

## **Review of LGA Annual Conference 2012**

### **Purpose of report**

To provide the Leadership Board with an overview of feedback from the LGA Annual Conference 2012.

### **Recommendation**

That LGA Leadership Board reviews the **attached** feedback from the LGA Annual Conference and considers the recommendations.

### **Action**

To consider recommendations for implementation for the LGA Annual Conference 2013.

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## **Review of LGA Annual Conference 2012**

### **Introduction**

1. Following this year's LGA Annual Conference delegates, members and staff were asked, through a variety of mechanisms – Delegate questionnaire at the conference, informal soundings at the conference, personal emails, a request on the Portal, one-to-one interviews, a session at the staff forum and a discussion at Leadership Board - for their views on the conference. The review asked three key questions:
  - 1.1 What worked well this year?
  - 1.2 What could be improved at next year's conference?
  - 1.3 What ideas do you have for the 2013 Annual Conference?
2. There was a good response with 155 formal responses from delegates and more than 120 individual responses received from staff (with many of the responses including informal responses from delegates).

### **Summary**

3. Overall the responses show that delegates feel the conference was very successful, acting as a good showcase for the LGA, the work of the LGA and our offer to member authorities. Described by one delegate as "the conference showed an LGA with purpose, so a massive advance on last year."
4. Delegates felt that the conference included a good range of sessions and speakers, covering the important issues for councils. It was seen as a positive event and a chance to network. One issue that delegates raised was the need for more 'improvement and learning' events and this was best described by one delegate as "the challenges for local government were well covered but what are councils doing to tackle these that others can learn from?"
5. The venue, layout of the exhibition and organisation of the event was singled out in most responses as being excellent.
6. Having one clear 'focal point' – the council funding report – was felt to be particularly successful by all respondents giving the conference a clear talking point and top-line media story which received a very high profile.
7. Some of the LGA responses questioned the length of the conference as a whole and the length of individual days (although this is not such an issue for delegates). This was balanced out with comments about the wide-ranging nature and breadth of the sessions on offer – giving delegates a good choice of sessions.
8. It was felt (by staff and council officers) that our offer to chief executives was stronger than in previous years ensuring the conference worked for chief

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executives as well as for elected members. LGA colleagues said that the structure of the conference allowed ease of meeting with senior politicians and chief executives which made it a good opportunity to network and get business done.

9. There are some comments about the workshops which focus mainly on structure and timing. A number of delegates felt that some of the workshop sessions would work better with just one main, headline speaker (rather than a panel) and others felt that they should be slightly longer to build in more time for questions.
10. Overall, this year the LGA's on-line offer was seen as being much improved, resulting in extensive coverage on social media networks such as Twitter, engaging many of the delegates.
11. A number of the issues raised in this report have been discussed in previous years.

**Summary of feedback from delegates**

12. The feedback from delegates mirrored that from staff in many areas. Around 12% of delegates completed a feedback questionnaire and **80.7% were satisfied with the event overall**. More than 80% of delegates attended for all three days. Two thirds were elected members and one third council officers. One fifth were attending the annual conference for the first time.
13. As with the staff feedback, there was high satisfaction with the organisation of the conference with **90.3% of delegates satisfied with the event organisation**. When asked if they would attend another LGA annual conference, 80.6% said they would.
14. The main headlines are:

**Reason for attending**

Networking	100%
To share experiences with other local authorities	96.8%
To hear about current issues in local government	96.8%
To hear high profile speakers	93.5%
To debate issues of importance to local government	86.6%
Quality of speakers and presentations	83.9%
To participate in political group activity	58.1%

**Length of conference – 87.1% satisfied**

Very satisfied	35.5%
Fairly satisfied	51.6%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	6.5%
Fairly dissatisfied	6.5%

**Do you prefer individual keynote speakers or panel discussions with 3 or 4 views?**

individual keynote speakers	45.2%
panel discussions	35.5%
Don't know	19.4%

**Usefulness of information issued during the conference – 67.7% satisfied**

Very satisfied	25.8%
Fairly satisfied	41.9%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25.8%
Fairly dissatisfied	6.5%

**The helpfulness of LGA staff – 96.6% satisfied**

Very satisfied	73.3%
Fairly satisfied	23.3%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3.3%
Fairly dissatisfied	0%

