LGA Leadership Board
13 February 2013

Item 7

LGA Perceptions Survey 2012

Purpose of report

For decision.

Summary

This report sets out the results of the 2012 perceptions survey and asks the LGA Leadership Board to agree the headline principles of the action plan.

Recommendation

For members to note the results of the 2012 perceptions survey and agree the headline principles of the action plan.

Action

As directed by Members.

Contact officer:	David Holdstock
Position:	Director of Communications
Phone no:	020 7664 3056
E-mail:	david.holdstock@local.gov.uk

LGA Leadership Board
13 February 2013

Item 7

LGA Perceptions Survey 2012

Introduction

1. The LGA Perceptions Survey 2012 is the first comprehensive, cross-cutting research that has been undertaken since the merger of the five organisations under the operating framework of the Local Government Association in 2010-2011. The research aims to build on the findings of the scrutiny panel sub-committee, published in late 2012 and endorsed by Leadership Board. The findings provide us with a benchmark to inform future work and give us a good understanding of the current views of member authorities on the organisation, the benefits of membership, their priorities, sector-led improvement, how well informed they feel about the work of the LGA and the sector generally, and areas for improvement.

2. The last perceptions survey (a 'rapid review') was undertaken in 2008. This set of results compares well with the 2008 results with satisfaction remaining broadly the same. This is against a backdrop of considerable change in the local government sector. Although helpful, as the sample size in 2008 was considerably smaller and the range of questions more limited, it does not allow for direct comparison.

Summary

3. This section contains a summary of the main findings and themes emerging from this research.

4. Overall, the results show that our member authorities are satisfied with the work we undertake on behalf of local government, with strong results in key areas. Respondents believe the LGA is effectively delivering the services and activities we offer to the local government sector. They also agree that we address the issues that are important to councils and that we have been an effective advocate for the interests of local government.

5. There is a high level of awareness **(61 per cent)** of the LGA and satisfaction with the work we undertake **(63 per cent)**. In response to questions about our overall reputation, a high proportion of respondents **(63 per cent)** would speak positively about the LGA.

---

[1] The Local Government Association; Local Government Improvement and Development; Local Government Employers; Local Government Regulation; and the Leadership Centre.

6. In terms of advocacy for the sector, **77 per cent** believe we are an effective advocate for the sector.

7. **Nine out of 10** respondents believe all the activities we undertake are '*very or fairly important*'. The areas of activity that respondents were asked to rank were:

   7.1 Providing a single voice for local government **(90 per cent)**;

   7.2 Managing local government's reputation in the national media **(90 per cent)**;

   7.3 Supporting and promoting councils which are trying to transform services to better support their communities **(90 per cent)**; and

   7.4 Providing support and challenge **(89 per cent)**.

8. In addition, respondents regarded *Lobbying on behalf of local government* as a particularly important service with **55 per cent** viewing it as 'very important'.

9. The results show a mixed picture of awareness of sector-led improvement and there are marked differences between different roles. Respondents agree that our approach to sector led improvement is correct in the current context. They believe their councils have taken steps to drive improvement and have strong local accountability driven by public engagement, consultation and information sharing. There is confidence in councils' and the sector's capacity to monitor their own performance and continuously improve. However, there are some relatively low levels of awareness of specific offers of support to the sector.

10. Overall, sector-led improvement is viewed as having a positive impact with **69 per cent** saying it has had a positive impact on the sector and **61 per cent** saying it has had a positive impact on their own council. Respondents were most aware of 'the *provision of a corporate peer challenge, at no cost'* and were least aware of the resource providing *'five days of free member peer support for all authorities undergoing a change of political control'.* However, respondents state that such resources would have a positive impact on their own authority's capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve. This shows good support for our approach to continuous improvement.

11. Respondents feel well informed. The strong links between feeling informed and overall satisfaction are reinforced with **69 per cent** of respondents feeling informed about the LGA and our work. The most popular methods of communication are directly by e-bulletins (suggesting digitalisation has become more entrenched in the sector) and First magazine. Respondents still prefer to engage with the LGA directly either responding to consultations or using email or telephone to contact us. Respondents would like to be more engaged with the LGA.

12. There is some work to do to further demonstrate value for money as only **43 per cent** agree that we demonstrate value for money for the funding we receive.

13. However there is a significant block of people **(44 per cent)** who either *'don't know/ neither agree/disagree'* with only **13 per cent** disagreeing that we offer value for money. This block of 'don't knows' is a key target audience for us to better demonstrate evidence of the value for money we offer.

14. There are some regional variations in responses to individual questions but across the full range of questions the findings are fairly consistent in all parts of the country.

15. Council leaders and chief executives are significantly more likely to know more about the detail of what we offer and more likely to be satisfied. Two thirds of respondents say they benefit from being members of the LGA. Again, this is higher amongst leaders and chief executives than it is for backbench councillors, chairs of scrutiny and directors.

16. Understanding of our work varies depending on specific job role, with backbench councillors having the least understanding overall. This suggests that further work will need to be undertaken to engage with this group and communicate the LGA's role and services to them. This supports the findings of the scrutiny panel sub-committee.

Objectives

17. This research was undertaken to:

    17.1 **Quantify member authorities' understanding of the LGA and what the LGA currently offers.** This includes levels and channels of awareness, understanding of functions perceived to be part of the LGA's remit, and how effective the LGA is seen at fulfilling these functions.

