

Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland Internal Audit 2023-24

Internal & External Communications
January 2024

Overall Conclusion

Substantial

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Internal & External Communications

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The matters raised in this report came to our attention during the course of our audit and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all weaknesses that exist or all improvements that might be made.

This report has been prepared solely for Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland's individual use and should not be quoted in whole or in part without prior written consent. No responsibility to any third party is accepted as the report has not been prepared, and is not intended, for any third party.

We emphasise that the responsibility for a sound system of internal control rests with management and work performed by internal audit should not be relied upon to identify all system weaknesses that may exist. Neither should internal audit be relied upon to identify all circumstances of fraud or irregularity should there be any although our audit procedures are designed so that any material irregularity has a reasonable probability of discovery. Every sound system of control may not be proof against collusive fraud. Internal audit procedures are designed to focus on areas that are considered to be of greatest risk and significance.

Overview

Purpose of review

The purpose of this assignment was to review the communication methods adopted by the Organisation to liaise with key stakeholders. This review encompassed reviewing the use of internal and external communication channels to understand how the Organisation engaged with their stakeholders and how this shaped their communication strategy.

This review formed part of our 2023/24 Annual Internal Audit Plan.

Scope of review

Our objectives for this review were to ensure:

- There is an effective internal communications framework in place which operates effectively in line with defined policies and procedures.
- The Organisation has a detailed Communications Strategy that is designed to allow the Organisation to communicate effectively and meet their core organisational objectives.
- The Organisation adopts a variety of methods to communicate with stakeholders removing any inherent barriers to information.
- The communication methods adopted are suitable for the Organisation and allows for effective operations.
- The Organisation effectively gathers feedback from their key stakeholders on the methods adopted and ensure actions are raised for areas of improvement.
- The Organisation has robust mechanisms in place to measure their communication strategies through statistical analysis and stakeholder engagement.

- The effectiveness of communication mechanisms is evaluated and reported at a Management and AAB level.

Our approach to this assignment took the form of discussion with relevant staff, review of documentation and where appropriate sample testing.

Limitation of scope

There was no limitation of scope.

Background

Policies and procedures

The communication framework is underpinned by the Media and Communication Policy. The Policy includes the following areas:

- Communication with external stakeholders.
- Planning for each project.
- Involvement of Children and Young People in communications.
- Partnership working.
- Responsibility for Social media.

Further contributing to the communication framework is a suite of procedural documents to provide staff guidance on how to manage the responsibilities of their role, these documents include:

- Media enquiries and interviews.
- Presenting papers to Parliament.
- Interview requests.
- How to manage the CYPSC Instagram page.
- Filming videos.
- How to write a blog.

Communication Strategy

Currently there is no up-to-date Communication Strategy with the most recent version covering the period to 2020. Our review found that a new Communication Strategy will be produced alongside the Organisation's new 2024 Strategic Plan to enable their objectives to be linked. The new Communication Strategy will be supported by Communication Plans which will set out how the Organisation will achieve its objectives. The previous Communication Strategy had the following four objectives:

- Support children and young people to recognise that they are young human rights defenders.
- Create engaging resources and supporting materials to raise awareness and understanding of children's human rights.
- Identify influential partners in Scotland and internationally to increase the office's social capital.
- Target media relations work where they need to challenge decision-makers, such as the Scottish and UK governments to respect, protect and fulfil children's human rights.

Our review confirmed that action has been taken to develop the new Communication Strategy with the Organisation having communicated with its stakeholders via social media and its website.

Stakeholders

Whilst the Organisation has several stakeholders, due to its purpose its main stakeholders are children and young people. The Organisation communicates with children and young people through a variety of methods to help them understand the support offered by the Organisation. Our review found that the Organisation had engaged with children through surveys, social media posts, physical posters to remove the information barrier to children in supported services without internet access and groups such as the Young Advisors Group, whereby children and young people provide their opinions and feedback on relevant matters.

Communication Team

Within the Organisation there are three roles directly related to Communication, these being: Head of Communication, Digital Media Officer and a Media & Communications Officer. However, due to the size of the Organisation most of the Organisation's 18 members of staff participate in communication to a varying degree.

