DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Board Meeting

Wednesday 23 September 2026, Main Hall, CAFRE Enniskillen

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 – 10.45	**VERBAL**
ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION				
4	Report from Finance Director	Roger Downey	10.45 – 11.05	**PAPER**
5	Corporate Risk Register	Sharon McFlynn	11.05 – 11.25	**PAPER**
6	Workforce Planning and Succession Planning update	Mark O'Donnell	11.25 – 11.45	**PAPER**
7	Progress in Implementing OEP Recommendations	Shane Doris	11.45 – 12.05	**PAPER**
8	DAERA Estate updates	Ambrose Tohill	12.05 – 12.25	**PAPER**
9	Capacity & Capability Committee update	Mike Johnston	12.25 – 12.35	**VERBAL**
10	Finance & Major Projects Committee update	Scott King	12.35 – 12.45	**VERBAL**
PAPERS TO NOTE				
11	ARAC update	Shane Lynch	12.45 – 12.50	**PAPER**

12	DB papers issued via correspondence	DB Secretariat	12.50 – 12.55	**PAPER**
CLOSING ITEMS				
13	Any Other Business	Chair	12.55 – 13.00	**VERBAL**
14	Date of Next meeting			**Clare House 18 November 2026**

The board meeting will conclude at 1.00pm promptly. A working lunch will follow, providing an opportunity to meet CAFRE staff, followed by a tour of CAFRE's equine facilities.

*****Members staying for the tour are advised to bring/wear a waterproof coat and suitable outdoor footwear*****

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Board Meeting

Meeting of Wednesday 23 September 2026, Main Hall, CAFRE, Enniskillen

MINUTES

Members present:	Katrina Godfrey (Chair)	Permanent Secretary
	Mark O'Donnell	Executive board member (Head of Strategic Planning and Corporate Services Group)
	Julie Thompson	Executive board member (Head of Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group)
	Richard Crowe	Executive board member (Interim Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Environment Agency)
	Martin McKendry	Executive board member (Head of Food, Farming and Rural Affairs Group)
	Mike Johnston	Non-executive board member (NEBM)
	Scott King	Non-executive board member (NEBM)
	Shane Lynch	Non-executive board member (NEBM)
Apologies:	Brian Dooher	Head of Veterinary Service Animal Health Group
	Roger Downey	Finance Director
	Jane Corderoy	Executive board member (Acting Head of Climate Change, Science and Innovation Group)
	Fiona McCandless	Head of Estates Transformation & Windsor Framework Implementation Group
In attendance:	Alison Caldwell	Director of Corporate Governance
	Paula Bratton	Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR
	Sharon McFlynn	Director of Strategic Support (via Teams – agenda item 5 only)
	Declan McCarney	Finance Deputy Director
	Ambrose Tohill	Acting Director of Estate Transformation
Secretariat	John Bateman	Board secretary
	Dolores Kelly	Minute taker

Item	Description	Action
1	**Welcome, apologies and declaration of interests**	
	Katrina opened the meeting, welcomed attendees and noted apologies from Brian Dooher, Roger Downey, Jane Corderoy and Fiona McCandless. Board 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 30 July 2026 was agreed and approved for publication, with no amendments required.	**Secretariat**
2(b)	**Matters arising from previous board meeting**	
	Actions from the July meeting were reviewed and agreed as complete or in hand.	
3	**Strategic issues**	
	Katrina provided an update on the wider political and fiscal context, including ongoing discussions on the budget between ministers and the UK Government. She explained that, in the absence of an agreed budget, the Department of Finance (DoF) permanent secretary had, under Section 7 of the 2001 Act and Section 59 of the Northern Ireland (1998) Act, provided authorisation of resource and cash limits for DAERA that would cover expenditure up to the end of October. Members considered the operational risks arising from the continuing uncertainty. Katrina also updated members on the independent review being carried out by Dr Martin Blake of the department's implementation of a court deprivation order in Fivemiletown. Members discussed the review, the significant political, public and media interest in the matter, and the impact on those involved. The board also received updates on the Climate Action Plan and wider Northern Ireland and UK net zero obligations. Members were updated on the Nutrients Action Programme consultation, related work on nutrient management and ammonia emissions, and the emerging news of an OEP investigation into the management of protected-sites.	
	ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION	
4	**Report from Finance Director**	

	Declan provided an overview of the main financial issues affecting the department, as set out in the finance paper. It was noted that there was still no agreed budget for 2026-27. However, an internal monitoring round exercise had been completed to establish any resource DEL and capital DEL easements and pressures and the overall picture had been considered by the Finance and Major Projects Committee on 21 September. Members also received an update on the department's response to a recent DoF budget information gathering exercise that covered the three years to 2028-29 on resource DEL and to 2029-30 on capital DEL. The board was advised of the latest position on the Integr8 Transformation Programme and that staff would be involved in User Acceptance Training over the coming months. Finally, members discussed prompt payment performance noting that it remained slightly below the 30-day target of 100%. The board noted the need for sustained focus and engagement across business areas to maximise performance against targets for the remainder of the year. The board thanked Declan for his report and noted the updates provided.	
5	**Corporate Risk Register**	
	Sharon joined the meeting via Teams and presented an update on the revised Corporate Risk Register (CRR), including refinements made since the previous board meeting in response to members' feedback. Sharon and Mark particularly highlighted the help and support provided by Scott in reshaping the risk register. The board considered the department's four amber risks and one red risk, probing the red 'People' risk in greater detail, and noted progress made, including the recruitment of new staff and arrangements for induction and support. Members also discussed further work to strengthen risk management and the department's approach to stakeholder engagement, including the importance of drawing on a broad range of views during policy development. Sharon confirmed that her team was finalising arrangements for a departmental board risk workshop later in the autumn.	

