

LGA Perceptions Survey 2016/2017

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report provides members of the Leadership Board with a summary of the findings from our annual perceptions survey of our membership.

A hyperlink to the full detailed report will be circulated to members once it has been published. In the interim, a draft version is available upon request.

Recommendations

That the LGA Leadership Board:

- i. notes the results of the 2015/2016 perceptions survey; and
- ii. agrees the draft action plan at **Appendix A**.

Action

As directed by Members.

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LGA Perceptions Survey 2016/2017

Introduction

1. This is the fifth consecutive year we have undertaken a perceptions survey of our membership. This comprehensive, cross-cutting research provides us with a benchmark to inform future work and gives us a good understanding of the current views of member authorities. In addition, it helps us to better understand their views on the benefits of membership, their priorities, sector-led improvement, how well informed they feel about our work and areas for improvement.
2. Last year, based on the previous year's survey, members agreed an action plan to help support some of the key findings, in particular, work to help improve the awareness of the LGA and our work amongst front-line councillors.
3. The Group Offices have continued to support our overall membership offer through their work with members and improvement teams have further developed our offer to include, as well as corporate support, bespoke support on issues such as finance, children's services and communications.
4. Our programme of visits to councils, at both senior political and managerial levels has also supported our work to raise awareness of the work we undertake with and on behalf of councils.
5. We have introduced new initiatives such as free places for front-line councillors at the LGA annual conference, allocated through the group offices and worked to encourage more input from them into First magazine, which remains the main way they receive information about the LGA and our work.
6. Based on this year's results, we have included an updated draft action plan at **Appendix A**.

Summary of Results

7. Overall, the 2016/17 results show that the improvements made since 2012 have been maintained. Respondents have a high level of awareness of the LGA and the work we undertake on their behalf; there are high levels of advocacy (those who would speak positively about the LGA); satisfaction with the work of the LGA remains high; and all but two respondents (of 862) find at least one of the activities undertaken by the LGA useful, with *providing up-to-date information about local government*, *lobbying on behalf of local government* and *providing a single voice for local government* seen as particularly useful.

Key Findings

8. Overall, nine in 10 understand the our purpose and how we work for local government, this ranges from **98 per cent** of Chief Executives to 82 per cent of Frontline Councillors.
9. Nearly three-quarters (**74 per cent**) of respondents say they would speak positively about the LGA to others (either spontaneously or if asked), in line with results since 2013. Only **3 per cent** would speak negatively about the LGA. Chief Executives remain particularly likely to say that they would 'speak positively about the LGA' (**89 per cent**), and Leaders are now significantly more likely to do so than was the case in 2015/16 (**96 per cent**).
10. Close to three-quarters (**73 per cent**) are either fairly or very satisfied with the work of the LGA on behalf of local government, this maintains the direction of travel established in the last few years. Leaders are most positive (**92 per cent**) followed by Chief Executives (**83 per cent**).
11. When it comes to LGA activities, respondents are most likely to find the LGA's role in providing up-to-date information about local government useful (**91 per cent**). High proportions also believe that the LGA's lobbying on behalf of local government and providing a single voice for local government are useful (both **89 per cent**). Results are in line with 2015/16, with the same three activities regarded as most useful. However there has been a drop in the proportion finding the provision of legal advice and co-ordination of legal action for councils useful, a reduction, from 72 per cent in 2015/16 to **64 per cent** in 2016/17.

Question	2012	2013	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	change from 2015/16
How well do you know the LGA?	61%	72%	73%	73%	75%	+2%
Understand the LGA's purpose and how it works for local government	89%	91%	92%	94%	89%	-5%¹
I would speak positively about the LGA	63%	73%	72%	75%	74%	-1%
Satisfied with the work of the LGA on behalf of the local government sector	62%	70%	75%	76%	73%	-3%
How well informed do you feel about the work of the LGA	69%	77%	79%	83%	83%	0%

¹ This is not a significant decrease, however there has been a significant decrease in those that understand 'a great deal' from 43 per cent to 36 per cent.

