

Wednesday 25 March 2026 – Ground floor, conference room - Clare House

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
ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION				
4	Progress in implementing OEP recommendations	Julie Thompson	10.50 – 11.10	PAPER
5	Windsor Framework Implementation	Catherine Fisher/ Brian Dooher	11.10 – 11.30	PAPER
6	Major Projects & Investment Strategy NI	Roger Downey	11.30 – 11.50	PAPER
7	Report from Finance Director	Roger Downey	11.50 – 12.10	PAPER
COMFORT BREAK AND WORKING LUNCH (12.10 – 12.40)				
8	Business Plan scrutiny of 2025-26 Q4 position	Mark O'Donnell	12.40 – 12.50	PAPER
9	Final review of draft 2026-27 Business Plan	Mark O'Donnell	12.50 – 13.10	PAPER

10	ARAC	Shane Lynch	13.10 – 13.20	PAPER
11	Capacity & Capability Committee	Mike Johnston	13.20 – 13.30	PAPER
12	Finance & Major Projects Committee	Mark O'Donnell	13.30 – 13.40	PAPER
PAPERS TO NOTE				
13	DB papers issued via correspondence	DB Secretariat	13.40 – 13.45	PAPER
CLOSING ITEMS				
14	Any Other Business	Chair	13.45 – 14.00	VERBAL
15	Date of Next Meeting			27 MAY 2026 NIEA LISBURN BOARDROOM

Meeting of Wednesday 25th March 2026, 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)
	Scott King	Non-executive board member (NEBM)
	Brian Doohar	Executive board member (CVO/Head of Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group)
	Roger Downey	Executive board member (DAERA Finance Director)
	Mark O'Donnell	Executive board member (Head of Strategic Planning & Corporate Services Group)
	Tracey Teague	Executive board member (Head of Climate Change, Science & Innovation Group)
	Martin McKendry	Executive board member (Head of Food, Farming and Rural Affairs)
Julie Thompson	Executive board member (Head of Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group)	
Apologies:	David Reid Fiona McCandless	
In attendance:	Paula Bratton Alison Caldwell Catherine Fisher John Bateman	Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR Director of Corporate Governance Director of Windsor Framework Implementation Observer for items (8-13)
Secretariat	Aideen McChesney Lauren McKeever	Board secretary Minute taker

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome, apologies and declaration of Interests	
	<p>Katrina opened the meeting, welcomed attendees and introduced Dr Scott King to his first board meeting as a non-executive board member.</p> <p>Apologies were noted from David Reid and Fiona McCandless. Catherine Fisher was welcomed in her role as joint presenter with Brian Dooher for agenda item 5 and as an observer on behalf of Fiona McCandless.</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 29 January 2026 was agreed and approved for publication, with no amendments required.	Secretariat
2 (b)	Matters arising from previous board meeting	
	Actions from the January meeting were reviewed and agreed as complete or in hand.	
3	Strategic Issues	
	<p>Katrina provided an overview of the strategic context, drawing out some of the challenges including those relating to the budget process and to NICS capability and capability and management of major projects.</p> <p>She also provided updates on the publication of the third Climate Change Adaptation Plan (NICCAP3) and on work to finalise the first Climate Action Plan and reminded members of Minister Muir’s focus on delivery of his key priorities. She also updated members on recent issues that had arisen in AFBI</p> <p>Members also discussed the recent introduction of the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Private Member’s Bill, noting that it had progressed to committee stage for further scrutiny.</p>	
	ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION	
4	Progress in implementing Office of Environmental Protection recommendations	
	Julie Thompson presented the paper on progress in addressing recommendations made to DAERA by the Office of Environmental Protection (OEP). She outlined the role and statutory remit of the OEP and provided an update on delivery of actions to address the recommendations.	

