**OA NETWORKS UPDATE: November 2024**

**Casework Network**

1. The Casework Network met virtually on 23 September to discuss how services ensure they get to the root cause/systemic issues sitting behind a complaint. This meeting included a presentation from Michael Hyatt on the LGSCO’s work on identifying wider issues in relation to organisational leadership and a presentation from Sarah Terrey at PHSO on how root cause analysis can be used in casework. This was followed by a discussion on the role of an Ombudsman in addressing wider systemic issues, and the appetite for this given current demand issues across services. The network will be meeting again on 2 December with the Financial Ombudsman Service leading a session about supporting complainants who are victims and survivors.

**Communications Network**

1. The Communications Network met at the end of September and looked at various big issues that were impacting the group, most notably the future of social media. This was discussed at length, with some Ombudsman schemes removing themselves from X and exploring other channels and others unsure about whether to leave the platform and push it further towards an echo chamber.

**Information Governance Network (formerly known as Data Protection Network)**

1. The inaugural meeting of the Information Governance Network is planned for 27 November.  The Network’s Terms of Reference has been drafted and shared with members ahead of the meeting. They’ll also be discussing the frequency of future meetings and themes.  Other agenda items include an introduction to the Data (Use and Access) Bill and Strategies for managing large volumes of FOI requests.  
     
   **First Contact Network**
2. The First Contact Network will meet again on 11 December, a range of discussion topics have been scheduled as agreed at their last meeting in June.

**HR Network**

1. The HR Network met on 6 November. They had 2 guest speakers: Sadie Marshall an Ombudsman from The Motor Ombudsman returned to the network to share the findings of her recent survey on wellbeing for Caseworkers; Anna Ives (HR Consultant) and Alix Beese (Partner) joined the network from BP Collins Solicitors to talk to the group about the update to the Worker Protection Act and the new duty on UK employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.  Both presentations encouraged interesting discussion in the group and we were pleased to be able to deliver these important HR topics to members. The next meeting will be planned for early in the new year with more exciting guest speakers invited.

**Legal Network**

1. The Legal Network has been inactive since the last OA Board meeting due to the lack of a Chair, Deput, or Secretariat. The CEX has engaged with individuals interested in leading the Network, and it is anticipated that fresh leadership will reinvigorate the Network in the new year.

**Policy Network**

1. The next meeting of the Policy Network will take place in January 2025. In the meantime, they have arranged a follow-up meeting with the UK Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to better understand their request for information about the status of recommendations. As a result of this, it is envisaged that a survey will be sent to members and the MOJ will attend the next meeting to discuss in more detail. Follow-ups are also in hand with the Law Society with a meeting to be scheduled.

**Outreach Network**

1. The Outreach Network has confirmed Catherine Evans O’Brien, Head of Communities at the ICO, as Deputy Chair following Natalie Freeman’s appointment as Chair and the next meeting will be held on 9 December. Outreach Network members have been surveyed for discussion topics for future meetings and have agreed to focus on ‘evaluating the impact of outreach’ and ‘cost-effective outreach approaches’ for the December meeting. Additional key areas of interest for Outreach include engagement with underserved communities; digital accessibility; and best practice – these topics will be factored into future meetings in the new year. Two speakers have been secured for the measurement/monitoring topic discussion and an in-person meeting will be discussed in the December meeting to plan for March/April meeting.

**New ‘ICT/Technology’ and ‘Research’ Networks**

1. Following the recent exploration of new networks to address emerging member needs, both the ICT/Technology Network and the Research Network have received positive support through survey results. Leadership selection for these networks is underway, and we anticipate that meetings for both will commence in the new year.

**Re-invigoration of dormant networks**

1. The Irish Forum, reconstituted on an ‘All-Ireland’ basis, is due to meet on 25 November. The ‘Territories & Dependencies Network’, reconstituted to include members in the Crown Dependencies, is expected to meet in the New Year. In addition, the CEX is taking forward work to re-launch the Senior Leaders Network in February.