



Report to: Cabinet

Subject: Feedback from the Local Government Association Annual Conference

Date: 4th September 2008

Author: Deputy Chief Executive on behalf of the Deputy Leader of the Council

The LGA Annual Conference took place in Bournemouth over 1-3 July 2008. The theme of the conference was “Putting People First” and approximately 1200 delegates, 130 speakers and 250 exhibitors were in attendance.

The conference comprised a mixture of key note speeches and question and answer sessions; themed workshops and political group meetings.

The conference programme covered a wide range of current and emerging priorities including:-

- Reducing carbon emissions and improving energy efficiency.
- Providing a sufficient supply of affordable housing.
- Enhancing the reputation of local government and demonstrating that Councils provide value for money.
- Ensuring that people can have more influence over their lives through strengthening local democracy.

All of the main political parties were represented and a summary of their key messages is set out below:-

Hazel Blears, Communities Secretary

- Confirmed that the “Engagement White Paper” would be published week commencing 14th July 2008.
- Confirmed that local authorities would be given a new duty to promote local democracy and encouraged Councils to run high profile campaigns to encourage first time voters.
- Commitment to allocate funding to train Council staff in the basics of local democracy.
- Expressed a commitment to devolve more powers to local authorities, but with an expectation that local authorities would in turn devolve power to local communities.

David Cameron, Conservative Leader

- Emphasised the key role of local authorities in helping to “mend Britain’s broken society”.
- Gave a commitment to relieving local Councils of excessive bureaucracy, audit regulation and inspection.

- Expressed support for establishing more elected Mayors in major cities.

Nick Clegg, Liberal Democrat Leader

- Called for a restructuring of local government finance, specifically to enable Councils to raise more income from local people and businesses.
- Proposed giving local Councils greater powers to hold the police to account for their performance.
- Emphasised the need to devote greater powers to local authorities and local communities.

One of the main benefits of the conference is the opportunity to learn from others and to hear about new initiatives. Three examples were of particular interest and these are set out below:-

1. The 'My Council' Campaign

This campaign was launched at the conference and encourages local authorities to spread the word about the vast range of services they provide, through a series of attention grabbing posters. The images, including a drunk woman vomiting in the street and a dog fouling in a park have already generated media interest and are designed to get people to appreciate their local Councils. An initial approach has been made to the LGA to obtain more information prior to confirming Gedling's interest in becoming involved.

2. Hertfordshire's Transformation Programme

Hertfordshire have moved from a network of 51 sites to 3 main bases. In doing so, they have transformed their working practices to (a) deliver efficiencies; (b) improve the working environment for staff and (c) improve customer satisfaction.

While there are significant differences between the scale and circumstances of Hertfordshire and Gedling, there are lessons to be learned, for example, in relation to home and mobile working. Contact has already been made with colleagues at Hertfordshire and it is proposed to draw on their experience where it is relevant to Gedling.

3. 'Make a Difference' initiative

This initiative was also launched at the conference to support Councils to promote public engagement within local communities. It follows on from the Councillors Commission report in December which recommended that Councils do more to promote interest in the work of Councillors and provide information to encourage people to put themselves forward for election as Councillors.

The Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) has produced a number of materials to support Councils to participate in this initiative and again, it is considered something that would be beneficial for Gedling to follow up.