

Review of LGA Events Programme Activity

Purpose of report

For information, discussion and direction in relation to the review of the LGA events programme activity.

Summary

The LGA delivers an extensive programme of events, which help to raise our profile, generate income and are part of our offer to member councils. This report sets out our current events and conference offer, the current process for commissioning and organising events and options for a future events and conference model.

Recommendation

The LGA Leadership Board is asked to review our current events programme and processes, options for the future management and delivery of events and give direction where necessary.

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Review of LGA Events Programme activity

Introduction

1. Conferences and events are an important part of the work of the LGA and are seen as a tangible benefit of membership by many councils, individual councillors and officers. In the last three years, through the in-house central events team, the organisation has organised and hosted nearly 100 events a year.
2. The programme currently consists of set piece events such as the LGA annual conference and one-day events. The feedback from member authorities is that LGA events are valued as a way of keeping up-to-date with current thinking and issues for the sector, sharing best practice and networking.
3. We seek to achieve a mix of speakers that are politically balanced, developing programmes of interest to councils.
4. Our conference programme aims to:
 - 4.1 Raise the LGA's profile and reputation with member councils and build understanding of what we do on their behalf.
 - 4.2 Highlight our strategic priorities.
 - 4.3 Support and contribute to our campaigns, lobbying and influencing work.
 - 4.4 Build understanding of opportunities and key issues affecting local government.
 - 4.5 Showcase local authority best practice, support learning across the sector and help improve performance across the sector.
 - 4.6 Provide speaking platforms for our lead members.
 - 4.7 Provide events in other parts of the country as well as in London.
 - 4.8 Generate income to cover costs, although in recent years, our conference programme includes a higher proportion of free events as part of our overall offer to member authorities.
5. We maximise every opportunity to promote our own key messages, campaigns and policy priorities. Currently, these are growth, sustainable funding for local government, adult social care, independent local government, 'Be A Councillor', 'Hidden Talents' and other associated priority themes. We do this by building time into every programme to present our policy position; either in the chair's opening session or

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presentation early in the programme from an LGA representative, and where possible, ending the conference with our key policy messages.

6. We always ensure our events are as green as possible for example, by selecting venues that are easily accessible by public transport which offer facilities for cyclists.
7. We manage bookings, conference administration and evaluations electronically to keep conference paperwork to a minimum. Finally, we ensure all our venues are fully accessible for both attendees and speakers.
8. We currently offer a wide range of events, across numerous subject areas of interest to our membership which broadly fall into four categories:
 - 8.1 One day commercial (paid for) events, usually held in Local Government House - organised by the central events team.
 - 8.2 Residential events, usually held at venues outside London – organised by the central events team.
 - 8.3 Free events for member authorities, targeting specific people or groups of people, which may be held in or outside London – organised by the central events team or individual teams.
 - 8.4 Occasional events (both free and commercial) organised on behalf of or with partners (for example, Healthwatch and National Youth Agency events. These are often funded by partners but still provide benefits for the sector – organised by the central events team or individual teams.
9. In addition, we organise on alternate years (with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)) the National Children's and Adults Services Conference (NCAS).

Commissioning events

10. Responsibility for commissioning events lies primarily with programme teams, working with their programme boards. Events are based around the organisation's strategic priorities.
11. The central events team is responsible for co-ordinating the overall events programme and assigns an events officer to work with programme teams to deliver individual agreed events.

Organising events

12. Currently, most LGA events and conferences (some are organised by individual teams) are organised by the central in-house events team which undertakes all aspects of events management, including sponsorship.

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13. The LGA events team was restructured in 2008 and again in 2010 as part of the organisation's wider re-structuring programme. The events team currently has 9.3 FTE members of staff. The team consists of:
 - 1 x Events Manager;
 - 1 x Senior Events Organiser (leading on the annual conference);
 - 3.8 x Events Organiser;
 - 1 x Sponsorship Officer; and
 - 2.5 x Events Support.

