



HOUSE OF LORDS

Management Board

Communications with members

Responsible Board Member(s) Rhodri Walters
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Summary of actions requested:

- Endorse the strategy and actions set out in the attached paper at paragraphs 5-10
- Agree to the corporate communications framework set out in the appendix
- Agree that the Clerk Assistant should be responsible at Management Board level for the co-ordination of member communications
- Invite the Staff Adviser to review the resources of the appropriate offices, and to recommend how they could be refocused to deliver this new priority

1. Towards the end of last year the Board appointed a group to review existing communications between the administration and members of the House and to make recommendations about how these activities could be improved. The background to the review was the finding of last year's members' survey that this should be an area for improvement.
2. The recommendations of the group include a strategy and corporate communications framework, and a number of practical actions intended to co-ordinate the communications activities of individual offices and departments. The group acknowledges that additional staffing to deliver these activities cannot be expected, and suggests that existing professional skills and capacity could be refocused, if the Board agrees that improving the way in which the administration communicates with members should be accorded high priority.
3. The Board is invited to agree to the actions recommended by the group and, in particular, to agree that this should be a priority to which appropriate resources should be redirected.

30 June 2010

Rhodri Walters

Improving communications between the administration and members

1. A review of resources, activities and channels identified a wealth of expertise devoted to communication with members. The proposals in this paper seek to maximise the effectiveness with which that expertise is deployed, through better co-ordination. A communications strategy is proposed, together with recommendations for action.

Summary of issues

2. Many members are less well-informed than they would like to be about the information and services available to them, as indicated in the members' survey of 2008. Indeed, a number of poor results in the survey arose from limited awareness of the services available, rather than from inadequate provision.
3. The administration's communications with members are less effective than they could be because -
 - a) there are too many separate materials for members, and little collaboration between offices in planning and preparing resources
 - b) there is no coherent programme to promote the information and services offered by the administration
 - c) the purposes of the corporate communication channels are inadequately defined
 - d) corporate communication channels do not reliably reach all members
 - e) feedback from members is not systematically shared or acted on.
4. Poor co-ordination and planning can result in too many channels being used to communicate the same information. The consequence of this duplication is that members are unclear about the purpose and content of each channel. They do not know where to look for the information they require and need to rely on asking a member of staff.

Communications strategy

5. The aim of the communications strategy should be to enable the administration to prioritise and manage its communications with members effectively.
6. The objectives of the strategy should be to -
 - a) introduce a Corporate Communications Framework (see appendix) to be used by offices when communicating with members; reduce the number of ad hoc communications with members; and establish a clear approval system for member communications
 - b) introduce a members' information point, close to the Chamber, to provide a "front of house" service dealing with general questions and, where a more detailed response is required, ensure the appropriate member of staff is lined up to respond
 - c) ensure all corporate communication channels are resilient and that they reliably reach all members
 - d) develop a programme of regular activities to promote the information and services provided by the administration.

7. The intended outcome is that members should know about, and understand the purpose of, communications from the Lords administration. Communications to members will be better coordinated, with different channels used for different types of content as appropriate. Communications will be directed clearly to members, with a distinction drawn between internal staff communications and communications with members. More consistent use of defined communication channels such as the intranet, email and newsletters, with less reliance exclusively on person-to-person enquiry, will provide better value for money.
8. Success of the strategy could be measured by improved recognition scores for the corporate communications channels in future members' surveys, in relation to the 2008 survey baseline (Question 1.3) and by an improved score for Question 6.2 on the 2008 survey: *overall rating of communications between members and House staff*. In future surveys, members' self sufficiency when accessing the services and facilities of the administration should also be measured.
9. The strategy will contribute to Objective 2 of the House of Lords administration ("To provide individual Members of the House with the advice and services they need for the effective performance of their parliamentary duties") and will support Task 7 of the Business Plan ("Ensure that information produced in support of objectives is well-managed").

Actions to deliver the strategy

10. The following actions should be implemented to deliver the strategy -
 - a) implement the Corporate Communications Framework, including its use by PICT and other bi-cameral services when communicating with Lords members
 - b) set up a members' information point to provide a "front of house" service to members
 - c) ensure that the contact details of members and members' staff are reliable and secure (stage 2 of the members' names project will facilitate this). Verify the communications preferences of members, to ensure that communications are reliably received, whether electronically or in hard copy
 - d) offer a rolling programme of briefings to ensure members have ongoing opportunities to develop their knowledge of the House and its services (this is already in hand as part of the work to improve the induction of new members)
 - e) co-ordinate regular promotion of the facilities and resources available to members, on the intranet and in a newsletter
 - f) provide a newsletter (fortnightly when the House is sitting) giving news and updates from the administration (subject to political approval, the most efficient course would be to build on the existing Red Benches - currently a channel specifically for the domestic committees)
 - g) establish a central system to co-ordinate members' feedback on information and services and any action taken by the administration (possibly using PICT customer service software for record keeping)
 - h) ensure staff have adequate information about the working of the House and the services of the administration. Staff who meet members on a regular basis should be

- able to provide them with consistent and reliable information, to redirect their queries confidently and to feel comfortable when addressing members
- i) form a Member Information and Communications Group, with representatives from those offices which produce materials for members, to implement the corporate communications framework set out in the appendix. Specific functions of the group should be to -
 - i. conduct an evaluation and consolidation of the resources and channels intended for members
 - ii. ensure that materials are tailored to the needs of members and meet the visual identity guidelines
 - iii. maintain a list of communication activities and resources to be held centrally and regularly updated
 - iv. contribute to the re-developed Red Benches
 - v. contribute to the online members' centre on the intranet
 - vi. develop a FAQs service for members on the intranet

Management and resources

11. The Clerk Assistant should have Management Board-level responsibility for co-ordinating communications with members, and should oversee the actions set out above, including the working of the Member Information and Communications Group.
12. Authority should be clearly delegated to deliver the actions outlined above and to work with PICT, the Web Centre and Lords offices to achieve co-ordinated corporate communications with members. (Communications between clerks and their committee members or personal interactions between individual members of staff and members on specific issues relating to their responsibilities would not be included in this activity.)
13. The professional skills, and capacity, exist within the administration to deliver the strategy and actions set out above without additional staffing, if the Management Board agrees to accord it appropriate priority. The Staff Adviser should recommend how the diverse resources within the Clerk of the Parliaments' Office, Information Office, Printed Paper Office, Library and other related offices as appropriate, already dedicated to communications with members, could be refocused to deliver this activity.

Recommendations to the Management Board

14. The Management Board are invited –
 - a) to endorse the strategy and actions set out above
 - b) to agree to the corporate communications framework set out in the appendix
 - c) to agree that the Clerk Assistant should be responsible at Management Board level for member communications
 - d) to invite the Staff Adviser to recommend how resources could be refocused to deliver this new priority.