

MINUTES OF VMD MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETING HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2026

Members

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

Present

Lea Reynolds - VMD – items 4 and 6
Kashif Shah – VMD – items 8 and 10
Chris Abbott – VMD - note taker

1. Announcements and apologies for absence

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed VMD's interim Head of Finance Nidhi Gupta to the Board and Kashif Shah of the Finance team was also welcomed to the meeting.
- 1.2 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 7 October 2025

VMDMB 25/43

- 3.1 The minutes were agreed.

4. Matters Arising

VMDMB 25/44 & 45

- 4.1 The IT road map for replacing legacy systems will be discussed at the March meeting as planned.
- 4.2 Lea Reynolds, Head of Policy Development and Delivery, explained that VMD had run a public consultation on the Medicines and Medical Devices (MMD) Act in September in accordance with conditions made by Parliament when it was passed 5 years ago. The Act provides VMD with primary powers to amend the detailed legislation in the VMR. The consultation was run on behalf of DHSC to a short timetable but the response had been positive. Responses covered a wide breadth of different areas, some of which were outside the scope of the Act, but there were no real surprises in terms of the subjects raised. An analysis of the responses was provided to the Board and VMD will send them to DHSC.
- 4.3 VMD clarified that veterinary medical devices are not regulated while human devices are regulated internationally and by the MHRA in the UK. The range of veterinary devices is large and complicated and VMD is considering whether there is a clear problem statement which requires action and if introducing legislation to regulate them would be proportionate. Board members noted that it is difficult to obtain the data needed to help decide if any changes to regulations will promote growth in accordance with the government's action plan. VMD will keep the Board informed about the outcome of the consultation.

5. Chair's Report

- 5.1 The Chair addressed the dynamic global and domestic challenges impacting the VMD, emphasising the need for strategic vigilance amid geopolitical shifts and evolving government priorities. The World Economic Forum has published its Global Risks Report which indicates that geo-economic fragmentation and societal polarisation have overtaken extreme weather events as top global risks, and VMD was urged to consider these factors in its strategic risk assessments.

- 5.2 The Secretary of State's speech at the Oxford Farming Conference on 8 January clearly set out the environment and generic policy direction for the Department, underscoring a push to enhance farming profitability through a new national plan and partnership, elements of which are relevant to VMD's work and linked to the forthcoming 25-year Farming Roadmap, and the Chair commended reading it to colleagues. Farming profitability is a key component of the recommendations made by the Minette Batters Review, which sets out a 'New Deal for Profitable Farming' that recognises the true cost of producing food and delivering for the environment.
- 5.3 A recent speech by the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister had called for a comprehensive transformation of public services into a digital state that delivers public services directly to the customer using modern technology. He also emphasised performance management with senior civil servants held to KPIs set by Ministers, thereby increasing pressures on VMD's executive team. The non-executives should recognise this and the importance of their own role in providing both scrutiny and support in an increasingly pressurised environment.
- 5.4 The Chair noted that the GIAA's audit committee effectiveness review was considered at the last ARAC meeting and anticipated that findings will inform the upcoming annual effectiveness review of the audit committee.

6. CEO's Report

VMDMB 25/46-48

- 6.1 The majority of work on the Corry and Hancock recommendations has been completed and the rest have been subsumed into regulatory targets which VMD is monitoring. A new EU Reset and Trade directorate under Emma Bourne has been created while VMD stays under the renamed Food Farming and Biosecurity division. VMD will need to work closely with the new directorate and is looking to increase the size of its own EU team. Northern Ireland was brought under the EU regulations on 1st January and VMD is now working with two sets of regulations. The CEO provided an overview of the latest state of play.
- 6.2 Capita has taken over the management of civil service pensions and is dealing with a large backlog of cases, which is causing problems for retiring staff. The CMA's interim findings on price increases for veterinary medicines and how businesses operate has led to a consultation on the Veterinary Surgeons Act being launched. This will lead to a better understanding of the economics of the sector. The Animal Welfare Strategy has been published and parts are relevant to VMD. An MA Holder's appeal against a VMD decision for its product was heard by the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) which agreed with VMD's original decision and the MA Holder is now taking their appeal to an appointed person as is their right under the legislation.
- 6.3 The burden of work on the Defra legal services will not affect the SI on Residues this year but changes to fees may be delayed which could affect income and Defra will need to make up any shortfall.

