

Minutes of the 126th Natural England Board meeting held on 19 February 2025

Attending

Dr Tony Juniper	Chair
Cynthia Alers	Board Member
Alastair Leake	Board Member
Mark Tufnell	Board Member
Professor Clare Fitzsimmons	Board Member
Peter Unwin	Board Member
Dame Caroline Spelman	Board Member
Professor Mel Austen	Board Member
Professor Lynn Dicks	Board Member

Executive Team

Marian Spain	Chief Executive (and ex-officio Board Member)
Kirsty Carter-Brown	Chief Officer, Business Management
John Holmes	Director, Strategy, (for Oliver Harmar)
Sallie Bailey	Chief Scientist
Alan Law	Chief Officer, Operations

Defra Group

Sally Randall	Director General, Environment, Rural and Marine
Rachel Fraser	Finance Director
Jen Garrett	Human Resources Director
Ilana Conn	Deputy Director, Operational and Local Communications

Guests

Vicky Gaillard	Director, Corporate Governance & Assurance
Matt Heard	Director, Strategy
Mike Cuthbert	Director, Planning & Performance
Alice Appleton	Principal Lawyer, Legal Services
Claudia Chambers	Director, National Operations
Matthew Wood	Senior Officer, Governance (Minutes)

Apologies

Kim Shillinglaw	Board Member
James Scott	Board Member
Navroza Ladha	Chief Officer, Legal, Governance and External Affairs
Oliver Harmar	Chief Officer, Strategy

Item 1 Welcome from the Chair and Declarations of Interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Board, Executive and guests to the 126th Board meeting. Board Members requested the following additions to the Register of Interests.

- Tony Juniper – Environmental Ambassador role for 100th Anniversary Year for Fields in Trust.
- Mel Austen - Trustee of British Ecological society
- Mark Tufnell – Chair and Trustee of Royal Agricultural Society of England
- Lynn Dicks - Trustee of the East Suffolk Trust charity

Item 2 2023-24 Annual Report and Accounts update (ARA)

2.1 Rachel Fraser led an update on progress made with the 2023-24 ARA. The Board was asked to note the paper and to delegate responsibility for final approval of the ARA 2023-24, prior to AO sign-off, to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC).

2.2 Rachel confirmed that there had been no material changes to the accounts since the version the Board had seen on 17 December 2024.

2.3 Rachel then provided an update on minor changes, including issues relating to Corporation Tax and post-balance sheet events.

2.4 Rachel confirmed the outline plan to lay the accounts before the end of the financial year 2024-25.

2.5 The Board were asked to confirm its approval that ARAC would approve signing off the accounts directly to the Accounting Officer and the Board agreed.

Decision:

The ARAC to approve the accounts sign off directly to the Accounting Officer.

Item 3 Minutes and Matters Arising

3.1 The Board approved the minutes of the 125th meeting subject to minor grammatical amendments.

Item 4 Chief Executive's Report

4.1 Marian Spain presented the Chief Executive's report to the Board and provided updates on the following topics:

- **Dartmoor:** Marian advised that the Evidence Review was nearly complete and was currently being finalised by Natural England Science Advisory Committee (NESAC). Marian confirmed that the purpose for publishing the report was that it provided an evidence-based backdrop for future decisions that would then be made on areas such as future Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) consents and conditions.

- **Paulownia:** Marian advised that a submission was going to Ministers which concluded with two options for future handling of Paulownia. The first option would be to continue with the current process with the Forestry Commission providing consents under environmental impact assessment regulations. The second option is that there is a pause to plantings until the Defra team have carried out a full review of Paulownia and whether it is potentially an invasive non-native species. Marian requested the Board approve the organisational view that supported the second option. Sallie Bailey, as Chief Scientist, confirmed that she had reviewed the evidence and supported the pause. The Board agreed to support option two.
- **Beavers:** Marian advised that it was likely that the Government would imminently announce a policy and programme for wild releases and a control mechanism. Marian added that a technical licence had been issued to the National Trust for releases in Little Sea National Nature Reserve in Purbeck, Dorset.
- **High Speed 2 (HS2):** Marian reflected that she had recently met the new Chief Executive, Mark Weil and they had both agreed the relationship between the two organisations was very sound. Marian indicated that NE would sign a continuation of the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) whereby HS2 pays for a dedicated team in NE that works solely on HS2.
- **Hinkley C:** Marian provided context for the Board and explained current issues regarding mitigation and compensation solutions.
- **Government Announcements/Reviews:** Marian provided an update to the Board on the Corry and Hancock Reviews and agreed to keep the Board informed when reviews are published.
- **Planning and Infrastructure Bill (PIB):** The Board were advised that NE is expecting to be named on the face of the Bill and that should NE be asked to take on new powers or duties the Board will wish to scrutinise our preparations and satisfy itself on organisational readiness.
- **Environmental Land Management (ELMs):** Marian explained that there are risks that as higher-level schemes come to an end, they cannot transfer into higher tier due to a lack of capacity. Marian confirmed that the risks have been raised with Defra and options are being considered.
- **Voluntary Exit Scheme:** Marian advised the Board that the scheme had been launched and thanked the People and HR teams for all the work that had been done.

