

30 SEPTEMBER 2021**VALUING OUR INFORMATION DELIVERY****Purpose**

To update the Executive Board on delivery of the Valuing our Information (Vol) programme over current reporting period January-September 2021.

To ask the Executive Board to support and enable staff across the Forestry Commission to fully engage with the programme through providing to steer to senior manager to encourage staff to make time for managing their information.

To gain support for the Forestry England Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) team increasing delivery focus on SharePoint document site delivery over the next reporting period (October-December 2021)

Background

The Executive Board recognises that information is vital to the delivery of every aspect of FC work for example, Forestry England's land management work is assisted through the deeds and land management files it keeps; Forest Research's research and analysis work is facilitated through the data it collects and manages; Forest Services licensing and grant work is enabled through the documentation it creates

In November 2020 the Executive Board approved a four-year programme of work to create significant improvements in information management across the Forestry Commission. The programme's four-year timescale reflects the degree of cultural change required to support the technical and policy changes to embed new information practices.

The Vol programme was established to address the organisation's challenges with managing current and legacy information in digital and paper formats. The Vol programme would create a new information governance framework to embed changes into the way the organisation works. It was recognised by the Executive Board that the work of the Vol programme would lead to improvements in efficiency, trust and compliance.

The programme's main objectives are to:

- Enable the right information to be found quickly while ensuring it is held and shared securely
- Keep and maintain quality, accurate and trusted information for the right length of time

- Ensure all information is managed in line with the FC Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) governance structure.

The programme is organised around three workstreams (digital, paper and governance) and covers various information projects being delivered across the federated Forestry Commission.

The programme is led by the Forestry England KIM team and sponsored by the Forestry England Director for Corporate Affairs, who took over this role from the FC Finance Director, in June 2021. The Vol programme has a steering group, who meet quarterly, and a project team, who meet monthly, both are comprised of representatives (KIM Champions) from across the federated Forestry Commission. The programme launched formally across the Forestry Commission in May 2021.

The programme delivery approach is based on Forestry England KIM team creating products, for example guidance or training, for Forestry England and sharing these as consultation and final drafts with the KIM Champions. The KIM Champions are responsible for operational delivery and encouraging their business units to follow new guidance, which the KIM Champions may adapt to suit local purposes. As the federated Forestry Commission is at different points on its Vol journey, the KIM team has provided some targeted guidance or support to KIM Champions, for example assisting FR with its digitisation process; this approach provides timely assistance and enables Forestry England to learn lessons for future guidance.

Discussion

Programme successes

The Vol programme has achieved delivery success in several areas since May this year including:

- Agreeing retention schedules for all the corporate services to standardise how long information is kept improving regulatory compliance
- Promoting and providing guidance and training on tidying digital information on MS Teams and file shares to enable efficient working practices
- Awarding a new contract for offsite storage to Iron Mountain, to replace the old Iron Mountain contract and provide the basis for consolidating offsite storage management
- FE Reviewing offsite storage holdings at File Centre resulting the decision to dispose of around 60% of the holdings which will lead to savings in storage costs and less costs when holdings are transferred to Iron Mountain
- FR developing a process for review and digitisation of their onsite physical records to free office space
- FS developing an approach to reviewing and refreshing their existing SharePoint sites to enable more efficient working practices

Alongside these delivery successes the Vol programme team have started a communications and engagement campaign across the federated bodies. The campaign has included blogs, training sessions and presentations raising awareness of programme, its aims and the guidance and support provided to staff.

The work delivered to date sets the foundations for using technology to improve information management. For example, to be able to automate deletion of information in line with statutory and business needs requires a set of agreed retention periods, to design new workable filing structures requires housekeeping and tidying of existing filing structures and to hold information offsite in a consistent approach requires consolidation of offsite storage providers.

The Vol Highlight Report (Appendix 1) provides more information on the programme's success since May 2021, the plans for the next three months and the milestones for the current reporting year 2021-22.

Supporting staff to deliver

The Vol programme team have had positive feedback from colleagues, especially business support staff, about the programme's ambitions. The assistance and guidance provided has been welcomed. However, programme team members from across all the federated bodies have experienced several occasions when colleagues say that while they recognise the improvements the programme brings they do not have time to put the new approaches into practice.

The benefits of information management include improved and clearly evidenced decision making, improved sharing of information avoiding duplication and re-inventing work and increased ability to demonstrate legal and legislative compliance. The Vol programme team have provided guidance, assistance and support to enable the organisation to realise these benefits, but as they are not using the information they are not best placed to re-organise or make final decisions on deleting information.

