

# **VMD AUDIT & RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE**

## **Minutes of meeting held on 4 December 2025**

### **Members**

Laura Catterick (Chair)  
David Catlow  
Mike Venables

### **Present**

Abi Seager – VMD  
Gavin Hall - VMD  
Mike Griffiths – VMD  
Suzanne Eckford – VMD (for item 3)  
Claire Stratford – VMD (for item 3)  
David Martin – GIAA  
Ian Coates - GIAA  
Matt Kay – NAO  
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 There were no interests.

### **3. Availability of Vaccines**

- 3.1 Suzanne Eckford, Head of VMD's International Office and Claire Stratford, Head of the Research, Innovation, Sustainability and Evidence (RISE) team, attended the meeting to present on work that is being done to ensure the availability of veterinary vaccines. They acknowledged first that the documented risk on the Corporate Risk Register needs to be updated to 1. address the questions the Chair asked in advance of ARAC and 2. better reflect how the risk is being managed. The other key point they identified was that the risk score on the risk register was too high and that they had rescored it.
- 3.2 They explained that a shortage of vaccines to treat endemic and emerging diseases was identified two years ago and VMD started a project to identify the causes and come up with solutions. It was realised this would be a complex process with multiple potential points of failure. Product supply chains have vulnerabilities and it is difficult for manufacturers to quickly increase or decrease production to meet changing demand. New disease threats are emerging and causing therapeutic gaps to arise. There is space for new technologies to be developed but this is expensive and Industry needs to be incentivised to commit resources, particularly for minor use/minor species products where the market return is likely to be small. Government policy is influential and is needed to provide a clear steer.
- 3.2 VMD has arranged workshops and meetings with stakeholders across government and the pharmaceutical industry to help identify problems and potential solutions. This has led to a Statement of Intent on veterinary vaccines being published in September which sets out the strategic approach through which the animal health sector, supported by government, should join forces to deliver the tools that vets and animal keepers need to keep animals healthy. The focus will be on improving supply and uptake, supporting innovation and reviewing the manufacturing landscape. The aim is to publish a 5-year multi-stakeholder UK action plan, which will set out deliverables, timelines and key performance indicators, in the next 12 months. As the UK regulator

with responsibility for assuring availability of products essential for animal health, VMD is seen as a leader but most actions will be outside its sphere to control and external parties will need to commit to targets.

- 3.2 Members suggested that a dashboard or risk register could be used to aid communication with the different sectors and VMD noted that an advisory board will be set up to oversee matters and liaise with the Treasury over funding. Members asked if hypothetical exercises could help with visualisation and engagement and VMD noted that case studies had proved to be useful in the past and that a disease outbreak exercise had been held recently by the APHA but disappointingly VMD had not been included.
- 3.3 The Chair thanked the speakers and the committee looked forward to hearing more about the action plan in due course.

**4. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2025** **VMDARAC 25/56**

- 4.1 The minutes were agreed.

**5. Matters Arising/Actions** **VMDARAC 25/57 & 58**

- 5.1 Action 147: It was agreed that the new version of the assurance map could be used to provide sufficient assurance to the CEO – see item 9.
- 5.2 Action 153: VMD confirmed that issues with SSCL would be raised at regular meetings with its Defra HR business partner and this action could now be closed.
- 5.3 Action 157: The Chair is awaiting a list of policies from VMD.
- 5.4 Action 159: VMD reported on PiE activities undertaken since the last meeting, including a plan for messaging on responsible use of spot-on parasiticide products. Further reporting will be done through the risk register, but the expectation is that the risk score should reduce following the messaging campaign planned for Spring 2026.
- 5.5 Action 160: VMD has recently been informed by Defra that full physical valuations of assets on the Weybridge site will take place every year and there are no immediate plans to use indexation. Members were surprised at this course of action and VMD will follow up with Defra.