Item 5 Quarter 3 Risk Report

- 5.1 Vicky Gaillard introduced the report. Vicky began by acknowledging there is further work to do on the outstanding action within the Matters Arising report on synthesising our risks and issues into the Quarterly Performance and Chief Operating Officer's reports. Vicky commented that discussions on specific risks would be covered in the later performance report item.

- 5.3 Vicky advised that that overall engagement around risk had improved in Quarter 3 and noted that no new issues had been added to the register over the last quarter, and one issue had been removed.
- 5.4 Vicky asked the Board to note that the operating context had worsened since Quarter 2 and has a worsening trajectory for the organisational sub-risks around agricultural transition that are likely to get worse in the quarters 3 and 4.
- 5.5 Vicky advised that Corporate Risk 7 (Financial Management) was also forecast to worsen by the end of Quarter 4 and a matter listed under Corporate Risk 5 (Digital Security) had been resolved since the report was published, with an updated narrative provided in the report.
- 5.6 In discussion, the Board raised questions regarding specific organisational sub-risks, including the "lack of single voice for nature recovery in the green sector", which was noted to reflect tensions in the sector concerning the non-governmental organisations (NGO) voice, with a number still advocating for site and species protection.
- 5.7 The Board questioned the red status of "workforce capability and skills reporting" and sought clarification on whether this indicated a lack of data or a perceived lack of capability.
- 5.8 The Board discussed how concerns relating to the agriculture transition risk were highlighted when NE engages with Defra and Ministers.
- 5.8 Sally Randall noted she would be talking to Ministers on the impacts for the farming sector and the delivery of the farming improving plan.
- 5.5 Further discussion points included financial management risks, which were reflected in a previous audit. It was noted that hard work had gone into building financial acumen, and that all Chief Officers and Directors were annually required to gain a financial license to operate. It was also noted that forecast bias was still an issue, and Natural England needed to further improve managing income. The Board noted that financial complexity was growing, particularly in relation to income schemes and forecasting accuracy was an issue across the Defra Group.
- 5.6 In conclusion the Board noted the Quarter 3 Risk Report. The Board noted the ongoing work to refresh the corporate risk register for 2025/26 and the plan to integrate risk management improvements into the Risk Framework and reporting processes.
- 5.7 The Board also noted that further work was needed regarding the outstanding action to roll risks and issues into the Chief Operating Officer's report and that a planned workshop with Board members on risk management would contribute to the ongoing development in this area.

Item 6 Quarter 3 Performance Report

- 6.1 Claudia Chambers introduced the Quarter 3 Performance Report to the Board. Claudia began by reflecting that measured against the 2024/25 Action Plan, progress is stable and broadly positive.
- 6.2 Claudia then drew the Board attention to three delivery risks: financial pressures, NE's ability to be flexible and responsive to the government's agenda and challenges around capacity and capability. Claudia also highlighted a new organisational sub risk relating to rules around parts of our budget and the flexibility we have with in-year delivery.
- 6.3 Claudia advised the Board that some of these risks are likely to become more acute as we move into next financial year and beyond.
- 6.4 Claudia then highlighted successes over the last quarter including:
- The release of State of Natural Capital report.
 - We helped 385 species through various projects and initiatives with partners, for example, funding habitat creation for Marsh Fritillary.
 - Our engagement with Local Authorities on green infrastructure including the plans for Greater Nottingham and Portsmouth.
 - The Biodiversity Net Gain Register is operational and working well.
- 6.5 Claudia then turned to the corporate resilience scorecard and advised that our metrics are improving. Customer service is improving, and we are working to improve feedback and align benchmarks with Defra Group.
- 6.6 Claudia gave the following updates on people issues:
- FTE numbers have reduced this year, and strategic assignment has placed staff in new roles. Turnover is decreasing and our FTE numbers have not declined enough to achieve our affordable average FTE and that has contributed to budget pressures.
 - Sickness rates have slightly increased.
 - Mandatory learning rates are low, but most staff do this in Quarter 4 and there will be an internal communications push.
- 6.7 Claudia then highlighted the section of the scorecard that shows our dependence on Defra business partners for delivery and reforms e.g. Digital. Claudia reflected that as our corporate service partners face their own spending review challenges, there could be a cumulative impact for NE and that this would need to be worked through together in partnership.
- 6.8 Claudia concluded by predicting a slight decline in our delivery scorecard at Quarter 4 but advised this may be pessimistic. Claudia then advised that beyond this financial year, NE's delivery outlook as defined by measures of success and KPI look more challenging, partly due to environmental pressures, but also due to the scale and pace of resource reductions and reforms that need to be implemented.

