



**Environmental Records
Information Centre
North East**

Business Plan 2015 - 2018

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Summary

About

The Environmental Records Information Centre North East (ERIC NE) was launched in January 2010 as the official local environmental records centre (LERC) for the region. It is hosted by the Great North Museum: Hancock within Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM). ERIC NE is governed by an independent Board made up of a range of stakeholders, including the voluntary wildlife recording community, and is funded by grants and service level agreements.

Prior to 2006, there was no established LERC collating and supplying digital information for the North East. The Exploring Your Environment Project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Northumbrian Water, Newcastle University, Tyne & Wear Museums, Natural England and Northumberland Wildlife Trust formed the development phase of ERIC NE between August 2006 and December 2009.

What ERIC NE does

Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) are not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area. ERIC NE collates species, habitat and nature conservation site information for Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, County Durham and the Tees Valley. The data is sourced from both local and national schemes.

This data is supplied to local authorities, government agencies, conservation organisations, voluntary groups, local recorders, consultants, landowners, educational establishments and the public via data searches, data licensing and data exchanges.

LERCs can provide quality data due to their local knowledge and access to local datasets and good relationship with data suppliers in their region.

Data holdings

Working closely with the local recording community, ERIC NE now manages a database of over 2.8 million species records as well as holding local sites and habitat data. This data is available due to the hard work and dedication of the voluntary recorders and naturalist groups who share their records as well as the organisations who collect data as part of their normal business.

What the information is used for

The data collated by ERIC NE is shared with third parties to inform decision making around land management, development planning, academic research and nature conservation work. Use of the services of LERCs can help contribute to compliance with requirements in law and government guidance.

The Business Plan

This Business Plan covers the three year period from April 2015 – March 2018. The plan proposes the principles on which ERIC North East will operate, examines the data it holds and outlines the services it will provide. It details the development objectives for the centre, the costs of running it and the sources of income to finance it.

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1. Aims of ERIC

- To collate and manage biological and geological data relating to the North East of England
- To provide a high quality data service, supplying information to all those who require it for legitimate environmental purposes
- To act as a data signposting service to data sets not directly held by ERIC North East
- To be partnership-led and not 'owned' by any one user or funder
- To provide support and assistance for local recorders and recording groups and to facilitate greater communication between the members of the recording community in the North East
- To encourage more people to appreciate North East's biodiversity and geodiversity, promote and encourage greater participation in biological recording, and to increase recording skills in the public
- To maintain an online wildlife recording facility for easy submission and management of biological records
- To assist partners in identifying and filling data gaps within the region
- To conform to nationally agreed standards and contribute to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway

2. Governance and Partnership

Recording Community

ERIC NE's wider partnership comprises of the many members of the recording community in the region. Many of these are highly skilled volunteers as well as professionals working for conservation organisations, government agencies and ecological consultancies. Without the hard work and dedication of the people who share their records with ERIC NE, the data would not be available to support sound decisions about the natural environment.

Not only does this wider partnership work to increase the quantity of data used to enhance biodiversity in the region, ERIC NE continues to be grateful for the time volunteer County Recorders and experts spend working to improve the quality of the data collated through verification.

Funding Partners

ERIC NE operates on a not-for-profit basis, providing biodiversity information products and services to a range of users. There is a cost to running such a service and for ERIC North East to remain financially sustainable, these costs must be met by its users.

ERIC NE is funded by Natural England and the Environment Agency along with the following local authorities:

- Northumberland County Council
- Northumberland National Park Authority
- Gateshead Council
- Sunderland City Council
- Durham County Council
- South Tyneside Council

Project work provides additional funding and is currently provided by Northumberland Wildlife Trust's Save our Magnificent Meadows Project until 2017 and by the North Pennines AONB's Cold Blooded & Spineless Project until 2018 for specific data management services.

Income is also generated through data services to ecological consultants, predominantly to support their work with the development planning process.

Board

The LERC's direction and policy is guided by the ERIC NE Board which meets quarterly. The Board ensures that the aims are being delivered successfully and the needs of the users are being met. They provide valuable advice and assistance to the team as well as advocating the work of ERIC NE across the region. The ERIC NE Board consists of representatives from the following:

- Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums
- Funders of ERIC North East
- Voluntary recorders and/or recording groups
- Statutory Agencies
- Local Wildlife Trusts
- Local Authorities
- Newcastle University

Staff and Volunteers

The ERIC NE team consists of three full time (FT) staff:

- The ERIC NE Coordinator (1 x FT) is responsible for the development, delivery and day-to-day running of the ERIC North East service. The Coordinator is line managed by the Great North Museum: Hancock's Museum Manager.
- The ERIC NE Officers (2 x FT) are responsible for data management, analysis and the production of data products for commercial customers and project work.

The minimum staffing level for the Centre has been set at three full time equivalents and continues at this level with the support of a number of excellent volunteers who assist with a variety of data tasks including reformatting and digitising species data, digitising Phase 1 habitat data using ArcGIS and carrying out administration work on Recorder 6. This contribution is vital to the work of ERIC NE and ensures valuable data can be incorporated into the database and utilised.

ERIC NE also offers student placement opportunities and regularly works with students from Newcastle University and Northumbria University. These placements are usually 35 or 70 hours, and are a chance for ERIC NE to receive support for specific data processing projects whilst providing beneficial work experience.

Legal Status

ERIC NE does not initially have an independent legal identity. It operates within Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM) on behalf of a wider partnership who determines its activities and direction.

