**MINUTES OF DEPARTMENTAL BOARD (DB) MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY 2019   
ROOM 229, DUNDONALD HOUSE**

**Members:**

Denis McMahon Permanent Secretary

Robert Huey Deputy Secretary, Veterinary Service and Animal Health Group

David Small Deputy Secretary, Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group

Brian Doherty Deputy Secretary, Central Services & Contingency Planning Group

Norman Fulton Deputy Secretary, Food and Farming Group

Sharon McCue Non-Executive Member (NEM)

Bernie Stuart Non-Executive Member (NEM)

Sean McGrade Director of Corporate Services

**In Attendance:**

Michael Cooke Director, NICS HR Employee Relations (Item 2(ii))

Annette Hutton Programme Manager, NICS HR Employee Relations (Item 2(ii))

Roger Downey Deputy Finance Director (Item 3(i))

Rosemary Agnew Director, Brexit Division (Items 5&6)

Colette McMaster Director, Sustainable Agri-Food Division (Item 7)

David Torrens Director, NIFAIS Programme (Item 8)

Michael Oliver Head, Central Management Branch

Dermot Millar Audit Manager (MERP injects)

Barry Yeo Strategy Group Minute Taker (MERP injects)

Kathryn Clarke Head, Permanent Secretary’s Executive Support Office

**Secretariat:**

Emma Murphy Central Management Branch

**Apologies:**

Fiona McCandlessDeputy Secretary, Forest Service, Rural Affairs & Estate Transformation Group

