

Health and Safety Executive Senior Management Team Paper		SMT/09/130	
Meeting Date:	2 December 2009	FOI Status:	Fully Open
Type of Paper:	For discussion	Trim Ref:	2009/475530
FOI Exemptions:			
Keywords:			

## HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

Senior Management Team

### Proposal for a Chief Knowledge and Information Officer for HSE

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Cleared by Kevin Myers on 18 November 2009

#### Issue

1. That HSE should seek to establish a new function of Chief Knowledge and Information Officer (CKIO). This to provide strategic oversight and direction to improving knowledge and information management in HSE and provide a strategic direction in respect of HSE's investments in technology.

#### Timing

2. Routine – for your meeting on 2 December

#### Recommendation

3. You are invited to:
  - Agree in principle that HSE should establish a new CKIO function and if you do;
  - Commission BSD (in conjunction with CSAG and under the guidance of the DCE) to develop detailed proposals for the role.

#### Background

4. Paper SMT/09/129 presents a discussion paper by HSE's Chief Scientist on the issue of knowledge management. The paper states that while there is no sense that things are out of control, there is a consensus that HSE would benefit from managing knowledge and information better. At the very least, this would reduce the risks associated with the present, unstructured approach, where the good practice required to safeguard HSE's business interests and risks in this area is

largely dependent on individuals choosing to do the right thing. The paper also reports that there are uncertainties about which issues to tackle first to have most impact in terms of improving the management of knowledge.

5. In recent work by the Programme Board updating HSE's Information and Information Systems (I &IS) Strategy<sup>1</sup> there was a broad consensus that improvements are needed in the tools and processes currently used to manage and exploit information. Managers and staff across HSE were concerned that without these improvements, the challenges posed by the new business strategy, increasing pressures on transparency, accountability and openness, events such as the ICL enquiry and predicted cuts in public spending, would make managing the business risks relevant to Information much more difficult to manage and control. Persisting with the status quo could also threaten HSE's reputation as a trusted regulator and guardian of a substantial part of the UK's repository of health and safety knowledge and information.
6. There was also recognition though, that while improvements are necessary, it is not possible to do everything at once. Change has to be managed and our plans for it must be based on strategically astute choices about the priorities for the business. Yet the work on the I &IS Strategy revealed that there is no obvious mechanism for injecting this level of strategic oversight into the change process. The governance arrangements for the 'current' I &IS Strategy have withered over time and there is now no senior level person in HSE charged with overseeing the translation of strategic ambition to delivered outcomes.
7. A further key element of the context for this issue is the Government's determination to improve standards of information management in the wake of recent, highly publicised data losses. There is an agenda of over 100 mandatory actions, covering policies, processes, the use of technology, education and awareness that departments (including HSE) have to address. HSE has to report on these actions annually and will be held accountable for progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Done as part of the Information Systems and Technology (ISAT) Programme, which is also responsible for re-tendering the Refit contract.

## **Argument**

8. These factors add up to a challenging agenda and to help HSE cope with this, the body of this paper sets out a proposal for the creation of a Chief Knowledge and Information Officer (CKIO). This function would be new to HSE but is becoming increasingly common (in different forms) in private and public sector organisations. It is regarded as a best practice approach in Government and structures have been set up around this role to stimulate the sharing of experience and joint working on matters of common cause.
  
9. The challenge of improving knowledge and information management is by no means unique to HSE. Organisations across the public and private sectors have been wrestling with the issue and although approaches vary, it is common ground that real progress requires clear, committed, focussed and accountable leadership at a senior level.
  
10. The arguments in favour of this leadership are practical as well as symbolic in nature. The success of efforts to improve knowledge and information management depends in large measure on a clear articulation of the case for change and robust, action plans with clear deliverables. While there is nothing novel about this, creating this case and these plans requires particular insights and expertise. It requires a clear understanding of the strategic objectives and context of the business and of the approaches, technologies and other resources that can be used to deliver what the organisation requires. Without this marriage of business and technical expertise (including for example, knowledge of markets and suppliers) there is a risk that plans will lack strategic relevance and fail to deliver the maximum return for the business.
  
11. Providing this leadership would be the province of the CKIO, or CIO. There is no settled definition of the role of the CKIO, but very broadly, the purpose is to provide this senior level, strategic leadership in two related areas. The first and usually dominant area is knowledge management and organisational learning, where the aim is to help get the maximum possible value from the knowledge an

organisation possesses. The focus is very much on people, processes and ways of working.

12. The second area is the management and use of information, usually with a specific remit to develop and deliver strategies for the use of technology. The technology element is becoming more and more important, simply because increasingly, information is stored and traded in the virtual world. Furthermore, while technology is vital to the management of information, it is also an area where the Government expects departments to drive demonstrably more value. HSE has spent substantial amounts of money on ICT over the last five years or so – in excess of £20m per year – yet for the most part, our investment plans have not been explicitly linked to and driven by strategy. We need stronger governance and strategic oversight of these plans if we are to deliver the capabilities HSE needs to support the delivery of our business objectives.
13. Although the role would involve setting the direction of travel for HSE, establishing priorities, prescribing standards and delivering solutions, the job of improving knowledge and information management would not be the exclusive territory of the CKIO. This would need to remain a line management function. The effectiveness of the role would very much depend on the CKIO's ability to create relationships with senior colleagues and to develop a deep understanding of the issues facing the business. In this sense, the role is consultative and very much aimed at supporting line managers in their attempts to get staff to develop good information and knowledge management habits.
14. The CKIO would not only be responsible for developing and implementing plans for improving the way we manage knowledge and information, but for building and maintaining momentum on the delivery of those plans. In HSE, past efforts to improve information management have met with limited success. Even where HSE has mandated action, such as the clear desk policy or the use of EDRM as the corporate repository for information, levels of compliance have been disappointing. Amongst other things, these examples show that changing established practices is challenging and probably requires the kind of sustained attention that may well be beyond the life of any particular project or initiative. It

would be for the CKIO to systematically take stock of the lessons of the past and to look for new approaches and ways of doing things to encourage greater success.

15. The above provides an overview of the main elements of the CKIO role and offers some insights into the advantages it would bring to HSE. The main benefit is that it would be a co-ordinating force for efforts that are currently dispersed across HSE and would help to ensure greater alignment between the business and other supporting strategies. **Do you agree that such a role would in principle benefit HSE?**

16. If you do, the next step will be for BSD (with CSAG and under the direction of the DCE) to develop detailed proposals for how the role might operate in HSE.

### **Consultation**

17. This paper has drawn on the results of consultations held across HSE to inform the development of a revised I & IS Strategy for HSE and with the ISAT Programme Board. Discussions have also been held with Richard Lewis from CSAG.

### **Presentation**

18. N/a

### **Costs and Benefits**

19. N/a at this stage.

### **Financial/Resource Implications for HSE**

20. If you agree in principle to the creation of the CKIO post, any additional costs and offsetting benefits will be included in the further, more detailed proposals.

### **Environmental implications**

21. N/a

### **Action**

22. You are invited to:

- Agree in principle that HSE should establish a new CKIO role and if you do;
- Commission BSD (in conjunction with CSAG and under the guidance of the DCE) to develop detailed proposals for the role.