Question	2012	2013	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	change from 2015/16
How useful are the following LGA activities to your council or local government as a whole?						
Providing a single voice for local government	90%*	94%*	91%*	87%	89%	+2%
Lobbying on behalf of local government	90%	92%	92%	90%	89%	-1%
Managing local government's reputation in the national media	90%*	93%*	91%*	83%	83%	0%
Providing advice and information through the political group offices	72%	78%	78%	78%	76%	-2%

* Prior to 2015/16 respondents were asked whether or not these activities were *important* and are therefore not directly comparable.

Priorities

12. Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed that a range of issues should be a priority for the LGA. Consistent with 2015/16, the top two priorities were funding for local government at **94 per cent**, and economic growth, jobs and housing at **90 per cent**.

13. **Seventy three per cent** agree that devolution should be a priority, a decline on the 81 per cent who agreed in 2015/16. Similarly there has been a decline in levels of agreement that sector-led improvement should be a priority (from 84 per cent to **77 per cent**), however **86 per cent** of officers agree that it should be.

14. The following sets out the priorities, in order, with variations by authority type:

Funding for local government: 94 per cent

- 14.1. 76 per cent strongly agree
- 14.2. There is no variation by authority type

Economic growth, jobs and housing: 90 per cent

- 14.3. There is no variation by authority type

Adult social care and health: 88 per cent

- 14.4. 65 per cent strongly agree
- 14.5. Agreement is lowest amongst districts (86 per cent) compared to 96 per cent of London boroughs and 97 per cent of county authorities.

Children's services and education: 86 per cent

- 14.6. Agreement is lowest amongst districts (83 per cent) compared to 93 per cent of metropolitan authorities and 95 per cent of county authorities.

Sector led improvement: 77 per cent

- 14.7. Agreement is higher amongst unitary and metropolitan authorities (82 per cent and 84 per cent respectively), compared to 70 per cent of London boroughs.

Devolution: 73 per cent

- 14.8. 84 per cent of London boroughs agree compared to 70 per cent of districts.

Support

15. Respondents were asked whether they thought the LGA should continue to provide support in a number of areas. Ongoing support from the LGA is valued in all of the areas outlined in the survey:

- 15.1. **91 per cent:** continue providing support in saving money/making efficiencies compared to 63 per cent in 2015/16;
- 15.2. **91 per cent:** continue providing training for councillors;
- 15.3. **90 per cent:** continue providing peer challenge and peer support;
- 15.4. **83 per cent:** continue providing support in transforming/digitising services compared to 57 per cent in 2015/16;
- 15.5. **78 per cent:** continue providing support in identifying and delivering commercial opportunities compared to 64 per cent in 2015/16;
- 15.6. **75 per cent:** continue supporting devolution.

16. When asked if they would like to see new areas of support provided by the LGA, there were high level of interest in each area:

- 16.1. **84 per cent:** provide support for local economic growth;
- 16.2. **79 per cent:** provide support for increasing housing supply;
- 16.3. **71 per cent:** provide support in relation to building community cohesion.

Communications

17. More than four in five (**83 per cent**) believe that the LGA keeps them very/fairly well informed about their work which maintains the uplift seen in 2015/16. Only 3 per cent believe that 'they are not told much at all'. Leaders are most likely to feel well informed (**95 per cent**).

18. As with previous years, respondents are most likely to find out about the work of the LGA through 'first' magazine (mentioned by **76 per cent** of respondents); although media work/press releases; LGA website; and events and conferences are also mentioned by **over half** of respondents.

