

If responding on behalf of an organisation please give its name

Forest Education Network

Does the draft document 'Towards a New Public Forest Estate management body' adequately reflect the conclusions of the government 'Government Forestry & Woodlands Policy Statement'? - If so in what way?

Yes but does not quite reflect the wide range of energetic social and community activities already in place or opportunities for the future. Also already a presumption for 'national headquarters' and need to be careful that England can have it's own free operation.

What further development is needed for the Management organisation?

Not answered

If not, what are your views on the proposed mission and objectives for the new organisation (see Annex A of the draft document)?

Social objectives need strengthening - the word 'enable' is too loose a term and leaves the impression of little thought to ongoing sustained commitment for these areas. Such loose terms will lead to unfocused delivery e.g. temptation to think that all this can be done by engaging third parties - needs some core commitment and thought to long term sustainability. This is especially true for learning.

What are your views on how the new organisation could improve the financial sustainability of the Estate?

There are some sound ideas here but for the social objectives it can be difficult to generate income here and needs thought as to how core or other funding will ensure delivery for the longer term. Perhaps more thought on how other areas might subsidise activities such as learning and how for example timber revenue and/or corporate timber industry links can be dedicated towards social objectives. Third party delivery in my experience can only be successful for shorter period of times as they tend to rely on contract arrangements and for some areas like learning this is not ideal as you need greater commitment to sustained delivery.

What are your views on the significant assets and disposals arrangements set out in the document?

Clear process is essential and also open and transparent and real methods to place social 'value' on woodlands. Care needs to be

taken with those woodlands that are easily accessible from towns and villages and in rural areas with good road access. Community consultation is vital in all cases with the aim of any parcels being offered to non profit /woodland related organisations in the first instance.

It will be necessary to give the new body a new name because Forestry Commission is established in law as a cross-border body. Do you have any ideas on a suitable name?

Forestry Commission England - it's important to keep recognition of this name already established as a successful 'brand' and one that has been worked on really hard over the last 15 years. Public Forest England is my other favoured from your suggestions.

What are your views on the arrangements proposed for the new organisation's accountability to Parliament?

These arrangements could work and maybe just need to be clear of what accountability 'measures' are in place for each of the objectives and a review process to ensure that objectives are being delivered.

What are your views on the proposed Board's remit, size and composition?

Board remit and functions will need more clarification to underpin the objectives. It would be more effective to keep the Board quite small - under 10 - so that decisions can be made in an effective and prompt manner. Also open and full recruitment of Board members based on cross representation and essential skills required from a range of policy makers to those that deliver. Forest Enterprises' current success is down to the freedom to make decisions quickly without the need for everything checking at board level. Board functions will need to build in some sort of 'levels' for decision and action.

What are your views on the Guardians' remit, role, numbers and composition?

This is a good idea but would think carefully about giving some sort of remuneration here as otherwise you will attract the 'usual suspects' - retired or those with their own funds an time on their hands. It will be essential to attract those from small enterprises or non profit organisations, voluntary and community representatives and they do always have the available funding to attend meetings or respond to advisory enquiries.

What are the most important things to put in a public charter for the new organisation?

Commitment to -

Social objectives - clear recognition on what these are and how they will be supported

Effective delivery of objectives

Clarity on measures of public benefit and commitment to these in the widest sense

True and open engagement - not just consultation about information already produced

Underpinning commitment and understanding to social benefits despite the fact that these areas don't make money

Support for smaller woodland enterprises

How it links to the other natural environment sectors

Do you have any general comments that you believe would be of assistance in creating the new organisation?

As an ex Forestry commission employee, I would like to add that care needs to be taken over the functions and size of any 'headquarters'. There needs to be local flexibility for many administrative procedures with 'guidelines' only from Headquarters. An example is the procurement process which can be very inflexible and prevents very small enterprises or individuals getting involved or applying for tenders. The Headquarters set up does need to recognise that the natural environment sector in England is quite complex and has a multitude of ways of working.

The forestry functions review concluded that the current arrangements 'complicate governance and obscure a clearer "line of sight" between forestry and woodland policy and delivery'. What do you think should be done to address this?

There needs to be a greater link between policy function, objectives and operational delivery through a proper business planning process. More meaningful and integrated working between policy and delivery teams could ensure this. There also needs to be shared understanding of what objectives actually mean in terms of how and what is delivered. ONGOING structured evaluation and review

against clear mechanisms and measures would be useful to make it responsive.

What more do you think should be done to improve the efficiency with which government's forestry functions are delivered?

Timely decisions and prompt response from Defra and ministers when needed

National and local cross working groups of staff for identified areas.

Understanding of all roles between all levels - from policy making, board, guardians to local delivery staff and organisations

Would you like to make any other comments about the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England, including on any impacts of the creation of the Public Forest Estate management body?

Higher profile on Forests and Woodlands from Defra

Need freedom of operation so that delivery can happen without Government interference.

Clarity of functions between levels - Memorandum of Understanding ? clearly written.

Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - Cross-boarder functions?

Cross Boarder functions need to focus on objectives for delivery but not interfere with 'how' they are delivered. Some cross boarder advisory, grant, research and plant health to support objectives would be good. Especially would like to see some cross boarder thinking /working on social objectives. Needs recognition in structure though so that resources are not depleted from delivering objectives.

Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - Shared services?

Would carefully think about extent of shared admin services as although can give openness and accountability can also be very restrictive. Shared service should focus on guidelines for countries to build on not 'headquarters' delivering areas of work. e.g

procurement; recruitment; design services. These all should leave flexibility for countries, local areas or specific projects/ partnership arrangements

Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - England's National Office

Location of national office should be based on most appropriate and relevant not the fact that Government owned buildings or long tenancies are there. In my opinion Bristol is not the right location and a central or London location would have been better. Although, I would not now like to see the staff relocation and disruption as part of this. Please think about resuming flexible and home working arrangements for key staff - in order to attract the right staff.

The England Office should house a small staff based on essential functions to deliver the objectives.

Would you like to make any other comments about any aspect of this work?

My organisation and others were recognised directly in the Report for their contributions to public benefit. The Forest Education Network, the Forest School Association and the Woodlands Initiatives Network I am sure join many others who are delivering social benefits for the Public Forest Estate through third party arrangements and short funding contracts. In delivering Objectives it needs to be recognised that delivering social benefits rarely makes an income and so a greater commitment needs to be made on funding that does not rely on such transient financial arrangements.

Response ID

ANON-69TR-9X5A-V