DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Board Meeting

Wednesday 27 May 2026 – Board Room, NIEA Lisburn

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	Information & Data Security	Conor O'Donnell	10.50 – 11.20	**PAPER**
5	Corporate Risk Register review	Mark O'Donnell	11.20 – 11.40	**PAPER**
6	People Plan for DAERA progress report	Mark O'Donnell	11.40 – 12.00	**PAPER**
7	Finance Director report	Roger Downey	12.00 – 12.20	**PAPER**
8	Health & Safety – Q4 paper	Lorrayne Simmons	12.20 – 12.40	**PAPER**
	COMFORT BREAK AND WORKING LUNCH (to include NIEA Review Programme Presentation below)			
9	NIEA Operational Review Programme	Janice Harris	12.40 – 13.40	**PRESENTATION**
	REPORTS FROM BOARD COMMITTEES			

10	Audit & Risk Assurance Committee	Shane Lynch	13.45 – 14.00	**PAPER**
11	Capacity & Capability Committee	Mike Johnston	14.00 – 14.10	**VERBAL**
12	Finance & Major Projects Committee	Mark O'Donnell	14.10 – 14.20	**VERBAL**
PAPERS TO NOTE				
13	DB papers issued via correspondence	Secretariat	14.20 – 14.25	**PAPER**
CLOSING ITEMS				
14	AOB		14.25 – 14.30	**VERBAL**
15	Date of next meeting		**30 July 2026 Ground Floor Conference Room, Clare House**	

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Board Meeting

Meeting of Wednesday 28 May 2026, Conference Room, NIEA Lisburn

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 Dooher	Executive board member (Chief Veterinary Officer/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)
	Fiona McCandless	Executive board member (Head of Estate Transformation and Windsor Framework Implementation Group)
	Julie Thompson	Executive board member (Head of Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group)
	Richard Crowe	Interim Executive board member (Interim Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Environment Agency)
Apologies:	Martin McKendry	

In attendance:	Conor O'Donnell Eamonn McCoy Lorrayne Simmons David Reid Stephen Welch Veronica Morris Alistair Beggs Janice Harris Ali McSperrin Tanith Jamison	Director of Digital Services Division (item 5 only) Digital Services Division (item 5 only) Health and Safety Coordination Branch (item 8 only) Outgoing NIEA CEO (item 9 only) NIEA NEBM (item 9 only) NIEA NEBM (item 9 only) Director of NIEA Waste Regulation and Enforcement (item 9 only) NIEA Operational Review Programme (ORP) Manager (item 9 only) NIEA ORP Team (item 9 only) NIEA ORP Team (item 9 only)
Secretariat	John Bateman Lauren McKeever	Board secretary Minute taker

Item	Description	Action
1	**Welcome, apologies and declaration of Interests**	
	Katrina opened the meeting, welcomed attendees, and introduced Richard Crowe to his first board meeting as an interim executive board member and Interim Chief Executive of NIEA. It was acknowledged that this would be the final meeting for executive board members Tracey Teague and David Reid, who were moving to DfE and DfI respectively in June. Katrina thanked David and Tracey for their contributions both to Departmental Board and across the wider Department and wished them well in their new roles. Katrina also provided the board with details of interim arrangements that were being put in place until the two positions were substantively filled. Apologies were noted from Martin McKendry. Members confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest to declare.	
2(a)	**Note of previous board meeting**	
	The note of the meeting held on 25 March 2026 was agreed and approved for publication, with no amendments required.	**Secretariat**
2 (b)	**Matters arising from previous board meeting**	
	Actions from the March 2026 meeting were reviewed and agreed as complete.	
3	**Strategic Issues**	

	Katrina provided an overview of the strategic context, noting Ministerial approval of the DAERA Interim Business Plan and a successful Balmoral Show. She also highlighted challenges relating to the current budget situation which would be covered in more detail in the Finance Director's report. Other contextual issues discussed included the EU Deforestation; Regulation; ongoing industrial action; new vacancy controls; and developments within AFBI, including the announcement of a new CEO and changes to AFBI governance arrangements and structures following the AFBI Review. Updates were also provided on progress on the Nutrients Action Programme and the Climate Action plan; the latest position on Executive and Private Member Bills of relevance to DAERA; SORPI; and the launch of the public appointment process to recruit a chair and members to the Just Transition Commission.	
	ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION	
4	**Information and Data Security**	
	Mark introduced Conor O'Donnell and Eamonn McCoy from Digital Services Directorate who presented the paper and delivered a presentation on the ISO27001 recertification audit. They outlined that the audit objectives had been fully met, and continued certification had been recommended. Conor outlined the audit commentary on the objectives and advised the board on steps being taken to address any non-conformances that had been raised as part of the process. Members discussed the importance of ISO accreditation and the Department's corporate risk position. Discussion also included review of the status of actions, key delivery challenges, and the importance of continued visible senior leadership support for security culture and behaviours. Board members thanked Conor and Eamonn for the paper and presentation, welcoming the achievement of obtaining recertification of ISO27001, and confirmed their commitment to reinforcing support for security culture and behaviours, as well as engagement in resilience and recovery activities. It was agreed that Strategic Planning Team and DSD would discuss the inclusion of the two new corporate cyber risks.	**Mark O'Donnell**
5	**Corporate Risk Register (CRR) Update**	