    17.2 **Investigate what our members want from the LGA and how they want to engage.** This aspect provides feedback on a strategic level in terms of the organisation's role and responsibilities but also on a tactical level in terms of formats and channels preferred.

    17.3 **Assess levels of awareness and views of sector-led improvement within local government, and views on support offered by the LGA.** The research identifies areas where the LGA might enhance its support in this area, by investigating the membership's preferences and experiences of support, the impact that such support and the resources we provide to support sector-led improvement.

Methodology

18. Telephone interviews were undertaken with a sample of 937 representatives from councils across all the English regions. These included:

    18.1 Council leaders;

    18.2 Portfolio holders;

    18.3 Chairs of scrutiny;

    18.4 Backbench councillors;

    18.5 Chief executives; and

    18.6 Directors,

19. This has given a strong, representative sample allowing detailed analysis by role and region. The sample size has a maximum standard error of +/-3.1per cent at the 95 per cent level of confidence, giving these findings a high level of accuracy. Interviews took between 15 and 20 minutes and explored:

    19.1 Our offer and current provision;

    19.2 Our current role and priorities and how these can be developed;

    19.3 Effectiveness of our communications and preferred methods of engagement; and

    19.4 Sector-led improvement within local government, our support offered to members and how it can be developed/improved.

20. Some of the role types have been amalgamated to aid analysis. The full breakdown of respondents by region, role and amalgamated role can be found in the table below.

Table 1 - Respondents, by region, role and amalgamated role type

Amalgamated role:	Officers		Frontbench Councillors			Backbench Councillors	Regional Total
Role:	**Chief Executives**	**Directors**	**Leaders**	**Chairs of Scrutiny**	**Portfolio Holders**	**Backbench Councillors**	
East	9	31	13	12	8	40	113 (12%)
East Midlands	18	31	11	13	12	40	125 (13%)
London	6	25	2	12	16	30	91 (10%)
North East	3	18	5	5	8	30	69 (7%)
North West	12	22	8	10	12	31	95 (10%)
South East	16	40	22	19	6	50	153 (16%)
South West	11	21	9	12	12	30	95 (10%)
West Midlands	11	26	8	9	17	30	101 (11%)
Yorkshire and the Humber	6	27	4	10	18	30	95 (10%)
Role Total:	92	241	82	102	109	311	937 (100%)
Amalgamated role Total:	333 (36%)		293 (31%)			311 (33%)	937 (100%)

Detailed analysis of the findings

21. The following gives a more detailed analysis of the findings, setting out and significant variations by role and/or region.

Knowledge of the LGA

22. Knowledge of the LGA is high. **Sixty-one per cent** say they know ‘a fair amount’ or ‘a great deal about’ the LGA.

Table 2 - How well would you say you know the Local Government Association? Would you say that you...

Base = all respondents (937)	**know just a little about it**	**know a fair amount about it**	**know a great deal about it**
Chief executives	5%	60%	35%
Directors	41%	51%	8%
Leaders	12%	71%	17%
Scrutiny chairs	40%	52%	8%
Portfolio holders	33%	52%	15%
Backbenchers	54%	37%	9%
All	38%	49%	12%

23. Awareness is significantly higher amongst leaders and chief executives.

24. Backbench councillors are significantly more likely to report that they ‘know just a little’ about the LGA (54 per cent compared with and average of 31 per cent of all other role types).

Understanding of the purpose of the LGA

25. Understanding of the purpose of the LGA is very high across all groups. Nearly **nine out of 10** respondents (**89 per cent**) agree with the statement ‘*I understand the LGA’s purpose and how it works for local government* ‘a great deal’ or ‘to some extent’.

Table 3 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about the Local Government Association? I understand the Local Government Association's purpose and how it works for local government

Base = all respondents (937)	**Not at all**	**Not very much**	**To some extent**	**A great deal**	**Don't know**
Chief executives	0%	1%	42%	57%	0%
Directors	0%	10%	65%	25%	0%
Leaders	0%	5%	45%	50%	0%
Scrutiny chairs	1%	14%	59%	26%	0%
Portfolio holders	1%	7%	59%	33%	0%
Backbenchers	2%	16%	59%	23%	<1%
All	1%	11%	58%	31%	<1%

26. Backbench councillors and scrutiny chairs are less likely to understand the role of the LGA.

27. In addition, analysis shows that respondents from shire counties are significantly more likely to agree 'a great deal' with the statement than English unitary authorities, London boroughs and shire districts.

Reputation of the LGA with others

28. Two thirds of respondents **(63 per cent)** report that they would *'speak positively'* about the LGA to others. Nearly one-third **(32 per cent)** report that they have *'no views one way or another'* with very few saying they would *'speak negatively'*.

29. Respondents from English unitary authorities are more likely to speak positively about the LGA than London boroughs, metropolitan districts and shire counties. (56 per cent compared with 43 per cent, 40 per cent, and 42 per cent respectively).

Satisfaction with the work of the LGA on behalf of the local government sector

30. Two thirds of respondents **(63 per cent)** report that they are either 'fairly' or 'very satisfied' with the work of the LGA on behalf of local government.

31. **79 per cent** of respondents agreed that '*the LGA addresses the issues that are important to councils'*

32. **71 per cent** agreed that '*the LGA helps to set and drive improvement in the local government sector'*

33. **69 per cent** agreed that '*the LGA effectively represents the views of its members to central government'*

34. **68 per cent** of respondents agreed that '*the LGA understands what councils need to help them improve their services and organisational capacity'*.

