



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

T 03459 335577
defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

July 2022

From Tamara Finkelstein CB
Permanent Secretary

To Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts

Dear Dame Hillier,

Fuller assessment on Cross-Government 25 Year Environment Plan Board

Further to my correspondence of [30th July 2021](#) I am now writing to provide a fuller assessment of the effectiveness of the Cross-Government 25 Year Environment Plan Board. The Board was established in December 2020 and is responsible for overseeing, co-ordinating and driving forward action to implement the 25 Year Environment Plan (the Plan) and associated requirements under the Environment Act 2021. To date we have had ten meetings (see Annex A).

Since its inception, the Board has made significant progress in driving forward work on a broad range of areas and is well established in driving cross-government environmental priorities, helping shape the refreshed 25 Year Environment Plan (Environment Improvement Plan) and embedding environmental outcomes across government planning, delivery and spending.

Delivery of Environment Act 2021 measures

The Board oversees a shared implementation programme for the new statutory requirements and legal frameworks established under the Environment Act, for example working across departments to develop draft Environment Act Targets, and to socialise how new Environmental Policy Principles should be applied. Alongside these statutory requirements, the Board has provided oversight for the new Greening Government Commitments (GGCs) - now [published](#) - helping increase ambition across government and align the GGCs more closely with the goals set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan.

Cross-Government delivery / trade-offs

Building on the Spending Review and Outcome Delivery planning work across government, the Board has commissioned work to map government policies and programmes to build a cumulative picture of government wide contributions towards to 25 YEP goals.

This Board actively reviews trade-offs and build synergies between departments and across sectors to help build collective government action and progress toward our environment ambitions. We have substantively reviewed major cross-cutting areas such as: Infrastructure and Planning Reform; development of a Land Use framework; and delivery of our commitment to protect at least 30% of land and of sea in the UK by 2030 for nature (30 by 30). In addition, several departments have presented their environmental plans and strategies to the Board including: DfE's Sustainability Strategy; Ministry of Defence work towards the 25 YEP ambitions and sustainability; DfT's Biodiversity Action Plan, and the Office of Government Property's draft Government Property Sustainability Strategy.

Building government capability

The Board is helping build capability across departments to support delivery of the new Environment Act statutory requirements and wider 25 Year Plan goals. This has included active engagement with the Government Skills & Curriculum Unit to develop a 'climate and environment' basic level skills offer available to civil service departments and agencies. The Board has also discussed a programme of work to identify and address skills gaps in key sectors.

We have used the Board to develop how we embed environmental considerations into the way departments plan their investment decisions. This has included joint work with HM Treasury to support the inclusion of environmental impacts in business cases and spending bids and work with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority to better reflect environmental factors in the planning of major projects.

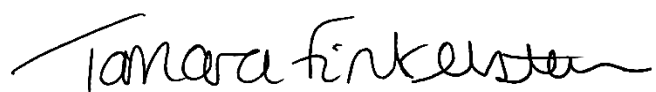
We have welcomed a range of external contributors to the Board. This has included a joint session with senior business leaders, including representatives from the Council for Sustainable Business and the Broadway Initiative, to discuss how Government and business can work in partnership to achieve better environmental outcomes approaches and align public and private finance; and sessions with the Chair and Chief Executive of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to help departments understand the OEP's role to discuss their recommendations in their ['Taking Stock'](#) scrutiny report on the 25 Year Plan. We were particularly pleased to welcome the Comptroller and Auditor General to a Board session, both to see the work of the Board in action and to discuss the NAO's approach towards scrutinising environmental action across Government.

Forward look

The 25 YEP Board is now well-established as a key governance mechanism for joining up environmental ambition across Government and embedding best practice across Government. We will continue to drive this work forward as we work towards the refresh of the Environmental Improvement Plan, legally binding targets, and the implementation of the environmental principles. Future Board meetings for the rest of this year will focus on environment, health and wellbeing and Land Use Framework and Levelling up.

I hope this provides the information and assurance you need and look forward to continuing to engage with you and the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tamara Finkelstein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

TAMARA FINKELSTEIN
Permanent Secretary

Annex A

Cross-Government 25 Year Environment Plan Board meetings December 2020 – July 2022

