**Communications Annual Report: April 2014 to March 2015**

**Purpose of report**

For information and discussion.

**Summary**

This report outlines communications activity against targets for the period April 2014 to March 2015.

Since December 2012, and following the publication of the organisation’s communications plan and strategy, a monitoring and evaluation system has been developed to allow tracking and recording of media coverage. As well as volume of media activity, it also allows the tone of coverage (positive or negative) and ratio of proactive and reactive coverage to be measured. The last 12 months has seen a continuation of the increase in national media coverage and volume of positive stories for local government. In addition, we are better able to measure our parliamentary and digital activities to show improvements in both areas.

The main results for the past 12 months are:

* National media mentions up **15 per cent** year-on-year from **1,244** in the previous 12 months to **1,439** during this current period.
* **84 per cent** of our national coverage was positive (79 per cent in 2013/14).
* **79 per cent** of coverage was through pro-active media work (67 per cent in 2013/14).
* More than **4.5 million** website page views by more than **790,779** unique users
* **1,429** mentions of the LGA in Parliament (up from 1,247 in 2013/14).
* Delivered **95 events** (39 of which were delivered in the regions, 33 per cent were commercial, with an average satisfaction rating of 90.5 per cent).

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| **Recommendation**That the Leadership Board is asked to note the communications activity for the period April 2014 to March 2015.**Action**As directed by Members. |

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**Communications Annual Report: April 2014 to March 2015**

**Background**

1. Our Communications Strategy and plan, approved by Leadership Board aims to position the LGA as the ‘come to’ organisation on all matters which affect local government. When it is necessary to react to events, stories or announcements, we ensure the LGA provides a strong voice for local government, defending the sector’s position. Our strategy sets out our key targets, which include a target to deliver high quality communications activity which is 75 per cent proactive, with a clear focus on national media.
2. The LGA continues to represent local government strongly in Parliament, ensuring that our members’ voices are heard in debates, committees and during the passage of legislation.  In 2014/15 the LGA was quoted 1429 times in Parliament or seven times each day Parliament was sitting.  In the 37 weeks Parliament sat during the 2014/15 parliamentary session, we prepared 60 formal written briefings for MPs and Peers which were used in debates.
3. Our campaigns and digital offer continue to enhance our relationship with the sector, the media, partners and think-tanks. In 2014/15 we launched a number of key campaigns that helped set the agenda for local government and wider public services. Our ‘100 days of the next government’ helped influence those writing manifestos whilst ‘Our Day’ engaged the public in the day-today work of councils, with 16,564 tweets using the #ourday hashtag to a potential 367 million users.

**Media activity April 2014 to March 2015**

1. The following sets out all media coverage, including national media coverage, for the period April 2014 to March 2015. In-line with our strategy, although there was a small decrease in overall coverage, national media coverage increased by 15 per cent.
2. The last 12 months has seen national media coverage increase by **15 per cent**.

**Proactive media relations**

1. **79 per cent** of coverage in the past 12 months was through pro-active work on our key priorities – Funding, devolution, social care and health, housing, children and sector-led improvement - a **9 per cent increase** compared to 2013/14. This was driven by our sustained work around the Budget, Spending Round, Autumn Statement, the summer and Christmas news grids, plus our annual conference and the launch of our 100 Days campaign. This alone delivered **190** positive, pro-active pieces of media coverage.
2. Other **successful** proactive work throughout the year included:
	1. Calls for common sense approach to term-time holidays **(44 pieces of coverage)**
	2. Councils fear school place tipping point **(31 pieces of coverage)**
	3. ‘Laughing gas' – national public health warning issued as councils launch crackdown on potentially lethal drug **(31 pieces of coverage)**
	4. Councils say constitutional convention must fast-track English devolution **(28 pieces of coverage)**
	5. Charities, schools, councils and road safety groups warn against CCTV parking ban **(24 pieces of coverage)**
	6. Funding needed to save concessionary bus services **(18 pieces of coverage)**
	7. Safety messages should be displayed on e-cigarette chargers after surge in blazes, say fire authorities **(16 pieces of coverage)**
3. **84 per cent** of our coverage this year was positive, compared to **79 per cent** for the year to March 2014. This was led by pro-active work which included how cuts are affecting councils’ ability to provide services, the adult social care funding crisis, school places shortfalls, calls for devolution and for a review into Ofsted following its handling of CSE.
4. Our main reactive work included responding to Rotherham and other instances of CSE, services for young people in care and rebutting criticism of council parking charges.

