

LGA Perceptions Survey 2015-16: Action Plan

Purpose

Direction and endorsement.

Summary

Following publication of the 2015-16 perceptions survey, the Leadership Board asked for an action plan to be developed to address those issues where we can further improve. This report sets out this action plan.

Recommendation

That the LGA Leadership Board endorse the LGA Perceptions Survey 2015-16 Action Plan.

Action

None.

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LGA Perceptions Survey 2015-16: Action Plan

Introduction

1. Following publication of the 2015-16 perceptions survey, Leadership Board asked for an action plan to be developed to address those issues where we can further improve – in particular engaging front-line councillors and value for money.
2. The results of the 2015-16 survey show that we have maintained the significant improvements in satisfaction ratings achieved since 2013.
3. Satisfaction remains high in most key areas with people more likely to speak positively about the LGA and our work than not. In addition, awareness of and satisfaction with the work we undertake on behalf of councils remains strong.
4. Members continue to feel well informed and this has an impact on overall results.
5. Engagement with leaders and cabinet members, chief executives and senior officers is strong and over the last three years we have improved levels of engagement with front-line councillors. The overall proportion of those who ‘know just a little’ about the LGA and those who ‘know very little’ about our work continues to decrease.
6. However, there is still some more work to do in this area to better engage those many councillors who engage directly with residents but who do not hold executive positions.
7. There have been improvements in the way we demonstrate value for money to our members but this is another area where further work is required.
8. As set out in the previous Leadership Board report, the services and roles delivered by the LGA that are perceived to be of the most importance to respondents are related to our national role in lobbying on behalf of local government and in providing a ‘national voice’.
9. There remains strong support for sector-led improvement as the main way for local government to drive improvement. Our campaign work in this area over the last year has seen increases in awareness of our sector-led improvement offer. However, this is also dependent on role and is consistent with the overall findings that front-line councillors tend to have lower levels of awareness). There is very strong support for the LGA to play an enhanced role in supporting and fostering innovation across local government.

Front-line councillors

10. Leadership Board asked us to do some further analysis of levels of satisfaction and engagement with front-line councillors.
11. Having analysed all the free text comments for all front-line councillors there is no single issue which stands out other than more engagement with our work, our leading councillors and officers.

12. Twelve per cent of front-line councillors say they have 'no or little understanding of the LGA's purpose and how it works for local government, which is a relatively small proportion overall. However, 23 per cent are 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with our work on behalf of local government, which shows that there is some room for us to 'convert' these members to a more positive view of the LGA. In other areas such as the effectiveness of the LGA as an advocate for local government, negative responses are no worse than for portfolio holders and chairs of scrutiny.
13. In terms of how well informed front-line councillors feel, the table below sets out progress over the last four years and compares the informed rating to all other roles (total). In the 2015/16 survey, 80 per cent indicate they feel well or fairly well informed, compared to 83 per cent of all other respondents. This is a relatively small differential and shows the progress we have made through previous action plans.

	2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Total	Frontline Cllrs						
Well informed	21%	20%	25%	23%	31%	27%	29%	29%
Fairly well informed	48%	46%	52%	50%	48%	49%	54%	51%
Gives me only a limited amount of information	24%	27%	17%	21%	16%	18%	13%	15%
Doesn't tell me much about what it does	6%	7%	5%	5%	4%	4%	3%	4%
Don't know/no opinion	1%		1%	1%	1%	2%	*%	1%
Summary informed	69%	65%	78%	73%	79%	76%	84%	80%

14. This shows that there is some scope for us to better engage with front-line councillors through all of our mechanisms – political, corporately through formal communication channels such as First and bulletins, at events and through personal contact as part of our council visits programme and council peer reviews.

Value for money

15. Having undertaken further analysis, there are no significant issues in relation to value for money which point towards a single solution. When compared to the total, 50 per cent of front-line councillors say that we offer value for money compared to 56 per cent and there is a slightly higher proportion of 'don't knows'.

