



Business Plan

2017 - 2018

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Introduction

As Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, this is my third business plan and covers the period from April 2017 to March 2018, setting out how I intend to fulfil my statutory obligations. My role as Registrar is set out in the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act (2014), “The Act” and is independent of both Government and the lobbying sector. I am required to account for my performance in implementing the provisions of the Act in public, to Parliament.

The Register opened on 26 March 2015, and by the end of the following financial year had 115 registrants. By the end of 2016, the Register had grown a little more to 132, a reflection of reductions due to industry consolidation; some changes in the nature of services provided by consultant lobbyists to their clients and the outcome of my compliance activities.

The nature of the definition of “consultant lobbying” (in summary, direct communications with Ministers or Permanent Secretaries about government business in return for payment) has brought lawyers, accountants, management consultants and think tanks onto the Register, alongside public affairs organisations.

As we enter the third full year of operation of the Register, and in a situation where further legislative changes seem unlikely, I anticipate a year of business as usual, although I recognise from experience that that means hard work! I intend to continue to operate a transparent, professional and efficient service for registrants and other stakeholders, so that confidence in the Register and in the value for money of the service can remain at a high level.

During the year ahead, I anticipate the continuing need for reviewing and refreshing guidance; for further modest investment in the technical development of the Register and website; and to enhance my programme of education and communication, with a particular focus on the improved use of social media. Where necessary, I will use the enforcement powers available to me where I identify situations of serious non-compliance.



Alison J White

Registrar

June 2017

A reflection on the past year

Before looking forward to the year ahead, a brief review of the year just passed is appropriate, in the context of the objectives I set last year for my Office.

Administer an accessible, up-to-date and accurate Register

We have worked very hard to improve the accuracy and content of the Register, with a particular focus on reducing over-declaration of clients. This tends to happen when registrants “err on the side of caution” in making their quarterly returns. My experience is that generally speaking, consultant lobbyists approach the need for registration in a professional manner and try their hardest to comply properly and in a timely fashion. Where the Office finds inaccuracies, it identifies the changes made on the face of the Register in a transparent manner.

Ensuring that all those that need to register do so

During the past year, I have conducted a series of investigations of think tanks, law firms and providers of support services to All-Party Parliamentary Groups. I have used information provided to me by whistle-blowing, review of Ministerial diaries and other sources to enhance the quality of my investigations. As a result, I have satisfied myself that evidence of unregistered consultant lobbying taking place is rare.

Providing clear, accessible, guidance

I keep all my guidance under review, but my focus this year has been on the provision of specialist guidance for organisations such as

think tanks and the providers of support services to All-Party Parliamentary Groups. I have also invested significant personal time in communicating with registrants and stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the requirements for registration and client declaration, and this has undoubtedly had a positive effect on the quality and accuracy of the information in the Register.

In response to sectoral feedback, I conducted a consultation about what constitutes a relevant code of conduct. Having taken a range of diverse views into account, I have arrived at what I trust will be considered to be a balanced viewpoint, which will be incorporated into an update of my registration guidance in due course.

Monitoring and enforcing compliance

Generally speaking, registrants approach their statutory obligations with professionalism. Throughout the year, there have been minor breaches identified which include late payments, late submissions and inaccurate declarations. I deal with most of these as administrative errors, though there have been some rare instances of serious non-compliance where I have used the mechanism of civil penalties available to me.

Good governance and cost effectiveness

There have been many back-office challenges during the year associated with staff continuity and financial support. My team has worked very hard to minimise costs and optimise value for money and to achieve all the targets set out in the legislation for operational processing, as well as laying unqualified accounts before Parliament.

About Us

Role of Registrar

The Registrar is an independent statutory office holder and has a duty to monitor compliance with the requirement to register and a power to undertake enforcement action in instances of non-compliance.

Under the Act, the Registrar is required to:

- establish and manage the UK Register of Consultant Lobbyists;
- develop and publish detailed guidance for consultant lobbyists on their duties under the Act;
- monitor and enforce compliance with the Act's legal requirements; and
- publish an annual statement of accounts.

It is the role of Ministers to set the charges for the Register and to seek to ensure that the total paid in charges is sufficient to offset the total of the costs. It continues to be the case that staffing and shared services costs are paid for by Cabinet Office budgets. It is the role of the Registrar to collect and account for all fees and pay them into the Consolidated Fund. More information about how my budget is spent is available each year in my published Statement of Accounts.