**LGA stand and launches – 73.3% satisfied**

Very satisfied	30.0%
Fairly satisfied	43.3%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	23.3%
Fairly dissatisfied	3.3%

**Political group activities – 50% satisfied (71.3% of members)\***

Very satisfied	23.3% (33.3%)
Fairly satisfied	26.7% (38.0%)
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13.3% (19%)
Fairly dissatisfied	6.7% (9.5%)
very dissatisfied	0%
Don't know/not applicable	30.0%

\* – One third of respondents were council officers and therefore this question would not be applicable, as set out in the findings. The figures in brackets denote members only)

**Did the annual conference represent value for money– 67.7% satisfied**

Very satisfied	16.1%
Fairly satisfied	51.6%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	12.9%
Fairly dissatisfied	16.1%
very dissatisfied	0%
Don't know/not applicable	3.2%

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15. The key issues raised by delegates include:
- 15.1 Length of conference – Should this be reviewed?
  - 15.2 Panel -v- single speakers
  - 15.3 More time for debate and questions
  - 15.4 More content required about solutions, transformation, improvement (Delegates felt a lot of the content covered current problems but not enough about solutions and best practice)
  - 15.5 More thought-provoking sessions – Some of the speakers were a little bland – many spoke for too long and were predictable
  - 15.6 More private-sector, international and celebrity speakers
  - 15.7 More 'challenge' in the sessions
  - 15.8 More opportunities for CEXs and officers to participate – Why 'invite only' sessions? Could officer sessions run in parallel to political group sessions?

**Venue, organisation and logistics**

16. Delegates felt the venue and layout was ideal for annual conference, allowing plenty of space for the main programme but also space to network. It was felt that having all the events in the one venue was a big plus as it meant everyone was contained in one place, making networking easier. The event organisation was mentioned numerous times as being to a very high, professional standard.
17. The exhibition area worked well for the political groups.
18. There were requests from both delegates and staff for more PC/internet access and a more user-friendly layout for PC access – internet café style, more stand-up pods – easier to view screens.
19. Delegates expressed some frustration with queues and length of time it took to register. However, with between 1200 and 1400 visitors, some queues are inevitable.
20. One issue that came up in a variety of forms from both from delegates directly and through feedback to staff was the length of the conference and each of the individual days. It was felt that people drifted away on the last afternoon and some thought should be given to shortening the event (However, 87.1% of delegates were satisfied with the length of the conference when asked directly). This has been explored in previous years and it was agreed that this could still happen, whatever the length of the conference.

**Recommendations**

Review duration and programming of the conference.

Review PC access and stand layout.

### **Conference content**

21. One issue that came up about the overall content was that we should consider what could be added to the programme to include more about innovation and new ways of doing things.
22. The 'Naked Leader' session was very popular with chief executives and delegates and it was suggested that we should use more speakers of this type and style to 'break up' the more formal nature of the conference (one example given was the use at a previous conference of slightly unusual speakers such as Richard Olivier on how to use Shakespeare in Leadership. One issue may be that we may have to pay for such a session.
23. Other suggestions from delegates included bringing in more people from outside the immediate local government family to share ideas and to bring external creative challenge or to bring in local government thinking from other places such as major European cities.
24. One specific suggestion was for a session with Grant Shapps, Kevin McCloud, Ted Stephens (National Self-Build Association) and a council on the use of major self-build projects to deliver house building in larger numbers using the Glastonbury session format, which was very popular with delegates.
25. There was some comment from some delegates (officers) about the 'invitation only' status of some of the sessions.

### **Recommendation**

Develop a wider pool of speakers and explore more 'unusual' speakers to include in the conference programme.

Take a view on whether the LGA should pay for speakers.

Consider widening participation in some of the sessions.

### **Main programme**

26. Delegates felt the overall programme was current and had a good balance of issues. The plenary sessions were well-conceived. To allow more time for delegates to get involved in the debates, a number of people suggested that the plenary sessions (and indeed the sub-plenary sessions) use a mixture of panels and single-speakers.
27. Some people expressed a view that by holding the General Assembly first in the same room as the plenary sessions the conference misses a really big opening moment.

