

LGA Perceptions Survey 2015/2016

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report provide members of the LGA Executive with a summary of the findings from our annual perceptions survey of our membership.

A full detailed report will be available [here](#) shortly.

Recommendations

That the LGA Executive:

1. notes the results of the 2015/2016 perceptions survey; and
2. agrees to continue with an annual perceptions survey of councils.

Action

As directed by Members.

Contact officer: David Holdstock
Position: Director of Communications
Phone no: 020 7664 3056
E-mail: David.Holdstock@local.gov.uk

LGA Perceptions Survey 2015/2016

Introduction

1. This is the fourth consecutive year we have undertaken a perceptions survey of our membership. This comprehensive, cross-cutting research provides us with a benchmark to inform future work and gives us a good understanding of the current views of member authorities. In addition, it helps us to better understand their views on the benefits of membership, their priorities, sector-led improvement, how well informed they feel about our work and areas for improvement.
2. Following last year's report to Leadership Board, a number of actions were put in place as part of an agreed action plan. These included a further review of membership packs, regular briefings for Principal Advisors for use during visits to councils and work to update the website and e-bulletins. We have also made improvements in our digital communications, to include more use of tools such as film and infographics and the use of 'hubs' such as our Devo Hub have been very popular. In addition, put in place more detailed monitoring of use of our website and other digital media channels to help us better understand our key audiences and target our communications activity.
3. The Group Offices have continued to support our overall membership offer through their work with members and improvement teams have further developed our offer to include, as well as corporate support, bespoke support on issues such as finance, children's services and communications.
4. Our programme of visits to councils, at both senior political and managerial levels has also supported our work around awareness raising of the work we undertake with and on behalf of councils.

Summary

5. Overall, the results show that we have continued the trajectory of improvements made since 2012. Respondents remain satisfied with the work we undertake on their behalf, believe we are influential in shaping the agenda for local government and feel we are effective at representing the views of our members.
6. They also agree that we address the issues that are important to councils and that we are an effective advocate for the interests of local government.
7. As in previous years, there are some variations, depending on specific job roles. Council leaders and chief executives are more likely to 'know a great deal' about our work and front-line councillors are more likely to have 'the least knowledge of the LGA'. This impacts directly on views about our effectiveness – the more informed, the more likely a respondent is to be satisfied with the work we undertake on behalf of local government.

8. Of the services we provide those identified as most useful were our role in providing up-to-date information about local government, lobbying on behalf of local government, providing a single voice for local government and providing support for sector-led improvement.
9. Both councillors and officers continue to feel we keep them well informed. This year has seen a further increase in those who feel we keep them well informed (**up from 79 per cent in 2014/2015 to 83 per cent in 2015/2016**). As set out previously, there are strong links between feeling informed and overall satisfaction.
10. The main method of communication from which respondents get their information continues to be First magazine; followed by media work, our website, conferences and events, and publications (such as '100 Days').
11. Nearly two-thirds (**62 per cent**) of people have heard of our *A Shared Commitment* campaign.
12. This year has seen another small increase in those who feel we offer value for money for the funding we receive (**56 per cent** which is significantly more than the 43 per cent in 2012). This is an area that councils themselves find challenging and it remains an area which requires more work to demonstrate our effectiveness to member councils.
13. At **81 per cent** there has also been an increase in those who think that the LGA understands what councils need to help them improve their services and organisational capacity.
14. We repeated the series of questions about the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and Local Partnerships. Around half of the respondents have heard of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (**52 per cent**) and Local Partnerships (**50 per cent**, although this is a decrease from 58 per cent in 2014). Of those who had used the services, **82 per cent** were satisfied with CfPS (significantly greater than 77 per cent in 2014) and **79 per cent** with Local Partnerships (significantly greater than 71 per cent in 2014).

Table 1: Key findings

Question	2012	2013	2014	2015	2014 to 2015 % point change
I would speak positively about the LGA	63%	73%	72%	74%	+2%
Satisfied with the work of the LGA on behalf of the local government sector	62%	70%	75%	76%	+1%
The LGA demonstrates value for money for the funding it receives	43%	53%	53%	56%	+3%
The LGA is influential in shaping the agenda for local government	62%	68%	72%	71%	-1%

Question	2012	2013	2014	2015	2014 to 2015 % point change
The LGA effectively represents the views of its members to central government	69%	77%	78%	77%	-1%
The LGA stands up for and defends the reputation of local government	N/A	85%	88%	86%	-2%
The LGA addresses the issues that are important to councils,	79%	83%	84%	86%	+2%
The LGA is transparent and accountable to its members	58%	66%	67%	69%	+2%
The LGA understands what councils need to help them improve their services and organisational capacity	68%	77%	78%	81%	+3%
How well informed do you feel about the work of the LGA	69%	77%	79%	83%	+4%

15. There continues to be a high level of satisfaction with the work we undertake on behalf of local government (**76 per cent**) and a high proportion of respondents (**74 per cent**) continue to say they would speak positively about the LGA.

