

LGA Fire Conference and Exhibition 2014 – conference feedback and venue options for 2015

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The 2014 annual fire conference and exhibition has seen a very slight increase in delegate numbers, a larger number of exhibitors and a very slight increase in profit.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the feedback from this year's fire conference in Cardiff and to agree the location for the conference in 2015.

Action

Officers to take on board any salient feedback when agreeing the location and planning of the 2015 conference.

Contact officer: Jane Marcroft
Position: Events Manager, LGA
Phone no: 020 7664 3080
E-mail: jane.marcroft@local.gov.uk

LGA Fire Conference and Exhibition 2014 – conference feedback and venue options for 2015

Headline feedback on the LGA Fire Conference and Exhibition 2014

1. This year's conference in Cardiff was attended by a total of 236 paying delegates which represents a very slight increase on last year's figure of 234 paying delegates. Significantly all Fire Authorities bar one were represented at the conference. 31% of delegates completed the online delegate feedback evaluation and out of those who replied 71% were either very or fairly satisfied with the event (down from 93% in 2013).
2. In assessing the delegate feedback outlined in this paper it should be noted that it is based on a delegate response rate of 31% which itself is in line with the level of response received in previous years. The feedback is of course a useful starting point but just how representative it is of the totality of possible delegate views needs to be borne in mind when just over two thirds of delegates did not respond.

Feedback on the programme and its content

3. Of the plenary sessions delegates particularly liked the session on the case for change followed by the one on national resilience which in turn was closely followed by the plenary on blue light integration. Although feedback levels for the workshops were rather limited, the future of CFOA and LGA sector led improvement proved the most popular. Some delegates felt that the conference was either too traditional, too backward looking or offered nothing new. A number of delegates expressed the view that adequate time should be given to speakers, particularly panel speakers and that more time should be allowed for debate, interaction and questions. Some felt that there should be fewer but longer presentations. In a bid to make sessions more interactive one delegate suggested being able to text questions into the session chairman before or during the Q&A session so as to enable the chair to theme the questions to speakers. One respondent would have liked to have seen a greater sense of coherence to the programme. One respondent enquired as to what consultation takes place with the sector to determine the overall programme, tone and emphasis.

Logistical feedback

4. 35% of respondents were either very/fairly satisfied with the Millennium Stadium's facilities and 45% were either very/fairly satisfied with the venue's catering. 64% of respondents were either very/fairly satisfied with Cardiff as the location for this conference. Many respondents did not like the fact that the conference facilities were split from the hotel accommodation and much preferred having everything under one roof at a single location. This is the first time since the conference was held in Scarborough that the event has been held at a split location and based on the delegate feedback this did not fulfil what was expected. A number of respondents felt that the conference venue was too big, cold and that the exhibition area was cramped, that the main room was the wrong shape and that there was a fair amount of walking to be done around the venue.

85% of respondents were very/fairly satisfied with the event organisation. Mention should also be made of the excellent support and assistance provided by the host fire authority, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and its team of volunteers.

Looking ahead

5. 84% of respondents stated that they would attend the conference again (the figure in 2013 was 86%). When asked to rank the factors which would influence their decision to attend in future, delegates commented that the most important factor is content, followed by cost, location, job role, with the least important factor cited the date of the conference. This ranking differs very slightly from that of previous years – namely the cost criterion is becoming more of a consideration.
6. In terms of suggested improvements for next year's conference the following ideas were put forward:
 - 6.1 Conference and overnight accommodation in one location;
 - 6.2 To include more speakers from wider government and other government departments and from outside the fire sector; and
 - 6.3 To build in more time for delegate interaction and to allow speakers more time to present by reducing the overall number of speakers.
7. In terms of suggested topics for next year the following suggestions were made:
 - 7.1 Collaboration;
 - 7.2 Response to the Knight Review;
 - 7.3 Learning from outside the fire sector; and
 - 7.4 More strategic and/or political issues as opposed to tactical/operational.

Venue for the 2015 conference

8. Having researched seven possible venues two emerge as front runners:
 - 8.1 DoubleTree by Hilton, Milton Keynes – this is a hotel and conference venue which is built into Stadium mk which is home to the MK Dons football club. The venue has ample space in the main room, enough workshop rooms of the right size and sufficient space to grow the exhibition further. At this point in time it is likely that not all delegates would be able to stay at the conference hotel, with the nearest hotel being 2.5 miles away.
 - 8.2 Hilton Gateshead – again there is ample space in the main room and workshop rooms and space to further grow the exhibition. The 2011 conference was held at

this hotel. There is a range of nearby hotels for those not wishing to stay at the conference hotel.

Financial implications

9. The 2014 fire conference has generated a profit which is very slightly up on the amount of profit achieved in 2013. This is the third largest income generating event for the LGA and the profit has been achieved whilst keeping delegate registration fees at the level set in 2008. It can be confirmed that we will be holding the delegate registration fees at the same level in 2015.