January and February 2025 – Written update in lieu of monthly staff meeting | 11 February 2025

The ICO has been unable to schedule a monthly Staff Meeting in January and February 2025 due to work and leave schedules, but we have a number of updates. ICO management provides this update in lieu of the Staff Meetings to ensure that officers are updated on the ICO's work and administration.

Staff Meeting Minutes

- The September 2024 Staff Update is on the website. Our MFA circulated the October 2024 draft meeting minutes for feedback by this Wednesday and these will be uploaded by Friday, 14 February 2025. No staff meeting was held in November 2024. The December 2024 draft meeting minutes need to be circulated for feedback and finalizing.
    - **Action item**: Finalise/upload October 2024 meeting minutes. MFA to circulate December 2024 draft meeting minutes for feedback by next week.

Review Team

- Review statistics were emailed to staff on 2 January 2025 and 3 February 2025, and the February statistics are currently reflected on the website's dashboard.
- The DIC will be reviewing 2024 accomplishments and 2025 targets shortly.
    - **Action item:** DIC to present review of 2024 accomplishments and 2025 targets.
- Congratulations to the Review Team for issuing the first 4 decisions for 2025, which will start to be uploaded to the website this week.

Finance/Administration

- Audit: The ICO's FY23 and FYE 24 audits are underway. The audits include a number of new standard requirements from OAG than in past audits. The IC and MFA continue to work the NMD Controller to provide ongoing submissions.
- Budget: The ICO's request for enhanced funding to allow it to maintain current staffing levels has been refused. The IC has submitted a budget that is within the current budget ceiling. The 2025/26 budget estimate will cover existing costs but does not have funding for further hires. s.29(1) applied [redacted] Appreciation goes to the DIC and MFA for their assistance in the preparation of the budget.

  With the announcement of the election, Parliament was dissolved and the budget debate cancelled. At the moment, offices continue to prepare budget documents. Once the new Government is in place and Parliament is reconvened, the revised date for the budget debate will be announced. If the final approval of the Appropriation Bill is after 31st March, then the Bermuda Constitutional Order No. 96(1) and 97 will come into effect to allow for continuity of government expenditures.
- Office space: s.29(1) applied [redacted]
    - **Action item**: MFA to arrange for site visit for officers.

s.29(1) applied [redacted]

- **Action item**: IC to share updates on move timing as available.

Human Resources

- Staffing: As noted above, the ICO will not be recruiting for an Investigation Officer or permanent Administrative Assistant at this time, due to the 2025/2026 estimated budget.
- Staffing: The current IC's last day is Friday, 21 February 2025, and the DIC will be Acting IC from 22 February 2025 until the appointment of the incoming IC. Government House has provided an update on the process and anticipates that there will only be a short gap before the appointment of the next IC, e.g., week(s) not months.
- New Relief Administrative Assistant: Thank you to our Relief Administrative Assistant who began in January to provide support during the various transitions and regular workload. She will be with us until 31 March 2025.
- Congratulations to our Senior Investigation Officer's successful attainment of the Practitioner Certificate in Freedom of Information in January 2025. This is a significant professional accomplishment.
- Reminder: Annual leave or TIL requests will not be approved in advance for the first two weeks of March because this is currently the anticipated start time for the incoming IC, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Officers should plan on attending the office during this transition period. If you are directly supervised by the IC and have leave requests for 17 March 2025 onwards, please submit them and these will be included in the IC handover memo for prompt attention.

Compliance

- Our DIC and PO successfully distributed the ICO's 2024 Annual Return in December. It included some revisions to improve the package based on feedback and experience from last year. Noncompliance reminder letters were sent on 28 January 2025 and the process is ongoing to identify any public authorities that will be listed in the 2024 Annual Report.
    - **Action item**: PO to identify PAs for Notice of Listing letters; IC to approve Notice of Listing letters this week; PO and DIC/SIO to then finalise public authority statistics for Annual Report
- Our SIO and IO will be presenting for the first 2025 upcoming Quarterly Briefing, *Practical tips for bridging the information gap between public authorities and applicants*, on 20 February 2025. Registration is already strong and we are looking forward to their insights.
- On 31 December 2024, the ICO published a new webpage, *Changes to PATI*, to help the public and public authorities navigate the impact of the various amendments and their effective dates. It includes summaries of the legislation, a decision-making flowchart, graphics and copies of the legislation. The ICO also published a new guidance on section 12A for public authorities, which reflects the same content presented at the November 2024 Quarterly Briefing.

- During January and February, the ICO also provided consultation to the PATI/PIPA Unit on the updates to the PATI Practice Code after the harmonising amendments with PIPA went into effect on 1 January 2025.

Outreach/Education

- Public awareness statistics need to be circulated for December 2024 and January 2025.
    - **Action item**: PO to circulate public awareness statistics by Monday, 17 February.
- The ICO's 2024 Annual Report is in production for submission to Parliament in February 2025. Thank you to our PO, SIO and DIC for their contributions to its content. Our staff photo has been scheduled for next week.