

LGA Fire Perceptions Survey

Purpose of report

For discussion and decision about any future activity.

Summary

This paper sets out the results of the fire perceptions survey as well as discussing possible actions in response to the findings.

Recommendation

Members are invited to consider further activity regarding the LGA's offer to fire and rescue services to address the issues raised in the survey.

Action

Officers to progress actions.

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LGA Fire Perceptions Survey

Background

1. At the last meeting of the FSMC members discussed the initial findings of the perceptions survey the LGA carried out for our fire and rescue members. The full report is now available on the LGA's website: http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/fire-and-rescue-services/-/journal_content/56/10180/7342178/ARTICLE
2. The survey was conducted with 67 respondents from a range of county, metropolitan and combined fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), and included both officers and members. The LGA provided BMG Research with contact details for Chief Fire Officers, Deputy Chief Fire Officers, Chairs of FRAs and Vice Chairs, this included members of the Fire Commission but did not include FSMC members. The full list of questions is available in **Appendix A**. The survey had a response rate of 44%, and only 8 out of the 46 FRAs did not respond to the survey.
3. The survey makes clear that the LGA has been successful in delivering a comprehensive offer to our member authorities and there are good number of positive aspects which we can build on to enhance our reputation and represent our member FRAs. However, there are a number of areas which the survey has highlighted where we need to consider further work to ensure that we continue to provide a good service to our members.

General observations

4. Overall the results are very positive for the LGA. Most of the respondents had a good knowledge of the organisation with 88% of respondents stating that they know either a great deal or a fair amount about the LGA. Only 1% said that they had heard of it but knew nothing about it. This compares favourably to the main LGA survey where 73% said that they know either a fair or great deal about the LGA. There was also a good understanding of the LGA's purpose and the work that it does for FRAs with 94% of respondents saying they agree with the statement "I understand the LGA's purpose and how it works for FRAs".
5. The report shows that the LGA's fire members are likely to speak positively about the LGA, in a similar proportion to the wider membership. Nearly two thirds were either fairly or very satisfied with the work of the LGA on behalf of the sector. Members also agreed that we stand up for and defend the reputation of FRAs (70% agree or strongly agree). 66% also agreed that the LGA addresses the issues that are important to FRAs. It was felt that the LGA was transparent and accountable to its members (70% agreeing or strongly agreeing), this was supported by the importance attached to the role of the Fire Commission in bringing together the LGA's FRA members, (81% agreed it was very or fairly important).
6. The majority of respondents agreed that the LGA is performing its key functions for its fire members, most respondents also believed that all the services provided by the LGA were either "fairly useful" or "very useful" (78%). The key activities were listed as:
 - 6.1 Providing support and challenge for FRAs/FRSs to improve – 88%

- 6.2 Supporting and promoting FRAs/FRSs who are trying to transform services to better support their communities – 88%
 - 6.3 Bringing together of FRAs for the Fire Commission – 81%
 - 6.4 Providing a single voice for FRAs/FRSs – 78%
7. The messages coming out of the survey are overwhelmingly positive, however there were a number of areas where further work will be necessary to ensure that members are aware of all that we offer and the work that we undertake on their behalf.

