

Communications - Annual Report 2013/2014

Purpose of report

To outline communications activity against targets for the period April 2013 to March 2014.

Summary

Since December 2012, and following the publication of the organisation's communication plan and strategy agreed by Leadership Board, a monitoring and evaluation system has been developed to track and record media coverage. As well as volume of media activity, it also measures the tone of coverage (positive or negative) and balance of proactive and reactive coverage. In addition, we undertake a range of other measurements and surveys to track and compare effectiveness. This report provides a summary of communications activity for 2013/14.

The headline results are:

- National media coverage **increased by 144 per cent** year-on-year from 483 episodes in 2012/13 to 1182 in 2013/14.
- **79 per cent** of national coverage was positive.
- **67 per cent** of coverage was through pro-active media work.
- **1247 mentions** of the LGA in Parliament.
- **61 per cent** of MPs feel the LGA is very or somewhat effective – up from 45 per cent in the previous 12 months.
- Delivered 100 events (82 per cent free to attend and 30 per cent held in the regions) with an average satisfaction rating of **92 per cent**.
- **3,730,300** website page views (**644,492** unique users).

Recommendation

That the Leadership Board note the communications activity for 2013/2014.

Action

None.

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Communications annual report 2013/ 2014

Background

1. Effective communications contributes to enhancing our overall reputation with our member councils, Parliamentarians, the media and increasingly, residents. In April 2013, Leadership Board agreed our Communications Strategy for 2013/14-2014/15. It sets out our strategy and key targets, aimed at further raising our profile and reputation. It is based on delivering high quality, proactive communications, with a clear focus on the priority areas for our member councils.
2. Our aim is to position the Local Government association as the 'come to' organisation on all matters which affect local government. When it is necessary to proactively lead the agenda or react to events, stories or announcements, we will ensure the LGA provides a strong voice for local government, defending the sector's position and campaigning and lobbying on behalf of local government.

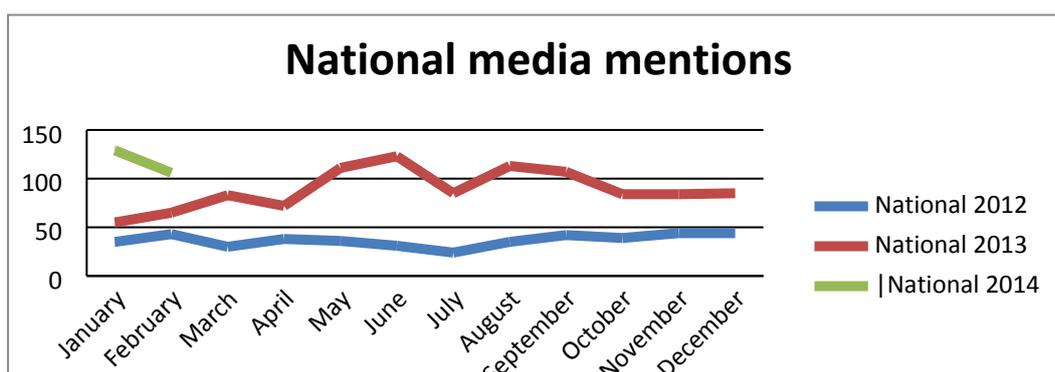
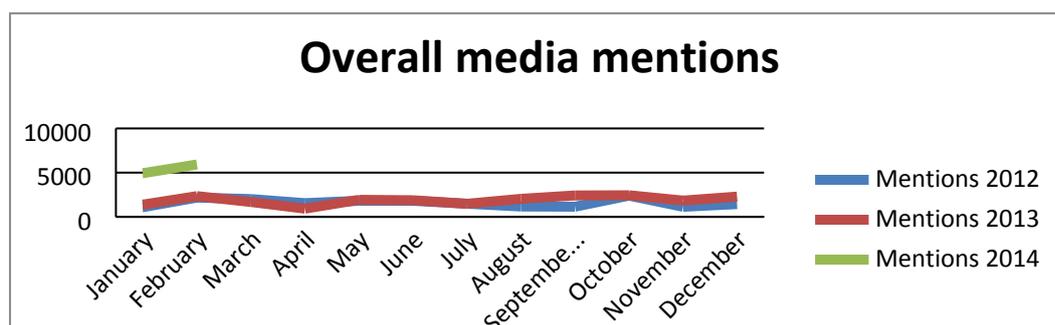
Summary of performance 2013/2014

Measure	2012-13	Target for 2013-14	Delivered
Key drivers of reputation			
1 Member authority satisfaction (with the LGA)	63%	65%	70%
2 Member authority advocacy rating (for LGA)	63%	64%	73%
3 Member authority informed (LGA)	69%	70%	77%
4 Value for money rating (of the LGA)	46%	48%	53%
Media relations			
5 Episodes of media coverage (all)	20,603	21,000	29,765
6 Episodes of media coverage (national)	483	550	1182
7 Proactive media coverage	58%	75%	67%
Campaigns and public affairs			
8 Effectiveness rating with MPs	46%	50%	61%
9 Effectiveness rating with Peers	60%	65%	60%
10 Awareness recall of campaigns in Parliament (Average)	34%	40%	38%

Media activity April 2013 to March 2014

3. The following sets out all media coverage and national media coverage for the last 12 months which saw an increase of 51 per cent in all coverage and 144 per cent in national media coverage.

