**DAERA Minutes/Notes of Equality & Diversity Steering Group (EDSG)**

**Date & time: 10 February 2021 2.30pm**

**Location: WebEx**

**In attendance:**

Denis McMahon Permanent Secretary (Chair)

Robert Huey Chief Veterinary Officer, Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group (VSAHG)

Brian Doherty Deputy Secretary, Central Services & Contingency Planning (CSCPG)

Norman Fulton Deputy Secretary, Food & Farming Group (FFG)

David Small Deputy Secretary, Environment, Marine & Fisheries Group (EMFG)

Tracey Teague Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency

John Joe O’Boyle Chief Executive Forest Service (FS)

Martin McKendry Director of CAFRE

Pauline Keegan Director of Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Division (SEED)

Colin Campbell Head of Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Branch (SEED)

Sean McGrade Director, Corporate Services Division

**Apologies:**

Fiona McCandless Deputy Secretary, Rural Affairs, Forest Service & Estates Management Group (RAFSETG)

Colm Morgan NI Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)

Brian McGeehan NI Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)

**Minutes:**

Russell McCurry Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Branch (SEED)

**Summary of Meeting:**

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| **Item** | **Description** | **Action Owner (where appropriate)** |
|  | **Welcome** |  |
|  | Denis McMahon welcomed all members and noted the apologies from Fiona McCandless, Colm Morgan and Brian McGeehan.  He noted that it was good to hold another meeting of the EDSG given that the October 2020 meeting had to be cancelled. |  |
| **1.0** | **Action Points from EDSG meeting held on 3 March 2020** |  |
|  | Most of the actions have been closed off and the few remaining will be taken forward by the EDWG members. | **AP1 Pauline and the EDWG members to close off the remaining actions from the EDSG list.** |
| **2.0** | **DAERA Committee Effectiveness Review – EDSG Update /Summary** |  |
|  | A short paper was shared with the EDSG members with everyone agreeing that the Group was still necessary and that it should continue to meet twice per year. Communication and publishing the work of the Group, as appropriate, was important and it was decided that EDWG would take this forward.  In relation to the visibility issue, it was important to create awareness of what was happening with all the EDSG related work. This should also incorporate the NICS Gender Champion’s role which is held by Fiona McCandless.  It was agreed that Pauline and Fiona should attend a future ‘News and Views’ event to highlight the key messages for staff.  Denis briefly mentioned the Employee Engagement Index Score and that recognition of the Equality and Diversity items in the survey are important parts for staff. | **AP2 Pauline to discuss with Fiona and both to prepare for a ‘News and Views’ event at a suitable date in the near future.** |
| **3.0** | **Equality and Diversity Working Group Update** |  |
|  | Pauline informed the members that the EDWG met in December 2020 and the team want to remain fully involved with the work of the Group and to maintain the link with EDSG.  Various issues were discussed at the EDWG, such as the Disability Action Plan and Sexual Awareness issues. EDWG have asked if Fiona McCandless (NICS Gender Champion) and Ronnie Armour (NICS Disability Champion) would come and talk to the members at a date convenient to them all.  Tracey asked if any work was being done on loneliness and it was noted that some work has already but done and that it forms a part of a broader package of activities which will be developed relating to loneliness and wellbeing generally. Tracey also suggested that evening catch up meetings could be held but noted that work would not be the topic of interest.  Robert drew members’ attention to an equestrian magazine which contained very useful full page articles on wellness and suggested that DAERA could do something similar.  Denis acknowledged the broad impacts for staff and their families and asked that a quick survey on the ‘News and Views’ event should be conducted at the event Fiona and Pauline will be giving their presentation and awareness session (see section 2.0 above). | **AP3 Pauline to consider the wider issues around loneliness and wellbeing as part of the on-going package.**  **AP4 Pauline to arrange for a quick survey for the News and Views event as agreed at AP2 above.** |
| **4.0** | **Equality and Diversity Report/Update** |  |
|  | Colin made reference to the Equality and Diversity report he submitted as part of the papers. He drew attention to the new structure of the team, the Annual Progress Report to the ECNI, screening and data issues, diversity calendar and Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan which is with the Departmental Board.  In relation to screenings and data, Norman pointed out he has returned screening forms to staff who are still using out of date data with some data sources stemming back to 2001. Russell stated that this is drawn to the attention of staff, among other issues on screening forms, and staff are advised to engage with the DAERA statisticians as it is the responsibility of the person drafting the screening document to make the changes where necessary and to use the most up to date data. It was noted that the new equality screening template has a link to the Data Signposting Guide which was produced by NISRA and the ECNI.  It was agreed that as there is a wide range of work currently being taken forward by the team, Denis suggested that we should do a readout of the EDSG meeting and also take a screenshot to help publicise the work of the Group.  Robert Huey left the meeting at this stage due to other commitments. | **AP5 EDSG Secretariat to produce a readout of the EDSG meeting and add the screenshot for publication.** |
