

Notes of meeting of Licensing Forum

25 April 2005
UKHO, Taunton

Present:

Muriel Adamson	UK Hydrographic Office
John Beaufoy	DSA
Andrea Bradley	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Richard Bridge	DVLA
Ken Dearman (Chair)	UK Hydrographic Office
Margaret Fuller	Fire Service College
Tony Jardine	Ordnance Survey
Anna Jeremiah	Office of Public Sector Information
Janice Knight	HM Land Registry
Frances Law	MHRA
Brian Morgan	DTI
Tim Padfield	National Archives
John Ponting	Met Office
Bill Pope	DFT
Helen Westhall (Secretary)	Office of Public Sector Information

1. Introductions

- The Chair welcomed everyone to the third Licensing Forum and introduced the first speaker.

2. Government Communications Network (GCN)

Introduced by Bill Pope (Department for Transport)

- Bill explained why GCN was relevant to the Licensing Forum and the obvious link to communications for those dealing with information. GCN is open to everyone, not just those who formerly qualified for the Government Information and Communication System (GICS). Bill explained that GCN appreciates that communication is two-way and it is not just a case of announcing information to the public or stakeholders.
- A wider spread of disciplines is required, as GICS was focused on marketing and press office, but GCN has opened up and the emphasis is on explaining policy to the public. There is a need to develop the communication skills of those working in policy. It is possible to recruit for licensing positions via GCN.
- There is now greater evidence of information sharing and sharing of best practice, particularly with initiatives such as the Government Publishers Group and the Licensing Forum. GCN is another method of sharing best practice. There are also paths to personal and professional development, such as 'Day

if the life of courses, and future plans include Chartered Institute of Marketing membership, and interchange and mentoring opportunities. Bill went on to explain that the website was central to GCN's development and includes guidance notes.

- Bill encouraged everyone to register with www.comms.gov.uk

3. Discussion

- The overlaps between other issues such as Freedom of Information (FOI), Public Sector Information (PSI) Regulations and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) were mentioned, and Bill agreed that there are problems with different projects operating with very little communication and there needs to be more integration. Joining the network would assist in creating a more joined up approach.
- Most organisations communicate, and in theory all government agencies could have members of GCN. Bill agreed and invited everyone to look at the skills framework and suggested that almost everyone present would have some of the relevant skills and experience to offer. Everyone has something to give and get out of the network.
- At first GCN was only communicated to the people involved in GICS, and people became aware of it at initiatives such as the Government Publishers Group, but one of the reasons that it was mentioned today is due to the necessity for widening of awareness. It is available to people not on gsi as it is website-based and you are required to register with the network for different levels of access. The only grey area is Non-Departmental Public Bodies.
- The question of whether GCN might be used to obtain advice and feedback via web-based forums was raised and this is an issue which is being looked into by HMSO for the Government Publishers Group at the moment.

4. The Advisory Panel on Public Sector Information

Introduced by John Ponting (Met Office)

- In the late 1990s the Treasury carried out a cross cutting review of the Knowledge economy, in which there was a general review of licensing of Public Sector Information and the regulatory framework of Trading Funds. The Information Fair Trader Scheme (IFTS) and the Advisory Panel on Public Sector Information (APPSI) were established. APPSI has an independent Chair and Deputy Chair and five expert and twelve representative members. The expert members demonstrate a balanced view; the representative members represent their field. John represents Trading Funds. HMSO also have representation at most meetings, although if there is a reserved matter, HMSO are asked to leave.

- The role is to advise ministers. This is carried out through the annual report and meetings between the Chair and ministers. Information is readily available via www.appsi.gov.uk. APPSI advises the Controller of HMSO and advises on the IFTS complaints procedure. APPSI's role may be extended to incorporate the complaints procedure under the PSI regulations. In this case APPSI would act as an appeals body, using a small panel with additional experts as necessary.
- In the first annual report there were four messages: overall awareness of the importance of the PSI regulations was low, Government policy is fragmented, the commercial exploitation of PSI needs further scrutiny and HMSO was performing well. There were also seven recommendations.
- APPSI has also held two annual seminars with very interesting and wide ranging debates on PSI. APPSI is also producing a booklet on "what is PSI?"

5. Discussion

- The issue surrounding conflict between releasing information in the public interest and commercial exploitation was raised. This is a difficult issue, but often people make more informed decisions when they consider how things are funded. It is often more effective to educate people if they pay, as information is of a higher quality. Often people don't take as much notice if information is free. This does, however, need to be explored in the context of each area and each individual case.
- It was emphasised that HMSO has been effective in communicating that the same price should be allocated for the same purpose.
- It would be useful to explore the definition of commercial and non-commercial at the next Forum. It was suggested that in the Information Society Directive, the definition of commercial was useful.
- When defining a commercial interest, the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) looks at the total use of UKHO i.e. the primary interest is to continue having UKHO and that requires funding. They then investigate the greater public need, not just individual need.
- John noted that it is often difficult to represent Trading Funds at APPSI. There have been meetings with some trading funds (those that trade mainly in information) and a copy of the annual report has been sent to all trading funds. The 2 Trading Funds representatives on APPSI, John and Duncan Shiell (from Ordnance Survey), requested feedback, but so far none has been forthcoming. Larger trading funds such as Ordnance Survey, UKHO and HM Land Registry face issues that John is aware of, but some of the smaller trading funds face different issues and there really needs to be more effective communication between the relevant groups.

- John outlined the recommendations from the first annual report. These include pulling together the overlaps between PSI and FOI, single and coherent policies applied across the public sector and greater scrutiny in the measurement of PSI activity.

6. General Discussion

- Ways of spreading best practice of licensing activity were discussed, and ideas such as mailing lists, newsletters, List Link, notice boards etc. There is also the possibility of providing expert answers.
- The question of how IFTS and FOI work together was raised and how much information should be given away free and what it will be used for. HMSO are working with the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) to produce standard paragraphs on this subject. Copyright notices should also be published, but under FOI it isn't possible to ask what the information will be used for. FOI is about access to information. HMSO is trying to build links with the DCA to ensure a joined-up approach.
- It was suggested that there is a need for rationalisation and a more joined up approach, as different groups are working on similar projects, but as FOI was passed pre PSI and EIR, it isn't always possible to pull all regulations together.

7. Next meeting

- The next Licensing Forum will be hosted by The National Archives in Kew and will take place in July.
- Topics may include frequently raised issues; the definition of commercial and non-commercial use and PSI and Guide to Best Practice.

Helen Westhall (Office of Public Sector Information)
25 April 2005