14. In previous years and following feedback from members, our approach was to give priority to income-generating events. However in the last two years the agreed approach has been to re-balance the event activity to include more free events, where possible in regional locations, to help improve our offer to member authorities. In recent months, there has been some feedback from member authorities that there should be more free events.

15. A number of (largely free) events are organised directly by staff in other parts of the organisation.

16. By ensuring all events are organised through the central events team:
 - 16.1 Ministerial speaking invitations are properly co-ordinated.
 - 16.2 Clashes of event activity are avoided.
 - 16.3 Proper evaluation and comparison can be undertaken.
 - 16.4 Delivery styles, materials and the overall experience for delegates are of a consistent style and quality.
 - 16.5 The organisation can fully benefit from the experience of the central team and from increased buying power, ensuring costs are kept to a minimum and income and sponsorship is maximised.

17. In addition, as part of the current Liberata contract, they are responsible for attracting commercial events to Local Government House. Under the terms of the contract, the current arrangement is that Liberata take the first £50K for any bookings and the LGA take the next £50K with any remaining income being split 60/40 in the LGA's favour. Currently, the LGA does not make any money from this arrangement. As part of the contract renegotiations with Liberata it is planned to move responsibility for external marketing of the Conference Suite at Local Government House to the Events Team. Priority will be given to LGA events.

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18. Between 2000 and 2003, the LGA's event management for the majority of our one day commercial events was outsourced to three external event management providers. LGA policy staff developed the conference programmes along with an LGA Events

Programme Developer. The contracts were managed by an LGA Events Contracts Manager and marketed by an LGA marketing Officer (three FTEs in total). Mail shots were undertaken by an external mailing house at an additional cost.

19. Outsourcing was a less cost effective option and it did not deliver the anticipated savings. The internal staff resources required to manage the programme outweighed any net benefits; it presented higher reputational risks and was more time consuming for policy colleagues to run the events programme in this way. In 2003, it was decided to bring events management back in-house.

Booking arrangements

20. Event administration is currently undertaken by Liberata for one-day events and the in-house events team who manage the administration for annual conference and residential events. We do not currently have a full online booking event management system and although delegates are actively encouraged to book online through the local.gov.uk website, the information keyed in by delegates needs to be re-keyed in by either Liberata staff or the events support team. In addition, the current arrangements allow delegates to book places at our events and pay at a later date. This results in significant additional work, including debt recovery.
21. A full review is currently being undertaken as part of the review of the Liberata contract and a full online booking event management system is being explored, which will include an advance payment facility. A full business case will be developed.

Marketing of LGA events

22. The events team keep up-to-date with competitor activity to ensure the relevance, cost and timing of our events is attractive to member authorities.
23. The team currently markets events in a range of ways. These are tracked by use of a mandatory field on the booking form which identifies the most effective marketing channels. Currently, these are:

Marketing Channel	%
Targeted emails/bulletins	68.57%
Word of Mouth	9.80%
LGA Alert Mailing	8.23%
LGA website	5.49%
Postal	2.35%
Knowledge Hub	2.35%
Other	1.96%
Flyer / promotion	1.17%

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Working with partners

24. We will on occasions, deliver events and conferences in partnership with other providers. This approach demands less internal resource and reduces the financial risk to the LGA, but depending on the deal we negotiate may limit our income. Potential partnership deals are considered on the basis of a business case. The events team currently negotiates arrangements which maximise the benefits and minimises the risks to the LGA. When events are organised outside of the central events team, the LGA does not receive a share of any income.

The LGA's current events offer

25. The last formal activity review of LGA events was undertaken in 2008/2009. Following that review and two extensive member authority surveys, the LGA's elected members gave a clear direction that we would adopt a 'do less but do it better' approach with the aim of maximising income. This has allowed us to enhance our offer to member authorities. It was agreed that we would:
- 25.1 Reduce event fees for member authorities.
 - 25.2 Reduce the number of one-day commercial events across the year by 20%.
 - 25.3 Develop a programme of free events for member authorities both nationally and in Local Government House to increase attendance at events by councillors.
 - 25.4 Increase the number of events held outside London.
 - 25.5 Identify topics, agreeing programmes and securing quality speakers as early as possible to maximise marketing time.
 - 25.6 Capture and analyse feedback to inform the future programme.
 - 25.7 Reduce existing residential events.
 - 25.8 Identify and target potentially lucrative markets not catered for elsewhere, such as the annual Coroners' Conference, to help offset the costs to the LGA of hosting more free events.
 - 25.9 Pilot a partnership with a commercial provider.

