Registers of Scotland

RoS Board

18 August 2020

Transition Project Update

Purpose

1.   To provide RoS Board with a progress update on the Transition project, which was formed at the beginning of May 2020 in response to the COVID-19 impact.

2.   To seek endorsement on the direction and desired future state of the business which is driven through key deliverables within the Transition project and ensure our key assumptions are still valid.

3.   To provide the board with a high-level view of the key outcomes to be achieved within the next 3 to 6 month period.

Recommendation

4.   The board is asked to note progress of the Transition project to date.

5.   The board is asked to review the projects key assumptions to ensure they are still relevant assumptions and provide guidance and endorse the proposals in points 27, 28 and 29.

Background

6.   A COVID19 transition project was established to provide the necessary planning, co-ordination, governance and monitoring of all the activities that need to take place.

7.   The overall goal of the COVID19 transition project was defined as getting RoS back on track and leveraging emergent opportunities to deliver on our vision of being a digital registration and information business.

8.   The project identified four critical success factors that are needed to deliver the goal which have now been established as workstreams:
- Ensure our services are resilient
- Enable the environment to safely deliver our services
- Enable the right people with the right skills
- Have financial sustainability

Progress update

Our Resilient Services:

9.   To date the Resilient Services workstream has enabled customers to transact remotely by providing a digital submissions solution for Advance Notices, Land Register applications, Register of Inhibitions and Register of Judgements and as of 16 July 2020 customers can now submit digitally to the Sasine register. Early feedback from customers has been positive and customers have expressed a desire to ensure the improved ways of working, resulting from these new services, remain in place post-COVID19.

10.   Work on the resiliency aspect has been carried out to ensure the application record never closes again and the business is more robust and future proof should it be faced with any further lockdown measures as a result of COVID-19 or similar disaster-stricken situations.

11.   The team has also worked on the operational side enabling digital submissions to be processed through to completion by the remote working teams in the relevant business areas.

12.   The Register of deeds re-opened on 1 July as it was necessary to support the housing market as SG route map moved into phase 2. To enable this to happen a small team of circa 20 colleagues now have controlled access to Meadowbank House to carry out this process. Measures are in place to ensure they are working in a COVID secure environment, in accordance with Scottish Government guidance.

Our Workplace Environments:

13.   To date the Workplace Environments workstream has delivered remote enablement to a large proportion of the workforce through the virtual desktop infrastructure and laptop build and deploy missions with a further 189 colleagues coming online to RoS network through May into early June now averaging at 900-950 online users per day.

14.   An overarching risk assessment was undertaken that details the COVID-19 related hazards in the offices and remote working locations and the enhanced overarching risk control measures that have been put in place with ongoing monitoring actions, to reduce risk to as low as reasonably practicable and minimalist risk appetite.

15.   Bespoke floorplate designs were configured to adhere to government guidance in relation to physical distancing and allow the Register of Deeds team to perform their necessary role as mentioned above in paragraph 17. Heightened controls are in place to ensure no unauthorised access and enhanced cleaning procedure and sanitisation protocols to mitigate any risk.

16.   The refurbishment of Floor 0 South is now complete and contractors will be off-site by 31 July.

17.   A remote working policy has been drafted and we are currently consulting with PCS, which will help shape the future ways of working. (Annex B shows how the organisation may align itself in the future state)

Our People:

18.   The people workstream has developed a strategic workforce people database solution that provides key data intel on colleagues' availability, core skills and capability to enable short term resource deployment and longer term strategic workforce planning.

19.   The team have identified the key business critical roles and tasks that need to take place within the office environment. The roles deemed business critical for on-site office work are around circa 30-40.

20.   The people workstream have worked in collaboration with Resilient Services workstream to determine the skills and capabilities needed in the workforce to support the new ways of working.

21.   Finally, this workstream have established a wellbeing support mechanism. Our working well remotely programme has provided a wealth of information, resources, toolkits and mental health awareness sessions (for managers) to support colleagues with their health, safety and wellbeing. We have also provided a free subscription to the Calm app for colleagues and we have communicated keeping in touch methods and offered support from the employee relations team during this challenging time for colleagues. Our working well remotely investment is for the long term benefit of smart working, in addition to supporting colleagues during lockdown.

Our Financial Sustainability:

22.   To date the financial sustainability workstream has worked with business areas to review directorate budgets and reduce forecasted spend as well as working through investment initiatives to take the decision to pause or stop in light of the COVID-19 impact.

23.   Enacted on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). This meant that, as the housing market slowed, the UK Government paid 80% of the wages of those who were not enabled to work from home (with RoS paying the remaining 20 per cent), instead of us relying on our fees or additional budget from the Scottish Government.