**Print and online media**

1. The following sets out national newspaper and online coverage for the period April 2014 to March 2015.
2. The LGA appeared in **EVERY** national daily and weekend newspaper and online broadcaster this year. **The** **Guardian** had **187 pieces** of coverage and stories were widely reported by **BBC Online (148 mentions) The Daily Mail (114 mentions), Times and Telegraph**. The spread of national print coverage was much wider this year with significantly more coverage across all national newspapers.

**Broadcast media**

1. The following sets our broadcast activity for the period April 2014 to March 2015.
2. Our media work saw **434 pieces of coverage** on national TV and radio this year, nearly double our total of **245** last year. July 2014 **(59 mentions)** and August 2014 **(57 mentions)** were our busiest broadcast months.
3. In July, Cllr David Sparks gave his first set-piece interview as LGA Chairman to the **BBC**. It ran on **Radio 4’s Today Programme** and on **BBC Radio 2, 3** and **5 Live** on **July 3**. **BBC Radio 5 Live** covered our 100 days campaign pledge on housing.
4. Cllr David Simmonds appeared on **BBC Breakfast, BBC News** and **Radio 4’s Today Programme** in July to discuss our 100 days call on roads funding.
5. Our 100 days call for a sugar tax to tackle the obesity epidemic was covered by **BBC Radio 5 Live** and **LBC** by Cllr Katie Hall.
6. Cllr David Simmonds appeared on **BBC Breakfast** and **Sky News** to discuss councils having to write off millions of pounds in unpaid parking fines issued to foreign-registered vehicles.
7. Cllr Peter Fleming dominated the airwaves in August with health warnings about the use of laughing gas. He discussed the issue on **BBC Breakfast, BBC News, Sky News, Radio 5 Live** and **Radio 4’s Today Programme** while the story ran across numerous news bulletins.
8. Cllr Simmonds discussed our research on free school meals funding on **Good Morning Britain** and **LBC.** This was followed by a number of interviews on subsequent research on school places on **Radio 4’s Today Programme, BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC Breakfast, Sky News, ITV News** and **Good Morning Britain.**
9. Several interviews also took place around the Local Government Finance Settlement in December. Cllr Gary Porter previewed the announcement on the **Daily Politics show,** Cllr Peter Fleming appeared on **Radio 2** and Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson was on the **BBC One O’Clock News**. Following the announcement, Cllr David Sparks responded on **BBC News**, **Sky News** and **BBC Radio 5 Live**.
10. The majority of our coverage this year was positive across all portfolios. Negative coverage for **Children and Young People** included cuts to youth services, care leavers being placed in B&Bs and information given by councils to foster carers, **Community Wellbeing** on council mental health spending, increased funeral costs, 15 minute care visits, Rotherham and the issue of CSE and Winterbourne View improvement programme.
11. For **Economy and Transport** the main negative coverage was on parking charges, **Environment, Housing and Planning** included bin collections and waste recycling rates and **Community Safety** included claims that councils are scaling back domestic violence prevention and victim support work.
12. Negative **Finance** coverage was on business rates and **Workforce** was on equal pay claims and strike action called following the local government pay offer dispute. In **Resources**, stories on the councils growing reserves and unpaid council tax generated negative coverage.

