

MINUTES OF VMD MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING HELD ON 25 JUNE 2024

Members

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

Present

Abby Monyard (Defra)
Lucy Stapleton (Defra)
Katie Smith (Defra)
Tochi Anurukem (Defra)
Anne Burt (Defra)
Karl Nsiah (VMD)
Chris Abbott – VMD (note taker)

1. Announcements and apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies had been received from David Catlow. The Board asked for its best wishes to be sent to David for his recovery from illness.

2. Declarations of interest in the matters to be discussed

2.1 No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2024

VMDMB 24/08

3.1 The minutes were agreed.

4. Matters Arising/Actions

VMDMB 24/09

4.1 The Board noted the actions from the previous meeting had been completed.

5. Civil Service People Survey 2023

VMDMB 24/10

5.1 Tochi Anurukem and Anne Burt from Defra HR presented the VMD results from the People Survey held in 2023. Overall, an upward trajectory in most areas was shown from the previous year's results and the employee engagement index had improved. The score for satisfaction with pay and benefits had improved significantly but was still low. Most staff feel treated fairly at work and have strong confidence in the leadership group. Areas of concern included effectiveness of line managers and lack of time to complete routine work.

5.2 VMD noted that staff feel valued but further culture change is needed. A rewards' process is in place but is underused by staff and a better platform for recognition is needed. Leaving the EU and establishing new procedures had been challenging and a continuing process for improvement is led from the top. An OD&D project has been started to identify staff's organisational needs and improve their wellbeing. VMD confirmed that the learning and development plan will be linked to messages from the people survey.

5.3 Members welcomed the areas identified for improvement by the survey and the actions VMD is taking. Attendance at EDI workshops has been good and senior management hold monthly meetings with the Go To team of volunteers who provide informal support to other members of staff. It was noted that it had taken some time to deliver the survey results and the Defra attendees confirmed that they are working with the Cabinet Office to improve this for the next survey which is due in three months.

6. CEO's Report

VMDMB 24/11

- 6.1 The General Election has caused some work to be halted, including the recruitment process for a new non-executive director and ARAC Chair which will need ministerial clearance before restarting. The end of year results show that performance was ineffective against two out of 31 published standards and increased recruitment should prevent that happening again this year. The revised Veterinary Medicines Regulations (VMR) have been made and guidance has been published which is being tweaked following feedback from stakeholders. A series of information webinars will also be run for them. Vaccine availability and pharmaceuticals in waterways remain hot topics. Members recognised the achievements of the executives in light of their having to operate in very difficult circumstances.
- 6.2 VMD noted the implementation of the VMR is progressing well and IT changes have been completed in all areas bar one and internal documents will be completed by September. A retrospective review will be held to see what lessons can be learned for the next round of legislation changes. The business focus going forward will be on clearing any backlog of application work and VMD has agreement to increase staff numbers. Significant blockers to recruitment are the competitive marketplace for suitable candidates, the office location, department requirement for 60% office attendance and slow security clearances. Level transfers and reserve lists are being utilised fully to maximise results.
- 6.3 A review of VMD's senior management structure by EMB identified a need for more SCS capacity and for a move away from divisions operating in silos. It was decided to replace them with three main groups covering regulatory delivery, portfolio delivery and business delivery which will contain all the work teams. Key priorities have been identified which will each have a decision-making body and opportunities for discussion. A carousel of topics has been drawn up for regular consideration at EMB meetings. Collaboration and communication will be improved across the organisational network with the aim of becoming more efficient and resilient. The organisation plan has been submitted to Defra for agreement.
- 6.4 VMD's Head of Legislation is leaving and is writing a handbook to aid succession planning.

7. Board Briefing

- 7.1 VMD reported that purdah has meant that there have been no recent developments for Northern Ireland and the next milestone is the end of July for Industry to provide their data. The election manifestos have been reviewed and Labour's intention to re-align more with the EU has prompted the revisitation of Brexit plans. VMD provides the veterinary medicines policy lead for NI and attends project board and operational meetings and meets with stakeholders to examine different scenarios. Some of our advocates may not be re-elected and VMD has drafted information for new ministerial appointments which will be shared with the Board.
- 7.2 Two provisional marketing authorisations for highly pathogenic avian influenza vaccines are being assessed for their use next year. Three applications for emergency use vaccines for BTV3 are being assessed in preparation for a summary to be provided to the Secretary of State and CVO by the end of July. Defra has provided funding to carry out this work. Statutory targets still need to be met for routine work and VMD is looking to recruit five new assessors to the Biologicals team, but candidates with suitable expertise are rare.
- 7.3 The results for VMD's 2024 customer survey have just been published and they indicate that most stakeholders are satisfied with the service provided. Scores have dropped in a few areas due to difficulties with the EU and applications. Going forward, the revised

VMR and resolution of NI issues will end barriers and give us the means to improve processes and establish a new relationship with the EU. It was agreed to have a deep dive into the survey results and stakeholder engagement at the next meeting.

8. Synergy

- 8.1 Abby Monyard gave a presentation on Defra's Synergy implementation project which she heads with Dianne Jeans and which is part of the Government's Shared Services (GSS) Strategy. Defra's shared services arrangements with SSCL are coming to an end along with the Department's use of the single operating platform to carry out its back-room functions. It will be replaced with Synergy which is a new cloud-based system for carrying out HR, financial and commercial services. It will provide a better experience for users, standardise processes and provide value and efficiencies by removing reliance on time-consuming systems and processes.
- 8.2 There are some risks involved with introducing such a large and complex system and VMD has appointed a change manager for working with project leaders to ensure its successful implementation. The programme will introduce a Common Operating Model (COM) across Defra requiring the standardisation of relevant policies, processes and data collection while maintaining continuity with our current systems. Funding approval for the project is at the final Treasury stage.
- 8.2 Members noted that the ability to hold suppliers who are delivering the systems to account is important and contracts should have performance metrics. The new system will need to have controls and provide clean accounts and VMD must be able to easily report any issues. Abby confirmed that governance groups will be formed and she promotes and supports the full involvement of ALBs like the VMD.

9. Business Performance

VMDMB 24/12-15

- 9.1 The Business Plan for 2024/25 was reviewed and members appreciated the level of detail provided. Further consideration will be given to how to report on progress to the Board and how to use the plan to review different areas of the business.
- 9.2 VMD's budget for 2024/25 was presented. Funding will come from Defra, different government projects and from fees and charges to Industry.
- 9.4 Members noted the higher costs this year for the planned increase to the number of staff and that the GAF will need to be raised. It was noted that expenditure had been fully accounted for and it was a balanced budget. Actuals will be provided in the regular progress reports sent to each meeting.
- 9.5 VMD's learning and development strategy and plan for 2024/25 were presented and it was noted that management and leadership training had been added. Members supported this initiative and asked that an update on delivery including details on CPD be provided at the next meeting.

10. Board Business

VMDMB 24/16 & 17

- 10.1 The Chair had provided the ARAC annual report for 2023/24 and the Board effectiveness report and commended them to the Board. Changes to the way the Board works have been implemented to improve the information provided to non-executives so that they are in a better position to fulfil their role whilst minimising the burden on executives.

11. Any other business

- 11.1 This was Philippa Hardwick's last meeting before her term as non-executive director to the VMD ends and the Chair thanked her for her valuable contribution and wished her well for the future.