All staff are subject to TWAM's Conditions of Employment and salaries are on TWAM pay scales. TWAM manages the finances of ERIC NE and is the accountable body for budgetary and auditing matters.

Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC)

ALERC is an association between LERCs in Great Britain. The Association aims to provide a central voice for the views and concerns of the Records Centre community, whilst building a support-based network of knowledge and advice to meet the needs of its members. ERIC NE is a member of ALERC and finds the support it provides invaluable. The team also meet on a regular basis with neighbouring Centres to share knowledge and best practice.

Over 2014/2015, in addition to providing support specific to ERIC NE on website developments, ALERC has been able to:

- Respond to many national consultations, and ensure LERCs are considered within, the highly influential Defra Biodiversity Monitoring and Surveillance Strategy, the wider NBN Strategy ensuring links between the two can be made for our benefit, on
- Parliamentary Post Notes and on the Nature Recovery Plan for Wales.
- Provide LERC representation within the Bat Conservation Trust's planning project.
- Enable LERCs to participate in a feasibility study for a tool to assist decision makers in making biodiversity offsetting decisions.
- Organise an annual conference for LERCs.
- Represent LERCs at the national EcoBuild event
- Worked with CIEEM to raise awareness of LERC services and to encourage consultants to make more use of them.

The National Biodiversity Network

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) is a partnership involving many of the UK's wildlife conservation organisations and agencies with the purpose of making wildlife data freely available to all who require it. The NBN Gateway is a national portal enabling species data submitted by numerous different organisations across the UK to be easily accessed.

Data held by ERIC NE are submitted to the NBN Gateway (data.nbn.org.uk), providing that permission from the data supplier has been granted. All data are restricted to a public resolution of 10km² and are downloadable. If enhanced access to the data is required, users must apply directly to ERIC North East via the NBN Gateway access controls. Such requests will be assessed on a case by case basis by ERIC NE staff.

Though not all of ERIC NE's data sharing partners have given permission for their data to be uploaded to the NBN Gateway, ERIC NE will make every effort to encourage new data sharing partners to do so. The NBN Gateway is the preferred route of data access for key users Natural England and the Environment Agency, and they require access to the most comprehensive dataset possible.

Data sharing partners who have refused permission usually cite concern about sensitive data being misused or duplication of data as the main reasons for opting out. Though ERIC NE has put measures in place, principally restricting public access to the records to 10km² resolution, work is required to overcome recorders' concerns and build confidence in the Gateway.

In addition to concern of some data sharing partners, ERIC NE's funding model is dependent on the supply of a local data provision service and as such is unable to prioritise the allocation of staff resources to renegotiating existing data sharing agreements.

ERIC NE does benefit enormously by working as part of the NBN partnership; contributing to consultations on strategy and data use, adopting NBN data management standards as well as accessing datasets belonging to national schemes and societies which are only available for sharing via this route.

3. ERIC NE's Work Plan

A summary of ERIC NE's core work is outlined below. These areas are broken down into a number of tasks and set out in an annual work plan which also encompasses the development objectives covered in Section 5.

The work plan captures how the work of ERIC NE links into the Arts Council England's goals which account for 30% of TWAM's overall funding. Areas of the ALERC accreditation criteria have been built in to the plan as ERIC NE will be working towards achieving this in 2015. The aims of Accreditation are to identify a minimum level of standards but also to build confidence in LERCs as bodies which hold biodiversity information in trust for society and manage public resources well. Achieving Accreditation will help ERIC NE assure external clients and stakeholders the Centre is developing and delivering consistently high quality services.

A summary of the core work of ERIC NE is outlined below:

Data Holdings

ERIC NE holds over 2.8 million terrestrial and marine species records, plus habitat data and Local Sites boundaries for the region.

ERIC NE will continue to negotiate data sharing agreements with key recording groups and ecological consultants in the region; working closely with priority groups that are currently uncertain about sharing their data. For groups recording particularly sensitive species, ERIC NE seeks to allow onward supply of these datasets to a limited range of partners only, including local authorities. This seems to be a more appealing and reassuring approach to data sharing for such groups.

Through the negotiation of Data Sharing Agreements, all recorders and recording groups can specify any restrictions they would like to place on the data in terms of protecting recorder privacy and management of and access to sensitive species records.

ERIC NE receives habitat and local site data from an array of organisations and government bodies in a variety of formats. This data is held as GIS Shapefiles. Habitat data is taken primarily from UK BAP Priority Habitats as well as Phase 1 and NVC surveys.

Prioritising Datasets for Mobilisation

ERIC NE receives a large number of datasets of varying size throughout the year, and does not currently have the resources to process all of these as they arrive. A priority system has now been implemented for any new data received to identify whether a dataset contains legally protected species records or is a dataset which will update information on a particular site or species.

There are numerous datasets which have not yet been allocated a priority status and this work will be carried out during the 2015/16 financial year.

Data Quality

ERIC NE endeavours to improve the quality of the data it holds, carrying out regular database clean-ups, ensuring volunteers are trained to a high standard in data entry and increasing the proportion of verified records in the database. As previously mentioned, ERIC NE relies heavily on volunteer recorders, not just for the collection of records in the field but also for verifying them. As such, the verification process can take some time to complete as it can be difficult for experts to find the time to review large datasets. It is hoped that in time, as the backlog of records awaiting verification is addressed, the burden on volunteer recorders will reduce and this task will become less onerous.

