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

**Date & time: 08 March 2023 @9.30am**

**Location: MS Teams**

**In attendance:**

Fiona McCandless Deputy Secretary, Central Services & Contingency Planning Group (CSCPG) (Chair of today’s meeting)

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

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

Tracey Teague EMFG Deputy Secretary

David Reid Deputy Secretary, Rural Affairs, Forest Service & Estates Management Group (RAFSET)

Paul Donnelly Deputy Secretary, Environment, Marine and Fisheries

Martin McKendry Director of CAFRE

Kathryn Clarke Director of Staff Engagement, Equality & Diversity Division (SEED)

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

Brian McGeehan NI Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)

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

**Apologies:**

Katrina Godfrey Chair, Permanent Secretary, DAERA

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

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

Colm Morgan 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)** |
| **1.0** | **Welcome and apologies** |  |
|  | Due to the Permanent Secretary (Katrina Godfrey) not being able to chair the meeting today, Fiona McCandless deputised for her. Fiona welcomed all members to the meeting and noted any further apologies that were received. |  |
| **2.0** | **Review of previous minutes** |  |
|  | The Chair confirmed with members that the minutes from 05 October 2022 had been agreed by correspondence.  A further correction was requested, to note an apology for Colm Morgan. | **Action Point 1**  Equality Secretariat to update the minutes for 05 October 2022 to note an apology from Colm Morgan.  **Completed** |
| **3.0** | **Action Points from EDSG meeting held on 05 October 2022** |  |
|  | All actions points have been completed.  Action Point 2 – a presentation is being finalised for the awareness sessions and dates just need agreed to present this information to key staff.  Action Point 3 – the ECNI attended the February Departmental Board meeting and gave an informative presentation which was followed by a discussion and conversation about equality issues.  Action Point 4 – it was noted that there was a poor response to the social inclusion volunteers with only 4 out of the 9 being filled. The Chair stressed the importance of filling these roles and drew attention to the gender representative role and the current International Women’s Day (IWD).  David Reid volunteered as the disability representative.  Tracey Teague will contact Kathryn Clarke about the mental health role. | **Action Point 2**  Equality Secretariat to update the Representatives table with David Reid as the Disability Representative.  **Completed**  **Action Point 3**  Tracey Teague to send Kathryn Clarke a note about the mental health role.  **Completed** |
| **4.0** | **Equality and Diversity Report/Update** |  |
|  | Colin Campbell’s report formed part of the papers for today’s meeting and had been shared with the group. It also included a paper highlighting the equality screenings completed throughout 2022 by each of the DAERA Groups.  He specifically drew attention to, Sections 1.1 Equality Screening; 2.2 Diversity, Inclusion & Wellbeing, and the arrangements to disseminate and organise such events; and 2.4 DAERA Wellbeing Strategy; in summary, he noted that DfC are the lead with this work, and we engage with them and decide how to take this forward on behalf of the Department.  A short discussion with some questions were asked and Colin gave further detail as to how this work was progressing. It is anticipated that Colin will get responses from the other departments within the next 2-3 months.  Brian McGeehan also asked for the equality duties to be listed for people to be continually aware of them. | **Action Point 4**  Equality Secretariat to list equality duties to the Equality and Diversity Report/Update for members awareness. |
| **5.0** | **Champions’ Updates** |  |
|  | * **Diversity & Inclusion Champion**   Kathryn Clarke informed the members that there were several engagement events and meetings already held for diversity and others are planned. Examples included the following:   * Dyslexia training – 7 March. * Dyscalculia training – 14 March. * International Women’s Day (IWD) – where DAERA was well represented. * Book swap events/chats for IWD. * Virtual fireside chat with the Permanent Secretary (Katrina Godfrey) was to be held today (08 March). * Diversity Wellbeing Calendar has been approved and issued to all DAERA staff via DAERA Digest. * International Job Shadow Day (IJSD). DAERA have provided placements from two business areas (College Services and NIEA River Basin). This took place over several days in November and January. * DAERA representatives attended the NICS Disability Network meeting – 22 February.   It was noted that there is difficulty in getting people to give a view, from an LGBT perspective, about their DAERA customers journey experiences.  The Chair stated that it would be helpful to get all the Champions and Representative roles filled with senior staff. This would help aid all the good work that is currently being done. She also mentioned the sexual abuse policy as well as the IWD event where all grades from DAERA were represented. A huge response of donations to Foyle Women’s Aid was provided by staff at the IWD event with some of this also being committed via on-line facilities.  Martin McKendry mentioned that CAFRE were still considering linking the diversity work and LGBT issues with the students and that he would be keen to link with the Diversity Unit to take this forward.  The Chair also mentioned that there were four networks across the NICS that Martin could pick up from and enquired if CAFRE had a similar structure to that.     * **Children’s Champion**   Martin McKendry provided an update on the work that is on-going with the Action Plan and its contribution to the Children and Young People’s Strategy (CYPS). Further work will continue over the next 4-5 weeks for this current reporting period.  He had three other main points to raise today.   1. **NICCY Statement (17 November)**   Martin highlighted that there were 52 calls across government, many related to the Department, however, there were two main issues for DAERA, Environmental Inequalities and Financial aspects.   1. **Environmental Justice**   Martin has already conferred with Tracey Teague about Green Growth and Climate issues and stated that they are on the road to making this visible and clearer for young people.  He also mentioned that a note about training on the Children’s Rights Impact Assessment is due to come out shortly.  Tracey has also nominated a member of her business area to be a member of the group and to help in taking forward this important work.   1. **Report on Support Services**   Martin gave a summary of the support services that the 2,000 students were accessing. Briefly, 2% were accessing Inspire services, 3% had raised safeguarding issues and 14% were accessing learning support services. It is possible the first two issues are under reported but the figures are all on an upward trajectory. He also reported that access to external counselling has improved from the six weeks it used to take.  A discussion about the issues raised took place with the Chair noting the encouraging developments with the counselling services. Paul Donnelly asked about safeguarding issues and Martin informed the group that some issues are emerging within the CAFRE environment and some being existing issues from home, etc.  Tracey also asked about placement students and if we have a duty there also, to which it was confirmed that we do. There should be a supporting environment within the workplace, and this should be in place for the 70 students across the DAERA students’ network. The Chair requested that Colin Campbell pick this up with the NICS HR to ensure this is taken account of. This would also be something for the DAERA Safeguarding Group to look at as well to ensure the safeguarding issues are in place for the DAERA placement students. | **Action Point 5**  Kathryn Clarke to discuss, off-line, with Martin McKendry as to how this could be taken forward.  **Action Point 6**  Colin Campbell to contact NICS HR and the DAERA Safeguarding Group to ensure safeguarding issues are in place for the DAERA placement students. |
| **6.0** | **AOB**   * **Budgets & EQIAs**   Norman Fulton noted that there are time constraints with these and that we would need to keep a close eye on this work. The Group agreed with this view and the important work that needs completed here.   * **Departmental Board Effectiveness**   The Chair noted that there is work on-going about the effectiveness of the Departmental Board (DB) and they were reviewing all the Board Committees, including EDSG.   * **Other Events being held.**   Brian McGeehan noted that NIPSA were holding an IWD event today for its members (12:30-13:30) which would dovetail with the Fireside Chat at 13:30 today as well.  The Chair thanked Martin McKendry, CAFRE and Neil Waters for all the work and support from CAFRE in organising and holding the NICS IWD event. |  |
| **7.0** | **Date of next meeting** |  |
|  | 10 October 2023 @9.30am |  |