

VMD AUDIT & RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held on 12 September 2019

Members

David Corner (Chair)
Julia Drown
David Catlow

Present

Paul Green – VMD
Abigail Seager - VMD
Mike Griffiths – VMD
Linda Simmons – VMD
Nick Stokell - Defra
Emma Parkinson – NAO
Peter Morland – NAO
Noel Joseph – VMD (Part)
Andrea Ford – VMD (Part)

Chris Abbott – VMD (note taker)

1. Announcements and apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Peter Borriello, Christine Middlemiss and David Kennedy.

2. Declarations of interest in the matters to be discussed

2.1 None.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2019

VMD ARC 19/31

3.1 The minutes were agreed.

4. Matters Arising/Actions

VMD ARC 19/32

4.1 Members noted that the IT disaster recovery test had been successfully completed.

5. Focus topic: International work and the safety and wellbeing of staff travelling overseas

5.1 Noel Joseph from the VMD's International team presented an overview of the the VMD's International Work in the past two years. He gave an overview of the major projects and safety measures that were undertaken to ensure safety and wellbeing of VMD staff. He gave an outline of the Livestock Micro-Reform in Agribusiness (L-MIRA) project with the World Bank where the VMD has been supporting the Veterinary medicines regulator in Ethiopia (VDFACA); the delivery of the European Commission's Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) program within Europe and internationally; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation project on scoping of the regulatory landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as our work with the United Nation's Food & Agriculture

Organisation (FAO) in developing a pre-qualification process for emergency procurement of Foot & Mouth vaccines.

- 5.2 In delivering the above-mentioned projects, a number of members of staff from different teams have been travelling mainly to Africa to take part in these projects and several measures have been put in place to assure their wellbeing and safety. Before travelling they are sent on a two-day Hostile Environment Assessment Training (HEAT) course to learn how to be alert and avoid threats and they are issued with comprehensive first aid packs and travel insurance cards. A risk assessment is carried out before any travel to a new country is undertaken which has to be signed off by a Director. These country risk assessments are based on FCO's and Insurer's assessment of the countries. In addition, if required, further FCO advice is sought to help evaluate potential dangers and embassies are informed about VMD activities and can provide safe transport when necessary. A personal travel check list is also being finalised which will contain details of travel plans and vaccination requirements. The procedure has been expanded to cover all VMD travel overseas. A question was raised, following recent adverse media coverage relating to NGO work overseas, whether consideration should also be given to the safeguarding of people VMD work with. The VMD will look into this further.
- 5.3 Members were assured by the safety and risk assessment procedures which are being followed. They noted that travellers contact the VMD at a set time each day via phone or WhatsApp and recommended that a single contact number and internet contact (eg. WhatsApp) is provided for the staff member and their emergency contact. This should be responded to 24 hours a day not just during office hours. Noel said that Defra is now following the VMD's lead in this area and setting up similar safety procedures.

Financial Year 2018/19

6. External Audit

6.1 External Audit Completion Report – NAO

VMD ARC 19/45

6.1.1 External auditors presented their final completion report for 2018/19 following additional testing which had taken place in late June to review anomalies which had been found. The Committee reviewed the report's recommendations and management's responses and were satisfied with them. Management had accepted the recommendations of the external auditors.

Financial Year 2019/20

7. Internal Audit

7.1 Internal audit plan – Defra IA

VMD ARC 19/33

7.1.1 The Defra Internal auditor presented their audit plan for 2019/20 which included audits to review communication and stakeholder involvement, vet practice inspections, procedures for dealing with product defects and contract management and services provided by DDTs. Members

approved the plan, subject to the Chair's agreement of the specification for the internal audit of communications with Defra once drawn up.

7.1.2 It was noted that the results of the first two audits are due to be presented at the next ARAC meeting in December. It was proposed that VMD's international operational activities be reviewed next year and the internal auditor agreed to consider including it as part of their 3 year plan.

7.2 No audit reports had been finalised since the last meeting.

8. External Audit

8.1 Update - NAO

8.1.1 External auditors reported that the 2019/20 audits were at the planning stage and the final plan would be presented at the next meeting.

9. VMD Finance/Other

9.1 Implementation of auditors' previous recommendations – progress report

VMD ARC 19/34

9.1.1 Members noted that there were no outstanding issues and asked for the auditor to be involved in checking actions had been completed in future.

Audit & Risk Committee Procedural Items

10. Papers circulated to the Committee since the last meeting

10.1 Members had received EU Exit SRO monthly reports and the VMD's staff training strategy.

11. Risk and Assurance

11.1 Risk Register

VMD ARC 19/35

11.1.1 The Committee reviewed the Risk Register. VMD reported that it would be reformatted to bring it in line with Defra standard in time for the next meeting.

ACTION

12. Update on data handling, fraud and corruption issues **VMD ARC 19/36**

12.1 The Committee noted that there had been no issues caused by the VMD since the last meeting. A minor breach of data by Defra had occurred involving information sent to them by the VMD and action had been taken to minimise the risk of this happening again.

13. Counter Fraud

VMD ARC 19/37-43

13.1 The Cabinet Office has removed the financial threshold at which reporting is required under the GovS 013 Counter Fraud Standard. Defra has provided updated Strategy and Policy documents, which have been adopted by the VMD. The VMD have prepared additional documents to fulfil the requirements of the standard and make this specific to VMD. Members reviewed the Fraud Risk Assessment and agreed the VMD's new Fraud Response and Procedure Plan subject to minor amendments being made. It

can be confirmed that the Accountable Individual/Senior Lead has discharged their responsibilities in accordance with GovS 013.

14. Audit Committee work plan

VMD ARC 19/44

14.1 The workplan was reviewed.

15. Any Other Business

15.1 There was no other business.

16. Dates of future meetings:

2019 5 December