24.   The workstream also negotiated a reduced rate with the high earning temporary contractors that are required for the long term and gave notice to agencies where (due to the introduction of digital submission services) RoS no longer required these temporary, manual/paper based services.

25.   There was collective effort and agreement to an increase of £10 to the statutory fees in Parts 1-4 of the Fee Order (which cover the land register, sasine register and judicial registers).

26.   Overall, these changes have contributed to a saving of £8.2m for RoS and an increase of £4.6m in our income, enabling the business to become more financially sustainable going forward. Please note a deeper dive into financial income future projections will form part of the day 2 RoS board agenda.

Key assumptions

27.   The board are asked to review the key project assumptions below to ensure they are still valid assumptions:

1. Colleagues who can work from home continue to do so.
2. The office sites will not re-open regardless of what Westminster or Scottish Government state about returning to work. (Note: RoS will work on basis of categorisation 'enduring home working', wellbeing office access', ad-hoc office access for tasks', 'enduring office access' (Timescales Late Aug- Sep)
3. Individuals who are shielding must not be asked to do anything other than stay home (measure to protect people who are clinically at high risk from the coronavirus, by supporting them to self-isolate to minimise all interaction with others)
4. Physical distancing measure of 2 metres remains the guidance from Government. RoS would maintain 2 metre distance even if 1 metre is permissible
5. Any member of staff displaying symptoms is to self-isolate.
6. The housing market will be impacted in the short, medium and long-term.
7. Due to our income projections being considerably less than forecast resulting in shortfall in funding the operational aspect of RoS we will have to find ways to make up some of the deficit.
8. RoS and its customers will work differently in the future and RoS do not plan to revert back to the old way of working
9. Schools in Scotland are set to return 11th August as part of easing lockdown route map 21/5. When schools fully return, we must have a contingency plan for reversal if there are further outbreaks.
10. Route map phase 1 – Housing market re-opens phase 2 – remote working remains default position phase 3 non-essential office – public transport increase phase 4 – workplaces re-open, public transport fully operational.
11. Notice of declaring the application record fully re-open will occur at a date no earlier than when solicitors can return to their offices (at the appropriate date in phase 3) plus 6 weeks (as agreed with The Law Society). Advance notices will start to expire 10 days after the application record fully reopens if they have not been replaced by applications, hence the importance of ensuring solicitors have had a sufficient opportunity to catch up before this point.

Transition Project outcomes with longer term strategic impact

28.   The move to becoming a smart working organisation has been accelerated as a result of COVID-19. Annex A provides the smart working maturity model and the guiding principles that we look to embed throughout the lifecycle of the project.

Question 1: Given the significance of the impact of COVID19, is it still a valid aspiration to transition to a smart working organisation?

29.   As part of the workplace environments workstream an options appraisal is being produced that looks at ways on how we may utilise the two buildings and provide a strategic view in the future use of the estate.

30.   The organisation has started dialogue with Scottish Government to explore options around sharing space in Meadowbank House and transitioning to a centralised

office hub. Options also being explored around the future use of the SVP Glasgow office.

Question 2:   Based on the RoS moving towards delivering a much greater proportion of its work remote from the RoS office environment, do the board endorse the approach to engage with other organisations and look at more effective ways of utilising any spare capacity in the estate in the longer term.

Key priorities for next quarter

31.   The key priorities for the Transition project going forward are as follows:

- Confirm position on budget with SG counterparts and what may be required for FY21-22 as a result of the COVID-19 impact.
- To scale the digital services and ensure business continuity measures are robust and in place.
- To continue work to explore the necessary provisions which will allow RoS to continue with digital submissions beyond the emergency legislation period.
- To fully transition to enabling effective remote working as broadly as possible and ensure that any resulting spare capacity within the estates is then utilised as effectively as possible.
- To bring back colleagues that were furloughed in a bid to deploy, develop and upskill which will aid in tackling the current arrear and land register completion.
- To return to being fully productive following now that the emergency response phase has ended to ensure the corporate plan is back on track as smoothly and effectively as can be, but also re-set any priorities in relation to the strategic objectives given where we are now.

Conclusion

36.   A significant amount of work has been delivered to date and a plan established to move RoS as far as possible back on track with the delivery of our corporate plan. There are significant risks inherent within the transition project, which we continue to monitor and mitigate against as well as many external factors for which assumptions that have been made are being continually reviewed in line with the ever changing landscape and government guidance. Board input and advice will continue to be sought on any key strategic decisions resulting from the work of the Transition Project.

32.   The Board are invited to note the progress of the COVID Transition Project to date and provide their thoughts and advice to the questions posed in relation to the project direction and intent.

