

Executive Team – for assurance

Meeting agenda title: Update on the work of the Communications and Engagement Board

Meeting date: 3 March 2022

Time required: 15 minutes

Presenter: Angela Balakrishnan

1. Objective

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the work of the Communications and Engagement Board and gives the Executive Team an opportunity to provide guidance on future work.
- 1.2. The Board continues to co-ordinate strategy, tactics and content that enables our communications to deliver on its purpose. This is to raise awareness and understanding of the value and impact of the ICO's work, and in turn protect and enhance our reputation.

2. Key achievements over the last 6 months

The key achievements of the Board over the last 6 months have been:

- 2.1. **Oversight of the ICO's new communications operating model** – including the development of the new strategic function following the onboarding of the Communications Business Partners. This has included seeking Board feedback and endorsement for new ways of working that have better integrated communications into the ICO and raised its visibility. E.g. Fortnightly and longer-term planning grids to co-ordinate work and strategic snapshots to bring a campaign approach to ICO communications under four themes which we want to become known for.
- 2.2. **Discussion to develop ICO research and insight.** The Board fed into the development of the user testing of the website to understand user experiences of our website and how this links to stakeholder perceptions of the ICO. A website user survey has been carried out to provide quantitative information which will then guide the qualitative user testing research.
- 2.3. The user survey covered a number of areas however the key areas which the Board agreed focus on are interaction with guidance, the complaints journey, fee paying and SME Hub. The Board discussed

the links into Institute of Customer Research survey and ensured join up so there was minimal duplication in this work. A set of recommendations are due shortly.

- 2.4. Regulatory Futures provided updates to the development and aims of a research function within the ICO. This, in part, links to the comms team's stakeholder perception work and also plays a valuable role how the ICO approaches its communications and engages externally. A presentation is coming to ET shortly setting this out. The proposal would provide a more formalised specialised research function to ensure that we are maximising the impact of our research and to ensure that it is not duplicated in different areas of the organisation.
- 2.5. **Agreeing an approach to segmenting our audiences for communication**, including a focus on priority audiences to enable the comms team to target their engagement to certain groups. This will enable developed insight to understand what key audiences think/feel/do in relation to our work, and the measurement of impact. This will not exclude engagement for a broader reach with audiences and upcoming comms campaigns. The priority communications audiences were identified from results from the annual track; Women aged 55+, the education sector, Children aged 12-16, Companies involved in legitimate marketing and start up businesses, particularly with tech/innovation links. The Board discussed the links into harms to identify the selection of priority audiences, how we can measure the impact of this work and possible benchmarking with other regulators to gain an understanding of how they have targeted audiences previously. There is work that crosses over to the EDI board to ensure we reflect diversity in the audiences we communicate to and the communications we carry out.
- 2.6. **Refreshing the Corporate Narrative** by developing updated messaging on our role to promote transparency and FOI now that is it one of our four priority communication themes. The Board also approved a new by-product of the Corporate Narrative – a ICO Message Book which sets out clear key messages, narratives and examples for the four priority themes. This aims to support consistency in our external communications messages as part of our campaigns approach, so that over time, through a drumbeat of regular communications activity, we can become know for certain messages and issues.

- 2.7. **Contributing to the development of the new Commissioner's 100 days plan**, ensuring there was effective join up between parts of the organisation involved in delivering this plan such as Comms, PGA and RMS.
- 2.8. **Using the Board to discuss approach and topics for cross-cutting international events**. This is developing area for the Board to consult on events that stretch across the ICO. A more strategic forward look proposal is in development. The Board has provided advice on immediate events – considering attendance at RightsCon2 and proposals for IAPP Europe.
- 2.9. **Approving the publication of the ICO consultations policy** on the website as an interim policy. The Board recommended that Policy Board has visibility of the policy for phase two as it is being finalised.
- 2.10. **Overseeing progress of the RMS operating model project plan**. This includes the confirmation that the department will now focus work on a sectoral basis; education, health, finance, and policing and justice sectors.
- 2.11. **Agreeing an approach to emailing the register to introduce some of the ICO's services and show value of paying the fee**. This was particularly focused on SMEs to help them comply with information rights law. In all around 12,500 fee payers will be emailed this financial year. Early next financial year the Board will review an evaluation of the initiative including recommendations for 2022/2023. Phase 1 of the initiative received some early positive signs. In the pilot, promotional emails were sent to newly registered controllers in the land and property sector. The email invited recipients to sign-up for a free webinar tailored to their sector. So far, we have received no adverse reaction beyond some polite opt-out requests. Around 2.5% of the circa 2,800 recipient requested to join the webinar vs 0.17% asking to opt-out. Phases 2 and 3 began in November and January respectively and we'll be able to report back on this shortly.

3. Key challenges over the last 6 months

The key challenges for the Board over the last 6 months have been:

- 3.1. Development of the RMS operating model. Recent challenges have included low staffing levels and a failed recruitment campaign. A review of the structure of the Directorate is currently being

undertaken to ensure that better resilience and support for the sectors is provided and also to provide development opportunities within the Directorate. A final operating model has recently been circulated and there are positive examples of the directorates work in steering the Commissioner's listening series.

- 3.2. The Board has experienced challenges in attendance, content and engagement. This year the Board has moved to a six-weekly cycle to ensure sufficient agenda content for quality discussions. James Dipple-Johnstone has also come on board as the ET sponsor for the Board.

4. Key areas of activity over the next 6-12 months

- 4.1. Evaluation – this will be a growth area for communications as we work with the organisation to show the impact of our comms and engagement. The foundations are currently being established in time for the new financial year and the Insight and Evaluation role within the comms team will help further develop this. This will include examining the cut through of our corporate narrative/message book and training to support its adoption.
- 4.2. Strategic Snapshots – the Board will continue to provide oversight to ensure that we have a pipeline of stories and products that can carry our message and demonstrate our work across the four themes.
- 4.3. Writing to influence training – help to develop the next phase of training to ensure that staff across the ICO are able to write and communicate our work in an accessible and engaging way that has impact.
- 4.4. Research – The Board will provide valuable input into the development of a research function.
- 4.5. DPPC/Events – help with the development of the DPPC – the first under the new Commissioner, and contribute to a new co-ordinated and strategic approach to ICO attendance at set-piece events and conferences.
- 4.6. Internal Comms – continue to feed into the development of a refreshed intranet and Knowledge Service strategy.

5. Areas for challenge

- 5.1. ET may wish to consider whether the role of the Communications and Engagement Board is clear and whether the level of assurance that the Board provides to the Executive Team is sufficient.
- 5.2. Timeliness of some of our work has an impact on how we can effectively use comms as a lever to raise the profile and impact of the ICO. ET may wish to consider how we drive the use of communications (and our risk appetite) across the organisation and be clear to our teams about the parameters in which we work.
- 5.3. Are there any areas of focus that ET would expect to see in the Board's future work which are not covered in this report?

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Consultees: Communications Team.

List of Annexes: None

Publication consideration: Report can be published internally and externally without redactions.