

LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition Venues and Locations for 2017 and Beyond

Purpose of report

For discussion and agreement.

Summary

Members attended the Fire Conference in Gateshead in March this year; and have agreed that the Hilton Bristol should be the venue for 2016. This paper sets out the benefits and drawbacks of a number of potential conference venues as well as a proposal to find a semi-permanent home for the Fire Conference and Exhibition in Gateshead for a 2 or 3 year period from 2017-19.

Recommendation

Members are invited to consider the venues for the Fire Conference from 2017 onwards.

Action

Officers to act upon Members' steer for future conference planning.

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LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition Venues and Locations for 2017 and Beyond

Background

1. The LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition is considered to be a key event within the fire industry calendar, regularly attracting an overall average of 230 paying conference delegates and a range of exhibitors and sponsors over the past eight years. It is an important event for the LGA also. It is one of the largest prestige events we organise, and it is important that we continue to attract delegates and exhibitors to ensure the events remains valuable.
2. However, we and FRAs will continue to face financial challenges as we move forward and we are keen to secure the best possible venue, and financial deal, to ensure that the event continues to generate income and attract delegates, exhibitors and sponsors. As discussed at the last FSMC meeting, officers have researched the benefits associated with moving to a three year model for conference venues. This would help to provide continuity for delegates as well as generate savings.

Update on 2016 Conference venue

3. Marketing and promotion is at the very early stages for the 2016 conference to be held at the Bristol Marriott City Centre Hotel. Outline conference details (booking and accommodation details) are currently available on its dedicated website page on the LGA events page (<https://lgaevents.local.gov.uk/lga/frontend/reg/thome.csp?pageID=20497&eventID=72&eventID=72>). Following members' concerns at the last meeting we have now secured an additional three exhibition stand spaces taking the total to 19 to bring it in line with this year's conference.

Considerations for future venues

4. The FSMC has agreed that the following criteria must be taken into consideration when sourcing a venue for the Fire Conference and Exhibition:-
 - 4.1 to **only** consider venues of a high standard that have in place a fire sprinkler system throughout; and
 - 4.2 continue to hold the conference over two days (finishing with lunch on the second day).
5. As indicated in the March board paper, there are other criteria that have emerged as a result of previous conferences which need to be taken on board when organising future conferences, including:
 - 5.1 a strong preference for the conference and room accommodation to be in a single hotel (rather than a split site);

- 5.2 the need to negotiate a larger number of bedrooms at the chosen conference hotel;
- 5.3 to have a larger exhibition area to accommodate increased demand from commercial exhibitors; and
- 5.4 ensure that all the workshop rooms are of a sufficient size to accommodate delegate numbers.

Venues equipped with a sprinkler system

6. In order to fulfil the criteria set out above officers have carried out research to find suitable venues. Unfortunately, the number of suitable venues equipped with fire sprinkler systems remains extremely limited. Venue research was carried out using our own knowledge of residential conference venues and Venuefinder.com – a leading source of up-to-date venue information. Availability has been checked based on the following dates:
 - 6.1. Tuesday 7 March-Wednesday 8 March 2017
 - 6.2. Tuesday 13 March-Wednesday 14 March 2018
 - 6.3. Tuesday 12 March-Wednesday 13 March 2019
7. The six venues we found which meet our basic criteria, ie they have sprinklers and are available over two days, are as follows:
 - 7.1. The Hilton in Gateshead
 - 7.2. Marriott in Bristol
 - 7.3. Hilton in Manchester
 - 7.4. Renaissance in Manchester
 - 7.5. Hilton Metropole Brighton
 - 7.6. Hilton in Liverpool

Venue options

8. Each venue we looked at would allow us to move the conference between the North and South in line with members' feedback at the March meeting. All the venues would allow the conference to proceed on a single site. However, beyond the basic criteria there are some issues with the number of bedrooms available as well as the space available to grow the exhibition space at each of the venues.
9. Of the hotels in Manchester, the Hilton is unsuitable because of a lack of exhibition space, with only 15 spaces available for exhibitors. The venue also has a number of small workshop rooms, which was identified as an issue when the Fire Conference was last held at the venue. The Renaissance in Manchester unfortunately cannot offer us a reasonable number of bedrooms on site for the size of the conference, meaning that

the majority of delegates may have to find accommodation in separate hotels from the conference itself. The venue does however, have space for the exhibition to grow.

10. We have used the Brighton Metropole before but had significant issues around management of the heating issues raised and we are only able to secure a second option for our preferred dates. It does however have space for 20 exhibition stands, which would allow us to grow the exhibition space further. However, Members will wish to be aware of the inflexible approach as the hotel is not prepared to negotiate on either number of rooms or on cost. The daily delegate rates are subject to increases each year of 5% which the LGA would need to pass on to attendees. Therefore there is no real benefit in entering into a longer term arrangement with the hotel.
11. As previously discussed the Marriot in Bristol has space for 19 exhibition stands, however this does not give us the room to grow the exhibition any further and would keep the number of stands available at the current level. However they are willing to reserve a larger number of delegate bedrooms on site than are available at the Brighton Metropole.
12. The Hilton Liverpool is not currently suitable, however planning permission has now been granted for an extension, we will therefore keep this venue under review given their plans.
13. Members may wish to consider whether they would wish to follow a North/South pattern or if the Hilton in Gateshead would be a suitable venue for the Conference for two or three years from 2017-2019. Applying further assessment criteria such as central location/transport links; capacity of main auditorium; minimum of 4 large workshop rooms, exhibition space; bedrooms on site and facilities available, the Hilton in Gateshead would be able to accommodate our needs for a number of years.
14. Feedback from this year's event at the Hilton in Gateshead shows that people were very positive about the venue, 94% were satisfied with the location and 96% were satisfied with the facilities and the catering. We are very grateful for the superb support provided by Tyne and Wear FRA to help the event run smoothly. It is clear that this remains a very popular venue, however it would mean a long journey for some of our Members. A semi-permanent home for the fire conference would provide stability for attendees. However, this is not without risk. A multi-year contract will need to be signed and would incur serious penalty charges if we were unable to proceed for any reason.

Recommendation

15. Members will wish to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each of the venues and the proposal to find a semi-permanent home for the conference.