

Information Management Assessment Action Plan Review

**The Department for Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs**

October 2013

Background

The Information Management Assessment (IMA) programme is the best-practice model for government bodies wishing to demonstrate commitment to the principles of good information management.

The IMA of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) was held over one and half weeks in July 2011, with visits to the department's offices in London and Alnwick. The IMA report was agreed with Defra in January 2012 and published in July that year after its presentation to the Permanent Secretary, Bronwyn Hill.

Defra subsequently produced a detailed action plan, which was published alongside the report. Progress against this was formally assessed in October 2013 and is summarised in the report below. Work required to address outstanding recommendations is detailed under 'Next Steps'.

Key findings of the 2011 IMA

The report specifically highlighted six examples of good practice, towards which the IMA programme will direct other assessed organisations. These include:

- well-managed and robust processes for paper appraisal, with an accelerated single file review process in place to meet the challenges of the 20-year rule
- the department's internal information audit programme, which was working with business areas to assess how information was being used and stored
- the use of the DROID tool to gain oversight and understanding of the legacy digital information stored on Defra's servers.

The IMA report rated Defra as 'Good' under four out of twenty headings on the IMA performance framework risk matrix and 'Satisfactory' under a further four headings. Eleven 'Development needed' areas were identified together with one 'Priority attention area' for Storage. The IMA report made 12

recommendations for improvement, each detailing a series of supporting actions. The IMA report placed particular emphasis on the following concerns:

- Senior support for the KIM agenda within Defra was highlighted as desirable, with a particular requirement for championing of KIM roles.
- Digital information was distributed across inconsistently structured unaccredited shared drives, accredited shared drives, Huddle sites and SharePoint TeamSites. The assessment highlighted particular risks associated with use of email Vault that Defra needed to define.
- Good quality information management guidance and policy was in place, but it had a low profile and there was a limited mandate for corporate ways of working. Staff were not clear what information needed to be captured corporately and did not consistently understand their responsibilities in information management terms. This compounded risks raised by the technology environment.
- A KIM plan was in place, but it was not aligned to an overall strategy. Core Defra needed to define its strategic approach and produce a revised plan to include timescales for the resolution of risks and issues. This was in addition to planned work to define a KIM strategy for the wider Defra network.
- Defra had not defined its requirements for information and records management in overall terms. No digital continuity plan was in place to support digital information over time and through change.
- The Defra Information Asset Register was not being used to its full potential as a tool to manage information risk, or as a means of documenting how information assets are supported by technology.

Progress against recommendations

The Defra IMA action plan was signed off at management committee level. This endorsement was obtained in recognition of the impact that information management standards can have on overall corporate efficiency and effectiveness. It also clearly demonstrates the department's commitment to addressing recommendations within the IMA report. Ownership of the action

plan was assigned to the department's Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Transparency Champion, which further demonstrates Defra's intention to raise its capability and performance in this area. Defra is to be commended for this.

In addition, this report highlights the following:

- The Defra network Knowledge Management strategy was signed off by the Chief Information Officer in October 2013. The draft document viewed by The National Archives establishes an overall vision for knowledge, data and information management. It includes good practice outcomes and a set of themes and principles aligned to the Knowledge Council's Information Principles for UK Government.
- A digital continuity strategy was signed off in autumn 2013. Defra should be commended for this. The strategy interprets best-practice guidance published by The National Archives into a series of Defra-specific outcomes. It sets out key requirements and identifies potential options for increasing oversight of legacy digital information.
- Business requirements for information and its management were identified through the Defra Network Open Working (DNOW) programme. DNOW was established on an Agile basis to put in place a single repository for digital information. It has now been superseded by the department's EDRMS project.
- Defra carried out a two-stage review of business roles responsible for supporting and enabling better knowledge, data or information management. It is now focussing on raising the skills and profile of role-holders and incorporating transparency requirements within existing structures. Roles will be re-launched at an Information Management Knowledge is Power' themed conference in January 2014. This is targeted at senior leads and intended as a platform to underline the benefits of good practice and serve to kick off a programme of learning and development activities aimed at up-skilling staff in the Business that will take place throughout the year.
- The Knowledge, Transparency and Resilience team has devised a

detailed presentation for new starters, which has been incorporated into the corporate induction process. This echoes high-level messages about the opportunities offered by better information management.

