

## Board Paper

### Date

27 April 2022

### Title

Communications Strategy, Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Media Relations Strategy

### Report Author

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### Responsible Executive Director

Richard Greenhous, Chief of Staff

Paper for decision

Open paper

## Issue

1. To date the OEP's approach to communication and engagement has either been set within the context of a specific programme of work or has been arranged on a relatively reactive basis. In order for the OEP to achieve its mission it is essential that a proactive and managed corporate level Communications Strategy, Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Media Relations Strategy are set and implemented.
2. We therefore propose a more strategic and structured approach to this area of the OEP's work to ensure that our communications and engagement activity supports our strategic objectives. The Annexes to this paper contain draft proposals for an over-arching communications strategy, stakeholder engagement plan and media relations strategy.

## Recommendation

3. We recommend that the Board considers the three draft strategies in the Annexes to this paper and provides comment and steer - noting that the final strategy is to be agreed by the Interim CEO.
4. We recommend that the Board considers the proposal that the approach set out in the Annexes is applied in England and Northern Ireland, or whether further work is needed to develop a separate approach for NI.

5. We recommend that the Board in particular consider the aspects of the approach relating to the roles of Board members:
  - a. Board members are a valuable asset in our stakeholder engagement and how they can best support this will be a key consideration during the planning stage for corporate and team / project level activity
  - b. The Chair will have a role in managing relationships as part of the leadership elements of the stakeholder plan and is a leading spokesperson for the organisation, alongside the CEO.

## 6. **Background**

7. The nature of the OEP's role and remit means that in order to protect and improve the environment it must do so by changing the behaviour or influencing the decisions of others. The OEP will therefore only achieve its strategic objectives if it has influence and impact. This will rely on excellent communications and stakeholder engagement. The organisation does not yet have in place agreed strategies for its communications and stakeholder engagement activities. The lack of a finalised stakeholder engagement plan is perhaps the most significant gap, as teams across the organisation continue to engage with a wide range of organisations and individuals without a framework to co-ordinate and oversee this work, or therefore maximise its impact.
8. The Communications and Strategic Relations team is currently made up of 3 members of staff. Their reach includes Northern Ireland. The proposed strategies must provide a framework to support engagement activities to be delivered by staff across the OEP. In this way, the OEP will be able to undertake engagement to the extent we aim for.

## **Analysis**

9. The Communications Strategy seeks to set out the overall aims and objectives for the Communications and Strategic Relations team to help the organisation achieve its strategic objectives. The intention is for this to then be supported by strategies for specific areas of work – stakeholder engagement, media relations, digital communications and internal communications that will support those aims and objectives. The team has prioritised stakeholder engagement and media engagement at this time and has set out a timeline for completion of the other areas.
10. The documents have been discussed by members of the Executive Committee and their feedback will be incorporated in the next round of amendments. This feedback primarily focused on ensuring that the stakeholder strategy includes more about engagement with the public as a lever for influence.
11. Key features of the Communications Strategy include:
  - a. Overall aim of establishing OEP as credible voice to increase influence and impact

- b. Two objectives – establishing credibility and ensuring operational effectiveness and impact of the communications function – supported by a range of deliverable activities
  - c. Several key messages to feed into all communications activities
  - d. Identification of the main communications opportunities and how these will be approached to support this strategy
12. The Stakeholder Engagement Plan sets out a framework for the OEP’s engagement with a broad range of organisations and individuals. The organisation has many stakeholders and needs to engage with them on diverse issues, for differing reasons and at various levels. This results in a large volume of activity, information and insight that must be captured and recorded in such a way it can be used purposefully to inform our work.
13. Key features of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan include:
- a. A proposed approach for stakeholder mapping and recording of information and intelligence in a central database
  - b. Categorising engagement activity across four levels – leadership; corporate; team/operational; individual – with explanation of the roles and responsibilities at each level. This will mean responsibility for some engagement activity sits with teams across the OEP, and we need to ensure that this is captured in the current business planning work.
  - c. A requirement for stakeholder engagement planning to be a key part of all projects or priority areas, to understand the position in detail and to aid the planning of specific activity to ensure influence and impact
  - d. Consideration to be given to how Board members can support stakeholder engagement to be a key consideration when planning our activities
14. The Media Relations Strategy seeks to set out a proactive approach to managing the OEP’s interactions with the press, with a particular focus on key environment sector journalists.
15. Key features to note in the Media Relations Strategy include:
- a. The press office will operate during office hours (Mon-Fri, 9am to 5pm) with no service to the media provided outside of these times
  - b. The Communications and Strategic Relations team will provide cover outside of office hours if needed in exceptional circumstances
  - c. All OEP statements and releases will be attributed to a named person. Our main spokespeople will be Dame Glenys for political / strategic issues and the CEO for operational issues. However, we will look for opportunities to show the depth and breadth of knowledge and expertise within the OEP by featuring other people where appropriate. The Executive Committee will be key to this, and media training will be provided to support.