- 6.9 The Board discussed wellbeing and expressed its concern around the data regarding mental health. The Board asked for comparable figures from other Defra Group bodies. Claudia replied that other organisations within the Defra Group have higher instances. Kirsty Carter-Brown commented that the stress reduction working group and stress reduction action plan have now been set up and are absolutely focused on tackling this issue. Kirsty advised that the Staff Pulse Survey would be launched on 21 February 2025, and staff will be asked to provide feedback again on instances of stress so that we can better understand how staff are feeling.
- 6.10 The Board asked for further detail on digital data risks and issues. Claudia explained that there are different metrics relating to digital within the scorecard. Kirsty added that there is an internal metric regarding the digital acumen of staff where we are seeing an improvement and increase in the digital maturity and that there is further information in the report regarding IT projects that have different levels of risk status. The Board questioned Sally Randall on Defra's position regarding funding for digital improvements and whether it was a common picture across Defra Group. Sally reflected that the same challenge is being addressed across the Group and that there are a substantial number of legacy systems that need to be updated and that these are being addressed in a prioritised way.
- 6.11 The Board asked for an update on progress with regards to the cultural aspects of the change programme. Kirsty replied that a session is planned to update the Board on the Critical Reforms programme on 2 April 2025 linked with the launch of the new NE Strategy. Kirsty also advised that staff were being engaged in the Critical Reforms via internal communication pieces.
- 6.12 The Board asked for further details on the progress of the KPIs relating to nature recovery, customer service, staff turnover and the Voluntary Exit Scheme.
- 6.13 Claudia advised that on nature recovery, the metric is made of contributing factors including declaration and notifications, grant schemes, and engagement with owner/occupiers that positive progress was being made.
- 6.13 Claudia advised that on customer service and complaints, NE is currently required to respond within 15 days and that response times have improved.
- 6.14 Kirsty advised that turnover for Q3 had seen a further drop compared to Q2, and to the same time last year, suggesting that it is gradually slowing down. Mirrored across Defra, turnover is highest for those with less than 1 year length of service (23.2%) with career progression and salary given as the most common reasons. Positively, 78% of leavers are recommending NE as an employer
- 6.15 Kirsty provided an update on the latest figures for the VES scheme and advised that the criteria for releasing staff had been designed with the new NE Strategy in mind. Peter Unwin reflected that the People and Remuneration Committee (PremCom) was recently given an update on the scheme and approved the VES criteria.

Item 7 Quarter 3 Finance Report

- 7.1 Rachel Fraser introduced the Quarter 3 Finance Report. The report set out Natural England's summary financial position for Quarter 3 against the 2024/25 Action Plan.
- 7.2 Rachel began the discussion by providing context and outlining the Defra Group position. Sally Randall commented that it is usual to have a 'hockey stick' forecast at this point in the financial year but noted that at this point the Group is experiencing significant capital pressures.
- 7.3 Rachel advised that at P9, NE had forecast for overspends for both capital and resource with a net pressure of £7.9m across both. The main reason is beginning the year with unaffordable pay costs and a mismatch in expenditure and income received. Rachel explained this is largely related to income targets not being met through a combination of a changing macroeconomic context and due to several credit sales, that were due before the end of the financial year not taking place. Rachel also advised that the reason for the capital overspend is the lack of cover for work on the England Coastal Path.
- 7.4 Rachel advised NE has taken the position very seriously and noted that several recommendations have been implemented across the organisation to address spend in Quarter 4.
- 7.5 Rachel advised that NE needs to consider the financial risk around the income schemes particularly around considering impacts when markets changes and advised that NE should consider whether it has the capability to segregate and manage income effectively.
- 7.6 Sally Randall commented that the position is being replicated across the Defra Group. Sally emphasised the seriousness of the situation and said that recommendations around not making new commitments in this period and taking every possible step to avoid additional spend were essential. Sally also emphasised that the importance of ensuring the right structures and systems is in place to manage income.
- 7.7 The Board discussed that these were new risks that required careful management and highlighted Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as a recent example of how the income schemes may develop. The Board agreed that ARAC should look at and evaluate NE's future exposure.
- 7.8 The Board questioned whether further interventions could be made before the end of the financial year and what the implications would be if an overspend remained.
- 7.9 Rachel reflected that deep dives had been done of all the expenditure over the last quarter and several areas have been identified including pausing all uncommitted spend and limiting travel and training budgets.
- 7.10 Rachel advised that there was only a limited amount of budget that could be saved before the end of the year, and the finance team would continue to scrutinise forecasts. Rachel advised that there could potentially be credit sales during this period.

