

DAERA FINANCE AND MAJOR PROJECTS COMMITTEE

Thursday 14 May 2026 – 2.00pm – 3.30pm
Ground Floor Conference Room, Clare House

AGENDA

Chair: Mark O'Donnell

	Agenda Item	Introduced by	Indicative Timings	Paper Reference
1	Apologies, Minutes of Previous Meeting and Action Points	Mark O'Donnell	2.00-2.05 (5 mins)	FMPC 06/26a FMPC 06/26b
2	Provisional Outturn	Nuala Hennessy	2.05-2.10 (5 mins)	FMPC 07/26
3	First Monitoring Round	Nuala Hennessy	2.10-2.25 (15 mins)	FMPC 08/26
4	Update on Budget	Gemma Robinson	2.25-2.40 (15 mins)	FMPC 09/26
5	Overview of Major Programmes and Projects	Melvyn McCurdy	2.40-2.55 (15 mins)	FMPC 10/26
6	NIEA Finance Update	Philip Walker	2.55-3.05 (10 mins)	FMPC 11/26
7	Forest Service Update	John Joe O'Boyle	3.05-3.15 (10 mins)	FMPC 12/26
8	AFBI Finance Update	Alison Caldwell	3.15-3.25 (10 mins)	FMPC 13/26
9	AOB	Mark O'Donnell	3.25-3.30 (5 mins)	
	Finish		3.30	
	Paper to note			
	Casework Committee Update	Nuala Hennessy		FMPC 14/26

Next FMPC meeting TBC - Thursday 10 September 2026 or Thursday 17 September 2026



OFFICIAL DAERA MINUTES

MEETING TITLE	Finance and Major Projects Committee (FMPC)	
REFERENCE	FMPC 15/26a	
VENUE	Clare House and *MS Teams	
DATE/TIME	14 May 2026 2.00pm	
LIST OF ATTENDEES	FMPC MEMBERS Mark O'Donnell Dr Scott King Roger Downey OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE Alistair Beggs* Paul Donnelly* Neelia Lloyd* Nuala Hennessy Melvyn McCurdy Gemma Robinson Helen Mullan* Beverley Bhatia JOINED FOR AGENDA ITEM Alison Caldwell John Joe O'Boyle Phillip Walker	Deputy Secretary, Strategic Planning & Corporate Services (Chair) Non-Executive Board Member Finance Director Director of Waste Regulation and Enforcement Director of Estate Transformation Director of Natural Environment Policy Head of In Year Financial Planning Head of Programme and Project Support Head of Future Years Financial Planning In Year Financial Planning In Year Financial Planning (Secretariat) Director of Corporate Governance Chief Executive, Forest Service Head of NIEA Budgetary Reporting
APOLOGIES	Richard Crowe Fiona McCandless Julie Thompson	Interim Chief Executive, NIEA Deputy Secretary, Estates Transformation & Windsor Framework Implementation Deputy Secretary, Environment, Marine & Fisheries

KEY POINTS DISCUSSED

INTRODUCTION

- Mark O'Donnell welcomed attendees and introduced Non-Executive Board Member, Dr Scott King at his first FMPC meeting.
- Apologies were received from Richard Crowe, Fiona McCandless and Julie Thompson, it was noted that Alistair Beggs, Paul Donnelly & Neelia Lloyd were in attendance to observe on their behalf.
- No Conflicts of Interest were declared.

MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS OF PREVIOUS MEETING

- Members agreed the minutes of the 19 February 2026 FMPC meeting.
- Of the six action points from the 19 February 2026 meeting, one remains ongoing, four have been completed and one has been superseded following a request from the Permanent Secretary. The action point carried over from the 13 November 2025 meeting has now been completed.

PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2025-26

Nuala Hennessy:

- reminded members that Provisional Outturn is a measure of Departmental spend against the Final Budget position;
- reported that the Department's 2025-26 Total DEL Provisional Outturn was 99.9%, broken down as Resource DEL 99.9%, Ringfenced Resource Depreciation DEL 99.5% and Capital DEL 99.8%;
- added that this result is a positive outcome for the Department as the level of unpredictability on finances this year has been challenging particularly due to the ongoing increases in the incidence rate of bTB combined with the impact of increasing market prices on the level of compensation payable, and the uncertainty around Avian Influenza; and
- confirmed that following in year monitoring of budget allocations, the decision to 'screen out' remains valid as no policies implemented were considered to either disadvantage or discriminate specifically against any of the Section 75 groupings as identified in the screening assessment

Members acknowledged the significant work involved in achieving the 99.9% Provisional Outturn figure.

UPDATE ON BUDGET

Gemma Robinson:

- advised that the Department continues to operate under significant uncertainty pending agreement of a Final Budget;
- advised that in the absence of an Executive agreed Budget, interim indicative opening allocations for 2026–27 were issued to Grade 3s on 2 April 2026 to provide a degree of operational certainty;
- highlighted the large number of exercises which have taken place since the last update to the Committee in February 2026, including a HM Treasury Open Book exercise to provide updates on pressures and mitigating actions; and a response to HM Treasury on actions to manage budget pressures;
- confirmed that on 28 April 2026, DoF wrote to Departmental Accounting Officers providing advice in the absence of an Executive agreed budget;
- advised that Contingency Planning Envelopes (CPEs) were issued by DoF on 30 April 2026;
- outlined the interim indicative opening allocations for 2026-27;
- confirmed that on 30 April 2026, the Head of the NI Civil Service introduced a time-limited, consistent approach to workforce decision making;
- highlighted the proposed 5% reduction to DAERA's admin budget; and
- added that an exercise will be commissioned shortly requesting Grade 3s review registered vacancies within their Group in advance of a wider NICS HR exercise.