### **Recommendation**

Review format and timing of the General Assembly.

Set-aside a proportion of the plenary and sub-plenary sessions as 'discussion sessions', led by a single speaker to give more time for debate and questions.

### **Workshops**

28. As will always be the case, opinion was divided on the number of workshops. Many felt that the strength of the conference was the number, breadth and quality of the workshops. Many also commented that they were 'engaging and thought provoking.' Others felt that there were too many, which often meant they were competing for the same 'airtime' and not thought provoking enough.
29. Comments were made about deviating from the 'set piece' panel format to a much more participative feel, where the aspiration would not be to fill a hall but have a space and format suitable for the subject.
30. Other comments focussed on delegates often wanting to continue the debate after a workshop had finished and being directed out of the room so that it could be prepared for the next session.

### **Recommendations**

Review workshop format, timings and programme.

Set aside some flexible meeting space for delegates to continue discussions after a workshop finishes.

### **Fringe sessions**

31. The fringe event about Glastonbury was well received (a number of positive comments from delegates) – can we learn from that and do more fringe events in a similar style?
32. There was also some criticism that some of the fringe sessions had lower attendance than anticipated due to the early start/late finish. However, others commented that even the early sessions were well attended. Some delegates suggested the 8am fringes were a 'bit of a struggle' and could work better as formal working breakfasts (as some of the sessions were this year).
33. Some LGA colleagues felt that as national politicians (including Ministers and Shadow Ministers) often attend at short notice, it was sometimes difficult to get meeting rooms.

**Recommendations**

Set aside some flexible meeting space so that meetings can be arranged at short notice.

Consider more sessions such as the Glastonbury fringe session.

**Our improvement offer**

34. There was good visibility of LGInform on the stand and it was heavily promoted in workshops. However, there were a number of comments from delegates (elected members and officers) about strengthening the promotion of our improvement offer. A number of delegates made the point that having covered in detail the financial difficulties the sector is experiencing it would have been good to have had more examples of how councils are dealing with these and more best practice examples.

**Recommendations**

Consider a dedicated 'improvement offer' session(s)

Consider peer review session(s) at which a speaker could give their experience of a peer review and we can explain what is available to member authorities as part of our offer. This could include a guide to what you would get from a peer review.

**Political group sessions**

35. These received positive feedback. However, some felt that the timings meant that those not involved tended to drift away from the conference and indeed the venue. It was suggested that the timings be reviewed and during the political sessions, consider more parallel sessions for chief executives and officers.

**Recommendations**

Review timings of political group meetings and sessions.

Consider parallel sessions for those not involved in the political group sessions.

**Local Government Challenge**

36. There were some comments, mostly from delegate feedback to staff about the number of Local Government Challenge sessions this year. One comment suggested that if there is a Local Government Challenge plenary next year, we need to change the format (and timing), moving away from the traditional charring style to something more motivational and inspirational.

**Recommendations**

Review format of LG Challenge sessions

**Summary of feedback from staff**

37. Staff were able to give feedback in a number of ways. In addition, many gathered feedback from delegates during the conference. The following sets out a summary of the main issues.

**Pre-planning**

38. The feedback from both staff and delegates shows that as an organisation, the pre-planning phase was more joined up than for previous annual conferences. However, there were a number of comments from staff about greater involvement across the organisation in the pre-planning phase to help avoid some of the late changes which were made to the programme. It was felt that late changes led to some 'mixed messaging', including differing views about the organisation's strap line, vision and mission. There were also some comments about the fact that there is sometimes a need to 'reverse-engineer' sessions to fit campaign themes late in the day
39. People recognised the need for balanced sessions (politically, by authority type and gender). This is not always easy to achieve and sometimes means that the best, most interesting speakers are not able to be accommodated. This chimes with the view of delegates for more 'interesting' and 'edgy' speakers and a mixture of panel and single-speaker sessions.

**Recommendations**

Whilst the planning arrangements will always need to remain flexible to allow for last-minute changes, giving the conference an 'up-to-the-minute' feel, the annual conference should be part of the organisation's thinking when business planning so that it forms the centrepiece of our year for activity and launches.

Ensure political balance across the whole conference rather than within individual sessions. Open up speaker slots to a wider cohort of councils to ensure greater involvement of LGA membership.

