

# MINUTES OF VMD MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING HELD ON 28 MARCH 2024

## Members

Alison White (Chair)  
Timothy Riley  
David Catlow  
Philippa Hardwick  
Abigail Seager – VMD  
Gavin Hall - VMD  
Mike Griffiths – VMD  
Muiz Agbaje – VMD  
Sian Wright – Boardroom Apprentice

## Present

John Millward – VMD  
Marian Bos - VMD  
Chris Abbott – VMD (note taker)

### 1. Announcements and apologies for absence

- 1.1 This was Dr Riley's last meeting before his term as a non-executive director ends and the Chair thanked him for his invaluable contribution to the Board's work.
- 1.2 Sian Wright has joined the Board as VMD's Boardroom Apprentice for this year and was welcomed to her first meeting.

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

- 2.1 No interests were declared.

### 3. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023

VMDMB 24/01

- 3.1 The minutes were agreed.

### 4. Matters Arising/Actions

VMDMB 24/02

- 4.1 The Board noted that employee pay is decided centrally. The Chair will discuss the future of the Bonus Panel with the executive outside the meeting.
- 4.2 Members commented that the action regarding the VMD's internal audit of its enforcement strategy had been closed without being concluded but noted that the Head of Enforcement would be giving a verbal report on the team's work at this meeting.
- 4.3 The Chair said that the new ARAC Chair would be asked to provide advice about the risk management process as a priority after their appointment.

### 5. Chair's Report

- 5.1 The Chair will circulate a proposal for carrying out the annual review of effectiveness of the Board and ARAC in a joint exercise.
- 5.2 The Board's strategy day planned for April will be deferred until later in the year when the new membership has settled in.

### 6. CEO's Report

VMDMB 24/03

- 6.1 The CEO reported that VMD's exemption from the civil service headcount freeze had been retracted. However, the executive had made a case based on its business planning that it needed to recruit more staff to deal with increased workloads and a limited dispensation has been granted.
- 6.2 The CMA had not communicated with VMD before publishing its report on veterinary services for pets and it included some misleading information which could be damaging. Outcomes are being followed up with CMA and departmental support will be sought if needed.

- 6.3 Members were pleased with the reported 59% reduction in sales of antimicrobials and the proposed move towards obtaining usage data was also welcomed. It was noted that there will always be a need for antibiotics along with the development of alternatives such as phage products.
- 6.4 Members suggested several areas to look at which can possibly be picked up in the next revision of the VMR including increased prescribing by veterinary nurses, prophylactic versus responsive use of medicines, the provision of residues testing information and developments in cell culture work. Appropriate prescribing levels and treatment oversight by veterinary surgeons is an important area with interest from several bodies including the BVA, AHWB and Animal Sentience Committee.
- 6.5 Members appreciated the new succinct format of the CEO's report and the infographics provided. They asked that more context to be given on performance in future, such as year-on-year figures, as well as a summary of the current challenges being faced.
- 6.6 VMD reported that its business plan for 2024/25 has been reduced to 5 priorities with climate change aims subsumed into the other targets. The high-level results of the civil service people survey had been released and would be reviewed at the Board's June meeting.

## **7. Executive updates**

- 7.1 VMD reported that recent figures indicate that the availability of around 50% of veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland will be affected by changes caused by leaving the EU. The general advisory working group on medicines has agreed its terms of reference and is looking at options as guided by the Windsor Framework. VMD is meeting with companies planning to reroute products to Northern Ireland while helping them meet the terms of the EU acquis. Members noted the need for urgency described in the Command Paper and asked to be kept informed about VMD's role.
- 7.2 Meetings have been held with Industry to produce an action plan to increase the availability of vaccines. Cross government incentives and regulatory easements are being looked at to encourage manufacturing. VMD is liaising with Defra and companies about producing vaccines to combat several exotic diseases and applications for provisional MAs and emergency licences are being assessed.
- 7.3 John Millward, Head of Inspections and Enforcement, reported that an enforcement policy has been published and an internal strategy document produced. The intelligence platform CLUE is at the centre of enforcement operations and is being used to collect anonymised reports, tackle illegal imports and share information with other agencies. VMD inspectors are being trained up as investigators so they can work with the enforcement team. Mr Millward will provide a written report of progress against the enforcement strategic objectives as requested. He was also asked to make the penalties which could be applied for breaches clearer on the published policy.
- 7.4 Head of Legislation Marian Bos reported that the new VMR SI had been laid in parliament on 4 March and the text is now available along with an explanatory memorandum. It is going through scrutiny before it is debated in the Lords and then parliament. Providing there are no difficulties, it will then be made and signed by the Minister and come into force in May or June. VMD guidance for interpreting the VMR is being produced and will be published on time.
- 7.5 VMD's 2024/25 training plan is being produced and will take a four-tier approach towards mandatory, strategic, individual and team building training. The final plan will go to the June MB meeting.

**8. Business Performance**

**VMDMB 24/04**

- 8.1 The Finance report for the end of February indicates that VMD will break even at the end of year with some underspend to go back to Defra. It was noted that a large amount remains to be spent in March which includes purchasing a training programme.
- 8.2 The Business Plan for 2024/25 is being drawn up with VMD Divisions and Offices and will be sent to Management Board when completed.

**9. Board Business**

**VMDMB 24/05-07**

- 9.1 VMD's positive statement of going concern status was endorsed.
- 9.2 Members were aware that the Board does not have a formal code of conduct and it was agreed to adopt and abide by the Cabinet Office's code of conduct for public bodies which describes how it is the responsibility of members to declare any conflicts of interest and conduct business openly and transparently. The code will be provided to new members on their appointment.
- 9.3 There was insufficient time to discuss the Annual Report and Accounts for 2023/24 and the Chair will meet with the Head of Finance to draw up the central themes of the narrative and circulate for comment before the June meeting.

**10. Any other business**

- 10.1 There was no other business.

**Veterinary Medicines Directorate  
April 2024**