

Progressing next year's Innovation Zone

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report invites Members' views on the strategic organisation of the Innovation Zone at the LGA Annual Conference 2018. The report includes background details about the Zone, latest developments and Members' involvement.

Recommendation

That the Improvement and Innovation Board advises on the Zone's development for 2018 as outlined in paragraph 6, in particular whether to theme the Zone or not, the types of innovation to showcase in 2018 and whether to appoint a member advisory group.

Action

Officers to progress the Zone in light of Members' guidance on the issues raised.

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Background

1. The LGA's innovation programme shares examples of local government and wider public sector good practice, helping equip councils with tools and confidence to use innovative approaches to solve their challenges.
2. This includes the three-day Innovation Zone that we have organised at the last five LGA Annual Conferences. This will be repeated in Birmingham in 2018.
3. Key successes this year were that the Zone:
 - 3.1. Received very positive feedback. 49 per cent of conference delegate survey respondents made use of, and were very/fairly satisfied with the Zone – up from 35 per cent making use of the Zone in 2016 - with particularly positive comments about delegates making changes as a result of what they learned in the Zone.
 - 3.2. Was more vibrant and better attended than ever. It was more colourful, with creative board and card games devised by Sandwell and Essex councils, Luton carnival costumes and prizes, and a delegate teaching tap dance to highlight how skills can be quickly and easily drawn out to help others achieve their goals.
 - 3.3. Saw some sessions as standing room only, almost all sessions were full, and delegates used the space for work and discussions between sessions.
 - 3.4. Featured innovations from 25 local authorities from across the country and 18 other organisations including New Urban Mechanics from Boston USA, the Democratic Society and the Department for Communities and Local Government. Newton, the Zone's sponsor, also showcased its work with the LGA and councils.

Improvement and Innovation Board input

4. At its meeting in November 2016, the Improvement and Innovation Board advised on the Zone's development for 2017, agreeing to:
 - 4.1. Invite examples from the wider public sector.
 - 4.2. Not have subject specific themes.
 - 4.3. Set up an informal Board advisory group providing strategic direction.
5. Officers progressed the Zone accordingly, taking on board comments from the advisory group comprising Cllrs Peter Fleming OBE, Judi Billing MBE, Bob Jennings and Mayor Dave Hodgson MBE.

Innovation Zone 2018

6. As we plan 2018's Zone, we would welcome Members' views on the following issues:

6.1. Whether or not to theme the Zone:

6.1.1. In 2015 and 2016, we had subject specific themes including leadership, integration of services for better outcomes, digitalisation, collaboration with others, and tools to help councils develop a culture of innovation. Themes were purposely broad to include innovations from a variety of local authorities including district councils and fire and rescue authorities.

6.1.2. In 2017, we had no subject specific themes but an overall theme of creative and positive disruption to connect the programme's examples.

6.1.3. Both having and not having themes have advantages and disadvantages.

6.1.4. **Subject themes** focus the programme on the most relevant topics and examples for councils. In turn, the resulting programme and the LGA are seen by the sector to provide coherent content for councils to learn from, on the top current priorities for local government. Each theme is allocated an LGA subject specialist to co-ordinate the best sessions, making the most of their knowledge and established relationships with speakers, requiring less time to organise. Themes however can restrict the breadth of innovation and authority types showcased.

6.1.5. **No subject specific themes** enable us to showcase the widest variety of innovations, from all authority types, relevant to councils. It can however potentially mean a less powerful programme that does not address the most relevant topics, looks less coherent, with the LGA seen to not be providing the most relevant contact for councils. No themes and therefore no theme leads also requires a generic assessment group to consider every Zone submission (over 140 in 2017), with relevant LGA policy officers still being involved to give their views on submissions relevant to their work area. Generic officers then progress chosen submissions but without the connections that LGA theme leads would have. We still produced a high quality programme due to our process but generic assessment requires a lot more staff and time than LGA theme leads do, creating a more lengthy process.

6.1.6. Views are welcome on whether to have themes or not, including what subject themes or what general theme to use, and what examples of innovation and speakers to consider. Commercialisation/investment, technology and public

services for example have been suggested through delegate feedback.

6.2. Any limits to the types of innovations to showcase – this year we:

6.2.1. Assessed submissions for how:

- Innovative their ideas were for the organisation;
- Much their innovation had improved outcomes;
- Much they were addressing difficult issues; and
- Relevant the innovation was to councils.

6.2.2. Included examples from the wider public sector and beyond, including from the USA, experimental innovations and those already producing positive results. We would look again to invite ideas from councils and organisations from UK to international level.

6.2.3. Delegate feedback was very positive about the innovations showcased, so we look to continue this approach, which didn't exclude any sector. Again however, comments are welcome to encourage the best examples from the outset.

6.3. Member involvement – throughout the Zone's organisation, officers liaised with this Board's Chairman, innovation lead and set up and worked with an informal Board advisory group to steer the strategic development of the Zone. The Board is asked to consider if it will appoint a similar member advisory group for 2018.

7. Comments are welcome on all these aspects, and whether anything else is required. Members are also encouraged to suggest innovations that could feature in the Zone, especially those that could launch the Zone and otherwise stand out.

8. Meanwhile, we have refreshed our LGA-wide officer working group to progress next year's Zone. The group has already considered and is acting on delegate and staff feedback from this year's Zone. Newton is also already confirmed as next year's Zone sponsor for the third year running.

Implications for Wales

9. None.

Financial Implications

10. None.

Next steps

11. Officers to progress the 2018 Zone in light of Members' guidance on the issues raised in paragraph 6 above.