**Campaigns and public affairs activity**

1. Campaigning and public affairs activity on behalf of local government remains a key priority for our member councils. In our perceptions survey, **78 per cent** of member councils believe we effectively represent their views to central government (a one per cent increase on last year).
2. 2014/15 was the last parliamentary session before Parliament dissolved for the General Election. Despite Parliament sitting for fewer days than previous sessions, the LGA’s profile remained high as we worked with MPs, Peers and stakeholders to promote the 100 days campaign, the work of local government and the policy recommendations of our Boards.
3. Over the last year, we have increased our work with Parliamentarians, including:
	1. Our Chairman, Cllr David Sparks met with MPs, Peers and key stakeholders more than 75 times in 2014/15 to discuss key priority issues and promote our campaigns.
	2. The LGA was mentioned 1429 times in Parliament over the course of 2014/2015, meaning that on average we were quoted seven times each day Parliament was sitting to debate policy and legislation.
	3. In the 37 weeks Parliament sat during the 2014/15 parliamentary session, the LGA prepared 60 formal written briefings for MPs and Peers.
	4. We gave oral evidence at seven select committee hearings and submitted written evidence to 19 select committee inquiries in 2014/15.
	5. As part of the LGA’s Future Funding campaign, 30 MPs from across the political divide supported a cross-party parliamentary motion on the need to ensure local government’s funding is fair.
	6. During September and October 2014 we hosted debates and evening receptions at the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat autumn party political conferences. We also secured 141 opportunities for our lead members to contribute to stakeholder events, including debates and roundtables.

**Parliamentary mentions 2010-2015**



1. We briefed Parliamentarians on a range of issues. The chart below sets out the main subject areas:

**Parliamentary briefings (total 60)**

1. We benefit from a strong reputation with Members of Parliament and Peers. External polling by NfP Synergy demonstrates that more than half of all parliamentarians ranked us as either ‘effective’ or ‘somewhat effective’ last year. Polling also demonstrates that our reputation with Parliament is comparable to similar organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry.
2. More than a third (35 per cent) of MPs said they were aware of *‘Investing in Our Nation’s Future: the First 100 days of the Next Government’* campaign. Those who supported the campaign did so because they ‘believe’ our policies would be a key driver of growth and/or a concern that local government is currently under-funded.

**Percentage of MPs and Peers that ranked the LGA as ‘Very Effective’ or ‘Somewhat Effective’ between April and June 2014.**

**Legislation**

1. Over the last year we worked to influence a number of pieces of legislation.
2. **The Deregulation Act** removes or reduces burdens on businesses, civil society, individuals and public sector bodies. It include measures relating to licensing, use of CCTV to enforce parking restrictions, housing, transport, the environment, education and training, and the administration of justice. The Act also provides for a duty on those exercising specified regulatory functions to have regard to the desirability of promoting economic growth. The Government accepted our argument that proposed measures to deregulate taxi licensing could be better implemented as part of a broader reform that included the improvements recommended by the Law Commission. As a result, we successfully prevented a relaxation of the rules. The Government also agreed to the LGA-supported amendments which introduced practical exemptions to the ban on CCTV use in parking enforcement.
3. **The Serious Crime Act** strengthens the law on the recovery of the proceeds of crime and creates an offence of participating in the activities of an organised crime group. The Act also extends the offence of child cruelty to include emotional neglect and psychological harm and introduces a number of new measures to tackle Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Following extensive lobbying we ensured the offence of participating in an organised crime group’s activities would not apply to local government inadvertently, for example, where councils provide housing. We also sought to amend the legislation to include an offence of ‘community or religious leaders encouraging the practice of FGM’.  Whilst the Government opposed this amendment, the Home Office strengthened other provisions in the Act which deal with FGM and created a specialist unit.
4. **The Infrastructure Act** covers strategic highways companies and the funding of transport services, planning conditions, land transfer, local land charges and Land Registry, and shale gas extraction. We secured changes including an amendment to ensure that newly created strategic highways companies must work closely with councils and a new statutory provision that fracking cannot take place unless companies provide financial or other benefit for the local area. The Government also committed to fund the proposed transfer of responsibility of local land charge searches to Land Registry and to ensure that policy and legislative changes will be made to enable centrally held public land to be transferred to councils. These land transfers will enable councils to build more affordable homes.
5. **The Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act**is intended to improve the regulatory environment and access to finance for small businesses and entrepreneurs. The legislation gave central government potentially wide-ranging powers to introduce a one-size-fits-all approach to procurement. We worked with parliamentarians to table amendments to the legislation that sought to uphold the principles of localism and commissioning for local social value. The Government gave formal assurances in Parliament that the Act would not be applied in a way that contradicts the Localism Act or the Social Value Act, with regulations drafted to reflect this commitment.

