

Title: **Update on SNH's Response to Coronavirus**

Date: **06 May 2020**

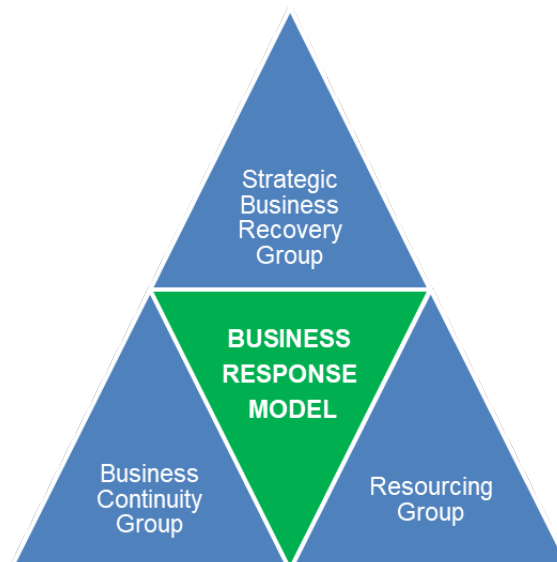
Purpose:	For information
How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change	An Emergency Business Plan is being developed for Q1, to focus on our business critical work within the constraints caused by Coronavirus. This will reflect our original strategic priorities for 2020/21 and remain focused on supporting work to enhance biodiversity, leading on nature-based solutions to climate change and supporting a Green Recovery.
Summary:	<p>In response to Coronavirus, SNH adopted a business response model with three governance strands. This covers the roles undertaken by the Business Continuity Group, the Resource Group and the new Strategic Business Recovery Group.</p> <p>Each group has its own set of responsibilities for responding to the challenges from the impact of Coronavirus. At the forefront of these is ensuring that we continue to plan and deliver our work within the constraints posed by Coronavirus whilst keeping staff safe and supported.</p>
Recommendations:	Board are asked to note the positive progress that has been made in managing the unprecedented circumstances resulting from Coronavirus.
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Purpose

1. This information paper provides Board with an update on SNH's response to the current restrictions and disruption caused by Coronavirus (COVID-19). It sets out what governance arrangements have been implemented to manage business continuity and deliver our planned priorities; what actions we have taken to safeguard staff welfare; and, what actions we are taking to prepare the organisation for a post-Coronavirus environment.

Background

2. Following advice from the UK and Scottish Governments, SNH began to close its offices on the 17th March to staff and the general public. All staff were asked to begin to work from home where this was feasible. To manage and co-ordinate the necessary actions, the Business Continuity Group (BCG) commenced implementation of its incident management and response plan.
3. Due to the magnitude of this event it was immediately apparent that it would have a major impact on our ability to deliver on our planned priorities and other essential work. As a result, the Resourcing Group has been re-purposed to act as a conduit for prioritisation of our work and the management of our resources across Activity and Area Teams.
4. To enable us to successfully operate in a post-Coronavirus environment, work has also commenced on preparing the organisation for the longer-term recovery. To lead on these preparations a new Strategic Business Recovery Group has been established, chaired by the CEO. The forming of this group, and the roles undertaken by the Business Continuity Group and the Resourcing Group, form our business response model as displayed in the following diagram:



Maintaining Business Continuity

5. Despite the unprecedented circumstances, the organisation has made the successful transition from working in a predominately office environment to home working. Whilst this came with its challenges, existing incident management and response planning enabled these changes to be swiftly implemented through the BCG. This group has representatives from across all the Activity Teams that form Outcome 4 so that support to front-line staff could continue. In addition, the group also includes input by the Communications Team so that key messages to staff, stakeholders and the general public are being effectively communicated. To ensure that we maintain engagement within our overall governance the Head of Internal Audit also attends, as does the TUS Convenor to provide feedback and advice on any staff-related issues. Finally, the group also has a representative from the Area Teams to ensure that practical issues from across the country are being addressed.
6. As with all other organisations that have staff working at home at the moment we are heavily dependent upon a reliable IT infrastructure. Previous initiatives through our 'Transforming our Workplaces' programme greatly assisted this transition with all staff already in possession of laptops. Remote access to corporate systems was improved in the lead up to the lockdown through an expansion of licences for a software tool called NetExtender. Apart from the very occasional issue, this functionality has worked extremely well and allowed staff full access to all the IT systems they would normally use. As well as through e-mail exchanges, staff have been able to communicate through the use of Lifesize video conferencing which has proven to be highly successful for keeping in contact and for meetings. Staff have also been able to divert their work phone to their private number so that all forms of communication have continued to operate.
7. During initial planning for long-term home working, it was acknowledged that staff may need equipment they would normally use in the office such as full-size monitors, full size key boards etc. As a result, all staff were permitted to procure up to the value of £100 any additional equipment they may require. Whilst the majority of staff were likely to have unlimited broadband, support has also been provided to those without this facility or had limits on how much data they could use. Smarter working guidance has been promoted to staff so that they can stay physically and mentally healthy whilst working from home.
8. During the initial period of home working the BCG met on a daily basis to review any issues that required to be immediately addressed. However, over the preceding weeks most of the resulting actions have been implemented and the group is now meeting weekly to monitor events. A dedicated e-mail address and contact details are available to staff so that they can raise any individual issues that may concern them. This is monitored daily so that responses can be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Staff Wellbeing