**Communications and marketing**

40. Collaboration across the communications teams was much stronger this year with everyone working together to one shared goal.

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41. In the run-up to the conference, there were a number of late requests for publications and other marketing material, some of which were organised independently. Having publications available at the LGA stands to encourage delegates to come to the stand was a positive move.
42. However, a number of publications ran out during the event. It was commented on that if a report is mentioned in a speech or at an event we need to anticipate that there will be high demand for it and have enough hard copies available. We also need to ensure larger stocks of these key publications are made available post our launch and announcements.
43. It was also suggested by a number of delegates that if a publication was being launched at a workshop or sub-plenary session, a copy should be placed on every seat, rather than expect delegates to try to find a copy of the relevant publications. Overall, delegates like publications to take away but we should think carefully about the number and purpose.
44. For those staffing the LGA stand, it was felt that a core briefing and a list of all the reports and publications would be helpful and it was suggested that all staff have more visible name badges to identify them to delegates.
45. It was agreed that we would keep the same stand as last year for reasons of economy. There were one or two comments about the stand needing to be 'refreshed'.

**Recommendations**

Provide core briefing for all LGA staff.

All publications to be co-ordinated through the marketing officers in the Communications Team.

Provide a copy of major publications for every attendee at launch sessions.

Explore costs and options for a new or refreshed stand for 2013.

Provide visible name badges to all LGA staff.

**Media**

46. This year, it was felt that the LGA's media offer was more cohesive in terms of a clear focus on its primary campaigning strands and there was positive feedback from many about the position LGA took in terms of challenging back over future projections for local government finance. Many commented that 'having the focal point on funding and everything hanging off that was ideal'.
47. A media grid was developed for the duration of the conference. This ensured media activity was well planned and resulted in extensive media coverage – national, regional, local and trade.

**Recommendations**

A clear focus on the LGA's media stories for conference

Continue with media grid in future years.

**LGA conference on-line**

48. This year, comments reflected that the conference was better organised and more joined-up in relation to the technology. It was also felt that the site that was created well in advance to advertise and provide information about the conference worked well. This included blogs by the Chairman, Chief Executive and other senior staff.
49. The LGA's events 'digital offer' was much better co-ordinated this year and the Twitter feeds were very effective, as was conference blogging and the Knowledge Hub.
50. One suggestion was to use a twitter stream on the main conference backdrop screen to keep it current and fresh. People tweet as they are listening to the speeches so it would be more interactive. This could be done in-between speaker sessions as a constantly changing backdrop could detract from the speakers and can cause audio interference.
51. It was felt that in future years, online sessions in Knowledge Hub could be better promoted. One suggestion to improve the sessions is to line up a few of the delegates present to submit questions. Perhaps collating some questions that were unable to be tabled during the floor Q & A session to give the later online discussion some early impetus

**Recommendations**

Review 'conference on-line' and continue to build on the success of social media at this year's conference.

Consider streaming twitter comments onto the main backdrop screen in the main auditorium.

**Staffing of the event**

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52. Having one or two people on the LGA stand the whole time offered consistency and meant there was always someone available who was familiar with any issue.
53. Some staff raised the question of whether all the LGA staff who attended conference were required. It was felt that by having fewer staff, any saving on travel, subsistence and hotel costs could be put towards paying for higher profile, well known speakers.
54. Reference was also made to the number of commitments for the main programme which left little time for CLT to network with member authorities. It was also felt that a programme of key 'meet and greets' should be drawn up for members of CLT in advance to avoid duplication. This would also ensure that staff fulfil attendance at social events, for which they may have pre-registered.

**Recommendations**

Review LGA staffing for annual conference.

Outline advance schedule of meetings with member authorities for CLT.

**Post-event activity**

55. As in previous years, presentations and speaker notes were made available to member authorities on-line. This took some time to deliver and ideally, should be 'live' within 24-hours.
56. Staff also raised the question of whether there is a greater opportunity to engage those who can't be present, or not attending every day of conference. Perhaps asking people to submit questions to speakers at some of the sessions in advance?

**Recommendations**

Review process for making presentations available to speed up the process.

Review options for involving councillors and officers not attending annual conference or who only attend for part of conference.