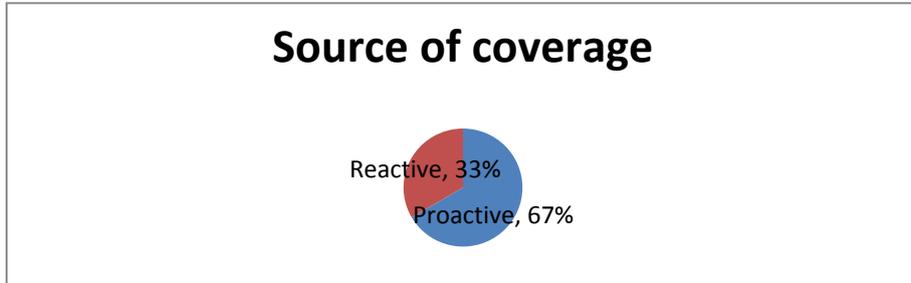
	2012/2013	2013/2014
Coverage (all)	19,669	29,765 (+51%)
National (Print, online, broadcast)	483	1182 (+144%)



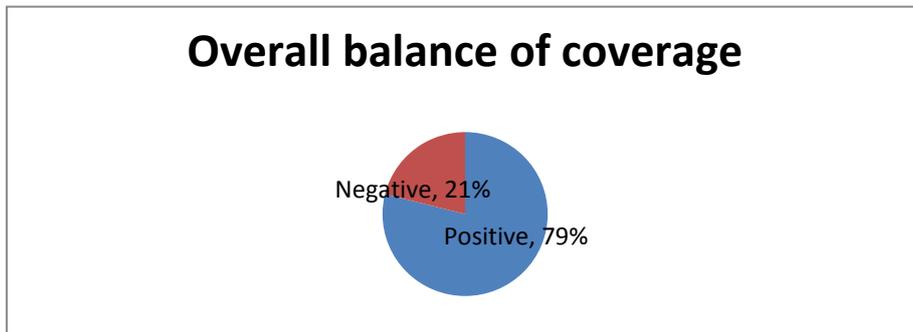
Proactive media relations

4. **67 per cent** of coverage was through pro-active work. This was driven by our sustained work around the 2013 Budget, Spending Round and Autumn Statement plus our Annual Conference and the launch of Rewiring Public Services which saw us generate a combined total of more than **150** positive, pro-active national media stories. The development of 'story grids' for key periods such as annual conference, summer holiday season and so on has helped to generate more positive media coverage and attracted positive comment, including a Guardian story specifically about the LGA's impressive summer media campaign in 2013.
5. Other successful proactive releases throughout the year included:
- 5.1. Councils warn of rising demand for school places (**35 episodes of coverage**)
 - 5.2. Fracking should not short-change residents (**32 episodes of coverage**)
 - 5.3. Licensing powers needed to end betting shop blight (**28 episodes of coverage**)
 - 5.4. Councils working tirelessly to protect communities from flooding (**27 episodes of coverage**)
 - 5.5. English councils short-changed by Barnett formula (**19 episodes of coverage**)

- 5.6. New permitted development rules could drain the life from our high streets (**22 episodes of coverage**)
- 5.7. Full impact of welfare reforms revealed (**11 episodes of coverage**)

