



Minutes

Meeting of the Board

Wednesday 29 January 2025 10am

MS Teams

Members

Malcolm Beatty OBE	Board Member
Julie Hill MBE	Board Member
Professor Dan Laffoley	Board Member
Dr Paul Leinster CBE	Board Member
Professor Richard Macrory CBE	Board Member
Natalie Prosser	Chief Executive
Dame Glenys Stacey	Chair
Helen Venn	Chief Regulatory Officer

OEP Attendees

Peter Ashford	General Counsel
REDACTED	Principal Analyst
REDACTED	Principal Complaints and Investigations Manager
Mike Fox	Head of Communications and Strategic Relations
Nic Edwards	Head of Intelligence
Helena Gauterin	Head of Environmental Law
Richard Greenhous	Chief of Staff
REDACTED	Team Leader, Scrutiny and Advice
REDACTED	Principal Analyst
Andy Lester	Head of Business Strategy and Planning
Angel Lai	Head of Finance and Corporate Services
Professor Robbie McDonald	Chief Insights Officer
REDACTED	Board Secretary and Private Office Manager
Ellie Strike	Head of Monitoring Environmental Governance

Observers

David Lambert	Boardroom Apprentice
Jo Braine	Senior Policy Advisor, DCMS

Guests

Alan Lovell	Chair, Environment Agency (item 25.5)
Tony Juniper	Chair, Natural England (item 25.5)

25.1 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

There were no apologies for absence. There were no new declarations of interest.

25.2 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the 27 November and 3 December were AGREED.

The matters arising report was noted.

25.3 Report of the Chief Executive

The report was presented to the Board and the strategic objectives were discussed.

The EIP publication and event had been a key focus of the organisation and had both gone well. The comms team are continuing to work on stakeholder engagement plans to keep the report in discussions. It was noted that the EIP briefings were warmly welcomed by the EAC Chair and that Minister Creagh had discussed the report in detail with Dame Glenys.

The Board were made aware that there had been an issue with DAERA in relation to the Protected Sites Northern Ireland report. Discussions continue to resolve the delay and to also learn from this with regards to how we work with DAERA going forward.

It was noted that the EPPS report is on track to be published in February. The Board were reminded that the Pickering intervention took place on the 14 and 15 January.

The Board were made aware of research being undertaken surrounding stakeholder perceptions. It was confirmed that surveys will be sent to stakeholders and interviews will take place with a smaller number of stakeholders. The result of this survey will be presented back to the Board at a future meeting.

It was confirmed that the HR systems have now successfully been moved from iTrent to CGI. There were a few minor issues to resolve.

Cooperation with both Defra and DAERA was discussed. It was noted that cooperation with Defra is still complex, and we would like to stake stock of this at the next Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting. ACTION Chair of the ARAC Committee.

25.4 P9 Finance Report

The finance position was presented to the Board. It was noted that the position remains subject to change, but is becoming more stable thanks to the work being carried out to mitigate.

The forecast underspend is reduced to £119,000 from £300,000 in light of the planned additions to our delivery plans, as discussed with the Board at its previous meeting. A number of further potential steps are in place which can be utilised if needed. These include an expansion of work on our CMS system and purchasing some additional laptops and iPhones, as leases on equipment come to an end. The Board requested that we ensure there is a robust plan in place to ensure we don't end the year with an overspend instead.

The Board discussed the absence figures reported in the report and noted that there is a belief that staff sickness is being underreported. The Board considered the significance of this and the ways in which sickness reporting could be encouraged.

It was confirmed that the budget for the 2025/26 financial year will be presented at the March Board meeting. The Board were made aware that it is expected that the headcount cap is to be removed next year which will allow us the ability to manage the people resource more freely.

The Board agreed with the recommendations to give permission to spend on the items detailed on slide 26 of the report following prior to 2025-26 budget delegation confirmation from Defra & DAERA to ensure business continuity and to avoid delay and underspend at the end of the financial year 2025-26.

25.5 Stakeholder Discussion: Development and Nature Recovery

Alan Lovell and Tony Juniper joined the Board to give their perspectives on prospective reforms to planning legislation and the planning regime (so far as is known), in the context of the government's stated ambitions for the environment.

25.6 Proposed Planning Reform

The Board discussed the Planning Reform and agreed that the impact of the reforms proposed will vary dependent on the detail as it becomes clearer.

25.7 Any other Business

There was no other business.