	The board considered and agreed the revised CRR, noting also the ongoing work to refine individual risks and mitigating actions through established governance processes.	
6	**Workforce Planning and Succession Planning update**	
	Mark provided an update on progress in developing the department's strategic workforce planning arrangements, including completion of the baseline assessment and the identification of key workforce risks and capability pressures affecting specialist and technical roles. The board discussed the emerging approach to critical roles and succession planning, and of planned actions to strengthen workforce resilience and capability. It was noted that these aligned with the NICS People Plan and included toolkits developed by DoF's People and Organisational Development, a corporate training plan and programmes to address identified capability gaps. Members discussed the findings of the baseline assessment and the impact of supply and budgetary constraints on recruitment. Members also considered the use of technology to improve efficiency and the potential benefits of engagement with higher education institutions to help develop future talent with the necessary skills. The board confirmed that it welcomed and was content to note the updates provided.	
7	**Progress in Implementing OEP Recommendations**	
	Julie provided an update to the board on progress in implementing the recommendations arising from OEP reports. The board was advised that the overall position had improved since the previous update, although progress in a number of recommendations remained behind schedule due to resource, legislative and Executive approval dependencies. Members discussed the progress made and also highlighted the challenges associated with co-ordinating the department's response to OEP reports alongside other priorities, while recognising the value of OEP scrutiny in supporting focus and maintaining progress. The board noted the arrangements for monitoring delivery and managing associated risks, with resourcing identified as a priority. The board thanked Julie for her report and noted the update.	

8	**DAERA Estate updates**	
	Ambrose presented the paper and provided updates on the department's Strategic Asset Management Plan 2025/26, including progress against the Long-Term Estate Strategy Action Plan, along with updates on the Estate Sustainability Action Plan. The board discussed the ongoing work to modernise, right-size and decarbonise the estate, together with progress in delivering sustainability and energy-efficiency initiatives. Members also discussed ensuring strategic alignment of existing assets with core business objectives and targeted interventions to reduce energy consumption. The board thanked Ambrose for his report and noted the update.	
9	**Capacity and Capability Committee update**	
	Mike provided a verbal update on the Capacity and Capability Committee (CCC) meeting held on 1 September, referencing the addition of Owen Lyttle to its membership. He outlined work to identify and promote best practice across the department; the development of a communications hub to support awareness of the department's people plan and the work of the committee; and the forthcoming NICS guidance on the evaluation of learning and development programmes. Members welcomed progress of the department's health and wellbeing plan and the proposed consideration of the draft terms of reference for the Equality and Diversity Working Group. Mike also advised that the annual review of the CCC terms of reference and work programme would be carried out at the next meeting and presented to the board for approval. The board thanked Mike for the update provided.	
10	**Finance and Major Projects Committee update**	
	Scott provided a verbal update to the board from the Finance and Major Projects Committee (FMPC) meeting held on 21 September, noting that the committee had considered a range of matters, including the implications of the continued absence of an agreed budget; the internal monitoring round returns; the DoF budget 2026-30 information gathering exercise; and issues considered by the Casework Committee.	

	Scott advised that the minutes of the FMPC meeting would be circulated to members by correspondence once finalised, and that the next FMPC meeting was scheduled for 10 November 2026. The board thanked Scott for the update provided.	**Secretariat**
11	**Audit and Risk Assurance Committee update**	
	Shane advised that a short paper had been provided for noting. As the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) had not met since the July board meeting, he updated members on discussions with ARAC chairs from DAERA NDBPs and agencies on assurance and governance matters, noting that further engagement was planned over the coming months. He also confirmed that the next ARAC meeting was scheduled for 7 October 2026. The board thanked Shane for the update.	
12	**DB papers issued via correspondence**	
	The board noted the status of the papers circulated between 1 July 2026 and 31 August 2026.	
13	**Any Other Business**	
	Katrina advised that the Head of the Civil Service and the NICS HR Strategic Director had indicated a willingness to join discussions at departmental board meetings. Members agreed that this would be a welcome opportunity to discuss some of the people challenges facing DAERA, It was agreed that the secretariat would check whether the January meeting might be suitable. The board agreed to maintain the established schedule of meetings, alternating between Clare House and other departmental locations, to provide opportunities for staff engagement across the department.	**Secretariat**
14	**Date of Next Meeting**	
	Board members noted that the next board meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 18 November 2026 and would be held in the Conference Room, Clare House, Belfast.	