

Meeting: Wednesday, 23 February 2022 at 10.00 am

MINUTES

Members:	Denis McMahon Alex Gordon Karen Pearson Tom Reid Gareth Johnston Chris Stewart Tara Kennedy Denis Power	Permanent Secretary, TEO First Legislative Counsel Deputy Secretary, Covid Strategy & Contingency Planning Group Deputy Secretary, International Relations & EU Exit Deputy Secretary, Good Relations and Inclusion Group (Acting) Deputy Secretary, Executive Support Director of Finance (Acting) Non-Executive Member (NEM)
Apologies:	Claire Archbold	Deputy Secretary, Ending Violence Against Woman and Girls Group
In Attendance:	Marcella Phillips	Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR
Secretariat:	Patricia McIntyre Lisa Murray	Head, Office of the Permanent Secretary Office of the Permanent Secretary

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome	
	Denis McMahon welcomed all to the meeting and opened the meeting by providing members with an overview of the current political situation and the implications that this would have for The Executive Office.	
1(i)	Declaration of Interest	
	No interests relating to the agenda were declared.	

2(a)	Minutes of the Previous Meeting	
	<p>Marcella advised that she would speak to the secretariat after the meeting on a minor amendment relating to HR terminology in para 2, but content with the minutes per se. All other Board members advised that they were content and the Minutes were agreed.</p>	
2(b)	Matters Arising from Previous Board Meetings	
	<p>All previous action points were either completed or on target with the following exceptions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. AP6 from the January 2022 - Submission on CVS/VSS check risks be prepared and issued to Ministers to update of the current position – target had been missed. 2. AP7 from the January 2022 - Business Continuity planning be added to the agenda of a Senior Management Team Meeting – it was agreed that this Action Point would be recorded as completed as following discussion at Senior Management Team Meeting on 23 February, a new format had been agreed and this AP would be taken forward through that business. 3. AP1 from June 2021 - G3s to ensure completion of outstanding IYRs and EOYRs – target unlikely to be met. Denis stressed the importance of each Grade 3 to ensure that End Year Reviews within their Directorates were brought up to date immediately as he viewed this as a Performance issue. <p>Denis Power advised that he would like to bring forward an Action Point to discuss the Board effectiveness review to the March Board, but on consideration of the range of other priorities that were currently being addressed, he was of the view that it may not be the right time.</p> <p>Secretary provided an update on the recruitment of two NEM's and advised that he would schedule a 1-1 meeting with Denis Power to update him and discuss the Board Effectiveness review. This was agreed.</p>	Office of the Permanent Secretary
ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION		
3	Finance Report	
	<p>Tara Kennedy provided an overview of the Finance Report and advised on the latest assessment of financial position for TEO as at 31 January 2022.</p> <p>Tara highlighted that there were underspends within both ring fenced and non-ring fenced funding. With the most notable underspend in non-ring fenced funding being salaries due to vacant posts not being filled as previously planned.</p>	

5	New Ways of Working	
	<p>Tara Kennedy introduced the paper to provide the Board members with an overview of the New Ways of Working Plans following the pandemic and to seek Board Members approval of the approach and recommendations.</p> <p>A Hybrid return to work policy had been launched by HOCS on 17 December 2021. The outworking's of the policy had been put on hold while further advice was sought relating to the guidance since issued from the NI Executive and Public Health Agency on working from home/ return to work. Once a return to the office is advised the plan would be to relaunch the policy.</p> <p>The paper has several recommendations listed in Annexes 1, 2 and 3 of the paper. The Board members confirmed that they were content to endorse all recommendations.</p> <p>Karen advised on the approach agreed at the Task Force meeting the previous day which was to look at how the hybrid working policy would be implemented across NICS and to ensure consistency. Karen advised that she would be updating Permanent Secretary Stock take on progress at Friday's Board.</p> <p>Secretary thanked Tara and her team for the work that had gone into the implementation of the policy proposals and advised that clear and consistent communication would be a key consideration. It was also noted that two engagement events were being taken forward by Gary Dempster relating to Castle Buildings Office accommodation and it would be essential that that the plans for the New Ways of Working would also be addressed at this time.</p>	Tara Kennedy
6	People Survey Results	
	<p>Tara presented the paper which outlined the TEO 2021 NICS People Survey results.</p> <p>She advised that the survey was carried out in November 2021 and that the survey had returned to using the standard questions normally used each year, noting that the 2020 survey had been shorter and related specifically to the pandemic, therefore direct comparisons for 2021 should be made with the 2019 survey.</p> <p>A discussion was held on the key points of the survey, with notably TEO's response rate being 65%, making TEO the second highest respondent and the TEO Employee Engagement Index figure has increased by 1% to the highest figure every of 64%, which is above the NICS average of 57% and the highest in the NICS.</p>	