Table 4 - Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the work of the Local Government Association on behalf of the local government sector?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary : dissatisfied**	**Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied**	**Summary: satisfied**
Chief executives	11%	16%	73%
Directors	7%	34%	58%
Leaders	9%	20%	72%
Portfolio holders	6%	23%	68%
Chairs of scrutiny	9%	41%	59%
Backbenchers	4%	34%	60%
All	7%	30%	63%

35. Leaders and chief executives tend to be more satisfied than other roles.

36. There were few statistically significant differences between the regions, however the North West was more likely than other areas to disagree that the LGA *understands what councils need to help them improve their services and organisational capacity*.

Value for money

37. Less than a half **(43 per cent)** of respondents agreed that '*the LGA demonstrates value for money for the funding it receives'.* However, only **13 per cent** disagree. The remainder said either that they *'don't know'* or *'neither agree nor disagree'.* Frontbench councillors were significantly more likely to disagree with this statement than officers or backbenchers (18 per cent compared to 10 per cent and 11 per cent respectively).

Table 5 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the LGA demonstrates value for money for the funding it receives?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Summary: agree**	**Don't know**
Chief executives	14%	27%	55%	3%
Directors	8%	44%	33%	15%
Leaders	21%	20%	57%	2%
Portfolio holders	14%	28%	47%	12%

Chairs of scrutiny	20%	21%	39%	21%
Backbenchers	11%	28%	44%	17%
All	13%	30%	43%	14%

38. Directors were significantly more likely than all other groups to say they neither agree nor disagree (**44 per cent**) that we offer value for money and respondents in the North East were more likely than those in the East of England and the West Midlands to say they *'don't know'* (22 per cent compared to nine per cent and nine per cent respectively).

39. This is an area that we need to target to convert the 'don't knows' to those who agree we offer value for money.

Representing the views of our members

40**.** **47 per cent** agree that *'the LGA represents the views of all its members* equally'. A lower proportion disagree (**22 per cent**) with the remainder (**31 per cent**) saying they *'don't know'* or *'neither agree nor disagree'.*

Table 6 -To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the LGA? : The LGA represents the views of all its members equally

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Summary: agree**	**Don't know**
Chief executives	37%	21%	41%	1%
Directors	17%	32%	40%	12%
Leaders	29%	15%	61%	5%
Chairs of scrutiny	25%	22%	43%	10%
Portfolio holders	20%	21%	52%	6%
Backbenchers	18%	21%	53%	8%
All	22%	23%	47%	8%

41. Chief executives are more likely to disagree with this statement than directors, portfolio holder and backbenchers (37 per cent compared to 17 per cent, 20 per cent and 18 per cent respectively).

42. Respondents in Yorkshire and the Humber were significantly more likely to say that they *'don't know'* than those in the East of England, the South West and the West Midlands (15 per cent compared to five per cent, four per cent and six per cent respectively).

Extent to which the LGA been an effective advocate for the interests of the local government sector

43. **Seventy-seven per cent** of respondents believe the LGA has been an effective advocate for the interests of the local government.

Table 7 - Based on what you know, to what extent, if at all, has the LGA been an effective advocate for the interests of the local government sector?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Not at all**	**Not very much**	**A fair amount**	**A great deal**	**Don't know**
East	2%	14%	67%	16%	1%
East Mids	2%	13%	66%	18%	1%
London	3%	20%	57%	15%	4%
North East	0%	19%	64%	16%	1%
North West	1%	20%	60%	16%	3%
South East	1%	21%	68%	8%	2%
South West	2%	19%	56%	21%	2%
West Mids	1%	25%	53%	20%	1%
Y&H	3%	17%	63%	11%	6%
All	2%	18%	62%	15%	2%

44. Overall the West Midlands and London are the least positive.

Benefits of relationship with the LGA

45. When asked the extent to which they believe their authority benefited from its relationship with the LGA, **77 per cent** reported 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal'.

46. Respondents in the West Midlands and London are more likely to provide negative responses to this question.

47. Respondents who said that their council did not benefit at all or did not benefit very much (**20 per cent**) were asked to give reasons. A range of responses were given, but in summary:

47.1 nearly one-fifth (**17 per cent**) report they believe this is because the LGA is not effective in addressing issues/representing their authority;

47.2 **12 per cent** report they had only had limited communication or contact with the LGA;

47.3 **12 per cent** say they do not have any evidence of the LGA's impact.

Activities conducted by the LGA

48. Respondents were asked to indicate how important various activities conducted by the LGA are:

49. Overall, the majority **(90 per cent)** of respondents believe all the activities conducted by the LGA were either 'fairly important' or 'very important'. Respondents viewed *managing local government's reputation in the national media* as a particularly important activity with **57 per cent** viewing it as 'very important'.

50. Respondents viewed *lobbying on behalf of local government* as a particularly important service with **55 per cent** viewing it as 'very important'.

51. Supporting and promoting councils to transform services is also seen as important by **52 per cent** of respondents.

52. Some differences between various groups were identified:

    52.1 Respondents in the **South West** were the most likely to identify *providing legal advice* as 'fairly useful' or 'very useful' (81 per cent).

    52.2 Respondents in the **South-East** were the most likely to identify *negotiating national pay terms and conditions* as 'not at all useful' (12 per cent).

