

Executive Team minutes

Tuesday 5 May 2015

Members and other attendees present

Simon Entwisle	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Christopher Graham	Information Commissioner (chair)
Jonathan Bamford	Head of Strategic Liaison
Graham Smith	Deputy Commissioner and Director of Freedom of Information
Neil Bostock	Corporate Governance Officer (secretariat)

1. Introductions and apologies

- 1.1. There were apologies from David Smith, Deputy Commissioner, who was unable to attend the meeting. Jonathan Bamford attended in his stead.

2. Matters arising from the previous meeting

Minutes

- 2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were presented for approval and were accepted as a true record.

Discussion on outstanding action points

- 2.2. Progress had been made on how best to utilise the expertise of the non-executive directors' at the ICO. Their inclusion in projects such as the Triennial Review and considering IT risk would soon be underway. Executive Team members were reminded of the need to consider using the expertise of the non-executive directors in more ICO projects.

3. Key finance issues

Issue

- 3.1. Simon Entwisle introduced a paper which highlighted some of the key financial issues for the new financial year. These included a discussion around salary underspend, moving budgets from one department to another (virement), and subsistence rates.

Salary costs

- 3.2. From April 2015 heads of department will receive more detailed real-time reports on their staffing complement and staff costs. This will help mitigate against the underspend in salary costs seen in recent years.

Budget virements

- 3.3. In order to track and control how budget spend is managed internally across the ICO, a formal process has been created to administer movement between budgets.

Subsistence rates

- 3.4. Simon Entwisle had considered the implications arising from increasing the ICO subsistence rates which currently match Treasury limits. The main issue administratively was that increasing the rates above Treasury limits meant that the excess was seen as a benefit in kind and the employee would be liable for tax.
- 3.5. The problem for staff arose when they had to be out of the office for several hours on business and could only do work between meetings (for example in a café) if they bought drinks or snacks. This could easily take them above the current subsistence rate. In certain cases it was thought that the additional expenditure in effect amounted to an external incidental office cost which could properly be met by the ICO.
- 3.6. There was also discussion about first class travel and the occasional circumstances when first class travel was cheaper than standard.

Decisions

- 3.7. It was agreed to trial the payment of incidental office costs as described above over the next six months. Employees must be able to prove any extra expenditure was necessary to allow them to work in a safe and practical environment.
- 3.8. It was agreed to allow first class travel where it was cheaper than standard class travel and where there was no evidence that there had been any manipulation of the system to travel first class.

Actions

- 3.9. Simon Entwisle to ensure finance procedures were amended to reflect the trial of incidental office expenses and the decision to allow first class travel when demonstrably cheaper than standard.

- 3.10. Corporate Governance to ensure a review by Executive Team of the incidental office expenses trial in October.

4. Strategic Liaison staffing proposals

Issue

- 4.1. The demands on Strategic Liaison have increased substantially in recent years and this paper recommended an increase in the complement of staff by an extra four level E posts.
- 4.2. The cost of the increase in staff members has been included in the 2015-16 budget.

Decisions

- 4.3. Executive Team agreed the recommendation.

5. European Spring Conference.

Issue

- 5.1. This paper was an opportunity for Executive Team members to receive the latest and final update on preparations for the European Spring Conference in Manchester.
- 5.2. Preparations are on track and all volunteer roles have been allocated to ICO staff members. The conference begins on Monday 18 May.

6. Any other business

- 6.1. The foreword for the annual report for 2014-15 has been drafted and Executive Team colleagues were asked for their input before final sign off.
- 6.2. To help the ICO make the best use of its powers under PECR (reinforced by the recent removal of the threshold at which the ICO could take enforcement action) it has been decided to increase the number of staff working in Enforcement with creation of a new group manager role.