Communities Working Group

Purpose

A cross office working group, chaired by the Head of Communities.

Purpose:
- To provide the Head of Communities with oversight of communities work across the ICO, with a focus on those who may be experiencing vulnerability or have an unmet need.
- To provide a forum for cross office discussion and feedback on 'communities' work.
- To use the groups collective knowledge & contacts to provide relevant input, feedback and resources for 'communities' work as appropriate.
- To establish a network of informed colleagues, so 'communities' work is integrated across the office.
- To bring together work into a coherent programme that tells the story of how the ICO is supporting diverse and vulnerable communities.

Meeting schedule

The working group will meet once every 6 weeks, with ad hoc meetings and/or contact between members in the interim if needed.

Secretariat

The agenda and any papers will be distributed in advance.

A volunteer will be sought to provide secretarial support, such as note & action taking.

Review

The purpose & operation of the working group will be reviewed six-months from the initial meeting and yearly thereafter.

Author: Catherine Evans O'Brien
Edit: 09.04.24 (addition of 5th purpose) v0.2
Drafted: 05.03.24 v0.1

Working definitions

Communities work:

The ICO must be a regulator for everyone – engaging and empowering individuals in relation to information rights.

The ICO will need to engage at a community level, building relevant networks with appropriate special interest or representative organisations. We can work with these networks to identify the information rights issues that are affecting them, enabling us to act on that information, both in the services we provide and action we take to empower individuals. We can use these networks to improve our impact and reach as a regulator.

'Communities' work is a term that can be used to describe this engagement. It is broader than just vulnerability & unmet need BUT full recognition that this will likely be a large focus.

Vulnerability:

The definition below encapsulates the common thread that a person's vulnerability makes them at [particular (or greater) risk of harm](#) from the misuse of their personal data. This is in line with the definition used by the UK Regulators Network.

The ICO defines a vulnerable individual as someone who due to their needs or personal circumstances is:

- Less able to exercise their information rights,

- and/or especially susceptible to harm or detriment if their information rights are not upheld (e.g. from the misuse of their personal data).

The ICO recognises that everyone is at risk of harm from misuse of their personal data, but this risk is increased by having characteristics of vulnerability.

This definition is intentionally broad, to include both permanent and temporary (circumstantial) vulnerability (for example, permanent capacity concerns due to a learning disability, or temporary vulnerability due to a period of unemployment), and also includes those at risk of inequality.

Unmet need:

The definition of 'communities of unmet need' is an additional definition which has been provided to support a shared understanding of this phrase, and to help identify work that could fall within the communities remit.

The ICO defines communities or groups of unmet need as people who would benefit from the support and protection of information rights laws but are not currently accessing their rights, because they are either unaware those rights exist; or there are barriers (economic, health or social) preventing them from accessing them. These groups of people and their representatives are likely to have limited awareness of the role of the ICO in upholding these rights or the role we can play in empowering them to access them. Equally, the ICO is unable to support those people and tackle their issues if it doesn't know about them.

For example, our recent public awareness work highlighted that only 29% of people are very or quite familiar with the ICO and its work (ICO Public Awareness Survey 2022). People can't assert rights they don't know they have; and won't complain to a regulator they don't know exists. Also, organisations that are supporting individuals won't be able to do so effectively if they aren't aware of our resources.