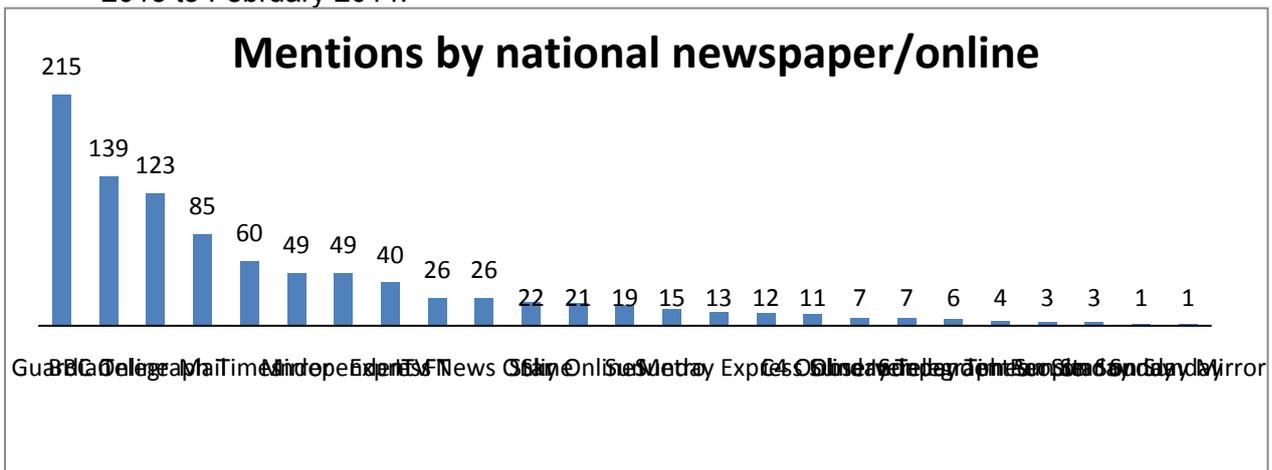


- 6. **79 per cent** of our coverage was positive. This was led by pro-active work which included highlighting how cuts are affecting councils’ ability to provide services, the adult social care funding crisis, school places shortfalls, licensing reforms, publicising how councils reacted to extreme weather, assessing the impact of welfare reforms and calling for urgent funding to help road repairs.
- 7. Our main reactive work continued to be around rebutting criticism from the Government over parking. This generated **83** pieces of negative coverage throughout the year on its own.

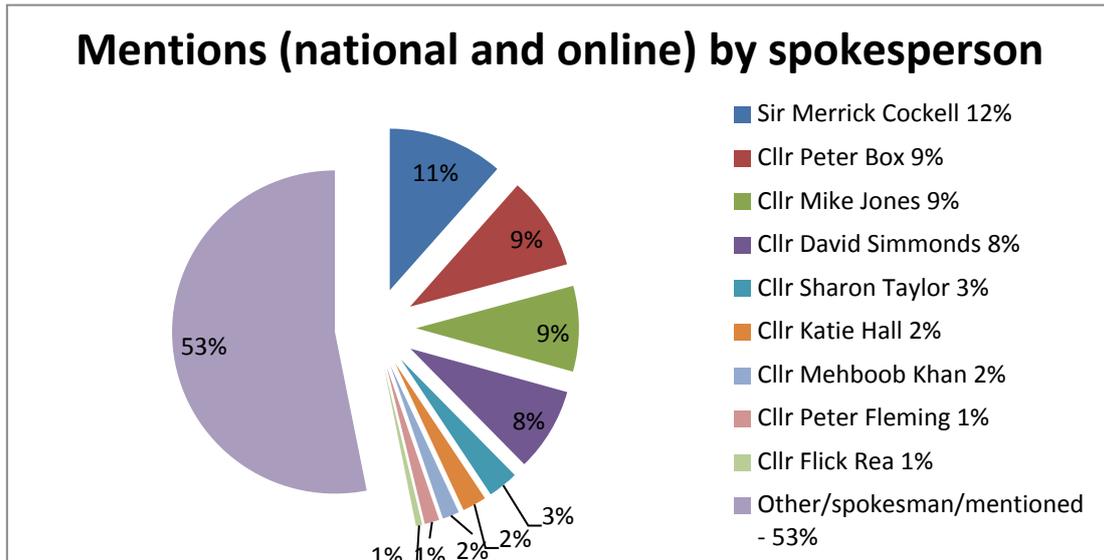


Print and online media

- 8. The following sets out national newspaper and online coverage for the period March 2013 to February 2014.