	<p>Denis Power thanked Tara for the paper and commended the Department, all staff and management on a tremendous result, particularly considering the backdrop of the last two years.</p> <p>Secretary echoed Denis' sentiment and advised that it was a very impressive achievement for all the people within TEO and noted that this increase in the Employee Engagement score had been achieved during the midst of a pandemic, with high numbers of vacancies and a huge cultural change underway, which was testament to the caliber of the people involved. Secretary noted that the scores for Learning and Development caused some concern, but these views were to be welcomed and as something that the Department could readily address.</p> <p>Alex Gordon advised that he found the low scores for L&D encouraging as it showed that the people who work here are interested in becoming better at the work that they do so they could improve the work of the Department.</p>	
7	<p>Resourcing of TEO IT Unit</p>	
	<p>Gareth Johnston introduced the paper and provided a brief background on the decision to create a central IT Unit in TEO.</p> <p>The previous IT function within TEO existed at an operational level, however following a BCS review it was recommended that TEO establish its own central IT Unit with an enhanced strategic capability.</p> <p>At a recent meeting with DoF Shared Services colleagues, it was noted that NICS HR have no supply at the ICT level grades to meet TEO required need with no prospect of supply anytime soon. A decision was taken to outsource an ICT 7 Level employee as a temporary measure from a DoF contract held with Version 1 and to recruit some temporary admin staff from Premiere People to carry out the day to day admin functions.</p> <p>Karen advised that she had recently attended a meeting where DoF colleagues had delivered a presentation on cyber security and it fed into the work she was doing on resilience.</p> <p>Secretary advised that he had raised his concerns regarding the risk due to lack of strategic IT direction and advice for TEO and the potential security risks that this would also bring.</p> <p>Following the meeting with DoF colleagues, it had been agreed to provide a presentation to TEO Departmental Board in March on this matter, and DOF IT would work with Gary Dempster in Business Support the meantime regarding security and providing assistance with the establishment of the TEO IT unit.</p>	

	<p>Denis Power agreed with this approach as he had previously shared his concerns on the risks if the situation was allowed to continue without an urgent intervention. It was agreed to support the direction of travel and asked Gareth to provide an update on progress.</p>	<p>Gareth Johnston</p>
8	<p>Development of TEO Business Plan (brought forward from AOB)</p>	
	<p>Secretary brought this agenda item forward as Karen advised that she had to leave the meeting early and he wished to discuss it before she left.</p> <p>Gareth advised that had been working on a template to gather the data for the business plan and that this was under consideration, and stated that the proposed approach was to align the business plan to the draft PfG.</p> <p>Karen agreed that as TEO were the lead Department on PfG that it would be really important to align the business plan to the PfG draft objectives.</p> <p>Alex advised that a central part of PfG was planning for legislation across the NICS and that he was keen to be part of the discussions that Chris Stewart and Neill Jackson were taking forward relating to approach for progressing future legislative programme plans.</p> <p>Chris advised that HOCS steer was that there should be a robust and rationale approach to planning for legislation and there was a need for any legislation put forward to be aligned with PfG outcomes.</p> <p>Secretary advised that the development of a Business plan for TEO was a priority and this required a more detailed conversation. To develop the plan and the key priorities Secretary sought agreement from the Board to dedicate the March Board meeting to a focused two item agenda:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cyber security 2. TEO Business plan <p>Board members were in agreement. Secretary advised that once the initial draft Business Plan was prepared, the Board could then turn their attention to the development of a focused Risk Register, which would be informed by the business plan. This was agreed.</p>	<p>Office of the Permanent Secretary</p>
9	<p>Corporate Governance Framework Annual Update</p>	
	<p>Tara presented the paper which she advised had been reviewed by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on 1 February 2022 and had recommended that it could now be forwarded for Departmental Board for approval.</p>	

	<p>Tara advised that an Annual review is normally carried out on the Corporate Governance Framework. The last review was completed in March 2020, the 2021 review had to be paused due to COVID-19 pressures. Tara highlighted the three key changes in the review and sought Board approval on the draft changes as set out in the revised Corporate Governance Framework.</p> <p>Denis Power confirmed that ARAC Board had reviewed the Framework and commended the work of the Governance team on this and advised that ARAC were content with the review and recommended approval.</p> <p>The Board Members approved the recommendations.</p>	
ITEMS TO NOTE - DISCUSSION BY EXCEPTION ONLY		
10	Health & Safety Update Report	
	<p>Members noted the paper.</p> <p>Denis Power queried the proposed scheduling of the paper and asked if it was required on a monthly basis and suggested that quarterly update should suffice.</p> <p>Secretary stressed the importance of the subject of Health & Safety and visibility of it at Board level, but advised that he would be content for a written update to be presented on a quarterly basis. However so as not to lose sight of the importance of Health & Safety he asked if the Board members would be content if the subject was raised at beginning of each Board and members could highlight if they had any Health & Safety concerns to declare. This was agreed.</p>	Office of the Permanent Secretary
11(a)	ARAC Update - Whistleblowing Register	
	Members noted the paper.	
11(b)	ARAC Update – Minutes from ARAC 8 November	
	<p>Members noted the paper.</p> <p>Denis Power thanked the Governance team for preparing the two ARAC papers for the Departmental Board and he provided a verbal update on the ARAC Board meeting held on 1 February 2022.</p>	
12	Executive’s Legislative Programme Report	
	<p>Members noted the paper.</p> <p>Alex Gordon advised that a paper would be brought forward at the end of the mandate offering a look back setting out plans for the next mandate.</p>	

CLOSING ITEMS		
13	Forward Look Agenda	
	It was noted that the current Forward Look agenda would require revision to take account of the two item agenda for March as discussed at Paragraph 8. Any papers that need to be brought will move to discussion by exception to facilitate the two item agenda.	
	Any Other Business	
	None discussed.	
	Close	
	The meeting ended at 11.45am.	
	Next Meeting: 30 March 2022, at 10am via Webex	