

**Meeting of Thursday 28 September 2023, Manor Suite, Greenmount**

**MINUTES**

<b>Attendees:</b>	Katrina Godfrey (Chair) Sharon McCue Bernie Stuart Bill Cargo Norman Fulton Brian Doherty  Robert Huey  David Reid  Paul Donnelly David Simpson Paula Bratton Declan McCarney  Claire Cockerill  Conleth Burns	Permanent Secretary Non-Executive Member (NEM) Non-Executive Member (NEM) Non-Executive Member (NEM) Deputy Secretary, Food & Farming Group Deputy Secretary, Central Services & Contingency Planning Group Deputy Secretary, Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group Deputy Secretary, Rural Affairs, Forest Service & Estate Transformation Group Chief Executive, NIEA Director of Corporate Services Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR Deputy Finance Director (attending for Roger Downey) Director of Green Growth and Climate Action Delivery Division Boardroom Apprentice
<b>Apologies:</b>	Roger Downey Tracey Teague	Director of Finance Deputy Secretary, Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group
<b>Additional Attendees:</b>	Chris Smart Lorraine Simmons	DoF, Director of Resourcing Division Health & Safety Coordinator (Head of Health and Safety Coordination Branch).
<b>Secretariat</b>	Ashley Davidson Nicola Cully	

Item	Description	Action
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome</b>	
	Katrina welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Bill and Conleth to the Board.	
<b>1(i)</b>	<b>Declarations of Interests</b>	

	Members confirmed they had no conflicts of interest to declare.	
<b>2 (a)</b>	<b>Minutes of Previous Board Meeting</b>	
	The Board noted two minor amendments to the July meeting minutes. These were then signed off and agreed.	<b>SECRETARIAT</b>
<b>2 (b)</b>	<b>Matters Arising from Previous Board Meeting</b>	
	No matters arising from the July meeting required discussion.	
<b>3</b>	<b>Strategic Issues</b>	
	<p>Katrina provided an update to the Board on the new Group structures that would take effect from 2<sup>nd</sup> October, expressing her thanks to her Top Leadership Team for their help in developing the new structure. She also advised the Board that David Reid had been successful in the recent temporary promotion competition to fill the Head of EMFG and advised that David would be remaining on the Board in his new role.</p> <p>Katrina also provided an update on work flowing from the Board Effectiveness Review to update the structure and membership of the board, noting that the new membership arrangements would also take effect from 2<sup>nd</sup> October and that formal letters appointing the executive members to the board would also issue to coincide with this date. She noted that work on the new committee structure and associated terms of reference for the Finance Committee and Capability and Capacity Committee was now well in hand and that some minor amendments to the terms of reference for ARAC were also now in hand. Brian advised that a paper setting out the proposed approach to DB committees' membership and terms of reference would be circulated shortly.</p> <p>Katrina provided an update on the wider strategic context within which the Board conducts its business including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the current political context;</li> <li>• the wider public expenditure context;</li> <li>• Windsor Framework implementation;</li> <li>• Lough Neagh; and</li> <li>• COVID Inquiry</li> </ul> <p>Paul provided a more detailed update for the board on the blue/green algae situation and the work in hand to address it.</p>	<b>Brian Doherty</b>
<b>ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION</b>		
<b>4</b>	<b>People: Vacancy Management</b>	

