

Sold Out?

Update on ticketing for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

February 2012



This year London will stage the world's greatest sporting spectacle, when we welcome the Olympic and Paralympic Games to the city. Hosting the Games represents a once-in-a-lifetime event, and many thousands of Londoners are eager to take this opportunity to attend the Games as spectators. The ticketing arrangements for the Games are, therefore, the focus of considerable public interest.

Overseen by the Olympic Board, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) is the body responsible for staging the Games and selling tickets. In doing so, LOCOG must seek to satisfy public expectations for an affordable, accessible Games while raising £2 billion pounds, its budget for staging the event.

The Economy, Culture and Sport Committee has been scrutinising this topic for over two years, consulting Londoners on their priorities and making recommendations to LOCOG about ticketing. This update report sets out our conclusion that, with the Games just a few months away, LOCOG has not yet done enough to ensure the transparency of the ticketing process.

LOCOG's lack of openness raises the risk that public trust in the process will diminish, fuelling a sense among Londoners that the opportunity to attend an Olympic and Paralympic Games in their own city was never truly within their reach. We have therefore set out a number of sensible steps that should be taken by LOCOG and the Olympic Board to introduce greater transparency.

The Committee's work on Games ticketing

The Committee has produced two previous reports on the ticketing arrangements for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. In March 2010 we published a submission to LOCOG's consultation ahead of its forthcoming ticketing strategy.¹ Our submission was based on discussions with experts in the field and the views of Londoners as expressed on a public discussion forum we established. We recommended that LOCOG's strategy had to address a number of issues including the need for affordable pricing, access for priority groups and transparency about ticket availability.

In March 2011 we published a report examining whether LOCOG's approach was addressing these issues, following further discussion with LOCOG's Director of Ticketing and the Mayor's Office.² We recommended that LOCOG publish information on the prices of tickets available for each event, and the number of tickets allocated to sponsors and public bodies.

The Committee recognises that LOCOG has taken many positive steps to ensure the Games are accessible and inclusive for Londoners. We have welcomed, in particular:

- LOCOG's decision to distribute tickets via ballot in the earlier rounds of sales;
- The commitment to make a large number of tickets available at affordable prices;

¹ *Ticketing for the Olympic and Paralympic Games 2012*, Economic Development, Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee, March 2010. Available at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/publications/2012-games/2012-ticketing>

² *Just the ticket*, Economic Development, Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee, March 2011. Available at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/publication/just-ticket>

- The Pay Your Age scheme, providing discounted tickets for young people and older people;
- The Ticketcare scheme, allowing disabled spectators to be accompanied by a carer for no extra charge; and
- The decision not to charge a booking fee on top of the cost of tickets bought through the official vendor Ticketmaster.

However, some of the problems highlighted by the Committee have not been fully addressed. In the past year we have continued to follow up these issues by pressing LOCOG for information about ticket sales and the ticketing process. This report presents a summary of our ongoing concerns and the responses we have received from LOCOG.

The price of tickets

In late 2010 LOCOG indicated that out of 8.8 million Olympic tickets, 2.5 million would cost £20 or less (28 per cent), 3.5 million would cost £30 or less (40 per cent) and 5.8 million would cost £50 or less (66 per cent). Overall, these commitments suggested that attending the Games would be affordable for most Londoners.

Tickets for each individual event are divided into different price points, which vary between events. For the preliminary stages of athletics competitions, for instance, there are five price points from £20 to £150, while for the later stages there are five price points ranging from £50 to £725.

LOCOG told the Committee it intended to make the distribution of tickets roughly equal between the different price points for each event. However, we have received no confirmation that this principle has been implemented.

In our 2011 report we asked LOCOG to publish the number of tickets available at each price point for each event. LOCOG declined to provide this information on the grounds that the precise seating configurations for the venues had not been finalised, and therefore the information could become out-of-date if additional tickets become available.³

Taking into account the possible release of additional tickets, we asked LOCOG to confirm how many tickets had been sold so far at each price point at each event. Again, LOCOG has declined to provide this information. In a response to the Committee in January 2012, LOCOG cited both data protection rules and the need to maintain commercial confidentiality as reasons why the information would not be published until after the Games.⁴

³ Letter from Paul Deighton, Chief Executive, LOCOG, October 2011. Available at: http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Locog%20response%20to%20Just%20the%20Ticket_0.pdf

⁴ Letter from Paul Deighton, Chief Executive, LOCOG, January 2012. Available at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Doocey%20Dee%2020120117.PDF>

We do not accept these arguments. The Committee is not seeking information on individuals and therefore we cannot see how data protection rules prevent publication of the information requested. Furthermore, LOCOG is the monopoly provider of Games tickets. It is not in competition with other ticket providers and we are not seeking any details of its commercial relationship with Ticketmaster. We fail to see therefore how commercial confidentiality can reasonably be used as a justification for non-publication of information which is clearly in the public interest.