- 7.9 In conclusion, the Board thanked Rachel for gripping the issue and for the quality of the data that had been provided.

Item 8 Quarter 3 Health and Safety (H&S) Report

- 8.1 Claudia Chambers presented the Quarter 3 Report and advised that the discussion would focus on the following areas: proactive work, incidents, investigations and trends, and how the organisation was tackling stress.
- 8.2 Claudia began by reminding the Board that NE has a proactive programme of activities to continuously improve how H&S is addressed. This programme is shaped by an understanding of the challenges teams are facing, our understanding of the culture and to address our highest risk activity. To improve our culture, we have adopted an Environment Agency approach on active monitoring. We have also delivered additional training on risk assessments and how to do investigations.
- 8.3 Claudia advised that on incidents and trends, near miss reporting had increased and accidents have decreased but cautioned that we would want to see a sustained trend on both in terms of our overall incident trends before drawing conclusions.
- 8.4 Claudia explained that work related stress remained the highest reported incident category.
- 8.5 Claudia advised that there had been increased reporting of exposure to vibrations and explained this is due to an improved process for staff to report and is detected through occupational health surveillance.
- 8.6 Claudia highlighted disappointment at the data for the timeliness of undertaking investigations of incidents within 10 days that are currently at approximately 80%. Claudia commented that as an indicator further work needs to be done to encourage staff and managers to improve on adherence to basic practices.
- 8.4 Claudia advised there were two chainsaw incidents in Quarter 3 and reminded the Board that we had an audit of our chainsaw work in recent years. The H&S team has now established a working group in Operations that is working through the lessons from the recent audit and considering NE's approach and that a draft report will be presented to the Operations leadership team in March. The H&S team have also been asked to look back over the last two years of our severe significant incidents and see if there are any trends from each quarter that can be provided as additional management information.
- 8.5 Claudia advised that to tackle work related stress, there has been a focus on providing line managers with the resources and tools to empower them to act. This includes the promotion of a training video training toolkit and by encouraging line managers to do stress risk assessments, with both individuals and teams. Senior Leaders have also been signalling how seriously they take the issue. Claudia advised that there is a risk of an increase in reported stress in Quarter 4 as staff complete the year's delivery programme.
- 8.6 The Board reflected that the Executive were right to take the issue very seriously.

- 8.7 The Board questioned whether an age analysis had been done and whether it was possible that focusing on the issue was generating additional incident reporting. Claudia replied that we do not have any age analysis of stress but there is analysis of incidence by grade there are higher instances of reporting from lower and middle grades. On the question of whether if it is focused more and do we get more incidents generated, Claudia advised that reporting is done across different area and national teams, and there is no benchmark of what is considered appropriate.
- 8.7 Sally Randall commented that similar conversations were being had across the Defra Group and that good, effective line management was the biggest and most successful intervention.
- 8.8 The Board discussed the likelihood of further changes to the operating context and agreed that equipping managers through measures such as the stress reduction programme would be beneficial.
- 8.9 The Board agreed that members would use every available opportunity during site and office visits to engage staff and ask how they were feeling and for feedback on what is and isn't working for them. The Board discussed the likely impacts of staff working from home and commented that being alone can be a cause of stress. The Board agreed that the Property and People Plans should consider where staff are based in future.
- 8.10 The Board concluded by noting the improved profile of health and safety and the great progress that team has made in gathering data and getting staff to culturally shift.

