

Meeting of Thursday 22 November 2023, Conference Room, Clare House

MINUTES

Attendees:	Katrina Godfrey (Chair) Sharon McCue Bernie Stuart Bill Cargo Norman Fulton Brian Doherty Fiona McCandless David Reid Tracey Teague Paul Donnelly Roger Downey Paula Bratton Brian Dooher Conleth Burns	Permanent Secretary Non-Executive Member (NEM) Non-Executive Member (NEM) Non-Executive Member (NEM) Deputy Secretary, Food, Farming & Rural Affairs Group Deputy Secretary, Strategic Planning & Corporate Services Group Deputy Secretary, Strategic Planning & Corporate Services Group Deputy Secretary, Environment, Marine & Fisheries Group Deputy Secretary, Climate Change, Science & Innovation Group Chief Executive, NIEA Director of Finance Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR WF SPS Delivery, Group Renewal & Business Management Division Boardroom Apprentice
Apologies:	Robert Huey	Deputy Secretary, Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group
Additional Attendees:	None	
Secretariat	Ashley Davidson	

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome & apologies	
	Katrina welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that Brian Dooher was deputising for Robert Huey.	
1(i)	Declarations of Interests	
	Members confirmed they had no conflicts of interest to declare.	

2 (a)	Minutes of Previous Board Meeting	
	The minutes for September were agreed for publication.	
2 (b)	Matters Arising from Previous Board Meeting	
	<p>The matters arising from September were noted as:</p> <p>Action 1 – complete; Action 2 – in hand and to be carried forward with today’s actions until Committee ToR agreed; and Action 3 – In hand and to be carried forward with today’s actions until Board paper circulated.</p>	
3	Strategic Issues	
	<p>Katrina set out the strategic context in which the Department was currently operating, focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political situation and preparation for formation of the Executive, including the work underway within the department; • Windsor Framework implementation including resource requirements and Treasury bids; • Budget and increasing concern at the absence of any detail on how the 2024/25 budget process would be taken forward; and • Covid Inquiry including the significant associated resource requirements, the arrangements for Module 2C and the Rule 9 request received by the Department. 	
ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION		
4	People: Capacity and L&D	
	<p>Brian Doherty set the context for the paper, outlining the relevance of DAERA’s business plan commitments, lIP feedback and people survey data in informing steps to build the capability in the workforce.</p> <p>Paula Bratton presented the paper, setting out the NICS’s strategic approach to L&D and highlighting the particular importance of self-directed development and on the job learning.</p> <p>The board discussed and agreed the themes set out in NICSHR’s revised offer to support delivery of NICS services and functions, with particular focus on the Policy & Government and Innovation, Improvement & Transformation themes. The board agreed also that a standalone Programme & Project Management theme was a surprising omission and agreed that this should remain a DAERA priority. Paula advised that the Programme and Project Management offering is captured under the Leadership and Management theme.</p>	

	<p>The Board also discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 70-20-10 learning model; • Mentoring, including the ‘buddying’ system included in the corporate induction package; • Hybrid working impact on ‘on-the-job’ training; • Budget constraints and potential to make greater use of in-house expertise; and • The work to provide science lunchtime seminars and finance profession CPD events. <p>In noting the paper, the Board agreed the following further steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need to re-state training resources available, the importance of mentoring and underscore the importance of taking time out to train; • the development of further masterclasses on project & programme Management; and • the need to identify how best to share good practice in training/development within individual business areas across the department. <p>Following the main discussion, Brian Doherty took the opportunity to provide an update on filling registered DP and SO vacancies and agreed to update Finance Division on the split between internal (to DAERA) and external candidates.</p>	<p>Brian Doherty/ Fiona McCandless</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Finance Update</p>	
	<p>Roger Downey presented the paper to the Board, updating members on the current position with the Department’s Annual Report and Resource Accounts for 2022 – 23. The pressures on the timetable for accounts submission associated with the new consolidation process and the resolution of technical treatment of a particular issue were highlighted. Members expressed significant disappointment that, despite the efforts of all involved, it had not yet been possible to complete the audit of this year’s accounts which meant that the Department had missed the statutory deadline for laying the audited accounts.</p> <p>Roger also provided updates on the European Agriculture Fund; the internal monitoring round arrangements; the Windsor Framework exercise returned to DoF, exercises commissioned on Resource and Capital Budget 2024 – 27; the AccountNI upgrade; and prompt performances for year to date at October 2023.</p> <p>Roger advised of capital easement declared in third internal monitoring round (predominately related to AFBI Green Growth).</p>	