    52.3 **Officers and backbench councillors** were significantly more likely than **frontbench councillors** to believe that *providing a range of online tools to help self-improvement* was either 'fairly useful' or 'very useful' (72 per cent and 71 per cent compared with 62 per cent respectively).

    52.4 **Frontbench** and **backbench councillors** were significantly more likely than officers to believe that *providing advice and information through the political group offices* was either 'fairly useful' or 'very useful' (78% and 80% compared with 59% respectively).

    52.5 **Chief executives** were significantly more likely than directors to believe that *providing legal advice* was either 'not very useful' or 'not useful at all' (45% compared with 24% respectively).

    52.6 **Officers and frontbench councillors** were significantly more likely than backbench councillors to believe that *providing employment advice* was either 'not very useful' or 'not at all useful' (35 per cent and 28 per cent compared with 19 per cent respectively).

    52.7 **Chief Executives** were significantly more likely than directors to believe that *providing employment advice* was either 'not very useful' or 'not at all useful' (48% compared with 30% respectively).

LGA communications

53. Overall, **69 per cent** of respondents believe we keep them well informed.

Table 8 - How well informed, if at all, do you think the LGA keeps you about its work?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: not informed**	**Summary: informed**	**Don't know / no opinion**
Chief executives	18%	82%	0%
Directors	38%	60%	2%
Leaders	10%	90%	0%
Portfolio holders	23%	73%	4%
Chairs of scrutiny	29%	70%	1%
Backbenchers	35%	65%	0%
All	30%	69%	1%

54. There are some statistically significant differences between the groups:

    54.1 **Leaders and chief executives** are the most informed group;

    54.2 **Frontbench councillors** were significantly more likely than backbench councillors or directors to report that we keep them well informed; and

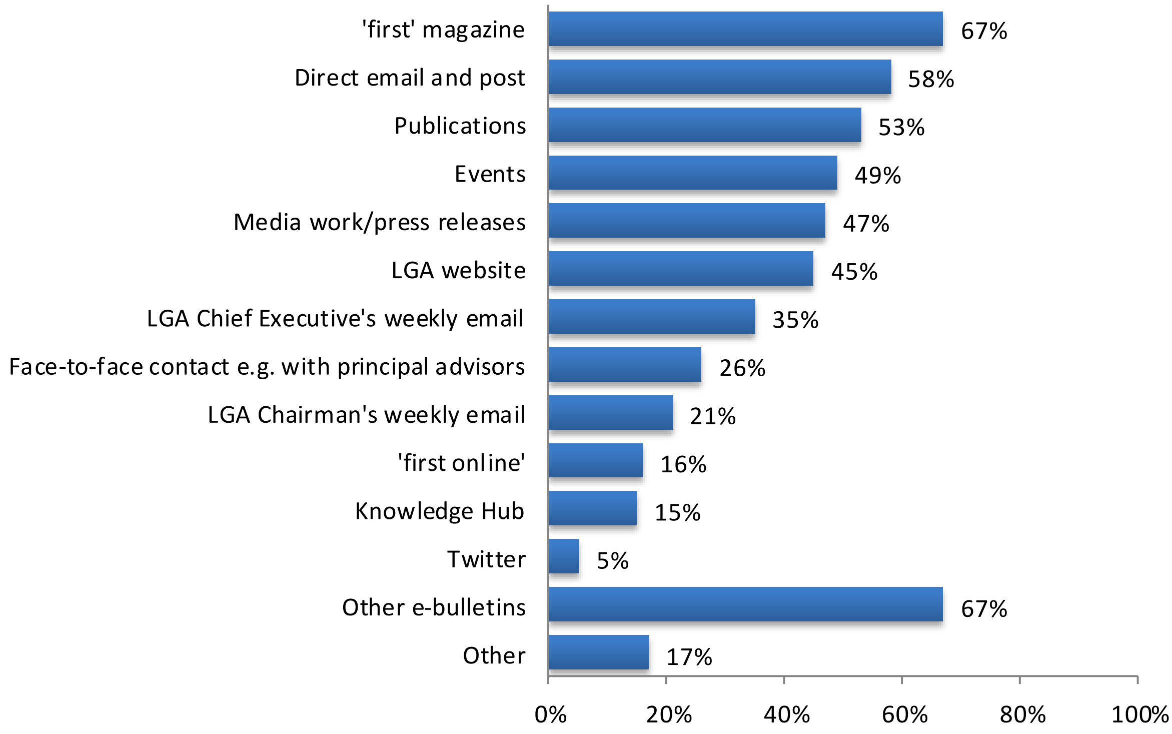
    54.3 **Directors and backbench councillors** were the least well informed.

55. Respondents reported that they get information about our work in a range of ways

Current methods of communication

56. Overall, **First magazine (67 per cent), e-bulletins (67 per cent), direct email/post (58 per cent) and publications (53 per cent)** are the most popular methods of communication. For councillors it is First magazine and e-bulletins and for officers it is e-bulletins, our website and direct mail/post.

Figure 1 - How do you generally find out about the work of the LGA?



Preferred methods of communication

57. When asked how they would prefer to find out about the work of the LGA respondents reported a range of preferences. The most frequently requested methods were through direct email or post (34 per cent) and First magazine (15 per cent).

