

ECB Board Meeting – Monday 22 January 2025

Venue: Money Advice Service, Tricorn House, Birmingham

Member attendance: Catherine Brown (Chair), Alan Cavill, Althea Efunshile, Jenny Watson, Chris Nichols

Apologies: Gerard Curran

In attendance: David Parkin, Hannah Semple, Jenna Durant, Jen Prior (minutes)

Minutes

Item 1: Welcome, apologies and declarations

1. The Chair welcomed all present, particularly the new Administrative Officer and Policy Manager, attending their first meeting.
2. Apologies had been received from Gerard Curran.
3. There were no new declarations of interest.

Item 2: Minutes of the previous meeting

4. The minutes of 25 November 2024 were **agreed** as an accurate record of the meeting.

Item 3: Matters arising

5. The Board **noted** the action tracker and Board forward agendas.

Item 4: Chief executive's report

6. The Chief Executive talked to the report and updated the Board on the following:
 - i. The ECB had now been published to the ICO register with details of its Data Protection Officer also available.
 - ii. The recruitment campaign for a Risk and Compliance Principal had been launched with interviews scheduled for early March. A replacement for the Director of Corporate Governance had been secured and there would be a handover in late April. This represented the end of the planned recruitment work for 2024/25.

- iii. The ECB's complaint function had launched successfully and was starting to receive enquiries and complaints.
- iv. A BBC reporter contacted the ECB having found its published research. It was currently unclear whether anything more would come of this initial conversation.
- v. Engagement with the British Parking Association had recently increased resulting in a number of opportunities to meet with parking creditors.

7. The Board **noted** the Chief Executive's report.

Item 5: Business Plan and Budget

- 8. The Chief Executive presented the draft business plan for 2025/26 and draft budget for the Board's consideration. This followed an initial discussion on direction at the November 2024 Board meeting.
- 9. The Board discussed the draft business plan and budget and raised the following points:
 - i. The Board noted the challenging financial context for the sector, including the fact that the proposed 5% fee rise had not materialised and the recent rises in employer's National Insurance and the living wage. It was noted that very early indications suggested that industry turnover for 2024 was unlikely to have significantly increased over 2023. It was important therefore to carefully assess all additions to the business plan and budget.
 - ii. In this vein, it was agreed that while the ECB should arrange for an internal audit soon, 2025/26 was not the optimal year to do so due to the cost. It is likely that this would now be scheduled for 2026/27.
 - iii. The addition of a new Board member was also discussed. It was agreed that the increase was necessary to protect the ECB's resilience and efficacy, as the ECB has a small Board in comparison to other comparable organisations. In order to mitigate the majority of the cost for 2025/26, the Board agreed that the new member should not start until Quarter 4 (January 2026).
 - iv. Similarly, to increase the ECB's resilience, the very small increase to reserves, set out in the budget was approved.
 - v. A section should be added to the plan discussing the longer-range view on the ECB's work with creditors. It would be noted that in 2025/26, the groundwork would be laid for future developments in this area. The ECB would aim to continue building awareness with Local Authorities and building creditor commitments to the ECB. The plan would also cover engaging with creditors on the ECB's policy work, especially on vulnerability and affordability.
 - vi. It was noted that the figure attached to the lived experience work was an early estimate and a more accurate sum could not be provided until further scoping work had been carried out. It was also noted that while this was considered 'additional' work to the ECB's operational work, the project would be core to the development of the 'know your rights' work that a wide range of stakeholders supported the ECB carrying out.

10. The Chief Executive explained that the budget and business plan would be socialised pre-consultation with a number of individual enforcement firm CEOs and the Engagement Forum.
11. The Board discussed the potential levy percentage and agreed that best practice would be to set out the figure required to achieve the 2025/26 business plan rather than to consult on a range of figures.
12. Pending the amendments above, the Board **agreed** the draft business plan and the draft budget and **approved** consulting on a budget figure of approximately £1.41m, which would be likely to mean an indicative levy of around 0.51% of turnover.
13. The Board **agreed** that the consultation document would be circulated to the Board for comment and then finalised and approved by the CEO and Chair.

Item 6: Data Protection at the ECB

14. The Director of Corporate Services presented a progress update on the ECB's Data Protection work. The Board had previously approved these policies and notices in December but were now asked to provide more detailed comment and feedback.
15. The Board discussed the suite of documentation and raised the following points:
 - i. General privacy notice: The policy needed to be reviewed from the perspective of a complainant and any terms, such as 'provisional notice' that may not be immediately understood, needed to be explained.
 - ii. Implementation plan: The Board would also complete the online data protection module currently being arranged for the Executive.
16. The Board noted that they would receive progress updates on the policy implementation plan and a general data protection update every Board meeting via the CEO report.
17. The Board **noted** the papers.

Item 7: Research: The Demographics of Enforcement

18. The Director of Creditors and Government presented a paper addressing the issue of what demographic data was known about those experiencing debt enforcement in England and Wales and sought views from the Board on whether the ECB should commission further research.
19. The Board discussed the paper and acknowledged that while the data available did not present a complete picture of those experiencing enforcement, it did indicate that certain demographic groups were significantly over-represented which was helpful to the ECB's understanding of enforcement issues.
20. It was also noted that this data was provided by debt advice charities and so was a representation of the demographics of people who approached these charities for help and as such may not be entirely representative of those experiencing enforcement.

21. The Board agreed that commissioning stand alone ECB research on this issue was unlikely to be cost effective but remained very keen to learn more and to build a more sophisticated understanding to inform policy making and communication.
22. The Board tasked the Executive to determine the policy questions that most urgently needed answering and to consider options to build and refine the demographic evidence base. Possibilities would include collaborating with other organisations and requesting demographic data from complainants **[ACTION]**.
23. The Board also proposed the conclusions of this research, in terms of who was most likely to experience enforcement, should be kept in mind when recruiting new Board members.
24. The Board **noted** the paper.

Item 8: Strategy Workshop

25. The CEO led and facilitated a session workshopping some high-level themes and discussion points that would help to inform development of the ECB's longer term strategic vision.

Item 8: AOB

26. There was no other business.

Item 9: Reflection session

27. The Board reflected on the meeting and discussed thoughts and ideas that arose but were unconnected to the immediate agenda.

Private session

28. The Board met for a private session.