	<p>Roger concluded by providing an update on arrangements to comply with the Secretary of State's directions on consultations for revenue raising (reducing the compensation rate for bTb and increasing CAFRE higher education tuition fees to the same level as England).</p> <p>Following discussion, the Board noted the paper.</p>	
6	DAERA Business Plan – 6 month position	
	<p>Katrina opened the item by highlighting the Board's responsibility to monitor performance of the core department's interim business plan and noting the role of Agency Management Boards in scrutinising the plans of the Department's two agencies.</p> <p>Roger presented the paper, outlining the actions and targets that had been set and the progress made in each area by the mid-year point of 30 September.</p> <p>The Board discussed the progress and the RAG status for each measure, asking questions on areas where progress had been slower than anticipated. Following discussion it was agreed that measure 14 should be re-worded to provide more clarity on the progress that had been made.</p> <p>It was agreed that the 9-month position would be provided to the board as a correspondence paper unless implementation of measures encountered difficulty or there was a significant change in RAG status, in which case the paper would need to be presented at the January board meeting for discussion to agree next steps.</p> <p>The Board noted the paper.</p>	Robert Huey
7	Corporate Risk Register	
	<p>Katrina thanked members for their input to the 'clean sheet' Risk Workshop on 18 October. Fiona McCandless then presented the paper, providing an update on the drafting of the Corporate Risk Register following the workshop and reminding board members of the discussion around appointment of SROs that had taken place at the workshop.</p> <p>The Board discussed the risks identified and the risk appetite for each, stressing the importance of communicating the Board's risk appetite to managers across the Department. The need to ensure that there were named senior officers responsible for implementing existing controls and mitigating actions was also stressed.</p> <p>In noting the paper, the Board asked that the Corporate Risk Register should come back to its next meeting for formal agreement following</p>	

	receipt and inclusion of Grade 3 comments and that a further update might usefully be circulated via correspondence in the interim.	Brian Doherty / Fiona McCandless
8	DAERA's Major Programmes and Projects	
	<p>Katrina introduced this paper, thanking the team for providing it and indicating the importance of having a clear assessment as to how DAERA was adhering to DAO (DoF) 02/20.</p> <p>Fiona presented the paper highlighting the detailed level of adherence set out in Annex A to the paper and the comprehensive overview of DAERA's eleven major programmes and projects in Annex B.</p> <p>The Board discussed training for both SROs and other project/programme staff along with the requirement for ALBs to also comply with the DAO. It was agreed that ALB compliance with this DAO would be added to the agenda for the ARAC Chairs meeting.</p> <p>The Board noted the paper.</p>	Roger Downey
9.	Health & safety quarterly update	
	<p>Brian Doherty presented the paper providing an update for 1 July – 30 September 2023.</p> <p>Brian summarised the update, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress of targets in the Health & Safety Programme of work 2023/24; • Incidents reported under RIDDOR; and • Resource pressures within health & safety teams across the department. <p>The Board focused on the options to relieve the resource pressure across the health & safety cadre and the importance of ensuring officials were aware that health & safety was everyone's responsibility and not just that of H&S staff.</p> <p>It was agreed that a paper providing further options to relieve resourcing pressures would be circulated via correspondence to the Board as a matter of priority.</p> <p>The paper was noted by the Board.</p>	Brian Doherty / Fiona McCandless
PAPERS TO NOTE		
10.	ARAC update	
	Sharon McCue provided an ARAC update based on the minutes of the last meeting held on 11 October. The focus of the meeting had been this	

	<p>year's Annual Report and Accounts along with an EAF update and progress made by DAERA in implementing the action plan in response to the external independent review.</p> <p>Sharon requested that Groups pay particular attention to Internal Audit recommendations that had been outstanding for some time.</p> <p>The Board noted the paper.</p>	
11.	Progress update on implementation of RHI recommendations	
	<p>Brian Doherty presented the paper, providing a readout of both DoF and DAERA's assessments on the implementation of the recommendations.</p> <p>The Board focused on discussing DAERA's implementation status of the recommendations and noted the progress made to date. While welcoming that progress, the Board also stressed that there was no room for complacency.</p> <p>It was agreed that it would be useful to have more information on the uptake on training courses rolled out on commercial awareness. It was also agreed that the next update on implementation of the recommendations should be within three months of appointment of a Minister or annually if a Minister was not in post. Any DoF updates on implementation would also be shared with Board members when received.</p> <p>The Board noted the paper.</p>	Paula Bratton
12.	Decisions made in the absence of Ministers	
	<p>Fiona presented the paper setting out the decisions taken in September and October 2023, noting that two were protectively marked as official-sensitive.</p> <p>The Board noted the paper.</p>	
13.	Any Other Business	
	<p>Katrina highlighted that today was Sharon McCue's last formal Board meeting and formally thanked Sharon for her support personally since April 2022 and also to the Board over the last 6 years.</p> <p>Sharon reflected on her last 6 years with DAERA, the breadth of the work covered by the department, the challenges faced during her tenure and thanked officials for their support and professionalism both in her role on DB and as ARAC Chair.</p>	
Next board meeting: Wednesday 24 January 2024 at 10.00am (NIEA Lisburn)		

