Office for Environmental Protection

Board Paper 26.28

Title: Corporate Plan	
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Accountable Executive Director: Richard Greenhous	**Open paper**

Summary

Issue

1. This paper seeks the Board's agreement to the corporate plan.

Recommendation

2. The Board is recommended to:
   a. agree the corporate plan
   b. agree that it should be published ahead of confirmation of our Northern Ireland resources.
   c. note the communications plan, including the developing 'plan on a page'.

Key considerations

3. We are yet to finalise our business plan and budget, as we wait for confirmation of our resources from DAERA. We propose to publish our corporate plan in advance, as considered in paragraphs 9 and 10.

Information and Analysis

Background

4. Our corporate plan is an important feature of how we are transparent and held accountable. It is the public statement of what we will do with the resources made available to us. We report on its delivery in each of our annual report and accounts, our quarterly reports to Defra and DAERA, and Ministerial performance reviews.
5. Our corporate plan also has signalling value to our stakeholders, including those we oversee, and aims to tell the story of our priorities and intended impact. We use it as a platform for engagement to this end.

The corporate plan is the public expression of our business plan. The Board agreed a draft business plan and budget in March, and agreed that this should be implemented as we await confirmation of our resources in Northern Ireland. We do not know, and DAERA officials cannot advise, when our resources in Northern Ireland will be confirmed. The Executive consulted on multi-annual departmental budgets in January, and has been seeking to agree a budget since. *This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

Analysis

The corporate plan is proposed in a similar form to previous years. In drafting commitments, we aim to strike the right balance between:

a. clear, measurable statements of what we will do (such as publish or conclude) which support the public, government and others to hold us to account for how we choose to use public funds, and best signal our intentions to those we seek to influence to amplify and respond to our work.
b. sufficient discretion for uncertainty, given this is a plan and will change as we reprioritise as the context changes, or new issues arise. We create discretion describing our work as 'to scrutinise' or 'progress', but at the expense of clarity.

6. The corporate plan should be published near to the start of the business year, if it is to fulfil its role in transparency, accountability and to have signalling value. We intend to publish the plan ahead of confirmation of our resources by DAERA. Certain items are marked with an * in the plan, to highlight those which may need to be reviewed if resourcing is not forthcoming in Northern Ireland as we have expected.
7. We have considered whether to defer publication until our Northern Ireland resourcing is clear. We propose to publish, given the indeterminate timeline, and the mitigations within the plan to signal what may change. We judge there is merit in transparency of what must change if we are resourced less than we expect. If that risk materialises, the Board will be advised on the decisions then required to amend our business plan and communicate that.
8. We must consult with Defra and DAERA on the content of our corporate plan. Minor drafting comments have been incorporated. Defra also seek to understand how the Chair's letter is reflected in the proposals: we judge our plans already reflect the suggested focus on outcomes, and desired proportionality. Both seek or reflect assurances on how we will work to manage the impact of requests for cooperation on their capacity.

<u>Northern Ireland</u>

9. The corporate plan extends to our work in England and Northern Ireland.

Impact Assessments

Risk

The Board considered a range of risks in deciding the draft business plan and budget which underpins the corporate plan.

10. *This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
11. By publishing in advance of our Northern Ireland resourcing being confirmed, there is a risk that we set expectations we will not meet. This is mitigated in the ways set out above, and in the plan.

Contribution towards our objectives

12. The corporate plan sets out the contribution we expect to make towards our strategic objectives, and the impact we intend.

Environmental and other duties

13. The Board considered its environmental and equality duties in considering the draft business plan and budget. It will reconsider these in agreeing the final plan. The corporate plan is the public statement of these decisions.

Finance and resource

The corporate plan has been designed with external resource in previous years. We will not this year. The time required to draft and publish the corporate plan is allocated in the business plan.

Communication and engagement

14. The corporate plan will be published on the OEP website and we expect to issue a press release and social media to promote it, although we do not anticipate it being of significant interest to the media or general audiences.

15. We have engaged with a range of stakeholders in relation to the business plan the Board agreed. This includes presentations to Defra, DAERA, Defra Group ALBs, eNGOs and professional bodies, and some parliamentary staff. We have plans to use publication of our plan as a trigger for broader engagement with senior leaders in public bodies in relation to our newer areas of interest.
16. It is important that the corporate plan is well understood by OEP staff, including both the 'big picture' of what the organisation is seeking to achieve and the roles of teams and individuals in that. We have run sessions with staff on our plans in each of our thematic programmes overall. We have developed a 'plan on a page' setting out our priorities in more visual terms. We aim to use this internally, and potentially externally.

Transparency

17. This is an open paper and will be published with the relevant papers for the Board's meeting.

Implementation

18. We intend to publish the corporate plan soon after the Board's decision. We intend to wait for the incoming Chair's appointment to agree a final publication date.

Annexes

Annex A Draft Corporate Plan - *This section has been redacted as it contains information available elsewhere.*

Annex B Plan on a Page - *This section has been redacted as it contains information available elsewhere.*