

Executive Team – for assurance

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

Meeting date: 18 March 2023

Time required: 10 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.

2. Key achievements over the last 6 months

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

Comms and Engagement Blueprint - The Board were shown the proposed approach to comms and engagement, in a creative and accessible way.

The Board welcomed the blueprint and discussed how to best to embed it across the wider ICO. Comms page on Iris have been updated, the new blueprint will be incorporated into induction training and a new community on Yammer created. A roadshow is being developed for team meetings using shorter messaging for staff. Keeping it clear reps, corporate narrative champions and comms business partners will also assist staff to change their thinking and ways of working.

The key message for ICO staff is to involve comms in projects at an early stage, so they can use external insight to feed into objectives and audiences and plan the approach using the best tools and channels to demonstrate impact.

The Board discussed the importance of buy-in from two key staff groups: all staff need to be aware of involving comms at an early stage to give visibility to their work; senior staff need to be aware of the approach to campaigns which will focus on impact and quality (rather than quantity).

Strategic Cross Office Planning & Engagement (SCOPE)

CEB played an important role in the evolution of Strategic Cross Office Planning and Engagement group (SCOPE). That included a transition from an unwieldy ICO-wide meeting to a more effective way of working. That has now developed into a series of new and existing channels to share information more efficiently. Most importantly, the SCOPE way of working allows us to influence objectives, timing and messaging to enable us all to work together to create maximum impact for our work.

Each CEB meeting kicks off with a SCOPE update – this offers the chance of additional challenge, is another way of embedding the way of working that can be cascaded through members’ teams, and is an example of the SCOPE way of working in itself.

For example: In talking about some of our upcoming campaigns at the last CEB meeting, members flagged work in their areas that could help us land our messages better. That included the opportunity to pursue case studies and an international aspect to our work around employee monitoring.

Parliamentary Strategy - The Parliamentary Strategy got final sign off from Management Board in March 2023. It mirrors the 3-year approach taken by ICO25, underpinned by a 1 year detailed action plan. The strategy was subject to discussion by Comms and Engagement Board during the its development. Input from the Board was helpful in identifying cross office communication and engagement touch points to feed into the strategy; and in identifying priority areas of focus. The Parliamentary Strategy will develop to be a part of a broader Public Affairs strategy and we will continue to engage with CEB as the strategy is developed and rolled out.

Insight/Research - The newly formed Research & Insight team are in the process of setting up year 1 of Data Lives, a longitudinal ethnographic piece of research into how information rights influences the daily lives of the UK Public. The findings will be available from Autumn 2023, and the Comms and Engagement Board will be an important forum to help identify channels in which we can share and promote this research with impact both internally and externally. The members of the Board will be key users of the research findings so providing regular updates to the Board has not only raised awareness of the research but also provided members with an opportunity to provide comments and input in the early stages of the project.

The Board has also been updated on progress for a longitudinal quantitative study which will explore the views, behaviours and concerns of the public. This will ensure that the ICO has two regular streams of insight to support our evidence-based approach to decision making. This survey will allow us to measure progress on a number of ICO25 KPIs. Internal engagement is critical to the success of this project and CEB is an efficient way of gathering views from teams who will be among the key users of the findings.

Recent experiences of setting up research with external providers has highlighted a number of challenges, particularly the length of time the process takes between identifying the need for research and beginning the research. It needs to be more efficient and agile, therefore the R&I team, along with Economic Analysis, are working with all the internal teams involved in the process to identify how we can streamline the process for the future. CEB will be kept updated and feed into this.

Website - The CEB has been key in facilitating the user centred design (UCD) approach to website services and content, with four different elements of the website design project presented to the CEB since Oct '22. This included presenting the outputs of website discovery research, a 24-month roadmap of web work, an approach to accessibility compliance for DNs and disclosure log PDFs and a demonstration of the new "for organisations" redesign.

In each instance, the Board has given constructive challenge that has led to action. For example, support from the risk and governance team on our approach to compliance, and making changes to users personas to ensure they were representative of our diverse stakeholder group.

Where the Board has added the most value to the UCD web project is in its status as a decision-making group. By receiving sign off at this level – the web team have been empowered to implement changes that impact other areas of the business or ICO wide standards in such a way that would have been difficult if they weren't being driven by a central cross office board.

Proactive engagements - Conventionally, the ICO's presence on the speaking circuit has been based on requests submitted to us. We're driving a new process to take control of where we speak and who we speak to as well as what we speak about. Comms and Public Affairs (formerly RMS) are working collaboratively to set up new processes and

embed a new approach to speaking engagements that will help the ICO's work have greater impact. Comms and Engagement Board has played a crucial role in shaping this new way of working offering challenge and assurance.