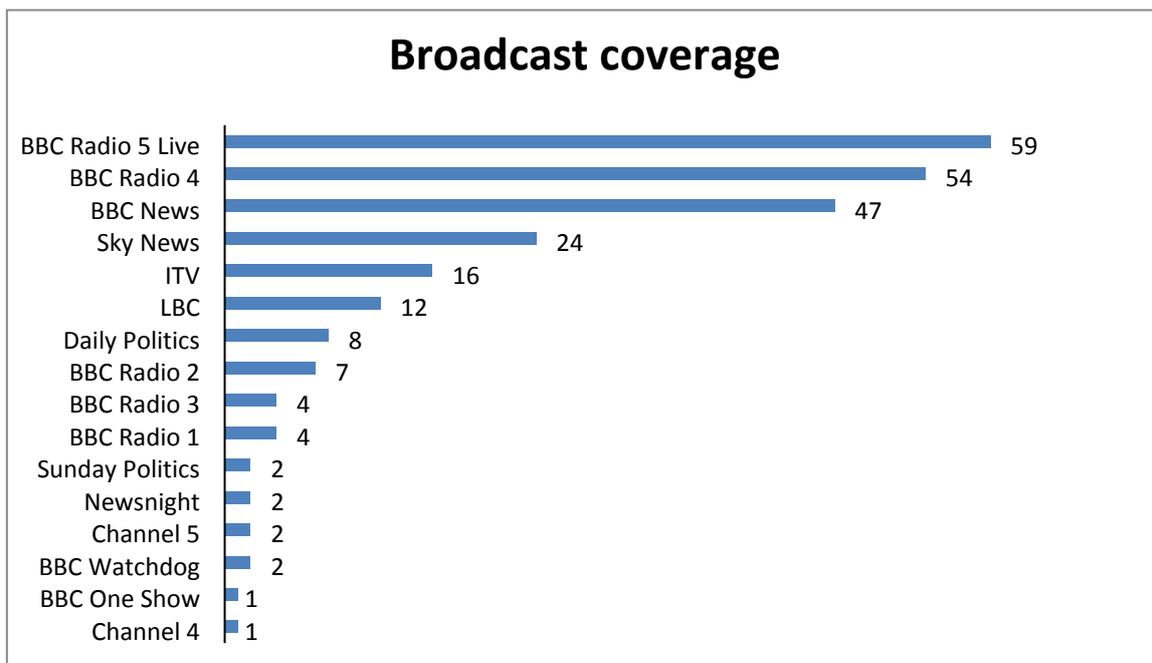


9. The LGA appeared in the **EVERY** national daily and weekend newspapers and online this year and featured in the **Guardian 215 times**. The coverage heavily reported our Annual Conference and debate around Rewiring Public Services. This was also reported widely by **BBC Online (139 times)**, The Times and **Telegraph (123 times)** which also covered our work on the spending round, school places and potholes.



Broadcast media

10. The following sets our broadcast coverage for 2013/2014.

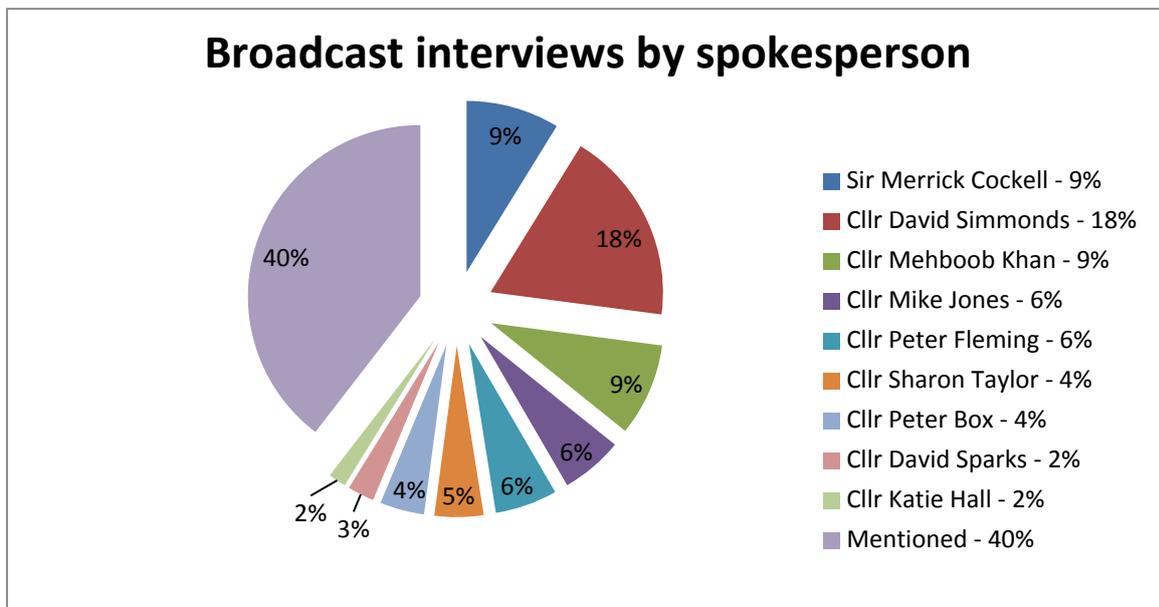


11. Our media work saw coverage **245** times on national TV and radio this year. January 2014 (**33 episodes**) and June 2013 (**31 episodes**) were our busiest broadcast months

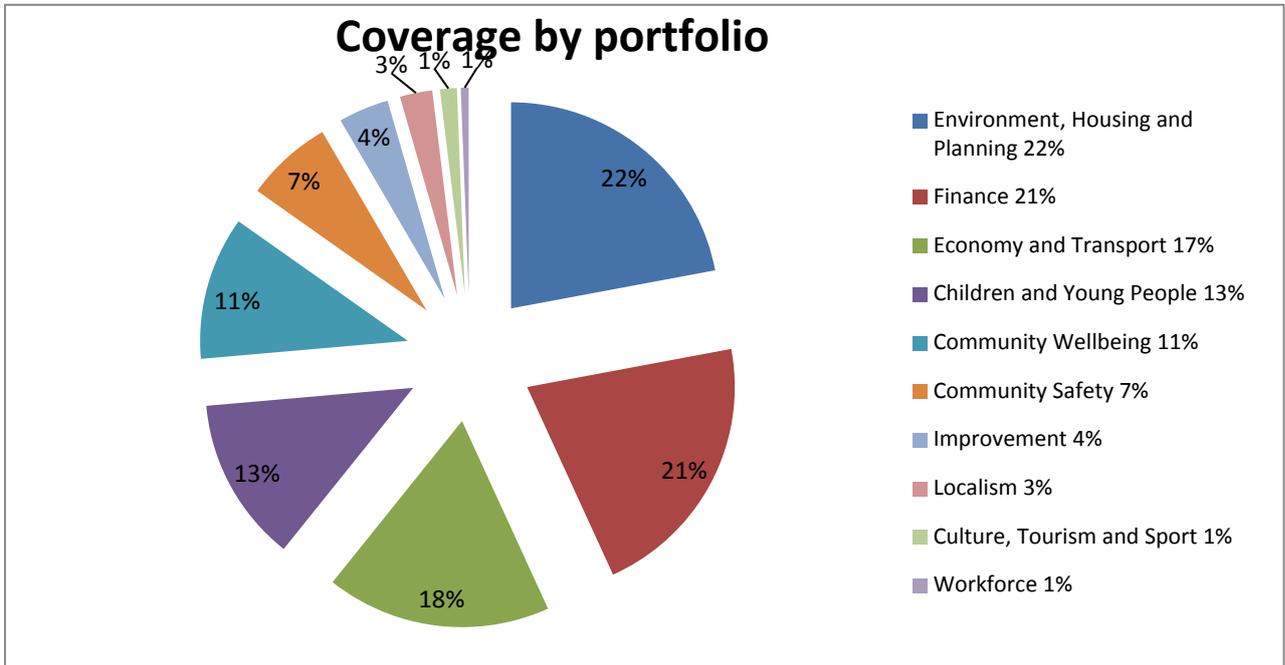
with stories over **12** different channels and programmes on issues including fracking, flooding and the June 2013 Spending Round.