Item 9 Hen Harrier Action Plan

- 9.1 John Holmes presented the update on Natural England's contributions to Defra's Joint Hen Harrier Action Plan, particularly the outcome of the brood management trial. John explained the outline of the choices that were being considered, and what impacts it would have for Natural England's wildlife licensing role.
- 9.2 The Board were asked to:
- Note that the brood management trial has concluded, and the project partnership has been disbanded.
 - Note the implications of that trial for Natural England's licensing role.
 - Agree the scope of a short advice letter to Defra presenting our findings on brood management and update on our progress with other actions.
- 9.3 John began by explaining the historical context behind the Joint Hen Harrier Action plan that was launched in 2016. The plan was created and developed with a range of stakeholders to address the species' long term threatened status and reduce instances of illegal killing. John explained Natural England's role in the northern brood management trial and that this had now concluded, and the steering group has been wound up.

- 9.4 John confirmed that the findings of the trials will be published as a Natural England Evidence Report. This is currently in draft and has been informed by the advice of NESAC and a Scientific Advisory Group convened by our Chief Scientist.
- 9.5 John advised the Board that the results of the trial have been objectively reviewed and concluded that whilst brood management alone would not eliminate the conflict, it could contribute to securing and growing the increased breeding population in the uplands. This means a plausible case could be made by moorland managers for licences for brood management for conservation purposes. Any applicant for a conservation licence would need to fund assessment and assurance.
- 9.6 John explained our delivery partner for the Southern Reintroduction, the International Centre for Birds of Prey, currently holds eleven captive birds of prey with the aim of breeding young for release over a sustained period. These birds are reaching maturity, and should they breed successfully this Spring, our plan would see the chicks released at our NNR at Parsonage Down in Wiltshire. We have invested in infrastructure there and a small team has been building understanding and support amongst local estates, farmers and land managers. The British Association of Shooting and Conservation has provided financial support for this advocacy work, and the National Gamekeepers Association has publicly expressed its support and enthusiasm.
- 9.7 John confirmed that Natural England Wildlife Licensing Service (NEWLS) is currently assessing an application from our previous partners in the brood management trial (the Moorland Association and International Centre for Birds of Prey) for a licence to continue brood management under a conservation licence. The assessment will consider the results of the trial, the advice from NESAC and Scientific Advisory Group, and the principles agreed by Board in 2023.
- 9.8 John advised that the stakeholder engagement that led to the Hen Harrier Action Plan has not been continued, and funding was not earmarked to continuing Natural England's actions in 2025 and beyond. Defra had indicated however that it remained committed to implementing the six actions.
- 9.9 John concluded by asking the Board to note that our contributions to Defra's Hen Harrier Action Plan have been substantial and to note the risk of losing the benefits of collaboration that has taken place and the increase in nesting numbers if there is a vacuum left by the end of this phase of the hen harrier recovery plan.
- 9.10 Lynn Dicks gave the Board an update on the conversations at NESAC on 27th November 2024 and highlighted that NESAC recommended that any conservation licence should include community engagement and monitoring activities, preferably through tagging and tracking birds and communicating about their locations.
- 9.11 The Board discussed the likelihood of continued conflict, the process undertaken by NESAC to review the trial evidence and the formation of a subgroup to produce a paper on the findings. The Board also discussed the need for a conflict management strategy and a wider strategic approach to species and habitat conflicts, highlighted the importance of considering species within wider ecosystem restoration, and alternative future funding approaches.

- 9.12 The Board concluded by agreeing to the outline of advice to Defra within the paper and advised that advice on wider ecosystem restoration, shared interventions and funding be given.
- 9.13 John Holmes was asked to draft a letter from the Chair to Defra regarding the Hen Harrier Action Plan. The letter should summarise the Board's discussion, incorporating lessons learned from the trial, addressing choices regarding licensing, including NESAC advice, and proposing future directions, including wider ecosystem considerations **(Action: John Holmes)**
- 9.14 The Board praised the work that had been done and asked that it be passed on by our staff, fieldworkers and stakeholders. **(Action: John Holmes)**