Lessons could have been learned from previous Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Sydney Organising Committee (SOCOG) was similarly criticised ahead of the 2000 Games for, among other things, a lack of transparency about its ticketing policy. After considerable pressure, SOCOG did release a session-by-session breakdown of ticket availability and demand for every price category of every sport. The information was released after the public ballot but before the Games. A subsequent inquiry concluded that *"SOCOG should have recognised [earlier] the importance Australians place on transparent and fair processes and released details of the number of tickets available to the public for each session prior to the public ballot"*.⁵ The inquiry report also noted, of the ballot: *"with no information about the number of seats available to the general public ... there was no way for individuals to assess their chances of obtaining a desired ticket"*.

It is disappointing to see the mistakes made before previous Games, in particular Sydney 2000, being repeated by LOCOG with the same consequences for UK residents trying to buy tickets for London 2012. Furthermore, there is now even less transparency than in Sydney: despite having now sold the vast majority of tickets for the Olympic Games, LOCOG still refuses to publish a breakdown of the number of tickets available, or sold, to the public for each session. This is information SOCOG made available before the 2000 Games.

The Committee considers that LOCOG's refusal to publish information on the breakdown of ticket prices for different events risks jeopardising public confidence in the ticketing arrangements. Furthermore, the justifications for secrecy cited by LOCOG simply do not apply: we can see no reasons why data protection rules or commercial confidentiality should prevent publication of the number of tickets sold at each price point.

We understand that LOCOG needs to raise a significant sum of money from ticket sales. However, there are legitimate concerns that the most popular events may have a disproportionate number of the highly-priced tickets, and so far LOCOG has done very little to dispel these fears.

We have already asked LOCOG to reconsider its decision to withhold this information, without success. It remains our strongly held view that the distribution of tickets by

⁵ *Report in Inquiry into Olympic ticketing*, Parliament of New South Wales Legislative Council,, 2 December 1999. Available at: [http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/committee.nsf/0/16d20b8c0ffb6a05ca256cf400097271/\\$FILE/olytick.PDF](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/committee.nsf/0/16d20b8c0ffb6a05ca256cf400097271/$FILE/olytick.PDF)

price and event information that is in the public interest. The Committee has therefore written to all members of the Olympic Board⁶ and the Olympics Minister with a copy of this report to request the release of this information.

Ticketcare

In early 2011 LOCOG announced it would be introducing the Ticketcare scheme, aimed at disabled people who are not wheelchair users.⁷ The Committee welcomed the scheme as an important step in making the Games more inclusive for all Londoners.

Under the scheme, LOCOG has committed to making a minimum of ten free tickets available for carers at each event session, if they are accompanying a spectator with high-dependency care needs. This minimum equates to up to 6,500 free tickets in total.

In October 2011, LOCOG provided some information about the overall number of tickets made available through the Ticketcare scheme: in total, 300 free tickets had been allocated to carers.⁸ It is not known how many people have applied to the scheme, or which events the tickets are for.

The number of tickets allocated through the Ticketcare scheme is much lower than the number LOCOG indicated would be available. LOCOG should publish information on how many people have applied for a companion ticket under the scheme, and the latest figure for the number of tickets allocated. LOCOG should also confirm the breakdown of the allocated tickets between different events.

Sponsors' tickets

The Committee's 2011 report recommended that information be published about the number of tickets purchased by public bodies and official Games sponsors.

In response we received information from the Mayor, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and almost all London boroughs, setting out the number of tickets the organisation was purchasing.⁹ We considered the allocation of tickets to public bodies to be excessive, in particular the 9,000 tickets allocated to central government.¹⁰ We will be following up with those bodies that have purchased tickets to confirm their final allocation, the cost incurred, and what events the tickets are for.

⁶ The membership of the Olympic Board is: Boris Johnson, Mayor of London (Co-Chair); Jeremy Hunt MP Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Co-Chair); Lord Moynihan, British Olympic Association; and Lord Coe, LOCOG. Board observers are Tessa Jowell MP, Sir Menzies Campbell MP and Don Foster MP.

