

# Minutes of VMD Management Board Meeting held on 15 March 2023

## Members

Julia Drown (Chair)  
David Catlow  
Timothy Riley  
Philippa Hardwick  
Nicola Charlton

## Present

Abigail Seager – VMD  
Gavin Hall - VMD  
Mike Griffiths – VMD  
John Millward – VMD  
Carol Siwicka - VMD  
Chris Abbott – VMD (note taker)

### 1. Announcements and apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Muiz Agbaje, VMD, and David Kennedy, Defra.

### 2. Declarations of interest in the matters to be discussed

2.1 Dr Riley declared he has been made President of the Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society.

### 3. Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2022

VMDMB 23/02

3.1 The minutes were agreed.

### 4. Matters Arising/Actions

VMDMB 23/03

4.1 Two days of strike action have taken place but disruption has been minimal.

4.2 John Millward, Head of Enforcement and Inspections, reported that the CLUE database was providing useful intel to the enforcement team and helping them to focus on the bigger issues. There was better engagement with trading standards, APHA and other agencies and local government through the K-Hub. The revised enforcement strategy would be presented for review at the next meeting.

### 5. Stakeholder Engagement

VMDMB 23/04

5.1 VMD's Head of Information Coordination and Engagement (ICE), Carol Siwicka, explained how the VMD identifies opportunities to develop and improve communication channels in order to deliver the right message to the right audience. The VMD blog has been going for a year and VMD Connect website was launched 6 weeks ago. This provides new material and also links to Gov.uk, making it easier for interested groups to browse and find information which is relevant to them. The ICE team has developed stakeholder and media matrices which help target key audiences and dates for social media messaging and for sending articles to publications. A list of hot topics is maintained and provides lines to take on issues which may carry reputational risks. Members recognised the importance of large networks for spreading enforcement messages widely and also recommended using the annual Open Day to engage more with interested NGOs and other stakeholders directly.

### 6. Civil Service People Survey 2022 results

6.1 The annual civil service people survey had been run in November and the staff engagement score had dropped slightly. However, the VMD compared well to other Defra agencies in some areas and its score for how it manages change has increased significantly which was very pleasing. A low score for learning and development was concerning and VMD would find out the reasons for this. Five percent of staff had reported that they had experienced bullying and harassment so the Board were keen to discuss how this would be addressed. In addition to their managers, VMD have five 'go to' staff members who staff can contact if they want to discuss any issues that are troubling them. The executive appreciates that the pace and volume of work is still too high and hybrid working practices can lead to staff working excessive hours at home and this is difficult to

control although staff are advised to prioritise work as much as possible. Until the remaining EU exit issues in Northern Ireland are resolved there will be uncertainties that affect workloads. Defra have introduced a package of measures to help workers. It is intended to measure staff satisfaction at mid-year to see how matters are progressing.

- 6.2 Members were encouraged by some of the results in the survey. They emphasised that it is important to continue to challenge inappropriate behaviour and develop the softer engagement skills. It is clear improvement is needed in that area of continuous development as it is very important for professionals and helps retain them. It was appreciated that there is not much VMD can do about low satisfaction with pay and benefits and that the new performance management procedures being introduced will unlink performance from pay awards. However, an extensive platform of employee offers and reward vouchers are now available.

**7. CEO's Report** **VMDMB 23/05**

- 7.1 The CEO's report was reviewed and it was noted that six priorities have been set out in the business plan for next year. The new online version of the veterinary wholesale dealer's authorisation register will be a significant benefit to wholesalers and retailers and an efficiency saving for VMD.

**8. Delivery against the Business Plan 2022/23** **VMDMB 23/06**

- 8.1 Members welcomed the good progress shown in the delivery report.

**9. Review of Business Plan Priorities 2023/24** **VMDMB 23/07**

- 9.1 The priorities for next year were agreed.

**10. Finance report** **VMDMB 23/08**

- 10.1 The finance report was noted.

**11. Annual Declaration of Interests** **VMDMB 23/09**

- 11.1 The board members' interests were noted.

**12. Management Board annual assessment form** **VMDMB 23/10**

- 12.1 The form was agreed and would be circulated to attendees to complete.

**13. Management Board work plan** **VMDMB 23/11**

- 13.1 It was agreed that the enforcement strategy and the progress of the VMR review would be reviewed at the next meeting.

**ACTION VMD**

**14. Any other business**

- 14.1 Nicola Charlton provided feedback on the boardroom apprentice pilot scheme and how attending VMD board meetings provides a useful balance to the theory she is studying.