

Registers of Scotland

RoS Board

6 May 2020

Board paper on COVID19 transition

Purpose

1. To seek advice from the RoS Board on the scope of the work planned to support RoS transitioning from our current COVID19 emergency response to getting back on track with delivering our corporate plan. The advice required is noted in the paper in the form of questions for discussion at Board meeting.

Background

2. RoS closed its offices on the 24th March 2020 following the Prime Minister's announcement on the evening of 23rd March 2020 in relation to the new rules to help tackle the spread of coronavirus. The immediate impact of the decision to close the RoS offices was the closure of some of our registers and a temporary hiatus in the Keeper's ability to deliver her statutory duties in the usual manner.

3. On 6th April new legislation was passed which introduced the following crucial changes:

- we can accept digital submissions
- all advance notices in the system last until 10 days after the application record reopens, rather than just for the standard 35 days

4. As a result interim digital solutions have been developed and deployed to enable customers to submit applications digitally.

5. A proportion of the workforce are now working remotely circa 790 on average and a total of 850 enabled with the business operating in a reduced state as a result of Government lockdown.

6. The Covid-19 impact to the organisation can be likened to William Bridges transition 3 stage model in the sense that change has been enforced on the organisation and we must irrevocably transition to a new future state. The main strength of the model is that it focuses on transition, not change itself.

- Stage 1 'endings' - Where the organisation was forced to close as a result of the Covid pandemic
- Stage 2 'neutral zone' - The organisation finds itself in an uncertain position during this period between the old reality and a new one which is currently undefined.
- Stage 3 'new beginnings' - The final stage is defining the new future state of the organisation with new energy and acceptance. Colleagues develop new skills necessary for the new work environment.

7. To ensure that the transition to the new state is delivered as effectively and smoothly as possible, a Covid19 transition project has been established to provide the necessary planning, co-ordination, governance and monitoring of all the activities that need to take place. The SRO for the Project is the Keeper and the full EMT, along with other key senior staff from finance, estates, legal and policy, registration, HR and communications, are on the project board.

8. The COVID19 Transition project will address how Registers of Scotland needs to adapt and evolve in the short to medium term to recover from the immediate impact of the lockdown and how we to plan to operate differently in the future to reflect the fact that:

- a) new ways of working (e.g. digital submissions) have been established that we probably want to continue,
- b) the circumstances we will find ourselves in are likely to present a serious financial challenge to RoS being able to continue to deliver the corporate plan as planned so we need to take action to address that,
- c) some level of COVID19 restrictions may remain in place for a long period of time so we need to plan to work differently rather than plan to get back to 'normal'.

9. The project is intended to undertake the thinking and the work to move the organisation from where we were pre-COVID, through where we are now (in-COVID), to where we need to be for the year ahead and beyond, recognise that this is not a state which can be described as post-COVID as the presence of the virus is likely to be a feature of life for the foreseeable future.

10. The transition offers us a very real opportunity to accelerate Registers of Scotland digital ambition and support RoS's move to become a fully digital business with a flexible adaptable workforce that are technology enabled to perform and exceed in their roles in a remote working environment.

11. Doing this well will enable us to get back up to full speed and full delivery as quickly as possible and to be working in a way that is more resilient and future proof. The project is not intended to replace our normal 'running the organisation' governance; but it may shape how some of our governance operates differently in the future, if we conclude that we need to do things differently to deliver more effectively going forward.

Project Scope

12. The goal of the COVID19 transition project is therefore to get RoS back on track and leverage emergent opportunities to deliver our vision of being a digital registration and information business.

13. In support of this goal the key objectives for the project are:

- To ensure that RoS can continue to ensure we can deliver our vision of becoming a digital registration business.
- To ensure that RoS can continue to deliver first year of progress towards strategic objectives as per 2020-2025 Corporate plan, as efficiently as possible, with minimal risk.
- To produce and action a plan that sees RoS colleagues become fully productive again
- To leverage and maximise benefit from the emergency interim digital submission solution and opportunities from having a mobilised workforce remotely working.
- To ensure all colleagues are re-engaged with the organisation as lockdown starts to lift and establish a phased plan to build up operational activity. This includes new safety procedures, any policy changes and remote working accessibility.
- To fully understand SG budgeting as a result of Covid impact and RoS financial position to inform decisions on investment and potential fee increases.

- To ensure our IT estate is secure and not at risk as a result of the emergency measures put in place
- To ensure our estate is safe for colleagues to return post-lockdown.

14. We are aiming to do everything possible to deliver the required first year of progress in the 2020-2025 corporate plan, as efficiently as possible, with minimal risk.

