

Review of the Delivery of Official Controls: MHS / FSA Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Executive summary

1. The communications teams in MHS and the FSA have been working closely to develop a joint approach to the management of communications issues arising from the review of the delivery of official controls.
2. A joined-up approach is of particular importance in managing effectively engagement with stakeholders.
3. The Board is asked to note the contents of this paper.

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The need for a communications plan

1. The July report to the FSA Board on the delivery of official controls generated considerable interest from stakeholders, both in industry, consumer groups, MHS staff and trade unions. The issues raised will remain significant for stakeholders over the coming months. It is essential that as the elements of the review are taken forward there is a coherent programme of communications to stakeholders which embraces both the MHS and FSA elements which follow on from the review.

Overview of communications activity

2. We have put two strands of work in place:
 - **Review of the delivery of official controls strategic communications** – managed by FSA External Affairs team, focusing on government, parliament, industry trade associations and consumer groups.
 - **MHS transformation communications** – managed by MHS communications team (with advice and support from FSA communications where required) focusing on MHS staff and contractors, FBOs, unions, trade press and industry trade associations.

The two strands are working in tandem, ensuring consistency of messages.

3. There are four main elements to the work:
 - ensuring that communications following the review of delivery of official controls reflect 'one' voice and a clear set of consistent messages

- close co-ordination between FSA and MHS on who is leading communications in particular areas
- a programme of active engagement involving appropriate senior staff and key stakeholders
- effective internal communications with MHS staff

One voice and clear messages

4. Our communications must be consistently open and honest. Our external messages must be consistent with the internal messages to MHS staff and contractors. We are striving to explain clearly the reasons for our plans and the progress we are making. We aim to listen to and respond to the concerns of stakeholders, but are prepared to challenge them where necessary (for example, if we are misrepresented). We must avoid any temptation to be excessively upbeat or to underestimate the challenges ahead.
5. Work is in hand on developing a core set of key communications messages. These will include key lines to take on the reasons behind the review of delivery of official controls, the Advisory Body, costs, charging, market effects, the Control Body, transformed MHS, etc. Crucially, we must clearly articulate the ethos behind the FSA Board decision to move towards full cost-recovery and the impact this will have on FBOs.
6. Once finalised, the key messages will form the core of all our outward-facing communications and be the basis of briefings for most of the meetings suggested below.

Achieving joined-up communications

7. In order to ensure that messaging and activity is co-ordinated between FSA and MHS, a joint working-group has been set up which meets fortnightly to assess progress and agree next steps.

This group currently consists primarily of MHS and FSA communications staff and this has proved valuable in building a shared understanding of communications challenges. However co-ordination of communications must embrace all this involved in MHS communications including MHS senior staff, the FSA Meat Hygiene and Veterinary Division and colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

8. Further consideration is being given as to how to address these challenges in a meeting taking place week commencing 12 November.

Active engagement

9. The core of both the strategic and transformation communications programmes is a series of meetings between senior FSA and MHS staff and key stakeholders. In addition to face-to-face meetings, we are pursuing opportunities provided by conferences and will supplement these with written briefings where helpful.
10. Key to the success of this plan is the appropriate use of the FSA Chair and Deputy Chair and the FSA and MHS Chief Executives time. Especially crucial is Ian Reynolds' joint role as FSA Deputy Chair and Chair of the MHS Board.
11. FSA and MHS communications teams are drawing together existing contact programmes for senior staff in order to assess what is currently planned and what further contact can be initiated. The current forward look is attached at Annex A.
12. Examples of current activity include the FSA and MHS working together to agree the key messages to be delivered in Deirdre Hutton's speech to the Association of Independent Meat Suppliers and the

development of a targeted programme of engagements for Ian Reynolds.

13. It is essential that our communications are responsive to the views of stakeholders. However well thought through our messages, and however well communicated, we need to listen to issues being raised by stakeholders and take account of the feedback we receive. This is essential both to develop effective policy and deliver strong communications.

Internal communications

14. In recognition of the critical importance of communication to the success of the change programme, the MHS is regularly communicating the transformation direction of travel, plans and progress to its staff.
15. Internal communications activities to date have included:
 - Letters from the Chief Executive
 - Weekly update notes on key activities and progress
 - Monthly cascade briefings delivered face to face by line managers
 - Fortnightly lunchtime seminars in Headquarters on key aspects of the programme. This has included a session by Ian Reynolds on the MHS Board
 - A briefing and Q&A session led by Kathryn Davies, Corporate Services Director, to inform Corporate Services staff of the shared services review

Activities being developed include:

- Face-to-face meetings for the four key management groups are planned for December for Employed Veterinarians, Senior Meat

Hygiene Inspectors, Area Managers and all office based HEOs and above

- A new TMHS intranet page
- A series of plant visits for SMT are being planned to increase visibility at the front-line

Each communication opportunity encourages MHS staff to contribute ideas for improvement and ask questions.

FSA EXTERNAL AFFAIRS TEAM

November 2007

