

LG first

For discussion.

Summary

This paper provides information about first, the LGA's membership magazine – including its aims, costs, distribution, recent redesign, readership feedback, editorial board, and plans for the future.

Recommendation

That Members comment on the information provided in the report.

Action

Members/Officers to action in line with Leadership Board discussion.

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LG first

Introduction

This paper provides information about first, the LGA's membership magazine – including its aims, costs, distribution, recent redesign, readership feedback, editorial board, and plans for the future.

Background

first has been the LGA's flagship membership publication since its launch in October 1999. It is currently a 16-page colour magazine published fortnightly around 25 times a year, with publication breaks over August and at Christmas. It is distributed free to around 18,100 councillors and chief executives in LGA member councils in England and Wales. Councillors usually receive it at their home address on Saturdays.

Aims

Keeping councillors informed about the work of the LGA is first's primary function. It also aims to:

- support members in their roles as councillors
- provide opportunities for members to share good practice
- stimulate debate about the issues and challenges facing the sector
- highlight the benefits and value of LGA membership
- ensure editorial coverage reflects the LGA's priorities, as set out in its current business plan, and
- provide this information in a lively, chatty, helpful and accurate way, making good use of case studies.

Budget

In February 2011, the magazine went fortnightly and circulation was reduced from around 23,400 to 18,200 copies by excluding all officers except chief executives. This resulted in savings of 40 per cent on the production budget and a reduction in staff days from nine to four.

The magazine currently costs around 44p per copy per reader to produce (excluding staff costs). Each edition costs around £8,000 to print and distribute to 18,100 readers. The production budget for 2011-12 is £230,000, down from £410,000 in 2010-11.

Redesign

The content was revamped in response to a full readership survey in 2010, which showed that readers wanted more on national issues affecting local government and more news on legislation and regulation. For example, the redesigned magazine includes a new policy page summarising key developments across the range of council responsibilities, from adult social care to winter readiness; and a new 'Parliament' section. The latter was further expanded in response to a mini-survey carried out in the summer of 2011.

First Editorial Board

As part of the changes made to the magazine earlier this year, an editorial board was set up to provide strategic direction and guidance and ensure the views of elected members are fed into first's content. The board is made up of an elected member and group officer from each of the LGA's political groups and members of the LGA comms team. The board meets quarterly, and its second meeting takes place today (7 December).

Reader feedback

The most recent 'snapshot' readership survey (summer 2011) found that:

- 44 per cent read every issue, and a further 27 per cent are regular readers (reading two or three issues out of every four).
- Readers find first very or fairly useful for providing up-to-date coverage of news and issues (80 per cent); informing them about what the LGA does (73 per cent); providing an analysis of policy issues (66 per cent); and overall in their role as a councillor (62 per cent).
- Readers most like to read about national issues affecting local government (58 per cent); council good practice (44 per cent); and new laws and regulations (44 per cent).
- The letters (34 per cent) and by-elections sections (33 per cent) are also popular with readers.
- 58 per cent prefer to receive first as a printed magazine, with 23 per cent interested in emailed alternatives.
- 58 per cent of readers are aged 50-plus, and 70 per cent are male.
- In the last full survey, carried out in 2010, 80 per cent of readers surveyed said first maintains a political balance in its content.

firstonline

firstonline (www.local.gov.uk/first) historically has been used as a place to upload editorial copy. Plans are in hand to make the site more interactive, and to commission around a dozen regular bloggers for the sector. The First Editorial Board is today (7 December) considering a report on these proposals.