- Do: Deliver BAU
- Do: Remove the FR arrear
- Do: Achieve 50% of Land Mass Coverage
- Consolidate: digital estate through the updating, retiring and improving activities planned in the Service Alignment Team roadmap.
- Consolidate: data through the delivery of a data warehouse and the achievement of a quality metric of 93%
- Consolidate: newest services through the ongoing development of ScotLIS
- Create: Geovation Scotland
- Create: Future Services and New Registers

Question 1: given the significance of the impact of COVID19, is it still a valid aspiration to try deliver our current corporate plan, or should we revisit our strategic objectives from the outset?

Question 2: if it isn't possible to achieve everything we had planned to deliver in the first year of the corporate plan, which activities should we prioritise and why?

Question 3: are these the right project objectives, is anything obvious missing?

15. The project has defined four critical success factors that are needed to deliver this goal:

- Have financial stability in the medium term and lay the groundwork for future benefits
- Ensure our services are resilient
- Enable the environment to safely deliver our services
- Enable the right people with the right skills.

16. It is clear that these four critical success factors are interconnected. For example:

- The availability of funding will determine how much we can invest in improving the resilience of our services and creating the most effective workplace that fits the needs of ongoing COVID19 ways of working.
- The ability to reshape and reskill our people will determine how efficiently we can process our work and release income from work that is currently in the arrear.
- The degree to which we can enable efficient remote working on an ongoing basis will underpin our ability to ensure our services are resilient.
- The changes we may make to deliver our services in a more resilient way will determine the skills and capabilities we need in our workforce to support these new ways of working.

Question 4: are these the right critical success factors, are we missing anything?

17. The expected timescale of the COVID19 transition project is the remainder of this financial year. Work is now underway to identify the scope of work that will take place under each of the workstreams for the four critical success factors.

18. In the meantime three urgent activities have been identified and are already underway:
- identifying the most straightforward cost-cutting measures that should be implemented immediately to reduce RoS outgoings as quickly as possible,
 - the immediate work that needs to take place to ready our buildings for some level of reopening when the lockdown is lifted to the extent that this is possible
 - the immediate work that need to take place to further extend remote working capability (and supporting infrastructure) to enable the maximum number of colleagues to work productively from home.

Question 5: are there any other urgent activities which the Board believe we should be prioritising at the current time in relation to transition activities?

Question 6: what questions does the Board have about how we plan to reopen our buildings and increase our remote working capacity?

19. The financial workstream is the area where the most contentious decisions are likely to need to be made. A supporting paper has been provided and we would welcome Board views on the immediate choices that need to be made and input on the broader issues that need to be resolved to address the budget shortfall and achieve financial stability as quickly as possible.

Question 7: what advice does the Board wish to offer in relation to the financial issues outlined in the supporting paper?

Project risks

20. A project of this magnitude running at pace carries great deal of risk. A internal workshop has been set up to follow on from the RoS Board/ARC risk workshop on the 7th May 2020 to identify and assess the project risk in detail. The following high-level project risks have already been identified and work within the project is underway to consider how to mitigate these.

- Pace of change may prove too much for colleagues
- Pace of change may prove too much for customers
- Though getting the organisation back on track there may be some decisions taken which will cause customer dissatisfaction.
- External factors may impact plans or decisions taken
- Opportunities may be missed

Question 8: are there other high level project risks that the Board can immediately identify?

21. Of particular concern is the potential impact on this project of external factors outwith RoS's control and for which even the current status is unknown.

- The timescales and nature of how the lockdown measures will be lifted (we are currently assuming that enduring social distancing measures will be in place and an ongoing expectation that people will continue to work from home as much as possible is likely).
- How the Government guidance about how house moves can (or cannot) take place will evolve is unknown. (We are currently assuming that the current embargo on all but the most urgent house moves will be lifted but, if social distancing measures are to remain in place, some restrictions may remain).

- What will happen to the housing market in the short, medium and long-term. (We have made assumptions, documented in the finance paper, on what may happen based on current economic forecasts),
- How the wider economic impact of COVID19 will shape commercial restructuring and personal re-mortgaging activity. (We have not yet defined an assumption on this may change the volume of work we deliver in detail).

Given that any of these assumptions may change at short notice, we will need to ensure that we can adapt the project quickly if required.

22. We will also need to make assumptions about the opportunities that may arise.
- What products and services will our customers want? What is the same, what will change?
 - What opportunities are there to offer new products and services?
 - What opportunities are there to change or switch off current products and services?
 - How has COVID impacted on new services we were planning to deliver (e.g. new registers such as ROCI) how do we respond to this, what opportunities does it give us?

Work to identify what our customers may want and how we can respond to this will form an early part of the workstream looking at how we ensure we deliver resilient services.

Question 9: are there other external factors that we should be capturing our assumptions about that the Board can immediately identify?

Conclusion

23. A significant amount of work lies ahead to plan and deliver the necessary activities 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 and a large number of external factors for which assumptions will need to be made but which may change very rapidly.

Recommendation

24. The Board are invited to note the planned COVID Transition Project approach and provide their thoughts and advice on the questions posed.

**Keeper of the Registers of Scotland
29 April 2020**