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26. Over the last three years as part of the 'getting closer to councillors' exercise we have actively encouraged more councillors to attend our events and organised more free to attend events, many of which have been in regional locations.
27. Adopting this approach has significantly improved our events offer to members and widened the audience pool. This is evidenced by the results of surveys which are undertaken at all of our events.

The LGA events programme

28. We know from research previously undertaken that despite an increasingly competitive market, the LGA's brand remains the strongest of all local government conference providers. This is reflected in our ability to attract high quality sponsors. In addition, there is a high demand for LGA speakers at commercial events, showing the value of the 'LGA brand'. The same research showed that:
 - 28.1 The two most important factors when choosing whether to attend an event are cost and quality of speakers.
 - 28.2 The most popular topics are new or emerging issues and service-specific events.
29. In addition, our delegates regularly inform us that the networking opportunities afforded to them by attending LGA events are beneficial and a major factor when they decide to attend our events. This was supported by feedback from this year's annual conference.
30. We have held, and in the case of one day conferences and our annual conference, decreased, our delegate fees. LGA events are consistently offered to member councils at approximately 60% of the cost of our main commercial competitors. In addition, over the past few years we have run more non-commercial free to attend events for our member councils, wherever possible in regional locations to ensure we continue to offer a first class programme which responds to the requirements of our members.

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31. A year-on-year comparison of event activity for the last three years is summarised below:

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Flagship residential events¹	2	2	2
Small/medium residential events²	2	2	2
One-day commercial conferences	29	23	22
One-day free conferences³	54	49	88
Cancelled one-day events⁴	10	9	4
%age attendees from member councils	80%	82%	91%
% of councillors attending / %of officers attending	30% / 70%	41% / 59%	45%/55%
	£000s	£000s	£000s
Income	1200	1200*	1260
Direct Costs	670	895*	650
Liberata Direct Costs (Catering, Print &Design)	140	140	140
Staffing Costs	582	501	506
Net operating deficit	-192	-336	-36

32. Income and expenditure are increased in alternate years because of the impact of the Children's and Adults conference which the LGA organises every other year.
33. The table above shows that the agreed strategy of delivering more free events has been successfully delivered. There is now more focus on member councils as part of our membership offer and year on year the number of attendees from member councils has increased. In addition, there is a better balance between councillors and officers attending, increasing the number of elected members attending LGA events.
34. This has been achieved without financial detriment to the LGA. The table shows that direct staff costs and other direct costs have been reduced over the three years since 2010/11. We have achieved this while managing to maintain income and also while increasing the number of free events.
35. It is recognised that income was lower than trend in 2011/12 because of the impact of the LGA's restructuring and the lower number of events commissioned by LGA teams. However, 2012/13 shows significant progress in increasing the number of free events, while maintaining income and managing down costs, in particular staff costs. Longer

¹ Annual conference and National children and adult services conference which is organised every other year by the LGA events team (2011, 2013 etc)

² Fire conference and Culture, tourism and sport conference

³ Including the Smith Square debates – a programme of early evening debates and other events held at Local Government House.

⁴ Cancelled due to poor take-up or changing priorities or postponed and rescheduled at another time

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lead-in times (which allow more effective marketing of our events) and better planning has ensured fewer events have been cancelled.

36. In general terms, we have now moved to the position of the LGA's Conferences and Events activities more-or-less breaking even, in terms of the direct costs associated with running them – staff and other costs - even with the delivery of more free events. This break-even position has not previously been achieved. (This includes the direct costs associated with Liberata for catering and print and design which have not previously been taken into account). If this position is maintained, then in alternate years when we run the Children's and Adults conference the LGA should expect to generate an overall operating surplus of about £150k from its Conferences and Events activity.

