

Meeting of Wednesday 19 November 2025, Ground Floor Conference Room – Clare House

MINUTES

Members present:	Katrina Godfrey (Chair)	Permanent Secretary
	Mike Johnston	Non-executive board member (NEBM)
	Shane Lynch	Non-executive board member (NEBM)
	Brian Doohar	CVO/Head of Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group
	Fiona McCandless	Head of Estates Transformation & Windsor Framework Implementation Group
	Martin McKendry	Head of Food, Farming and Rural Affairs Group
	Mark O'Donnell	Head of Strategic Planning & Corporate Services Group
	David Reid	Chief Executive, NIEA
	Tracey Teague	Head of Climate Change, Science & Innovation Group
	Julie Thompson	Head of Environment, Marine & Fisheries Group
Roger Downey	Finance Director	
Apologies:	None	
In attendance:	Paula Bratton Sharon McFlynn Paul Donnelly	Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR Director of Strategic Support (items 4 and 5 only) Deputy Director of Estate Transformation and Windsor Framework Implementation Group (item 9 only)
Secretariat	Aideen McChesney Lauren McKeever	Board Secretary

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome, apologies and declaration of Interests	
	<p>Katrina opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.</p> <p>Members confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest to declare.</p>	
2(a)	Note of previous board meeting	
	The note of the meeting held on 24 September 2025 was agreed and approved for publication, with no amendments noted.	Secretariat
2 (b)	Matters arising from previous board meeting	
	Actions from the September meeting were reviewed and agreed as complete or in hand.	
3	Strategic Issues	
	<p>Katrina provided an overview of the strategic context within which the board was meeting, noting in particular the difficult budgetary context and the challenges faced in moving forward the policy priorities of ministers. She also provided updates on the recent publication of the final report from the independent panel appointed by Minister Muir to review environmental governance in Northern Ireland and likely next steps and on the current avian influenza position.</p> <p>Katrina also reflected on Exercise Pegasus, noting positive participation and next steps, and on the forthcoming publication of the findings from Module 2 of the Covid Inquiry. The importance of emergency planning was discussed and board members noted that a civil contingencies paper would be prepared for the January 2026 board meeting.</p> <p>Katrina also updated members on progress in making a further non-executive appointment to the board and reminded members to complete the Board effectiveness review survey before the end of the week.</p>	
	ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION	
4	Business Plan 2025-26 – Mid-year progress report / Corporate Plan	
	Sharon presented the six-month progress report on the DAERA 2025-26 business plan. The board reviewed the position, noting steady progress at mid-year in many areas, and discussed reasons for any delays or slippage.	

	<p>Progress against commitments and pledges in the corporate plan was also reviewed and the board welcomed plans to develop a more detailed monitoring and reporting tool for Minister Muir’s ten key pledges.</p> <p>Sharon also provided the board with a proposed timeline for developing the 2026-27 business plan. The board welcomed and agreed the timeline, noting the potential for budget uncertainty but agreeing the need to progress the plan as far as possible.</p>	
<p>5</p>	<p>People (a) People Plan 2025-27 (b) Capacity and Capability report 30 October 2025</p>	
	<p>Mark and Mike jointly presented the People agenda item. On the DAERA People Plan 2025-27, Mark outlined the steps taken to date and advised that earlier feedback provided by board members had been incorporated into the final version of the plan. The board discussed the plan’s high-level themes, proposed actions and outline implementation plan, noting that a new Grade 7 had been appointed to work in this area and a programme structure was being established to support delivery.</p> <p>Members provided positive feedback and made further suggestions to refine the leadership and inclusion actions and to add a specific action on leadership development at middle management level and specifically reference professional, technical and scientific staff groups. The importance of developing a corporate learning and development plan was recognised, with progress already underway in some areas. David also shared insights from the NIEA future leaders’ forum and agreed to provide a summary of activities to the Capacity and Capability Committee.</p> <p>Turning to the Capacity and Capability Committee meeting which had taken place on 30 October, Mike provided a readout of the key points discussed. He highlighted an excellent presentation provided by Marine and Fisheries Directorate on use of artificial intelligence; a discussion on the 2025 People Survey results; and further discussion of the ‘People Risk’.</p> <p>The board noted the updates provided, and subject to minor refinements, endorsed the People Plan. The board also agreed the outline implementation plan, noting that further detail on metrics would follow.</p>	<p>Mark O’Donnell</p> <p>David Reid</p>