Policy

8. The policy work on fire and rescue was well regarded in the responses to the survey. The policy team is responsible for supporting the Fire Services Management Committee and Fire Commission and in order to deliver Members' priorities, lobbies Government on behalf of FRAs to influence and shape Government's thinking. This may mean lobbying for legislative change to overcome barriers to progress, budget provision, structural proposals, consultation exercises and wider profile as part of the local government family. Working with a wide range of partners, it showcases the best of the sector ensuring that Government proposals are grounded in a practical understanding of the fire world.
9. The policy work of the organisation was well understood within the sector, 82% of respondents said that our lobbying activities were either very or fairly useful for them as members, and 19% indicated that of all the services the LGA provides it was the most useful. 71% agreed that the LGA had been an effective advocate for the interests of the fire sector and 65% also agreed that the LGA addresses the issues that are important to the fire and rescue sector. Around half (52%) of respondents agreed that the LGA is influential in shaping the wider agenda for FRAs. Although this is positive, there is clearly more to do here. There were also concerns about the LGA demonstrating value for money for the funding it receives. These issues have also been identified in the wider LGA survey with 53% of respondents to the 2013 survey agreeing that the LGA demonstrated good value for money.
10. When officers have costed the various elements of our offer, it does in fact exceed the annual subscriptions (which have decreased since 2009 and are now between £5,706 to £14,096, excluding LFEPA) and therefore provides excellent value for money. However we clearly need to make this information more accessible and encourage all FRAs to take full advantage of the support available.

Improvement

11. The improvement work at the LGA consists of a number of different strands. The most well-known is the fire peer challenge and operational assessment. The other parts of the LGA's improvement offer includes member development, through our dedicated Fire Leadership Essentials programme and online resources, including LG Inform for data and the Knowledge Hub for sharing good practice.
12. Overall 91% of respondents said that the LGA's provision of support for sector led improvement was useful to them, with 11% of respondents stating it was the most

important service we provide. The online tools for improvement work were less well known than the peer challenge and operational assessment process. 42% of respondents said that they had heard a lot or a moderate amount about LG Inform and 39% said that they had heard nothing about the service. 49% of respondents said that they had heard a lot or a moderate amount about the Knowledge Hub and 28% had heard nothing.

13. However, the vast majority of respondents (87%) agreed that the approach to sector led improvement was the right one in the current context, and the majority of respondents were confident that they had the necessary skills and capacity to monitor their own performance and continuously improve.
14. Members were keen to see the LGA be more challenging about FRAs performance (72%). Respondents were also clear that they supported the expectation of a peer challenge every four years (94% agreed). There was also a feeling that LGA should place a stronger emphasis on supporting and fostering innovation across the sector (93%). We therefore need to ensure that members are more aware of the broad range of improvement tools available to them through the LGA. Members should also be aware of opportunities within the LGA to promote and share good practice with the Fire Commission, at the Innovation Zone at the LGA's Fire Conference, through publications the bulletin and the Knowledge Hub.

Communications

15. Members felt informed about the work of the LGA. 63% believe that the LGA keeps them well informed about its work, compared to 79% of council members. 27% of members felt that the LGA only gave them a limited amount of information and 10% said that the organisation does not tell them much at all about the work that we carry out.
16. The vast majority of respondents (78%) received information through the quarterly fire bulletin. Other sources of communications included:
 - 16.1 Events and conference – 76%
 - 16.2 first magazine – 69%
 - 16.3 Publications – 67%
 - 16.4 Media work/press releases – 66%
 - 16.5 LGA Website – 58%
 - 16.6 Direct contact e.g. with their principal adviser and/or fire policy team – 57%
 - 16.7 Regular HR circulars – 52%
 - 16.8 Parliamentary bulletin – 42%
 - 16.9 Political group offices e-bulletin – 36%
 - 16.10 LGA Chairman's weekly email – 31%
 - 16.11 Access to Knowledge Hub – 25%
 - 16.12 LGA Chief Executives email – 25%
 - 16.13 first online – 21%
 - 16.14 Social media (for example twitter) 19%

17. Respondents also stated that they would prefer to hear more information through the Chairman's weekly bulletin (24%) and through further information on the LGA's website (15%). They also stated that they preferred to engage with the LGA through contacting officers by email or telephone (48%) and through attending LGA events and conferences (27%).
18. 72% of respondents could think of a time in the last two years when they believed the LGA had engaged or involved them in a way they really liked. Respondents had particularly liked engaging with the LGA through conferences and events (38%), operational assessments and the peer challenge process (27%) as well as through face-to-face meetings (23%). It is clear that the bulletin, the Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition and our publications all play an important role in keeping members informed about, and engaged in, the work of the LGA.