58. Further analysis shows that:

    58.1 **Officers** were most likely to want to receive communications from the LGA through direct email and post (32 per cent), other e-bulletins (17 per cent), and the Chief Executive's weekly email (eight per cent);

    58.2 **Frontbench councillors** were most likely to want to receive communications from the LGA through direct email and post (39 per cent), First magazine (17 per cent), and other e-bulletins (six per cent); and

    58.3 **Backbench councillors** were most likely to want to receive communications from the LGA through direct email and post (32 per cent), First magazine (27 per cent) and other e-bulletins (six per cent).

59. This shows the increasing use and popularity of digital communications and continuing popularity of First amongst elected members (and in particular backbench councillors).

Engagement and contact with the LGA

60. Nearly three-quarters of respondents **(70 per cent)** feel they have *'about the right level of contact*' with the LGA.

Table 9 - How engaged do you feel you are with the LGA?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: not engaged**	**Summary: engaged**
Chief executives	27%	73%
Directors	61%	38%
Leaders	35%	65%
Portfolio holders	51%	49%
Chairs of scrutiny	65%	35%
Backbenchers	64%	36%
All	56%	44%

61. Further analysis shows no significant differences in respondents' answers by region. However, analysis by role type shows that officers were significantly more likely than councillors to feel they *'did not have enough contact'* with the LGA.

62. **Chief executives and leaders** are more likely to report that they were *'fairly engaged'* or *'very engaged'* than all other roles (73 per cent and 65 per cent compared with 40 per cent of all other roles).

63. **Chairs of scrutiny, backbench councillors and directors** are the most likely to report they were *'not at all engaged'* or *'not very engaged'* (65 per cent, 64 per cent and 61 per cent respectively).

64. Respondents who reported they were *'not at all engaged'* or *'not very engaged'* were asked if they would like to be more engaged. Responses were evenly split between *'no, not more engaged at all'* (44 per cent) and *'yes, a little more engaged'* (40 per cent). Only 14 per cent of respondents reported that they wanted to be *'much more engaged'* with the LGA.

65**.** **Officers** were significantly more likely than councillors to report they would like to be *'a little more engaged'* (51 per cent compared with 32 per cent and 37 per cent respectively).

How do respondents engage with the LGA

66. Analysis shows key differences in how respondents in different roles engage with the LGA:

 66.1 **Officers** are significantly more likely than **councillors** to engage with the LGA '*when contacted by LGA officers or in my role as an advisor'* (49 per cent compared with 37 per cent and 24 per cent respectively);

 66.2 **Officers** are significantly more likely than **councillors** to engage with the LGA by contributing via Knowledge Hub (17 per cent compared with nine per cent and nine per cent respectively);

 66.3 **Officers and frontbench councillors** are significantly more likely than **backbench councillors** to engage with the LGA by contributing in LGA meetings/seminars (48 per cent and 49 per cent compared with 26 per cent respectively);

 66.4 **Officers** are significantly more likely than **frontbench** and **backbench councillors** to engage with the LGA by responding to consultations (80 per cent compared with 62 per cent and 46 per cent respectively);

 66.5 **Officers** are significantly more likely than **frontbench** and **backbench councillors** to engage with the LGA through face-to-face contact for example, with principal advisers (37 per cent compared with 28 per cent and 17 per cent respectively);

 66.6 **Officers and frontbench councillors** were significantly more likely than **backbench councillors** to engage with the LGA by acting as an LGA peer or supporting LGA development programmes (22 per cent and 20 per cent compared with 14 per cent respectively); and

66.7 When asked how they would prefer to engage with the LGA respondents reported a range of preferences. The most frequently requested methods are:

66.7.1 contacting LGA officers by email or phone (**52 per cent**); and

66.7.2 contacting councillors/boards by email or phone (**40 per cent**).

67. Further analysis shows that there are no significant differences in respondents' preferences for engagement with the LGA by region, role or local authority type.

Sector-led improvement

68. Overall, the findings show that sector-led improvement is seen as the right approach to continuous improvement. There are variations in the levels of awareness of our detailed offer.

69. More than half **(58 per cent)** of respondents report that they *'strongly agree'* or *'agree'* that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context. More than three-quarters **(83 per cent)** of respondents report that they *'strongly agree'* or *'agree'* that my authority is making advances in driving improvement. The same number **(83 per cent)** of respondents report that they *'strongly agree'* or *'agree'* that local accountability is strong in my authority.

Table 10 - How much, if anything, have you heard about this sector-led improvement approach?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: heard nothing / a little**	**Summary: heard a moderate amount / a lot**
Chief executives	10%	90%
Directors	55%	45%
Leaders	55%	45%
Portfolio holders	61%	39%
Chairs of scrutiny	65%	35%
Backbenchers	75%	25%
All	59%	41%

70**.** **Chief executives** are significantly more likely than all other roles to have *'heard a lot'* or a *'moderate amount'* about sector-led improvement (90 per cent compared with 38 per cent of all other groups).

71. **Backbench councillors** are significantly less likely than other roles to have heard little or nothing about sector-led improvement (25 per cent).

72. **Chief Executives** are significantly more likely than all other roles to ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that *the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context* (84 per cent compared with 56 per cent of all other roles).

73. **Backbench councillors** are significantly more likely than **officers** and **frontbench councillors** to ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ that *my authority is making advances in driving improvement* (16 per cent compared with two per cent and four per cent respectively).

74. **Leaders and chief executives** are more likely than other roles to agree that m*y authority is making advances in driving improvement* (98 per cent and 98 per cent compared with 82 per cent of all other roles).