16. In terms of advocacy for the sector, the majority of respondents (**85 per cent**) continue to believe we are an effective advocate for the sector; with those responding 'a great deal' significantly increasing from 23 per cent in 2014 to 28 per cent in 2015.

17. Respondents rated the following activities as '*very or fairly useful*':

- 17.1. Providing up-to-date information about local government (**93 per cent**) – a significant increase from 88 per cent in 2014
- 17.2. Lobbying on behalf of local government (**90 per cent**)
- 17.3. Providing a single voice for local government (**88 per cent**)
- 17.4. Providing support for sector led improvement (**85 per cent**)
- 17.5. Providing conferences and events (**85 per cent**) – a significant increase from 77 per cent in 2014

18. There are some regional variations in responses to individual questions but across the full range of questions the findings are fairly consistent in all parts of the country. By role, officers are most likely to find LGA activities to be useful.

Sector-led improvement

19. There continues to be some variations in awareness of our sector-led improvement offer, which is understandable when thinking about the commissioners of this work. However, our focus on promotion of our sector-led improvement offer has had some impact. Whilst on average **51 per cent** have heard about sector-led improvement (a significant increase from 42 per cent last year), **ninety three per cent** of **chief executives** have heard a lot/moderate amount about it (significantly higher than 83 per cent in 2014).

20. The number of officers who have 'heard a lot' about sector-led improvement stands at **49 per cent**. However, front-line councillors are still the most likely group to know 'little or nothing' about sector-led improvement (**66 per cent**).
21. Nearly three quarters (**71 per cent**) of respondents agree that sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context. This is significantly greater than last year (63 per cent).
22. **Officers and councillors in executive positions** are more likely than front-line councillors to agree that sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context (**84 per cent** and 68 per cent compared to 64 per cent). However, agreement amongst front-line councillors has significantly increased since 2014 (**54 per cent**).
23. Of the support and resources offered by the LGA for sector-led improvement that the respondents had heard of, the following were rated as '*very or fairly useful*':
 - 23.1. Access to good practice to help authorities learn from others (**94 per cent**)
 - 23.2. Peer challenges to provide an external view on performance (**93 per cent**)
 - 23.3. Supporting, coaching and mentoring for members and officers by their peers (**91 per cent**)

Objectives

24. This research was undertaken to:
 - 24.1. Quantify member authorities' understanding of the LGA and what the LGA currently offers. This includes levels and channels of awareness, understanding of functions perceived to be part of the LGA's remit, and how effective the LGA is seen at fulfilling these functions.
 - 24.2. Investigate what our members want from the LGA and how they want to engage. This aspect provides feedback on a strategic level in terms of the organisation's role and responsibilities but also on a tactical level in terms of formats and channels preferred.
 - 24.3. Assess levels of awareness/views of sector-led improvement within local government, and views on support offered by the LGA. The research identifies areas where we might enhance its support in this area, by investigating the membership's preferences and experiences of support, the impact that such support and the resources we provide to support sector-led improvement.
 - 24.4. Compare with the results of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 surveys.

Methodology

25. Telephone Interviews were undertaken with a sample of 835 representatives from councils across all regions. These included:

- 25.1. Council Leaders
- 25.2. Portfolio Holders
- 25.3. Chairs of Scrutiny
- 25.4. Front-line councillors
- 25.5. Chief Executives
- 25.6. Directors

26. This has given a strong, representative sample allowing detailed analysis by role and region. The sample size has a maximum standard error of +/-3.4% at the 95% level of confidence, giving these findings a high level of accuracy. Interviews took no longer than 22 minutes and explored:

- 26.1. Our offer and current provision;
- 26.2. Our current role and priorities and how these can be developed;
- 26.3. Effectiveness of our communications and preferred methods of engagement; and
- 26.4. Sector-led improvement within local government, our support offered to members and how it can be developed/improved.

Response rates

27. Each year, it has been increasingly more difficult to engage members and officers to take part in the survey; lack of time available is the most frequent response. Although an annual survey allows us to take prompt action should the results show any significant issues for our member councils, Leadership Board may wish to consider moving to a biennial survey.

28. Another alternative is to conduct an annual survey using a mixed mode of research. This would supplement our existing phone polling with on-line. This has the advantage of increasing participation and improving the quality of responses, by engaging with respondents through devices that are most convenient to them.

