

MINUTES OF VMD MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING HELD ON 7 OCTOBER 2025

Members

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

Present

Kitty Healey (VMD) – item 10
Chris Abbott – VMD (note taker)

1. Announcements and apologies for absence

- 1.1 VMD's Head of Finance Muiz Agbaje was leaving the VMD and the Board wished him well for the future. A temporary replacement would be starting soon and arrangements will be made for him to meet with both Chairs as part of his induction.
- 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 19 June 2025

VMDMB 25/33

- 3.1 The minutes were agreed.

4. Matters Arising

VMDMB 25/34

- 4.1 It was agreed that AI strategy would be discussed at the next meeting.

5. Chair's Report

- 5.1 A new Secretary of State for Defra, Emma Reynolds, and permanent secretary, Paul Kissack, have been appointed. Sir Jon Cunliffe's final water commission report has been published and makes recommendations about reforming the regulatory framework. The Chair had attended a departmental Chairs of Audit Committees meeting where issues discussed included delivering growth with a purpose, autonomy earning for ALBs, strategic workforce plans to develop skills and reduce contingent labour and the critical priority of cyber security. The delivery of systems for some new services is proving problematic. The Chair also took part in a review of audit committee effectiveness being conducted by the Government Internal Audit Agency and will inform the Board about the outcomes.

6. CEO's Report

VMDMB 25/35-37

- 6.1 VMD has a high-level trust from the government and can operate autonomously. A letter from the Prime Minister to Defra has emphasised the need to drive change and growth over the next 6 months; growth is not a primary driver for VMD but the Agency is a proven growth enabler. FBT is leading on delivering against the SPS agreements with EU; these don't include veterinary medicines but have related elements.
- 6.2 VMD reports monthly to Defra against the recommendations made by the Corry and Hancock reviews. There are issues around funding and legislative and contractual blockers to data sharing. VMD is looking at reducing inefficiencies and increasing the use of AI which is already being used in some departments for minutes and briefings. It is currently implementing a new correspondence handling system.

- 6.3 VMD needs to grow in order to meet its objectives and aims to significantly increase the number of its staff by the end of the financial year, although attrition is an unknowable risk. Productive meetings are being held with the contracted IT systems builder but more delivery is needed and VMD is also considering using buy-in options while analysing the cost, timings and benefits. The Board will be notified when a decision is reached.
- 6.4 The Chair was concerned at the number of monthly reports VMD is required to send to Defra and Ministers and the pressure on the executive to deliver this information and questioned how much value they add. VMD questioned whether earned autonomy could equate to reduced reporting.
- 6.5 VMD reported that a number of responses had been received to its consultation on the Medicines and Medical Devices Act. These covered a number of areas including devices regulation, pharmacovigilance guidance, RCVS under care guidance and controlled drugs. The outcomes will be reported to DHSC and the Board.
- 6.6 There is a reduction in income for AMR work following the closure of the Fleming Fund and VMD may have to reduce its international activities including ending its status as an AMR reference centre.

7. ARAC Chair's Report

- 7.1 A fresh look at the risk register had been held at the September ARAC meeting and a review of assurance effectiveness is ongoing and will be completed for the next meeting. GIAA had withdrawn its audit report on implementation of the revised VMR and submitted a new report which downgraded its opinion from substantial to limited. It was agreed that this was unusual and VMD will feedback to GIAA. The appointment of an auditor for 2026/27 has gone out to tender and VMD will include the ARAC Chair in the process.
- 7.2 The Board approved revisions made to the Risk Management Policy.

8. Risk Register review

VMDMB 25/42

- 8.1 The Chair noted that although the risk register was good in parts, e.g. cyber security, there is an opportunity to review the details: current and future mitigations need separating, more realistic colour ratings given and comments moved to mitigations. The ARAC Chair will work with the COO on the format for approval at the next meeting. Risk appetite will also be reviewed.

9. Risk Management Policy

VMDMB 25/38 & 39

- 9.1 Revisions to the Risk Management Policy were approved.

10. Board Briefings

10.1 Antimicrobial Resistance

- VMD's Head of Surveillance, Kitty Healey, reported on recent developments in reducing AMR. Recommendations which came out from the NAO report on AMR implementation included using trade agreements, scientific developments and ambitious targets. VMD's objectives are already in line with these recommendations and some amendments to KPIs have been made. Gaining additional resources to implement new strategies is challenging.
- 10.2 The RUMA task force targets which VMD uses and the annual VARSS report are both due to be published in November. The report will show that usage data in farm animals is mostly level but there is a slight increase in pigs which is being investigated. It would be useful to understand the impact of strategies to increase the use of vaccines but there are a lot of variables. There are no plans to introduce mandatory collection of antibiotic use data at this time.

10.3 Following the closure of the Fleming Fund, VMD is looking at alternatives and rewriting its international ambitions. Future funding will depend on decisions made by Defra on the AMR framework.

10.4 Pharmaceuticals in the Environment (PiE)

The road map for PiE group activities has been published and has set sensible targets. A recent meeting with stakeholders had agreed that pharmaceuticals in the environment come from a number of different sources including the washing of animal bedding in homes. Labelling advice on the safe use of parasiticides for companion animals and their over-the-counter sales are two areas under review. There are complications around not wanting different labelling for products in Northern Ireland. The topic links to the health of water courses and remains an area of high public interest. VMD will review how this risk is recorded on its risk registers and the wording of mitigations.

11. Business Performance

VMDMB 25/40 & 41

11.1 Progress against the business plan was reviewed and the Board asked that staffing targets be added to the KPI for recruitments. VMD is now working with a cyber incidents response partner and the Board asked that a deep dive on cyber security be held at the ARAC and Management Board meetings. The IT road map will be brought to the March meeting.

11.2 The finance report was noted. There are funds available for recruiting the additional staff needed but the process is long and subject matter experts are in high demand. Staff have been asked to consider whether there are any tasks they can stop doing in order to relieve work pressures.

12. Any other Business

12.1 There was no other business.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate
October 2025