

The MHS Transformation Programme - an update.

Issue 6
April 2008

The MHS has undergone a number of radical changes since July in accordance with key milestones identified in the Transformation Programme. Through consultation and close collaboration with industry representatives, contractors and key stakeholders, the Meat Hygiene Service has made great progress in significantly improving the efficiency of the delivery of official controls in approved meat premises.

- The MHS is on course to meet and potentially exceed the financial targets set by the FSA Board last July.
- £4 million per annum has been saved as a result of the staffing verification project.
- The new operational management structure is taking shape: 12 Business Managers have been appointed and are in situ (see the Business Manager leaflet enclosed); 10 Lead Veterinarians have just been appointed. The new Business Manager and Lead Veterinarian roles are at the heart of our vision to improve business performance and the quality of our client and stakeholder relationships.
- The regional offices in Wales and north England have now closed with the remaining offices to follow by the end of September 2008 (see page 4). The MHS recognises the particular concerns of the Governments in Scotland and Wales and is committed to working with them and with the Industry representatives in those countries as transformation progresses.
- Contractors are well on the way through the pre-qualification to tender process. The new contractual approach is entirely focused on improving quality, efficiency and further reducing our costs.
- A FSA/ MHS/ Industry team is due to visit abattoirs shortly to identify ways to optimise the delivery of official controls under the current EU regulations and thereby deliver further savings (see page 3).
- The MHS has made significant progress with automating many of its paper based systems through the eMHS project. The 'e-enabling' of systems has recently included the launch of contractor e-timesheets and e-throughput with the aim of further reducing overheads and improving efficiency.
- Work is continuing on maximising the potential for sharing services across the corporate services of the MHS and FSA.
- MHS staff numbers have already been reduced by 130 and a further reduction of 190 posts will be achieved by 2011, predominantly management and support staff.

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PIA training guidance

The article on PIA training in the last edition of Link mentioned that the PIA qualification and corresponding syllabus is currently being redrafted by Improve Ltd (the food and drink sector's Skills Council) in consultation with the FSA, MHS, Royal Society for the Promotion of Health (RSPH) and the British Poultry Council (BPC).

As an interim measure until the new qualification is in place, guidance on PIA training is available to all OV's on the MHS intranet to help OV's discuss and supervise training of PIA candidates with FBOs. The main points of the guidance are:

- The OV will be supervising the PIA candidates and assessing their competency through a formal "assessment of practical application experience".
- New PIAs trained during this transitional period will remain authorised regardless of future changes that are made to the qualification.
- Existing PIAs appointed pre-2006 are not required to update their training until the position is further clarified on whether the update is necessary.

This guidance will remain valid until the new PIA qualification is launched.

OV contracting - an update

Existing MHS contracts for the supply of contract OV's and MHIs cease at the end of this year. The MHS has now commenced a two-stage procurement exercise to deliver these services when current contracts expire.

Using the MHS's revised model of geographic clusters and with a vision of a single contractor providing all contracted services within a whole cluster, the outcome is expected to improve the efficient use of resources, reduce resource cost and improve management and consistency of service through the economies of scale. However, due to the unique and isolated nature of the Scottish islands, the process is considering separating these out and forming a number of localised individual contracts.

Stage 1 of the OV contracting procedure involves pre-qualification of contracting applicants to become an approved supplier. Stage 1 is a qualitative exercise designed to ensure that organisations which go on to tender at stage 2, meet the capability, experience and quality criteria required by the vision for MHS transformation. Applicants have been given 8 weeks to complete and return their pre-qualification application by the end of April when an evaluation panel including FSA, DEFRA and representatives from the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, will select the approved suppliers list. Approved suppliers will be asked to tender in full at a second stage from July with final contracts being awarded for a 5 year period in October.



Final selection will be made on value for money and market share but also taking into consideration current geographic footprint to minimise where possible any disruption to FBO services and established working relationships. Nonetheless, the contract process includes a 3 month migration period from October to early January 2009 to facilitate smooth transfer between contractors. In some cases it is anticipated that although the contractor servicing a plant may change, the contract personnel may transfer between contractors, minimising the impact on working relationships. Further information may be obtained from your area MHS Business Manager.