	2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Total	Frontline	Total	Frontline	Total	Frontline	Total	Frontline
Strongly agree	11%	11%	16%	16%	15%	13%	18%	19%

Tend to agree	32%	33%	37%	34%	38%	37%	38%	31%
Neither agree nor disagree	30%	28%	28%	28%	22%	18%	28%	31%
Tend to disagree	10%	8%	7%	5%	8%	8%	6%	5%
Strongly disagree	2%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%	2%
Don't know	14%	17%	10%	14%	14%	19%	7%	11%

16. The tailored membership packs have contributed to better promoting our offer to individual councils. However, it is important that we don't rely on these as the sole way in which, once a year, we engage with councils and in particular, front-line councillors.
17. The issue of value for money is strongly linked to the issue of engaging all councillors and officers throughout the year and demonstrating the positive impact on their council. The more engaged they feel, the more likely they are to value our offer.

Work already undertaken

18. Following approval by Leadership Board, action plans were developed and delivered in each of the last two years, contributing to the improvements and maintaining levels of satisfaction.
19. In addition, a councillors' working party was set up and a number of small focus groups were held to further understand how we can improve engagement with all councillors.
20. First magazine is consistently rated as the most effective way to engage with all councillors (89 per cent of front-line councillors cite it as the main way they find out about the work of the LGA) and was re-launched at annual conference last year alongside an improved on-line version. E-bulletins are also an effective engagement tool with high subscription levels. The political group bulletins are cited as one of the main ways front-line councillors get information from us. All of our bulletins were reviewed last year and improved and streamlined to ensure we maximise all communication with our members, in ways which they will find useful.
21. Conferences and events, face-to-face meetings and visits also impact on views of our work.

Next steps

22. A draft action plan is attached for approval by Leadership Board. This will form the basis of our work over the next 12 months to help further engage all councillors will continue to be 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. Our sector-led improvement awareness campaign will continue to be developed so we highlight the growing improvement offer we are able to provide to

councils and we will ensure our narrative is clear about the differences between our DCLG-funded improvement work and our member offer to councils.

Perceptions survey 2015/16 - Action plan

Recommendation	Actions	Timescale	Owner
A. Improve access to information for all councillors			
1. First magazine – Maximise First as this is the main channel front-line councillors prefer for receiving information from the LGA	<p>Personal letter to go out to all councillors with July edition of First from the LGA Chairman. This will encourage front-line councillors to contribute and will promote letters page.</p> <p>New 'from the front-line' column to be introduced for front-line councillors.</p> <p>Further develop First on-line as an alternative/addition to the printed copy</p>	July 2016 September 2016 Ongoing	David Holdstock/Karen Thornton David Holdstock/Karen Thornton David Holdstock/Karen Thornton/Hannah Berry
2. Membership packs	<p>Continue to improve bespoke membership packs for all councillors</p> <p>Include all visits undertaken by senior members and officers</p>	Ongoing Ongoing	Claire Holloway/ Andrea Gillian/Hannah Berry/heads of group offices Claire Holloway/ Andrea Gillian
3. Member bulletins	<p>Undertake further work to promote and increase uptake of e-bulletins to front-line councillors and review take-up.</p> <p>Maximise use of digital monitoring to better target content and bulletins</p>	Ongoing Ongoing	Hannah Berry Hannah Berry
4. Targeted emails	Develop targeted emails which involve all councillors (polls, petitions and so on).	Ongoing	Hannah Berry/Lynne Morris/Heads of group offices
5. LGA website	Improve general information about LGA, with benefits of membership clearly and compellingly explained.		Hannah Berry

