

1 October 2014

FORESTRY FUNCTIONS GOVERNANCE PROJECT

Purpose

1. This paper updates you on the Forestry Functions Governance project of the reshaping Forest Services workstream.

Recommendations

2. That you note the project is now complete and that we are asking you to play a challenge role for the programme of shared policy development and delivery at the core of the approach developed through this project.

Background

3. On 29 January 2014 it was announced that: *'Having carefully considered the options and the views received on the review's conclusions, Ministers have decided that the Government's key Forestry Functions will continue to be delivered by the Forestry Commission; with enhanced working arrangements between Defra and the Commission at all levels to strengthen integration between policy and delivery'*.
4. This project is part of the Forestry Functions Woodland Policy Enabling Programme (WPEP) area of work. Its aim is to elaborate the enhanced working relationship including governance arrangements. Mark Broadmeadow, Forestry Commission (FC) England is project lead working with Huw Thomas, Defra and drawing on expertise across FC.
5. The project began in February 2014 and is now complete with revised working practices in progress. The WPEP Board meeting 12th August 2014 signed off the final project report to be put to you, subject to a few follow up actions, these are in hand or fulfilled.

Context and scope

6. Context: The announcement on forestry functions governance sets the context for the workstream and the outcomes that it has worked towards:
 - a non-legislative solution focused on enhancing current accountability and reporting arrangements between Defra and the FC, with modest changes to improve policy integration, transparency and delivery.
 - the development of existing engagement between Defra and FC officials into a more formal programme.
 - improved 'line of sight' for ministers and scope for further efficiencies and better integration between forestry and tree health policy and delivery.
7. Scope: The approach affects England only, including how the changes in England relate to and affect Cross Border issues; distinct responsibilities for FC and Defra will be retained that are consistent with current legislation; other WPEP

workstreams will consider arrangements with Corporate and Forestry Support and with Forest Research as part of WPEP.

Content and key conclusions

8. Shared forestry programme: A shared programme of work on forestry policy development and delivery where Defra and FC England need to work together (for 2014-15 in the first instance: see Annex 5 of the project report included with this paper) was developed on the basis of FCE's Corporate Plan for 2014-15, actions outlined in the Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement, key areas of Defra policy development where forestry is a key area of delivery as outlined in Defra's Business Plan 2014-15 and those workstreams of WPEP that will require ministerial decisions to be made. Without need for further elaborate formal arrangements, delivery of the shared programme will be adequately overseen by a "Forestry Shared Programme Oversight Group" (FoSPoG) consisting of: Director Forest Services; Head of Forest Services National Expertise and Strategic Development; Director Corporate and Forestry Support; Team Leader Defra Forestry Policy and Sponsorship Team; Deputy Director Defra Landscape and Outdoor Recreation Policy Team; Chief Executive Forest Enterprise England. Progress on delivery of the shared forestry programme will be a regular item at ENC meetings.
9. Improved line of sight: The enhanced working relationship will build on existing structures and processes through: Defra Forestry Policy and Sponsorship Team (DFPST) engagement in FC policy discussions; Director Forest Services and FC Director England attending regular Defra Director and Deputy Director meetings; regular meetings established between Ministers and FC Chair/Director; FC to be present when briefings on matters requiring forestry and woodlands expertise are discussed.
10. More efficient use of available resources: Defra and FC will work more efficiently through: improved awareness of FC capacity to represent technical and expert policy development issues at Defra and other Government Department boards, working groups etc.; explicit role for FC to lead on Parliamentary correspondence, briefings and submissions where this is consistent with the technical nature of an issue; clarification of protocol for sign-off of Parliamentary correspondence, briefings and submissions; FC and Defra to operate strategic approach to stakeholder engagement based around "multi-objective engagement for a multi-objective resource" the Forestry Forum, Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committees and subject specific working groups.
11. Ongoing activity: The majority of current working practices are fit for purpose and the respective responsibilities of Defra and FC are understood. Examples include joint working of the communications teams and FC's role in producing technical publications. The changes outlined in the project report are therefore modest but cumulatively represent real improvements. They build on existing working practices and relationships. The Summary of changes in working practices from the report (Table 5) is attached as an Annex.
12. The full report which runs to 78 pages as is available to the Committee if required.

Key next steps

13. Formally sign the Agreement on ways of working at senior official level with a submission for information to Ministers.
14. Continue to fulfil other actions as shown in Table 5 of the report (this is subject to some minor amendment as actions are finalised).
15. Confirm the approach for PQs and correspondence with Private Office, as agreed by Defra Customer Contact Unit and further improve FC's capability on PQs via joint training with Defra colleagues.
16. Communicate the enhanced working arrangements more widely across FC, Defra, and other Government departments where relevant.
17. Activate the shared programme of forestry policy development and delivery via an initial session of FoSPOG. We plan to do this prior to your next meeting, with a short report on progress in 2014/15 and headlines for the next programme in 2015/16 for your consideration.

Dominic Driver and Mark Broadmeadow
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