7. ARAC Chair's Report

- 7.1 The ARAC Chair reported that the strategic Risk Register had been reviewed at the December meeting and improvements proposed which are in progress. The NAO had set out its plan for end of year accounts which was accepted. It was noted that its statement of materiality for the VMD has increased, and will be under close scrutiny, while clarity is needed on the asset capitalisation of the office modernisation and there was also a query over the VAT restatement which VMD will discuss with NAO and report to the Chair. The Committee is awaiting VMD's draft Governance Statement for the annual report.

- 7.2 The internal audit programme is on track for completion by the end of the year. The audit report of the Enforcement team was considered and it was noted that some of the management responses require amendment. The change to another audit provider, RSM, from next year has been agreed and GIAA informed.
- 7.3 A revised format for the Assurance Map was agreed and it was thought this could be used to provide the CEO with adequate end of year assurance but the Board was not satisfied with this approach and ARAC will look at producing a formal governance process involving reports from heads of teams.
- 7.4 At the next ARAC meeting it is planned to review any outstanding risk policies and cyber security and VMD will consider with the Chair whether to review the IT road map as well before it comes to the Board.
- 7.5 The Board Chair questioned whether there was enough on the Risk Register concerning threats to critical national infrastructure and the business contingencies needed to ensure continued approval of medicines. In addition, a recommendation from Hancock and Corry was that Defra be less risk averse while VMD's risk appetite was generally cautious. VMD noted that Defra had provided an analysis of risks taken and VMD had come out as less averse than some other ALBs. ARAC will discuss these aspects with the Executive before they are brought back to the March Management Board.

8. Annual Report and Accounts

VMDMB 25/49-51

- 8.1 The Chair noted that the annual report should reflect how VMD is leading on events rather than reacting to them. The need for a themed golden thread for the narrative will be taken forward by the CEO. The Board endorsed VMD's statement of going concern and was reassured that the organisation would continue into the long term.

9. AI Strategy

VMDMB 25/52

- 9.1 VMD presented its draft AI strategy which has four aims: for AI and its benefits to be embedded in operations; to understand the implications of how stakeholders are using AI in order to be able to provide clarity and direction on its proper use; to be clear how VMD will use it within regulatory processes; and to empower staff with AI tools and training to enhance productivity and confidence in digital transformation.
- 9.2 VMD confirmed that AI testing is ongoing and timelines and costs for implementing the strategy still need to be set. Some outside training has already been provided to users and conversations are ongoing with MHRA which is contributing to understanding the implications for the regulatory sphere. A big issue is the time and resources needed to learn how to use all the tools available.
- 9.3 The Board commended the strategy and the way it articulated risks and recognised controls are needed. It appreciated it was still at an early stage and asked for it to be brought back when further developed.

10. Business Performance

VMDMB 25/53 & 54

- 10.1 Progress against the business plan was reviewed. VMD's recruitment processes are becoming quicker and there are more applicants. Delivery of IT systems development is back on track for the end of March. Build or buy options for IT systems are being considered and an extended review of IT issues and the roadmap will be held at the March meeting. Online pharmacovigilance reporting is due to go live in April.
- 10.2 Progress against the budget was reported and remains on track.

11. Any other Business

- 11.1 The Chair commented that the Board recognises the large amount of work VMD is doing and challenges it is facing and asked that its thanks be passed on to staff for continuing to deliver progress under difficult circumstances.

**Veterinary Medicines Directorate
January 2026**