Systems

The Organisation employs the use of PRGloo, third-party media management software, which enables them to review journalist enquiries, approve and reject media requests and view the engagement of its communications to external stakeholders. The Organisation is also able to view the engagement it gets from each of its social media posts, through views, to enable them to understand the reach of its posts.

Reporting to Senior Management and AAB

Senior Management are updated on Communication as part of their monthly meetings, whilst the Audit Advisory Board receives an annual update via the Organisations annual report. The Audit Advisory Board are provided with an update on the progress of the Organisation against one of its six equality actions as it relates directly to communication i.e. *`all our communications are accessible and inclusive`*, as well as being provided with examples of how the organisation updated its stakeholders in the last year.

Work Undertaken:

In line with each objective, we undertook the following work:

Objective 1: There is an effective internal communications framework in place which operates effectively in line with defined policies and procedures.

- We reviewed the communication policies and procedures to confirm there is a communication framework in place.

Objective 2. The Organisation has a detailed Communications Strategy that is designed to allow the Organisation to communicate effectively and meet their core organisational objectives.

- We reviewed the Communication Strategy to assess whether its design to enable the Organisation to meet the objectives within its Strategic Plan.

Objective 3: The Organisation adopts a variety of methods to communicate with stakeholders removing any inherent barriers to information.

- We reviewed the methods in which the Organisation communicates with stakeholders to confirm that they can be altered to remove barriers to information.

Objective 4: The communication methods adopted are suitable for the Organisation and allows for effective operations.

- We reviewed the communication methods to confirm they are suitable and effective for the Organisation's operations.

Objective 5: The Organisation effectively gathers feedback from their key stakeholders on the methods adopted and ensure actions are raised for areas of improvement.

- We reviewed the methods for gathering feedback to assess how actions and improvements are drawn from feedback.

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Objective 6: The Organisation has robust mechanisms in place to measure their communication strategies through statistical analysis and stakeholder engagement.

- We reviewed the systems in place to measure engagement to ensure that the Organisation is aware of its stakeholder engagement.

Objective 7: The effectiveness of communication mechanisms is evaluated and reported at a Management and AAB level.

- We reviewed a sample of three meeting minutes of the Senior Management team and the annual report to the Board to confirm they are updated on communication.

Conclusion

Overall conclusion

Overall Conclusion: Substantial

Following our review, we can provide a substantial level of assurance surrounding the communication methods in place. We have identified 2 medium grade recommendations for improvement.

Summary of recommendations

Grading of recommendations				
	High	Medium	Low	Total
Internal & External Communications	0	2	0	2

As can be seen from the above table there were no recommendations made which we have given a grading of high.

Areas of good practice

The following is a list of areas where the Organisation is operating effectively and following good practice.

1	Communication within the Organisation is underpinned by a Media and Communications Policy as well as procedures.
2	The Organisation has adopted its communication methods with stakeholders to remove barriers to information.
3	The Organisation is aware of online engagement through monitoring social media posts and engagement with the media.

2 DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication Strategy			
Ref.	Finding and Risk	Grade	Recommendation
1.	A Communication Strategy should be in place to enable the Organisation to set out its current communication aims and objectives and the steps taken to achieve these objectives. There is currently no up-to-date Communication Strategy in place, although we acknowledge that the Organisation is actively developing a new Communication Strategy to align with the release of its 2024 Strategic Plan. There is a risk that the Organisation may not meet its communication objectives, as there is no Communication Strategy in place, which could lead to the objectives in the 2024 Strategic Plan not being met.	Medium	We recommend that a Communication Strategy is produced.

2 DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

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Management response	Responsibility and implementation date
Accepted.	<i>Responsible Officer:</i> Head of Communications <i>Implementation Date: By end May 2024 in line with new Strategic and delivery plan completion</i>

2 DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

Actions			
Ref.	Finding and Risk	Grade	Recommendation
2.	Feedback should be collated and analysed in such a way that key themes and trends can be drawn and action can be taken to improve these areas. Stakeholder feedback is sought through a variety of methods such as groups, surveys etc, however there is no direct action log to trace feedback to drive improvements. There is a risk that without analysing feedback and drawing key themes, actions cannot be taken to address these themes, meaning that stakeholder engagement will be less effective than it could be.	Medium	We recommend that feedback is collated, analysed and corresponding actions arise to address any feedback.