| Board Meetings | Topics | Key Outcome(s) |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| December 2020 First Board Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith (Minister for Pacific and the Environment) – setting the strategic context for the Board's work Purpose and Terms of Reference of the Board Departmental contributions to the delivery of the Plan | <p>Establish the role of the Board to bring departments together to drive forward the 25 Year Environment Plan</p> <p>Identifying expected contributions of departments to the wider environmental agenda</p> |
| March 2021 Second Board Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embedding environment in departmental plans and spending Development of legally binding environmental targets Greening Government Commitments 25YEP Plan Performance & HMG Outcome Delivery Plan | <p>Decision approved to take forward action plan to embed the environment across departmental planning</p> <p>Developing understanding of the future role of legally binding environmental targets across HMG</p> |
| May 2021 Third Board Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice and presentation from business: including Council for Sustainable Business; Broadway Initiative (including CBI; Home Builders Federation; Green Finance Institute and Federation of Small Business) 25YEP Plan Progress Update | <p>Shared best practice and identifying ways in which government can work with private sector on environmental outcomes, including leveraging private finance</p> |
| July 2021 Fourth Board Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comptroller & Auditor General, Gareth Davies Embedding Environment into departmental planning and spend Land Use, Infrastructure and Planning: environmental impacts 25 Year Environment Plan Annual Progress Report and Outcome Indicator Framework | <p>Discussion of effective systems leadership across environmental outcomes</p> <p>Mapped activity across government and a high-level assessment of progress and impacts. Recommendations and next phase of work agreed for embedding the environment into spending and investment decisions.</p> |
| September 2021 Fifth Board Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) – Dame Glenys Stacey Review and Refresh of the 25 Year Environment Plan | <p>OEP providing departments with an understanding of the role and purpose of OEP within the new legal framework under the Environment Bill (now Environment Act 2021).</p> |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Principles duty, and implementation plans to embed in policy-making processes | <p>All departments were asked to allocate their relevant Deputy Director to be 'Environmental Principles Champions' to raise awareness within their departments.</p> |
| <p>November 2021 Sixth Board Meeting</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and capability within Government and wider economy • Government Estates Sustainability Strategy • HMT update on SR • Green Gilts • 25 YEP Update | <p>To improve skills and capability towards 25 Year Environment Plan (as raised by Public Accounts Committee) looking at a) how we develop 'climate and environment' skills for the core civil service within Government; and b) agreement from the Board to embed 25YEP skills needs within HMG's skills policy and identify skills needs by sector within the wider economy.</p> <p>The Board endorsed approach and planned next steps for the Government Estates Sustainability Strategy.</p> <p>Progress update on Green Gilts with input from members on Governance and Reporting</p> <p>25 YEP progress update: on Environment Bill, cross Government embedding work, Annual Progress Report, Greening Government Commitment and Targets</p> |

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>January 2022 Seventh Board Meeting</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board priorities and forward look for 2022 • Review and Refresh of the 25 YEP Plan • Environmental Targets • DfE's Sustainability Strategy • The Civil Service Environment Network (CSEN) | <p>Set out Board priorities for 2022 focused on key delivery towards 25 YEP goals and implementation of the Environment Act.</p> <p>Secure Board agreement for the scope and approach to the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) and provide update on progress and next steps</p> <p>Update the Board and hear views on the Environmental targets prior to formal consultation.</p> <p>DfE's Sustainability Strategy – Board members to review and support in achieving the ambitions set in their Strategy (now published).</p> <p>The Civil Service Environment Network presented an overview of their work and identified opportunities for collaboration between Board members and CSEN</p> |
| <p>March 2022 Eighth Board Meeting</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets and Environment Improvement Plan (EIP) • Land Use • Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) • Ministry of Defence (MoD) • Embedding environment in delivery planning | <p>Reflection on environmental targets following write round and request from departments to support consultation and development of policy pathways. Progress of EIP and development of logic models.</p> <p>Departments were updated on initial findings on land use change work and links to target implementation. Opportunity to seek early views on application in their policy areas, trade-offs and working together.</p> <p>Update from IPA on their commitment made at the July Board including overview of governance and reporting progress</p> <p>MoD setting out their work towards the 25 YEP ambitions – from sites to strategy.</p> <p>Review progress on embedding environment work providing a cumulative 25 YEP outcome</p> |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | delivery roadmap and strategic planning - Proposal for next steps: environmental enablers, governance and planning |
| May 2022 Ninth Board Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebecca Pow MP, Minister for the Domestic Natural Environment • 30by30 Update and Alignment • HMT's role and priorities • Environment Improvement Plan (EIP) | <p>Defra's Minister Pow addressed the Board on delivery of a refreshed Environment Improvement Plan and implementation of the Environment Act and importance of collective government action.</p> <p>A high-level overview of the 30by30 commitment, proposed approach and next steps, including opportunities for contributing to 30by30 commitment through departmental estate or policy development and engage further with Defra colleagues to explore options further.</p> <p>Role of HMT in embedding environment into economic and financial decision making.</p> <p>A substantive update on the emerging EIP setting out ambition, department commitments and shape of the emerging plan.</p> |
| July 2022 Tenth Board Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DfT's Biodiversity Action Plan / Priorities • Natural England presentation • OEP – Dame Glenys Stacey • 25 YEP Update | <p>Setting out a view of upcoming strategies / transport infrastructure priorities including Biodiversity Action Plan.</p> <p>Presentation from Natural England Chief Executive on their work with government departments.</p> <p>Progress on establishing the OEP and their work with departments. Discussion of OEP report 'Taking stock'.</p> <p>Progress update on EIP and development; update on Environmental Targets; Annual Progress Report and Environmental Principles Policy Statement and next steps</p> |