

Meeting of Wednesday 15 February 2023, Rm 106, Dundonald House

MINUTES

Attendees:	Katrina Godfrey (Chair) Sharon McCue Bernie Stuart Fiona McCandless Brian Doherty Robert Huey Norman Fulton David Reid Paul Donnelly Tracey Teague Roger Downey Kathryn Clarke Paula Bratton Carla McElrone	Permanent Secretary Non-Executive Member (NEM) Non-Executive Member (NEM) Deputy Secretary Central Services and Contingency Planning Group Deputy Secretary Central Services and Contingency Planning Group Deputy Secretary, Veterinary Service Animal Health Group Deputy Secretary, Food & Farming Group Deputy Secretary, Rural Affairs, Forest Service, Estate Transformation Group Chief Executive NIEA Deputy of Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group Director of Finance Director of Corporate Services Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR Board Room Apprentice
Apologies:		
Additional Attendees:	Jacqui McKee Kevin Oakes	Equality Commission Northern Ireland (ECNI) Director of the Advice & Compliance Directorate ECNI Equality Officer
Secretariat	Ashley Davidson Janice Cowan	Office of the Permanent Secretary Office of the Permanent Secretary

Item	Description	Action
1	Section 75 Delivering Effective Leadership	
	Katrina welcomed Jacqui McKee and Kevin Oakes from ECNI and introduced Board attendees. They led a discussion centred on the ECNI's Section 75 Demonstrating Effective Leadership checklist and the importance of the role and leadership of the board in ensuring that the Department embraced and delivered effectively its responsibilities under s75 of the Northern Ireland Act. Jacqui and Kevin also highlighted some	

	<p>of DAERA's strengths, including its commitment to engagement and training and focus, and shared some lessons from other organisations. They stressed in particular the importance of concentrating on meaningful delivery and ensuring that not only the risks to equality but also the opportunities to promote equality of opportunity were factored in at the earliest stages in the policy process. They also stressed the importance of data collection, data analysis and conscious evaluations to inform future decisions.</p> <p>The Board welcomed the discussion and the assessment of DAERA's progress in taking forward the ECNI S75 Demonstrating Effective Leadership checklist.</p>	
2	Welcome	
	Katrina welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
2(i)	Declarations of Interests	
	Members confirmed they had no conflicts of interest to declare in relation to the agenda items.	
3 (a)	Minutes of Previous Board Meeting	
	Subject to two small amendments being made by the Secretariat, the January minutes were approved for publication.	SECRETARIAT
3 (b)	Matters Arising from Previous Board Meeting	
	Updates were provided on the outstanding action points, all others were completed.	
4	Strategic Issues	
	<p>Katrina set out the strategic context in which the Department was currently operating, focusing on the following aspects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work was continuing in the absence of Ministers, within the parameters set by the Executive Functions Bill • Negotiations were progressing on the NI Protocol Bill • Budget 2023-24 discussion were continuing and would be further discussed at Item 7 • Intensive discussions with Defra were taking place in relation to SPS facilities. • The Retained EU Legislation (REUL) Bill and its implications were requiring significant staff time and work had been reprioritised to provide the necessary leadership at SCS level. • The completion of the recent recruitment process for policy development director posts and the posting of the successful candidates from 1 February. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The action taken within the Department to mark International Week of Women and Girls in Science and the attendance of DAERA science staff at a lunch event hosted by HoCS. 	
Items for Discussion		
5	PWC Reports and Raising Concerns	
	<p>Roger introduced this item and updated the Board on the discussions at the recent Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) meeting and ARAC's agreement to oversee progress in delivering the action plan.</p> <p>Roger briefed the board on the work already in hand, noting that Paul Donnelly had agreed to lead work to update the DAERA Enforcement Policy (Action 1) and that he would lead on updating the DAERA Whistleblowing Policy (Action 4) to reflect the newly launched Raising Concerns Framework. Roger also set out the arrangements being put in place to ensure effective communication with staff, including during the induction process.</p> <p>The Board noted the DAERA Reporting Framework and agreed that it should approve the updated Whistleblowing Policy. It also agreed that the policy should now be renamed Raising Concerns.</p> <p>In discussion, the Board also stressed the need to ensure staff were clear on the difference between raising a concern and making a complaint and also the importance of seeing the ability to raise concerns and complaints as a positive and something that might help improve public services. The Board also discussed how the confidence of staff in the process might be measured, noting the place and importance of the NICS People Survey in that regard.</p>	
6	Update on Board Effectiveness Review Action Plan	
	<p>Katrina updated the Board on progress made in refining the Board Effectiveness Review Action plan since the workshop on 1 February and proposed that an updated action plan, including a timeline, be brought to the March meeting for further discussion [Action Brian Doherty/ Fiona McCandless to agree with Secretariat].</p> <p>The need to update the Board Operational Framework to reflect decisions was also highlighted as was the value in ensuring that the schedule of board meetings ensured that meetings were sufficiently spaced to allow for progress to be made between meetings and also for the scheduling of deep-dive and policy update workshops.</p>	<p>BRIAN DOHERTY/ FIONA McCANDLESS/ SECRETARIAT</p>

