

# HM LAND REGISTRY

## CREATING A DIGITAL VOICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

BY CAROLINE ANDERSON, HR DIRECTOR



*Caroline  
Anderson*

A consultation on the privatisation of HM Land Registry, conducted in the spring of 2016 was the second in two years and was a challenging time for our staff. Following years of continual changes to our Board, plus a lack of strategic direction leading to poorly managed change our staff felt like their voices were not heard and their opinions did not matter.

The consultation's conclusion (that HM Land Registry would stay in the public sector) marked a watershed for the organisation and opened the opportunity for new, open and honest engagement from the Chief Executive and Board. Through a digital communications approach which enabled 2-way dialogue, senior colleagues were expected not only to engage in conversations with frontline staff in real time but also for action to be taken on their feedback – an accountability loop that was transparent and immediate and that had never been experienced by our staff. This was reinforced with regular visits and town hall style meetings, staff forums and networks.. This approach saw significant increases in annual engagement scores and rises that were amongst the highest in the Civil Service, particularly around leadership and managing change.

### What is HM Land Registry?

We are the Government department which is responsible for registering the ownership of land and property in England and Wales. Every day, our staff undertake 120,000 transactions a day recording ownership changes, mortgages or leases that affect it.

### Our People

We are 5000 civil servants, located across 14 offices in England and Wales, with an average length of service of over 20 years and a 75% trade union membership.

### Turbulence and uncertainty

Following two privatisation attempts in 2014 and 2016, five chief executives in the span of as many years and poorly managed transformation projects the morale of our staff was poor and trust in senior management was negligible. Structural issues included a lack of a career progression for operational staff and little recruitment into the organisation with only one percent of employees under 30 in 2014.

Chronically low engagement scores reflected these issues and our scores against leadership and managing change were the lowest across the Civil Service. Our staff felt their views were being suppressed.



# HM LAND REGISTRY

## CREATING A DIGITAL VOICE FOR OUR PEOPLE



### Using communication to rebuild relationships



*Graham Farrant, CEO of HM Land Registry*

With the appointment of our current Chief Executive in 2015 we decided to radically change our approach to communications between senior management and our staff. We moved to a transparent and public two-way dialogue platform through our intranet and used face-to-face engagement to follow up on challenging issues.

We wanted to create a greater understanding of Board decisions, recognise the achievements of staff, and to make the relationship between seniors and staff more personal and more accountable.

### Blogging and listening

A new blogging platform, embedded on our intranet, for our Chief Executive and Board allowed them to regularly discuss issues with our staff. There were weekly blogs from the CEO and Board Directors wrote every week on rotation. The key focus was to rebuild trust through frank conversations and feedback. This was encouraged in several ways:

- Every feedback comment was attributable to a named colleague. Anonymous comments or avatar names were not possible;
- A thumbs-up function to enable people to indicate their approval of specific comments and allow senior leaders to focus on comments that were attracting the most likes;
- Light-touch and rapid moderation of the comments made sure that, providing they were in line with our values, all comments were published, no matter how critical they were. The quick publishing of comments made sure the conversations could flow;
- Honest appraisal of challenges and open invitations to discuss certain issues were offered and senior leaders were encouraged to follow up face-to-face to respond to critical or cynical comments;