Members discussed what new potential revenue raising measures had been explored to reduce pressures and agreed that Finance Division should engage with the Chief Scientific Advisor's Office and Digital Services to discuss options – **Action Point**.

FIRST MONITORING ROUND

Nuala Hennessy:

- advised that despite the absence of an agreed 2026-27 Budget, or a timetable for a formal DoF Monitoring Round, an internal First Monitoring Round was commissioned on 17 April 2026;
- added that the First Monitoring Round returns were due from Groups by 28 April, which was prior to the issuance of the CPEs by DoF on 30 April;
- confirmed that while the Minister of Finance's draft Budget included a Resource DEL allocation for Lough Neagh, this additional funding was not reflected in the CPE;
- highlighted key pressures identified within the Department including bTB Programme and staff costs;
- outlined proposals to meet these pressures;
- reiterated that the Department continues to operate in a period of significant uncertainty pending agreement of a Final Budget; and
- recommended that members agree to forward the proposals set out in the paper to the Permanent Secretary and Minister for consideration.

There were significant discussions among members on the identified pressures, associated risks and the proposed approach to manage funding in 2026-27.

Members **agreed** that the proposals within the paper should be forwarded to Grade 3s for their consideration and comment in advance of being issued to the Permanent Secretary and the Minister – **Action Point**

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

Melvyn McCurdy:

- updated on key changes to DAERA's 21 Major Programmes and Projects (MPP) since the last update to the committee in November 2025;
- advised that DAERA has three new projects over £10m;
- highlighted that five MPPs have a high Risk Potential Assessment classification and 16 MPPs have been classified as either medium or low risk and
- added that following the NIAO review of Major IT projects in July 2025, Programme and Project Support has taken forward the recommendation to implement a tracking system to ensure suitably qualified staff on projects.

Members questioned the level of assurance provided to the committee, and it was suggested that for a select number of projects, the Senior Responsible Officers could provide updates on project progress, targets being met, reporting against KPIs, and an outline of the impact achieved – **Action Point**.

NIEA FINANCE UPDATE

Phillip Walker:

- advised that the audit of NIEA's 2025-26 accounts is currently underway and confirmed that the draft Annual Report and Accounts is scheduled to be presented to ARAC on 21 May 2026, with the final version issued to NIAO on 19 June 2026;
- outlined the 2025-26 closing budget for NIEA;

- provided an update on the 2026-27 opening allocations and the pressures identified as part of the First Monitoring Round; and
- added that NIEA is currently reviewing registered vacancies to ensure a better understanding of the staffing profile and associated financial implications.

FOREST SERVICE UPDATE

John Joe O'Boyle:

- outlined Forest Service priorities, including afforestation, plant health, economic growth, timber supply and contribution to NI climate action plans;
- provided an update on the ongoing impact of severe storms which caused significant damage to forests in 2024 and 2025;
- provided the timetable for the 2025-26 Annual Report and Accounts;
- detailed the opening indicative allocations for 2026-27; and
- advised that Forest Service is progressing a Strategic Outline Case on the potential for windfarm development across selected areas of the forest estate.

AFBI FINANCE UPDATE

Alison Caldwell:

- advised that AFBI's consolidation pack was submitted to DAERA by the deadline of 23 April 2026;
- highlighted detail of AFBI's 2025-26 Provisional Outturn return;
- summarised AFBI's opening budget allocation for 2026-27;
- provided an update on AFBI's Major Projects, Research Vessel Replacement, Green Growth Instrumented Living Landscapes and the Green Growth In-vitro Emissions Lab; and
- added that there is ongoing regular engagement between, AFBI, AFBI Sponsor Branch and DAERA Finance Division.

Roger Downey added that in preparation for Integr8, AFBI had successfully moved to Account NI during 2025-26.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Members noted the Casework Committee update paper and Mark O'Donnell advised that a recent stocktake meeting had concluded that Grade 5 representation should be included on the Casework Committee.
- The next FMPC meeting is planned for September 2026, with the exact date still to be confirmed.

Mark O'Donnell closed the meeting at 3.55pm

ACTION POINTS/OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE/TARGET DATE:

- Finance Division to engage with the Chief Scientific Advisor's Office and Digital Service to explore potential revenue raising options – Roger Downey 10 September 2026.
- First Monitoring Round proposals to issue to Grade 3s for consideration and comment in advance of being issued to the Permanent Secretary and the Minister – Roger Downey 31 May 2026.
- Seek assurance for a select number of MPPs by requesting updates on project progress, targets being met, reporting against KPIs and an outline of the impact achieved – Programme and Project Support 10 September 2026.

Minutes written by: Beverley Bhatia	Date: 15 May 2026
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