Information Technology

For ERIC NE to meet the needs of users, staff and volunteers work towards computerising all of the datasets held. This enables the information to be safely stored, accessed rapidly and easily analysed. ERIC North East uses the UK standard biological recording database Recorder 6 as its primary data system for all species records. Designed specifically to meet the needs of LERCs, this software manages biological records to a common standard and enables checking of records, management of taxon changes, and import and export of records. It is essential that these systems are maintained to the most recent version and staff carry out regular system updates including dictionary upgrades.

IT support is essential for the smooth running of the Centre and is currently delivered through Newcastle City Council's ICT services through a service level agreement with TWAM.

Policies and Procedures

ERIC North East maintains a number of data management policies and procedures based on recommendations from the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) modified to reflect local circumstances. These are necessary to engender confidence in data suppliers and users, and to give clear direction to staff. These policies include:

- 1.1 ERIC Data Sharing & Access Policy
- 1.2 ERIC Verification & Validation Procedure
- 1.3-1.4 ERIC Data Sharing Agreement for Recorders and Collators (two versions)
- 1.5 ERIC Dataset Information Sheet
- 1.6 ERIC Sensitive Species List
- 1.7 Data Security Policy (currently in draft form)
- 2.1 ERIC Guidelines for Data Requests
- 2.2 Terms & Conditions for Data Use
- 2.3 ERIC Data Request Form
- 2.4 ERIC Data Request Form NON-COMMERCIAL
- 2.5 ERIC Charging Policy

ERIC NE complies with the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) which gives members of the public the right to access environmental information held by

public authorities. In complying with these regulations ERIC NE will apply the 'public interest tests' to determine if any of the potential exceptions may apply.

Disclosure of data under the EIR may be refused in the following circumstances:

- The Environmental Exception 12(5)(g): a public body may refuse to disclose information to the extent that its disclosure would adversely affect the protection of the environment to which the information relates

- The Volunteered Information Exception 12(5)(f): a public body may refuse to disclose information to the extent that its disclosure would adversely affect the interests of the person who provided the information where that person:
 - Was not under, and could not have been put under, any legal obligation to supply it to that or any other public body;
 - Did not supply it in circumstances such that that or any other public body is entitled apart from these Regulations to disclose it; and
 - Has not consented to its disclosure

When a request for data is refused the reasons for refusal will be specified in writing in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations.

Support for the Recording Community

Ideally ERIC NE will hold data on the wildlife of the region including up-to-date habitat data and comprehensive species records across all groups. In practice this is difficult both because of the sheer scale of the task but also because of the availability of data.

ERIC NE collates data collected by individual wildlife recorders, groups and organisations and as such relies heavily on the establishment of successful partnerships to ensure the two-way flow of data.

Supporting recorders and recording groups is vital in the continuous generation and sharing of environmental data and ERIC NE aims to do this in the following ways:

- Provide access to data collated by ERIC NE from other sources which can enhance individual recorders' and groups' own databases
- Provide support with recording software (Recorder or MapMate) assistance with installation, basic training and basic technical support
- Digitisation or assistance with the digitisation of paper data
- Provision of distribution maps for atlases or to identify gaps
- Delivery of two annual North East Recording Conferences which celebrate recording across the region and offer opportunities to become involved with a variety of different projects and schemes
- Promotion of recording groups' and societies' activities and events through the website, email lists and social media
- Offer Small Grant Scheme to support an improvement in the quality and quantity of data being gathered
- Talks for local community wildlife groups focussing on the importance of wildlife recording and how the data is actually used

All data held by the Centre will remain in the ownership of the recorders, with ERIC NE being licensed to manage the data and supply it to third parties on their behalf. Recorders will always receive recognition for their work when others use their data.

Services and Products

It is essential that ERIC NE can provide a flexible and customised range of services to meet the needs of users and suit the way the user works. However, many users' requirements will be met through a core suite of services and products. Examples of these are given below:

- Notable and protected species

This will be a licensed product supplied as a GIS layer and associated database. The data will give details of all records of protected and notable species held by the centre. This layer will be updated regularly as more data become available. The license for this will include updates for the user and support in using the data.

Key users: local authorities, conservation bodies

- Site or locality data search

The results of a search done on a site or area to identify its known biodiversity. This includes species and habitats that have been recorded within a specified area as well as grid references, dates, records sources and the designations or statuses of notable and protected species or habitats. Any nature conservation sites in the area or in a specified buffer zone are also identified and displayed on a map.