Events pricing - LGA delegate fees

37. In line with the reduction in LGA membership fees, events fees were reviewed and reduced in 2011-12. The following table sets out the current pricing schedule for events:

	Free event	One day discounted event	One day commercial event	Residential Fire (fee includes dinner)	Residential Culture, Tourism & Sport	Annual Conference
LGA Member Organisation	0.00	£150	£199 Reduced from £219 in 2011-2012	£360 Fee held since 2007-2008	£340 Fee adjusted to reflect removal of dinner in 2011 otherwise held since 2007-2008	£495 Fee reduced from £519 in 2011
Non LGA Membership Organisation	£100	£345	£345 Fee held since 2007-2008	£460 Fee held since 2007-2008	£460 Fee held since 2007-2008	£640 Fee held since 2008-2009

Evaluation

38. LGA events are evaluated to highlight areas of improvement. The feedback over the last two years shows that broadly, the direction the organisation has taken in relation to events (more free events and locations outside London) is seen as the right approach. Satisfaction has either improved slightly or been maintained at a time when attendance at events within the local government sector is carefully considered by member authorities.

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2011-2012

39. Between April 2011 and March 2012, the results were:
- 1 event with an overall satisfaction range between 60-69%
 - 1 event with an overall satisfaction range between 70-79%
 - 8 events with an overall satisfaction range between 80-89%
 - 9 events with an overall satisfaction range between 90-99%
 - 5 events with an overall satisfaction total of 100%
40. The **average ratings** across all the events during 2011-12 were:
- Overall satisfaction = 90%
 - Location of event(s) = 91%
 - Venue facilities = 91%
 - Catering = 83%
 - Overall organisation, structure of programme = 91%.

2012-2013 (to date)

41. In the first half of 2012-2013, the results were:
- 1 event with an overall satisfaction range between 50-59%.
 - 0 events with an overall satisfaction range between 60-69%.
 - 3 events with an overall satisfaction range between 70-79%.
 - 7 events with an overall satisfaction range between 80-89%.
 - 2 events with an overall satisfaction range between 90-99%.
 - 9 events with an overall satisfaction total of 100%.
42. The **average ratings** across all the events run so far in 2012-13 from 482 completed online surveys are:
- Overall satisfaction = 90%
 - Location of event(s) = 95%
 - Venues' facilities = 96%
 - Catering = 87%
 - Overall organisation, structure of programme = 95%

Benefits of attending LGA events

43. Across all the completed surveys, members cite the top three benefits of attending as an opportunity to:
- Hear about up to date or emerging issues relevant to their work;
 - Meet others with similar interests/work/networking.
 - Learn from what other authorities are doing

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Areas for improvement

44. Delegates are also asked what could be improved about the event they attended. The following trends appear across the event surveys:
- 44.1 Value of group discussion and need for workshops to be more interactive.
 - 44.2 More time for questions and answers.
 - 44.3 Need to get beyond information-giving and search for practical solutions.
45. Again, these are consistent with feedback from the annual conference.

LGA Speakers at external events

46. The LGA is often approached to provide speakers at external events. These are generally organised by commercial, profit making organisations and whilst we are keen to secure platforms at external events in order to get our messages out, we are also careful that we do not subsidise commercial providers.
47. Speaking at or chairing conferences organised by other providers can raise the profile and visibility of the LGA nationally and with member councils, and ensures that our key policy messages are central to any debate.
48. The request process is currently managed by the events team to ensure we avoid speaking at or chairing any event in direct competition with one of our own events. Decisions on accepting invitations are based on - Does it help raise the image and profile of the LGA? Can it be used as a platform to highlight our campaign and priorities? Can it be used to signpost delegates towards forthcoming LGA events and publications?
49. We currently charge a fee of £500 plus expenses for speaking at commercial events.

