

Party Conferences 2015

Purpose

For discussion.

Summary

This paper summarises the LGA's engagement with the 2015 autumn Party conferences.

Recommendation

That the Leadership Board notes the LGA's engagement with the Party conferences.

Action

As directed by Members.

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Background

1. Each year we seek to influence the political agenda in relation to local government at the autumn party political conferences. The conferences present an opportunity to promote our policies, the important work of local government and to engage closely with key politicians and stakeholders.
2. In 2015 we worked across the conferences to meet key individuals, deliver a series of debates and evening receptions and provide support to councillors.
3. This year, members spoke at 75 events across the party conference season.

LGA events

4. With the Spending Review due to be announced on 25 November 2015 and devolutionary measures being brought forward by the Government, we held a number of debates at the conferences on our calls for the Spending Review to deliver further devolution and ensure fair funding. Our Spending Review submission, *Spending Smarter: A shared commitment*, and our *English devolution: local solutions for a successful nation* report were shared at each conference in order to highlight local government's priorities for the forthcoming Parliament.
5. We held fringe events at the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative conferences which were well attended, with over a hundred delegates at each. High profile speakers secured for each including representatives from think tanks, civic leaders, and ministers or shadow ministers, including the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Greg Clark MP at our Conservative event.
6. We also supported evening receptions for councillors at the conferences at which the respective Party leaderships and LGA Group Leaders spoke about the important work of local government.
7. In addition to the events supported by the LGA corporately, the Political Group offices organised a series of debates, training sessions for councillors and meetings across each of the conferences including those held by UKIP and the Green Party. These included debates, roundtables and *Be a Councillor* workshops. The Liberal Democrat Conference also saw contributions from the party's councillors in two key policy debates – one on Public Health funding and the positive role local authorities can play, citing LGA research; and the second calling for more funding for social care.
8. Alongside our events the Political Group Offices worked with our Chairman, Group Leaders and Lead Members held a number of meetings with a series of key national politicians, stakeholders and members.
9. We were also well represented on the main platforms of the conferences. All Group Leaders spoke on the main stages of their various conferences, alongside the Chairman and a number of lead members.

Stakeholder engagement

10. As with previous years, we worked closely with a range of stakeholders from across the private, public and voluntary sectors to secure speaking opportunities for our councillors at debates, policy seminars and private meetings such as evening dinners. This year, a number of our key stakeholders reduced the amount of events they hosted as is always the case following a general election. However, despite this we still secured 75 speaking opportunities at debates and roundtables with more than 40 stakeholders.
11. The Chairman, Group Leaders and LGA Councillors spoke at events on: devolution, housing, enterprise and growth, skills, social investment, health and social care, transport, licensing, public health, and young people and children services. These events were held with high profile stakeholders such as the Care and Support Alliance, the British Property Federation, Barnardos, Ambition, the MS Society, the Charities Aid Foundation and the Enterprise Forum (please see the LGA guides to Party conferences [here](#)). Briefings were provided for each event and were a platform for members to highlight its messages on the Spending Review, devolution, housing, health and care and many other policy areas.

Promoting the LGA at party conferences

12. As with previous years we have worked hard to embrace the increasing use of digital to promote our work, events and speaking engagements across the conference season.
13. For the conferences we produced guides that were emailed out from Group Leaders to all Councillors and made available online showcasing our significant number of speakers and events over the season. These guides, attached as an appendix to this report, were downloaded **971** times for Conservatives, **1,031** times for Labour and **255** times for Liberal Democrats.
14. Twitter remained a strong channel to both promote our events, and push our messages during the busy conference season. During conference our tweets gained **13,986** average **impressions** per tweet (compared to benchmark of site average of 1,338 impressions per tweet - 10.4x greater).

Key announcements

15. Across the party conferences a series of key announcements relevant to local government were made by each of the national Parties. These included:

Conservative Party

- 15.1. **The Prime Minister David Cameron MP** used his speech to announce that the Government has secured a deal with housing associations to give their tenants the Right-to-Buy their home, with the first tenants able to start to buy their homes from next year. Mr Cameron also announced a “dramatic shift” in housing policy through the introduction of new rules for developers that means affordable homes can be built for sale as well as rental.
- 15.2. Elsewhere in his speech to Conference, Mr Cameron praised the Troubled Families Programme which he said has turned around the lives of over 100,000

families and aimed to get adults into work, arguing that the new National Leaving Wage would help create a “route out of poverty” and highlighted the poor life chances of children in care, noting that the Education Adoption Bill will increase the adoption rate and prevent children needing to be in care at all.

