

**COMMUNICATIONS – A NEW DEFRA SERVICE**

**Purpose**

- 1) As part of the Defra group strategy, communications teams and other corporate services are working closely together. By integrating our work, we can save money for frontline services, reduce duplication, act together more effectively and make things simpler and better for our customers. For the Forestry Commission this has meant the transfer of its communication service to Defra on 1 February 2017.
- 2) Defra communications service to the Forestry Commission will continue on a business as usual service basis until a new operating model is approved and new posts are filled.
- 3) This paper sets out how the 'new' Defra communications service for the Forestry Commission will operate, until the Defra communications transformation project is completed.

**Recommendation(s)**

- 4) EEB are asked to note the transfer of the Communications team and agree to review the effectiveness of service delivery to FC, and working relationships with FE and FR, at the end of 2017.

**Background/Introduction (if applicable)**

- 5) The then Secretary of State agreed to a single integrated Communications function in June 2015 to reduce duplication, improve consistency and reduce headcount.
- 6) The first stage of integration happened on 3 August 2015 through the creation of a virtual single press office function which led to improved ways of working and greater visibility and clearance for FC work via the Defra and No. 10 media grid.
- 7) The next phase of integration included the transfer of the FC communications team into Defra on 1 February 2017. The posts that have transferred to Defra are:
  - i) Head of Communications – vacant (Mark Funnell on secondment to EA)
  - ii) Head of PR and Partnerships - Rebecca Binns (temporary cover for Louisa Aveyard)
  - iii) Senior Press Officer - Ben Scotchbrook
  - iv) Senior PR and Partnerships Manager - vacant
- 8) There are also two temporary posts being transferred:
  - i) Transition Manager - Louisa Aveyard
  - ii) Senior Communications Project Manager Tree Health - Meera Hindocha
- 9) Charlton Clark is retiring on 10 February 2017 and Rebecca Cox left in October. Backfilling of these posts was approved by the Defra Group Director of Communications on the condition that we realigned our vacancies with the emerging centre of excellence model, and savings were

- identified. We have therefore restructured the roles and are currently recruiting a Press Officer (G4) and a Senior Campaigns Advisor (G3).
- 10) To support this transition, Ben Scotchbrook has been with the team on assignment from Defra since January 2017, ensuring that we maintain an effective media function, and is currently having a hand over with Charlton.
  - 11) From the 1 February the team will be line managed by Alice Holmes and Clare Jennings who job-share as Deputy Directors, Strategic Communications for the Defra Group. Rebecca Binns will continue to manage the PR and Partnerships team including the new Senior Campaigns Officer and report to Alice and Clare. The Transition Manager will also report directly to Alice and Clare. The Press Officer role will report into the Defra Single Press Office.

### **Key facts**

- 12) Team roles and recruitment
  - a) The Senior Campaigns Manager post has not yet been filled. Recruitment is underway.
  - b) Defra have included a Press Officer post (IO) in a wider recruitment campaign for Defra press officers.
  - c) The post of Communications Support Officer (Becky Stone) will continue until March 2017, enabling the continued management of FCE Comms cost codes, and supporting the team's transitions. This post is not transferring to Defra.
  - d) Rebecca Binns' loan from Cabinet Office has been extended to November 2017.
- 13) Communications programme:
  - a) We will continue to deliver our communications programme for 2016/17 that was agreed with FS. The FS communications programme for 2017/18 will be discussed at FS senior managers on 7 February.
  - b) Together with FEE Head of Marketing we have established effective ways of working between FEE communications team and Defra. FEE Media operates within the Defra Single Press office – sharing systems for planning, media handling records and media monitoring. Head of PR and Partnerships and Head of Membership and Marketing regularly review FEE forward looks to identify opportunities for FEE within core-Defra campaigns.
  - c) We continue to provide strategic communications advice to FCE National Office (for example Centenary) and provide media handling for publications and national statistics. We will also be supporting internal communications around the FC Future Operating Model, and the Defra Group Single Strategy.
  - d) The Transition Manager will be on a project team to develop and finalise the Defra communications strategy for 2017/18. The Ministers have just agreed to the priorities and campaign themes in annex 1. We will look for opportunities to help bring the strategy to life through the work of the FC.
- 14) Cross Cutting services: The ongoing management of cross cutting services including internal channels, website, transition to gov.uk, and the photo library will be discussed at the newly established Forestry Commission communications board. Membership of this board includes FR, FS, FE, CFS

and Defra (FC) comms. The board's first meeting will be on the 6 February. The board will meet biannually.

- 15) Forest Research:
  - a) We have taken the opportunity to review the ways of working with Forest Research and we have proposed that with the departure of Charlton Clark and the team's move to Defra that it would be much more efficient and effective for Forest Research to take on the press office role.
  - b) There will still be a clear line of sight with FR communications and Defra (FC) communications through the Strategic Publications Group that meets on a quarterly basis. The membership to this board includes FR, FS, CFS, FCS, NRW and Defra (FC) Comms
- 16) Defra's new service
  - a) The Communications Transformation team is working with an organisational design expert to develop the foundation for the new communications team. The five centres of excellence will be Internal communications, Strategic communications, Media, Local communications and Performance and Transformation.
  - b) Defra have now reviewed and refined the proposed high level structure for the Group Communications function, which will be shared with all staff in a conference call w/c 13 February.
- 17) The new Defra communications service will continue to be reviewed to ensure that continuity of service is maintained, with a more systematic review for EEB at the end of the year.

### **Resource Implications**

- 18) The level of resources transferred to Defra will be maintained and the team will be operating at full capacity once the vacant posts have been filled.

### **Risk Assessment**

- 19) There is a centralised risk register for the Transformation project where any risks identified can be logged.
- 20) There are more specific Forestry Commission risks around the current level of vacancies and ability to resource the communications programme for the Forestry Commission as well as being more exposed if we were drawn into incident management. Also with the departure of Charlton Clark we are losing the depth of knowledge and experience in Tree health communications. We are mitigating this with an extensive handover to the team and with Ben being with us since January.
- 21) We are currently reviewing the decision on the future of the Press Officer post once Ben completes his assignment in March 2017. We will work with the Defra Head of News to ensure that the right decisions are taken to mitigate any risks to continuity of service as well as protecting the FC reputation.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 22) There is centralised Equality Impact Assessment for the Defra Shared Service Transformation project.

**Communications**

- 23) Internal communications have been completed around the team's transfer to Defra. Further communications will be required once more information is available on the changes to Defra communications and the way we work.

**Name:** Louisa Aveyard and Rebecca Binns

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