| **5.0** | **Champions’ Updates** |  |
|  | **Diversity & Inclusion and Racial Equality Champion:**  Pauline provided an update on diversity, inclusion and racial equality.  She also suggested that the team is considering adding diversity sessions as part of the development groups, such as the G7 group.  Discussions are underway with DfC with a view to recommencing the Evolve programme and it was agreed that diversity items could be added to individual’s PPA/PDP’s.  The team are currently talking to partner groups to take these ideas forward.  It was also noted that the Racial Equality Champions are also considering developing a booklet for race issues (similar to the LGBTQ booklet).  **Children’s Champion:**  Martin McKendry updated members on the work of the Children’s Champion Sub-Group, the work that CAFRE are currently doing, and the action plans for 2020, 2021, and up to March 2022 and how all this work ties in with DE.  It was agreed that the plan should be attached to the EDSG minutes.  He also informed the Group that DAERA are represented on various Boards which relate to and focus on, for example, under 14 year olds, children and young people in policy development and best practice (with Paul Brush (DE) being the lead on this), among other Boards and projects. Tracey suggested that she would get in touch with Martin in relation to the policy development work and her own work with Green Growth and while this would be done outside of the EDSG, it may be useful to the whole department.  Other work also revolves around safeguarding with a significant amount of training being completed. There will be a student engagement activity on 22 February based on the HOPE concept (Health, On-line, Personal, & Exercise).  It was suggested that Martin and Pauline could work together to help with various projects and engagement with the student body.  The Internal Audit review of safeguarding within CAFRE will be issued soon. Brian, the Department’s Safeguarding Officer, noted the expert knowledge within Martin’s team with much work being done quietly in the background.  Norman noted that while the 1,700 young people at CAFRE are not really part of the wider DAERA perspective, Martin and CAFRE take care of them on the behalf of the Department. However, as they have no profile at EDSG level even though there are common themes for everyone. Denis supported the idea of seeking the views of the students.  Denis McMahon left the meeting at this stage due to other commitments and Brian Doherty Chaired the meeting from this stage onwards. | **AP6 Martin to provide the Action Plan to append to the EDSG minutes.**  **AP7 Tracey and Martin to speak off-line to discuss the work around Green Growth and the children and young people in policy development and best practice.**  **AP8 Pauline and Martin to speak off-line to discuss the issues and arrangements in getting the views of the 1,700 students.** |
| **6.0** | **Reports from:**   * **Diversity Champions Network meeting on 28 January;** * **Minister’s meeting with Prof O’Neill on Mental Health; and** * **Sexual Awareness Webinar on 8 February**   **Diversity Calendar** |  |
|  | Pauline provided an update and mentioned that there is a report from NICSHR called, Fair Participation in the NICS, which can be shared with the EDSG members. It was noted that there is a lack of fair participation (women) in the Meat Inspectors Group, and a good gender participation with Agricultural Inspectors.  NICSHR have also produced a new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and they will liaise with DAERA on taking it forward.  Pauline mentioned the meeting between Minister Poots and the Mental Health Champion (Siobhan O’Neill). Rural mental health and suicide were two of the big issues they had discussed. Siobhan is happy to work with officials and young people. It was a positive meeting with both agreeing that they could take further work forward in relation to the rural side of things in particular.  Pauline also updated members on the Sexual Violence Awareness presentation which well over 100 people attended. A broader role for the DAERA Harassment Contact Officers (HCO) to include the very early phases of dealing with sexual violence was discussed and it was agreed that Pauline and Sean should further discuss this proposal as the HCO role is voluntary and report back to the Group. | **AP9 Pauline to provide EDSG Secretariat with the reports for onward submission to the EDSG members.**  **AP10 Martin & Fiona to discuss this and see what areas the Department can work with the Mental Health Champion in going forward.**  **AP11 Pauline & Sean to discuss the HCO role and the sexual violence issue and report back to EDSG.** |
| **7.0** | **AOB** |  |
|  | Pauline informed the Group that we may want to hear from other colleagues about the Social Inclusion Strategies and for them to provide updates as appropriate. Brian suggested that a one page update by each of the four contacts for the social inclusion strategies should be sent by email to the EDSG members, given that the EDSG group only meets twice a year. | **AP12 The contacts for the Social Inclusion Strategies to produce a one-page update for the EDSG members.** |
| **8.0** | **Date of next meeting** |  |
|  | Next meeting – October 2021 |  |