



Event: LGA Annual Conference, Bournemouth
Date: 6 - 8 July 2010

Introduction

Cllr David Harrison from Hampshire Fire & Rescue Authority has provided his personal perspective on the recent LGA Conference held in Bournemouth. SEFIP is very grateful to him for this note.

"The majority of Councillors, whether parish, district or county members, rarely (if ever), attend national conferences. I'm one that does. I find I get a lot from them. I'm always rooting around for ideas and wanting to know what the future holds. One of the best ways to achieve this, is to attend the Local Government Conference. This year, I was able to ride my motorcycle down to Bournemouth for the 3 day event.

Conferences always tend to have a mood, sometimes exaggerated by the press and other media. The conference this year was a mixture of excitement and grim foreboding, partly reflecting your political allegiances.

As a Liberal Democrat, I fall mainly into the category of excitement. The General Election result threw up a very unexpected outcome. Even now, I find it hard to believe that my party is in coalition with the Conservatives. Having always been in opposition, we now are part of the government, with Cabinet Ministers charged with running the country at a time of deep financial and economic problems.

Eric Pickles MP, the new Minister for Communities and Local Government attended. He spelt out that there would be far less money for local government in future years. Savings would have to be made and tough decisions lie ahead about which services should be cut. If there is a positive, he is letting local councils decide where the axe will fall by decentralising power whilst cutting red-tape wherever he can.

Karren Brady, (formerly of Birmingham City FC and now Vice Chairman of West Ham United and star of "The Apprentice") gave an inspiring speech about leadership, emphasising how important it is to get your staff believing in what you are doing and that they understand the bigger picture.

I enjoyed a session called "Hidden Talent – Getting the most out of our young people". Contributors were Martina Milburn, Chief Executive of The Prince's Trust and Debbie Scott OBE, Chief Executive of Tomorrow's People. Both organisations have enjoyed stunning success over many years, helping young people, giving them opportunities that have turned their lives around.

Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change addressed Conference on

how the new coalition government is already working towards an ever greener agenda, dealing with issues such as energy security, reducing carbon emissions and helping people live in a more sustainable way.

An old political rival of mine, John Denham MP, now Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government, spoke on the final day of conference. Unsurprisingly, he contended that a lot of cuts in government spending were too deep and too quick and reminded us that Labour are still running lots of councils, now faced with the task of implementing the cuts.

Conference was wrapped up by a speech from Michael Gove MP, the new Education Minister. This was a particular surprise because he is extremely busy, having announced only this week that some 700 "Building Schools for the Future" projects will not go ahead and then having to apologise profusely for getting the list wrong. There were a lot of Councillors in the audience who were very angry that their local council had spent thousands of pounds, in some cases millions of pounds, preparing for projects only to see it dropped at the last hurdle.

His tone was altogether different from Mr Pickles at the start of the conference, apologetic, acknowledging what an important role we have, nice words about his coalition partners, the Lib Dems. He did get polite applause from the, mostly conservative, audience. However, I was amused to watch him almost run out of the building hotly pursued by a scrum of journalists and television cameramen, all wanting a further quote from him.

Perhaps the greatest value of conference is that you get to mix with other councillors from around the country. It's very interesting to swap experiences and to hear about some of the heroic successes and spectacular calamities that have happened elsewhere. I have a few things in mind that I want to see implemented in my area as a result."

For more info contact

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