19. At **39 per cent**, there has been an increase in respondents that mention face-to-face contact compared to 32 per cent in 2015/16; and the Parliamentary bulletin (**33 per cent** compared to 27 per cent).
20. This year there were fewer respondents that said they find out about the work of the LGA through publications (**40 per cent** compared to 50 per cent in 2015/16) and whilst **86 per cent** of surveyed Chief Executives find out about the LGA's work via the LGA Chief Executive's email and **75 per cent** of Leaders from the LGA Chairman's weekly email there were decreases in others accessing these materials (46 per cent down to 39 per cent and 33 per cent down to 27 per cent respectively).

Sector Led Improvement

21. Half of respondents (**51 per cent**) indicate that they have heard about the sector-led improvement approach either a lot, or a moderate amount. At **90 per cent** Chief Executives are the most likely to have heard the most.
22. In terms of agreement that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context, **70 per cent** of respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. By role type, Chief Executives remain particularly likely to agree that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context (**84 per cent agree**).
23. When thinking about the resources that the LGA offers, **61 per cent** of respondents feel that these have had a positive impact on their authority; consistent with 2015/16. Conversely, **32 per cent** feel that these LGA resources have had a small impact or none at all. Chief Executives continue to be most likely to view the resources as having a positive impact on their authority (**84 per cent**).

Local Partnerships²

24. Consistent with 2015/16, **50 per cent** of respondents have heard of Local Partnerships. Awareness varies significantly by role, ranging from **90 per cent** of Chief Executives, to **37 per cent** of Portfolio Holders.
25. Of those aware of Local Partnerships, over a third (**35 per cent**) are aware that their council has used Local Partnership services in the last year and is significantly higher among those in Metropolitan Districts (**58 per cent**). Of those who have used services provided by Local Partnerships, **69 per cent** express satisfaction with them, which is a decrease of 10-percentage points from the 79 per cent who were satisfied in 2015/16 although similar to the levels of satisfaction in 2014/15.

Differences by role

26. As with previous years there are some variations by role. On the whole, Chief Executives, Directors and Leaders have a greater knowledge of the role and services

² In order to reduce the survey size Local Partnerships and Centre for Public Scrutiny questions are now asked on alternate years. CfPS will be included in the 2017 survey.

provided by the LGA and of Sector Led Improvement (SLI) compared to that of Frontline and Frontbench Councillors. This year, there have been significant increases in satisfaction and knowledge by Leaders, however in contrast, there has been a decrease in knowledge amongst Frontline Councillors.

27. Overall nine in 10 understand the LGA's purpose and how it works for local government. Significant changes by role since last year: Frontline Councillors who would agree 'a great deal' have declined from 35 per cent in 2015/16 to 22 per cent in 2016/17, and there has been a small decline among Directors, from 44 per cent to 35 per cent.
28. Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of respondents say they would speak positively about the LGA to others (either spontaneously or if asked), in line with results since 2013. Significant variances by role.
 - 28.1. Chief Executives remain particularly likely to say that they would 'speak positively about the LGA' (89 per cent), and Leaders are now significantly more likely to do so than was the case in 2015/16 (96 per cent compared to 85 per cent).
29. Close to three-quarters (73 per cent) are satisfied with the work of the LGA on behalf of local government. Significant variances by role:
 - 29.1. Leaders are most positive in this respect, with none indicating dissatisfaction at any level, and more than nine in ten (92 per cent) either fairly or very satisfied, a significant increase on the 80 per cent for this group in 2015/16.
 - 29.2. There has also been an increase in levels of satisfaction among Chairs of Scrutiny, from 61 per cent in 2015/16 to 73 per cent in the latest survey.
 - 29.3. Levels of satisfaction have declined significantly among Portfolio Holders (from 84 per cent to 72 per cent) and Frontline Councillors (from 72 per cent to 62 per cent), although this is due to an increase in the proportion who indicate a neutral rather than a negative opinion in this respect.
30. Seventy per cent of respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context. Significant variance by role:
 - 30.1. 64 per cent of Frontline Councillors agree, this is a significantly lower proportion than was the case in 2015/16 (73 per cent).
31. When thinking about the resources that the LGA offers, 61 per cent of respondents feel that these have had a positive impact on their authority. Significant variance by role:
 - 31.1. Portfolio Holders are significantly less likely to feel this is the case than they were in 2015/16 (59 per cent compared to 73 per cent).