Objectives for 2017-18

At its heart, the role of the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists is about ensuring there is transparency about the work of consultant lobbyists and their engagement with Ministers and Permanent Secretaries and their equivalents on behalf of clients. For this to happen it is important that the public can access information in a clear and easily understandable way.

In line with my statutory obligations, I have set the following objectives for 2017-18:

- a) Administer an accessible, up-to-date and accurate Register of Consultant Lobbyists;
- b) Ensure that all those who are required to register do so, by making potential registrants aware of their obligations under the Act;
- c) Provide clear accessible guidance on the requirements for registration and compliance;
- d) Monitor and enforce compliance with the Act's legal requirements; and
- e) Operate the Register and the Office in a way that demonstrates good governance through delivery of my statutory obligations in a cost effective and accountable manner.

Work Programme for 2017-18

In order to deliver my objectives, I plan to undertake the following programme of work which represents a continuation of the key priorities of the last 12 months:

Activity 1 – Continue to operate an accessible, cost effective Register

My intention is to continue business as usual in maintaining the accuracy and timeliness of information contained in the Register. Assuming no changes to legislation are required, I anticipate the need for only modest investment in both the Register and website to keep them refreshed and responsive to user requirements.

Why this work matters:

Data integrity is important for the credibility of the Register: stakeholders must have confidence that information is accurate, and also must be able to access and engage with it in a straightforward manner.

We will:

- Quality assure registration information and Quarterly Information Returns to ensure consistency, accuracy and timeliness in line with statutory requirements.
- Regularly review and update the website to ensure it supports stakeholder engagement with the Register;
- Ensure the minimum administrative burden is involved in registration and Quarterly Information Returns; and
- Manage the payments for registration robustly and securely.

We will measure success by:

- Quality assuring data on the Register and following compliance checks, publishing new registrants within four days of receipt (as per our statutory obligations);
- User feedback from stakeholders on the accessibility of the Register.

Activity 2 – Communication and engagement with stakeholders

I intend to continue a proactive engagement programme of education and communication with registrants as well as those not currently on the Register, but whose work for clients might bring them under the requirements of the Act.

Why this work matters:

It is a statutory obligation for those that undertake relevant consultant lobbying to be registered. I will work with the sector and relevant stakeholders to provide information and promote awareness, so that potential registrants are aware of their obligations and know how to register.

We will:

- Continue to engage with public affairs organisations and their representative bodies to ensure the registration process is understood and implemented properly;
- Continue to engage with lawyers, accountants, management consultants and others to explain the requirement to register;
- Find cost-effective ways to disseminate information about the Register to as wide an audience as possible; and
- Build user expertise and compliance through training and communication, and through an enhanced social media strategy.

We will measure success by:

- Ensuring a clear plan of stakeholder engagement and being responsive to feedback.
- A programme of enforcement activity which assures compliance.

Activity 3 – Providing clear, accessible guidance

I plan to regularly review and refresh my suite of guidance documents and continue to provide specialist updates and respond to registrant feedback where there is dubiety about the requirements.

Why this work matters:

It is a statutory obligation for those that undertake relevant consultant lobbying to be registered. However, without clear guidance on the requirements for registration, registrants do not know what is expected of them and therefore would find it hard to comply.

We will:

- Review and refine our guidance, including a refresh of the registration guidance, to continue to provide the level of clarity needed to support registrants; and
- Seek feedback from stakeholders to identify other areas for which the publication of guidance might be helpful.

We will measure success by:

- Feedback on the guidance which indicates that users find it easy to use and clear.

Activity 4 – Ensuring compliance

Under the Act, I am required to ensure that all those who ought to register, do so. This work involves ensuring the completeness and accuracy of the content of the Register; carrying out investigative work and engaging with Ministerial private offices, representative bodies and consultant lobbyists themselves to ensure that all those who should be, are on the Register. Enforcement and the various sanctions available to me are the last stages in a process that begins with dialogue, discussion and engagement.

Why this work matters:

The credibility of the Register depends on the public having confidence that all those that should be registered are, and that the information that is provided is accurate.

We will:

- Quality assure the information on the Register to ensure that entries made are accurate;
- Monitor and review information about organisations who engage with Ministers and Permanent Secretaries who are not on the Register to ascertain if they need to be;
- Where appropriate, undertake formal investigations into, and enforcement activities with, organisations suspected of non-compliance, in line with my compliance guidance; and
- Ensure our whistle-blowing policies are clearly communicated on our website.