7	Finance Update	
	<p>Roger provided an overview of the current financial position of the Department, noting in particular that the EAF accounts had been finalised with an unqualified opinion.</p> <p>Roger advised that that the February Estimated Provisional Outturn exercise for was underway and indications are that the Department will be able to live within its final 2022-23 Resource DEL and Capital DEL budgets. He stressed the need for executive members to ensure Finance Division was informed of any changes in the March exercise.</p> <p>Roger also reported on the discussion that had taken place at the Budget 2023-24 Bilateral between DoF and the Department on the DAERA return. Key issues discussed included the statutory obligations pressures facing DAERA and the impacts of the DoF scenarios.</p> <p>The Board discussed the importance of ensuring that statutory obligations were discharged appropriately and continuing the work already in hand to ensure prioritisation of work and affordability of vacancies.</p> <p>Roger also provided an update on work to develop the DAERA inputs to new draft Investment Strategy for NI and this was noted by the Board including the need to consider the resource implications of capital expenditure.</p> <p>Finally, Roger reported on prompt payment performance, noting that there had been a drop on 10 day and 30 day performance and reminding executive members to renew their focus on ensuring that prompt payment targets were met.</p>	ALL G3s
8	People: Capacity and Capability Update	
	<p>Paula presented her paper which set out the HR update and Management Information position at the end of December 2022 and provided an update on the end of January 2023 position including in relation to Staff in Post, TPs and Agency workers.</p> <p>She highlighted that all departments were reviewing their active vacancy caseload for vacancies that had not yet reached offer stage and drew the Board's attention to the pause currently in place on filling any further general service vacancies that were not yet at offer stage, stressing that this did not affect professional and technical vacancies and that competition planning was continuing across all disciplines. The Board noted that it would be necessary to fill some general service posts during</p>	

	<p>the coming year after the budgetary position became clearer and the prioritisation exercise was complete.</p> <p>Paula also reminded the board that it was coming close to the end of year period for the current performance management cycle and emphasised the importance of ensuring that End of Year Review reports were completed and recorded on HRC as soon as possible after 1 April.</p> <p>The Board noted the HR Report and the Management Information Pack for December. It also noted the challenges that the budget position presented for filling vacancies and again stressed the importance of the prioritisation exercise currently underway.</p>	
9	VSAHG Renewal	
	<p>Robert updated the Board on progress with the VSAHG Renewal project following the presentation at the January Board meeting. He advised that Brian Dooher had continued to lead workshops with all VSAHG staff and there were common themes emerging including the structuring of roles, especially for technical staff; pay and grading issues; performance management; and the need for greater visibility of senior VSAHG staff. Robert also reported on TUS engagement with the project.</p> <p>The Board thanked Robert for his candour in highlighting the issues and stressed the importance not only of maintaining the momentum that had been established but also starting to deliver in ways that staff would recognise as responding to their feedback. They sought assurance that there was a focus on both professional and administrative staff and Robert confirmed that this was the case.</p> <p>Board members also offered their support and their readiness to share experiences and learning from their own work on change management. The need to keep the People and OD Directorate in DoF involved was agreed.</p>	
10	Update on OCR and SPS position	
	<p>Robert presented a paper which provided an update on discussions led by Defra on SPS issues and the decision-making now needed by DAERA to ensure compliance with the law.</p> <p>The Board noted the content of the paper, including the protective marking.</p>	
CLOSING ITEMS		
11	Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting	
	Departmental Board noted the content of the minutes.	

12	Decisions Taken in the Absence of a Minister	
	The Board noted the paper, and the protective marking.	
13	AOB	
	<p>The draft agenda for the March 2023 meeting was agreed, with the inclusion of an item to discuss whether a risk related to governance might be added to the Corporate Risk Register. [Action: Brian Doherty].</p> <p>Norman proposed the inclusion of a presentation on the Agriculture Sector Input to the Climate Action Plan for a future board meeting and Tracey highlighted the importance of setting this in the wider context. The Board indicated a willingness to discuss further and agreed that the Secretariat should liaise with Tracey and Norman to determine the best approach. [Action: Board Secretariat]</p>	
	Close	
	Next Meeting: Wednesday 22 March 2023, at 10.00am. Steinbeck Suite, Jubilee House (tbc)	