

COMMUNICATIONS PAPER ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM PROGRAMME FOR SLB MEETING 6 MARCH 2009.

Agenda Item: 5

Summary: This paper provides a framework and general principles which should guide all communications issued by the Joint Secretariat on the Local Government Reform Programme.

Action required: For approval.

BACKGROUND

1. It is vital to have an effective, adaptable and inclusive communications framework to support the communications requirements of the Local Government Reform Programme.
2. This communications framework recognises that various organisations know the best way to communicate with their audiences but is designed to give direction and support to the overarching communications programme to ensure a more consistent message.
3. There are three communication strands – DOE, NILGA and joint DOE and NILGA (the DOE draft communications strategy has been attached for reference).
4. This paper outlines the communications framework and principles to guide everything issued by the Communications Joint Secretariat on the Local Government Reform Programme.
5. Joint communications will be issued from NILGA and DOE primarily on any relevant output from the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) and the Regional Transition Co-Ordinating Group (RTCG.)

6. DOE and NILGA will work together on the communication, format and means of disseminating this information. All joint communication will be clearly identified through dual branding.

COMMUNICATIONS STRUCTURE

7. The RTCG will be the Communications Steering Group, and will provide the oversight to ensure communications are taken forward in accordance with the policy directions established by the SLB.
8. A Local Government Reform Programme Communications Group will be established to drive communications activity. This will be facilitated by the NILGA/DOE Communications Joint Secretariat who will report to RTCG.
9. The Local Government Reform Programme Communications Group initially will include representatives from each of the 26 council areas. Ideally this will evolve through time to become more closely aligned with the 11 council structure as relationships strengthen between council areas.
10. Essential requirements for these representatives will be that they are at a level of sufficient seniority to ensure that actions are taken and messages cascaded and also that they have experience in communication.
11. Further information on the Communications Group will be provided in the Communications Plan that will be developed as a next step based on the Programme Implementation Plan.

COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK – GUIDING PRINCIPLES

12. The overall aim of the Communication Framework is to support the Local Government Reform Programme through timely, interactive and targeted communication with all relevant stakeholders.

13. This should ensure that key stakeholders are fully aware of and involved in shaping communications from the programme, resulting in stakeholders at all appropriate levels receiving direct and visible communications. Strong collaborative communication will help develop trusted relationships and provide a strong, consistent message.

14. The following principles will guide all joint DOE and NILGA communications through the Local Government Reform Programme:

- Provide clear, consistent, timely and relevant information targeted to audience needs.
- Milestone-led communication kept to a reasonable frequency and level of detail to ensure a balance between saturation and keeping all interested parties informed.
- Ensure that all relevant stakeholders have been consulted prior to the release of information and their feedback incorporated where appropriate.
- Ensure that all communication relating to staff abides by Public Service Commission guidelines and Trade Union consultation where appropriate. Communication should be delivered in a sensitive, inclusive and appropriate format.
- Incorporate communications best practice and learning from other organisations that have been through a major change process, particularly any learning points gained from the experience of DHSSPS.
- Ensure all communications are of a high quality standard and suitable for audience needs.
- Utilise existing communications and explore innovative delivery channels to ensure the message is appropriate, interesting and easy to digest for the audience.
- Provide a single point of contact for all communications to ensure an integrated, coordinated and consistent approach.

- Employ adaptable and flexible communications through the use of robust evaluation processes and incorporation of 360° feedback to ensure communications are regularly evaluated, assessed and future improvements made.

MONITORING AND FEEDBACK

15. All communication activity will be evaluated, reviewed and monitored on an ongoing basis. An external organisation will be selected to carry out an initial communications auditing exercise to ascertain the level of knowledge in key target audiences in order to baseline and monitor communication activity going forward.
16. Quarterly snapshot reports and more in depth 6-monthly reports on communication impact amongst key audiences and stakeholders will also provide continuous performance indicators. This will mean communication can focus on the most relevant issues and will assist in continuously improving performance.

COMMUNICATIONS JOINT SECRETARIAT

16. DOE has appointed a Senior Communications Officer for the Local Government Reform Programme who works directly with and under the guidance of Local Government Policy Division and DOE Press Office. There is also an officer dedicated to the Local Government Policy Division website.
17. The Director of Communications and Engagement and a Communications Officer working directly under the guidance of the Chief Executive Officer will provide the NILGA joint secretariat function.

Communications Joint Secretariat

