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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

The HSE Board

HSE CHANGE PROGRAMME: COMMUNICATIONS

A Paper by Kate Timms

Issue

1. Raising the profile of our communications effort is an emerging theme – from the change programme, from the July SCS conference and from work with external stakeholders. How should this be taken forward?

Timing

2. Board to note plans for handing this work at 18 September meeting; progress to be reported to Board on 6 November alongside change management team's recommendations.

Issue

3. The effectiveness of HSC/E's communications strategy – both external and internal – has emerged as an issue from several quarters. The change team have identified an improved understanding of our communications function and organisation as issues to be addressed, perhaps as a separate project in its own right alongside the suite of projects on which they are currently engaged. The SCS conference fully recognised (as had the Board/Commission joint meeting in June) that the effectiveness of our external communications – with stakeholders, Government and with the public more widely – would be a key factor in the success of our influencing strategy. The point was also reflected in the Executive's action plan promulgated on 12 July. The staff survey and other research suggests that staff do not see internal communications as always effective. This note therefore sets out some preliminary questions and thoughts, and suggests a way forward.

Communications: Our strengths and weaknesses

4. What does HSC/E currently “do” by way of communications? Is there a strategy behind our activity at present? What are our strengths and weaknesses? The answer is that there are many strengths and much activity, in particular:
 - High reputation for HSE books, infoline and HSE direct, and recognised as such across Government;
 - Communications contribute to current high degree of trust amongst the public in HSE’s role (the UEA study);
 - Strong reputation in EU and with European Agency, in particular in relation to European H & S week;
 - Many examples of effective communications campaigns: (Granada TV and “Worksmart”, gas safety campaign, Construction Summit 2001 etc)
 - HSE website one of the most visited in the Government – one million plus pages downloaded each week;
 - Effective publicity support for priority programmes (eg Farmwise for Agriculture).
 - Organisation and infrastructure capable of delivering multiple face to face contacts per year.

5. Equally, at a time when strong communication is recognised as central to the effectiveness of organisations, both public and private, there are weaknesses:
 - Publications strategy determined by pressures from disparate sources;
 - Communications not automatically built into policy and operational strategy from the outset;
 - Internal communications not given sufficient priority (different messages communicated at different levels, etc);
 - Chair, Commissioners, DG, senior staff not seen as, or used as, a resource to communicate HSC/E’s message;
 - Over – reliance on communicating with known stakeholders in health and safety community and reluctance to go wider;
 - Lack of clarity at all levels as to what is the message we are communicating.
 - External perception of HSE not yet as unified body with common messages.
 - Reluctance of Board hitherto to commit to higher profile work on stakeholders and intermediaries, as proposed by SASD.

6. This picture adds up to a range of activities and a lot of hard work across HSE. But we can and should do better, building on our strengths and remedying our weaknesses. As the change programme approaches implementation stage, we should work to ensure that refocusing our internal delivery effort across HSE is matched by a re-focussing of our communications effort, both internal and external, including a greater degree of customer focus.

Action

7. If we are to seize the opportunity created by the change programme and the message from the SCS conference, work should be set in hand now to address three key questions:
 - How to engage our communications effort more fully in enhancing the effectiveness, reputation and standing of HSC/E;
 - How to focus that effort more fully to promote health and safety, and in particular our strategic goals;
 - How to measure the impact of our communications on those we are seeking to influence.
8. Initial thoughts on the scope of the work needed to respond to these questions suggest a project on the following lines:
 - (a) Describing and understanding by means of a rapid communications audit what we do, what we should do, and our effectiveness; this should lead to a clearer definition of what we mean by a communications policy and what are its principal components;
 - (b) Getting a grip on the diffuse “stakeholder management” exercises carried out across HSE, and how best to marshal the process coherently;
 - (c) Articulating clearly the outcomes we are seeking to achieve through better communications in the areas identified in paragraph 7 above (reputation, strategy and impact);
 - (d) Defining current and foreseeable opportunities for enhancing our communications impact (eg with new Department and Ministers, with OGDs and other NDPBs and Agencies, and with the wider public);
 - (e) Revisiting and strengthening our internal communications effort;
 - (f) In the light of the above, proposing the most appropriate approach to delivering a re-focussed communications strategy, consistent with emerging outcomes from the change programme.
 - (g) Identifying good practice in other organisations which HSE might usefully emulate.

Recommendation

9. That the Board agrees a project on the lines set out in paragraph 8 above, to be taken forward rapidly by a small team involving SASD, DIAS, the change team, the secretariat and contributors from both policy and operations.

