

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. The report includes background details about the Zone, latest developments and Members' involvement.

Recommendation

The Board advises on the issues outlined in paragraph 6 to assist the Zone's development for 2019: whether or not to theme the Zone, what criteria to use, creative thinking workshops and Member involvement.

Action

Subject to Members' comments, officers to progress the Zone, which will take place 2-4 July 2019.

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Background

1. In addition to specific support offers such as the Behavioural Insights and Design in the Public Sector programmes, the LGA's innovation programme includes sharing examples of local government and wider public sector good practice. This helps equip councils with tools and confidence to use innovative approaches to solve their challenges.
2. The programme includes our three-day Innovation Zone, which we have organised as part of the last six LGA Annual Conferences and has gone from strength to strength. The next Zone will take place over 2-4 July 2019 in Bournemouth.
3. This year's key successes were that:
 - 3.1 99 per cent of delegate survey respondents were aware of the Zone at conference.
 - 3.2 83 per cent found the Zone very/fairly useful and 57 per cent visited the Zone, up from 49 per cent who used the Zone and were very/fairly satisfied last year, and up from 35 per cent who used it in 2016.
 - 3.3 43 per cent considered participating in the Zone very/fairly important
 - 3.4 19 organisations are already interested in taking part in next year's Zone – this is by far the most interest ever received at such an early stage.
 - 3.5 The best attended sessions included: Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol, outlining how the Bristol City Office is developing a new, more inclusive way of governing a city, Pepper the Robot from Southend on Sea Borough Council and Tom the companion cat from Knowsley Council, highlighting how technology is socially engaging with those with dementia, autism and other conditions, to help them thrive.
 - 3.6 We also showcased how virtual reality (VR) headsets are helping staff understand how their support in the care system is viewed from children's perspective and how VR can improve behaviour and relationships between staff and users.
 - 3.7 Our 'Super Wednesday' programme on the busiest day of conference focused on how councils are tackling homelessness, housing and care issues, and loneliness. innovations from the Netherlands and India focussed on alternative social care models and ink made out of pollutants respectively.
 - 3.8 In total, 68 speakers from 26 local authorities across the country and 22 other organisations showcased their innovations; other councils' work was also referred to.

3.9 Newton, the Zone's sponsor, was very pleased with its involvement and how the Zone went.

Improvement and Innovation Board input

4. The Board agreed at its November 2017 meeting to have no constraints on innovations showcased as long as they were relevant to councils. The Board also agreed not to have subject specific themes but a broad theme for the Zone as a whole, and to set up a small working group to provide strategic oversight of the Zone's development.
5. Cllrs Peter Fleming OBE, Joy Allen, Laura Miller and Catherine Rankin volunteered and were appointed to the working group at the November meeting and thereafter advised on the programme, which officers progressed accordingly. The group recommended 'your local place' as the Zone's overall theme, highlighting how innovations shape and enhance local communities as well as benefitting individuals. Members of the group and this wider Board also compered the Zone, encouraging delegates to join each session.

Innovation Zone 2019

6. As we plan 2019's Zone, we would welcome Members' views, particularly regarding:

6.1. whether or not to theme the Zone:

- 6.1.1 In 2015 and 2016 we had subject specific themes, eg leadership, integration of services, digitalisation, collaboration, and tools to help councils develop a culture of innovation. Themes were purposely broad to involve the largest range of local authorities including district councils and fire and rescue authorities
- 6.1.2 In 2017 and 2018 we had no subject specific themes but general themes of 'creative and positive disruption' and 'your local place' respectively to connect the programmes' examples
- 6.1.3 Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages and it is worth outlining them so Members can advise on their preferred option for next year
- 6.1.4 **No subject specific themes** enable the showcasing of the widest and most vibrant variety of innovations in terms of authority types and topics to the widest local government audience. It can however mean less focus on priority topics, which may be perceived as the LGA not understanding the sector, or the programme looking irrelevant or random. Additionally, as a generic approach, councils and organisations are invited to apply and take part by core Zone officers, who are not as connected as policy/subject leads to advise on the best innovations to consider from the outset, and to best secure invitation acceptances
- 6.1.5 **Subject themes** focus the programme on the most relevant topics and examples, producing the strongest, most relevant, credible programme for councils. Allocating LGA policy/subject leads to themes makes the most

of their knowledge and expertise to inform the best possible programme, including their advice on the best innovations to consider from the outset, and their connections to best secure invite acceptances. They do however limit the subjects and diversity covered, and, depending on the themes, can limit the types of council showcased and encouraged into the Zone.

6.1.6 Views are therefore welcome on whether to have themes or not - if so, what subject themes or general theme.

6.1.7 'Take the plunge' has already been suggested as a general, overall theme to convey the idea of boldly trying new approaches as well as linking to the conference's seaside venue, with the possibility of incorporating deckchairs and beach huts, eg through imagery or furniture.

6.2. **what criteria to use** – for the last two years we have invited and assessed submissions based on how:

6.2.1 Innovative their ideas are for the organisation

6.2.2 Much their innovation has improved outcomes

6.2.3 Much they are addressing difficult issues

6.2.4 Relevant the innovation is to councils.

6.3. We also consider and invite innovations from around the world, ambitious innovations in their early stages as well as those that have delivered tangible benefits. Altogether, this approach is working well but Members' views are welcome to improve our processes wherever possible.

6.4. **Creative thinking workshops on the Thursday morning of the programme** – the Zone secures strong speakers throughout its programme but delegate numbers can fall on the final/Thursday morning, as they can for wider conference sessions. This can be disappointing for those speakers if, despite best efforts to encourage participation, delegate numbers are low, not least because of the time spent preparing their sessions. Officers are therefore considering organising creative thinking workshops on the Thursday morning to inspire delegates to use new tools and think in different ways to generate new ideas to tackle problems. Officers have links to those who could run these sessions, and can manage delegate number expectations with them. Other ideas for the Thursday programme are also welcome.

6.5. **Member involvement** – throughout the Zone's organisation, officers liaise with this Board's Chairman, innovation lead, and as mentioned above, a small Board working group. The Board is asked to consider if it would like to continue this same approach. If so, Members' views are sought on whom to appoint on to that group, including if the Members on the last group would like to continue.

7. Comments are welcome on all these and any other aspects, including any suggestions of innovations we could feature in the Zone.
8. Meanwhile, the LGA-wide officer Zone group is progressing next year's event, having already considered and taken account of delegate and staff feedback.

Implications for Wales

9. None.

Financial Implications

10. None.

Next steps

11. Officers to progress the 2019 Zone in light of Members' views.