Key users: developers and their consultants

Data Searches

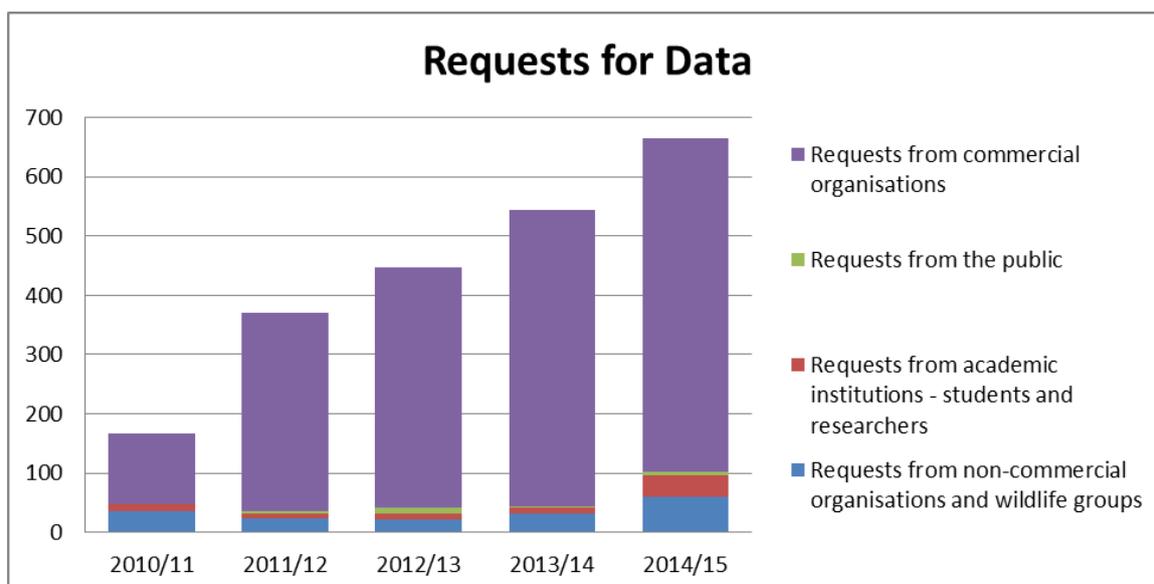


Figure 1. Number of data requests received since the launch of ERIC NE in 2010.

Requests for data have increased year on year since 2010 when ERIC NE launched, though the rate of increase is slowing. The majority of data requests are from ecological consultants (88%), predominantly to inform planning and development.

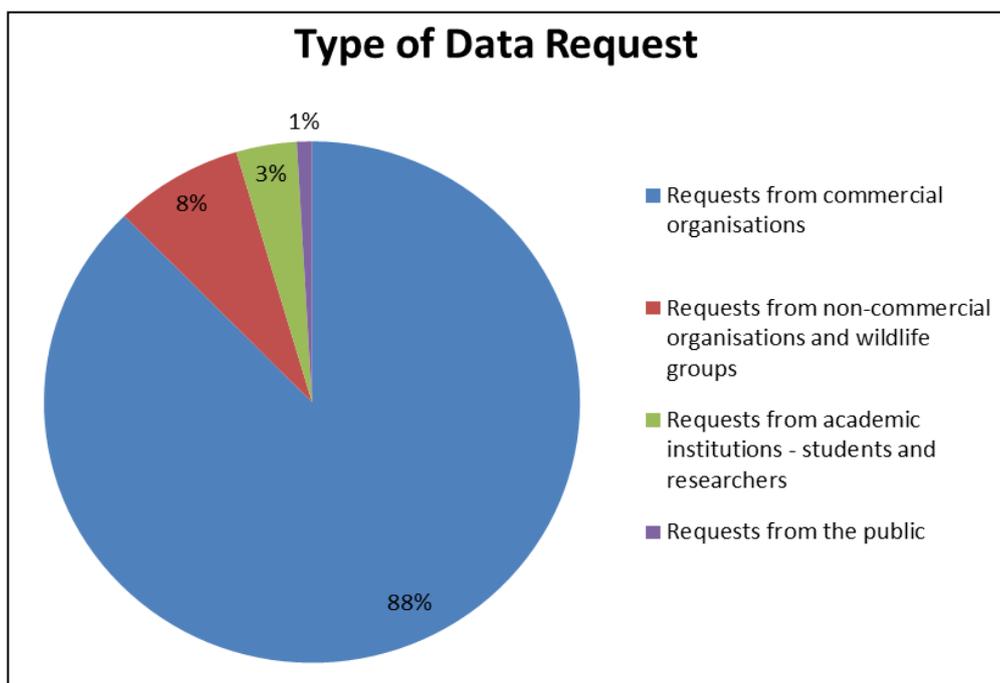


Figure 2. Proportion of data requests from different types of user.

Data Provision to Partners

- **Recording groups**

ERIC NE exchanges data annually with local recording groups and national schemes with whom a data sharing agreement is established.

- **Local authorities**

Local authorities subscribed to ERIC NE for data provision receive six-monthly updates of data for their areas of coverage in GIS shapefile format along with a bespoke request service for specific areas of interest comprising of species lists and distribution maps. Sunderland Council has adapted their requirements and now receives Protected Species Alert Layers which are used as an initial screening toolkit in planning and strategic development but could also be useful for targeted survey work.

Data supplied by ERIC NE helps to ensure that local authority partners comply with planning policy and wildlife legislation. The data can be used to provide advice on strategic decision making (i.e. Local Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents), and to ensure that sound decisions are made about where to focus conservation effort, how best to manage land for conservation and as a tool for Development Management in Planning. ERIC NE works closely with

local authority partners to ensure the service provided is fit for purpose and suitable for their needs.

- **Government agencies**

The services provided to Natural England and the Environment Agency do vary with each annual Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) but always include the provision of species data via the NBN Gateway and local site boundaries which are supplied directly to staff in the national team.

The agreement for 2015/16 is renewable annually for a period of three years ending 31st March 2018 and the delivery schedule for this period now specifically asks LERCs to progressively upload copies of all existing species records they hold for Natural England and the Environment Agency to access via the NBN Gateway. Other deliverables include a report on how ERIC NE is both motivating and supporting the recording community and to harness online technologies and establish more collaborative approaches to receive verify and share species records.