29. As changes in methodology can result in skewed results, any impacts on results would be mitigated through a weighting process. However, if results differ significantly from previous years, there is a slight risk that this would be as a result of the change in methodology and therefore would not allow direct comparison.

Table 2 - Respondents, by region, role and amalgamated role type

Amalgamated role	Officers			Councillors			Regional Total
	Chief Executives	Directors	Leaders	Chairs of Scrutiny	Portfolio Holders	Front-line Councillors	
East	12	25	10	8	14	27	96 (11%)
East Midlands	7	14	9	9	16	45	100 (12%)
London	5	24	3	14	7	39	92 (11%)
North East	2	5	1	7	5	6	26 (3%)
North West	5	23	4	15	15	67	129 (15%)
South East	11	35	12	13	23	86	180 (22%)
South West	11	8	8	11	15	20	73 (9%)
West Midlands	11	32	4	14	11	20	92 (11%)
Yorkshire and the Humber	6	9	3	10	8	11	47 (6%)
Role Total:	70 (8%)	175 (21%)	54 (6%)	101 (12%)	114 (14%)	321 (38%)	835 (100%)
Amalgamated role Total:	245 (29%)		269 (32%)			321 (38%)	835 (100%)

Detailed analysis of findings

30. The following gives a more detailed analysis of the key indicators in our business plan. It shows where there are significant differences between different roles and regions and highlighting significant changes from previous years.

Satisfaction with the work of the LGA on behalf of local government

- 30.1. **Seventy six per cent** are satisfied with our work on behalf of local government. This represents a significant increase on 2013 (70 per cent) and is in line with 2014 (75 per cent).
- 30.2. **Officers** and **frontbench councillors** continue to be satisfied with the work of the LGA (**81 per cent** of officers and **74 per cent** of frontbench councillors). There has also been a significant increase in the satisfaction amongst **backbench councillors**, increasing from 67 per cent in 2014 to **73 per cent** in 2015. By role:

- 83 per cent of portfolio holders
- 82 per cent of directors
- 80 per cent of chief executives
- 80 per cent of leaders
- 60 per cent of chairs of scrutiny

- 30.3. **Satisfaction is highest in the South West (88 per cent) and the West Midlands (85 per cent)** and lowest within Yorkshire & Humber (68 per cent).

LGA capabilities

- 30.4. The majority of respondents agree that we stand up for and defend the reputation of local government (**86 per cent**) and that we address the issues that are important to councils (**86 per cent**) - both in line with 2014.
- 30.5. More than three-quarters agree that 'we understand what councils need to help them improve their services and organisational capacity' (**81 per cent**); effectively represents the views of our members to central government (**77 per cent**); and help to set and drive improvement in local government (**79 per cent**). Results are in line with 2014 findings.
- 30.6. **Fifty six per cent agree that we demonstrate value for money**, which is an increase on 2013 and 2014. This is broken down by role as:

72 per cent of leaders (significant increase from 67 per cent)
70 per cent of chief executives
59 per cent of portfolio holders (significant increase from 46 per cent)
57 per cent of directors (significant increase from 51 per cent),
54 per cent of chairs of scrutiny
50 per cent of backbench councillors

Extent to which the LGA been an effective advocate for the interests of local government

- 30.7. The majority of respondents (**85 per cent**) believe that the LGA has been an effective advocate for the interests of the local government sector.
- 30.8. Respondents from the **East Midlands** and the **South West** are significantly more likely to believe 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' that the LGA has been an effective advocate for the interests of the local government sector (both at **90 per cent**). Respondents in the **North East** and **London** are least likely to believe the LGA has been an effective advocate for the interests of the local government sector 'a great deal' or a 'fair amount' (**77 per cent in the North East and 79 per cent in London** compared with a sample average of 85 per cent).
- 30.9. **Council leaders** are particularly likely to be positive about the LGA as an effective advocate for local government (**91 per cent**). **Backbench councillors** are the least likely to be positive about the LGA as an effective advocate (**24 per cent** specifying 'a great deal' compared with 28 per cent of the sample overall), although this position has improved since 2014 (17 per cent).

Communications

- 30.10. The majority of respondents (**83 per cent**) believe we keep them well informed, this has increased since 2014 (79 per cent), 29 per cent believe they are 'very well informed'.
- 30.11. **Leaders** and **chief executives** are particularly likely to feel 'very well informed' (**43 per cent** and **39 per cent** respectively).
- 30.12. By region, respondents in the **South West** are most likely to feel 'very and fairly well informed' (**92 per cent**).
- 30.13. As with previous years, respondents are most likely to find out about the work of the LGA through 'First' magazine (**76 per cent**). However, media work/press releases; LGA website; and events and conferences are also key channels, mentioned by at least 60 per cent of respondents.

