchise to run the web coverage of certain LG Group events. This year's Fire Conference will be the first LG Group residential event to be filmed.

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**Financial implications**

8. Financial implications for the choice of venue and conference duration will be considered very closely as part of future work on conference planning.
9. If Members feel that any of the further considerations outlined in this report should be pursued, officers will fully examine the full costs and benefits of implementing those changes as part of the wider conference planning.