Workforce

19. The workforce functions within the LGA include providing employment advice to members, negotiating national pay terms and conditions through the National Joint Council for the fire and rescue service as well as providing legal advice and the coordination of legal action. 81% stated that the LGA's role in negotiating national pay, terms and conditions was very or fairly useful to them as members, with 36% identifying these activities as the most useful services that the LGA provides. Providing employment advice was useful for 76% of respondents and providing legal advice and coordinating legal action was useful for 79%.

Future working

20. We asked members what further activities they would like to see the LGA to undertake if our corporate fire offer was expanded. Respondents wanted to see the LGA providing *more opportunities to lobby Ministers* (85%), *more active press work to raise issues at the national level* (75%), and *greater access to bespoke support* (70%). Over half (52%) of respondents also wanted to see *more regional events and seminars*. Only 3% of respondents did not want to receive any additional services.
21. Of those selected, respondents most wanted to see *more opportunities to lobby Ministers* (47%), followed by *more regional events and seminars* (27%), *greater access to bespoke support* (15%), and *more active press work to raise issues at the national level* (8%).

Action plan

22. As a politically-led organisation, our focus is clearly around supporting elected Members in FRAs and this emphasis is borne out by the fact that councillors tended to have a higher level of satisfaction with the work of the LGA than the officers who responded. However we remain keen to engage productively with senior officers in the service so that the political and professional leadership of the service is joined up as far as possible.

23. We have recently held induction days for senior officers from FRAs (particularly newly promoted officers) to share how we work and to discuss their challenges: this has been very warmly welcomed. We might consider offering this more routinely as part of our offer. We might also wish to strengthen our ties with CFOA and engage in more joint working such as the joint CFOA/LGA document “The fire and rescue service: making our nation safer” or the cross-promotion of events or communications. We now have closer links with CFOA, attend CFOA’s FRS council in July. Securing a LGA slot on the ELP programme would provide even more visibility and knowledge about the value of working with the LGA.
24. This year one of our key priorities was to ensure that we had continuing and useful political engagement with Ministers, with the Shadow Minister as well as with other influential politicians. The Fire Commission regularly hosts a Ministerial slot, and there are further opportunities to meet Ministers at the annual Fire Conference, which are both important to members. Members may also consider if there are other Ministers across Whitehall that the FSMC should be engaging with for example Mike Penning MP, Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice and Victims, who is responsible for Police and Crime Commissioners, and Lord Prior of Brampton, Minister for NHS Productivity, who is responsible for the ambulance service. We might consider whether the various political group offices have a greater role in discussions with Ministers and Opposition spokespeople, perhaps organising informal briefings.
25. We have been working this year on increasing our communications with members, with articles in *first* magazine and a number of press releases tied to the document “The fire and rescue service: making our nation safer”. This is alongside the quarterly bulletin, which is clearly already an important source of information for members. The Fire Commission, reviewed and improved in format two years ago, has also continued to provide an excellent opportunity for networking and discussions for councillors. We may want to see how we can build on this role to facilitate members’ discussions with home authorities.
26. Our improvement work is already well-received although respondents were keen for us to be more influential in shaping the improvement agenda and offer more bespoke support. We already offer special leadership programmes tailored to individual fire and rescue authority’s challenges for a small fee and we can seek to do more. The information available through LG Inform and the Knowledge Hub as a key improvement tool also needs to be more accessible to members. In common with peer review more generally, a more systematic approach to follow up, and early engagement when authorities are due a second review will ensure the programme maintains momentum.
27. It is clear that we are generally delivering the services that our members want, however there is a need for further communication on what that offer is to ensure that all councillors and officers are able to take full advantage of membership of the LGA.

Conclusions

28. This was the first year of the LGA’s perceptions survey for fire and rescue services and provides a depth of helpful information in ensuring our offer remains strong and relevant.