

Meeting of Wednesday 20 April 2022, CAFRE – Greenmount Campus

MINUTES

Members:	Anthony Harbinson (Chair) Tracey Teague Fiona McCandless Robert Huey Norman Fulton Brian Doherty Paul Donnelly Roger Downey Lynda Lowe Paula Bratton Sharon McCue Bernie Stuart Gillian Stirling	Permanent Secretary Deputy Secretary Environment Marine and Fisheries Group Deputy Secretary, Rural Affairs, Forest Service, Estate Transformation Group Deputy Secretary, Veterinary Service Animal Health Deputy Secretary, Food & Farming Group Deputy Secretary, Central Services & Contingency Planning Group Chief Executive, NIEA Director of Finance Director of Corporate Services Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR Non-Executive Member (NEM) Non-Executive Member (NEM) NI Boardroom Apprentice
Apologies:	None Recorded	
In Attendance:	Katrina Godfrey Ash Davidson John Joe O’Boyle Hugh Quinn Ronan Gunn	New Permanent Secretary Office of the Permanent Secretary Forest Service Chief Executive (Item 5) Head of Strategic Planning Branch (online - Items 3 & 4) Strategic Planning Branch (online – Items 3 & 4)
Secretariat	Glenn Donnelly	Central Management Branch

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome	
	Anthony welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked those present to introduce themselves as the new DAERA Permanent Secretary was in attendance. In reply Katrina thanked Anthony for the invitation to the	

	<p>meeting, recognised the importance of the Board's function as an aid in her Accounting Officer role and said she was looking forward to meeting the Team.</p> <p>Anthony gave a brief update on some current issues – those created/exacerbated by the situation in Ukraine and the pressure on the availability of some foods by the reduction by P&O Ferries to a single crossing.</p>	
1(i)	Declarations of Interests	
	Nothing was declared.	
2 (a)	Minutes of Previous Board Meeting	
	Members agreed the minutes from March's meeting subject to a minor change suggested by Bernie. It was agreed that the words 'the target' should be removed from point/comment 4 (22/23 DAERA Balanced Scorecard...)	Secretariat
2 (b)	Matters Arising from Previous Board Meeting	
	<p>All previous action points complete.</p> <p>Details on Group Pulse surveys and Cyber Security questionnaire can be found in Board Paper DB 200422 -1b.</p> <p>Paula reported on vacancy information as part of her update on HR Management Information and provided the Board with details in Paper DB 200422 - 6b.</p>	
Items for Discussion		
3	Corporate Risk Register Deep Dive (Risk 1 NI Protocol)	
	<p>Brian introduced Hugh and Ronan who joined the meeting online. He summarised what the paper was asking the Board to consider and opened the topic to discussion.</p> <p>Members of the Board agreed that due to its influence on the work of the Department as a whole this issue must remain on the Risk Register.</p> <p>However it was accepted that as it had started as a 'catch all' risk it now seemed time to restructure and re-order the detail, separating internal and external risks, removing elements that were complete or no longer relevant and ensuring that it is sufficiently reflected in relevant Group and Branch Risk Registers.</p>	

	<p>It was recognised that Ministerial views on the protocol could potentially change approach and consequently the range of potential risks. In recognition of this possible alternative wording for the risk was discussed and ‘to ensure all known risks are noted and elevated as necessary’ was suggested.</p> <p>It was agreed that this issue would be dealt with through correspondence. The NI Protocol Risk would be circulated to members to note their proposed amendments/comments.</p>	Brian Doherty
4	22/23 DAERA Balanced Scorecard	
	<p>Brian spoke to the paper, reminding members that the agreed approach had been to update and ‘roll forward’ the previous Balanced Scorecard for one year.</p> <p>While members recognising that ideally the Scorecard should reflect a new Executive’s Programme for Government and Ministerial priorities, as both could change under a new Administration the ‘roll forward’ was agreed as the best approach.</p> <p>Members discussed the detail of the Scorecard with the revisions made following the last meeting and a number of additional points were raised. It was felt that it would be useful to circulate the draft to let members propose amendments and make any further comments.</p> <p>On the specific issue in Brian’s paper of keeping Target 14 (EU Exit and Protocol) it was agreed that it should remain to reflect this area of work. Although it was suggested that the target could be refined as it was at present too wide and lacked some clarity on responsibility.</p> <p>It was agreed that this issue would be dealt with through correspondence. The draft 22/23 Balanced Scorecard would be circulated to members to note their proposed amendments/comments.</p>	Brian Doherty
Items for Agreement		
5	Forest Service Corporate Plan	
	<p>Fiona provided some background on Forest Service and introduced John Joe to present the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>He explained that following the classification of Forest Service as a Public Non-Financial Public Corporation they were required to have a Corporate Plan covering at least 3 years to enable the building and holding of cash reserves. He outlined Forest Service’s priority work streams and their focus for investment.</p>	

