Paper 25.56

Minutes

Meeting of the Board
Wednesday 8 October 2025
MS Teams

Members

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

OEP Attendees

Peter Ashford	General Counsel
REDACTED	Principal Analyst (item 25.52)
REDACTED	Principal Complaints and Investigations Manager (item 25.51)
Mike Fox	Head of Communications and Strategic Relations
Angel Lai	Head of Finance and Corporate Services
Andy Lester	Head of Business Strategy and Planning
Professor Cathy Maguire	Head of Assessments (item 25.52)
Professor Robbie McDonald	Chief Insights Officer
REDACTED	Board Secretary and Private Office Manager
Kate Tandy	Head of Litigation and Casework (item 25.51)
REDACTED	Lawyer (item 25.51)
Helen Venn	Chief Regulatory Officer

Observers

David Lambert	Boardroom Apprentice

25.48 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Natalie Prosser.

There were no new declarations of interest.

25.49 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes from the 16 July and 27 August meetings were agreed.

The matters arising were noted.

25.50 Report of the Chief Executive

The report was presented by Richard Greenhous, in the CEO’s absence.

Emma Reynolds was appointed the Secretary of State for Defra on 5 September 2025 and the initial interactions with her were noted to the Board.

The Board was updated on the work being carried out as a result of the recently completed culture review. It was confirmed that the Executive is considering the findings of the review and will develop an action plan. The Board asked that it was updated on the implementation of the review once appropriate. **ACTION** Chief of Staff.

It is understood that EIP25 may be further delayed due to the new Secretary of State reviewing the document. It was confirmed that our EIP progress report would remain on track for publication in January.

The Board was made aware of the developments with regards to our research strategy. The Board encouraged members of the Executive to explore the breadth of opportunity to take advantage of research undertaken by others including through research councils, or within the government’s Chief Scientist network **ACTION** Chief Insights Officer.

The Board was provided with an update of our engagement within Northern Ireland. This included a meeting between Dame Glenys and Minister Muir in relation to the Nutrient Action Programme. Minister Muir confirmed that a proposal for practical implementation at farm level is expected once the working group has reported (February 2026) and following the necessary subsequent consultation. It was also confirmed that the independent panel on environmental governance would submit its final report to Minister Muir imminently.

Defra has announced reforms of certain environmental laws relevant to diffuse nutrient pollution from agriculture. We have therefore paused the project scheduled in the business plan to gather evidence to produce a report on this topic. We will be ready to give advice on any proposed reforms.

There continues to be rumoured proposals for amendment of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill in relation to duties in respect of national parks and national landscapes. We will continue to monitor the situation and will assess the impact of any proposed amendments in relation to environmental protections and for prospects for environmental improvement before deciding what, if any, further assistance to government and Parliament the OEP may offer.

The Corry review continues to be considered in terms of Defra’s implementation of its recommendations and we hope to engage with Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency imminently. It is known to be a priority of the Secretary of State; we therefore want to ensure that we can reflect where our work aligns with this.

The latest financial position was confirmed. It was noted that due to the fine margins being managed, the risk of both under and overspend continues to be managed very tightly.

The budget allocation board had been held. Our resourcing may be questioned further by the Secretary of State, but we understand the likeliest outcome for 2026/27 to 2028/29 is a flat cash funding settlement from Defra. There is much more uncertainty in relation to funding from DAERA.

The Board discussed our ongoing use of CoPilot and emerging evidence of the impact on staff capabilities where there is a dependency on the use of AI in other organisations. Generally, it is accepted that AI has its benefits to the OEP and is being managed with our AI policy, but that this will be continually reviewed.

It was noted that the advert for the OEP chair position is still not published but would hopefully be shortly. The Board raised the potential issue for ARAC with all committee members' terms ending at the same point. **ACTION** Chair to consider how to mitigate by January.

25.51 Proposed closure of investigation and production of report regarding the Statutory Guidance for Farming Rules for Water

This section has been redacted as it relates to information recorded for the purposes of OEP's functions relating to investigations and enforcement.

25.52 EIP progress reports – Northern Ireland scope and England main findings

The Board was reminded of the differences in scope and substance between the Northern Ireland and England EIPs. It noted that the outcome indicator framework in Northern Ireland has been developed as a monitoring framework for the EIP, unlike in England. This therefore directly supports our assessment, though it is judged necessary to supplement it with a broader range of indicators.

The Board commented on the proposed scope of the Northern Ireland progress report in this light. It noted the benefit from clearly distinguishing in our assessment between binding and non-binding environmental targets, and ensuring the assessment covers all binding targets. It noted that the progress assessment will be integrated with the wider Northern Ireland work programme, drawing from it and supplementing it as appropriate.

The Board considered the implication of any delay to DAERA's preparation of its first annual progress report. The Board noted the audience for our progress report includes officials, Assembly members and ministers.

The Board endorsed the view that the OEP should ideally publish something before the Assembly's summer recess in 2026, even in the event DAERA's annual progress report is delayed, meaning our statutory progress report may also need to follow at a later time. It noted that decisions on the nature and timing of our statutory and any other publication will need to be made early in 2026. It welcomed the consideration being given to engagement in relation to the report.

The Board noted that the England report is on track for completion to be considered by the Board in draft form in November. It noted that the timing of publication of the revised

EIP and the timetable of our statutory reporting function mean that any revised EIP cannot be taken into account within the assessment. A supplementary product is proposed to consider the revision against the attributes of a lawful and effective EIP and our recommendations soon after its publication.

The Board queried the assurance and review processes in relation to the report, and how any feedback is visible to the Board for its own review. The Board was assured that key comments and suggested changes could be summarised for the Board as the review process is carefully logged so further detail can be made available if needed.

25.53 Board Effectiveness Review

The Board was invited to provide feedback on the action plan and the results of the review.

The induction process for new Board members was discussed, with recognition that clearly defined progress expectations could facilitate their development. It was agreed that an induction progress review should be scheduled for new members between three and six months after joining the organisation. **ACTION** Board Secretary and Private Office Manager.

It was confirmed that both the paper and action plan had been endorsed by each of the Executives as an accurate representation of their perspectives on the Board's effectiveness. They also considered the proposed actions to be both practical and achievable within the stated timeframes. The Board valued the Executive's insights regarding their periodic Board membership, confirming this arrangement is beneficial and supports professional development.

The Board requested the organisation explore presenting the effectiveness trends in a visual format to support ongoing monitoring in future.

The Board agreed the action plan.

25.54 Any other business

There was no other business.