12. Our Chairman, Sir Merrick Cockell appeared on **BBC News, BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC Radio 4, Sky News** and **Channel 4 News** to preview and react to the Spending Round. Cllr Mehboob Khan appeared on **BBC Daily Politics** and **ITV Daybreak** and Cllr David Sparks appeared on **BBC News** to discuss the issues on the same day.
13. Sir Merrick discussed the launch of Rewiring Public Services on **BBC News** and the **BBC Daily Politics** on July 2 and appeared **Radio 4's Today Programme, BBC News** and **Sky News** to discuss fracking on January 13 2014.
14. Cllr Sharon Taylor took part in interviews with **Sky News, BBC News** and **5 Live** to discuss local government tax collection rates in September 2013.
15. Cllr Peter Box appeared on **BBC Breakfast** to discuss our calls for the Government to provide councils with emergency money from the floods while Cllr Mike Jones discussed the issue on **BBC Radio 5 Live**.
16. Our spokespeople were regularly interviewed to defend the reputation of the sector on parking charges. Cllr Peter Fleming appeared on **ITV Daybreak** in December 2013 while Cllr David Simmonds was on **Sky News** and **BBC News** on the issue in the same month. Cllr Peter Box was on **BBC News** in October while Cllr David Sparks appeared on **BBC Radio 4's Today Programme, BBC News, Sky News** and **ITV News**.

Broadcast interviews by spokesperson

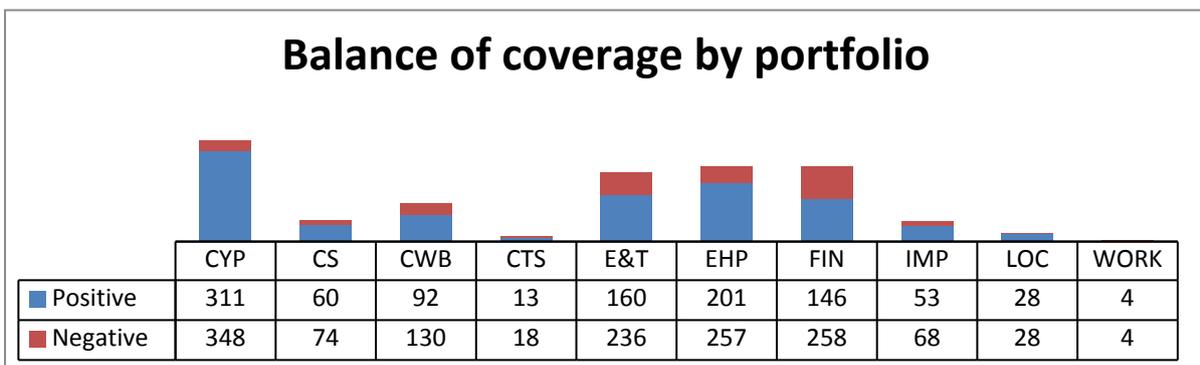


Coverage by portfolios



Balance of coverage by portfolio

17. The majority of our coverage this year was positive across all portfolios.
18. Negative coverage for **Children and Young People** included councils housing homeless teenagers in B&Bs, CSE cases and care leaver support. **Community Wellbeing** on 15 minute care visits and care home costs.
19. For **Economy and Transport** the main negative coverage was on parking. For **Environment, Housing and Planning** it was claims that councils were charging for sandbags during the flooding crisis, the use of Section 106 cash and the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payments. For **Community Safety** it was food testing and the collation of council databases.
20. Negative **Finance** coverage focused on the use of bailiffs, the cost of local government pensions, council tax arrears and **Workforce** was on council worker pay negotiations.