	<p>The significance of Forest Service’s new classification was raised by members with regard to the importance of having robust governance structures in place and from the major implications it has for the Department’s budget.</p> <p>There was discussion over the apparent contradictions in the plan between timber supply and biodiversity/reduction in carbon. John Joe explained how careful timber management could aid long term carbon capture in wood products and individual business cases would address biodiversity issues.</p> <p>The general observations were made that the important area of Plant Health may not have been given due emphasis and that the increasing expectations of recreational users of outdoor visitor attractions and the need for continued development/investment in this area.</p> <p>Members noted and agreed the draft Forest Service Corporate Plan and were asked to provide any further suggested amendments by correspondence.</p>	
6	Ruminant Genetics Project	
	<p>Norman spoke to the paper.</p> <p>He outlined the potential benefits of providing farmers with data, already available across the industry, to inform breeding decisions. It was proposed that this should be done through a project which would be developed and delivered as a public private partnership at an anticipated Capital cost to the Department of approx. £12m.</p> <p>Members welcomed the aim of the project which could increase efficiency and potentially help meet climate change goals. It was felt that the project had great potential and was something the Department could not do ‘in house’ so if successful this may be a model to be replicated in future.</p> <p>As with the previous item discussed, the importance of having a robust governance structure in place was stressed due to the approach being taken by this project. It was suggested that it would be important to look at lessons learnt by similar projects.</p> <p>Members noted the paper.</p>	
7	HR Management Information	
	<p>Paula spoke to the paper providing a summary of the Department’s present HR Position and covering the ‘Information on Vacancies’ action point from March’s meeting.</p>	

	<p>Members commented that it was good to see progress in the reduction in Temporary Promotions in the Department and it appeared that the plan to look at these, longest term first, was showing results.</p> <p>Concern was expressed on the number of posts that were declared as vacancies and subsequently withdrawn, impacting on the prioritization and efficient allocation of a limited supply of new staff.</p> <p>Comment was made that sick absence compliance rates remained low for the Department. Katrina advised that she used the BI Dashboard to identify hotspots of non-compliance and recommended it as a very useful tool.</p> <p>Members noted the paper.</p>	
8	Finance Update	
	<p>Roger spoke to the paper.</p> <p>He highlighted the ongoing work on the Provisional Outturn Exercise which DoF have now confirmed has a return date of 13 May and ongoing work on the 2022-23 Budget.</p> <p>He noted that the Budget Bill allowing departments to access 45% of their 2021/22 cash and resources until the Assembly approve a 2022/23 budget had received Royal Assent.</p> <p>He also advised that DoF had issued 'contingency planning envelopes' for 2022/23 on Resource DEL and Capital DEL and that he had submitted proposals to Minister based on these..</p> <p>This overall approach was supported by the Board and it was emphasised that there should not be a reluctance to make necessary spend or allow spending decisions to slip.</p> <p>Members noted the paper.</p>	
9	Health and Safety Update	
	<p>Brian spoke to the paper.</p> <p>He reported on progress on the agreed Health and Safety Programme at the end of fourth quarter 2021/22.</p> <p>The need for sufficient Fire Wardens and First Aider cover was highlighted as increased numbers of staff return to offices. Fiona advised that requests for nominations to fill these rolls had been sent to Groups.</p> <p>Members noted the paper.</p>	
Closing Items		

10	Forward Look Agenda – April 2022	
	Members agreed to add the regular ARAC Update to May’s agenda.	
11	Any other Business	
	<p>Norman referred to the list of dates for CAFRE Higher Education Graduation Ceremonies (Board Paper DB200422 – 10). He asked Board members for their availability to Chair these events.</p> <p>Initial discussion by members confirmed availability across the Board to cover all these events. It was decided that a formal request and list of dates would be circulated.</p>	Norman Fulton
	Close	
	Next Meeting: Wednesday 18 May 2022, at 10.00am. Venue to be confirmed.	