



**Report to:** Cabinet

**Subject:** Feedback from the Local Government Association Conference 2009

**Date:** 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2009

**Author:** Deputy Leader

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To feedback to Cabinet on the key issues raised at this year's LGA Conference.

**2. BACKGROUND**

The 2009 LGA Conference took place in Harrogate, 30 June – 2 July.

Approximately 2000 delegates and exhibitors were present from across local government, central government, the private sector and voluntary and community organisations.

The theme of the conference was 'big issues, local solutions', with a particular focus on value for money, the recession and the reputation of the public sector in general and local government in particular.

**3. FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP**

Not surprisingly, this year's Conference was dominated by presentations and discussions about the recession. The Chairman of the Local Government Association told delegates that the public sector would have to shrink by up to 20% over the next five years as the country paid back its national debt. While no firm figures were offered about how this would impact on local government, it is clear that there will be a substantial reduction in funding. Given the stated political commitments to protect

**education and health services from funding cuts, it is not unreasonable to assume that core District Council services will be affected disproportionately.**

**SMT have already started to think about the implications of what are expected to be extremely tough financial settlements in future years. In addition, a recent Audit Commission report has highlighted that the legacy of the recession for local councils will not only be financial pressures but also the social consequences associated with increasing unemployment. For this reason, it is suggested that the Policy Review Scrutiny Committee be invited to consider what is currently being done to support individuals and businesses through and beyond the recession and to identify what other measures could be taken.**

**“Mending the broken trust in politics” was highlighted as a key issue and was especially topical given the focus at the time of the conference on MP’s expenses. The most recent MORI survey of local councils showed a national decline in public satisfaction and, while some the contributory factors were outside of Councils’ control, all Councils were encouraged to “prove our value, to prove how great we are at what we do and to make sure the public know it”. Linked to this, a number of councils shared what they were doing to “liven up” local government and modernise its image. Gedling was singled out for specific praise for the way that it kept residents informed (one of the measures of the MORI survey) which is an indication of the effectiveness of the Contacts publication.**

**The Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron, took the opportunity to re-state commitments to abolish the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Standards Board and to rationalise the number of “quangos”, including Regional Development Agencies. He also pledged to expand the number of City Mayors and to devolve more power to local councils.**

#### **4. DISTRICT COUNCIL’S NETWORK**

**At the Conference, it was agreed to establish a new District Council’s Network to represent the interests of District Councils at a national level and to encourage sharing of expertise and best practice.**

**Approximately 80 District Councils signed up to the network at the Conference, including the annual subscription fee of £950.**

**Gedling has already played an important role in the establishment of the network through Helen Barrington, our Senior Solicitor.**

**Helen drafted the constitution and her work has been recognised and appreciated by District Councils across the country. There is sufficient money available within the Council's subscriptions budget to join the District Council's Network and it is proposed that we should subscribe for an initial one year period.**

**5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**It is recommended that Cabinet:-**

- (i) notes the report;**
- (ii) invites the Policy Review Scrutiny Committee to consider the current and future impact of the recession on Gedling;**
- (iii) agrees an initial one year subscription to the District Councils Network at a cost of £950, and authorises the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader, to determine whether to subscribe in future years based on the benefits of being a member.**