

Improving operational efficiency

Defra & Natural England



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Hedra, a Mouchel Group company, worked with Defra to help safeguard the countryside for future generations.

What was the challenge?

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) manages the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), a far-reaching initiative to help rural landowners and businesses meet environmental outcomes and enable the public to enjoy access to the countryside through financial assistance from Government via a range of separate incentives.

To better serve customers and manage growing demand, Defra wanted to be able to process more applications for grants and subsidies without a corresponding increase in resources.

Defra's Rural Development Service (RDS) had been managing the various regional incentive schemes employing a range of different end-to-end processes. Defra wanted to transform the scheme management into a single, harmonious process. To do so, it created a change programme called erdpIT, with objectives to manage the process of change within the business and deliver a major new IT system to enable that change.

Defra set an ambitious target of 40% improvement in efficiency from the change programme. Recognising the challenging scope and scale of the project, it engaged Hedra, a Mouchel Group company, to lead the business change process.

How did Hedra support Defra & Natural England?

The Hedra team began by leading the development of a new organisational model. This turned the existing regional silos into local customer-facing delivery teams providing an integrated offering to customers.

Development and promotion of the business and benefits cases for the new organisational model encouraged RDS management and staff to understand the vision for change and to contribute to it, follow the critical path and adopt new working practices. Buy-in was further encouraged by a communications programme and the advocacy of local change agents in each region and national team.

Hedra is now helping Natural England (a newly established body which has, inter alia, taken over responsibility for delivering the successor programme to the ERDP) with its follow-on goal to further improve operational efficiency. Natural England wants to rationalise the regional administration of payments and other transactional processing into more focused centres of excellence and we have developed a workload forecasting model to enable it to consider alternative resourcing options. Depending on the preferred approach, further productivity gains of between 10% and 25% are targeted.

What was achieved?

Through a working style of facilitation and guidance, Hedra created long-term commitment and support for business change within RDS, and subsequently Natural England, thereby enhancing organisational capability.

Our approach to the change programme's design and implementation achieved significant senior management endorsement across the department and regions. Staff were also more willing to accept revised roles in the new structure.

This open mindset can be used increasingly to exploit the opportunities for efficiency gains created by the new IT system and deliver significant cost reduction and service enhancement benefits for both customers and the department.

The more efficient and effective administrative system that has been put in place will allow government subsidy to be distributed more quickly and accurately to all customers, encouraging environmentally effective land use, improving biodiversity and sustaining rural businesses and communities.

The achievement of productivity targets will promote greater environmental benefits by releasing Natural England staff to provide more technical advice to customers that enhances environmental outcomes and also generate savings to the tax payer through a reduced cost base.