

LGA Scrutiny Panel**Maintaining Council membership of the LGA 2009/10****Final Report****1 Summary**

- 1.1 As part of the Panel's work programme for 2009/10, an investigation into maintaining council membership of the LGA was conducted. The scrutiny was undertaken by Cllr Sandra Barnes and Cllr Felicity Hindson.
- 1.2 This review focused on:
- What the LGA is currently doing to encourage and maintain membership.
 - How effective these methods have been.
 - Methods the LGA is using to enhance the benefits of membership to member councils while ensuring they are not available to non-members.

2. The Investigation & Evidence Gathered

- 2.1 Discussions were held with Claire Holloway (Corporate Programme Director, LGA) to understand what action the LGA was taking to retain its current membership, and restrict membership to non-members.
- 2.2 As of 1 April 2010, all English councils are members of the LGA, with the exception of the London Borough of Bromley, North Somerset Council, Torridge District Council and King's Lynn & West Norfolk District Council.
- 2.3 In total, 422 local authorities are members for 2010-11, including English local councils, Welsh councils via the Welsh LGA and fire, police, National Park, passenger transport and police authorities, plus one town council.
- 2.4 10 councils have given their notice so far for 2011/12. These councils may withdraw their notice closer to April 2011.
- 2.5 To date the LGA has taken the following steps to retain its current membership and improve the benefits of membership:
- Regular communication with member councils through a range of publications and email alerts, including *first* magazine and LG alerts.
 - Member area on the LGA website.

- Appointment of a Member Communications Team who will specifically develop communications for member authorities.
- Annual membership packs sent to all member authorities outlining their subscription charge and the services and benefits of LGA membership. The pack is sent from the Chief Executive and Chairman to all Leaders and Chief Executive of member authorities.
- All member councils can join Special Interest Groups (SIGs).
- Free use of Local Government House conference venues on weekdays between 9am and 5pm.
- Allocated spaces at the Annual General Assembly of the LGA.
- Councillors and officers may be invited to join LGA task groups or advisory networks.
- Free access to legal advice and opinion (e.g. on land charges.)

3. Key findings

3.1 Over the past two years, the LGA has taken further specific action to build strong relationships with its membership through the following:

- A system of Account Managers has been developed to provide each authority with a named LGA officer who will assist with any queries or concerns. An Account Manager has direct contact with senior officers in the authority and facilitates two way communications between the LGA and the member authority.
- The LGA has developed an internal membership site allowing all LGA officers to monitor contact with member authorities.
- A “watch-list” is maintained to gauge which authorities may give notice.
- The LGA Group Business Plan 2010-11 has made customer services one of its five priorities, this is in line with the Getting Closer programme.
- Member authorities are welcome to initiate meetings with the Chief Executive of the LGA to discuss the benefits of membership.
- The LGA is actively developing the facilities available at Local Government House, in order to provide councillors and officers of member authorities with an excellent work space in London.
- Councillors are able to access support through Political Group offices.

3.2 The LGA is beginning to restrict the benefits of membership to non-members. To date the following has been implemented, or will be implemented in 2010-11:

- Restricted access to parts of the LGA website. Member authorities are able to access ‘member only’ content by using a specified username and password. Non-member authorities will not have access to these areas.
- Two tier charging for members and non-members for LGA events, conferences, and room bookings at Local Government House.
- LGA email alerts and publications are only available to member councils.

3.3 At present, there is no method of assessing whether the actions which the LGA has taken to retain membership are effective. Although the “watch-list” does monitor action taken to deal specifically with councils which may give notice,

there is no proper system in place to assess the action which the LGA has taken to retain its membership and restrict benefits for non-members.

4. Recommendations

Set out below are the main recommendations which the Panel has proposed, following discussions with the main participants involved in retaining LGA membership:

- 4.1 Differential charging should be continued and increased to enhance the financial benefits of membership and costs of non-membership.
- 4.2 The role of the political groups should be promoted to councillors within member authorities and their expertise should be easily accessible to member authorities. As part of this, political groups could look at ways of 'catching councillors early' i.e. when they are first elected, so that they are fully aware of what the LGA does.
- 4.3 The LGA should consider sending bulletins such as "*Start the Week*" to all councillors within member authorities rather than just Chief Executives, Leaders, Group Leaders and LGA Board and Panel members, to engage with a wider membership.
- 4.4 There should be a review of the Member Communications Team at an appropriate time to ensure that it is achieving the improvement aims of the LGA Group, and that member councils and their elected members are getting the best from their membership.
- 4.5 Although it has so far been successful, restricted access to the LGA website is at a preliminary stage and it is recommended that restrictions should be strengthened.