Project Work

ERIC NE are hoping to develop this aspect of the data service and offer environmental data analysis, interpretation and presentation services which would be relevant to a variety of different organisations in the North East.

Examples of previous project work are available on the website.

Increase Participation in Wildlife Recording

ERIC NE seeks to encourage more people to appreciate the region's biodiversity, improve wildlife identification skills and increase participation in biological recording through the delivery of a volunteer and public events programme.

The Centre's programme of public wildlife recording 'taster' days is aimed at beginner recorders and people who have an existing interest in wildlife but have not previously thought about recording their sightings. The events usually focus on one particular species or taxon group and take place at a variety of different sites and habitats across the region.

These events are an excellent opportunity to stimulate an interest in species recording, talk to people about the value of logging their sightings and then direct interested parties to local groups and national recording schemes where they can gain support and improve their identification skills. These events are often run in partnership with such groups, making this support easily accessible for participants.

The ERIC NE team also work in partnership with the Great North Museum: Hancock and other organisations to deliver activities for children and young people. These events encourage families to explore the natural environment of the region and enable children to improve their species identification knowledge. As well as activities such as rockpool rambles and minibeast hunts, the team regularly assist in BioBlitz events which are ideal for engaging with families.

The principle of a BioBlitz is to record as many species as possible on a site within a defined time period, usually 24 hours. Experts in species identification are invited to lead groups of people on a variety of different walks and activities, including wildflower walks, small mammal identification sessions and pond dipping. As well as engaging a wider range of people in wildlife recording, and breaking down the barriers between experts and the wider public, these events are an excellent way to fill data gaps and build up a picture of the overall biodiversity of a site.

ERIC NE's engagement programme is run entirely in partnership with local and regional nature conservations organisations and groups, and in addition to these joint events, ERIC NE signposts and promotes the wildlife recording and species identification activities being delivered by partners across the region.

In the future, ERIC NE hopes to become more involved with more structured surveying and species monitoring, encouraging volunteer recorders to engage with a more formal recording protocol. A recent example of this is the Big Watch Weekend, a citizen science cetacean survey based on the Sea Watch Foundation's national land-based recording protocol. ERIC NE arranged local training sessions for volunteers in species identification and recording techniques to enable them to man a watch site and generate high-quality cetacean and effort data which can be shared with regional and national partners.

ERIC NE's involvement with such activities can range from simple promotion of surveys and training sessions to coordinating the supply of survey equipment to volunteers.

Communications & Advocacy

ERIC NE currently has a range of marketing materials used to promote its data services and products and encourage wildlife recording amongst the public. These materials include:

- Make your Records Count flyer – to promote the online wildlife recording portal to potential new users including beginners
- Service for Ecological Consultants; Accessing Data for the North East of England leaflet – to describe data products available to ecological consultants to inform their work and also to encourage them to submit their survey data to ERIC NE
- ERIC NE Advocacy Document – for potential funding partners to describe the work and value of ERIC NE in relation to their data needs
- Guidance for Local Authorities on Biodiversity Data – a document produced by ALERC describing the role of a local records centre and detailing why their services should be sought

ERIC NE is supported by TWAM's communications and design team who assist with e-flyers, press releases and posters where required for specific events and activities. A Communications Plan is produced annually to outline the publicity strategy.

ERIC NE also runs a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ericnortheast) on which wildlife recording events and sightings across the region are promoted. Both ERIC NE and partner organisation wildlife events and workshops are also promoted via a mailing list of over 250 people.

The team regularly deliver talks to local volunteer and community groups, sharing information on ERIC NE's activity, how the data is used and why it is so important. These events are a good opportunity to show how valuable the groups' records are and show ERIC NE's appreciation of their hard work, and also a chance to promote ERIC NE's online recording system and talk participants through the process of logging their records online.

In addition to meeting with local volunteer groups, ERIC NE continues to meet with partnership organisations including existing and potential funding partners to advocate the work of ERIC NE to local staff and ensure the service remains relevant and user-led.

4. Financing ERIC North East

Income

The core funding of ERIC North East is from agreements with key partners and income derived from the commercial data service to environmental organisations and consultants. Additional project funding supplements this.

