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## Management Board

### Communicating with staff: options for consideration

*Paper by the Head of Central Communications,  
Office of the Chief Executive*

#### Purpose

1. This paper provides the Board with a number of options to consider which would help improve staff communication, especially during the progress of the Savings Programme, but also in the longer term.

#### Matters for decision

2. The Board is asked to:
  - (a) Endorse the Savings Programme plans for further staff engagement and consultation, including the possibility of further all-staff meetings in the New Year.
  - (b) Agree to replace *Parliamentary News* with a Commons-only publication.
  - (c) Agree to merge *Commons Digest* with the new Commons-only staff publication.
  - (d) Agree to the establishment of 'Management Briefing Notes' and to agree the audience for them (e.g. managers or Senior Leaders).

#### Background

3. At its meeting in September, the Board discussed the findings of the staff survey, and asked the OCE Communications team to bring forward proposals in November on improving the cascade of information to staff. The category of communications was rated highly in the 2010 staff survey, with 76% of staff expressing satisfaction. However, management visibility - especially that of the Board - was not rated highly in the survey and the need for improved internal communications around the Savings Programme was a consistent theme running through the Leadership Event held on 15 October. This was also raised in the all-staff meetings in November.

#### Savings Programme – further staff engagement and consultation

- 4.1 The OCE and the Savings Programme Team are working with Business Management Directors (BMDs) to plan interactive, two-way, savings communications activities at a departmental level.
- 4.2 The following communication process has been adopted:
  - OCE Communications Team met BMDs and the savings team on 10 November to help ensure that a consistent approach to staff consultation is adopted by all departments.

- Consultation document ( with emailed covering message from the Clerk of the House and Chief Executive) containing details of the proposed package of savings to be issued to all staff via the intranet on Monday 15 November.
  - A consultation period will run from 15 to 30 November – the deadline for feedback and staff input is 30 November. The aim of this exercise is to help the Board understand:
    - The risks associated with making these changes and how the risks might be mitigated.
    - The interdependencies – for example whether savings in one area would lead to increased costs in another.
    - Any additional areas where it might be possible to reduce costs or generate income in the shorter-term.
  - Departments have been advised by OCE to set up large staff meetings to gather views.
  - OCE will provide a form to allow departmental managers to collect staff views in a consistent way for the Savings Team to consider.
  - BMDs will be the focal point for any questions from staff about the savings proposed in other departments. BMDs will log questions and obtain answers as required.
- 4.3 Staff can give feedback through BMDs; to the Savings Team through [communicationsoce@parliament.uk](mailto:communicationsoce@parliament.uk); or via their trade union representative if they would prefer to remain anonymous.
- 4.4 More meetings are planned for all staff, senior leaders and middle managers (Band As). The recent staff meetings on the strategy, savings and the staff survey have illustrated that staff have an appetite for face-to-face communications and we propose to hold more frequent meetings of this nature, especially while the Savings Programme is underway.
- 4.5 Plans include:
- A leadership cadre meeting scheduled for December 2010 (this group will be primed for running possible all staff meetings in January).
  - A series of all staff meetings have been arranged to run over six days in the Attlee Suite and Room E (7 Millbank) at the end of January. These meetings have been set up in case the Management Board wants to update staff following the December Commission meeting or to give a flavour of what is going to happen in the year ahead (e.g. implementation of tactical savings and development of longer- term savings).
  - The possibility of reviving the A grade management/management conference during the implementation phase of the Savings Programme – date to be confirmed.

## Improving written communications

5. The following measures could be implemented quickly across the House to improve staff communications in the short- and medium-term.

### 5.1 *Parliamentary News*

5.1.1 The House of Lords have, for some time, expressed a desire to withdraw from the monthly bicameral *Parliamentary News*. Currently the Lords contribute only about 15% of the cost of production and the OCE meets all the staff costs. The recent Lords staff survey found *Parliamentary News* was less valued by staff than the Lords-only *Red Carpet*. There are now other forms of bicameral communication - e.g. the intranet – and the two communications teams work closely together. There is therefore less need than in the past for a formal bicameral newsletter.

5.1.2 This would therefore be an opportune moment to phase out *Parliamentary News* and in its place launch a Commons staff magazine. We would of course continue to liaise with Lords colleagues to ensure proper coverage of issues relevant to both Houses. The magazine could be renamed *Commons News*. This approach has been discussed with the Lords supervising editor of *Parliamentary News* and she is content. PICT staff will continue to be featured in the proposed Commons only publication and will continue to receive their own hard copies of it. (*Red Carpet News* is not supplied to PICT as a matter of course, though it is available on the intranet.) Lords and Commons communications teams would work together on communicating the fact that *Parliamentary News* was to be replaced. The impact on OCE's budget would be minimal

5.1.3 Were *Parliamentary News* to be replaced with a Commons-only newsletter, it would be easier to use it as a vehicle to support the Management Board's efforts to be more visible to staff and to show leadership (particularly during the savings programme). For instance, we could publish the full 'Ask the Management Board' digest every month – something which has been requested – and the editorial comment could be rotated among Board Members.

### 5.2 *Commons Digest*

5.2.1 *Commons Digest* is a monthly e-newsletter currently aimed at managers (e.g. A2s and above). It is possible, however, for any member of staff to subscribe to the publication, which means it includes much information which is not specific to managers. It has been suggested that emailing *Commons Digest* to all staff (rather than waiting for them to ask for it) could help increase staff understanding and knowledge of corporate issues.

- 5.2.2 Were *Parliamentary News* to be replaced by a Commons-only newsletter available to all staff, there would be less need to continue *Commons Digest* in its current form. To avoid unnecessary duplication and communication overload, we propose that the two newsletters be merged into a single monthly magazine. This would appear in two formats, with the hard copy being complemented by an e-version (containing e.g. links to relevant information on the intranet.)
- 5.2.3 We suggest a new communication, *Management Briefing Notes* to supplement the new merged newsletter (see below).

### 5.3 ***Management Briefing Notes***

- 5.3.1 At present, the OCE Communications Team sends senior leaders various ad hoc emails on particular issues as required. There are, however, a number of issues on which a 'briefing note', giving background information on a given issue, might be very useful – e.g. the nursery, latest position on pay, voluntary severance etc. The need for this kind of briefing was flagged up during the staff meetings, especially by senior leaders.
- 5.3.2 We propose the establishment of *Management Briefing Notes*: a simple A4 sized publication, usually single-sided, but with the flexibility of being longer if needed, containing information (background, current position etc) on a single issue. These would be emailed out to senior leaders/managers and would ensure that managers were well informed, should staff or Members ask them questions. They be used as the basis for team briefings. Such briefing notes would provide an opportunity for the Management Board to outline its position proactively on key issues and would ensure consistency of message when managers talked to their staff – one of the issues raised at September's Board. We could also encourage managers to suggest topics for *Management Briefing Notes*, based on the comments and queries they have had from staff. At the team meetings, it was suggested that a "rumour busting" mechanism might be devised – MBNs could perhaps provide the means. Initially, OCE would prepare MBNs based on the 'lines to take' prepared for the recent staff meetings.
- 5.3.3 Does the Board want MBNs to be sent only to Senior Leaders or more widely to managers in their departments? If the latter, it would be helpful if DGs and D-PICT could identify which managers they would like it sent to in their department.

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