

MINUTES OF VMD MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2024

Members

Alison White (Chair)
David Catlow
Sian Wright
Abigail Seager – VMD
Gavin Hall - VMD
Mike Griffiths – VMD
Muiz Agbaje – VMD

Present

Natalie Shilling - VMD
Chris Abbott – VMD (note taker)

1. Announcements and apologies for absence

1.1 There were no apologies.

2. Declarations of interest in the matters to be discussed

2.1 No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2024

VMDMB 24/18

3.1 The minutes were agreed.

4. Matters Arising/Actions

VMDMB 24/19

4.1 The VMD is developing an Artificial Intelligence strategy and this will be brought to the Board in January along with the AMR plan. The business plan will be revised to tie in with the Defra's new outcomes framework and the Chair can help with this.

5. Chair's report

5.1 The Chair will meet with the new DG for Biosecurity, Emily Miles. Ministerial approval to appoint an independent ARAC member has been received and the exercise to recruit a new ARAC Chair will restart. It has been decided that VMD will not take part in the boardroom apprentice scheme next year.

5.2 The Chair noted Defra's 5 priorities under the new government and their implications for the VMD. The main aim is to enable growth and VMD contributes to this is by helping Industry implement a strategy for increasing vaccine availability. Its other activities mainly come under the priority for supporting farmers and food security. Members were disappointed that other issues it deals with like animal welfare, disease outbreaks and One Health were not represented in the plan. VMD will need to link its activities into the outcomes framework.

5.2 Defra has carried out a cost mapping exercise for some of its ALBs including the VMD in order to identify possible efficiencies. VMD feels that its funding strategy has been misinterpreted in the final report and has resulted in an inflated cost per head figure which needs correcting - VMD is presented as being dearer than Defra which is not the case. In addition, a Defra audit has looked at sponsorship models for delivery bodies and made recommendations which aren't appropriate for the VMD as it doesn't need policy sponsors. VMD needs to improve the department's understanding of how it operates, as involvement in multiple commissions, audits and reviews which are not relevant to it are an unnecessary burden on time and resources.

6. CEO's Report

VMDMB 24/20

6.1 The CEO reported on positive progress being made in a number of areas. Interviews for a new SCS will be held before the end of the year and the restructuring of the senior

management structure is ongoing with groups replacing divisions/offices. The terms of reference for internal committees are being reviewed for consistency. The SI for residues charging has been made and will be implemented on 1 October. A round table meeting on vaccine availability will be held in the new year and VMD will represent Defra on a global panel for AMR. The VMD continues to face challenges delivering core regulatory services due to complexities following Brexit. Industry is understanding but expects a route out soon. The action plan includes increasing resources, repurposing staff, delivering more training and talking to the EU about managing the flow of work. NOAH concerns with the revised VMR guidance are being addressed in ongoing meetings with them. BTV3 vaccine applications for emergency use have been assessed and recommendations made to the CVO and Minister and their use has been permitted in the UK apart from Scotland. The disease is endemic and Industry is being encouraged to submit provisional MA applications.

- 6.2 The Windsor Framework October reporting milestone has been met and has indicated that some products could be discontinued in NI. This is being taken up by the Defra vaccines task force. Alternatives are being looked at in order to avoid the prospect of illegal imports. The Veterinary Medicines Working Group meets on 5 November.

7. Board Briefing: Stakeholder Engagement

VMDMB 24/21

- 7.1 The results of the 2024 customer survey have been published and indicate that most stakeholders are content with the service provided but levels of satisfaction have dropped in some areas including speed of response. VMD is reviewing what actions it can take including streamlining systems, using AI and recruiting more staff. The level of satisfaction with the Finance and Communications teams is high. The fairly low response rate is thought to be down to survey fatigue.
- 7.2 Stakeholder engagement activities include sending them automatic updates on news items and multiple meetings are held with NOAH throughout the year. It is planned for each group of stakeholders to have an owner. The new Head of Communications is reviewing the Comms strategy and will be invited to the March Board meeting to give an update.

8. Business Performance

VMDMB 24/22-24

- 8.1 Progress made delivering the Learning and Development strategy plan for 2024/25 was reviewed with the Head of the People Services team. Workshops on leadership, project management and risk management are being provided for higher grades and it is emphasised to all staff that they should prioritise training. Time spent on it is added to work recording and feedback on courses is gathered so only effective providers are re-used. VMD's continuous improvement advisor will include training in their review of expectations by grade. It was noted that a low percentage of staff have completed all the mandatory training courses so far this year and reminders will be sent out as these are a corporate responsibility and provide valuable assurance. The Chair noted that the scientific staff need appropriate training suitable for their professions and it was agreed to arrange a separate meeting to discuss how to take this forward.
- 8.2 VMD staff numbers were reviewed and it was noted there are a number of active recruitments ongoing. However, it is recognised that it will not be possible to achieve full staffing by the end of the year due to leavers and the slow recruitment process. It was noted that the shortfall in staff numbers is creating resourcing issues.
- 8.4 The finance report was presented and forecast a pressure at the end of year but this is based on full staffing being achieved (which is unlikely). The Defra budget under the spending review will be known by the end of October. VMD baseline funding has been rolled over from last year and our finance model provides some secure funding.

9. Any other business

- 9.1 Staff will be informed that a whistle-blowing awareness campaign is starting. The role of whistle-blowing champion for the VMD may be taken up by the new ARAC Chair.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

October 2024