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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

The HSE Board

Managing ministerial, HSC business and media events

A Paper by Mark Dempsey

Advisor(s): Mark Dempsey, Sian Lewis

Cleared by Kate Timms on 9 December 2002

Issue

1. To propose improved methods of managing ministerial submissions and HSC business following the move to DWP sponsorship and changes to the Commission's ways of working.

Timing

2. Urgent. In developing new ways of handling ministerial submissions, at HSE's instigation, we will need to plan ahead more thoroughly and agree handling arrangements in advance. Ministers are positive about the changes but some difficulties have been experienced when they are asked to consider complex issues to short deadlines. In addition, the Commission will move to monthly meetings in 2003, and we will need better disciplines for forecasting and managing HSC's workload. Media handling should be considered alongside these changes.

Recommendation

3. That the Board:
 - Notes the changes to the handling of ministerial and HSC business, including roles and responsibilities;
 - Notes proposed improvements to media handling arrangements;
 - Agrees to contribute to new style forward looks.

Background

4. We have agreed new arrangements for handling ministerial submissions and the role of HSSD in DWP. As a general rule, submissions will:

- (a) be routine, in that they do not involve wider political considerations. These will be submitted direct to ministers by HSE, copied to HSSD;
 - (b) involve wider political issues and require co-ordination with and input from other departments. These will be handled jointly, usually by HSE with support and input from HSSD;
 - (c) relate to key parts of the DWP agenda or to fees and appointments and will be handled by HSSD.
5. A new style forward look at planned submissions is attached **Annex A**. Its purpose is to ensure that handling and timing issues are flagged up in advance and so that ministers are able to plan for issues that are likely to come up. Nick Brown has indicated that he needs two weeks, or longer if there is a European dimension, to consider most issues. HSSD and Private Offices have indicated that they cannot guarantee to consider submissions that have not been notified in advance through in this way. Board members themselves will want to have a firm handle on business coming from their Directorates. The Secretariat will therefore ask board members to update the list on a monthly basis so and we can manage the processes and agree the appropriate handling of each submission. Revised Secretariat guidance has been prepared to deal with these changes – **Annex B**. In the meantime, the Secretariat is happy to advise on a case by case basis.
6. HSC business is also changing in line with recent decisions that its role should focus on more strategic issues. In 2003, normal business meetings will take place once each month. It will be important to get a better picture of future business based on Directorates' plans and projects. At present no forward look is produced and agendas tend to change frequently. We will need Board support to ensure that we can produce an accurate forward look at Commission business; this will also help to inform the ministerial forward look and the two might be combined.
7. A forward look at media events is also produced and circulated. This currently lists known events, such as launches, speaking engagements, new publications, prosecutions, and relevant external events. While it highlights the more important events by printing them in bold, the Press Office believes that the diary could be developed into a far more useful planning tool that would play a role in overall strategic communications. Following the move to DWP, ministers are showing renewed interest in health and safety. They and the Chair are keen to develop a series of messages on health and safety and proactively to seek opportunities to deliver them. To facilitate this, HSC/E needs to adopt the practice of most other government departments, where strategic communications units liaise closely with their own officials and with No.10 to produce a co-ordinated cross-government approach to news planning. HSE Press Office takes part in this liaison activity, but feels hampered by the general absence of detailed strategic planning within HSE and by the difficulty of getting access to such plans as do exist. It comes down to building a new culture, from the top, in which HSC/E projects are guided by a very clear sense of what our over-arching strategies are, by a commitment to putting dates on strategic or sensitive projects in agreement with a central planning unit, and last but not least delivering on those dates. In a communications environment like this, a new forward diary could be produced that showed up the strategic relevance of major entries, enabling a good fit with the plans both of HSC/E and government in general. Close liaison between Press Office and the new Strategy and Intelligence team will be needed in order to have a clearer idea of issues in prospect.

Argument

8. The move to DWP has brought a higher level of ministerial interest in our work and a potentially higher political profile. It has also provided an opportunity to review the role of HSSD and to reduce the extent to which it acts as a filter for HSE business. These changes are welcome but place a greater onus on HSE to show that we can manage the transition effectively and that the quality and timing of submissions does not suffer as a result of the absence of third party intervention. Directors and SCS members will need to ensure that quality is maintained and that, for example:
- (a) The Press Office and Solicitors are consulted at an early stage;
 - (b) Appropriate lines to take for ministers are provided;
 - (c) Timing and handling considerations are taken into account.
9. As greater interest in our work is shown by ministers, and health and safety issues are higher on the political agenda we will need to reconsider our approach to the management of media relations, and getting HSE staff to be more acutely aware of the presentational issues in policy and other work, will help to ensure that we maximise the impact we have with stakeholders.

Consultation

10. Press Office have been consulted.

Presentation

12. Improving the management of submissions, HSC business and media relations should help to ensure that HSE is seen in the best possible light by ministers and recognised as responsive and flexible.

Costs and Benefits

13. There are no additional costs involved in these proposals. Benefits are covered above.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

14. None.

Environmental Implications

15. None

Other Implications

16. None

Action

The Board is invited to:

- note the proposals for revised forward looks for ministerial, HSC and media business;
- support the changes by agreeing to help ensure that the documents are up to date;
- note the implications for improved quality control and quality assurance in paragraph 8.