9. To keep staff informed and supported during home working a new 'Coronavirus' Hub has been established on our Intranet. This is regularly updated and contains the latest news on what the organisation is doing to support them. This includes guidance on IT support and other practical matters, as well as a range of wellbeing advice and help on how to cope during this period of social and physical isolation. Some of this wellbeing support has included novel approaches such as on-line yoga and mindfulness sessions. A new staff wellbeing survey (temperature check) has also recently been conducted about their experiences so far with home working. The results of this are currently being analysed, and initial indications are positive in terms of the feedback.
10. To support staff in trying to juggle their work and domestic life in the same environment we have also introduced some changes in policies. Staff have been permitted to be flexible in when they work if they need to balance any domestic responsibilities. Staff are therefore not expected to always be available during normal working hours and may therefore undertake their work at various times of the day. Where this is not feasible, and staff are unable to work their contracted hours due to additional childcare or other caring responsibilities, they may apply for paid special leave. Staff have also been encouraged to continue to take any planned leave despite the restrictions on how this might be used during lockdown. Taking an extended break from work continues to be seen as a vital way in which staff can maintain their wellbeing and maintain a work/life balance.
11. It is imperative during this period of uncertainty that line managers maintain regular contact with their staff so that they still feel supported. As well as direct contact via e-mail etc, line managers have been setting up regular team meetings/virtual coffee breaks using the Lifesize video conferencing facilities. These have proven to be highly successful and enabled staff to share their experiences and keep in touch with their colleagues. SLT are also joining these team meetings where appropriate, so that they can remain in touch with staff from across the organisation. In addition, SLT are also taking turns to produce a weekly video blog about their experiences of lock-down which complements Francesca's own weekly update.

Managing delivery of SNH's Priorities

12. With severe restrictions on some types of work that staff and partners are able to undertake during this period of disruption, the role undertaken by the Resourcing Group was re-purposed. Primarily, this is to manage and plan for SNH's work on a short-time horizon and ensure that resources across Activity and Area Teams are focused on delivery of this work.
13. The original 2020/21 Business Plan has remained the basis for our immediate focus for Q1. Where possible, we will continue to focus on work that supports our two strategic priorities for Enriching Biodiversity and Leading on nature-based solutions to Climate Change. Whilst the primary scope of the Business Plan therefore remains valid, its publication has been delayed at the moment until we develop an Emergency Q1 Business Plan. This is primarily a replacement for the internal element of the Business Plan (Part 2) so that staff have a better understanding of our immediate priorities and where we will focus our resources.

14. To support the development of the Emergency Q1 Business Plan, each Activity and Area Team have identified their business critical tasks which can be delivered under current arrangements, and which reflect some of their original plans for 2020/21. Those tasks that cannot at the moment be delivered have been de-prioritised, but remain part of their plans in case they can still be progressed later in the year.
15. Whilst many staff have continued to support organisational priorities by delivering the normal scope of their work, this is not always feasible. This has primarily affected staff working on our NNRs and other field workers on outdoor-related projects etc. Whilst some related work that can be undertaken indoors has taken up some of this slack, the Resourcing Group have developed a process to enable staff to contribute to the work of other teams. Each Activity and Area Team have identified work which they would benefit from additional support and this has been promoted across the organisation. In consultation with their line managers, staff have been able to sign-up to these tasks, thereby enabling them to gain experience in supporting the wider organisation. At the time of drafting this paper this process has only commenced so its scale and benefits have yet to be analysed.
16. To support the wider response to Coronavirus, the Resourcing Group have recognised that staff may want to help their local communities by volunteering with the NHS, local charities etc. Staff have been given the opportunity to apply for up to two weeks of volunteering time, subject to approval by line management and current workload. This arrangement will be kept under review by the Resourcing Group. At the moment no direct requests have been received from SG to redeploy staff to support other public sector organisations, as part of the wider response to Coronavirus.

Strategic Business Recovery

17. Whilst it currently remains the intention to focus on delivering the work that supports our two strategic priorities we will need to be sensitive and ready to respond to any subsequent shifts in national focus in a post-Coronavirus environment. To ensure that SNH is prepared to meet these challenges, the Strategic Business Recovery Group (SBRG) has been established to focus on the longer-term implications from Coronavirus on our work. The Group has set itself an ambitious target of *“ensuring that SNH comes out of this stronger than when it went in”*.
18. The SBRG’s role will therefore focus on undertaking horizon scanning on the emerging environment in which we will likely operate and identify any strategic issues and risks that need to be addressed. It will also take account of any opportunities that may emerge such as how the organisation may operate in the future following the experience of mass home working. To support this a ‘positive learning points’ survey is currently being undertaken to capture these details whilst they remain live in staff’s experiences. As well as those internal opportunities, others may emerge such as a renewed focus and greater public appreciation of the benefits that nature and the outdoors provides us.
19. The SBRG is also looking at how we will successfully begin integrating some of our services back into the ‘new normal’ working environment, as part of the easing of any current restrictions. This will focus on where these services can support the national recovery e.g. how we undertake survey work in order to support data for developers, what project work can re-commence that can support the rural economy (as well as for

biodiversity) such as peatland restoration etc. The SBRG will also consider how we can contribute and promote the safe re-opening of the outdoors for the public in order to enjoy nature, such as through our NNRs. As part of these preparations, the SBRG will be reflecting on the position of our partners who may not be in the same position as ourselves to re-commence delivery, due to financial pressures etc. These factors will be taken into account as we develop our business recovery plans.

20. The SBRG will also take ownership of the new corporate risk on the business impacts from Coronavirus (see accompanying Q4 Performance Report for details). This will look to ensure that the mechanisms in place to manage the risk are being implemented and are supporting its mitigation.

Recommendations

21. Board are asked to note the positive progress that has been made in managing the unprecedented circumstances resulting from Coronavirus and how SNH is endeavouring to successfully respond to these challenges.