

Thursday 29 January 2026 – Manor Suite, Manor House, Greenmount

AGENDA

	Agenda Item	Introduced by	Indicative Timings	Paper Reference
1	Welcome, apologies and declarations of interests	Chair	10.00 - 10.10	
2(a)	Note of previous board meeting	Chair	10.10 - 10.20	PAPER
2(b)	Matters arising from previous board meeting	Chair		PAPER
3	Strategic issues	Chair	10.20 – 10.50	VERBAL
4	Board Effectiveness Review 2025 – report on survey findings and development of action plan	Chair and Board Secretary	10.50 – 12.00	PAPER AND DISCUSSION
ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION				
5	Business Plan 2025-26 Q3 progress report	Mark O'Donnell	12.00 – 12.10	PAPER
6	Review of draft Business Plan 2026-27	Mark O'Donnell	12.10 – 12.40	PAPER
COMFORT BREAK AND WORKING LUNCH (12.40 – 13.10)				
7	Corporate Risk Register review	Mark O'Donnell	13.10 – 13.30	PAPER
8	Report from Finance Director	Roger Downey	13.30 – 13.50	PAPER
9	Civil Contingencies	Alison Caldwell	13.50 – 14.05	PAPER
10	Capacity and Capability Committee update	Mike Johnston	14.05 – 14.15	PAPER

11	ARAC	Shane Lynch	14.15 – 14.25	VERBAL
PAPERS TO NOTE				
12	DB papers issued via correspondence	DB Secretariat	14.25 – 14.30	PAPER
CLOSING ITEMS				
13	Any Other Business	Chair	14.30 – 14.45	VERBAL
14	Date of Next Meeting			25 March 2026 – Conference Room, Clare House

Meeting of Thursday 29 January 2026, Manor Suite, Manor House, Greenmount

MINUTES

Members present:	<p>Katrina Godfrey (Chair) Permanent Secretary</p> <p>Mike Johnston Non-executive board member (NEBM)</p> <p>Shane Lynch Non-executive board member (NEBM)</p> <p>Brian Doohar Executive board member (CVO/Head of Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group)</p> <p>Roger Downey Executive board member (DAERA Finance Director)</p> <p>Fiona McCandless Executive board member (Head of Estates Transformation & Windsor Framework Implementation Group)</p> <p>Mark O'Donnell Executive board member (Head of Strategic Planning & Corporate Services Group)</p> <p>David Reid Executive board member (NIEA Chief Executive)</p> <p>Tracey Teague Executive board member (Head of Climate Change, Science & Innovation Group)</p>
Apologies:	<p>Martin McKendry</p> <p>Julie Thompson</p>
In attendance:	<p>Paula Bratton Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR</p> <p>Alison Caldwell Director of Corporate Governance</p> <p>Neelia Lloyd Director of Natural Environment Policy Division (items 7-14)</p> <p>Alison Chambers Director of Agri-food Development (items 7-14)</p> <p>Scott King Observer (items 1-4)</p>
Secretariat	<p>Aideen McChesney Board Secretary</p> <p>Lauren McKeever Minute taker</p>

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome, apologies and declaration of Interests	
	<p>Katrina opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. She introduced Dr Scott King who would shortly take up a role as a non-executive board member on the DAERA board and who was attending the meeting in an observational capacity.</p> <p>Apologies from Martin McKendry and Julie Thompson were noted.</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 19 November 2025 was agreed and approved for publication, with no amendments noted.	Secretariat
2 (b)	Matters arising from previous board meeting	
	Actions from the November meeting were reviewed and agreed as complete.	
3	Strategic Issues	
	<p>Katrina provided an overview of the strategic context within which the board was meeting, including the prevailing financial challenge facing the Executive. She briefed members on the latest financial position, noting that the Finance Minister had launched a consultation on his proposed approach to the draft 2026-27-2029-30 budget and noting also that the allocations proposed in the consultation document did not at this time have collective Executive agreement.</p> <p>Katrina also updated members on a recent Ministerial Direction issued by Minister Muir.</p> <p>Discussion followed on the financial challenges facing the Executive and on the implications for DAERA.</p> <p>Turning to other matters, Katrina drew members' attention to the publication of Northern Ireland's first Environmental Improvement Plan progress report and thanked the teams who had been involved in preparing this report. She also highlighted the recent NIAO report on Leading and Resourcing the NICS, noting the importance of ensuring that DAERA took action to address the recommendations made, including where possible through the DAERA People Implementation Plan.</p>	