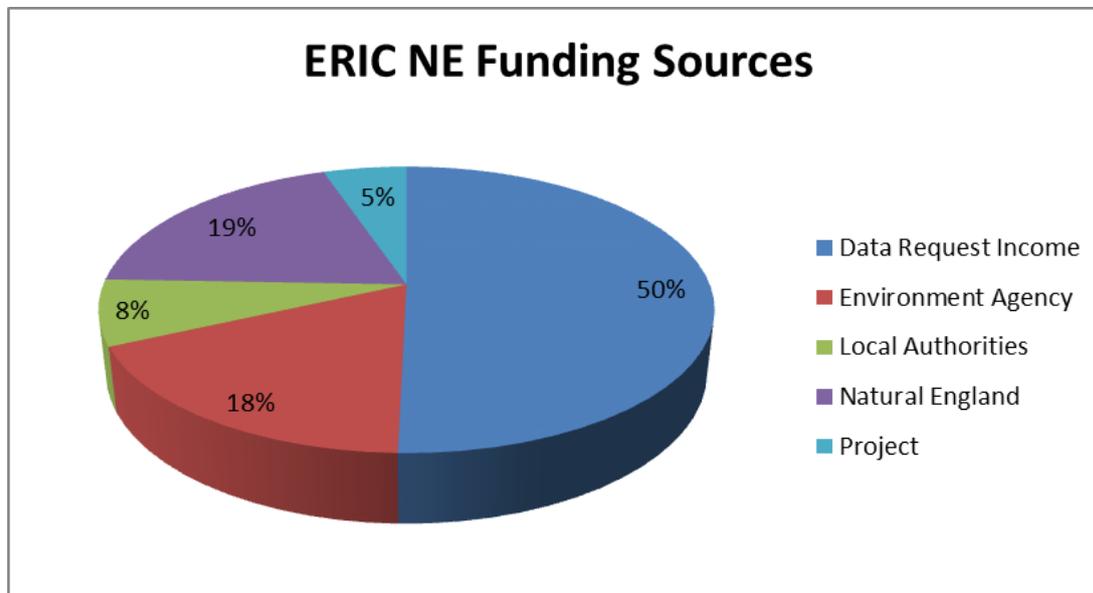


Figure 3. % contribution to total annual cost of collating and managing the ERIC NE database for the three year period 2012/13 – 2014/15

DESCRIPTION	Apr 2012 - Mar 2013	Apr 2013 - Mar 2014	Apr 2014 - Mar 2015
Data Request Income	£41,876.47	£50,015.00	£57,848.00
Environment Agency	£15,000.00	£20,250.00	£20,250.00
Local Authorities	£1,000.00	£13,054.00	£9,128.00
Natural England	£20,000.00	£20,000.00	£20,000.00
Projects	£6,071.67	£5,870.69	£4,275.00
Northumbrian Water Data Requests	£3,240.00	£1,000.00	£3,240.00
TOTAL	£87,188.14	£110,189.69	£114,741.00

Table 1. Income for the three year period 2012/13 – 2014/15.

The charging policy of ERIC North East is determined by the Board and will follow Association of Local Environmental Record Centre's (ALERC) best practice. Charges made for commercial data searches will be for the time taken to collate, process and analyse data rather than for the information itself. Full details are set out in document 2.5 *Charging Policy*.

All of these funding streams contribute to the cost of collating and managing ERIC NE's database. The Centre operates on a not for profit basis and any financial surplus above that required to meet the running costs (excluding the Reserve fund) will be used to fund activities compatible with the general aims of ERIC NE, such as support and assistance for recorders and recording groups or funding the collection of new

data. It is the responsibility of the ERIC NE Board to decide how any surplus should be used.

Expenditure

Description	Apr 2012 - 2013	Apr 2013 - Mar 2014	Apr 2014 - Mar 2015
Staff Costs	£56,765.53	£55,176.45	£73,810.50
Information Technology	£5,836.72	£11,970.77	£6,566.69
General Office Costs & Overheads	£12,257.58	£5,956.02	£7,996.92
Recorder Conference	£1,480.92	£1,850.82	£904.41
Small Grant Scheme	£0.00	£1,000.00	£1,758.15
Public Events	£1,731.70	£1,562.28	£1,829.80
TOTAL	£78,072.45	£77,516.34	£92,866.47

Table 2. Expenditure for the three year period 2012/13 – 2014/15.

Reserve

The Board has agreed that ERIC North East will ideally operate with three years' worth of expenditure in reserve. This is to engender confidence in existing and potential funding partners of the sustainability of the service. This level of reserve has been agreed by TWAM.

Financial Projections 2015 - 2018

PROJECTED EXPENDITURE			
DESCRIPTION	Apr 2015 - Mar 2016	Apr 2016 - Mar 2017	Apr 2017 - Mar 2018
Staff Costs	£93,068.49	£87,356.71	£81,813.00
Information Technology	£7,275.00	£7,480.00	£7,790.00
General Office Costs & Overheads	£10,125.00	£10,685.00	£10,945.00
Recorder Conferences	£3,000.00	£3,000.00	£3,000.00
Small Grant Scheme	£2,000.00	£2,250.00	£2,500.00
Accreditation	£350.00		
Public Events	£2,000.00	£2,100.00	£2,200.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£117,818.49	£112,871.71	£108,248.00

PROJECTED INCOME			
DESCRIPTION	Apr 2015 - Mar 2016	Apr 2016 - Mar 2017	Apr 2017 - Mar 2018
Data Request Income (Estimated)	£63,600.00	£68,370.00	£71,788.00
Natural England LRC Grant	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	£10,000.00
Environment Agency SLA	£20,250.00	£20,250.00	£20,250.00
DBAP local authorities SLA	£8,128.00	£8,128.00	£8,128.00
Northumberland County Council SLA	£2,032.00	£2,032.00	£2,032.00
Northumberland National Park Authority SLA	£1,000.00	£1,000.00	£1,000.00
North Pennines Cold Blooded & Spineless Project	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	£2,000.00
Northumbrian Water Data Requests	£3,240.00	£3,240.00	£3,240.00
NWT Magnificent Meadows	£1,275.00	£1,275.00	
TOTAL FUNDING	£111,525.00	£116,295.00	£118,438.00

ANNUAL SURPLUS / DEFICIT	-£6,293.49	£3,423.29	£10,190.00
Reserve	£228,478.68	£222,185.19	£225,608.48
TOTAL RESERVES CARRIED FORWARD	£222,185.19	£225,608.48	£235,798.48

Table 3. Projected income and expenditure for 2015 - 2018

Though it would be desirable to have secured future funding for the subsequent three year period, the figures shown in Table 3 for years 2016/17 and 2017/18 are projections only. Many of the funding partners are unable to sign up for agreements continuing past 2015/16 due to their own budgetary uncertainties, making it difficult to plan ahead.