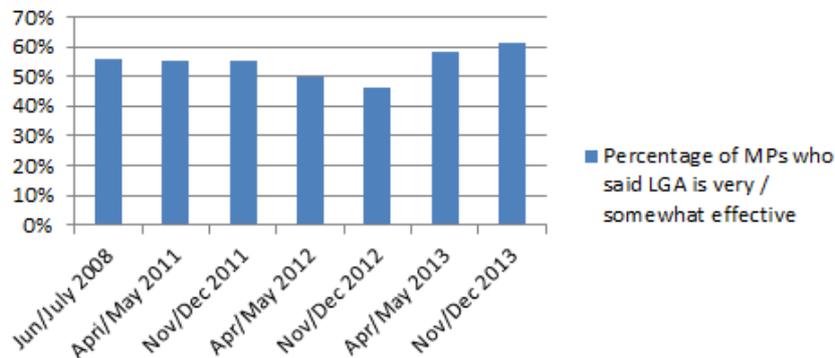


Campaigns and public affairs activity

21. Campaigning and public affairs activity in Westminster on behalf of local government is seen as a key priority for our member councils. It is important that the voice of local government is heard in Parliament, its reputation defended and legislation reflects the needs and concerns of our residents. In our perceptions survey, **77 per cent** of member councils believe we effectively represent their views to central government.
22. Each year, we commission a survey of Parliamentarians, undertaken on our behalf by nfpSynergy survey into MPs and Peers' attitudes to and awareness of the LGA.

Members of Parliament

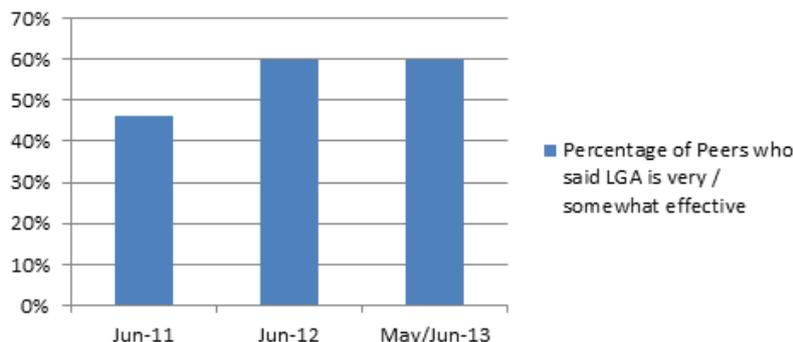
23. In the last year **61 per cent** of MPs believe the LGA is effective in Parliament, our highest ever recorded level of effectiveness with MPs. This compares favourably over the same period with other organisations lobbying on local government issues (LGIU 30 per cent) or other membership organisations that lobby (BMA 39 per cent).
24. One MP said "Work closely with and very impressed - specifically in terms of lobbying against cuts and innovative thinking in local government." This is fairly typical of the feedback received.



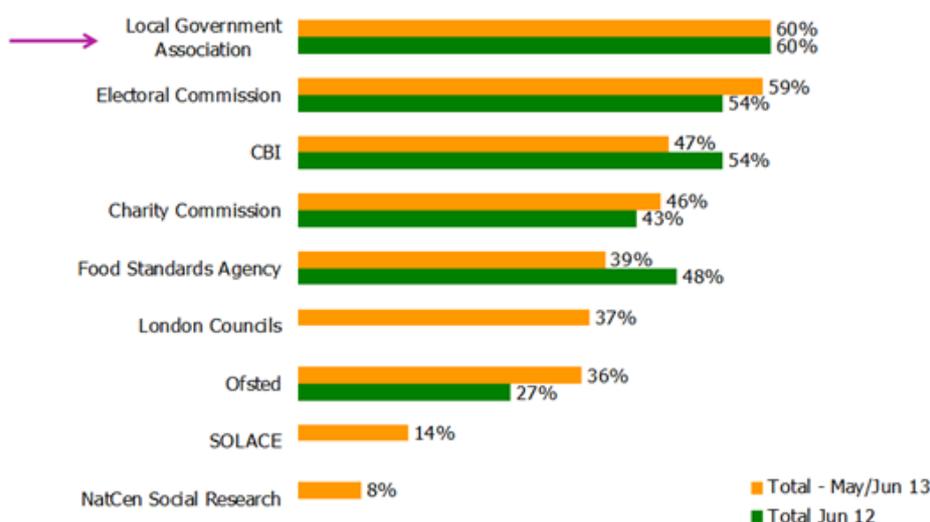
25. MPs were also asked specifically about our work on the Children and Families Bill and our Rewiring Services campaigns. These received **53 per cent** and **38 per cent** awareness ratings. This is significant considering the radical nature of our messages within the Rewiring campaign and the key messages of localism and decentralisation which it proposes.

Lords

26. The percentage of Peers who believe we are effective has remained unchanged at **60 per cent** for the second year running. Again this rating is similar when compared to other organisations over the same period (CBI 47 per cent) and can be in part attributed to the work undertaken to support of our Vice-Presidents.