We will measure success by:

- Feedback from stakeholders that the Register is accurate and up-to-date; and
- Dealing with any instances of non-compliance in line with our compliance policy.

Activity 5 – Effective governance arrangements

I continue to seek to minimise the administrative costs of my Office by sharing services with the Cabinet Office where possible, including financial processing, facilities and accommodation. I am constantly mindful of my independent status and the requirement for an appropriate level of resource to carry out my statutory responsibilities. This includes proportionate budgets for communication and enforcement. I will make public any attempt to arbitrarily reduce my budget below the level I judge is required for effective implementation of the legislation.

Why this work matters:

I expect to be held publicly accountable for the effective management of resources, and demonstrating value for money.

We will:

- Ensure the Memorandum of Understanding with the Cabinet Office is adhered to;
- Operate financial management systems that ensure clear accountability and value for money;
- Provide clear and effective communication with the public, registrants and the media about budgets, income and expenditure;
- Continue to deliver a proportionate risk management approach and corporate governance arrangements to ensure effective administration of the Office;
- Ensure I fulfil my statutory and legal obligations in relation to data protection and freedom of information;
- Report to Ministers on the work of the Office through business planning and financial reporting systems; and
- Report to Parliament in any way required by public scrutiny.

We will measure success by:

- Meeting Cabinet Office, Treasury and National Audit Office requirements in our financial management, including producing accurate and unqualified accounts;
- 90% of correspondence is dealt within 5 working days of receipt; and
- Meeting our statutory obligations for dealing with freedom of information and data protection requests.

Delivering our plan

Budget

Table 1. The proposed 2017-18 budget

| Resource | Programme (running costs) |
|--|---------------------------|
| | |
| *Registrar | £24,090 |
| Staff costs | £107,494 |
| *Website running costs | £2,000 |
| *Register running costs | £ 38,344 |
| *Other costs (legal, communication, travel) | £16,180 |
| *Enforcement costs | £10,000 |
| SSCL contracted financial services costs | £22,500 |
| *Audit costs | £9,000 |
| | |
| Subtotal | £229,608 |
| Notional cost | |
| Cabinet Office shared services | £47,000 |
| Sub total | £47,000 |
| Resource expenditure fully financed by Grant in Aid from the Cabinet Office | £276,608 |

There has been an increase in costs of c.£11,000, compared to the 2016-17 budget, which is as a result of increases in staff remuneration.

Costs marked with * are those which form the programme (running cost) to be offset by charges for registration (£99614 in 2017-18).

Table 2. The breakdown of expenditure, which forms part of the Cabinet Office's calculation on the fee(s) charged to registrants

During 2016, it was announced that the current level of fee (£1000 per annum) would be held for the spending review period (i.e. till 2020).

| | Admin (set up costs)£ | Programme (running costs)£ | Totals £ |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| Forecast programme running costs for 2017/18 | | 99,614 | 99,614 |
| Estimated income for 2017/18 | | | 123,000 |

The Cabinet Office intends to recoup the initial set-up costs of the Register (£222,200) from any annual surpluses.

Budgeting assumptions

In line with Schedule 2 paragraph 8 of the Act and through our Memorandum of Understanding, the cost of resourcing the Office and the shared services costs of our accommodation, financial services, IT etc. will be absorbed by the Cabinet Office.

Governance

I will ensure a proportionate approach to corporate governance, including completion of accounting records in accordance with Schedule 2, Paragraph 9 of the Act and consistent with HMG guidance and instructions issued by the Cabinet Office and Treasury. I expect to be held accountable for the delivery of my statutory role in public by Parliament.

Risks

I am committed to a proportionate risk management approach and have identified our key risks as:

- ***Accuracy of data in the Register*** – we will manage this risk through effective data validation and compliance processes;
- ***Escalation in non-compliance*** – we will manage this risk through adherence to compliance policies, effective stakeholder relations and communication and engagement;
- ***Availability of proportionate budgets to implement legislation*** – we will manage this risk through ensuring cost effectiveness of operations, transparent financial processes and communicating requirements effectively to stakeholders;
- ***Retaining the confidence of stakeholders*** – we will manage this risk by having a robust stakeholder engagement plan; taking relationships seriously; listening carefully and delivering on our promises.

