

Small Abattoir Grant Fund - Project Management Support

Background

In February 2023, Minister Spencer announced the Government's intention to launch a capital grant Fund for smaller abattoirs in England. The Fund will offer grants towards the purchase of capital items to support smaller abattoirs in England under four key themes:

- improve productivity
- utilise innovative and new technology
- enhance animal health and welfare
- add value to processed products.

It is anticipated the Fund will help maintain a productive and efficient smaller abattoir sector, support the availability of local high-quality produce, and promote local rural economies.



Challenge

Following Ministerial announcement and the approval of the funding package by the Farming and Countryside Partnership, it fell to the Policy leads in Defra's Red Meat and Dairy team to deliver the scheme in what was a very tight timeframe. Having reached agreement with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) that they would develop and launch the scheme (based on existing grant funds, enabling delivery at pace), the Policy team needed to establish a Governance Framework and the necessary project management infrastructure to manage the delivery and launch. Unfortunately, the team had no prior project management experience and Methods were engaged to fulfil the requirement.

The challenge for Methods was to implement the necessary framework and controls in short order with minimal resources – there wasn't the time nor the budget to develop a full Project Management Office (PMO) service. It therefore had to be 'light touch' whilst delivering the necessary planning and reporting capabilities to effectively manage the delivery across multiple stakeholders, ensuring senior team leaders had full visibility of progress and risks.

Solution

Following a kick-off meeting with the Policy Team Lead and key staff, Methods reviewed the Governance structure and proposed a new Steering Group that would allow rapid reviews of progress, risks, and decisions that needed to be made. Following agreement of a new Terms of Reference (ToR), this Group was established. Chaired by Methods it consisted of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and each of the subgroup leads (Governance, Delivery, Communications, Finance, and Legal). A reporting cadence and template were introduced that enabled what became a weekly meeting to quickly review the projects' status and subgroup progress. Agenda management and meeting protocols were set up to ensure advance preparation of collateral and minute taking, action tracking, etc. These were not previously in place and the client expressed appreciation for the discipline being enforced.

In parallel Methods introduced a number of project management artefacts to allow the Steering Group to assess progress, make decisions, and review/mitigate risks. These included a Plan on a Page (POAP), a detailed MS Project Plan, RAIDD logs, and Action Trackers. In addition, a weekly Highlight Report was presented to the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) to be discussed at a new weekly SLT meeting.

Methods provided a Principal Consultant and a Project Support officer to implement and manage the service, as well as senior colleagues to provide management and assurance of the delivery.

Requirements

The primary objectives and outcomes for this work were:



The Service should provide overall management and oversight of the Programme, aiding Go Live of the new capital grant scheme for smaller abattoirs to be launched by the end of 2023.



To include the main aspects of Programme and Project Management (PMO) and support, providing leadership and direction to the Policy Team. The service provided should manage and own the Governance process to aid effective and informed decision making.



Key programme artefacts were to be provided and managed, including RAIDD and Planning, supporting a governance structure that built delivery confidence, alongside supporting the Policy team in its day-to-day activities, providing continuous knowledge transfer. In addition, support for the development of the Outline Business Case was expected, by way of planning and engagement of key stakeholders/contributors. In the event, Methods' provided support for the development of the structure and different elements of the OBC, helping to coordinate the drafting of the OBC by the team leads across the division, such as Finance, Comms, Economics etc.



Engagement with Stakeholders across the programme, the Policy Team and wider Defra community was expected, to aid Programme delivery. The overall objective was to enable the programme to be in a confident place to pass the go/no milestone at the end of October 2023.

What benefits were achieved?

The key benefit was ensuring the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) were confident that the programme was being well managed, and that the scheme would be delivered on time. The project discipline introduced supported a thorough understanding of the plan, the governance requirements, and the risks to be addressed, improving the overall understanding of the project status and quality of the delivery.

The ongoing knowledge transfer to the Policy Team gave them a better understanding of project management and how to use the tools and artefacts to improve the delivery of new policy initiatives. The meeting discipline and artefact templates introduced were especially welcomed and will no doubt improve the quality of their delivery of future initiatives.

Toward the end of the project and as part of knowledge transfer, Methods provided a PMO Handbook, developed in accordance with other Defra public sector project management standards, to further inform the policy team and enhance their understanding. This, along with additional collateral to help them develop Stakeholder Management plans and Communications planning, will aid their delivery planning going forward.

The Smaller Abattoir Grant Fund launched successfully at the end of 2023, and was announced by Ministers on 13th December 2023.

[Applications open](#) for new £4 million fund to support smaller abattoirs

What was it about Methods offering that made this a success?

Feedback from the ELT and Policy Team was very positive. Given the budget and resource constraints, having a proportionate 'light touch' approach was highlighted as a major contributor to the success of the assignment. On the ground, the knowledge transfer approach and to some degree the skills transfer (meeting discipline for example), helped the Policy Team grasp the importance of a project management approach.

Methods' flexible resourcing model was also a key factor, providing additional support to address new requirements with skilled specialist resources and ensuring cover for continuity and when diaries posed a challenge.

Methods' commitment to knowledge transfer is a core feature of the Defra Project Delivery Partner framework and sharing skills and experience as the project evolved also contributed to its success. Methods is always looking to add value, in this case providing additional PPM material to help the Policy Team develop their project management capabilities further. With this basic understanding of PPM methodologies and processes, their next delivery project will be set up to succeed.



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