The Vol programme team recognise there are many competing demands on staff time and staff have had to cope with changes to their working practices over the passed 18 months. It has been recognised that the ongoing COVID-19 experience has put into sharp focus the concept of what effective information management looks like. The difficulties of accessing information remotely and identify the correct information when the creator is not available is more apparent when most staff are working remotely.

Information management practices will enable the FC to handle information more effectively and efficiently so more time can be spent doing the work it was set up to deliver. Staff need to be given time to understand, adopt and use information practices now so they can reap the benefits of the practices later. The efforts put into place over the next couple of years will facilitate the use of new technology that will enable automated information governance practices to be put in place.

Information systems (Microsoft 365)

Technical systems are needed to automate the information governance requirements around security, retention and sharing information. The Vol programme is embracing several different information systems, including Microsoft 365 (M365) technology to improve and deliver information governance practices. The programme team are using these tools as the basis for developing principles that can be applied more widely in other information systems.

The programme team are focusing on using specific M365 applications, MS Teams, SharePoint and One Drive to facilitate automated information governance. The Forestry England KIM team have set up several pilot SharePoint document management sites for teams using the Forestry England tenancy (which includes Forestry England, Commissioner's Office and Forest Services). Based on the knowledge and learning from the experience, the KIM team are preparing to scale up delivery of SharePoint document management sites starting in January 2022.

The current slow progress on preparing for SharePoint delivery in FE is raising a risk of missing the delivery milestone to deliver the first phase of SharePoint within the current financial year. The FE KIM team needs to prioritise delivery of SharePoint in FE to enable automation of information governance processes across Forestry England. FS and the Commissioner's office will benefit directly from the work as the KIM team will produce guidance and training materials to use in their SharePoint implementations. FR will benefit in a different way as they are not planning to use SharePoint in the same way as the rest of the Forestry Commission. The benefits to FR will be through sharing approaches for automating information governance for MS Teams and digitised paper records.

As a result of prioritising SharePoint delivery the work on improving paper records and digitisation may slow down until the middle of next year. As work in these areas is ahead of schedule and digitisation will rely, to some extent, on there being a suitable location in SharePoint to store documents the impact on the overall delivery of the project is anticipated to be minimal at this stage.

Resource implications

All staff need to have regular short periods of time to manage their information.

Risk Assessment

The programme has its own risk register with planned mitigation actions which it reviews on a monthly basis. The top risks to programme delivery are:

- Staff have insufficient time to engage in the changes being introduced meaning new information management practices are not adopted and improvements to information management are not realised.

- The adoption of the wider M365 suite and its use. Colleagues are tired of change, and/or using new systems so are unwilling to adopt new programmes.
- Each of the federated bodies are at a different place on their information management journey, making it hard to find common ground on group delivery at times.
- Delivery and embedding the change necessary for the adoption of SharePoint Document management sites in FE will take an extremely long time and may prevent delivery in other areas of information management and/or will require additional resource. This risk will be reviewed and managed by a programme sub-group for Forestry England SharePoint Delivery.

Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment, if required, will be undertaken at an appropriate stage as the project progresses.

Communications

As the Vol is fundamentally a change programme, communications and engagement are essential. The programme has a dedicated communications plan to manage both strategic and tactical messaging.

The FE KIM team have leaders in FS, FR, FE Districts senior teams and will present to the FE Senior Leadership Team in October. The FE KIM team have produced blogs for Roots to promote guidance and supplemented with direct messaging all of which is shared with FR.

Owing to the growing profile of the Vol programme and increased output, it has been agreed that Vol programme will have a set of pages on Roots; this will help colleagues in FE and FS to understand the programme and provide as a single access point for all guidance on Information Management.

The FE KIM team intends to send direct messages to team leads within the organisation to ensure colleagues are made aware of the guidance and support available.

The programme has developed links with CWWW as a result of the inter-dependency between the two programmes for example, paper use, office space and digital working.

The KIM team adapted its approach and focus in response to feedback from a small survey conducted to better understand issues faced by colleagues. The feedback showed that the move to home working and increased use of MS Teams and One Drive led to a more acute sense of information overload. The FE KIM team

responded by providing additional guidance and training (via a Lunch and Learn session) on the use of MS Teams. It was important to put these in place before starting to introduce SharePoint in FE to reduce the risk of exacerbating the situation.

Recommendations

The Executive Board are invited to note and accept the ongoing work plan set out in the highlight report for the next three month period.

In light of the risks outlined, the Executive Board as asked to lend their support to the programme and help ensure colleagues have sufficient capacity to engage and take the necessary steps to manage their current and legacy information.

Knowledge and Information Management Lead
23/09/2021