

COSLA Annual Conference 2021

Summary and Recommendations

Leaders will be aware that the COSLA Annual Conference normally takes place in and around this time of year. This Report provides Leaders with an update on arrangements under consideration for the Annual Conference 2020/2021.

Political soundings suggests little appetite for a full conference at this time. Further research outlined difficulties with COSLA's sponsorship and commercial partners due to budget and staff resource constraints. Charging our Membership at a time when they are coping with the effects and challenges that COVID has presented, could also have a real detrimental impact on the reputation of COSLA as a Membership organisation.

An Annual Conference in its traditional sense or indeed any form is therefore not considered to be the way forward for March 2021.

Leaders are invited to:

- i) Agree that we miss a year and bring the COSLA Annual Conference and the Excellence Awards back in October/November 2021; and
- ii) Agree that COSLA officers further explore options for an online mini-conference with speakers centred around the framework of the Convention in March 2021.

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October 2020

COSLA Annual Conference 2021

Background and Purpose

Leaders are aware that the COSLA Annual Conference normally takes place in October each year. Given the complexities surrounding the COVID-19 Pandemic, COSLA initially explored options with venues for an event taking place possibly in March 2021, this would be a Conference only event and agreed that the timing was not right to host an Excellence Awards Ceremony within this timeframe.

Key Points for Consideration

Whilst venues did have availability in and around March 2021, given the uncertainty around the restrictions that may be in place, venues also provided a clause within their Contracts that covers any cancellation or postponement of the event due to 'pandemic' related reasons.

COSLA has actively been in contact with our sponsorship and commercial partners, who would normally support the Conference. Whilst there is no commercial appetite, at this time, for a Conference in its traditional format due to budget and staff resource constraints, they would feel in a better position to be involved again if we were to stage the event in October/November 2021.

The Membership of COSLA has also previously voiced that an important aspect of the Conference is the face to face interaction with other Elected Members and Officers from across all Local Authorities.

To compound matters, charging our Membership at a time when they are coping with the effects and challenges that COVID has presented could have a real detrimental impact on the reputation of COSLA as a Membership organisation that reflects the views of its Members.

With the above points made, an Annual Conference in its traditional sense or indeed any form is not considered to be the way forward for March 2021 due to budget and staff resource constraints.

Whilst COSLA has been successful in moving meetings from Verity House online to Microsoft Teams, the ability to run a full event has not yet been tested to the extent that Leaders and Board Meetings have. Furthermore, Live Meetings (a webinar type feature in Microsoft Teams which allows the focus on the speaker as well as the ability to monitor and publish Q&As) in this setting or context have not been assessed for potential usage as of yet.

COSLA's Chief Executive has however been in dialogue with Political Group Leaders and there is an emerging view that we explore the possibilities of hosting an online mini conference including speakers and workshops centred around the framework of the Convention in March 2021.

Next Steps

Leaders are asked to give a political steer on whether we simply miss a year and bring the COSLA Annual Conference and the Excellence Awards back in October/November 2021 and further explore options of an online mini conference, including speakers and workshops worked around the framework of the Convention in March 2021.

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