	<p>Members discussed the status of actions, key delivery challenges, and also discussed actions being taken to address vacancy issues. Roger noted the progress made in filling scientific officer vacancies and stressed the need to ensure affordability.</p> <p>The board thanked Julie for the paper, noting the current position and work ongoing and stressing the importance of a sustained focus on addressing OEP recommendations.</p>	
5	Windsor Framework Implementation	
	<p>Catherine Fisher and Brian Dooher presented the paper updating the board on progress regarding Windsor Framework (WF) implementation.</p> <p>The board noted updates on WF legislation, WF resourcing, WF funding and discussed the wider UK-EU reset context. Members discussed updates on SPS infrastructure facilities, SPS staffing and compliance trends, and the effective deployment of digital and AI enabled systems to support operational delivery.</p> <p>The board also discussed the importance of filling WF vacancies and sought assurance that all reasonable actions were being taken to address the position.</p> <p>The board thanked Catherine and Brian for the updates provided.</p>	
6	Major Projects and Investment Strategy NI	
	<p>Roger Downey presented a paper updating the board on the status of major programmes and projects within DAERA, budget availability, the development of the Investment Strategy (ISNI), and recommendations from the NI Audit Office review of major IT projects.</p> <p>The board discussed the updates provided and noted that progress on DAERA actions arising from the NI Audit Office review of major IT projects would be reported to ARAC.</p> <p>The board thanked Roger for the paper.</p>	
7	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 the 2025–26 estimated provisional outturn exercise and timelines for preparation of the Annual Report and Accounts. He also provided updates on the 2026 - 29/30 Budget exercise, Integr8 transformation programme timelines, and prompt payment performance.</p>	

	<p>Members discussed the updates provided and, in relation to Integr8, noted the value of considering feedback and lessons learned from the Scottish Government.</p> <p>The board thanked Roger for his report and confirmed that it was content to note the paper and updates provided.</p>	
8	DAERA 2025-26 Business Plan – Year End Report (Q4)	
	<p>Mark provided members with an end-of-year update on delivery of the 2025–26 Business Plan, noting that the majority of commitments were reported as on track or achieved. Members explored the causes of slippage in a few areas, including delays linked to Executive approval, and discussed actions to address underlying difficulties in achieving targets.</p> <p>Tracey requested revised wording for the Green Growth commitment progress report, while Julie noted additional progress in relation to the Lough Neagh target since the paper was circulated. Mark agreed to update the year-end report based on feedback from Tracey and Julie.</p> <p>The board also recognised the importance of acknowledging delivery successes and agreed that options to celebrate achievements would be considered further.</p> <p>The board thanked Mark for the paper and confirmed that it was content to note the year-end report, subject to the updates required above being made.</p>	Mark O'Donnell
9	Development of DAERA 2026-27 Business Plan	
	<p>Mark provided an update on the progress in developing the 2026–27 DAERA business plan, noting that the version presented was at final draft stage. He drew members' attention to the proposed business plan targets and sought the board's input on climate action and water quality targets.</p> <p>Members provided feedback, emphasising the need to maintain a strategic focus, and agreed that targets relating to climate action, water quality and nutrients targets should be refined. It was also noted that affordability of the plan needed to be reviewed once the budget was confirmed.</p> <p>The board agreed that budget uncertainty should not delay the plan and endorsed the draft business plan, subject to the agreed updates being made. It was noted that the next step would be to present the plan for ministerial approval.</p>	Mark O'Donnell

10	Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	
	<p>Shane provided a paper on Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) activity, including key issues considered at recent ARAC meetings, and confirmed that no critical issues had been identified.</p> <p>In relation to the ARAC Chairs' meeting he noted that attendees discussed the importance of internal audit, delivery of the audit plan, and strengthening alignment between business plan priorities and the risk register. They also had a useful discussion on shared risks.</p> <p>The board thanked Shane for the paper and noted the updates provided.</p>	
11	Capacity and Capability Committee	
	<p>Mike presented a paper outlining the latest developments from the Capacity and Capability Committee, which met on 25 February. Approval for the Committee's 2026-27 forward workplan was sought.</p> <p>He also drew members' attention to planned promotional activity for the People Plan and to a presentation provided by the NIEA operational review programme team, which members agreed may be useful, subject to time permitting, to be presented at the next board meeting.</p> <p>The board thanked Mike for the paper and agreed the 2026 Capacity and Capability Committee workplan.</p>	Secretariat
12	Finance and Major Projects Committee	
	<p>Mark provided a readout of key items discussed at the Finance and Major Projects Committee meeting held on 19 February, including City and Growth Deals, PEACEPLUS, in-year and multi-year budget positions, and casework activity.</p> <p>The board also considered the Committee's Terms of Reference and 2026/27 forward work plan and confirmed that it was content to agree both.</p>	
12	DB papers issued via correspondence	
	The board noted the status of the correspondence papers circulated between 1 January 2026 – 28 February 2026.	
13	Any Other Business	
	No further business was raised.	

14	Date of Next Meeting	
	Katrina confirmed that the next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 27 May 2026 and would be held at NIEA Lisburn Boardroom.	