

Meeting: Wednesday, 27 November 2024 at 10:00am

MINUTES

Members:	<p>Gareth Johnston (GJ)</p> <p>Alex Gordon (AG)</p> <p>Claire Archbold (CA)</p> <p>Karen Pearson (KP)</p> <p>Ronan Murtagh (RM)</p> <p>Gary Fair (GF)</p> <p>Jo Aston (JA)</p> <p>Claire Keatinge (CK)</p>	<p>Deputy Secretary, Good Relations and Inclusion Group, The Chair</p> <p>First Legislative Counsel</p> <p>Deputy Secretary, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Group</p> <p>Deputy Secretary, Covid Strategy & Contingency Planning Group</p> <p>Director of Finance</p> <p>Director of Corporate Services</p> <p>Non-Executive Member (NEM)</p> <p>Non-Executive Member (NEM)</p>
Apologies:	<p>David Malcolm (DM)</p> <p>Tom Reid (TR)</p> <p>Jayne Brady (JB)</p>	<p>Interim Permanent Secretary, Accounting Officer</p> <p>Deputy Secretary Intergovernmental & International Relations</p> <p>Head of Civil Service</p>
In Attendance:	<p>Marcella Phillips (MP)</p>	<p>Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR</p>
Secretariat:	<p>Nicole Gibson (NG)</p>	<p>Office of the Permanent Secretary</p>

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome	
	<p>The meeting commenced with GJ welcoming Board members. A brief overview of the 2025/26 Budget was provided, outlining its starting point as reflected in the October Monitoring outcome.</p> <p>Additionally, an update was shared on key Departmental matters, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TEO reconfiguration which proposes a reduction to Grade 3s. • The Delivery Unit whose work is to focus on the 8 priorities detailed in the Programme for Government (PfG). • Consideration of how people issues will be addressed moving forward, including complement for the year ahead. • The People Strategy. • Grade 6 & Grade 7 competitions which are to be launched internally in the coming weeks. <p>A discussion took place regarding the work of the Delivery Unit and the standing down of the People Development Sub Committee. CK requested assurances in relation to the consideration being given to a new People Group/Committee and what the Terms of Reference (ToR) will look like. GJ agreed to bring a draft ToR to the next Departmental Board meeting in January 2025 having discussed these with CK.</p>	GJ
1(a)	Declarations of Interest	
	No interests relating to the agenda were declared.	
1 (b)	Escalation of Health & Safety/Whistleblowing Concerns to the Board	
	No concerns over and above those already being managed through existing governance processes were escalated to Board level at this time.	
2 (a)	Minutes of the Previous Meeting	
	Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2024 and the Departmental Board Workshop held on 30 October 2024 were agreed.	
2 (b)	Matters Arising from Previous Board Meetings	
	There were 8 action points. 5 have now been completed and 3 are pending.	
ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION		
3	Business Plan Progress Update Q2	
	<p>The Board were asked to discuss the overview of progress of the Business Plan and the update provided against each of the 24 outcomes.</p> <p>A query was raised regarding the timetable for next year's Business Plan and</p>	

	<p>assurances were provided that the team were working towards delivering against the timeline previously shared with the Board. GF agreed to share a draft with the Board well in advance of the March Board meeting.</p> <p>The Board members reviewed and discussed the RAG status of the 24 outcomes. CK queried the number of areas with a “green” status, seeking assurances on how that was achieved. GF agreed to include further information (1-pagers) for anything with “amber” or “red” statuses in future.</p> <p>CA highlighted that whilst the EVAWG team are delivering, they are doing so in the context of severe staffing constraints.</p>	GF
4.	Finance Report	
	<p>RM took the paper as read, which provided an update on the October Monitoring outcome, the 2024-25 Financial Position, January Monitoring and an update on instances of retrospective spend.</p> <p>October Monitoring allocations have now been notified to business areas, setting out the revised budget for 2024-25 financial year. The revised budget position shows a non-earmarked DEL Resource reduction of £3.272m, an earmarked Resource DEL increase of £6.81m, an increase in Capital DEL of £1.342 and an AME reduction of £93.34m.</p> <p>The forecast outturn financial position for TEO shows a forecast non-earmarked DEL Resource easement of £0.8m. This excludes the risk of a non-earmarked pressure of £0.5m in respect of the new Delivery Unit. The Department is also forecasting a total Earmarked DEL Resource pressure of £1.5m and a total Capital DEL pressure of £0.1m.</p> <p>RM highlighted the importance of carefully reassessing the requirement at January monitoring, which was commissioned on 26 November 2024.</p> <p>CK praised the clear and concise Finance Report and there was some discussion around Victims’ Payments and the process for easements and bidding. RM agreed to enquire about Construction & Procurement Delivery requirements relating to Victims’ Payments.</p>	RM
5.	HR Report	
	<p>MP took the paper as read, and the Board was asked to note the HR Information provided; the standing down of the People Development Sub Committee; and further information on the workforce & vacancy position, sickness absence & employee relations casework, learning & development, analysis of TEO sickness absence, and the Financial Year Absence Report 2023/24.</p> <p>MP advised that the Grade 7 internal competition will launch on 2 December and the Grade 6 competition at the end of January 2025, both of which will be open to all NICS staff. Board members were requested to encourage G5s to volunteer for</p>	

