

Reputation of Local Government and the Board's priorities

Decisions

1. *To consider how to contribute to the LGA's work in enhancing the reputation of local government*

Actions Required

2. *As determined by the Board*

Action by: *LGA Secretariat*

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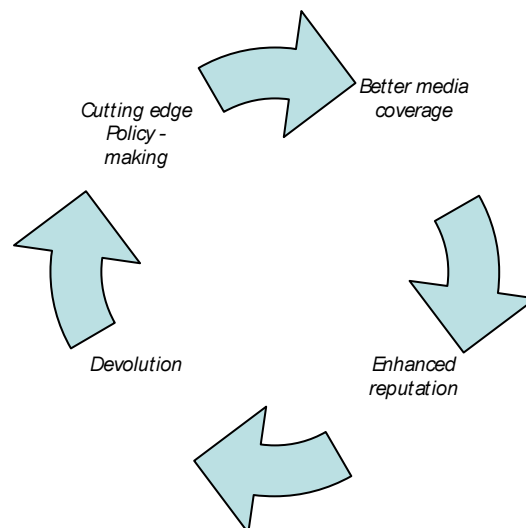
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Summary

1. *The LGA Media Strategy, which seeks to contribute to winning an historic deal on devolution by enhancing the reputation of local government, was adopted last month.*
2. *The Safer Communities Board is already contributing to the LGA's work of enhancing the reputation of local government. However, this approach could be developed further by ensuring that local government has its say more frequently on the big, public protection stories of the day and by ensuring a regular stream of news worthy reports on policy initiatives.*

Background

3. *The LGA Executive agreed the Media Strategy for the LGA Boards and officers on 20 April. Members then also provided guidance on the subject areas for the development of core messages about local authorities.*
4. *The strategy sets out how to use media work to support the LGA's work at heading local government's efforts to get central Government to devolve power to councils. The strategy does this by supporting the achievement of the LGA's priority interventions and enhancing the reputation of local government (itself a priority intervention).*



5. Key elements of the strategy are:

- *To use a small number of core messages about the vital role of local government*
- *To ensure that local government has its say on all the important stories of the day*
- *To generate more positive media stories*
- *To create closer links with communications officers in councils around the country*

6. The strategy was developed after consultation with LGA policy, research, public affairs and political officers, and local government communications experts.

7. While the core messages are still being developed, the LGA and some councils have already begun implementing the strategy. The LGA Media Office is:

- beating its target of issuing 15 quotes a month on behalf of LGA Members to national media in response to news events
- generating a measurable increase in positive stories about councils in national and regional media
- producing more media coverage of local government both locally and nationally after the launch of CommsNet, its system to create stronger links with councils communications officers

The work of the Board and media opportunities

8. Anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder, police and fire services, licensing and regulatory services, and the other areas of the Board's work are issues rich in potential for producing material capable of enhancing the reputation of local government.

9. Public protection is one of the most dominant issues covered by the media because it is a subject which the Government and the public care a great deal about. Local government has an important part to play in public protection. This means that the media are interested in what the LGA and councils have to say about public protection, and thus provides an opportunity for both to make sure that local government has its say on this issue when it is making news.

10. The media Hoover up human interest stories – fresh, focused takes on issues that are relevant to large numbers of people. For local government, this means:

- People whose lives have been improved because of a council
- Unsung heroes working for councils
- Councils pioneering solutions to the delivery of public services, illustrated by real life examples

11. Councils' public protection work is ripe with examples of the above, and, once turned into media stories, portrays local authorities in a favourable light. This provides a chance for the LGA, working in conjunction with councils and policy officers, to generate positive media coverage about local government.

Making the most of media opportunities

12. The Board has a media officer dedicated to working with its Members and policy officers. Nicholas Mann can provide advice and guidance to the Board and his fellow officers about how to exploit media opportunities. He is also developing specialist knowledge about the policy issues covered by the Board and building up contacts with journalists in the national media who cover public protection.

13. To make sure that local government has its say on the most important subjects of the day, the Media team is also developing senior LGA Members' profiles with national journalists as the authoritative spokespeople on specific subjects. This encourages journalists to seek out the

Chairman and Vice Chairman or Board chairs and officers holders to respond to stories. Where this approach is successful, the LGA Member must be able to respond quickly – within an hour – of a breaking news story and be able to issue a bold and pithy statement which can grab the attention of journalists inundated with many competing quotes.

14. The Board can contribute to generating positive media stories in two ways. The Chair and Vice Chair already work with policy officers and the dedicated media officer in preparing human interest stories drawn from councils for release to the media. This approach could be developed further by, for example, policy officers highlighting pioneering work by councils.

*15. The second way the Board can contribute to generating positive media stories is by producing news worthy reports, such as last November's *Beyond the Black Hole*. To do this, policy work must be:*

- Relevant: how many people care about the subject?*
- Focused: is there a clear, simple point, expressed in plain English*
- Fresh: is there a new angle?*

16. Publishing a report creates a news "event". Not only does this allow the LGA to showcase policy work and generate positive media coverage about local government, but it also helps better to achieve the LGA's lobbying goals by raising the profile of its work among significant stakeholders, particularly in Government. However, media cannot be a bolt on at the end of this process; the communications policy must be considered from the first moment of its conception.

17. The Board might wish to consider setting targets for this work. Because of the intense media interested in public protection, it would appear, from a media perspective, that realistic targets would be at least two quotes and two human interest stories a month. It may also be possible for the Board to include in its work programme for the future the production of, say, four reports (likely to be linked to work on priority pieces of work) a year which would be capable of generating national media coverage.

Implications for Wales

18. There are none.

Financial/Resource Implications

19. This workload can be managed within LGA resources through inputs from the LGA media team.

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