**Select Committees and all party parliamentary groups**

1. In the last year, we gave oral evidence at **seven select committee hearings** and submitted written evidence to **19 select committee inquiries**. These include:
	1. Our Chairman, Cllr Sparks gave evidence to the Communities and Local Government Committee on the subject of ‘Councillors on the frontline', highlighting our ‘Be A Councillor’ campaign; and the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee on the future of devolution.
	2. Cllr David Simmonds, Chair of the Children and Young People’s Board, and Carolyn Downs, our Chief Executive gave evidence to the Communities and Local Government Committee on the Jay report into child sexual abuse in Rotherham. Their evidence covered the work of the Rotherham Improvement and Innovation Board.
	3. Cllr Liz Green, Deputy Chair of the Children and Young People’s Board, gave oral evidence to the House of Lords Affordable Childcare Committee.
	4. Carolyn Downs, our Chief Executive, also gave evidence to the Health Committee and the Public Account Committee. These technical hearings were an opportunity to highlight our concerns on the future of health and social care and the Better Care Fund and to call for five-year funding settlements and for social care funding to be protected in the post-election Comprehensive Spending Review.
2. The breakdown by policy area is set out below:

**Select Committees (total 26)**

**All-Party Parliamentary Groups**

1. We worked closely with a number of All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) to provide evidence and brief MPs and Peers on subjects covering devolution, health and social care, housing and skills.
2. Through that work, we were invited to provide secretarial support to the APPG on the Reform, Decentralisation and Devolution in the United Kingdom. As part of our DevoNext campaign we hosted the launch of their legacy report, *A Parliament for Reform 2015-2020*, at Local Government House. In the report the APPG set out the constitutional questions that needed to be answered in the new Parliament, including the question of further devolution in England.
3. Cllr Richard Watts, a member of the Children and Young People’s Board, gave evidence to an inquiry into parenting support and social mobility being jointly conducted by the APPG for Social Mobility and the APPG for Parents and Families. His evidence covered examples of how local authorities were working successfully to implement parenting support models and the Troubled Families programme. Cllr Watts also took part in the APPG on Local Growth, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Enterprise Zones’ panel debate on tackling worklessness.
4. Cllr Izzi Seccombe provided evidence to the APPG on Housing and Care for Older People, setting out the challenges facing the health and care system, highlighting the importance of housing alongside the provision of social care and health and the need for developers to consider the housing needs of the older population.

**Party conferences**

1. During September and October we hosted debates at the main autumn party political conferences and secured **141 opportunities** for our councillors to speak at stakeholder events, including debates and round-tables.
2. We worked closely with stakeholders such as the British Chamber of Commerce, British Property Federation, the National Housing Federation, NHS Confed, Kings Fund, Age UK, Alzheimer’s Society, the RCN, the BMA, the TCPA, Living Streets, British Parking Association, Action 4 Children, Crisis and the Mental Health Policy Group throughout party conferences to secure speaking opportunities and promote the work of local government.
3. For the first time, we produced a guide to each of the party conferences. These were downloaded **5732 times.** We used Twitter during the party conferences to maximise our reach and publicise our events and speakers. Up to **3.8 million** people had the opportunity to view our content. This included tweets from our events, tweets from stakeholders and our wider campaigning tweets.