	Mark O'Donnell presented the paper updating the board on progress to revise the DAERA Corporate Risk Register, including recent refinements and an overview of the current Departmental risk position. There was discussion around the description of risks, and the board noted updates on allocation of CRR risk action owners, and movement of certain risks from red to amber. Assurance was provided that these risks would continue to be managed. Shane referred to recent discussions on risk at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and advised members of an upcoming ARAC deep-dive session on Animal Disease and Welfare. He invited the Strategic Planning Team to contribute to this session. The distinction between risks on the Civil Contingency Risk Register and the DAERA corporate risks was discussed, and it was agreed that procedures for escalation of risks would be clarified with the Strategic Planning Team. The board also discussed the importance of the People risk, particularly in relation to staff welfare concerns arising from resourcing pressures, and how these issues might be addressed. The board thanked Mark for the update and noted the paper.	**Mark O'Donnell**
6	**People Plan for DAERA progress report**	
	Mark O'Donnell presented a paper updating the board on the implementation of the DAERA People Plan 2025- 2027. Mark advised members that three meetings of the DAERA People Plan 2025-27 Implementation Programme Board had taken place, and that there had been a deep dive into Strategic Workforce Planning. Updates were also provided on the project reporting dashboard; Evolve leadership training for SO and DP grade staff; and progress in implementing the People Plan intranet page. The board discussed the update, welcoming the significant progress made and recognised that resourcing remained an area of ongoing concern. The board thanked Mark for the progress update and noted the paper.	
7	**Report from Finance Director**	
	Roger provided an overview of the main financial issues impacting the Department, as set out in the finance paper tabled. He briefed the board on the Annual Report and Accounts process, and on completion of Provisional Outturn exercises. He also provided updates on the absence of an agreed budget; the 2026/27 - 2029/30 internal and	

	external budget information gathering exercises; the Integr8 transformation programme; and prompt payment performance. Members discussed the updates provided and the implications of the absence of an agreed budget. The board thanked Roger for his report and confirmed that it was content to note the paper and updates provided.	
8	**DAERA Health and Safety Quarterly Update – 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026**	
	Fiona introduced Lorrayne Simmons, who presented the paper and invited the board to note the update for the period 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026. Lorrayne advised that the Health and Safety plan for 2025/26 had been completed and that the Health and Safety programme of work for 2026/27, together with the 2026/27 audit plan, was in place and being progressed. Updates were provided to the board on health and safety incidents meeting the criteria for reporting under RIDDOR and on Fire Risk Assessment actions. Following discussion, the board noted the paper and thanked Lorrayne for attending to present it.	
9	**NIEA Operational Review Programme (ORP) presentation**	
	Katrina welcomed NIEA agency management board members, Veronica Morris, Stephen Welch and Alistair Beggs, who were joining the departmental board for this item and invited David Reid to lead the discussion. David introduced members of the ORP PMO who delivered a presentation which provided an update on the agency's ORP, outlining how the ORP was intended to drive performance improvements in NIEA. The team also highlighted the success of one of the programme's outputs, the Future Leaders Team, with two NIEA participants offering their own insights on the programme and the benefits it offered at organisational and individual level. Board members and NIEA staff had a discussion on the ORP and the achievements it had delivered to date and the challenges that remained to be addressed. They also probed areas of learning that might inform the wider departmental capacity and capability work programme. The board congratulated David on initiating the ORP and thanked the team for an informative presentation and a very useful discussion.	

10	**Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**	
	Shane presented a paper on ARAC activity which included the key issues considered at recent ARAC meetings and the updated ARAC terms of reference. He confirmed that no critical issues had been identified by ARAC since the last board meeting. The board received updates on ARAC's consideration of the draft DAERA Annual Accounts and Governance Statement and on the work of internal audit during the year. The board also noted the planned external review of the committee later this year. Shane also advised the board of his intention to meet with arm's length body ARAC chairs on a one-to-one basis during the summer. This was welcomed by the board. The board thanked Shane for the paper, noted the updates provided, and agreed to publication of the updated ARAC terms of reference.	
11	**Capacity and Capability Committee**	
	Mike provided a verbal update outlining the latest developments from the Capacity and Capability Committee, which met on 7 May. Approval to issue the committee's Annual Report to board members by correspondence was sought and agreed. Mike also drew members' attention to an upcoming pilot scheme for staff moves to address short-term needs and provided a brief update on the People Plan. The board thanked Mike for the update and noted that the next meeting of the committee would take place on 22 June.	**Secretariat**
12	**Finance and Major Projects Committee**	
	Mark provided a readout of key items discussed at the Finance and Major Projects Committee (FMPC) meeting held on 14 May, including in-year and multi-year budget positions; the first monitoring round; casework committee activity; and presentations on the funding position for NIEA, Forest Service and AFBI. Mark advised that Scott would take over as chair of the FMPC from September, coinciding with the next FMPC meeting. The board thanked Mark for the update and noted the change of chair in the coming months.	
13	**DB papers issued via correspondence**	

	The board noted the status of the correspondence papers circulated between 1 March 2026 – 30 April 2026.	
14	**Any Other Business**	
	Richard updated the board on the preparations underway within NIEA for the upcoming bonfire season. Katrina advised that HOCS had offered to attend a departmental board meeting and that she was keen that the board facilitated this. Potential dates were discussed and it was agreed that the September meeting would provide a good opportunity for the engagement proposed Katrina closed the meeting by thanking NIEA for hosting the meeting and again extending best wishes to Tracey and David in their new departments.	
15	**Date of Next Meeting**	
	Katrina confirmed that the next board meeting was scheduled for Thursday 30 July 2026 and would be held in the Clare House Boardroom. A deep-dive session would follow this meeting with the topic to be confirmed.	