**6. Risk Register** **VMDARAC 25/59-61**

- 6.1 The Chair had reviewed the format and detail of the Corporate Risk Register with the Executive before the meeting and proposed some improvements. It was agreed that complexity and duplication needs to be reduced so it is easier to engage with and there are issues with overscoring risks and keeping information up-to-date. Rating risks before and after mitigations is useful but more detail needs to be added to the mitigations. GIAA noted that summary sheets are used at some other ALBs. The aim is to make the document simple and clear for VMD to use and also for it to give ARAC members information they need while providing a clear audit trail.
- 6.2 It was noted that VMD had amalgamated some risks together as reputational risks and Members questioned how helpful this was but would leave to VMD to decide whether separating them would be better.
- 6.3 The Chair offered to provide teach-ins to risk owners for completing their sections. VMD reported that mitigations put in place to reduce to a low level the number of discontinued veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland following the end of the EU grace period have been successful. This has been acknowledged by NOAH but some parties have put out misleading messages sensationalising the negative effects on availability of medicines and animal health which is disappointing considering their

involvement in planning meetings. There is no operational delivery risk and there are suppliers ready to supply veterinary medicines to NI. Any medicinal gaps can be filled using the cascade and VMD can also issue temporary product authorisations under EU regulations. All preparatory measures have been taken but the full picture regarding any supply issues will only become clear next year.

## **7. Internal Audit Progress Report**

**VMDARAC 25/67-73**

- 7.1 The internal auditor reported that there had been some slippage in delivering the audit timetable but it was on track to be completed by the end of March. The indicative overall opinion following audit work already completed this year is moderate.
- 7.2 The audit of Enforcement has been completed and the report gave a moderate opinion and made eight recommendations including the need to fully document procedures. Members noted that the issue of incomplete written procedures seems thematic and VMD confirmed that staff have been reminded to focus on improving this as best practice.
- 7.3 The audit report on implementing the new VMR had been reissued with a revised limited opinion following disclosure that VMD's internal documentation to support the changes had been incomplete. The one recommendation made had already been actioned by VMD.
- 7.4 GIAA provided several supplementary reports on ARAC effectiveness and the Chair would use these to identify areas the committee could improve in. The Chair also highlighted the events available for ARAC members that are hosted by GIAA, with the next one scheduled for March 2026.
- 7.5 VMD confirmed that it would soon reach a decision about its plans for an internal audit provider for next year.

## **8. External Audit planning report 2025-26**

**VMDARAC 25/74**

- 8.1 The external auditor presented their planning report for the 2025-26 financial statements audit. The committee confirmed it was content with the change to the materiality percentage proposed. VMD will take up intangibles with NAO and advise on the planned office refurbishments capitalisation.
- 8.2 VMD confirmed it would take note of changes in the Orange Book to ways of managing public money as described in the report. The HR process for making exit payments will be reviewed.
- 8.3 The auditor noted that its annual fee has increased due to additional resources needed to comply with new product standards and that in previous years it has been under recovering on charges to VMD. NAO will come back with information to support this.

## **9. Assurance Map**

**VMDARAC 25/62 & 63**

- 9.1 The format of the assurance map had been revised and Members appreciated the changes made and found the document to be clear and helpful. It was suggested that direction of travel could be added, the overview comments made more succinct through use of bullet points, and instances of over assurance be recorded, with appropriate actions undertaken to address findings identified. The accompanying one page outlining the approach to Assurance needs to be updated to confirm that actions identified through the assurance processes would be addressed. It was noted that the intention was for the map to be reviewed regularly at EMB and this would significantly contribute to providing sufficient assurance for the CEO as well as ARAC. The CEO was content that this process would provide sufficient assurance for the end of year without further specific contributions being needed from Heads of Teams.

**10. Timetable for Annual Report and Accounts** **VMDARAC 25/64**

10.1 A proposed timetable for end of year accounts was presented. NAO noted that it aims to complete their fieldwork in May and asked for the timetable to be shortened if possible and VMD would look into revising it. VMD will circulate the first draft of the governance statement before the next meeting.

**11. Security/Data handling/Fraud/Complaints** **VMDARAC 25/65**

11.1 The report was reviewed.

**12. Work Plan** **VMDARAC 25/66**

12.1 It was agreed that the March deep dive will be on tech risks. The Chair will clarify the subject after meeting with IT heads next week.

**13. Any Other Business**

13.1 Following the publication of an NAO report on the use of external consultants, the Chair raised the question about the extent of its use of consultants in VMD. Assurance was provided that there will always be a place for contingent labour and external consultants are on time-limited contracts and used to tackle high work volumes rather than lead projects. Loss of knowledge when they leave is not significant although there are some longstanding IT consultants who would be difficult to replace. This would be discussed during the meeting with the IT heads next week and would feature in the deep dive on tech risks.