	<p>interview panels and GJ agreed to reiterate this at the Staff Webinar.</p> <p>A concern was raised about the need for Staff Officer and Deputy Principal competitions to fill the gaps created by those moving into the Grade 6 & Grade 7 posts. MP stated that it would be subject to budget availability and agreed to discuss the matter with DM.</p> <p>JA raised concerns around the number of Performance Reviews that have not yet been started. GJ agreed to flag the matter at the next Staff Webinar and MP will issue a spreadsheet to Grade 3s for updating in relation to In-year Reviews.</p>	<p>GJ</p> <p>MP</p> <p>GJ MP</p>
6.	ARAC	
	<p>RM advised of a new ARAC member, Heather Cousins, who recently joined the Committee. An update on retrospective approvals, along with the Financial Transactions Capital update as outlined in the Finance paper, was also provided.</p> <p>JA gave an overview of the paper which summarised the key issues from the ARAC November meeting as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TEO Quarterly Assurance Statement - JA advised that the new format was welcomed by the ARAC. • Corporate Risk Register and performance against Business Plan, Risk and Assurance Mapping – the new draft Corporate Risk Register is to be presented at the next ARAC meeting in February 2025. • Update on Business Cases – Departmental Board members are to be updated on the Community Relations Council (CRC) and Maze Long Kesh (MLK) business cases. • Victims Payment Scheme update. • NIAO - RTTCWG and Audit of ALBs. • Internal Audit. • Internal Audit – External Quality Assessments. 	GJ
7.	ALB Director Assurance Reports Qtr 2	
	<p>GJ acknowledged the paper without further discussion and advised that a meeting had been held with the CRC Chair and the Audit Committee to address a pensions issue. It was agreed during the meeting to seek external assistance. GJ then outlined the necessary steps and timeline for CRC to address the pensions matter by the end of the financial year.</p> <p>JA stated that the ARAC would need to call the CRC Chair to a meeting if significant progress is not achieved. She requested an update on the pensions issue by the end of January 2025.</p> <p>The non-executive Board members raised a query regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECNI and their obligations - GJ updated following recent meetings held with ECNI. • New Chair for Victims and Survivors Service and SIB. • Strategic Investment Board's new CEO. • The Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation's risks. 	GJ
8.	ALB Business Plans	

	<p>GJ presented the paper which was seeking Board agreement on a streamlined way of dealing with ALB business plans which currently go to the Board and to Ministers for approval.</p> <p>The only ALB which has a legislative requirement to seek Ministerial approval of business plans, is the Commission for Victims and Survivors. The recommendation for all other TEO ALBs is that sponsor branches will be responsible for engaging with the relevant ALBs on their business plans, so that matters should only be escalated to the Departmental Board where there are significant concerns. CK and JA both raised a concern about the level of responsibility that this would put on sponsor branches and suggested that they be shared with the Senior Management Team. A section is to be added to the report to confirm that the business plan has been reviewed and flagging any issues. GF noted that G5s would be signing off on ALB business plans in any case, albeit there may be a need for some training among sponsor teams. The Board agreed the recommendations in this paper.</p> <p>GJ agreed to send a submission to Ministers detailing the proposed changes.</p>	GJ
9.	Forward Planner 2025	
	The Board members approved the proposed Forward Planner for 2025, incorporating the flexibility to adjust as business needs evolve over the year.	
10.	FLC update on Legislative Programme and OLC/SPO Corporate Issues	
	AG updated on the number of Bills processed during 2024, highlighting the process involved and the importance of not overpromising on to the timescales for completion. An overview of the Office of Legislative Counsel was given, detailing the staffing and recruitment proposals. Following a recent Grade 5 competition, interviews will take place on week commencing 2 December 2024, with the aim of filling all 3 vacancies.	
11.	Risk Register Update	
	<p>GF gave an oral update on the work on risk which is progressing well, with general agreement around risk appetite.</p> <p>A new spreadsheet is being developed to incorporate a drop-down menu for the RAG status and is being tested across Corporate Services before being issued to Grade 5s for completion.</p> <p>It is hoped that a draft Corporate Risk Register will be brought to the Departmental Board in January, and a more or less final version to the ARAC in February 2025.</p>	GF
	The meeting ended at 12.25 pm.	
	Next Meeting: 29 January 2025 at 10am in Executive Room, Stormont Castle	