**Parliamentary support to our membership**

1. In 2014/15 we have continued to expand our parliamentary support offer to member councils. Launched last year, our Parliamentary Network has grown **to a membership of 120**.
2. Our Network has supported councils in their parliamentary engagement by producing weekly summaries of parliamentary debates, a forward planning weekly email with key opportunities in Parliament, the sharing of LGA briefings and the hosting of a briefing event on the General Election in Local Government House. Ahead of the General Election we also produced briefing notes on key manifesto commitments which were shared widely across local government.

**Campaigns**

1. Our main campaign, ‘Investing in Our Nation’s Future: The first 100 days of the next government’ campaign launched at the LGAs annual conference 2014. Throughout the year, the campaign gained support from members, council officers and stakeholders.
2. To date, the publication has been download 8,908 times with an additional 4,000 hard copies distributed at conference, party conferences and events throughout the year.
3. The campaign microsite, developed to host all content relating to the campaign, received 15,000 visits from 10,603 users over the course of the year. The majority of these users were new visitors (70.7 per cent compared to 29.3 per cent returning visitors).
4. The most viewed page, after the microsite homepage was the localised data tool where councils could create their own infographics.
5. In total, thirty nine stakeholders worked with us on promoting the campaign. These are:

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| Action for Children  | Home Builders Federation  | Reform  |
| Age UK  | JRF | RSPCA |
| Alcohol Concern | Living Streets | RTPI |
| Asphalt Industry  | Localis | Scope  |
| CBI  | London Chambers of Commerce | St Mungo’s Broadway |
| Centre Forum  | NatCen  | The Children’s Society  |
| Centre Point  | NCVO  | The Kennel Club |
| CILT | NFB | The Kings Fund  |
| CLGF | National Obesity Forum  | Trading Standards Institute  |
| Cycle to Work Alliance | National Trust  | UK Health Forum  |
| Electrical Safety First | Prospects | Universities UK  |
| FMB | RAC Foundation  | Water UK  |
| Guide Dogs  | Ramblers | Woodland Trust |

1. ***#OurDay*** *-*For the third year running, we held OurDay on Wednesday 26 November. The day is an opportunity to showcase the breadth of work that councils undertake for their residents. This year, we produced a toolkit for council communications teams which allowed them to promote the day to their staff with posters and branding for use on websites. The OurDay branding featured on a number of council homepages in the lead up to the day. The toolkit was downloaded 2,935 times.
2. A total of 16,564 tweets were sent during the day (up from 11,000 in 2013) from council staff, members and chief executives. More than 8,000 twitter handles took part in the day and the tweets had a potential reach of 397 million users. The hashtag #OurDay was the second most popular topic in the UK for most of the 24 hours.

**Digital communications**

1. Over the last year, we have continued to improve our digital offer and integrate it with other communications activity. Our website saw an increase in total page views – 4.5 million in 2014/15 compared to 3.7 million in 2013/14 – and an increase in unique users of 790,779. More new visitors used the website than returning visitors, meaning we were attracting new audiences.
2. The audience for the corporate twitter feed – @LGAComms – has increased significantly over the last year. Followers increased by 39 per cent to 10,922 on 31 March 2015. This number has now increased to over 12,000.
3. The @LGAComms twitter account had a potential reach of 32 million people over the last year and 9,052 mentions.

**Member bulletins**

1. Subscriber numbers for our e-bulletins remain high. Changes to the format of bulletins have increased engagement rates.
2. Programme bulletins now reach a total audience of 80,020. Alongside first magazine, these are the main ways for us to reach backbench councillors.
3. In addition, the Chairman’s bulletin and the Chief Executive’s email have continued to be a successful route to communicate with leaders and chief executives. The Chairman’s bulletin is sent to 1,052 council and group leaders and the chief executive’s email goes to 362 people.

**Communications improvement**

1. Over the last year, our communications improvement offer (part of our wider sector-led improvement programme) has further developed. We have undertaken a number of full communications peer reviews, one-day communications ‘health checks’ and supported a number of councils on a range of reputation and other issues. We already have a number of reviews programmed in over the coming months with more scheduled for next year.