Office for Environmental Protection

Minutes

Meeting of the Board
Thursday 12 March 2026
MS Teams

Members

Malcolm Beatty OBE	Board Member
Professor Liz Fisher	Board Member
Richard Greenhous	Chief of Staff
Julie Hill MBE	Chair
Professor Dan Laffoley	Board Member
Dr Paul Leinster CBE	Board Member
Caroline May	Board Member
Natalie Prosser	Chief Executive
Helen Venn	Chief Regulatory Officer

OEP Attendees

REDACTED	Principal Strategy and Performance Manager (item 26.11)
REDACTED	Senior Investigations Officer
REDACTED	Principal Investigations Manager (item 26.10)
Mike Fox	Head of Communications and Strategic Relations
Richard Greenhous	Chief of Staff
Joe Hayden	Head of Complaints, Investigations and Enforcement
REDACTED	Principal Investigations Manager (item 26.10)
Angel Lai	Head of Finance and Corporate Services
Andy Lester	Head of Business Strategy and Planning
Professor Robbie McDonald	Chief Insights Officer
Ray Purdy	Head of Legal Research and Analysis (item 26.10)
REDACTED	Board Secretary and Private Office Manager
Kate Tandy	Acting General Counsel

26.06 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Helen Venn. Liz Fisher attended the meeting until item 26.11

There were no declarations of interest.

26.07 Minutes, Matters Arising and Matters Decided by Electronic Business

The minutes from the 26 November Board were approved.

The matters arising report was noted.

Since the previous Board meeting, both the Annual Report and Accounts 24/25 and the Interim Chair delegations plan were approved via electronic business.

26.08 Report of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The Chair of the ARAC reported that the budget had been considered during the most recent meeting, noting the potential implications of reduced funding. The Committee agreed to consider a reduction in internal audit activity for the following year.

This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

26.09 Report of the Chief Executive

It was confirmed to the Board that the EIP25 report was published in December and we spent time communicating and engaging with the report which was successful. The success of our Annual Progress report was also noted, including both the in-person events and stakeholder briefings surrounding the report. There was notable interest from the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC).

The Chair and Chief Executive appeared before two select committees in relation to the Annual Progress report. We attended the Defra Group Environment Board. The Board discussed the importance of the whole government approach to delivering the EIP. **Action** Chief Insights Office to consider ways to detail wider government department engagement when producing our reports.

DAERA published its Annual Performance Report (APR) on time in January, supporting our own assessment timeline as progress continues to our first Northern Ireland report.

It was noted that our research strategy, as presented to the Board in November 2025, had been published internally. It was confirmed that the team is engaged with the Government Office for Science in relation to our areas of research interest.

The protected sites report for England was also published in early December. A government response was received last week, and we made a statement in reply expressing our concern at the degree of action proposed in the light of our recommendations.

The NAP report is complete, but publication has been postponed until the end of April to maximise influence. A meeting with Pilgrim Foods (owners of Moy Park) was positive, with discussion focused on expansion plans and strategies to reduce ammonia output, including use of anaerobic digestion (AD) or incinerators.

The Board welcomed and commended the team in relation to EPPS as this is now included in the HM Treasury Green Book. Work continues with DAERA on the Northern Ireland EPPS.

The Board was made aware that we intend to respond to the Draft Statutory Nature Report Strategy within DAERA and the Government's National Planning Policy Framework consultation.

It was noted that Helen Venn and Neil Emmott attended the EU Environmental Cooperation Forum under Article 295 of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement in Brussels.

A response was submitted to the water white paper, which is closely tied to our Water Framework Directive investigation.

This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

Preliminary results from the staff survey have been received, indicating a strong and positive response overall. These results will be presented in full at a future Board meeting.

The role of Board Critical Friend, as set out in Annex D, was noted to be very helpful by Board members. It was suggested that, using this guidance, the role should be considered at the earliest opportunity in a project or investigation timeline to ensure its full benefit. **Action** Head of Business Strategy and Planning to consider Board comments to finalise the documentation.

26.10 Waste Inspections Report

The Board discussed the approach to the Waste Inspections Report, noting the intention for the report to present factual evidence on the implementation of these regimes. It was agreed that the evidence within the report would speak for itself.

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The Board noted that this report differs in style from previous reports, in that it presents raw data rather than focusing on legal analysis, resulting in a more direct document.

It was proposed that visual elements be included in the report where appropriate to provide context and assist reader engagement with the findings. The Communications team confirmed that the report will be used as a source of factual evidence and are developing an infographic to illustrate the 97% figure cited in the report.

The Board agreed to approve the draft report at Annex A and to agree to delegate authority to the Chair and Chief Executive to approve any non-material amendments to the report that arise from the fact-checking and publication process.

26.11 Budget and Business Plan

The Board considered a draft budget. It was noted that a flat cash settlement has resulted in a real-terms reduction in funding, due to increases in both pay and non-pay costs.

The Board noted the draft budget has a contingency of £117,000 to cover uncertainties including year-end close-down. The accuracy of financial forecasting has improved, providing greater confidence in budget management going forward. For example, in response to overspend risks, certain programmes of work have been halted during the year.

Strategic actions are required to maintain financial stability in the medium term. The financial risk is considered current rather than future, with the business-as-usual (BAU) budget accounting for 73% of the non-pay allocation, consistent with the 2025/26 period.

The Board discussed key risks, including the potential for pay to fluctuate around the assumed 3.5% increase, and the possibility of inflation varying, which could drive up non-pay costs. Inflation costs will be monitored closely, particularly considering the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, which could have significant implications.

Opportunities were identified for cost savings, such as the benefits and efficiency gains from the improving the OEP programme which has not yet factored into the budget. It was noted that cost reductions could also come from reducing our bonus pot, referencing Defra's recent reduction by 0.5% - no consideration has as yet been given to this.

The Board considered the proposed work programme, which had been designed in light of the steers the Board gave in November. We remain focused on nutrient management in Northern Ireland and in England have designed a programme which centres on restoring nature, and the associated apex targets government has in relation to species abundance and 30x30 and reform initiatives in England.

It was confirmed that the business plan allows for reactive measures, ensuring flexibility in response to emerging issues.

The Board noted the draft budget and business plan. It noted that the Executive will consider further adjustments (including in light of the contingency) and that it will be implemented, when agreed by the Chief Executive. The final budget and business plan will be considered by the Board after DAERA's funding is confirmed

26.12 P11 Finance Report

A brief overview of the P11 finance position was provided to the Board. It was confirmed that the year-to-date underspend had increased to £33,000 at the end of February compared to £23,000 at the end of January.

26.13 Any Other Business

Julie Hill expressed her personal thanks to Dame Glenys for her significant contribution during her time at the OEP.