6	<p>Finance</p> <p>(a) Finance Director report</p> <p>(b) Finance & Major Projects Committee</p>	
	<p>Finance Director report</p> <p>Roger provided an overview of the key financial issues impacting the Department as set out in his paper. In relation to the 2025-26 financial year, he briefed the board on the December monitoring round position, noting that returns were due back to DoF on 20 November. Roger also updated the board on the financial outlook, including the latest timeline for consideration of DAERA’s budget bids for the period 2026-27 to 2029-30 as part of the budget gathering exercise, and progress on the development of the Department’s five-year budget plan.</p> <p>An update on timelines for the implementation of the Integr8 transformation programme was also provided, and Roger updated members on the proposed ‘go live’ date for DAERA and the risks associated with this timescale. The board discussed the risks and was keen for Roger to explore with DoF whether there was a need for preparatory contingency measures. It was agreed that the position should be kept under review, with updates presented to the board at subsequent meetings to ensure effective monitoring.</p> <p>The board thanked Roger for his report and confirmed that it was content to note the paper and updates provided.</p> <p>Finance & Major Projects Committee (FMPC)</p> <p>Mark advised that the minutes from the Committee meeting held on 11 September 2025 had been shared with board members and that the committee terms of reference has been updated to reflect membership changes. He also provided a readout of the key points from the recent Committee meeting held on 13 November 2025, noting positive discussion on the approach to managing major projects.</p> <p>The board confirmed that it was content to note the minutes of the 11 September meeting and agreed the updated FMPC Terms of Reference. Katrina also thanked Fiona for agreeing to join the committee.</p>	<p>Roger Downey</p>
7	<p>ARAC Update</p>	
	<p>Shane provided a verbal update from the ARAC meeting that had taken place on 14 November 2025, noting this was his first meeting as chair of</p>	

	<p>the committee. He outlined discussions on internal audit reports, the 'People Risk', and on the 2024–25 Annual Report and Accounts.</p> <p>Shane also drew members' attention to current membership of the Committee, an update / review of its terms of reference, and his intention to arrange a meeting with chairs of the ARACs of DAERA's agencies and NDPBs in early 2026. Shane noted that ARAC was reviewing the need to augment its membership with a qualified accountant and confirmed that there were no other issues for escalation to the board.</p> <p>Referring to the ARAC timetable for deep dive sessions, Shane informed members of the proposed agenda items and recommended that these sessions be scheduled after the publication of relevant internal audit reports to ensure maximum benefit.</p> <p>The board thanked Shane for the ARAC update.</p>	
8	<p>Review of Enforcement Activities</p>	
	<p>David presented a paper summarising enforcement activities across the department and NIEA and outlined the key challenges faced and the work being taken forward to address these. He highlighted the role of the Enforcement Liaison Group and the reinvigoration of the senior Enforcement Oversight Group, noting that the latter had met on 4 November 2025, and drew board members' attention to the strategic objectives of the group.</p> <p>The board stressed the importance of effective enforcement and acknowledged the need for a consistent approach, while also recognising the need for the policy to reflect the range of enforcement activity across the department and the NIEA.</p> <p>Board members also strongly welcomed the planned review of DAERA's enforcement policy, noting the importance of progressing this work.</p>	
9	<p>H&S updates</p> <p>(a) 2024-25 Annual Report</p> <p>(b) Health and Safety report - 1 April - 30 September 2025</p>	
	<p>Fiona introduced the item seeking agreement on the DAERA Health and Safety (H&S) Annual Report 2024-25 and invited Paul Donnelly to provide an update on departmental activities during 2024-25 and the first two quarters of 2025-26.</p>	

	<p>Board members considered the reports and noted Paul's intention to review the level of information provided to ensure that the board was provided with the right level of strategic information needed to enable it to provide leadership, manage any significant risks and meet H&S responsibilities.</p> <p>Members also discussed the role of the Forest Service AMB in overseeing its H&S management arrangements and the mechanisms for reporting to the departmental board.</p> <p>Fiona also updated members on staffing within the H&S Team and highlighted the support the team provided to other work areas across the department. The board also discussed the benefits of sharing information and lessons learned across the department to ensure we are learning and improving.</p> <p>The board thanked Paul for his presentation. The updates in the papers were noted and the board confirmed that it was content to agree publication of the 2024-25 DAERA H&S Report.</p>	
10	<p>Policy updates</p> <p>(a) Lough Neagh Action Plan</p> <p>(b) Bovine TB progress update</p>	
	<p>Katrina introduced the item, stressing that while the board did not have a remit in determining policy, it was important that it received regular updates on progress in key areas of strategic significance, including to inform its role in scrutinising performance.</p> <p>Lough Neagh Action Plan</p> <p>Julie presented the board with a progress update on the implementation of the Lough Neagh Action Plan and summarised the progress of the 37 actions included within the plan. Members reviewed the 14 actions that had been delivered and discussed the progress in the remaining actions in more detail.</p> <p>The board noted the useful exchange of information and thanked Julie for her paper.</p> <p>Bovine TB progress update</p> <p>Brian presented the board with an update on the status of the NI bovine TB (bTB) programme. Members noted the progress in establishing the TB Partnership Steering Group and ongoing efforts to implement actions detailed in the NI bTB Blueprint for Eradication, as well as plans to seek</p>	

	<p>feedback on possible wildlife intervention measures and to offer biosecurity advice directly to farms. The board also considered current disease statistics, projected costs, and progress in bringing forward a pilot cross-border regional initiative on tackling bTB.</p> <p>The board thanked Brian for the progress update and useful discussion.</p>	
11	DB papers issued via correspondence	
	<p>The board noted that one correspondence paper had been circulated between 1 September 2025 – 31 October 2025 and agreed the paper had been resolved.</p>	
12	Any Other Business	
	<p>No further business was raised. Katrina thanked everyone in attendance and encouraged them to participate in the deep dive session focused on Innovation and Artificial Intelligence which would follow the main board meeting.</p>	
13	Next board meeting	
	<p>Katrina confirmed that the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 29 January 2026 but noted that, due to the unavailability of some members, the secretariat would contact board members to explore whether there was scope to move to an alternative date.</p>	Board Secretariat