

Meeting of Wednesday 24 August 2022, Dundonald House

MINUTES

Members:	Katrina Godfrey (Chair) Brian Doherty Tracey Teague Robert Huey Norman Fulton Paul Donnelly Lynda Lowe Roger Downey Paula Bratton Sharon McCue Bernie Stuart Gillian Stirling	Permanent Secretary Deputy Secretary, Central Services & Contingency Planning Group Deputy Secretary Environment Marine and Fisheries Group Deputy Secretary, Veterinary Service Animal Health Group Deputy Secretary, Food & Farming Group Chief Executive, NIEA Director of Corporate Services Director of Finance Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR Non-Executive Member (NEM) Non-Executive Member (NEM) NI Boardroom Apprentice
Apologies:	Fiona McCandless	Deputy Secretary, Rural Affairs, Forest Service, Estate Transformation Group
In Attendance:	David Reid (deputising for Fiona McCandless) Paddy Griffin (Items 7&8) Lorryne Symmons (Item 9)	Director of Rural Affairs ALB Sponsor Branch Health & Safety Co-Ordinator
Secretariat	Ashley Davidson	Office of the Permanent Secretary

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome	
	<p>Katrina welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Reid would commence a TP on 1 September to Grade 3 for Rural Affairs, Forest Service, Estates Transformation Group; and • Today was Gillian Stirling's last meeting as DAERA's Board room Apprentice and Katrina thanked her on behalf of everyone for her excellent contribution to the Board over the last 12 months. 	

	<p>Gillian Stirling thanked the Board for the opportunity afforded through the Board Room Apprentice Scheme to be part of DAERA. She highlighted the value of the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme and the benefits of participation and spoke positively about the experience of serving on the DAERA Board and the learning she had gained.</p> <p>Brian Doherty informed the Board that Carla McSorley would join as the next Apprentice in September. Carla works for a not-for-profit organisation and had specifically requested a placement with DAERA due to strong environmental interests.</p>	
1(i)	Declarations of Interests	
	Members confirmed they had no interests to declare.	
2 (a)	Minutes of Previous Board Meeting	
	Members approved the minutes of the last meeting with an amendment to include Briege Lafferty as in attendance deputising for Roger Downey.	
2 (b)	Matters Arising from Previous Board Meeting	
	<p>Action point 1 from 22 June – Tracey Teague had produced a paper providing an update On EMFG and NIEA EU Monitoring Issues via correspondence.</p> <p>Action point 1 from 20 July – it was agreed that Grade 3s would manage infraction risks for their own Group, escalating if necessary.</p> <p>Action point 8 from 20 July – Board Effectiveness questionnaire would issue tomorrow and was to be completed by 7 September. Joy Allen would attend the September Board meeting in an observer capacity.</p>	
3	Strategic Issues	
	<p>Katrina set out the strategic context in which the Department was currently operating, highlighting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenges presented as a result of the absence of an agreed Budget and the further challenges for the Department, its staff and its stakeholders related to the exceptionally difficult cost of living landscape • The wider winter context including the potential for further outbreaks of Covid-19 • The political context and the legislative position in the event that an Executive was not formed by 28 October • The work underway to help the parties entitled to make up the Executive prepare to agree a new Programme for Government and Budget, including a specific workstream looking at Green Growth and Climate Change 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Covid Inquiry and, particularly, the focus on decision-making by the Executive that would be part of Phase 2c 	
Items for Discussion		
4	Vacancy Management – progress report from NICSHR	
	<p>Katrina advised this item had been included in today’s agenda to provide the Board with assurance that NICS HR was acting swiftly to fill all approved vacancies and to explore whether there were any steps that DAERA might take to ensure that there were no delays being caused by action or inaction within the Department.</p> <p>Paula opened the item by setting out the strategic context that NICSHR is currently operating in and then spoke to the paper.</p> <p>Paula advised that, following the NICS Resourcing exercise undertaken in November 2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 665 DAERA vacancies had been filled; • 848 new vacancies had been requisitioned; and • 48 of the November 2020 vacancies were still to be filled (20 in progress and 28 not started). <p>Paula highlighted that, while these figures confirmed vacancies had continued to be filled, there was insufficient supply for specialist posts such as Accountants, IT grades and those in the veterinary discipline.</p> <p>Katrina acknowledged that the focus placed on general service recruitment had been to the detriment of professional and technical grade recruitment and this was far from ideal. She indicated that she had asked the NICS Board to reconsider the prioritisation currently being used.</p> <p>The Board discussed the withdrawal level of registered vacancies and the importance of this being kept to the minimum. Bernie suggested that withdrawal of previously registered vacancies should be closely monitored. It also noted the importance of ensuring that the vacancy caseload remained affordable within current and likely future funding envelopes, taking account of churn and other factors.</p> <p>Brian Doherty advised that supply would shortly become available for all SO vacancies registered with NICSHR. Brian and Katrina both stressed the need to ensure that, once supply was available for each grade, any relevant TPs were brought to an end.</p> <p>Paula encouraged the Board to ask teams to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respond promptly to NICSHR Resourcing for requests for information; 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure panel members were provided and freed up diaries to participate; • adhere to resourcing transition principles; • accept advice on method to fill vacancies and ensure action was fully in line with the vacancy management process; • adopt a flexible approach to AWP requests in line with the AWP policy; • maximise opportunities and benefits of hybrid working; and • recognise legal responsibilities in facilitating reasonable adjustment requests due to DDA. <p>Robert highlighted his concerns about the continued shortage of vets. While he acknowledged that vet supply is an issue across the public and private sectors and across the UK, he pointed out that DAERA's situation was not helped by the salary position when set against the attractive salary package offered to vets by DAFM. Robert also advised that work was in train to review the Department's current workforce model for vets and to bring forward new proposals.</p> <p>Tracey noted the consequences of the slowness in filling vacancies on existing staff, including in relation to stress. She and others highlighted the importance of each group taking robust action to prioritise – and where necessary deprioritise - work to ensure that work programmes reflected available resources.</p> <p>The Board noted the current HR context and the updated vacancy management position. Given the forthcoming supply in some key grades, it asked that the vacancy position be brought back for further consideration in November when hopefully there would be further improvements to report.</p>	<p>Paula Bratton Louise Mackey</p>
Items for Agreement		
5	HR Management Information	
	<p>Paula spoke to the paper, setting out the HR Management information as at 30 June.</p> <p>Paula updated that TPs had remained static to the end of July with a reduction in long term TPs of 8 and reminded the Board of the need for regular review of TPs to ensure a fair, open and transparent process.</p> <p>Katrina stressed the need for all groups to ensure they had regularised all TPs lasting longer than 2 years by the autumn. The focus would then shift to TPs over 1 year. Katrina noted that she had received several complaints from staff about the unfairness of allowing lengthy TPs and that it was important to be able to show staff that robust action was being taken across every part of the Department.</p>	

