

NATURAL ENGLAND BOARD



Meeting # 1
17 October 2006

Item M5

Title: External communications

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform Board of the external communications activities that have supported the launch of Natural England and the proposed approach for moving forward.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board:

1. Notes the activity to date and approach to developing an external communications strategy for Natural England both nationally and regionally.

Background

In the period to vesting, we focused on the key areas of external communications needed for day one: developing the Natural England visual identity; designing and introducing a new website; launching Natural England, including media activity, the national launch and nine regional stakeholder launches; and rebranding key publications. In addition, we have disseminated Strategic Direction and maintained communications with top 50 stakeholders.

Over the next two months, we will launch our four campaigns to maintain momentum from the launch: marine conservation, health, land management and climate change. The campaigns are to be initially introduced at the national launch and communications plans are being developed to identify the most effective and powerful channels for their individual launches.

A short brochure of Natural England entitled 'Our Direction' has been produced for the launch to provide new and existing customers and stakeholders with an overview of our Strategic Direction. Four campaign 'calling cards' (with a call to action), have been produced to fit with 'Our Direction' or as stand-alone communication materials to support the campaigns.

A communications consultant currently acting as interim Head of Communications, is reviewing what we will need to successfully support the delivery of Strategic Direction. The principles we will use to develop an external communications strategy for Natural England are:

- In line with Strategic Direction, to communicate in a way that is plain speaking, objective and focused on shared outcomes to support open dialogue with partners and stakeholders.
- To establish a clear brand identity with a consistent tone of voice.
- To develop an integrated communication strategy in order that national and regional teams will work together to deliver joined up and consistent messages and communications.
- To raise awareness and profile of Natural England via a targeted press and media strategy.
- To ensure that our communications are responsive, tailored and delivered through the appropriate channels to all stakeholder groups.
- To respond to feedback and review and develop communications accordingly.
- To develop communications which focus on electronic delivery and mechanisms in order to deliver the multiplier effect we need to deliver the targets for our second strategic outcome.

- To monitor and evaluate communications activity and appropriately respond to outcomes.

Issues

Following any merger, it is important that an integrated strategy is developed and embedded within the organisation to ensure a consistent approach that is easy to implement and manage.

Brand development and management

To date, the brand has focused primarily on the visual identity. However, the brand will evolve further as the values and culture of the organisation develop. This will be a critical signal of change both internally and externally and we will ultimately be judged on how successfully we deliver on our brand promise. It is therefore essential that the brand identity is closely controlled and managed, especially in these early stages. Brand guidelines have been developed and we intend to roll them out regionally via the Regional Policy and Advocacy managers (RAPs), who will act as brand guardians. We will map and audit all current and planned activity and work closely with the RAPs to ensure correct implementation of the brand.

Key messages

We will develop and communicate key messages and train all staff accordingly.

Communications channels and tools

It is important that we continue to carefully balance the ongoing communication with key stakeholders with developing the external communications strategy. This will identify the priorities of the business and how we will help achieve them through the appropriate channels and tools. We will develop a twelve-month plan, which will identify three months' fixed activity but be flexible enough to respond to changing priorities and objectives. The first three months' objectives will include ensuring the successful launch and support of the four campaigns.

Press and media

The launch media plan is focused on introducing Natural England both nationally and regionally; the Strategic Direction; Chair, the Board and Chief Executive. The ongoing press strategy will be aimed at raising awareness of Natural England to develop its reputation as a campaigning NDPB and key commentator on environmental issues in line with our third strategic outcome. The ability to communicate and engage effectively and knowledgeably with the press will continue to be a priority for Natural England and media training will be arranged for all key spokespeople to ensure consistency of message and delivery.

Online

The web site launching Natural England, is intended to be short-term solution (12 - 18 months) whilst a fully integrated and interactive state-of-the-art site is developed and introduced.

Management arrangements

To ensure the effective delivery of the external communications strategy, it is critical that the right structure and level of skill and expertise is in place, these will be reviewed as an immediate priority.