- Defra ran an email campaign backed by the COO with the aim of reducing staff's reliance on email as a means of communication and encouraging more effective email management. This was not explicitly linked to IM policy but asked staff to 'declutter' and ensure important emails were stored appropriately.
- Information audits, which received strong support in the IMA report, have been replaced by a system of information health checks aimed at incentivising staff themselves to improve the management of knowledge and information at the local level. These reviews are conducted jointly by knowledge partners in the knowledge services team at the request of business areas.

Next Steps

Since the IMA, Defra has signalled its desire to influence information management culture within the department from the top down. Defra has the opportunity to set the pace within the network in implementing the network Knowledge Strategy. It now needs to define how outcomes will be achieved, and how implementation will be aligned with other initiatives including the One Business Evidence project, according to its own requirements. The digital continuity strategy represents a key potential tool for achieving this. Defra must define the relationship between these documents, together with key work streams such as the EDRMS project and information health checks. As emphasised in the original IMA report, a detailed implementation plan will be needed, with clear milestones and defined reporting requirements.

Digital information management, storage and appraisal continue to be risk areas. Defra should ensure that progress in reducing these risks through the EDRMS project, digital continuity strategy outputs and the new information health checks can be tracked at a strategic level. In addition, this report emphasises the following:

- Clear direction and leadership will be crucial for the success of the EDRMS project. The project is building on proof of concept testing and statement of requirements compiled under its predecessor, DNOW. Defra should revisit the latter to ensure, firstly, that they still reflect current business needs and, secondly, that they reflect the impact of wider subsequent policy changes relating to public sector information. Defra should consult The National Archives guidance on business requirements for information and records management.
- Alongside EDRMS, Defra should also consider how greater corporate control of shared electronic information systems could be exerted in overall terms. This should be recognised as another option to reduce risks to the availability, completeness and usability of information.
- The digital continuity strategy is at an early stage of implementation and currently emphasises technology solutions. To realise the strategy's potential, priority should be placed on increasing corporate oversight of the information that is held, the reasons for holding it and identifying requirements to find, open, trust, work with and understand it.
- Although Defra has surfaced and published a number of previously un-catalogued datasets since the IMA, work to address recommendations covering the management of information assets remains at an early stage. A consistent approach to identifying information assets is needed together with a framework to support their management and protection and enable their exploitation. This is a requirement of the Information Principles for UK Government, which the network Knowledge Strategy references. It also reflects requirements identified in the department's digital continuity strategy.
- Information health checks represent one means of gaining greater understanding of the information held on Defra's servers. To gain full benefit, they need to be carried forwards as an active, on-going and supported programme. The concerted effort applied to encouraging better email management may represent a useful model that could be applied to driving good practice in digital storage.

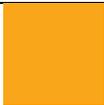
The National Archives can offer Defra support in taking the above work forward, with particular emphasis on further developing the digital continuity strategy and information asset management approach.

The Defra digital continuity strategy highlights the deletion of information over 10 years old from the department's servers as a possible option to reduce storage related risks. Defra has previously liaised closely with The National Archives on approaches to the appraisal and disposal of digital information created before 2000, through the department's Clean Sweep project – however, this context is not referenced within the strategy. Any decisions about deletion of information over 10 years old should be taken in the same structured manner and in consultation with The National Archives. This report notes that Defra has expressed its willingness to maintain an open and active dialogue on this specific issue.

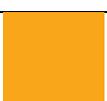
The National Archives will continue working closely with Defra to address remaining issues via the action plan monitoring process and standard meetings with the department's Information Management Consultant (IMC). Further review meetings will be scheduled until closure of the action plan. Following this, progress against any outstanding recommendations will be reviewed at the time of the next IMA in 2015–16.

Risk Matrix

The table overleaf recognises progress made by Defra since the original assessment.

Key to colour coding	
	Best practice
	Good
	Satisfactory

	Development needed
	Priority attention area

Governance and Leadership	Assessed 2011	Reviewed 2013
Strategic management		
Business objectives		
Management controls		
Resourcing		
Risk management		
Records Management		
Creation		
Storage		
Appraisal, disposal and transfer		
Management of information		
Digital continuity		

Access to Information		
FOI/Data Protection		
Re-Use		
Security		
Compliance		
Staff responsibilities and delegations		
Policies and guidance		
Training		
Change management		
Culture		
Commitment		
Staff Understanding		
Knowledge Management		