The board's previous input into the operational model development for RMS and its positive impact on the development of the novel work around last year's listening series, makes it well placed to give a relevant and informed overview of developing engagement processes. The seniority of membership also inspires confidence that new ways of working have support and will be embedded in teams. This new approach also comes with challenges – it is part of a wider culture change of reaching new audiences and increasing our risk appetite. Leveraging Private Offices (as part of ET) is also essential to making this a success.

International events

The International Events Horizon Scan (IEHS) aims to deliver a more strategic and proactive approach to ICO representation at international events and maximise the impact of ICO global engagement aligned with ICO25 objectives and priorities. Following a successful 12-month pilot, CEB approved the IEHS as a permanent function, and is invited to endorse IEHS products biannually. CEB oversight of the pilot and now the agreed BAU approach has provided two-way benefit. It provides visibility to CEB of the upcoming international privacy and transparency landscape and the areas being focused on, which can shape CEB strategy in the international space. It has also provided a strategic comms overview to the IEHS team which enables them to identify suitable engagement events with clear knowledge of the ICO's overarching comms approach, including the opportunity to use more comms channels outside the usual privacy and transparency circuits. Furthermore, tactical input from the CEB on what the focus and objective for specific events might be feeds into business planning for those events across the ICO. The International team will be bringing a paper covering the next 12 months of Tier 1 (ET-appropriate) events to the ET informal meeting on June 1 to provide shared visibility of the proposed suitable events (not all of which will necessarily be covered) with the ICO objectives to be served by attendance.

DPPC

The newly formed DPPC Planning Board reports into CEB as an important decision-making tier in both the strategic and content planning for the event.

Members have offered challenge and support and have informed issues that require escalating to ET for either assurance or decision. Reporting and consulting CEB at meetings is built in to the planning schedule for conference to keep the project on track and ensure there are opportunities to test ideas and seek input at director level that contributes to effective planning.

For example – we wanted to take a three-year approach to DPPC to align with ICO25 and move the date to the autumn. CEB membership played a key role in making sure this was a workable plan. They helped us take a wide view, ensuring we considered international events at around the same time and by providing reassurance that our proposed timeframe helped promote our ICO25 commitments with a key audience. They also provided insight and decision into opening up the conference to FOI practitioners for the first time.

CEB members are champions for DPPC and the board is a key channel to engage with our stakeholders and they spread that message through their teams. This, along with other internal comms, helps make sure staff are given the time within their work programme to develop the high standard of content expected at our flagship conference.

3. Key challenges over the last 6 months

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

- 3.1. Cross over with other Boards – how work of RDB and Policy Board and EDI sub-groups feeds into considerations of CEB, sometimes there is duplication or not enough read across (eg Enterprise operating model went to RDB but not CEB).
- 3.2. Purpose of the Board – as corporate governance review our decision making structures, the role of the Board is likely to change. This reflects some of the feedback from Board members on where the Board has been useful (eg in the SCOPE space) but less frequently so in it's decision making requirements. Another aspect is engagement with projects and constructive challenge seems to come from the same few members each time.

3.3. Internal communications - There has been great progress with our digital channels and investment in internal communications – especially with Yammer and Iris. People are engaging more easily with different groups and with people they wouldn't normally find it easy to be in touch with. Open engagement through comments and on a wider choice of channels has increased. Further investment is being made in podcasts too. However, the wider roadmap has taken longer than expected and resources in internal communications are being reviewed to support the roadmap which can be expected over the summer. The roadmap will support the wider team in knowledge, content and comms to work together and provide a unified internal service.

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

- 4.1. Public Affairs operating model and ICO strategy on engagement, including stakeholder mapping exercise so we have clarity on who we are focusing on and what we want from them.
- 4.2. Communities/Vulnerability outreach and engagement as a strategy and action plan develops to co-ordinate the work across the organisation.
- 4.3. More progress to share on internal communications strategy and proactive speaking engagements.
- 4.4. Developing communications and engagement evaluation statistics to report on our impact. Using this impact to inform office wide approaches.

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. We also need to ensure ET engagement and visibility of key campaigns and workstreams that are coming up externally to ensure a one-voice, one-team approach to our most high-profile work. This can be done via the SCOPE campaigns tracker which also surfaces what ET need to get behind to unlock our high impact stories.
- 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. How can ET support the use of comms and engagement (and the work of the Board) as a regulatory tool to influence behaviour and make an impact? Early involvement of communications and engagement and mutual support in setting timelines based on prioritisation and resourcing would be helpful.

- 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: CEB members

Publication consideration: Report can be published internally.