David Reid Director of Finance

Gail Downey Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR

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| **Item** | **Description** | **Action Owner** |
| **Opening** | |  |
| **1** | **Secretary’s Opening Remarks** |  |
|  | Secretary noted apologies from Fiona McCandless, David Reid and Gail Downey. |  |
| 1 (i) | **Declaration Of interests** |  |
|  | No interests which relate to today’s agenda declared. |  |
| 1 (ii) | **Previous Minutes** |  |
|  | The Board considered the previous Minutes and agreed them subject to the addition of a third bullet point at paragraph 4(ii) referencing the need for business areas to develop and test their own plans. |  |
| 1 (iii) | **Matters Arising & Action Points** |  |
|  | Action points have been updated to reflect Members comments. |  |
| **Strategic Governance** | |  |
| **2** | **People** |  |
| **2 (i)** | **Monthly Staffing Update** |  |
|  | The Board noted the paper and discussed:   1. Progress on the filling of Brexit related posts since the previous meeting, with particular reference to the NICS Priority Pool process; 2. Progress on the General Service and Brexit specific Grade 7 competitions, and the need for a holistic approach to be taken to the posting of successful candidates; 3. Lack of clarity on the detail of other Departmental promotion lists that could be used to address DAERA vacancies; 4. Difficulties in relation to drilling down into management information to identify those staff not compliant with various personnel processes, including completion of PPAs and H&S training and a need to clarify the impact of GDPR; 5. A need to identify actions that could be taken in respect of a failure to comply with required actions, e.g. certification of sickness absence; 6. The work of the Resourcing sub-committee in relation to TPs and Agency staff; 7. Sickness absence levels, absence reasons and certification of absence.   It was agreed that Brian Doherty would liaise with NICS HR on a number of the points raised. | **Brian Doherty** |
| **2(ii)** | **NICS HR Presentation: Employee Relations Standardisation Project** |  |
|  | The Board noted the presentation by Michael Cooke and Annette Hutton, NICS HR, on the progress of the Employee Relations Standardisation Project.  Members welcomed the work being undertaken to simplify HR processes, the future role of dedicated NICS HR case workers, and the work undertaken to put staff at the heart of the processes. The Board welcomed the development of a new NICS HR portal which would offer clear and concise advice for both managers and staff.  Members were invited to provide further feedback to NICS HR via the Business Partners as considered appropriate. |  |
| **3** | **Resources** |  |
| **3(i)** | **Budget Position** |  |
|  | Roger Downey provided an update on the Budget position for 2018/19, noting that the focus is now on spending out. He noted that the Finance Committee would receive updates at its next meeting.  Roger also provided an update on the anticipated position for 2019/2020, noting that the formal budget was not yet agreed. There was a discussion in respect of allocations for Brexit posts, and the need to secure staffing resource in a timely manner.  Members discussed the need to consider whether any areas of work could be paused. It was agreed that the raw data from the exercise undertaken at the Leadership Convention (December 2018) would be shared with G3s for further consideration.  The Board noted the Finance paper.  Robert Huey and Norman Fulton left the meeting following this item. | **Brian Doherty** |
| **3 (ii)** | **Fire Risk Assessments – AFBI** |  |
|  | The Board noted the paper, and asked for clarification as to how the Department could ensure the safety of those within buildings where it did not have a maintenance role, e.g. AFBI farm buildings.  The Board noted that this paper dealt specifically with the AFBI Estate, and sought an update on the position in respect of the other DAERA ALBS. | **Fiona McCandless**  **Fiona McCandless** |
| **4** | **DB Governance** |  |
| **4 (i)** | **ARAC Update** |  |
|  | Sharon McCue presented the paper and draft minutes of the ARAC meeting that took place on 10 January 2019. She highlighted ongoing work in respect of the Corporate Governance Framework, the Audit Committee’s Self-Assessment exercise, plans to revise the ARAC Terms of Reference, and the need for a discussion on reporting structures with the Delivery Committee and / or ALB Committee.  Sharon alerted Board Members to the need to understand the findings of the Internal Audit Review in relation to Trade Certification, and advised that papers had been requested for the next ARAC meeting.  Secretary agreed that it would be useful for the NEMs to gain an understanding of the Department’s trade role and Trade Certification functions to allow them to provide a challenge / assurance as appropriate.  Robert Huey will provide a short paper to NEMS outlining the trade certification issue. | **Robert Huey** |
| **Strategic Issues** | |  |
| **5** | **Brexit Update** |  |
|  | Rosemary Agnew presented the paper and brought Members up to date following recent parliamentary debates.  The Board noted that the Gateway Review was ongoing, and that significant progress had been made on preparatory work prior to Exit day, including the development of a significant legislative programme which is nearing completion and now largely with Defra. |  |
| **6** | **NI Future Agricultural Policy Framework – Stakeholder Engagement Exercise** |  |
|  | Rosemary Agnew provided an update on the Stakeholder Engagement Exercise undertaken in 2018 and an overview of the responses received. She noted that a summary of responses would be shared with the Trade and Agriculture Committee and the Environmental Steering Group, and would be published on the internet in due course.  It was noted that a number of responses considered the issue of convergence of direct payments to flat rate, and that a further paper would be brought to DB in due course. | **Norman Fulton** |
| **7** | **Funding of Veterinary Medicines Residues Testing Schemes in NI** |  |
|  | Members noted the paper which outlined the current position in relation to the Residues Testing regime, and suggested that it may be appropriate for consideration by the Senior Decision Making Forum (SDMF) at some stage in the future.  In response to a question on the SDMF, it was agreed that a paper would be provided ‘Below the Line’ for the next DB meeting, and that the SDMF should be reflected within the Corporate Governance Framework. | **Sean McGrade** |
| **8** | **NIFAIS Update** |  |
|  | David Torrens provided an update on developments since the last Board meeting, and confirmed that the Gateway Review would take place in w/c 04 February 2019.  The Board noted the paper and asked for a further update following the Gateway Review. | **Robert Huey** |
| **9** | **Strategic Direction for the NI Environment Strategy** |  |
|  | David Small presented the paper which outlined progress on the work undertaken to develop a NI Environment Strategy, and the opportunity this would present to enhance NI’s position globally, with associated benefits for the environment and agriculture sectors, and NI plc more widely.  The Board commended the detail and ambition within the paper, welcomed the work to date, and asked David to consider how this work could be progressed. |  |
| **10** | **Informal Feedback - DB MERP Exercise** |  |
|  | Michael Oliver and Dermot Millar provided initial and informal feedback on the MERP tabletop exercise which had taken place throughout the DB meeting.  Members noted that it had been a useful exercise and looked forward to a formal update as a ‘Below the Line’ paper at the February meeting. | **Sean McGrade** |
| **Closing Items** | |  |
| **11** | **DB February Forward Agenda** |  |
|  | The Agenda for February was agreed with the verbal feedback on the MERP test to be presented as a Below the Line paper, and the addition of a Below the Line paper on the Senior Decision Making Forum.  It was agreed that the paper on the Departmental Asset Management Plan, for consideration at the March DB meeting, should address how it fits into the wider SIB plan. | **Fiona McCandless** |
| **12** | **Internal Communication Messages for Team Brief** |  |
|  | Items for inclusion in the next available Team Brief were:   1. Budget position 18/19 and 19/20 2. NIFAIS 3. Brexit 4. Update on NI Future Agricultural Policy Framework Stakeholders Engagement Exercise 5. Update on the development of the NI Environment Strategy 6. DB Member’s experience of the MERP exercise. |  |
| **13** | **AOB** |  |
|  | NICS People Survey 2018  Secretary advised that the NICS People Survey 2018 Benchmark Scores had been published and he was happy to note the improvement in Employee Engagement within DAERA. He recorded his thanks to the Management Team for their work to date and noted the positive impact this was having on staff and how they viewed their place within the organisation.  Brian Doherty advised that some initial analysis of the detail had been prepared and would be shared with the Board shortly. | **Brian Doherty** |
|  | **Close** |  |
|  | Secretary thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting. |  |

**Date of next meeting: Wednesday 27 February 2019**

**Glenree House, Newry**