

MINUTES OF VMD MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING HELD ON 30 JANUARY 2025

Members

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

Present

Kitty Healey – VMD (item 5)
Chris Abbott – VMD (note taker)

1. Announcements and apologies for absence

1.1 No apologies had been received.

2. Declarations of interest in the matters to be discussed

2.1 No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2024

VMDMB 25/01

3.1 The minutes were agreed.

4. Matters Arising/Actions

VMDMB 25/02

4.1 It was noted that VMD actively promotes wellbeing and respectful behaviour and staff are encouraged to meet with Directors at weekly drop-in sessions to discuss any issues or talk to the network of Go To staff for help and advice.

4.2 VMD continues to develop its policy for the use of AI tools and it was agreed that its draft strategy would be considered at the next Board meeting.

4.3 Since the last meeting, the Chair had met with the Head of People Services to discuss CPD and ways of maximising its effectiveness for staff using objective analysis.

4.4 The Chair had also met with VMD to discuss developing an improved way of presenting its business plan to the Board so that it can keep track of issues of most interest. The draft 2025/26 plan will be reviewed at the next meeting.

4.5 The importance of completing mandatory training has been emphasised to staff and new staff are now required to complete in their first week.

5. AMR Action Plan

5.1 The Head of Surveillance, Kitty Healey, explained how her team is carrying out the VMD's AMR action plan as part of a project which will run until 2040. This aims to tackle the threat of drug-resistant infections caused by antimicrobial resistance. The team achieves this by setting policy, engaging with farmers and pharmaceutical companies and encouraging the responsible use of antibiotics and promoting alternative treatments. It monitors and collects sales and usage data through voluntary schemes from the pig, meat poultry, laying hen, trout, salmon and gamebird sectors, and then publishes the results. These indicate a reduction of around 50% in use of antibiotics has been achieved over the last 10 years. There are some blind spots caused by a shortage of data in some species and there may need to be a move towards mandatory reporting backed by legislation in the VMR. VMD receives laboratory data from the National Bio-surveillance Network but would like to have more from private sector laboratories. It is also considering the effect of climate change on AMR but this is a complex area and reliable metrics are needed.

5.2 AMR is a global issue with potentially disastrous effects on animal and human health. The VMD engages with regulatory bodies worldwide to share advice and agree on what

actions to take. The Board noted that continued government support is needed to provide resources and build capacity to achieve the aims of the project.

6. CEO's Report

VMDMB 25/03 & 04

- 6.1 Two reports were presented on operational delivery and policy. Pressure remains on delivery of core regulatory services caused by a backlog of issuing work and difficulty maintaining trained staff resources. Six out of 38 published standards have fallen slightly below an effective rating but the key goal of maintaining the availability of medicines is still being achieved. Exit from the EU has opened up opportunities for reaching agreements with other countries but also created severe challenges - any new political aims to reset the relationship will take a long time to resolve. One long term aim supported by Industry and regulators is to achieve global authorisations for new products. The Board noted that the Government prioritises a growth agenda and VMD needs to make clear how its work contributes to that through schemes such as joint labelling.
- 6.2 Negotiations are ongoing around substantially increased costs for a new contract with Fera for residues testing but Defra should help fill any funding gap. The overall financial forecast for 2026-27 is that VMD will need to raise fees and charges but there is pressure to recover costs in ways which are not detrimental to industry. There are concerns about the delivery of replacement of IT legacy systems following the announcement that the contractor is merging with another company; future plans are being watched carefully as IT transformation is key to delivery and security.
- 6.3 The non-executives noted the professional way the executive is dealing with a host of challenges and recognised the difficult circumstances everyone is working in.

7. Business Performance

VMDMB 25/05

- 7.1 The full-year financial forecast indicates a balanced position and a significant improvement from Q3. This is partly due to lower than predicted staff numbers and it was noted that recruiting and retaining staff remains challenging. The surplus in RDEL will be switched to CDEL and used for replacing IT legacy systems. As of Dec 2024, overhead costs per person are in line with the full year figures in the past year. It has been emphasised to all staff that it is important for charging purposes that they accurately allocate their recorded time against chargeable activities.

8. Board Business

VMDMB 25/06 & 07

- 8.1 The proposed 'golden thread' for the narrative of the 2024/25 annual report was discussed. It was agreed that the report is an important opportunity to deliver a clear message about VMD successes and how it continues to perform while facing serious challenges. The Chair will help with wording.
- 8.2 The Board engaged with the Executive's financial assessment of the VMD and agreed with the conclusion that it will continue to operate as a going concern in context of what is anticipated to happen over the next 12 months.

9. Any other business

- 9.1 There was no other business.

**Veterinary Medicines Directorate
January 2025**