

MINUTES OF VMD MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING HELD ON 19 JUNE 2025

Members

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

Present

Misha Anand – Defra (for item 9)
Callum Harris – VMD (for item 9)
Chris Abbott – VMD (note taker)

1. Announcements and apologies for absence

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Laura Catterick, newly appointed Non-Executive Director and ARAC Chair, to the Board.
- 1.2 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 20 March 2025

VMDMB 25/18

- 3.1 The minutes were agreed.

4. Matters Arising

VMDMB 25/19

- 4.1 There were no matters arising.

5. Chair's Report

VMDMB 25/20 & 21

- 5.1 The Chair provided an annual report of the ARAC's activities. There had been an improvement in perceived added value of the work of the Committee in the past year and in risk management, but that there was still significant opportunity for further improvement. The appointment of a new ARAC Chair will help address resource issues and achieve better separation between the Committee and Management Board.
- 5.2 The new government is creating a lot of activity based on a change agenda. Two reviews have been launched by Corry and Hancock and Defra has been tasked with streamlining its regulatory regime and reducing inefficiencies. A wider review of ALBs has also been started which includes the VMD. Sir Jon Cunliffe is conducting a review of water quality and the NAO has submitted reviews of AMR implementation and resilience against disease outbreaks which will have significant impacts. Non-Executive Directors will need to understand the nature of this review activity and help VMD successfully engage with these challenges. A new permanent secretary is to be appointed following the retirement of Tamara Finkelstein.
- 5.3 The Chair's review of ARAC effectiveness provided a list of opportunities for making improvements which she commended to colleagues.

6. CEO's Report

VMDMB 25/22-25

- 6.1 An end of year policy report and delivery reports for April and May had been provided and set out the top issues, challenges and emerging risks being dealt with. The NAO's audit of AMR has given rise to new proposals but VMD's budget limits how much more surveillance work it can do and it will continue to focus on pigs and poultry and use RUMA's targets for antibiotic usage for its AMR national action plan. The ending of the

Fleming Fund to support AMR work has been disappointing. In regard to disease resilience, VMD's statement of intent on improving vaccine availability will go to Ministers next week and will be shared with Board members.

6.2 The Minister's written statement on veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland has been published and confirms the need for companies to comply with the EU acquis and move their operations out of GB by the end of this year. EU reset conversations are ongoing. The Board will be kept informed on developments.

6.3 The Board recognised the significant improvement made by the Authorisations teams in validating and issuing 100% of documents within targets and asked that their congratulations be passed on to staff.

7. VMD Strategy

VMDMB 25/26

7.1 Following its review at the last Board meeting, a draft strategy had been produced which runs a golden thread from Defra's vision through to the VMD and then to individuals. Longterm goals include regulating medical devices including use of AI and increasing the proportion of VMD's income received from fees and charges. It was agreed to consider what stakeholders' expectations are and focus on strategy further at the October meeting.

8. ALB reform

VMDMB 25/27

8.1 VMD reported on the Corry and Hancock reviews commissioned by the government. The Dan Corry review examined whether Defra's regulatory landscape is fit for purpose in driving economic growth and nature recovery. It made a number of recommendations, notably around pay and chargeable services, but did not support a major reorganisation of the regulatory landscape. The Heather Hancock review also made a number of recommendations some of which were more relevant to the VMD.

8.2 Defra have set up a Defra Group governance team for taking forward both sets of recommendations. VMD has representation in the governance structures involved and will keep a watching brief over activities.

8.3 An interim report is imminent from the Sir Jon Cunliffe's review on how to restore trust in water regulations with the final report due in September.

9. Board Briefing

VMDMB 25/28

9.1 Residues

VMD's Head of Residues, Callum Harris, explained that his team works to protect public health and ensure the secure trade of animal-sourced food products by coordinating the testing of residues samples and investigating any instances of MRL breaches and contamination. To achieve this, his team works with 7 other agencies representing all the animal food sectors so that samples can be sent to Fera for testing. They test around 30,000 samples and results show that GB achieves 99.7% compliance. Where non-compliance is found, VMD has powers to stop animal slaughters and to prosecute. The process is paid for by fees charged to abattoirs. The contract with Fera has been repurchased for 10 years at an increased cost which VMD accepts is largely due to a well evidenced correction. VMD fees are included in legislation and it is intended to amend them every two years through changes to the VMR but the income generating steering group is looking into ways of making charging models more streamlined.

- 9.2 Two members of the Residues team look at international aspects and audit the testing systems used in other countries, although outward looking work is currently paused pending a reframing exercise.
- 9.3 It was clarified that sampling is based on production rather than consumption. Most non-compliance is found in sheep due to contamination by heavy metals and pour on products. There have also been cases in calves caused by selling practices. The UK and EU base their testing on risk analysis while in other countries the randomised Codex approach to testing is commonly used.
- 9.4 **Digital Transformation**
 Misha Anand, Defra's Head of Digital Transformation, joined the meeting to explain how her department is looking to introduce digital practices and transform its provision of services to the public. The current strategy started in 2023 and comprises of six missions: improving delivery; modernising business capabilities; obtaining better data to aid decision making; improving efficiencies; improving confidence and skills and removing barriers. The overall aim is for Defra to deliver efficient services that effectively meet user needs. ALBs are required to reflect the Digital Transformation Strategy in their own business plans or develop their own digital strategy which aligns with it. It will put an end to working in silos and introduce simplified and standardised delivery of services. This is against the backdrop of Defra Group services needing to deliver significant technical efficiencies over the next SR period.
- 9.5 Currently there are a large number of individual service journeys available on gov.uk, only a small percentage of which are digital, and there are multiple contact centres and teams. The digital services introduced need to be easy for users to find, quick and accessible to use and available when needed. In this way they will improve Defra's reach and help it influence and incentivise the way people and organisations behave through the provision of grants, permits, inspections and guidance. At the moment members of the public have to engage with different agencies all using different computer systems which have been developed at different times. A major aim of the strategy is to avoid duplication and improve consistency while reducing operational costs.
- 9.6 Members noted that challenges include finding the security of capital needed to fund these developments and the spare capacity needed to inform and action them. Subject matter experts with the appropriate business knowledge will be critical. Authority will also be needed to break down the organisational barriers in place. VMD is in an unusual place as its highest users are in Industry and it is not clear how it will link up with other systems developed by DDTS which it does not use. Ms Anand noted that there are difficult tradeoffs to be made and welcomes input from the VMD on what to do. The outcomes framework sits with the CEO.

10. Review of strategic risk and appetite

VMDMB 25/29

- 10.1 The Chair provided a paper on the Board's role in regard to risk which would help it to engage in a more effective way. New risk appetite categories had also been proposed with the aim of recalibrating the way they are recorded and prioritised. It was agreed to have a more substantive discussion on the subject at the next meeting along with a review of the revised risk management policy.

11. Business Performance

VMDMB 25/30 & 31

- 11.1 Progress against selected KPIs in the business plan was reviewed. Members asked that cross references to Ministers' expectations and requirements be added. The strategic workforce plan had been completed and would be circulated.

- 11.2 VMD's 2025/26 budget allocation and plan were presented along with estimated spending at the end of May. The spending review results are due at the end of June. A headcount of 233 staff is accounted for but may be ambitious to recruit to. VMD will provide last year's figures for comparison in its next report.

12. ARAC Terms of Reference

VMDMB 25/32

- 12.1 The revised terms of reference reviewed at ARAC were approved subject to the understanding that any requests for the release of additional funds would be made in collaboration with the organisation.

13. Any other Business

- 13.1 There was no other business.

**Veterinary Medicines Directorate
June 2025**