75. **Backbench councillors** are significantly more likely than **front bench councillors** and **officers** to ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ that ‘*local accountability is strong in my authority’* (seven per cent compared with one per cent and one per cent respectively).

76. **Leaders** and **chief executives** are more likely than other roles to ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that *local accountability is strong in my authority* (96 per cent and 96 per cent compared with 82 per cent of all other groups).

77. There is little regional variation in the overall responses to sector-led improvement.

Capacity for continuous improvement

78. The majority **(84 per cent)** of respondents are confident their authority has the capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve either *‘to a moderate extent’* or *‘to a great extent’*.

Table 11 - To what extent would you say you are confident that your own authority currently has the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: not at all / to a small extent**	**Summary: to a moderate extent / to a great extent**	**Don’t know**
Chief executives	5%	98%	0%
Directors	9%	60%	2%
Leaders	1%	90%	0%

Portfolio holders	9%	73%	0%
Chairs of scrutiny	16%	70%	0%
Backbenchers	26%	65%	1%
All	14%	84%	1%

79. **Backbench councillors** are significantly more likely than front bench councillors and officers to report that their authority did not have the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve (26 per cent reported *'not at all'* or *'to a small extent'* compared with eight per cent and nine per cent respectively).

80. The majority **(79 per cent)** of respondents are confident that the local government sector has the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve either 'to a moderate extent' or 'to a great extent'.

Table 12 - To what extent would you say you are confident that the local government sector currently has the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: not at all / to a small extent**	**Summary: to a moderate extent / to a great extent**	**Don't know**
Chief executives	15%	84%	1%
Directors	13%	85%	2%
Leaders	11%	85%	4%
Portfolio holders	14%	78%	6%
Chairs of scrutiny	24%	73%	8%
Backbenchers	21%	73%	4%
All	14%	84%	1%

81. **Leaders, chief executives and directors** are more likely than other roles to report that the local authority sector has the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve (84 per cent, 85 per cent and 85 per cent respectively reported *'to a moderate extent'* or *'to a great extent').*

Awareness of resources to support sector-led improvement

82. Although overall awareness of sector-led improvement is high, awareness of the resources offered by the LGA to support the sector in taking the lead in its own improvement is low.

83. The highest levels of awareness were for the provision of a *'corporate peer challenge, at no cost, over the three year period'* (31% of respondents reported that they had *'heard a moderate amount'* or *'heard a lot'* about this resource);

and the LGA's commitment to work with local authorities to develop local accountability tools (40% of respondents reported that they had *'heard a moderate amount'* or *'heard a lot'* about this resource).

84. There was least awareness of the resource providing five days of free member peer support for all authorities undergoing a change of political control (73% of respondents reported that they had *'heard nothing'* or *'heard a little'* about this resource); and development of the LG Inform data service, to provide access to key data about the council or fire and rescue service area, and allow benchmarking and comparisons with others (75% of respondents reported that they had *'heard nothing'* or *'heard a little'* about this resource).

85. There are differences between groups regarding awareness of the resources offered by the LGA:

85.1 **Chief executives** are significantly more likely to have heard of the provision of a free peer challenge (90 per cent compared to 38 per cent of all other roles);

85.2 **London councils** and **councils in the South East** are significantly more likely than other regions to say that they have *'heard little'* or *'heard nothing'* about the offer of five days of free member peer support for all authorities undergoing a change of political control (85 per cent);

85.3 **Chief executives** are more likely than other roles to have heard *'a moderate amount'* or *'a lot'* about the offer of free member peer support (72 per cent);

85.4 **Chief executives** are more likely than other groups to have heard *'a moderate amount'* or *'a lot'* about the Knowledge Hub (58 per cent); development of LG Inform (61 per cent) and supporting member and officer networks (53 per cent); and

85.5 **Sixty per cent** of respondents believe that the support and resources offered by the LGA for sector led improvement will have a positive impact on their own authority's capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve either *'to a moderate extent'* or *'to a great extent'*. A further 25% believe it will impact on their authority *'to a small extent'*.

Table 13 - To what extent do you think that this support and these resources offered by the LGA for sector led improvement will have a positive impact on your own authority's capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: not at all / to a small extent**	**Summary: to a moderate extent / to a great extent**	**Don't know**
Chief executives	25%	75%	0%

Directors	37%	56%	7%
Leaders	38%	59%	4%
Chairs of scrutiny	34%	56%	10%
Portfolio holders	30%	66%	4%
Backbenchers	32%	59%	8%
All	33%	61%	6%

86. Further analysis shows respondents from the **South East** are significantly more likely to report that the resources will impact on their authority either *'to a small extent'* or *'not at all'* (51 per cent in the South East compares to 30 per cent of all other regions).

87. More than two-thirds (69 per cent) of respondents believe that this support and these resources offered by the LGA for sector led improvement will have a positive impact on the sector's ability to monitor its own performance and continuously improve either *'to a moderate extent'* or *'to a great extent'*. A further 20 per cent believe it will impact the sector 'to a small extent'.

Table 14 - To what extent do you think that this support and these resources offered by the LGA for sector led improvement will have a positive impact on the sector's capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?

