

Communications update

Purpose of report

For Leadership Board to consider.

Summary

The purpose of this report is to update members on progress with the recreation of our online presence via a new Group website. A small number of slides will be available at the meeting to demonstrate the look and feel of the new website. An update of annual conference is also given.

Recommendation

Members are invited to consider the report

Action

Any follow up as directed by members

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Communications update

Background

1. Annual conference

Preparations for the Group Annual conference in Birmingham from 28 – 30 June 2011 are well underway. Booking numbers are slightly down on last year's attendance, but not significantly so. We do now expect an increase in bookings following the local elections and as we promote marketing with an almost finalised programme. If the pattern this year follows previous patterns, we expect to see a significant number of bookings made this month. Sponsorship income has met target and we have negotiated reduced costs in the production of conference, which has enabled us to reduce our delegate fee to below £500. At the last Leadership board, members requested that we review marketing material to ensure it had cross party appeal. This has been done and the final version of the programme is nearing completion and will be available for circulation within the next week.

Members also requested that in our conference we focus in attracting members of the next generation to attend, to enable us to gain the feedback on relevance, look and feel. We have arranged for a number of free passes for next generation alumni members. We will arrange a reception and focus group with them to gain feedback and help learn about future conference programme content.

2. Media and Public Affairs

The Media and Public Affairs teams have both been very busy. During the pre-election period, we used media time to place positive stories about Local Government that will enhance reputation. As one example, we focussed on the efforts local authorities have made to help people celebrate the Royal Wedding. This generated significant media reporting at home and abroad (including the Wall Street Journal) and helped counter negative health and safety stories that made an attempt to appear. The Public Affairs team are focussed on key bills including Police and Crime Commissioners and the Health and Social Care bills. The Localism Bill is due to report on 16/17 May and will then begin its work in the House of Lords. We have met with Vice Presidents to discuss how we achieve changes to the parts of the bill which conflict with Localism, and have arranged briefings for all peers in the Lords next week. We are also working with a range of different organisations in areas where we can mutually suggest amendments that could be supported, primarily with our Vice Presidents and their networks.

Item 2

3. Group Website

As members will be aware, current arrangements for managing the Group's web presence are fragmented. Each organisation within the Group has its own website(s), processes and arrangements with third parties. We undertook an audit which identified over 130 websites within the group with over 150,000 pages. Part of the task of getting to one website has been to undertake that audit, remedy and review the problems.

The aim of a new Group website is to provide a cohesive, joined up online view of our functions and offer. It will aim to refocus our relationship with the sector. The website is currently in design and due to launch at Annual Conference. Work has focussed on the purpose of the website and defining audiences. To this end, a number of user experience workshops have been held with staff, members and officers from councils. This has helped us to define audiences and messages and is driving the look and feel of the site, which will be less static and more interactive. We will be ready to launch the group website at our annual conference, on time and to budget. Slides will be presented to show the latest development work.

The Group website is being developed alongside work on the Knowledge Hub, so that both products work in harmony. We will begin a soft launch of the Knowledge Hub at the Annual Conference, with more focussed activity in September of this year.

Next steps

The finalised annual conference programme will be circulated next week. We need to have discussions with members to inform a communications strategy identifying our key campaigns, audiences and messages over the next three years. Whilst this will need to be agreed with new political leadership, it would be useful to discuss this before annual conference, and in particular to focus on the area of reputation, which was a previous campaign area but now needs some attention.

Financial Implications

Provision for commission of the group website and knowledge hub has been made within this year's budget. Significant one off costs occur with development this year that will not occur in future years.