Objectives

32. The overarching aim of the research is to provide insight into how councillors and senior officers in LGA-member authorities view the LGA and how we engage with them, and to explore their feelings about LGA support for sector led improvement.
33. More specifically the research aims to explore the following:
- 33.1. Perceptions of the LGA across the board;
 - 33.2. Views of how the LGA communicates and engages with members;
 - 33.3. Whether there are groups of councillors and/or officers who have different levels of knowledge and engagement, and, if so, in which areas they lack knowledge/have minimal engagement;
 - 33.4. Perceptions of the service and benefits members get from the LGA, and whether there are other services and benefits they would value, or that would promote and improve the sector most effectively in the future.

Methodology

34. Interviews were undertaken with a sample of 862 representatives from councils across all regions. The majority of interviews were undertaken over the telephone and 32 were undertaken online. These included:
- 34.1. Council leaders
 - 34.2. Portfolio holders
 - 34.3. Chairs of scrutiny
 - 34.4. Backbench councillors
 - 34.5. Chief executives
 - 34.6. Directors
35. This has given a strong, representative sample allowing detailed analysis by role and region. The sample size has a maximum standard error of +/-3.3% at the 95% level of confidence, giving these findings a high level of accuracy. Interviews took no longer than 22 minutes and explored:
- 35.1. Our offer and current provision;
 - 35.2. Our current role and priorities and how these can be developed;
 - 35.3. Effectiveness of our communications and preferred methods of engagement; and
 - 35.4. Sector-led improvement within local government, our support offered to members and how it can be developed/improved.

Response Rates

36. Each year, it has been increasingly more difficult to engage members and officers to take part in the survey – lack of time available is the most frequent response.

37. In an effort to reduce the burden of the survey on our member authorities the survey was reduce from 22 minutes to 15, with some questions cut from the survey, whilst others were decided to only ask biennially.
38. In addition an online version of the survey was offered to accommodate those who did not wish, or did not have the time available, to complete the survey over the telephone. This option was offered only to those respondents who indicated that they would not be able, or were not prepared, to complete a telephone interview within the fieldwork window, those who requested a call back at an unspecified time on five or more occasions, or those who specifically requested this option for completion. Online interviews represented 4% of the total. Most of these were Directors (24) or Chief Executives (5), indicating that this option did help to improve the response within these groups. Differences between telephone and online completion results reflect differences by role rather than method of completion.
39. As the results of the online survey were in line with that of the telephone survey it is suggested that a full mix method approach is implemented next year.

Amalgamated role: Role:	Officers		Frontbench Councillors			Frontline councillors	Regional Total
	Chief Executives	Directors	Leaders	Chairs of Scrutiny	Portfolio Holders	Frontline councillors	
East	12	30	16	12	19	41	130
East Midlands	9	37	11	11	11	32	111
London	4	16	1	9	9	32	71
North East	1	8	1	4	2	13	29
North West	4	19	6	12	10	42	93
South East	10	44	15	17	19	62	167
South West	6	21	12	9	13	35	96
West Midlands	13	26	11	9	11	33	103
Yorkshire and the Humber	4	20	4	7	7	20	62
Role Total:	63	221	77	90	101	310	862
Amalgamated role Total:	284		268			310	862

Conclusions

40. This year's results show that we are broadly maintaining the improvements we have achieved over the last four years.
41. Satisfaction with our work, our priorities and the way we work on behalf of councils remains high.

42. The issue of engaging frontline councillors remains a challenge for us and is the main focus of our action plan for the year ahead.
43. Our members continue to feel well informed and this has a positive impact on overall satisfaction results.
44. Our sector-led improvement offer remains well regarded and seen as the main way for local government to drive improvement. Levels of awareness and agreement that it is the right approach remain high.