	<p>Paula advised of a spike in new vacancy requisitions in July (100) taking DAERA's total to 660. She noted however that this included student placements and also that allocation of SOs should reduce this total significantly in the near future.</p> <p>Paula confirmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply continued to exist at AO – EOI; • Supply was now available at SO; • Invitations to interview had now issued at DP; • G6 & 7 competitions were still under active consideration; and • The temporary embargo on outward secondments had been lifted <p>Bernie noted the drop in uptake of mandatory training. Following discussion it was agreed that Paula would ask Anne Breen for a breakdown on the 65% compliance figure for Data Protection Essentials.</p> <p>Tracey Teague would liaise with Paula Bratton in relation to a specific case. Paula Bratton to liaise with Employee Relations team to ensure casework figures were accurate.</p> <p>The Board noted the HR update and management information.</p>	<p>Paula Bratton</p> <p>Tracey Teague/Paula Bratton</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Finance Update</p>	
	<p>Roger spoke to the paper, highlighting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department was carrying out a second internal monitoring round in the absence of monitoring rounds being commissioned by DoF; • DoF had advised that Departments were likely to receive the additional funding to bring them up to their Draft Budget positions; • DAERA's cost of living pressures would be considered along with those of all departments against the £270m available at the centre; and • The Department had met the prompt payment performance targets for the year to date to July and Finance Division would work with those Groups/Agencies across the Department where performance is below target to identify reason and take action. <p>Roger confirmed that the Department had received a Section 59 letter from the DoF Permanent Secretary this morning authorising additional cash and resources for DAERA. This cash would cover DAERA until the end of October.</p> <p>In response to a query from Sharon McCue, the position on Direct Farm Payments was confirmed.</p>	

	The Board noted the paper.	
7	LMC Draft Business Plan 2022-23	
	<p>Paddy Griffin, ALB Sponsor Branch, joined the meeting for this item.</p> <p>Paddy spoke to the paper, highlighting that the plan reflected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the challenges faced by the beef & sheep sector; • the impacts of the covid pandemic; and • the drive to meet the Climate Change Bill and a sustainable agenda. <p>Bernie highlighted the absence of assurance in the draft business plan regarding compliance with equality obligations.</p> <p>Norman set out the importance of the future work of LMC in terms of the Ruminant Genetics Programme, Farm Quality Assurance Scheme and a potential Sustainable Body for Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Roger noted the cost increases within the draft business plan. Paddy explained that LMC staff salaries had been brought in line with NICS salaries and that significant recruitment had been undertaken driving up costs. Additionally, the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme had commenced a new contract with a cost increase.</p> <p>The Board asked Lynda Lowe to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amend the recommendation on the paper to seek endorsement for the Business Plan to be forwarded to the Minister; • follow up with LMC and ensure the Board receives assurance that the organisation is satisfied that equality implications are addressed; and • ensure any outdated PfG references within the draft plan were corrected. 	Lynda Lowe
8	NIFHA Draft Business Plan 2022-23	
	<p>Paddy Griffin, ALB Sponsor Branch, remained for this item.</p> <p>Lynda advised that Robert McConnell had recently resigned as NIFHA Chair and so the 'Introduction from the Chair' at the beginning of the draft Business Plan would need to be updated.</p> <p>Lynda clarified that Marine and Fisheries Division was the Policy Sponsor Branch for NIFHA and ALB Sponsor Branch was responsible for governance.</p>	

Closing Items		
10	Forward Look Agenda – September 2022	
	<p>Norman noted that the date of the September Board meeting might have to be reconsidered given the requirement for several members to be with the Minister at the EPC. Louise and Katrina would consider and confirm revised arrangements as soon as possible.</p> <p>Item 4 Risk Deep Dive – Climate Change to be introduced by Tracey Teague</p> <p>Katrina reminded Board members that the October Board would not be a regular meeting and would focus on cyber security.</p> <p>Katrina advised that there would be no Board meeting in December.</p>	Louise Mackey
11	Any other Business	
	None	
	Close	
	Next Meeting: Wednesday 21 September 2022, at 10.00am. Venue to be confirmed.	