

Capability Review: Defra Response



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The Department's Response

The Department has responded to the findings of the Review and identified five key strands of action. These strands of action have been identified here, and have been integrated into the broader 'Renew Defra' programme. The Cabinet Secretary will use this programme to hold the Permanent Secretary to account on progress, with a particular focus on the specific actions agreed as part of the Capability Review.

The Permanent Secretary's response

I welcome this report and the focus which our Capability Review has helped bring to our efforts to build the kind of Department we wish Defra to be: flexible, responsive and highly skilled.

I am delighted the Review concluded that Defra has come a long way since it was set up in 2001 and recognised our achievements:

- Leading internationally in climate change policy
- Excellent use of science in policy making
- A good reputation in Europe as a strong negotiator
- A clearly articulated business model
- An innovative approach to citizen engagement

At the time of our Capability Review, Defra was already setting out an ambitious programme of change to respond to this challenge. This programme – Renew Defra – will create a Department which is more responsive and innovative; where outcomes will be developed in true partnership, and policy making will be effective and consistent. Defra will be differently shaped and smaller, and a place where it is easy to get things done. The programme will deliver in months, not years.

The starting point for this work has been our refreshed strategy, developed in partnership between the Defra Ministerial team and Management Board. As a result of this Strategy Refresh Defra now has a clearer sense of direction built around a new mission of 'one planet living', supported by high level goals of avoiding dangerous climate change and securing a healthy natural environment, which in turn are delivered through high impact policies. Alongside these, our Strategy Refresh recognised the essential 'licence to operate' work which we carry out, often through complex sets of delivery partnerships, in areas which include our preparing for, and responding to, emergencies such as floods and animal and plant disease outbreaks.

Setting the direction

Our Ministers and Management Board have set a clear direction for Defra, through the Strategy Refresh. The challenge ahead is to ensure this direction is understood across the whole department and that people can see where they make a contribution. This process starts with the Management Board and top team.

We will achieve this through agreed actions including:

- The Management Board embarking on an active and visible programme of engagements outside of their normal portfolios from April 2007, helping communicate a compelling vision of where Defra is going;
- Aligning Defra and Delivery Bodies business plans behind the Strategy refresh from April 2007, thus establishing a clear link between business objectives and the allocation of money and people;
- Engaging Directors, Deputy Directors and top teams of Delivery partners, to develop a framework for setting out the skills and behaviours needed for their roles, from April 2007.

Seeing ourselves as customers see us

To deliver Defra's challenging set of outcomes requires effective partnerships across complex delivery networks. Since Defra's creation we have invested significant effort in building the effectiveness of these networks and relationships, but we recognise there is still much to do.

We will achieve this through agreed actions including:

- Establishing a Defra Customer Intelligence Unit, which will provide a focus point for how we transact and engage our customers, and involve them in policy development, from April 2007.
- Developing a customer feedback reporting mechanism for the Management Board, supported by active Management Board engagement with customers, from April 2007;
- Implementing the recommendations from our Governance of Delivery Action Plan, by March 2008;
- Appointing a Defra delivery body representative as a Non-Executive Director on the Defra Management Board by April 2007;
- Establishing a formal programme where the Environment Agency, Natural England, Rural Payments Agency and the State Veterinary Service have active biannual engagement with Defra Ministers and Management Board from April 2007;
- Implementing an interchange strategy between Defra and delivery partners, and access to other forms of short term delivery experience, supported by rewards for participation in this scheme

Building a high performance culture

The Management Board and I recognise we have a significant amount of distance to travel if we are to instil a high performance culture throughout the organisation. Critically this requires a combination of both behavioural and system changes.

We will achieve this through agreed actions including:

- Implementing revised policies for dealing with poor performance, reinforced through behaviour and reward systems.
- Revising and publishing new terms of reference and expected corporate collective behaviours of the Defra Management Board, and developing and implementing mechanisms to measure against these, from April 2007.
- Underpinning collective Management Board behaviours with a leadership assessment and coaching programme for individuals, which will be piloted with the Management Board from April 2007 and subsequently rolled out across the Department;
- Implement a talent and succession planning strategy to maintain a pipeline for the development of talented groups in the organisation with the right skills and behaviours by March 2008. This includes more systematic monitoring and discussion of the performance of individuals across the Department, by the Defra Management Board;

Defining a Defra way of doing things

To improve our effectiveness and efficiency, we need to establish and embed a 'Defra way of doing things'. The perspectives of individual customers, the business community, citizens and taxpayers must be integral to what we do and how we do it.

We will achieve this through agreed actions including:

- Developing a strategic performance management framework for the Management Board, revising and simplifying the existing Defra balanced scorecard, and using this as the key input into discussions on organisational performance between the Defra Management Board and Ministers from April 2007;
- Implementing and embedding a standard policy process, supported by guidance and training, from April 2007;
- Implementing a Defra standard approvals process for programmes and projects and continued assurance over successful delivery, from May 2007;

Right size, right shape

Effective delivery of Defra's outcomes requires us to be flexible, agile and responsive to changing demands and priorities, supported by organisational structures and systems which minimise overlap with partners. We also have challenging efficiency target to achieve over the next few years.

We will make these changes through agreed actions including:

- Move to a predominantly programme and project based organisational model from April 07.
- Taking action in 07/08 to create a smaller department, with the right skills and the right grade mix.
- Implementing the HR Organisational Design project in order to take account of development needs in deployment decisions by September 2007;
- Look at other organisations and establish a process whereby Defra can meaningfully benchmark our performance and organisational design from April 2007;
- Identifying, implementing and embedding across the Department, the processes to support flexible resource deployment, from April 2007

We have already made progress against our agreed actions and extensively engaged with staff in shaping our work. The Management Board and I have set ambitious targets for achieving change through the Renew Defra Programme. I believe our key strengths, identified by the review team - pride in what we do and passion for delivering our outcomes - are ones which all high performing organisations aspire to, and they are universally recognised as being difficult to instil in an organisation. They are also the qualities which give me confidence that we can respond positively and effectively to the challenges which lie ahead.



Helen Ghosh
Permanent Secretary
Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
27 March 2007