⁷ This scheme is separate to the arrangements for wheelchair users: spectators who purchase one of 9,000 wheelchair spaces automatically have a companion seat allocated to them free of charge.

⁸ Paul Deighton, Chief Executive, LOCOG, Transcript of the London Assembly plenary, 19 October 2011, page 9. Available at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=5655&T=9>

⁹ See *Public Bodies' Access to Olympic Tickets*, Economy Culture and Sport Committee, May 2011. Available at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2012%20ticket%20responses.pdf>

¹⁰ 2,065 of tickets purchased by central government will be paid for by towns and cities outside London that are hosting Games events.

In total, LOCOG made eight per cent of the 8.8 million Olympic tickets (700,000 tickets) available to sponsors. LOCOG declined to provide any further information to the Committee about tickets bought by Games sponsors, citing the commercial confidentiality of agreements between LOCOG and the sponsors. LOCOG also said that many sponsors will make their tickets available to the public through promotional activity.

The Committee does not consider the number of tickets reserved for sponsors is excessive, considering their financial contribution to the Games. However, it is important Londoners are able to see what tickets sponsors have access to. LOCOG should publish the total number of tickets purchased by sponsors for each event; in providing this information there is no need to breach confidentiality by specifying which sponsor(s) bought the tickets.

To help Londoners understand how sponsors' tickets are being used, we also urge LOCOG to encourage all sponsors to specify how many of their tickets are being made available to the public through promotional activity.

Flaws in the ticket sale process

In January 2012, two significant problems in the sales process for Olympic and Paralympic tickets were identified. First, it was revealed that LOCOG had over-sold tickets for the Olympic synchronised swimming events; approximately 10,000 tickets were sold which were not available.¹¹ Around 3,000 customers who had purchased the tickets were contacted by LOCOG, and offered a chance to exchange their tickets for other events they had unsuccessfully applied for.

Secondly, the re-sale website established by LOCOG for customers to sell their unwanted tickets was suspended soon after its launch because of technical faults. Reported issues included tickets that had already been sold still being listed as available, and tickets listed as available disappearing when customers attempted to purchase them.¹² LOCOG subsequently changed the re-sale process, announcing that it would buy back unwanted tickets from customers directly, and sell them alongside any other remaining Games tickets in April.

LOCOG needs to reassure Londoners by accounting fully for these problems and setting out how they will be addressed. Specifically, LOCOG needs to explain:

- **The cause of the over-selling of synchronised swimming tickets;**
- **The steps LOCOG has taken to satisfy itself that the over-selling of synchronised swimming tickets was an isolated incident;**
- **The steps that have been taken to ensure LOCOG will not over-sell tickets for any other event;**

¹¹ *London 2012: Olympic synchronised swimming tickets oversold*, James Pearce, www.bbc.co.uk, 4 January 2012

¹² *London 2012: Olympic ticket resales website suspended*, www.bbc.co.uk, 6 January 2012

- **What testing was carried out of the ticket re-sale system, and why this did not identify the problems which occurred following its launch; and**
- **How faults in the re-sale system have been corrected, and what lessons have been learned for the remaining ticket sales.**

Conclusion

In determining the ticketing arrangements for the 2012 Games, difficult decisions need to be made. LOCOG must balance the need to raise revenue against the desire to make tickets as widely available as possible to the public. This is well understood by the Committee and we have welcomed many of the decisions made to date.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to judge whether LOCOG is continuing to make the right decisions because of the secrecy that surrounds the ticketing process. Similarly, disquiet about the ticketing process has been fuelled by the technical problems in the ticket sale system, which have not yet been fully explained.

In our view it is unacceptable that key information on the price of available tickets will be withheld until after the Games. We also need to know more about the tickets made available to sponsors and to disabled people. LOCOG has been able to withhold this information because of its status as a private company yet the sole reason for its existence is an event that is being staged as a result of a huge investment of public funds.

Overall, LOCOG's approach risks jeopardising the trust and support of Londoners. The Games' success depends on public support and we now call on the Olympic Board to help ensure that public confidence in the distribution of 2012 tickets is maintained.

The Committee has written to all members of the Olympic Board, as the public body that oversees LOCOG, and the Olympics Minister to ask that these issues are discussed at the earliest opportunity. We have asked that LOCOG provide the information to the Committee by 27 February 2012, in order that it can be published for discussion at the London Assembly meeting with LOCOG on 7 March 2012.

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