27. Peers are also asked to indicate their impression of the LGA’s effectiveness over time in comparison with similar organisations. The following shows the percentage of those who said we are ‘effective’ compared to the ‘basket’ of similar organisations.



Parliamentary Mentions 2012-13/13-14

28. We continue to secure a high number of parliamentary mentions across debates, committees and other areas of the political process. Mentions, although only one measure of parliamentary effectiveness and activity, are a good indication of the involvement of the LGA, and by extension local government, in the debates and discussion that shape legislation and policy.

	2012/13	2013/14
Commons Chamber Debates, including Westminster Hall	191	180
Commons Committee debates	123	169
Commons Select Committee Reports	347	352
Commons Written Answers	102	74
Commons Written Questions tabled	14	10
Commons Oral Answers	18	16
Lords Debates	391	276

Lords Oral Answers	9	5
Lords Written Answers	14	17
Lords Written Questions tabled	9	10
Lords Committee Reports	51	5
Commons and Lords Joint Committee Reports	10	25
Committee Evidence	110	108
Total	1389	1247

29. In 2013/2014 we gave oral evidence on **30 occasions in Parliament** and issued **70 briefings** to parliamentary inquiries and debates in both Houses of Parliament. In addition, we briefed specifically on debates more than **30 times** and worked extensively with parliamentarians on the bills we prioritised for local government. We also met with a wide range of stakeholders and held events to promote our messages and pursue joint working. We secured **104 speaking platforms** for members at last autumn's party conferences.

Legislation

30. Over the last year we actively campaigned, with significant success, to influence and inform legislation. Below are details of the major pieces of legislation we have campaigned on over the last twelve months. Other examples include the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill; Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill; and Criminal Justice and Courts Bill.
31. **The Children and Families Act 2014** covers adoption and contact, family justice, children and young people, Special Educational Needs (SEN), childcare and child welfare. The focus of our campaigning was on the clauses in the Bill relating to adoption and SEN. The adoption clauses gave the Secretary of State the power to remove all local authorities from adoption recruitment and assessment. As a result of our work, we were successful at Lords Report Stage in December when the Government curtailed the power, accepting an amendment to the clause which requires an active debate and vote in both Houses before its use. This was in addition to an earlier concession delaying its implementation until 2015. We also campaigned for changes to the SEN clauses and as a result, the Government made a number of amendments.
32. **The Pensions Bill**, which is completing its parliamentary stages, introduces a single-tier state pension system from April 2016 and as it stands, places a significant financial burden on local authorities through the ending of contracting out for public service pension schemes, including the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). During the Bill's passage through Parliament an amendment to the Bill was tabled on our behalf to 'recycle' an equivalent amount to the increase in employer National Insurance contributions back into the LGPS. As a result of our work, DCLG agreed to work with the LGA on how money lost might be recycled back into the LGPS for the benefit of all scheme employers.
33. **The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014** has three components which establishes new arrangements for the auditing of local public bodies (the Act abolishes the Audit Commission), provides the Secretary of State with further legal powers to enforce compliance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority

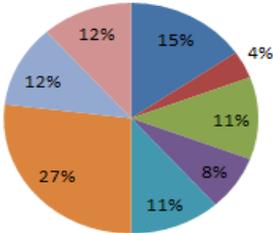
Publicity and extends the referendum provisions introduced in the Localism Act to include levying bodies when setting the limit by which council tax can be raised before a council needs to hold a referendum. Our lobbying secured an amendment to the Act that creates the flexibility for councils to procure their audit nationally should they wish to do so. Independent modelling shows that central procurement and appointment would save the public purse more than £200 million over a five year period when compared against local appointment.

34. **The Care Bill** is currently awaiting Royal Assent and will consolidate existing adult social care law, and modernise and simplify the current complex legal system. We worked with our network of supporters in Parliament and in partnership with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and the Care Support Alliance to highlight local government's concern that inadequate funding for the reforms, and for the system itself, will jeopardise the Bill's good intentions. We led amendments that sought to provide further reassurances that the new care system will be adequately funded and create a national body for running the system of deferred payment agreements as a way of helping councils manage potential financial and reputational risks. Our work on funding, which achieved cross-party support, has secured a firm commitment from central government that the new system will be adequately funded.
35. **The Deregulation Bill** seeks to make provision for the reduction of burdens resulting from legislation for businesses, other organisations and individuals; make provision for the repeal of legislation which no longer has practical use; and make provision about the exercise of regulatory functions. We are pursuing amendments which would remove the housing borrowing cap, localise retention of Right to Buy receipts, and localise the setting of Right to Buy discounts. We are also using the Bill to push for a government-led review of all licensing legislation and regulation. In the House of Commons we have engaged with all political benches and gave oral and written evidence to the House of Commons Bill Committee.
36. **The Consumer Rights Bill** aims to clarify and simplify consumer rights while making sure consumers are better informed and better protected. We provided substantial written and oral evidence during the pre-legislative stage, particularly focused on proposals within the draft Bill which would have restricted the ability of trading standards officers to undertake unannounced inspections where they have reasonable grounds to do so, for example because of a known risk relating to a business or type of activity. Following our work with the Trading Standards Institute, The Government amended the proposals.