Disease outbreak! - are you ready?



Sample map from Defra website showing type of detailed information available.

Note: this map does **NOT** necessarily depict the current situation.

We encourage all FBOs to regularly revise their contingency planning for disease outbreak situations and discuss their plan with the plant OV. Where applicable, FBOs should ensure that as part of their contingency plan, they apply for a designation/ listing or approval to ensure minimum disruption to their operations.

Written procedures for operations under a disease control situation, explaining any additional C&D steps, separation facilities etc, should also be part of contingency planning.

All FBOs should keep themselves updated on any disease outbreak situation via the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable

You may also contact your local Animal Health office. For a list of offices go to www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/about-us/contact-us/animal-health-offices.htm

MHS staff and stakeholders are regularly updated on new changes relevant to the MHS via MHS operational briefing notes.

Optimisation of MHS resources in plants

A number of outcomes have resulted from the work started last November when the MHS and FSA jointly hosted workshops with industry and others (see issue 2). Significantly, a team will now examine how MHS operational costs can be further reduced by taking advantage of flexibilities allowed under the current EU regulations. The team will be made up of staff from the FSA, MHS and industry.

The following opportunities for reducing MHS operational hours will be investigated:

- Streamlining MHS working practices
- Improving FBO scheduling and processing to increase MHS efficiency
- MHS hours worked on non-statutory tasks
- Applying permissible flexibilities
- Identifying flexibilities that are not currently permitted by policy or legislation

Where flexibilities are allowed, the team will work with FBOs to identify cost effective changes to working practices.

Where policy or legislation restricts efficiencies, we intend to explore whether these can be changed through national measures in the medium term or legislative changes to EU regulations in the longer term.

Industry organisations are being asked to nominate premises which they believe have anomalous attendance for the team to consider. Visits to individual premises are expected to start in April.

Transformation Programme update

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Charging

The MHS have now hosted four meetings with senior industry representatives, Defra, the FSA and the devolved administrations to discuss future proposals for charging arrangements. The meetings looked at potential options proposed by the MHS together with those from industry bodies. There was majority support for the time cost charging proposals, subject to the necessary checks and balances being in place. A small minority of industry representatives supported alternative charging arrangements based on throughput.

As a result, a paper outlining the proposed charging system will be considered by the MHS Board in May. The recommendations of the MHS Board will be put forward to the Advisory Body and the FSA food advisory committees for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland before proposals are considered by the FSA Board in July. Ministers will be briefed following the meeting. A formal consultation will be held on the proposed new system during which stakeholder organisations, the devolved administrations and food business operators will be able to comment.

New Charges Regulations.

New Charges Regulations came into force on 31 March 2008. The new regulations provide for an increase in MHS hourly charges by around 8%, and similar increases in most throughput rates. Ministers in England, Scotland and Wales agreed to these changes after they were subject to a full public consultation. The consultation elicited 32 responses out of around 1000 letters issued. A summary of responses and further reasoning behind the decision to proceed can be found at www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/consultationresponse/mocceng08response.pdf

A new MHS Charges Guide (effective from 31/03/08) has been issued to all approved food business operators and other stakeholders. This sets out how MHS charges are calculated and shows all of the new hourly and throughput rates. If you have not yet received your copy of the new Charges Guide please contact us on 01904 455 538.

Regional Office closures

In accordance with the MHS's Transformation plans, the closure of two MHS Regional Offices took place on 31 March. The North and Wales regional offices in York and Cardiff were decommissioned, with all operational processes moving to a temporary Transition Hub in headquarters from that date. All Human Resources and Finance processes have been absorbed into departments within MHS headquarters. All regional FBOs, contractors and key stakeholders have been informed and have been supplied with contact details. The remaining three Regional Offices are scheduled for decommissioning and closure as follows:

South & West (Taunton) - 30 June 2008
Central (Wolverhampton) - 31 August 2008
Scotland (Edinburgh) - 30 September 2008

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MHS Communications.



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The Meat Hygiene Service is an executive agency of the Food Standards Agency



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