Base = all respondents (937)	**Summary: not at all / to a small extent**	**Summary: to a moderate extent / to a great extent**	**Don't know**
Chief executives	18%	82%	0%
Directors	23%	71%	6%
Leaders	28%	78%	4%
Chairs of scrutiny	27%	62%	11%
Portfolio holders	25%	71%	5%
Backbenchers	29%	63%	8%
All	25%	69%	6%

88. Respondents from the **South-East** are significantly more likely to report that the resources will have a positive impact on the sector's capacity to improve either *'to a small extent'* or *'not at all'* (34 per cent in the South East compared to 23 per cent of all other regions).

Barriers and challenges to increasing local accountability and driving improvement

89. Respondents were asked what barriers and challenges they perceived to increasing local accountability and driving improvement. A range of reasons were given. The most frequently mentioned barriers are a lack of:

89.1 financial resources (31 per cent);

89.2 public interest in engagement (14 per cent);

89.3 human resource support (nine per cent); and

89.4 time or capacity (nine per cent).

90. Respondents were also asked to identify the key challenges their local authority were likely to be facing in the next two years that they would like the LGA's help with. The most frequent responses were:

90.1 Funding and budget management (52 per cent);

90.2 lobbying central government (five per cent);

90.3 maintaining service delivery (five per cent); and

90.4 making improvements, savings and efficiencies (five per cent).

Conclusions

91. Overall, member authority perceptions of the LGA are positive. There is a need to build on the ratings set out in this report and further address those areas which are less positive.

92. There is a high level of awareness of the LGA and the work we undertake. However, understanding of this work varies dependent on specific job role, with backbenchers having the least understanding overall. This suggests that further work needs to be undertaken to engage with this group and communicate the LGA's role and services to them.

93. Overall, respondents believe that we are effectively delivering the services and activities we offer to the local government sector. However, we need to do more to convert the 'don't knows' on the issue of value for money.

94. The services and roles we deliver which are perceived to be of the most importance to respondents is our national role the LGA in lobbying on behalf of the local government sector.

95. Although direct caparisons are not possible, views and understanding of the role and services of the LGA have broadly remained the same or improved between 2008 and 2012. In particular, frontbench councillors' views and awareness appear to have improved. However, there is still some work to be done to improve ratings amongst backbench councillors.

96. The majority of respondents prefer to receive communications directly by email suggesting digitalisation has become more entrenched in the sector, although overall, use of social media was low. First magazine is still seen as one of the key tools for communicating with members and in particular, backbench councillors.

97. Analysis shows that respondents who were most likely to feel better informed of the LGA's activities and were also more likely than other groups to have received email communications from the LGA including the 'LGA Chief Executive's weekly email', the 'LGA Chairman's weekly email' and 'Other e-bulletins'. These respondents were also more likely to use the 'Knowledge Hub'. This suggests that these methods of communication are the most effective and wider dissemination of messages using these outlets should be considered.

98. Some respondents do not currently feel engaged with the LGA but would like to be. However, respondents still preferred to engage with the LGA directly either responding to consultations or using email or telephone to contact LGA officers or Boards.

99. Respondents agree that sector-led improvement is the right approach and believe their local authority had made steps to drive improvement and has strong local accountability driven by public engagement, consultation and information sharing. There is confidence that authorities and the local government sector has the capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve. There is work to do to raise awareness of the individual improvement offers available to councils. Despite this lack of awareness, there is a strong belief that such resources would have a positive impact on their own authority's capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve.

Next steps

100. Further work will now be undertaken to address the key issues that have come out of the survey results. The work to engage backbench councillors will be further developed to ensure all members, whether they play a leading role in their council or undertake a ward function understand the key activities and benefits of being a member of the LGA. In particular, we will focus on Sector-led improvement, Parliamentary affairs and our role as the national voice of local government. These are areas that are valued by members and in the case of sector-led improvement, are important for the future development of

local government. We will focus on the individual components of our offer so that councils understand the full range of the support available to them.

101. Although not hugely significant, there are some regional differences. We will develop a series of briefing sessions and updates for principal advisors and their teams so that they can focus on key issues for their area.

102. Annual conference and our events programme is another opportunity for us to focus on the areas highlighted in these results. We are developing our regional offer which will deliver 40 per cent of events in the regions next year (compared to 30 per cent this year).

103. The action plan attached at **Annex A** has been updated and builds on the existing plan developed in response to the scrutiny panel sub-committee report and agreed by Leadership Board 2012.

104. A meeting of the scrutiny panel committee will be held to further develop the action plan and the Communications team will work with all the group offices to determine the right approach to involve members in strengthening our contact with backbench councillors.

105. A communications strategy and more detailed action plan will be presented to Leadership Board in March.

LGA Leadership Board
13 February 2013

Item 7 – Annex 1

Perception survey and scrutiny panel review - Action plan

RECOMMENDATION	OWNER	ACTIONS	TIMESCALE	PROGRESS
Improve members' access to information				
1. **Take steps to segment audiences and provide more targeted inform**ation	David Holdstock	Segmented survey to set basis for greater targeting	October 2012 April 2013	Perceptions survey undertaken and results presented to Leadership Board in February 2013.
	Claire Holloway/ Andrea Patrick	Bespoke membership packs for all councillors.	April 2013	New tailored membership packs were distributed to councils in January 2013.
2. Develop the LGA website so that presentation is more compelling and structured around members' interests rather than boards	David Holdstock/ Sarah Jennings	Establish communications reference group to oversee	Ongoing from the scrutiny panel review	Resources panel members have been sent the perceptions survey results and will form the basis of the reference group to test out ideas and track progress.
		Introduce quarterly tracker	March 2013	A 'dashboard' will be developed showing use of our website, digital channels and social media channels to help inform overall strategy and determine usage.
3. Develop and enhance the group websites to provide up-to-date political information of all members.	HGOs/ Sarah Jennings	Establish communications reference group to oversee	Ongoing	Conservative and Independent sites are now live and the Labour site will be launched imminently. Regular reviews are taking place.
4. Ensure events programme reflects	Amanda Cowen	Increase number of regional	January 2013	In 2012, 30% of events were held

