



A POWERFUL AND AFFORDABLE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

One of Natural England's challenges has been to integrate the work of the founding parts of the organisation into a single coherent three year Corporate Plan for the delivery of its strategy. Natural England management recognised the need to develop tools for corporate planning and reporting and for monitoring and managing performance. The organisation needed a performance management solution that was both powerful and affordable.

Impetus for the performance management project came from the top. Natural England's Chief Executive identified improved corporate reporting and monitoring as key to helping Natural England deliver its strategy and improve its performance. A Project Board of managers and users was appointed to oversee the project – the scope included corporate plan reporting, financial reporting, risk management and project management. Benefits:

- Financial – reduced cost against current reporting process; resource and efficiency savings against current cumbersome, and sometimes opaque, legacy systems. Longer term benefits should stem from the ability to identify and avoid/solve problems earlier, and from greater transparency allowing for easier prioritisation.
- Operational – a tailored system; less bureaucratic, simpler, streamlined and reporting faster; easier tracking of progress; earlier warning and better management of risk; clearer presentation and more targeted information. Longer term improved coherence of contributions to common goals.
- Reputation – internal cohesion from a shared understanding of overall goals and achievements; pride in the organisation and a defined corporate identity. External sponsors and stakeholders have clear reporting and improved communications; demonstrable achievement against objectives and value for money.

Deliverables:

- Corporate Performance Reporting in a structured cascade down to team level by team and by outcome;
- Exception Reporting;
- Financial reporting by team and outcome;
- Risk Register (Corporate Risks)
- Project Management Reporting (Tier 1 projects)
- Graphic Performance Views, Briefing Books and Maps
- Online reporting – underpinning quarterly team and outcome performance reviews

“It has been a delight to work with Europartnership on a project that has greatly benefited Natural England and me personally”

Bob Middleton, Project Manager

- Data Interchange – import expenditure against budget by team and outcome; export
- Quarterly Review and Reporting
- Web based Briefing Books – for non systems users and stakeholders
- Natural England team – systems administration, development, user and superuser training
- User training – 400 staff accountable for delivery of Natural England objectives, targets and milestones; all those accountable for target setting, monitoring and reporting; the Executive Board in the use of the performance management tool

- Superuser training – 27 superusers able to undertake local user support and training; direct data entry; local customisation of features such as maps, reports, briefing books

Having identified its requirements, Natural England considered various integrated solutions but was deterred by implementation costs and by the ongoing level of external dependence (and consequential costs).

Europartnership offered an approach which involved Natural England working with independently contracted world class hardware and software providers to develop a tailor made solution – subsequently managed by Natural England with limited external support. Europartnership facilitated the links between Natural England and the hardware and software suppliers; systems configuration and implementation; roll out across the organisation; and developing a training regime – including inducting the future trainers and support team as part of the project.

Has the project delivered to expectation?

Natural England considers this a successful project. It delivered – and exceeded – expectations. The team and their deliverables met expectations with excellent feedback from the Executive and users.

The project was delivered on time and within budget – albeit the budget was increased by the Project Board as demand for access exceeded initial estimates of

licenses required. Consequentially the system highlighted data deficiencies (eg, where target status didn't reflect true performance), and the extent of poor data quality.

What the users think has worked well

- Being an intelligent client – not being overly reliant on an external provider
- Employing the right combination of external skills and experience – resulting in the business requirement being delivered at 'incredible value for money'
- Clarity of purpose and short project timetable
- Natural England being an integral part of the project team
- The super user concept to grow internal expertise
- Super user group being the key vehicle for testing
- Knowledge transfer from Europartnership to Natural England
- Comprehensive and timely training
- Top level engagement, visible support and strong project governance
- Good levels of business engagement across Natural England teams
- Realistic management approach to project limitations as well as project aims
- Responsiveness of the project team – external experts enabling it 'to innovate and take risks'
- Using the system quickly – sparking strong interest and enthusiasm
- It is transforming the view of Corporate Planning within the

organisation – no longer only 'something only for top management'

- It 'feels right' and is easy to use
- Signs that system is a catalyst for change, bringing transparency and leading to questioning the Corporate Plan, putting pressure on teams for change
- Encourages looking ahead

Challenges

- The project demanded a lot from a relatively small group of people
- Project implementation coincided with organisational restructuring. However, restructuring in flight tested system – judged as having passed the test.
- Demand for usage, mid-implementation, led to an increase in the number of users and increased costs (due to licence cost per user)
- An inevitable variability of use across teams – regarded as something to be overcome by peer and business manager pressure as the system becomes an integral part of business.

Lessons learned

- Data quality – have more discussion about data at an earlier stage
- Staff resource – more superusers
- Business Partnership Network – established post implementation could have been built earlier
- Implementing in September – dead month of August meant many staff were not available for training, etc.

NATURAL ENGLAND

Natural England was formally established in October 2006 as an independent statutory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) by the merger of English Nature and parts of the Countryside Agency and Rural Development Service.

Natural England's purpose is 'to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.'

It employs 2,500 people working from 40 locations across England.

Conclusions from NE team

- Project successful – and will achieve the outcomes sought
- Although lessons can be learned – there is nothing which couldn't be managed
- Would do the same project again in broadly the same way
- Inevitable constraints impacted on scope – but those also had benefits. ■



Europartnership is a specialist management consultancy focusing on equipping organisations to introduce change and improve business performance.

To find out more about our work, contact: **Neil Shuttleworth** on **01323 479 588**, or visit our website at: **www.europartnership.com**