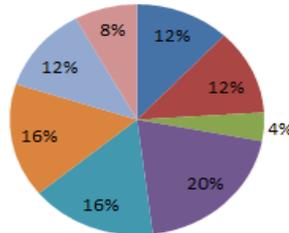
Select Committees, All Party Parliamentary Groups and All Party Commissions

37. In addition to providing written evidence to Select Committee inquiries, in the last year, members and/or officers gave evidence on 25 occasions. Members also gave evidence on two occasions to All Party Parliamentary Groups and once to an All-party Commission. The breakdown by policy area is detailed below.

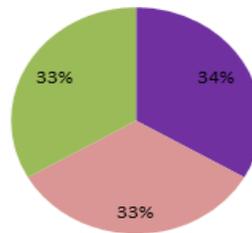
Parliamentary debates (Total 26)



Select Committees (Total 25)



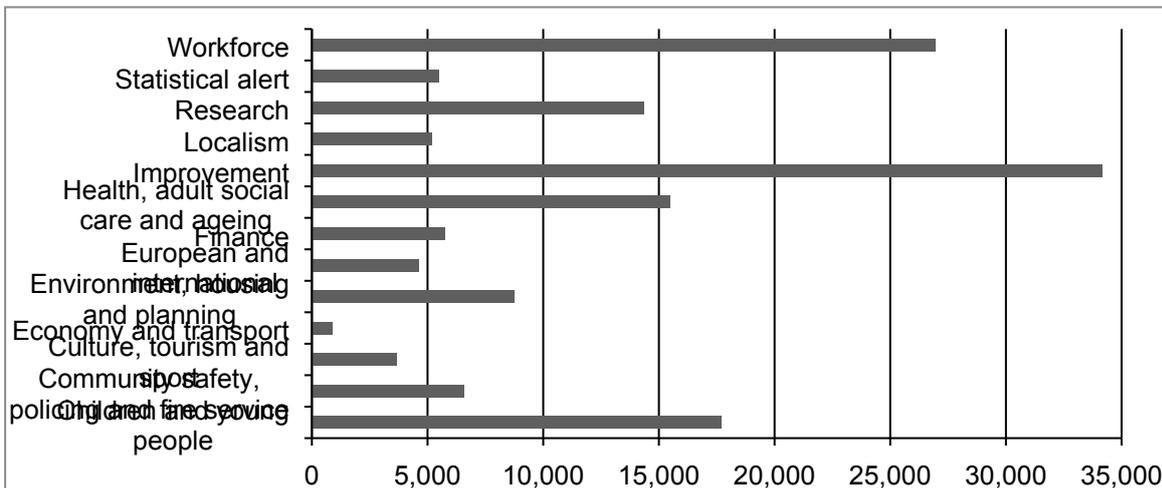
All Party Parliamentary Groups / Commissions



- Children and Young People
- Community Safety
- Culture, Tourism and Sport
- Economy and Transport
- Environment, Planning and Housing
- Finance
- Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care
- Localism

External communications

38. To support our media and Parliamentary activity, we have a range of other mechanisms to engage with our key stakeholders. Our bulletins are one of the main ways we engage with our member councils and in particular, backbench councillors. The following sets out the current subscription levels:



39. By analysing the most effective ways and times in which to send bulletins out, the 'open rates' have increased. Changing the day and time of the Chairman's bulletin to 07.30 on Saturday morning has resulted in an increase in open rates of **7 per cent**. Circulating the Workforce bulletin at the same time each month has resulted in an increase of open rates of **13 per cent**.

Digital communications

40. Digital communications are becoming increasingly popular both with our members but also key audiences such as journalists.
41. In the last year, more there were **3,730,300** website page views by more than **644,492** unique users. During the floods, our website resource was a key tool for councils to get the latest information and access to information about support and help.
42. This year, we added all council leaders and chief executives to our daily news headlines, and CommsNet, our weekly bulletin to council communications teams continues to be popular, providing us with a wealth of proactive material.

Events

43. Our events and conferences remain an important part of our membership offer and increasingly form part of our overall proactive communications as we use them to launch research, best practice and to gain coverage for keynote speeches.
44. In 2013/2014 we delivered 100 events. A total of 9,089 delegates attended our events (an increase of 555 on the previous year), 76 per cent (6,908) of these were from our member councils. Eighty two per cent of our events were free to attend and we held a third in the regions.
45. Our overall delegate satisfaction figures were **92 per cent**.

Improvement

46. Over the last year, the communications team has provided a range of support to more than 30 member councils. This has included help and support on single issues such as child sexual exploitation through to full communications peer reviews and recruitment of senior communications staff. This is an area of work which is increasing and is valued by member councils.

Conclusion

47. Having seen improvements in our communications activity over the last 12 months, particularly the balance of proactive -v- reactive, we will focus on the key areas that are important to our member councils and the priorities contained in our business plan for 2014/15.