

Audit and Risk Committee – for assurance

Meeting agenda title: ICO Estates and Environment Report

Meeting date: 25 April 2022

Time required: 10 minutes

Presenter: Angela Donaldson

Approved by: Paul Arnold

1. Objective and recommendation

- 1.1. To provide the ARC with assurance regarding the ICO's approach to our estates and environmental considerations.
- 1.2. To enable the Chair of the ARC to sign off assurance for the annual report to confirm that adequate monitoring of the condition of the ICO's estate is in place, and that challenges posted by the Global Climate and Ecological Emergency are being considered and managed appropriately.
- 1.3. The recommendation is to take assurance from the attached report, noting the actions taken to manage and monitor our estates and response to environmental issues.

Author: Mike Collins

Consultees: Angela Donaldson, Spencer Bradshaw

List of Annexes: Overview of ICO estates and environmental monitoring

Publication decision: Can be published internally and externally

Outcome reached:

ICO Estates and Environment Monitoring

1.0 Introduction

1.1 As part of the ICO's reporting responsibilities the Chair of the Audit Committee will be asked to give assurance to DCMS that we are adequately managing issues relating to Estates and Climate & Environment. This report gives assurance to the Committee on those matters.

2.0 Estates

2.1 The ICO's estate consists of four properties at our Head Office in Wilmslow along with four regional office locations across the UK. These are:

- Wycliffe House (Wilmslow) – whole building
- Sandfield House (Wilmslow) – three wings
- Kings Court (Wilmslow) – two wings
- Venture House (Wilmslow) – two floors
- Regional Office (Belfast) – 8 workstations (private lease)
- Regional Office (Cardiff) – 10 workstations (private lease)
- Regional Office (Edinburgh) – 10 workstations (Civil Service Hub)
- Regional Office (London) – 24 workstations (Regus serviced accommodation)

During the pandemic Kings Court has not been opened to staff, as Wycliffe House and Sandfield House have been big enough to accommodate the numbers of staff going into the office.

Venture House is currently unoccupied. The lease for the office was taken out in the lead up to the pandemic and work to bring it into use did not commence. In the light of the new ways of working which the pandemic has brought into focus, further consideration of the need for or use of Venture House will be needed. The lease for the building has a break clause in April 2024.

We are working with the Government Property Agency to secure more suitable and long-term accommodation in London.

- 2.2 Our estate in Wilmslow is managed and maintained by the Facilities team. They are responsible for the day to day upkeep and maintenance of the offices. For Wycliffe House this involves ensuring that the fabric of the building is safe and fit for purpose as the ICO is the sole tenant. With regard to the shared offices in Wilmslow, responsibility for the fabric of the office is shared with the landlords. The ICO is responsible for any systems which are discrete to the wings the ICO occupies, and liaises with the landlord concerning any shared systems and common areas.
- 2.3 Although the ICO has continued to operate largely through homeworking in the last twelve months, offices have been available for staff to attend either for essential tasks or for health and wellbeing reasons. The Facilities team have been based in the offices throughout that time, as have cleaning and security staff. This has enabled the ICO to provide a suitable and safe workplace for staff and ensure that maintenance is completed. This has included, for example, replacement of emergency lighting in Wycliffe House.
- 2.4 Our Regional Offices have been managed by our Regional Managers, with maintenance needs addressed in advance of staff returning to the offices as local regulations allow.
- 2.5 Our London office is maintained by Regus. In the last year, the office suffered water leakage due to heavy rain. This caused cosmetic damage to a ceiling area in the office which took some time to address due to a dispute between Regus and the building owners. This has, however, now been resolved.

3.0 Environmental considerations

- 3.1 The ICO is obliged to consider the challenges posted by the Global Climate and Ecological Emergency and manage them appropriately. The UK government has established a strategy for the UK to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

- 3.2 The ICO's operations are relatively low risk, and low polluting. The environmental impact of our operations largely arise from heat and power, water consumption, business travel and waste produced from our offices.
- 3.3 Each of the ICO's premises are in locations which are considered to be low or very low risk of flooding, so reducing immediate concern of susceptibility to flooding and the impact on the availability of our premises. Nonetheless, through our operations we are making contributions to the challenges arising from the climate and ecological emergency.
- 3.4 The ICO has a Green Group and has developed an Environmental Policy which also fulfils the ICO's responsibilities under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to have a Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystem Plan.
- 3.5 We have established a range of environmental objectives, which are:
- minimising the amount of energy and water we use;
 - minimising the amount of CO2 resulting from our activity and offsetting CO2 emissions where possible;
 - maximising the proportion of the energy we use from renewable and environmentally responsible energy sources;
 - minimising the use of single use products, plastics and harmful chemicals where feasible;
 - encouraging and facilitating the recycling of waste;
 - link with and support local initiatives on environmental issues;
 - minimising or eliminating the amount of waste we produce that goes to landfill; and
 - raising awareness and influencing our staff to understand how they can improve the environment through their behaviour both in work and at home.

3.6 In our efforts to achieve these objectives we have implemented a variety of actions such as:

- Using energy efficient lighting with sensors that turn off lighting automatically when not needed.
- Taking energy efficiency into account when purchasing business infrastructure equipment such as IT and servers, and vending machines.
- Raising awareness of staff of the need to switch off computers and equipment when not in use.
- Moved the ICO onto an electricity tariff which is entirely based on renewable energy sources.
- Using technology to reduce the need for business travel.
- Using waste management suppliers who recycle as much of our waste as possible.
- Installed smart metres to improve monitoring of gas usage in the buildings we manage.
- Eliminating the use of plastic cups in vending machines or at water coolers, and supplying staff with re-useable water bottles.
- Reducing the use of plastic in the offices.
- Linking with local initiatives such as 'Plastic Free Wilmslow' to demonstrate our commitment to green issues.

3.7 As part of the future of work, issues such as travel to work will come under further consideration, providing longer term opportunities to reduce pollution created as a result of commuting to the office. The Our Ways of Working project will incorporate hybrid and blended working into the culture of the ICO, with one of the impacts being the continued reduction in staff journeys to our offices from pre pandemic levels.

3.8 Similarly, the use of technology for collaboration during the pandemic has highlighted the possibilities to reduce business travel and conduct meetings remotely. The ICO's travel and subsistence policies require staff to assess the need to undertake a journey and the environmental impact of the method of transport, such as encouraging the use of trains rather than car journeys. The journey booking system gathers

information about the CO2 emissions arising from business journeys booked using the system.

- 3.9 The way in which the organisation operates has developed to reduce the amount of paper used by undertaking more business electronically, and this will continue to be an area to progress in order to achieve business efficiencies and reduce the environmental impact of our activities.
- 3.10 We will continue to develop environmentally responsible initiatives, such as carbon offsetting, car sharing and improved provision for staff who cycle to the office
- 3.11 Future work will also include the appointment of a Head of Estates and Facilities. Amongst their responsibilities will be the development of an Environmental Strategy, to support the ICO to achieve net carbon zero in line with government objectives. The timeframes and mechanisms for doing so will be an early priority for the postholder. The postholder will report into the Director of Finance, who therefore has senior level responsibility for sustainability and climate change.