Annual Conference

50. Leadership Board has previously seen the feedback and review report for last year's annual conference and exhibition held in Birmingham and given direction for the 2013 event. Income from our annual conference helps to offset the costs of other events.
51. It has been previously agreed that the LGA annual conference will take place in Manchester 2013; Bournemouth in 2014 and Harrogate in 2015.
52. Previous venues for our annual conference were:
- 1997 – Manchester
 - 1998 – Bournemouth
 - 1999 – Harrogate
 - 2000 – Bournemouth
 - 2001 – Harrogate

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2002 – Bournemouth
2003 – Harrogate
2004 – Bournemouth
2005 – Harrogate
2006 – Bournemouth
2007 – Birmingham
2008 – Bournemouth
2009 – Harrogate
2010 – Bournemouth
2011 – Birmingham
2012 - Birmingham

53. We have already secured a headline sponsor for the 2013 annual conference.
54. If Leadership Board agrees that our annual conference for 2016 should broadly follow the format of this year, due to the scale of our annual conference and exhibition it is necessary to make bookings early to secure our preferred venues, dates and sufficient hotel accommodation and to ensure we can negotiate the most favourable rates for our members. Due to the scale and profile of the event, cities and venues are keen to host our annual conference allowing us to choose from a number of options.
55. Our annual conference is usually held in the last week of June or first week of July.

Annual conference 2016

56. Based on previous informal discussions, Bournemouth is holding provisionally on first option for Sunday, 3 July 2016 to Thursday, 7 July 2016 – this is an affordable venue and destination which feedback shows delegates like.
57. Alternatively Liverpool is holding provisionally on second option for the later dates of Sunday, 10 July 2016 to Thursday 14 July 2016. The Liverpool venue would cost considerably more than Bournemouth, significantly reducing our net profit (which is re-invested in free events throughout the year).
58. In addition Brighton has expressed an interest in hosting our event and is available on first option - Sunday, 3 July 2016 to Thursday, 7 July 2016. Although a great destination for our event, the conference and exhibition would need to be spread across a number of venues. From feedback, delegates prefer one central venue. However, Brighton is used successfully for party conferences.
59. In addition Harrogate, Manchester and Birmingham could also be explored further.
60. Members are asked to give direction on this issue.

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Future options

61. As part of the full review of events an exercise was undertaken to compare the current in-house delivery model against external options.
62. Three external events management companies from the LGA's preferred supplier list were approached and asked to outline their approach with costings for the delivery of the full LGA programme of events. This includes all one-day events (based on 72 one-day events which is the number delivered in the 2011-12 programme), all residential events and our annual conference.
63. The results of the informal tender exercise are:
- Company 1 - Declined to tender
 - Company 2 - Quoted for the one-day events element of the programme only
 - Company 3 - Quoted to deliver the full programme
64. Based on the responses, there are three options for the future management and delivery of LGA events:

Option one – Retain events management in-house

65. Based on the 2012-13 programme, this would deliver a **net operating deficit of £36k** (as set out in the table at paragraph 31). In addition, as shown by the table, expenditure on events is reducing year on year and there is likely to be more scope for additional savings for reinvestment in more free events. In addition, as part of the Liberata contract review, the in-house events team will be taking on responsibility for the marketing of our conference suite for external commercial events, with the potential for some additional income.

Option two – Outsource all events

66. Based on the 2012-13 programme, this would deliver a **net operating deficit of £358k**. A small core in-house events team would need to be retained to manage the contract, marketing, programme development and sponsorship.

Option three – Outsource one-day events and deliver residential events and the annual conference in-house

67. Based on the 2012-13 programme, this would deliver a **net operating deficit of £268k**. This 'split option' would require the retention of an in-house events team to deliver residential events and the annual conference. There is also a premium charge for events outside London which would increase costs and limit our strategy of offering more regional events.