Detailed analysis of sector led improvement findings

31. The following gives a more detailed analysis of the sector-led improvement questions.

Question	2012	2013	2014	2015
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the LGA?				
The LGA helps to set and drive improvement in the local government sector.	71%	76%	77%	79%
I am going to read out a list of activities conducted by the LGA. For each, I would like you to tell me whether they are useful or not to your council or local government as a whole. ¹				
Providing support and challenge for councils to improve ²	89%	91%	90%	84%
Providing support for sector led improvement (for example, peer challenges and mentoring, support for leadership, workforce management and productivity) ³	83%	86%	82%	85%
Supporting and promoting councils who are trying to transform services to better support their communities. ⁴	90%	92%	91%	81%
Providing a range of online tools to help sector led improvement (like LG Inform and access to Knowledge Hub (delivered by Capacity Grid)) ⁵	69%	75%	71%	71%
How much, if anything, have you heard about this sector-led improvement approach?	41%	44%	42%	51%
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: - The approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context. ⁶	58%	62%	63%	71%

¹ Previously: I am going to read out a list of activities conducted by the LGA. For each, I would like you to tell me whether they are important or not to your authority/council or the sector

² Previously: Providing support and challenge for 'local government self-improvement' (2012) and Providing support and challenge for 'councils to improve (2013 and 2014)

³ Previously: Providing support for sector led improvement (for example, peer challenge and mentoring, support for leadership, workforce management and productivity)

⁴ Previously: Supporting and promoting councils who are trying to transform services to better support their communities.

⁵ Previously: Providing a range of online tools to help 'self-improvement, like Knowledge Hub and LG Inform' (2012 and 2013) and 'sector led improvement, like LG Inform and access to Knowledge Hub (delivered by Capacity Grid)' (2014)

⁶ Previously: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: The approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context.

Helps set and drive improvement

- 31.1. Opinion that the LGA 'helps set and drive improvement in the local government sector' has improved a little this year compared to previous years (**79 per cent** in 2015, compared with 76 per cent and 77 per cent in 2013 and 2014). At **82 per cent** and **83 per cent** respectively **officers** and **councillors in executive positions** are significantly more likely to agree than **front-line councillors (74 per cent)**.

Knowledge of sector led improvement

- 31.2. There has been a significant increase in how much respondents have heard about sector-led improvement, increasing from 42 per cent in 2014 to **51 per cent** in 2015. This is highest amongst **chief executives (93 per cent)** and **directors (70 per cent)** and lowest amongst **front-line councillors (33 per cent)**.

The right approach

- 31.3. When asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context, **71 per cent** agreed, whilst question wording changed slightly it is comparable with 2014. There has been a significant increase since 2014 (63 per cent). Whilst agreement was lower amongst backbench councillors (64 per cent) there was a significant increase compared to 2014 (54 per cent).

Conclusions

32. These results demonstrate that we have broadly maintained the significant improvements in satisfaction ratings achieved since 2013.
33. Satisfaction remains high in most key areas with people more likely to speak positively about the LGA and our work. Awareness of the LGA and the work we undertake remains high.
34. The issue of more fully engaging front-line councillors' remains a challenge for us. However, the overall proportion of those who 'know just a little' about the LGA and those who 'know very little' about our work continues to decrease. This is positive.
35. There was a further increase this year in those who feel we demonstrate value for money for the funding we receive. However, this is an area we will need to continue to focus on.
36. Our members continue to feel well informed and this has a significant impact on overall satisfaction results.
37. As in previous years, the services and work delivered by the LGA that are perceived to be of the most importance to respondents tend to be related to the

national role the LGA has in lobbying on behalf of local government and in providing a 'national voice'.

38. There remains strong support for sector-led improvement as the main way for the sector to drive improvement. Our work over the last year to promote our sector-led offer has seen increases in awareness and overall satisfaction.

Next steps

39. The findings from this year's perceptions survey will be shared with the LGA Executive and staff.
40. Work is currently underway to refresh our three-year communications plan and strategy. In addition, a paper setting out our priority campaigns, based on issues highlighted by councils, is also going to Leadership Board for approval. Our sector-led improvement awareness campaign will continue to be developed so we highlight the growing improvement offer we are able to provide to councils.
41. The work to engage front-line councillors will continue to be developed to ensure all members, whether they play a leading role in their council or undertake a ward function understand the key activities and benefits of being a member of the LGA.
42. The annual review of our membership packs will continue so that we highlight the benefits of membership of the organisation.