	More calls to action.		
B. Develop an events' programme that is relevant for all councillors			
6. Ensure events programme continues to reflect members' interests	<p>Maintain the target of 60% free events.</p> <p>Further develop our annual conference offer to front-line councillors and consider options such as offering one free place per council for a non-executive councillor who has never attended annual conference</p> <p>Continue to develop our regional events programme and highlight to members.</p> <p>Ensure LGA attendance at external events such as party conferences and the London Councils annual conference, aimed at front-line councillors and includes a stand promoting the LGA's offer, including our member development opportunities.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Amanda Cowen</p> <p>Amanda Cowen</p> <p>PAs/Amanda Cowen</p> <p>Heads of group offices/PAs/Lee Bruce/ Amanda Cowen</p>
C. Demonstrate the value of the LGA's Parliamentary work			
7. Highlight the LGA's influence, including 'wins' for local government through our Parliamentary work	<p>Ensure all councillors have access to our annual 'LGA in Parliament' report.</p> <p>Further promote our parliamentary bulletin to a wider range of councillors and officers.</p> <p>Further promote and expand the LGA's local public</p>	<p>May/June 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Lee Bruce</p> <p>Lee Bruce</p>

	services public affairs network	Ongoing	Lee Bruce
D. Demonstrate the value of the LGA's media work			
8. Highlight the LGA's media activity to demonstrate our role as the 'national voice of local government'	<p>Extend the daily mail out of news headlines to include weekends instead of including weekend stories in Monday's round up</p> <p>Involve front-line councillors in our campaigning/media work. For example, involve them in petitions.</p> <p>Provide front-bench councillors with access to data and campaign materials such as draft press releases</p>	June 2016 Ongoing Ongoing	Lynne Morris/Greg Burns Heads of group office/Lynne Morris Heads of group office/Lynne Morris
E. Clearly communicate the LGA's improvement offer to councils			
9. Communicate a clear menu of improvement support available	Continue to progress sector-led improvement campaign and demonstrate value of the programme to councils	Ongoing	Dennis Skinner/Nick Easton/Campaigns Team

F. Supporting and equipping newly elected councillors

<p>9. Ensure front-line councillors are aware and have access to the LGA's leadership programmes and support offers. This starts with newly-elected councillors.</p>	<p>A letter of welcome from the chairman is sent to all newly elected members (with a link to the Councillors' Guide and relevant membership pack).</p> <p>Produce an annual guide for all councillors. We have now launched our new Councillors' Guide for 2016/17. This online resource is designed as a quick reference guide to provide new councillors with the essential information they need to know as they begin their roles.</p> <p>Induction: Support regional improvement bodies and individual councils to induct new members through a range of local programmes. This provides an opportunity to promote the LGA to newly elected members.</p> <p>Equipping new councillors: Deliver programmes to equip new councillors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Community Leadership programme is specifically designed for newly elected councillors and aims to help them develop a portfolio of skills to equip them for their role as community leaders and 	<p>May/June 2017</p> <p>Annual</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Frances Marshall</p> <p>Will Brooks</p> <p>Principal advisors</p> <p>Will Brooks</p>
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	<p>effective politicians.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Leadership Essentials series includes for front-line councillors. These include a two-day course on effective scrutiny, focus on leadership which provides seminars and workshops to act as a bridge to more senior leadership position, Young Councillors Weekender Event and BAME Councillors event. <p>Explore an offer to visit each (say once every three years) to highlight the work of the LGA, benefits of membership and to answer questions from front-line councillors.</p>	Ongoing	Dennis Skinner/David Holdstock
G. Encourage people to become councillors			
10. Promote the benefits of being a councillor	<p>Further roll out our successful “Be a Councillor” Campaign to promote the role of the local councillor and encourage people to stand for election.</p> <p>Involve front-line councillors in further developing our “Be a Councillor” resources: Dedicated website, which includes resources such as guidebooks, support for disabled candidates and other useful information.</p> <p>Run further bespoke local campaigns with councils, regional organisations and local parties. We have run a campaign for Rotherham and are currently working with Birmingham, Lancashire, East Midlands and Isle of Wight to design local campaigns</p>	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing	Will Brooks Hannah Berry Hannah Berry/Dennis Skinner