- 15.3. **George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer** announced that all £26 billion of business rates will be kept by councils, phasing out the need for a local government grant altogether. He also announced an end to the uniform business rate, so that any local area can reduce them as much as they like to attract new business and, with the support of the business community, Mayoral Cities will be able to raise them to invest in their infrastructure. Mr Osborne also announced the creation of an Independent National Infrastructure Commission and that the 89 different local government pension funds will be replaced with six wealth funds across the country.
- 15.4. **The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Greg Clark MP**, said that building more affordable housing and the extension of Right-to-Buy to housing associations would enable more people to own their own home. He also highlighted how the Government we’re delivering on their commitments by giving power to cities, towns and counties, building more homes and giving the chance to people to become home owners.
- 15.5. **Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State for Education**, discussed raising standards in schools and their role within communities. Ms Morgan highlighted the speeding up of adoption, the provision of joined up support for children with special education needs, and the introduction of 30 hours of free childcare for working parents. She also said that academies had transformed thousands of schools across the country, by freeing schools from bureaucrats and providing them instead with strong sponsors. Ms Morgan said that the Government will be giving families the right to request childcare for up to a full working day, including before and after school and during the school holidays. She said that schools should take reasonable steps to accommodate requests in a way that works for them.
- 15.6. **The Home Secretary, Teresa May MP**, used her speech to announce that an Asylum Strategy will be published next year. She referenced measures such as a Community Sponsorship Scheme, a register of people and organisations that can provide houses for the settlement of refugees, and the use of the Aid Budget and other funds to take the pressure off public services.

Labour Party

- 15.7. **Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party**, used his conference speech to argue that local government cuts put social care at risk. Mr Corbyn called for an investment in council housing and affordable homes, stating that low interest rates offer an opportunity to invest in infrastructure. Mr Corbyn also said that funding for mental health should be increased, especially for children and young people, and that he wants to put an end mental health stigma and discrimination.

- 15.8. **Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Lucy Powell MP**, announced plans to make schools accountable to local government through Local Education Authorities.
- 15.9. **Jon Trickett MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**, called for a transformation of politics and 'democratic renewal', starting with local communities and locally elected councillors in order for more voices to be heard in politics. He said the roles of Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Shadow Minister for the Constitutional Convention have been joined to enable transformative political change to 'open up power and politics', and that the Convention will be a major plank of the Labour Party's activity in the coming years.
- 15.10. **Rt Hon John Healey MP, Shadow Housing Minister**, discussed issues affecting housing, identifying rapidly rising rents, homelessness, the high housing benefit bill and the need for more housebuilding. Mr Healey announced that Labour would oppose the extension of 'Right to Buy' to housing associations, which he argued would lead to fewer genuinely affordable homes, and would ultimately cost taxpayers more. Mr Healey announced that he has asked Peter Redfern, Taylor Wimpey Chief Executive, to lead an independent review to analyse the root causes of the decline of home ownership which will report in the summer.

Liberal Democrat Party

- 15.11. **Tim Farron MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party**, used the Conference to announce that his Party will give councils the freedom and power to borrow so they can start building housing, will build 10 new garden cities, will create a housing investment bank to bring cash and security to the sector. He also said the Liberal Democrats would oppose the Right-to-Buy of housing association homes. Mr Farron also used his conference speech to call on the Government to opt in to the EU plan to take a share of the refugees to be relocated throughout the continent, and to provide the necessary financial support so that local authorities can settle refugees.
- 15.12. **Norman Lamb MP**, spoke on NHS and adult social care at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference, calling for a non-partisan commission for health and social care, and a national conversation to confront the need for more resources and for change. Mr Lamb also argued for a dedicated NHS and care contribution, separated out from other taxation and clearly identified on pay-slips.

UKIP

- 15.13. **Nigel Farage, Leader of UKIP** used his address to UKIP Conference to argue that the numbers of economic migrants has put a strain on public services, highlighted a shortage of school places, increased demand for housing and further pressure on the NHS.

Green Party

15.14. **Natalie Bennett, Leader of the Green Party**, used her conference speech to argue that investment in public transport, through local and regional schemes would help to “rebalance” the economy, linked to local bus services under the control of local councils. Ms Bennett said that a secure, sustainable economic future is based in “strong local economies, with local needs met by local suppliers, with a rich ecology of farming, manufacturing and services supporting each other.”

16. The LGA produced a series of guides to the Party conferences which promoted our work with stakeholders. These are available to view on the LGA website:
<http://www.local.gov.uk/party-conferences>.

Next steps

17. Members are asked to note of the LGA’s Party conference engagement.

Financial Implications

18. The cost of party conferences is covered by existing communications and group office budgets.