For the full costings for all the options, please see the table attached at Appendix 1

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Conclusion

68. Our current approach is to provide a comprehensive, high quality events offer to our members, consisting of a range of free and paid for events and conferences. From ongoing research and evaluation, the LGA's events programme is valued by our member councils. They form part of our membership offer and the increase in recent years of free events is viewed as a valuable part of being a member of the LGA. Increasingly, we are aiming to hold more regional events and this is being further explored for future years.
69. In addition, events are a source of income for the LGA which fund our free events and contribute to our overall budget. Our current arrangements utilise an in-house central events team which has the knowledge, skills and experience to deliver a cost-effective programme of events to the sector, supporting the work of the LGA.
70. There are options to reduce the size of our events programme and to re-balance the number of free and paid for events. A reduction in the overall scale of our events programme could offer savings by reducing the size of the events team (if an in-house model is retained). A higher proportion of free events would reduce the income into the organisation but would further enhance our membership offer.
71. Those events which are currently delivered in other parts of the organisation could be included within the work of the central team to provide a more co-ordinated approach and to enhance our overall offer. If an in-house option is retained, delivering and co-ordinating all events through one central team would be the most effective approach.
72. The informal tendering exercise indicates that retaining an in-house events team is the most cost-effective option for the organisation. It also allows us more flexibility with the future shape of the events programme.
73. Finally, there are a number of options for venues for our annual conference from 2016 onwards, all of which would offer a high quality event.
74. Whatever approach we take to events management and organisation, it is clear from member feedback that events are an important part of the LGA's national reputation, provide a valuable platform for us to promote the work of our boards, share best practice and lead the improvement agenda and are seen by member councils as an important part of our member offer.

Leadership Board is asked to agree:

- Based on the informal tender exercise, events and conference management should continue to be provided in-house.
- The current fees for LGA events and conferences (including annual conference) should be frozen for 2013/14.
- The continued offer of free events for member authorities and continued development of regional events.
- Preferred locations for the annual conference and exhibition for 2016 and beyond.

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Option 1 – The LGA events team to continue organising events

Appendix 1

Analysis based on the LGA running 72 one day events plus the annual conference, national children and adult conference, fire and culture, tourism and sport residential conferences plus advertising and sponsorship sales.

Event	Gross Income (sponsorship, delegate income, exhibition income £k)	Direct Expenditure £k	Approx Liberata direct costs £k	Net income (sponsorship, delegate fees, exhibition income) £k	LGA staff costs £k	Net position £k
		(excluding staff costs)				
Annual Conference–	885	-475		410		
One day events and other residential events (NCASC, Fire, CTS)	292	-175	-140	23		
Speaking engagements at external events	8	0		8		
Sponsorship and advertising Sales	75	0		75		
Totals	1260	-650	-140	470	-506	-36

Option 2 – Outsource all LGA events (contract management and support provided by LGA events team)

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Analysis based on outsourcing 72 one day events plus the annual conference, national children and adult conference, fire and culture, tourism and sport residential conferences plus. Also includes LGA staff costs for managing the contract, programme development, events marketing, advertising and sponsorship sales.

Event	Gross income (Sponsorship, delegate fees, exhibition income) £k	Expenditure (excluding staff costs) £k	Approx Liberata direct costs £k	Net income (Sponsorship, delegate fees, exhibition income) £k	External event management costs (all events) £k	LGA staff costs £k	Net position £k
Annual Conference	885	-475		410	-107		
One day events and other residential events (NCASC, Fire, CTS)	292	-175	-140	23	-528		
Speaking engagements at external events	8	0		8			
Sponsorship and advertising Sales	75	0		75			
Totals	1260	-650	-140	470	-635	-193	-358

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Option 3 – Outsource one day events and retain residential events in-house.

Analysis based on outsourcing 72 one day events only. Management of all other events, contract management, programme development, events marketing, advertising and sponsorship sales to remain in-house.

Event	Gross income (Sponsorship, delegate fees, exhibition income) £k	Expenditure (excluding staff costs) £k	Approx Liberata direct costs £k	Net income (Sponsorship, delegate fees, exhibition income) £k	External event management costs (all events) £k	LGA staff costs £k	Net position £k
Annual Conference	885	-475		410			
One day events and other residential events (NCASC, Fire, CTS)	292	-175	-140	23	-319		
Speaking engagements at external events	8	0		8			
Sponsorship and advertising Sales	75	0		75			
Totals	1260	-650	-140	470	-319	-419	-268

**Note: Additional charges applicable for events outside London.*