Communications Committee – 25 February 2008

Proposal for communications discussion event

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction
At its meeting on October 24 2007, the Communications Committee discussed whether it might be helpful to hold a discussion meeting. The draft minutes of the meeting specifically raise the question of whether '*a more informal discussion event might be appropriate. This would build on the enthusiasm of committee members, and help to address the need to be more forward-looking.*'

This paper has been put together to provide one possible solution to this suggestion.

Decision
The Committee is asked to agree the recommendations set out below.

Background information
Not applicable

Resource implications
Not applicable

Financial implications
Not applicable

Appendices
Not applicable

13 February 2008

Communications Committee discussion event

The Communications Committee currently meets three times per year, normally once in February, once in May, and once in October.

The main business of the Communications committee is to approve, and oversee the delivery of the HPC Communications strategy, and underneath this to similarly approve and oversee the HPC Communications yearly workplan. Alongside this function, the committee also has oversight of the whole of the Communications function, including the Communications committee budget. To support this, other papers are provided as and when the need arises (for example the papers on today's agenda, which include updates on events, public affairs, opinion polling, and CPD communications).

Because these documents are reviewed and written, respectively, every year, it will normally be the case that the draft Communications strategy and Communications workplan are presented to the Committee for approval in February of each year. In line with the HPC budget-planning cycle, this allows time for the alignment of the budget (including the various stages for approval of the budget by Finance and Resources Committee, and by the Council), and also provides an opportunity for the Committee to comment on the workplan well before the start of the financial year to which it applies.

As part of putting together the budget for the Secretariat, a certain number of committee meetings are assumed each year. Including travel, subsistence, lunch, and attendance costs, it is estimated that each Communications Committee meeting costs around £4,600.

It is therefore suggested that, given the normal length of Communications Committee meetings, it could be prudent to add a more informal, discussion event onto the afternoon of an existing meeting. This would also be beneficial in terms of reducing pressure on members' diaries, and minimising members' travel.

It is further suggested that this discussion event could usefully be held after the Communications Committee event in October. This would mean that the results of the discussion event could be fed into the development of the Communications work plan, which would then be discussed and agreed by the committee at its next meeting in February.

Suggested format

Preliminary aims for the discussion meeting might include:
- Providing a more informal forum for discussion;
- Allowing committee members who are new to communications to explore areas that they are not familiar with;
- Allowing committee members with particular areas of expertise to explore, with members of the Executive, how this expertise can best contribute to the Communications plan; and
- Allowing all members to 'step back' from the activities of the Communications department and think more broadly about the aims of HPC's Communications activities, key audiences and key messages.

To these ends, it may be helpful if the discussion event, in common with other events such as the Council awayday, has a different room set-up to that of the committee, and employs a less formal structure, including small-group discussion, and feeding back to the whole group.

It may also be useful if the day combines the opportunity for members to share ideas about key stakeholders and messages in small groups, with the opportunity for the Director of Communications to discuss with the group the process of putting together the strategy and workplan.

Decisions

The Committee is asked to agree:
- To hold a discussion meeting in the afternoon after the Committee meeting scheduled for October 16th 2008.
- To ask the chair to agree the precise format of the discussion meeting with the Director of Communications, taking into account the suggestions above and any additional ideas or suggestions made during the meeting.
- To ask the Secretariat to alert Committee members that this meeting will finish later than other Committee meetings.
- To feed back as to the success of the first discussion event, and to consider at a future meeting whether this should be a yearly arrangement.