Defra Board Minutes: 21 March 2016

Board Members in attendance were:
- Elizabeth Truss Secretary of State
- George Eustice Minister of State
- Rory Stewart Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
- Clare Moriarty Permanent Secretary
- Betsy Bassis Director General, Chief Operating Officer
- Steven Holliday Lead Non – Executive Director
- Paul Rew Non-Executive Board Member
- Catherine Doran Non-Executive Board Member
- Andrew Sells Ex-Officio member
- Emma Howard Boyd Ex-Officio member

Apologies received from:
- Lord Gardiner Defra spokesman in the House of Lords
- Mark McLaughlin Chief Finance Officer
- Peter Bonfield Non-Executive Board Member

Also in attendance were:
- Eileen Mortby Board Secretary
- Meenakshi Westhead Board Secretariat
- Stuart Colville Principal Private Secretary (SoS)
- Sophie Treddinick Chief of Staff (Permanent Secretary)
- India Perry Private Secretary to Rory Stewart

Declarations of interest and minutes from the previous meeting

No declarations of interest were given.

The minutes from the previous meeting were cleared.

The meeting

The Secretary of State welcomed Steven Holliday, recently appointed as Defra’s Lead Non-Executive Director and the ex-officio member Emma Howard Boyd to their first meeting.

The Board noted the concern expressed by Paul Rew, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) in relation to the cumulative impact of risks facing the department and his recommendation to monitor them regularly. Clare Moriarty, Chair of the recently formed Non Executive and Executive meeting (NEEM) reported that the first meeting on 2 February was productive with good discussion on the recent floods and on the Transformation Portfolio. NEEM agreed that this was a useful forum to hold ‘deep dives’ on current issues.
The Board was informed about work to develop a Target Operating Model by John Tuckett, Interim Change Director. This work, over the next few months, will provide a framework for the Defra group to work within. The Board recognised that the challenge was to manage expectations and robust engagement would be required across the Defra group.

Sonia Phippard, Director General, Environmental and Rural updated the Board on the role of Local Area Plans in the delivery of the 25 year environment plan. Better integration of action and decision making at local level is expected to result in improved service for the customer. Aligning the geographical boundaries between the Environment Agency and Natural England was the first step and the Board noted that this was progressing well.

Sonia Phippard explained that the 25 Year Environment Plan aims to share data to ensure Government businesses and individuals have a consistent common currency (natural capital) as the basis for improved decisions. An Environment Analysis Unit has been established to help embed natural capital systems thinking across Defra.

As part of modernising Defra, the Better Regulation Programme is seeking to create simpler systems whilst delivering efficiencies and reducing regulatory burdens for the customer. Amy Holmes, Director EU, Marine and International informed the Board that this would be achieved by scrutinising more closely the regulation and associated delivery proposed, working innovatively to achieve the target set in the Single Departmental Plan.

Information Technology (IT) is a key enabler to modernising Defra, achieving the efficiencies required, and delivering the Secretary of State’s priorities. Chris Howes, Interim Chief Technology Officer updated the Board on the current position of IT delivery. Work is underway to replace the current contracts with IBM and Cap Gemini, once they have ended, with a new delivery model UnlITy.

The Performance report was revised after the last Board meeting and the Board commented on the revised format and suggested some further changes.