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Des May

Thank you for your letter of September 2018 on behalf of the Environmental Audit Committee about reallocated staff in Defra Group and the department's ability to deliver SSSIs.

As at the end of September 2018 Defra group has recruited over 2000 staff to work on EU Exit including fixed term appointments, interims and staff redeployed from elsewhere in the group. Over 1800 are already in post with the remainder working though pre-employment processes.

You asked how many staff have been moved to work on EU exit and from which agencies or teams have they moved. We have taken this to mean those staff who have moved from ALBs to take up EU Exit posts into the central Department. Of the posts filled within the central department, over 400 posts have been filled with colleagues from across the Defra group via loan or secondment. Their pay costs for a full year would be approximately £22m. The majority of these staff have come from Environment Agency, Natural England, RPA and APHA.

Where loans or secondments align to supporting required efficiency savings in the exporting organisation then roles have not been backfilled and will be removed from future structures. Priority roles such as those that are required to enable delivery of statutory responsibilities are being backfilled. We utilise a range of options for backfilling posts including using fixed term appointments and temporary promotions, which provide development opportunities for individuals and a future talent pipeline for the business. Ongoing prioritisation of work continues to ensure that resources are deployed to priority work.

With regards to Natural England c.50 staff have recently been seconded in to EU Exit roles on two year secondments as part of a Defra group secondment initiative.

When identifying candidates for secondment, consideration was given to ensuring the potential impact on Natural England's KPIs was minimised. Secondees' substantive roles which are not deemed a high priority have been left unfilled and work reallocated or paused for now.

Overall, 13 of NE's secondees were spending over 50% of their time working on SSSIs in the period prior to their secondment, noting that individual Natural England staff do move between different areas of work through the year. The work that people were doing on

SSSIs prior to their EU Exit secondments has been passed to others to absorb in to their workplans.

The secondments will be individually developmental, and add new expertise and fresh perspectives to the EU Exit work, whilst helping NE balance its budget for 18/19.

Thank you again for your letter.

With every good wish,

Michael Gove