2 DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland
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Management response	Responsibility and implementation date
Accepted.	<i>Responsible Officer:</i> Head of Communications <i>Implementation Date:</i> April 2024

3 OBSERVATIONS

The following is a list of observations from our review

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | The Organisation can view its communication engagement via content management systems such as PRGloo, however it is investing in an additional system for digital communications to be able to draw statistical trends and analysis from this data. |
|----|---|

4 AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS

The table below details the actual dates for our fieldwork and the reporting on the audit area under review. The timescales set out below will enable us to present our final report at the next Audit Advisory Board meeting.

Audit stage	Date
Fieldwork start	6 December 2023
Closing meeting	7 December 2023
Draft report issued	3 January 2024
Receipt of management responses	23 April 2024
Final report issued	23 April 2024
Audit Advisory Board	10 October 2024
Number of audit days	3

5 KEY PERSONNEL

We detail below our staff who undertook the review together with the Organisation staff we spoke to during our review.

Wylie & Bisset LLP

Partner	Graham Gillespie	Partner	graham.gillespie@wyliebisset.com
Director	Stephen Pringle	Director of Internal Audit	stephen.pringle@wyliebisset.com
Senior	Colin McNeill	Internal Audit Senior	colin.mcneill@wyliebisset.com

Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

Key Contact	Ezmie McCutcheon	Head of Communications	ezmie.mccutcheon@cypcs.org.uk
Wylie & Bisset appreciates the time provided by all the individuals involved in this review and would like to thank them for their assistance and co-operation.			

APPENDICES

A GRADING STRUCTURE

For each area of review, we assign a level of assurance in accordance with the following classification:

Assurance	Classification
Strong	Controls satisfactory, no major weaknesses found, no or only minor recommendations identified.
Substantial	Controls largely satisfactory although some weaknesses identified, recommendations for improvement made.
Weak	Controls unsatisfactory and major systems weaknesses identified that require to be addressed immediately.
No	No or very limited controls in place leaving the system open to significant error or abuse, recommendations made require to be implemented immediately.

A GRADING STRUCTURE

For each recommendation, we assign a grading either as High, Medium or Low priority depending on the degree of risk assessed as outlined below:

Grading	Classification
High	Major weakness that we consider needs to be brought to the attention of the Audit Advisory Board and addressed by Senior Management of the organisation as a matter of urgency.
Medium	Significant issue or weakness which should be addressed by the organisation as soon as possible.
Low	Minor issue or weakness reported where management may wish to consider our recommendation.

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- The Organisation have robust mechanisms in place to measure their communication strategies through statistical analysis and stakeholder engagement.

- The effectiveness of communication mechanisms is evaluated and reported at a Management and AAB level.

Our approach to this assignment took the form of discussion with relevant staff, review of documentation and where appropriate sample testing.

Limitation of scope

There is no limitation of scope.

Audit approach

Our approach to the review will be:

- Review of communications mechanisms used throughout the Organisation.
- Discussions with staff to gain feedback on the effectiveness of internal and external communications throughout the Organisation.
- Review of internal communication within the Organisation to ensure it is consistent with communications strategy, policies and procedures.
- Review of the effectiveness of internal communications within the Organisation.

Potential key risks

The potential key risks associated with the area under review are:

- The inability to maintain effective communications with staff at all levels.
- The Organisation does not have a detailed Communications Strategy that is designed to allow the Organisation to communicate effectively and

meet their core organisational objectives.

- The Organisation have not adopted a variety of methods to communicate with stakeholders and have not removed any inherent barriers to information.
- The communication methods adopted are not suitable for the Organisation and does not allow for effective operations.
- The Organisation does not effectively gathers feedback from their key stakeholders on the methods adopted and does not ensure actions are raised for areas of improvement.
- The Organisation do not have robust mechanisms in place to measure their communication strategies through statistical analysis and stakeholder engagement.
- The effectiveness of communication mechanisms is not evaluated and not reported at a Management and AAB level.