## Northern Ireland

16. The intent is for the approach set out in the Annexes to be applied in England and Northern Ireland, although there will be differences in implementation to reflect the different operating environments.
17. While the longer-term aim will be to integrate our Northern Ireland stakeholders into the overall approach and mapping work, it is proposed that in the shorter term we view them as a separate stakeholder group and put in place a bespoke engagement plan as we develop our knowledge and understanding.

## Impact Assessments

### Finance and Resource

18. There are no added financial implications relating to these strategies. They have been developed within the resources available and been considered during the business planning process. *This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
19. There is one vacancy in the Communications and Strategic Relations team, a HEO post. The intention is to develop that job role to focus on digital communications, as social media and the website are currently under-resourced.

### Risk Assessment

20. The main risk to the implementation of the proposed strategies is the limited capacity within the Communications and Strategic Relations team. The team is vulnerable to abstractions and to unexpected increases in demand. In mitigation, the team will seek support from elsewhere in the organisation via the Executive Committee when necessary. Short term procurement of contractors is unlikely to be a workable option in response to increases in demand at short notice due to the nature and pace of the communications work.
21. While the OEP's stakeholder engagement has been proactive and well-received up to now, as we become operational there is apprehension among some around how we will work and engage with them. The feedback to the strategy consultation also showed a desire for more clarity and detail around how this will work. Failure to implement a strategic and structured approach to stakeholder engagement could undermine the organisation's credibility, damage its ability to influence and therefore prevent it achieving its strategic objectives.
22. No legal risks have been identified relating to these strategies.

### Equality Analysis

23. No material equalities impacts have been identified. However, it is acknowledged that the proposed Communications Strategy does not include specific actions to target hard to reach audiences. This will be developed in future reviews of the strategy. However, we are ensuring that our website meets accessibility requirements and are putting in place

arrangements to ensure all publications can be available in the appropriate formats. Without a proactive strategy, there is a greater risk of us failing to effectively communicate with groups that share a protected characteristic.

## Environmental Analysis

- 24. The proposed strategies have been developed to support the OEP to achieve its strategic objectives.

## Implementation Timescale

- 25. The principal steps to implement the strategies will be for the Communications and Strategic Relations team to meet with other teams and members of the Executive Committee to start planning the details for the required engagement activity. The team will also need to complete the stakeholder mapping exercise and develop the central database to store information and intelligence. The intention is to complete this work by the end of July. The Communications Strategy sets out a proposed timeline for completion of the different supporting strategies to deliver the required outcomes.

## Communications

- 26. The Communications and Strategic Relations team will engage with colleagues across the OEP to implement the approach. When the plans for engagement activity have been worked through, we will develop a communications approach to inform stakeholders and implement the required engagement activities.

## External Stakeholders

- 27. In developing these strategies, we have considered feedback from earlier stakeholder engagement, advice from colleagues who have led OEP stakeholder engagement activities and the feedback received in response to the strategy consultation.

Paper to be published	Yes
Publication date (if relevant)	With meeting minutes
If it is proposed not to publish the paper or to not publish in full please outline the reasons why with reference to the exemptions available under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or Environmental	N/A

Information Regulations (EIR). Please include references to specific paragraphs in your paper	
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## ANNEXES LIST

*Annex A – This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

*Annex B – This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

*Annex C – This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*