Keeper of the Registers of Scotland
28 July 2020

Annex A – Smart working maturity model & principles
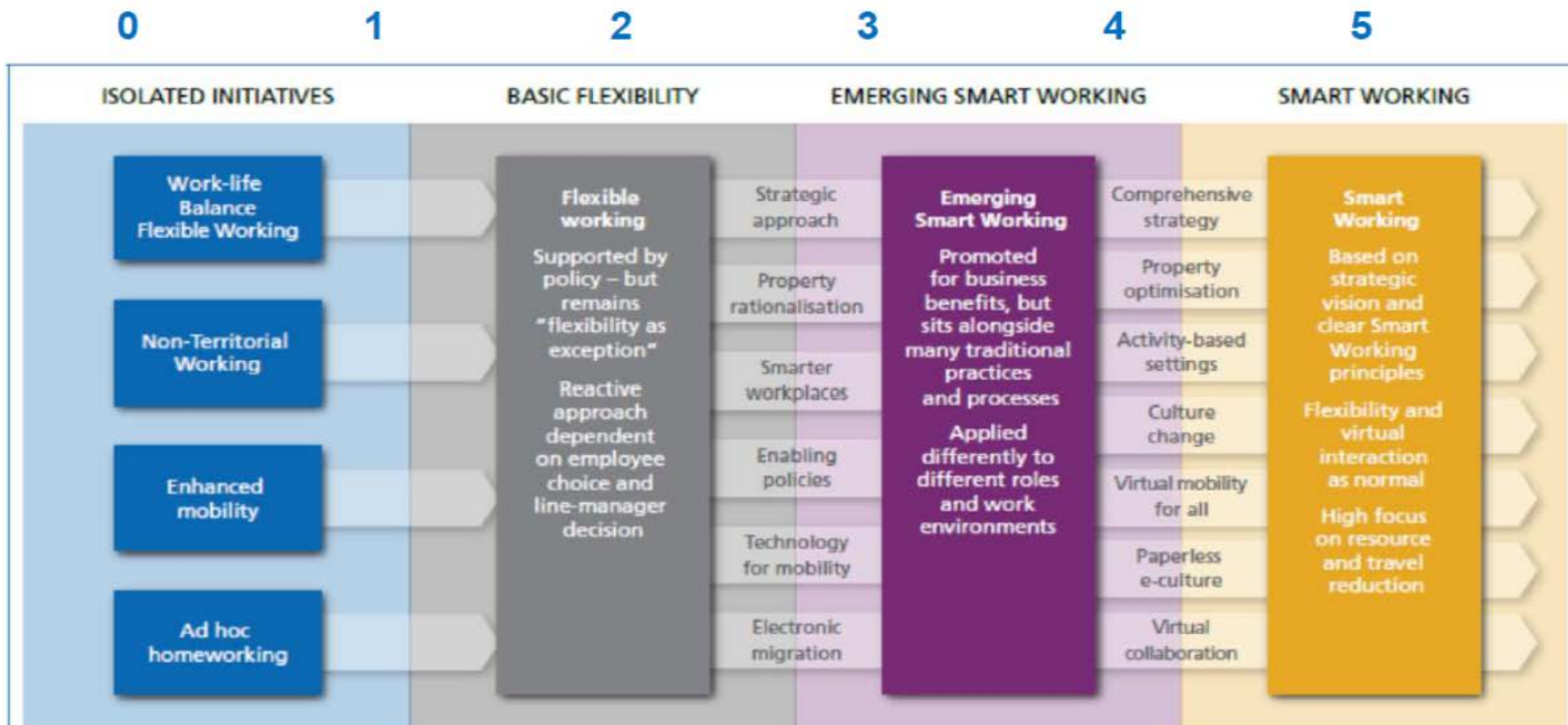
[Source: The Way We Work: Smart Working in Government © Flexibility.co.uk Ltd [5]]

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Ref	Principle
P1	Work takes place at the most effective locations and at the most effective times, responding to the needs of the task, the customer, the individual and the team.
P2	Simplified collaboration and connectivity virtually everywhere means sharing information and working with others regardless of location.
P3	Physical space is allocated to activities, not individuals and not on the basis of seniority.
P4	Flexibility is the norm rather than the exception. Everyone is assumed to be capable of Smart Working without assumptions being made about people or roles.
P5	Employees are empowered and provided with autonomy, having more choice about where and when they work, subject to business considerations.
P6	The processes people are asked to work with are continuously challenged to make sure they are fit for purpose.
P7	The technology enables employees to work anywhere.
P8	A variety of workspaces are designed to match the needs of teams.
P9	Managing performance focuses on results and outcomes rather than presence.
P10	The costs of doing work are reduced.
P11	Work has less impact on the environment.
P12	Employees and contractors have the opportunity to lead balanced and healthy lives.

Annex B – Categories of people