Item 10 2025–26 Business Planning

- 10.1 Rachel Hart joined to lead the discussion. The purpose of the session was to provide an update on 2025/26 business planning in advance of a more substantial agenda item on 28th May when Board will be asked to sign-off the 2025/26 budget and Action Plan.
- 10.2 The Board was asked to note:
- The proposed 2025/26 budget position and particularly the implications for our staff resource.
 - Work areas where adjustments of resource (both increasing and decreasing) are being made in 2025/26
 - Proposals for the 2025/26 performance reporting framework.
- 10.3 Rachel began by giving an indication of NE's likely Grant in Aid (GiA) budget for 2025/26 and advised that the GiA budget is made up of a baseline allocation and a series of one-off transfers for specific projects and initiatives. Rachel noted that most of our baseline budget funds our statutory remit.
- 10.4 Rachel confirmed that whilst it may appear that the 2025/26 GiA budget has increased a reduction of £7.5m has been applied to our baseline allocation which will compromise our ability to deliver our statutory role.
- 10.4 Rachel then advised that we have been asked to consider a 15% reduction to our baseline as part of phase two of the 2025 Spending Review and that it would be difficult to achieve efficiencies without digital investment.
- 10.5 Rachel advised that whilst Defra have removed many of the budget ringfences, we are trying to get in a position where one-off transfers are moved into our baseline.
- 10.6 Rachel advised that some agreed transfers will be agreed in-year, and we are trying to get letters of comfort so budgets can be allocated at the start of the year.
- 10.7 Rachel then detailed changes to our GiA budget and what Natural England is being asked to deliver including a significant uplift in revenue and capital grants to deliver landscape recovery and for Protected Sites Strategies. We are still trying to be able to use the Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) budget more flexibly to enable us to utilise this for Landscape Recovery work. There will not

be a budget for landscape designations, and this will have a significant impact on current four designations. There will be no budget for nature returns, we are currently negotiating for a small bid to maintain the programme and await a decision on the 3rd March. There will be no budget for digital from the data team within Defra, it will be provided by policy teams and no 'invest to save' budget from Digital, Data, Technology and Security (DDTS). A further £2m will be required to maintain costs of our existing digital systems.

- 10.8 Rachel advised that we expect to have a significant pay pressure, managed by turnover and recruitment controls along with the Voluntary Exit Scheme. The turnover rate had fallen by 2% and continues to fall.
- 10.9 Rachel advised that we are working closely with Defra on refreshing our performance reporting framework and are looking to bring all performance reporting into a single reporting and scorecard system that can be used in real time and allow real time decision making.
- 10.10 Sally Randall commented that budget planning across the Defra Group has been extremely challenging. There has been 13% less RDEL budget across the Group which is significantly higher than the reduction in NE's budget. Defra is trying to remove as many dedicated lines as possible and into baseline. Sally also advised that the exercise to find 15% reductions in budget was an exercise not a plan, but this reflects unavoidable pressures in terms of inflation and pay pressure. The next Spending Review will be multiyear and more transformational.
- 10.11 The Board noted the proposed 2025/26 budget position, the implications for staff, the work areas where adjustments of resource would take place and the proposals for performance reporting.
- 10.12 In discussion, the Board questioned whether efficiencies in licensing and planning and more broadly within the organisation had been considered and whether potential external engagement/funding could be sought. The Board advised that we need to look carefully at exit strategies and wind downs. The Board requested that the performance reporting should be streamlined and condensed wherever possible.

Item 11 Strategy Follow up

- 11.1 The Board approved the strategic document presented at the 18 February 20225 workshop.

Item 12 Governance update

- 12.1 The Board agreed to create the National Nature Reserve Declaration Committee (NNRDC) and approved the Terms of Reference.
- 12.2 The Board noted the Committees decision to declare Risley, Stiperstones and Bradford Gateway at NNRs.
- 12.3. The Board noted the meeting dates for 2026 and asked that a Strategy workshop was considered for January 2026.

- 12.4 The Board notes the intention to rejuvenate the webinar forward look and the move to monthly webinars.
- 12.5 The Board noted that Lynn and Mel had been confirmed as ARAC members.
- 12.6 The Board noted that the following Board Members would take on Area Team representative responsibilities:
- Alistair Leake – Cheshire to Lancashire
 - Clare Fitzsimmons - Cumbria.
- 12.7 Peter Unwin provided an update on the most recent PremCom meeting and highlighted the committee discussed and considered the VE scheme and future strategic pay plan.
- 12.8 Cynthia Alers provided an update on the most recent ARAC meeting and highlighted the committee discussed and considered the ARA, internal audits, risk framework, counter fraud. Government Procurement Cards (GPCs) and procurement. Cynthia advised there were several internal audits to note.
- 12.9 Caroline Spelman provided an update on the most recent NELAP meeting and commented there had been a very positive discussion on the development of the strategy.
- 12.10 Lynn Dicks provided an update on the most recent NESAC meeting and comment that it had been a joint NESAC and Social Science Panel meeting and the NESAC had welcomed five new members.