	<p>Chris Smart joined the meeting.</p> <p>Katrina set out the background to funding for posts and the importance of ensuring that affordable posts were filled quickly and highlighted some of the wider challenges for, and frustrations of, DAERA in that regard. She mentioned in particular the legal obligations placed on the Department by the Windsor Framework and the requirement to have sufficient numbers of suitably qualified staff in post for OCR checks.</p> <p>Paula spoke to the paper and provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An overview of current vacancy position and content</li> <li>- NICSHR Actions to support</li> <li>- Opened the floor to questions and discussions</li> </ul> <p>Chris provided more detail on vacancy lists as well as current and planned competitions within the NICS and also updated the board on some of the changes that had been made within NICS HR to improve the service it provided to departments.</p> <p>Brian welcomed the NICSHR changes and praised the good working relationship with the HR Business Partner. He reiterated again the importance of ensuring that posts for which funding streams existed are progressed to fill.</p> <p>The Board noted the information provided in the paper and thanked Chris for attending the meeting.</p> <p>Chris left the meeting.</p>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Finance Update</b>	
	<p>Declan McCarney attended the meeting on behalf of Roger Downey and presented the finance paper to the Board, asking it to note the information provided and endorse the internal actions agreed by the Finance Committee in the Second Monitoring Round. A copy of the minutes from the Finance Committee meeting was provided to aid the Board in its consideration of this request.</p> <p>Declan also briefed the Board on the recent correspondence from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which formally directed the Permanent Secretary to carry out public consultations on increasing HE tuition fees for CAFRE and reducing the level of bTB compensation payable and outlined the steps now in place to ensure compliance with the direction. For the tuition fees consultation, Norman advised the Board that this would be taken forward in conjunction with DfE.</p> <p>The Board was content to note the finance paper and agreed to endorse the internal actions agreed by the Finance Committee in the Second Monitoring Round.</p>	

<b>6</b>	<b>Health &amp; Safety</b>	
	<p>Lorrayne Simmons joined the meeting for this item and she and David introduced the Health &amp; Safety paper highlighting in particular assurance requirements; review of the current Health &amp; Safety model; Fire Risk Assessment Schedule; and the focus in Departmental risk registers on health and safety.</p> <p>David also highlighted the current staffing structure and the level of vacant posts, linking back to the earlier discussion on vacancy management.</p> <p>Recognising the point about risk and the importance it attached to health and safety, the Board agreed that the forthcoming Risk Workshop would provide a useful opportunity to consider the health and safety risks and the associated risk appetites.</p> <p>Katrina highlighted the importance of the team feeling able to make clear asks from the Board. Brian confirmed that a further Health &amp; Safety paper would be provided to the Board that would provide assurance on the work in hand and include any specific areas where Board-level intervention would be helpful.</p> <p>Lorrayne left the meeting.</p>	<b>Brian Doherty</b>
<b>PAPERS TO NOTE</b>		
<b>7</b>	<b>ARAC Update</b>	
	<p>Sharon provided a readout from ARAC's last meeting in July and confirmed that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 11 October. She stressed in particular the focus of ARAC on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ALB assurances, particularly from AFBI given the difficulties it had experienced with its financial systems;</li> <li>- COVID-19 Inquiry;</li> <li>- External Independent Review and Raising Concerns;</li> <li>- Fraud reports &amp; DACs</li> </ul> <p>Katrina thanked Sharon and the Board noted the update.</p>	
<b>8</b>	<b>Decisions Made in the Absence of Ministers</b>	
	<p>The Board reviewed and noted the decisions made in the absence of Ministers. Noting the position on public appointments, Sharon asked about the latest position on those appointments it had not been possible for senior officials to progress in the absence of ministers. Brian confirmed that the Secretary of State had now legislated to include the relevant DAERA bodies in the list of public bodies to which he could make appointments in the absence of local ministers.</p>	

<b>CLOSING ITEMS</b>		
<b>9</b>	<b>AOB</b>	
	<p>Brian provided an update on progress in implementing all of the I DAERA recommendations in the Action Plan in Response to the External Independent Review, indicating that he was now in a position to inform Katrina and the Board that all were now implemented and to ask that Internal Audit now carried out its validation exercise and expressed his thanks to the groups.</p> <p>Katrina thanked Brian and Fiona for their leadership in this area and for the focus they had brought to ensuring that the actions were completed in a timely manner.</p>	
	<b>Close</b>	
	<b>Next board meeting: Wednesday 22 November 2023 at 10.00am (Clare House)</b>	