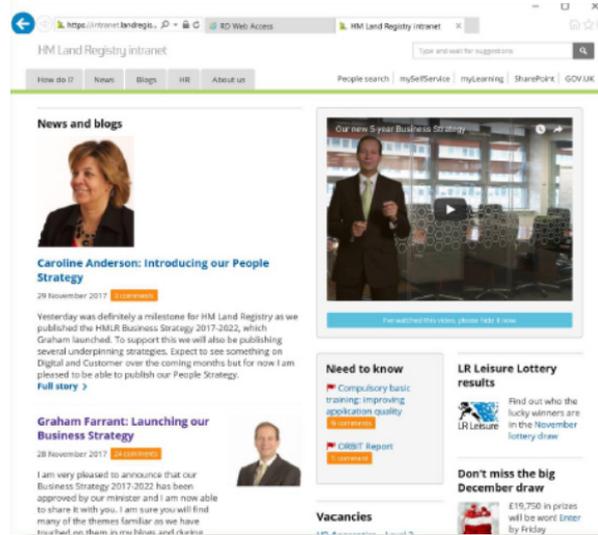


# HM LAND REGISTRY

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- Comment feedback led to changes to key policies such as performance management and career progression. This was explained to our staff and this active listening built trust and credibility. This enabled us to explore wider cultural issues such as the importance of diversity in the workplace and discussion around living our values;
- This new digital voice was backed up by face-to-face visits to offices which were then reported in CEO blogs every week, with individuals recognised for their involvement in communications;
- The Chief Executive sharing his passions for life inside and outside of work with regular updates including mentions of family, DIY, sport and travel. This meant that when he met staff, they had things in common and the discussion could be wider than purely work issues.

*HM Land Registry's intranet was the platform for publishing CEO and Board blogs.*



*A face to face discussion led by Caroline Anderson, HR Director*



# HM LAND REGISTRY

## CREATING A DIGITAL VOICE FOR OUR PEOPLE



### Results

Our 2017 Civil Service People Survey results showed that over the last 3 years, we raised our engagement score by 12% and we moved up from 93rd to 59th in the Civil Service ranking. We also raised our leadership and change score by 22% and moving up from 102nd to 71st.

*There has been a steady rise in HM Land Registry's People Survey Engagement score, compared to the Civil Service overall*

To monitor progress, we conducted all-staff Pulse Surveys three times a year with response rates consistently above 60%. Results continued to show steady progress with the new communications channels and content cited as the main area of improvement in all qualitative feedback.

From June 2015 to September 2017, over 100 blogs by senior leaders generated over 5000 individual staff comments. Readership was well above industry standards with weekly blogs read by around 80% of our staff.

Progress was also made on some of the systemic structural issues, with increased recruitment into the organisation, particularly through apprenticeship schemes which also has the impact of increasing the total percentage for staff under 30 from 1% in 2014 to 10% in 2017.



*The greatest rise in engagement scores since 2014 have been in the area of leadership and managing change*

One regular staff commenter was voted by colleagues for a special 'People's Award' and invitation to the Queen's Garden Party for their contributions to the conversations.



# HM LAND REGISTRY

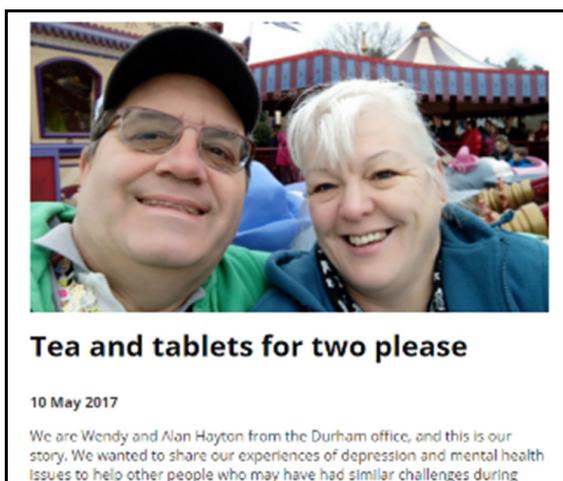
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A blog on bereavement and depression, during mental health week, received 3171 unique page views, 34 comments, and 344 thumbs-up. One member of staff commented:

*“Everyone seems to have written all I wanted to say, but just wanted you to know that I have felt very deeply moved by your poignant story. It must have been so hard to put into words. It feels so painful, yet honest. You have both been very brave to share your heart & soul. By the comments written, just by opening up, you have helped so many more people. I admire your spirit, bravery and zest to fight and survive.”*

The weekly blogs from both leaders and staff have now become vibrant places where information and experiences are shared and different perspectives and voices are heard. It has become a powerful and empowering tool.



*Blogs explored wider issues such as diversity and wellbeing, including one on bereavement and depression*