	<p>Katrina also thanked members for their participation in the deep dive session on Innovation and AI and invited Mark to provide an update on progress. Mark explained the steps being taken to progress agreed actions and noted that a further paper would be brought to the board in the coming months</p>	
	ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION	
4	Board Effectiveness Review 2025 – report on survey findings and development of action plan	
	<p>Katrina opened discussion by reminding members both of the requirement for board effectiveness reviews and the value of such reviews and thanked members for engaging with the survey.</p> <p>Aideen provided a summary of the results from the 2025 review and highlighting the positive feedback that the survey had generated as well as the areas where the survey identified was scope for further improvement.</p> <p>Aideen then led a discussion, in both small group and plenary format, to develop actions to build on strengths identified in the review; and to improve/enhance board performance. Board members provided suggestions for both, which Aideen summarised. The board agreed to refine the actions further and incorporate these into a focused action plan to be implemented over the coming months.</p>	Secretariat
5	Business Plan 2025-26 Q3 progress report	
	<p>Mark provided members with a paper detailing the status of commitments included in the 2025-26 Business Plan at the Q3 / 9-month review point and a summary of progress being made, drawing out areas of strong progress and areas where progress had slipped or where there was now a risk of the published commitment not being met.</p> <p>Mark also drew attention to Minister Muir’s 10 key pledges and stressed a particular need to maintain scrutiny on progress to deliver these.</p> <p>The board considered the report, noting that the majority of commitments were either on track or already achieved. Board members also explored through questioning the reasons for delay/slippage for the remaining commitments and asked for information on actions being taken to regain ground or address the root causes of delay.</p> <p>The board also noted that some commitments had not progressed fully because of the difficulties in securing the necessary Executive approval.</p>	

	Finally, the board noted that a further report on the 10 key pledges would be presented shortly.	
6	Review of draft Business Plan 2026-27	
	<p>Mark provided an update on work to finalise the draft 2026–27 DAERA business plan, providing members with the opportunity to review and ask questions about proposed commitments for inclusion in the new plan. He explained the process used to develop the plan and asked members for feedback on the format and approach.</p> <p>In discussion, some useful feedback was provided which Mark undertook to consider when updating the draft. This included the need to keep the plan’s focus at a strategic level, ensuring a sensible number of commitments and ensuring appropriate strategic alignment.</p> <p>Members noted also that the plan would need to be reviewed once final budget decisions were made to ensure it remained affordable. However, they stressed that budget uncertainty was not a reason to delay the plan as it was important that staff had clarity on the key priorities for the year ahead.</p> <p>Mark undertook to circulate a final draft for members’ comments before it was formally presented to Minister Muir.</p>	Mark O’Donnell
7	Corporate Risk Register review	
	<p>Mark provided an update on changes to the Corporate Risk Register since the previous board meeting, thanking colleagues for stepping forward as risk leads, and provided an overview of progress to revise the five corporate risks.</p> <p>He also drew members’ attention to publication of a National Audit Office Report on ‘Resilience to animal diseases’ and advised that, while the recommendations were made to Defra and its agencies, many of them were also very relevant to DAERA. Brian provided a short update on current work in this area and indicated that veterinary colleagues would work with the Strategic Planning Team to ensure that relevant findings were reflected in the Corporate Risk Register.</p> <p>The board reviewed and discussed the Corporate Risk Register and Mark agreed to consider suggestions related to the responsibilities of the risk owner, and on visual presentation of the risks.</p> <p>The board noted that the ‘policy and programmes’ risk remained subject to further refinement but was content following discussion to endorse the remaining four corporate risks.</p>	Mark O’Donnell / Secretariat

8	Report from Finance Director	
	<p>Roger provided an overview of the main financial issues impacting the Department as set out in his paper. He briefed the board on DAERA's December monitoring round return, and the latest on the 2026-27 to 2029-30 draft budget exercise.</p> <p>Noting the recent Ministerial Direction that had been provided, he explained the further steps now in hand to process that Direction. He also provided members with an update on the timelines for the implementation of the Intergr8 transformation programme and confirmed that contingency arrangements were in place in the event that current go live dates were delayed.</p> <p>Finally, Roger provided an update on prompt payment performance, and the board noted the continued strong performance against targets.</p> <p>The board thanked Roger for his report and confirmed that it was content to note the paper and updates provided.</p>	
9	Civil Contingencies	
	<p>Alison Caldwell provided a paper on Civil Contingencies and briefed the board on the Department's current business continuity and emergency planning arrangements. She also outlined the testing, exercising and training arrangements in place across DAERA and the NICS.</p> <p>The board discussed the DAERA risks listed on the NI Civil Contingencies Risk Register and noted details of planned civil contingency actions for the year ahead.</p> <p>The board thanked Alison for her update and confirmed that it was content to note the paper and updates provided.</p>	
10	Capacity and Capability Committee update	
	<p>Mike presented a paper outlining the latest developments from the Capacity and Capability Committee, which last met on 8 January. He also thanked the NICS Business Partner for providing a useful report on HR management information and drew members' attention to publication of the DAERA People Plan and work to progress a Workforce Strategy.</p> <p>The board noted the updates provided.</p>	

11	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	
	<p>Shane provided a verbal update on the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) activities, highlighting positive feedback from the in-house ARAC training session held on January 14, 2026. It was agreed that the slides from the session would be shared with all board members.</p> <p>Shane also drew members' attention to his planned engagement, supported by Katrina as PAO, with the ARAC chairs of DAERA's agency and ALB boards. The board welcomed this, noting the positive outcomes of similar past meetings.</p>	Secretariat
12	DB papers issued via correspondence	
	<p>The board noted that one correspondence paper had been circulated between 1 November 2025 – 31 December 2025 and that the paper was now considered approved.</p>	
13	Any Other Business	
	<p>No further business was raised.</p>	
14	Date of Next Meeting	
	<p>Katrina confirmed that the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 25 March 2026 and provided an outline of proposed agenda items. Katrina also reminded members of upcoming joint board meetings with the LMC, AFBI, and NIFHA boards prior to the next board meeting.</p>	