

LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition 2012

Purpose of report

To provide early feedback from the 2012 Annual Conference and give an opportunity for members to advise and comment on both this year's conference and the future direction of the event.

Recommendation

For discussion and direction.

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LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition 2012

Background

1. The LGA conference and exhibition 2012 took place at the International Convention Centre, Birmingham (ICC) on 26-28 June. An online delegate survey is currently being undertaken – with the deadline for responses towards the end of July. This will assist the Association to ascertain views, and to help shape and plan future events.

Staff and delegates have been asked to provide feedback and some early responses, based on a small sample (2% of audience) have been referenced in this report. Any comments should be taken in context and the full report will be available in the coming weeks.

2. Over 320 Local Authorities sent delegates to this year's conference with a total audience of just under 1400 attendees. This included around 1,000 attendees from member authorities and the conference was also opened up to different groups, including Next Generation Councillors and around 50 Police and Crime Commissioner Candidates.

Conference objectives

3. The conference met its objectives in the following way:

- 3.1. **To support the LGA's lobbying and influencing agenda**

At this year's conference, delegates heard speeches from each political party, including two Secretaries of State, and there was also a large contingent of MPs, a further Secretary of State and other Ministers in attendance, including at various political group meetings, functions and workshops.

The conference received cross sector support from leading speakers from the fields of health, finance, business, governance, innovation, and the voluntary sector and speakers from key Government departments.

- 3.2. **To help showcase local authority best practice**

In addition to the high profile speakers detailed above, the conference heard from speakers from over 60 different local authorities – allowing delegates to share best practice with their peers. Every workshop included representation from at least two member authorities.

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3.3. To provide an opportunity to profile the LGA's lobbying, research, publications, and the work of the programme areas.

The conference had a high profile throughout the week and continues to generate interest via the Knowledge Hub. The 61 blogs currently online created over 5000 views and covered a range of subject matters, from troubled families to public health and policing.

During conference week there were 558 mentions of the LGA in the news. The Chairman and Group Leaders were involved in national TV and news coverage, including 365 articles in regional, trade and online publications on, or about, the LGA's publication 'Funding outlook for councils from 2010/11 to 2019/20: Preliminary modelling'.

This year's conference was one of the most talked about events (across social media) in the whole of the UK – trending for 2 days on twitter – reaching over 23,000 twitter accounts.

3.4. To support the LGA's policy work and membership strategy and help to promote local government reputation.

This year's conference fully showcased the LGA, and the sector's, priorities providing an excellent opportunity for lead members and senior staff to connect with members and share more of the detail around the work the Association is currently undertaking. Personalised membership packs were available on request from the exhibition stand, and the conference directory – provided in the conference delegate bags included LGA successes over the past year.

3.5. LG Inform and Knowledge Hub were showcased widely on the LGA stand and in outlying areas and three key documents were heavily showcased at this year's event: 'Get in on the Act – The Health and Social Care Act 2012', 'Funding outlook for councils from 2010/11 to 2019/20: Preliminary modelling' and 'Local Leadership, Local Growth'.

3.6. To raise income for the LGA

The conference remains on target to make a profit of £400,000. This allows us to keep delegate fees at the current comparably low rate and to continue to offer discounted rates to individual groupings in order to increase the reach of the conference to the wider membership.

Conference bookings, sponsorship and exhibition

4. Full member delegates for this year's conference increased by around 50 from last year's conference, sponsorship and exhibition matched 2011 levels. Day delegates across all days also increased on 2011 levels.

Conference programme

5. Plenary sessions seem to have been widely well received this year and the use of journalists to assist the debate – particularly in panel sessions was a success.
6. All sessions were well attended this year and allowed for a good level of debate with a wide mix of topics. We allowed more time for movement between sessions and longer refreshment and lunch breaks to allow more networking time. However, the overrunning of some sessions meant that this was sometimes eroded.

Delegate feedback

7. A snapshot of the delegate feedback (based on the current small sample of responses received) shows the following:
 - 7.1. around 85% of delegates were very or fairly satisfied with this year's conference
 - 7.2. over 80% attended all three days
 - 7.3. responses were received from 60% members, 30% officers, 10% other
 - 7.4. 77% of responders had attended the LGA conference in the past.

Reasons for returning include:

 - 7.4.1 *Find the Conference provides me with new ideas, able to learn best practice from elsewhere, good networking opportunities and good to hear directly from Govt Ministers.*
 - 7.4.2 *General interest in latest thinking, and networking with colleagues around the country.*
 - 7.4.3 *To obtain knowledge of current and future issues and to meet with fellow councillors.*
 - 7.4.4 *I think it is the best place to meet colleagues from other Authorities and to network. It is also very useful to hear how the LGA are working on behalf of their members and to become aware of how Government legislation is helping or hindering local government.*
- 7.5. some comments about lack of time for discussion – but speakers generally well received.
- 7.6. some comments on site about the number of sessions running concurrently, albeit there was good attendance at all sessions. Decisions need to be taken as to whether to scale down and focus the conference on fewer areas, providing less choice to delegates, or to accept that in order to profile the wide range of the work programme of the Association, a similar level of sessions are required which inevitably means conflicting pressures.

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7.6.1. Note: sessions were reduced down from 36 in 2011 to 30 in 2012, and there is scope to reduce session's further, limit maximum numbers in a cluster, or increase the number of clusters.

7.6.2. Previous feedback has shown that delegates prefer the workshop sessions to be smaller to enable more discussion as this is often lacking in the large set piece plenary sessions.

Conclusion and next steps

8. Work has already begun on the 2013 annual conference which will take place on 2-4 July at Manchester Central and the Events team will continue to work with the Leadership Board to ensure that feedback is acted upon, the conference programme is current and the speakers and sessions are of interest.

Financial Implications

9. The conference remains on target to meet its budgetted profit of around £400,000 and continues to generate the largest profit of all the events held across the Association