Natural England and the Environment Agency have been able to develop a three year funding agreement in partnership with LERCs beginning April 2015 which does offer some level of certainty, though the level of funding and outputs could be renegotiated annually should either party wish. The funding from Natural England has been reduced by 50% since 2014/15, from £20,000 to £10,000.

In light of this reduction, it is hoped that the volume of commercial data requests will continue to rise (see Figure 4) and form a larger proportion of the overall income for ERIC NE. Staff will continue to promote the services offered to ecological consultants to inform desk-top studies and survey work.

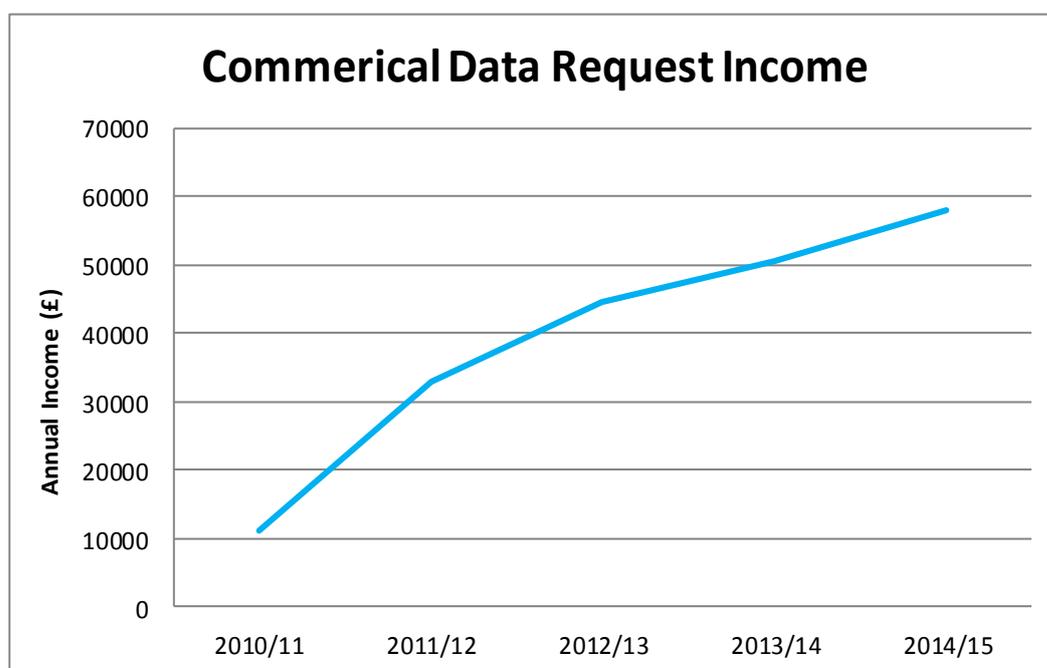


Figure 4. Commercial data request income since the launch of ERIC NE in 2010.

Over the past three years, only 8% in total of ERIC NE's income has been derived from service level agreements (SLAs) with local authorities. This figure is relatively low, reflecting the financial position of the local authorities in the North East region. Feedback from local authorities currently not signed up to ERIC NE is that it will be extremely difficult for them to establish agreements for new or additional services with any external organisations in the current climate. ERIC NE will continue to maintain relationships with these local authorities and promote the variety of services on offer, and approaches will be made to explore how ERIC NE can fulfil their ecological data requirements. As each ERIC NE funding partner contributes to the overall collection, processing and distribution of environmental information,

there are efficiencies of scale which provide excellent value-for-money for local authority funding partners.

ERIC NE is also working to develop and promote bespoke services and project work, comprising of environmental data analysis, interpretation and presentation services which would be relevant to a variety of different organisations in the North East and a potential new source of income. New data products and services to explore could include:

- Protected Species Alert Maps for planning screening, as produced for Sunderland Council in 2015
- Habitat connectivity mapping, as produced for Buglife's B-Lines Project in 2015
- Service level agreements for data provision to ecological consultancies
- Wildlife recording, team-building activity days for local companies

External funding from grant giving organisations could potentially be sought to support the public engagement work of ERIC North East.

5. Development Objectives

In addition to the core work plan outlined in section 3, ERIC NE plans to develop in the following areas to ensure the Centre is capable of staying abreast of demand for data whilst providing a high quality, comprehensive data service:

Activity	Timescale
Data Management	
Identify key recording groups and work towards negotiating suitable data sharing agreements	Ongoing
Prioritise and mobilise all abandoned 'in progress' datasets	September 2015
Develop network of verifiers, specifically for invertebrate groups to improve data quality	March 2016
Maintain software, ensuring it is at the required level for maintaining efficient service	Ongoing
Apply for better access to NBN Gateway datasets	December 2015
Increase usage of Indicia online recording portal and develop the mobile/tablet view	Ongoing July 2015
Improve the quality and availability of habitat data locally and encourage action to strategically fill any obvious data gaps	December 2016
IT strategy – streamline processes, secure effective support, develop solutions for increased IT efficiency	March 2016
Complete Data Security Policy and ensure inclusion on the TWAM Risk Register	September 2015
Produce and maintain a list of species and habitat datasets with metadata for the website	September 2015
Increase proportion of verified records to 90%	March 2016
Structure and Business Development	
Continue to develop and promote ERIC NE's services and profile to attract new partners and clients	Ongoing
Look to expand depth and range of products to meet the needs of the various audiences.	Ongoing
Produce Business Plan every 3 years and review annually	Ongoing
Strengthen existing local authority partnerships, delivering workshops to staff from a variety of different departments detailing how ERIC can be used in areas outside of ecology/countryside	March 2016
Work closely with funding partners to ensure their data needs are met and revise/renew SLAs accordingly	Ongoing