members' interests – include more regional events.		events and include lists of events region by region with map-based access to information on the LGA website.		regionally. The programme for 2013 will increase this to 40%. The regional events map will go live in February 2013.
5. Communicate directly with councillors on LGA lobbying successes	David Holdstock	Include in Comms strategy	March 2013	Draft strategy will be presented to Leadership Board in March 2013.
	David Holdstock/ Laurence Meehan	Produce an annual 'LGA in Parliament' report for member authorities. Further promote our parliamentary bulletin to a wider range of councillors and officers.	April/May 2013 February 2013	First annual report to be published at the end of the parliamentary year. This has already started with a focus on council communications teams who have been asked to sign up and promote within their council.
	HGOs	Regular newsletters	Ongoing	
Widen range of councillors targeted, with particular focus on backbenchers				
6. Develop a clear narrative about our offer to backbenchers as the basis for a concerted campaign	David Holdstock/ Claire Holloway	Develop easy to find web pages on membership offer, including council-by-council info and map-based access to local events. Develop and improve use of social media to communicate with councillors and officers.	Ongoing Ongoing	This work continues to be developed

	Claire Holloway HGOs	Enhanced presentation of membership offer for circulation	February 2013	Membership offer will be sent to all backbenchers in February 2013
	David Holdstock	Develop monthly back benchers update on the work of the LGA Make more use of video for Leadership Board members and Chars of boards to communicate short messages to members on key issues (such as funding, council tax support, planning and so on)	April 2013 April 2013	Work starting on developing an e-bulletin for backbenchers summarising the main LGA activity for the previous month. These will be used on the day to support our media responses to stories that impact on the sector.
7. Ensure backbenchers are aware of and have access to LGA leadership programmes	Pascoe Sawyers	New Councillors' Road shows July - Sept 2012 Publicity	Held in all regions except SW.	LGA leadership programmes promoted at road shows and being reviewed.
8. Target elements of the website, and online services directly at backbenchers – especially Knowledge Hub and LG Inform and *firstonline*	David Holdstock/Sarah Jennings	Series of regional sessions for backbenchers	Ongoing	Events are planned for London, Taunton and Preston in early 2013. of LG Inform to be re-launched in March 2013
9. Improve general information about LGA as an organisation, particularly on the website, with benefits of membership more clearly and compellingly explained.		See actions 2 and 5		
	Cathy Boyle Alison Edwards	Enhanced new members' packs incorporating Councillors' Guide and invitations to New Councillors' Road shows	From May 2013	Agreed with LG Leadership team HGOs contributing to improved Councillors' Guides

Item 7 – Annex 1

Strengthen the LGA's approach to relationship management				
10. Ensure Principal Advisers are supported by wider LGA workforce in managing relationships with councils and that attention is given to the "squeezed middle" as well as highest and lowest performing	CX, Directors HGOs	LG Development	Ongoing.	Structured approach to programme of visits for Chairman, CX, directors, PAs Significant programme of visits undertaken by the Chairman and CEX, directors and PAs.
11. Develop a system of recording contact with councils and take up of LGA services	LG Development Executive Office	CRM/Membership site	By end 2013	New Sharepoint system scheduled for rollout from March 2013.
12. Ensure that relationships are maintained with key members in councils as well as officers, using lead peers	HGOs	Develop programmes of contact via Group Executives and Lead Peers		New Lead Peers appointed
Clearly communicate the LGA's improvement offer to councils				
13. Communicate a clear menu of improvement support available, in particular on the LGA website	Dennis Skinner Sarah Jennings	Sector-led improvement awareness campaign being developed.	Planned launch- February 2013	Plan currently being developed. Two-page e-flyer produced for use during council visits as part of wider campaign.
14. Capture and communicate the experiences and benefits of peer	HGOs	Establish process for recording information	By 31 March 2013	Group Offices now routinely updating system which can be used to draw down

challenges from the perspective of individual councils and of peers	Andy Bates			stories for wider communication
15. Whilst maintaining confidentiality, raise the profile of the LGA's direct support to councils with performance issues, positioning the LGA as the place members can go for an independent view.	HGOs Dennis Skinner	Appoint new Lead Peers with remit to "sell" LGA peer support work.	By 30 September	Lead Peers all in place and working pro-actively across the country
Establish a member-level Communications Reference Group to allow the LGA to consult with a cross section of councillors on communication and marketing plans and ideas as they develop				
16. Establish Communications Reference Group	David Holdstock Sarah Jennings	See recommendation 2	September 2012.	Scrutiny group has received the final report and will meet again following Leadership Board. Reputation Group, which includes a lead member from each of the groups to meet on 7 February.
17. Develop feedback loop with HGOs to support feedback from the member Communications Reference Group.	David Holdstock HGOs	See recommendation 2	September 2012.	This will be put in place after the first meeting of the reference group.