Support externally funded projects across the region with a wildlife recording remit, working in partnership to manage data efficiently and engage with local communities	Ongoing
Set data management targets for staff and develop work timetabling	September 2015
Bid for funding to maintain public events and engagement programme	TBC
Achieve ALERC Accreditation to assure external clients and stakeholders the Centre is developing and delivering consistently high quality services.	March 2016
Supporting the recording community and increase participation in biological recording	
Visit local recording groups, sharing information on ERIC NE's activity, how the data is used and why it the records they share are so valuable	Ongoing
Promote the variety of support options ERIC NE can offer recording groups	Ongoing
Work with a wider variety of partners to deliver public engagement activities which promote wildlife recording	December 2016
Launch public wildlife recording survey	April 2016
Schedule Facebook posts and better plan content to ensure posts cover new records/datasets received, events and surveys on a regular basis	Ongoing
Support structured surveying for national schemes and societies	Ongoing
Develop online recording portal to allow recording groups and projects to submit records via their own surveys	March 2016

For ERIC NE to continue to develop sustainably the recommendations in this plan need to be implemented. The objectives listed above will be built into the team's annual work plan, reviewed annually and will be monitored by TWAM and the ERIC NE Board.

Appendix 1
ERIC North East Risk Table

To be reviewed on a quarterly basis with ERIC NE Coordinator and line manager

Risk	Controls to manage risk
Management of assets including:	
Material assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate insurance • Office security
Digital assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERIC NE Data Security & Continuity Policy outlining IT security and backup procedure
Damage to Centre output including:	
Loss of records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continual liaison with partners and recorders • Formal Data Sharing Agreements in place • Recorder representation/input at ERIC Board • ERIC NE Data Security & Continuity Policy outlining IT security and backup procedure
Mismanagement of data resulting in inaccuracies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERIC NE Data Management Guidelines • ERIC NE Validation & Verification Policy • Staff training and induction programme
Loss of funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget will be monitored and reviewed against Business Plan on a regular basis • Financial Reserve to cover unforeseeable additional costs • All funding partners signed up formally to ERIC NE
Loss of expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training and induction programme • Staff to provide notice period so that impact on workloads can be properly assessed. • Role descriptions and person specifications are kept up to date to assist with quick recruitment
Change in governance of Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management level TWAM representative on ERIC NE Board • ERIC NE to maintain reciprocal working relationship with TWAM
Damage to reputation:	

With recording community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Sharing Agreements in place with recording groups • Recorder representation/input at ERIC NE Board • Continual liaison with and support offered to recorders • Staff training to ensure ERIC NE policies adhered to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ERIC NE Data Sharing & Access Policy - ERIC NE Guidelines for Data Requests - ERIC NE Sensitive Species Policy • Communications team to provide brand guidelines and assist with the production of appropriate marketing materials • Working towards achieving ALERC Accreditation to ensure ERIC NE is working to a required standard • Complaints from recorders or recording groups resolved effectively
With funding partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERIC NE Board in place to ensure deliverables and needs of the users are being met • Continual liaison with funding partners to ensure ERIC NE remains user-led • Communications team to provide brand guidelines and assist with the production of appropriate marketing materials • Working towards ALERC Accreditation to ensure ERIC NE is working to a required standard
Compliance Risks:	
Health & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training to ensure compliance with regulations • Adherence to TWAM governance and procedure
Data Protection Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training to ensure compliance with regulations • Adherence to TWAM governance and procedure
Financial Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training to ensure compliance with regulations • Adherence to TWAM governance and procedure
Freedom of Information Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training to ensure compliance with regulations • Adherence to TWAM governance and procedure
Data provision conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training to ensure ERIC NE policies are adhered to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ERIC NE Data Sharing & Access Policy - ERIC NE Guidelines for Data Requests - ERIC NE Sensitive Species Policy • Data sharing agreements in place • Data Log summarising how each dataset should be supplied
Software use conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • License agreements adhered to and renewed
Employment legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training to ensure compliance with regulations • Adherence to TWAM governance and procedure
Ordnance Survey data licensing conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training to ensure compliance with regulations • Copyright statement including license number provided will all relevant data products
Personnel risks:	
Loss of key personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff to provide notice period so that impact on workloads can be properly assessed. • Ensure that role descriptions and person specifications are kept up to date to assist with quick recruitment
Poor Health & Safety management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training upon induction and knowledge of H&S procedure annually reviewed • Adherence to TWAM governance and procedure • Risk assessments produced for all ERIC NE public event
Staff misdemeanours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TWAM HR policies and procedures • Regular line management meetings carried out
Inappropriate volunteer activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective volunteer support provided by ERIC NE team • Volunteer interviews / induction meetings carried out • Volunteers provided with relevant TWAM policies and procedures
Volunteer injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers briefed on Health & Safety in relation to museum environment • Office-based volunteers supervised at all times
Natural Disasters:	
Fire / flood / storm / loss of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great North Museum: Hancock Emergency Plan in place to identify and manage risks associated with the building and its contents