



The MHS Transformation Programme - an update.

TMHS Decision on Operation Structure and Support Services

The MHS Senior Management Team met on 10 December to take a number of key decisions on the transformation of the MHS. The decisions set out the operational structure for the future to support our aim to be the best option for the delivery of official controls.

All MHS staff have now been given details of how the Transformation Programme will impact on each part of the organisation, from operational delivery to HQ Departments.

Operations

The initial working assumption identified a need for 41 clusters, this has been revised after extensive research and the final figure is now expected to be 38. The primary reason for moving to the clusters system is to group plants together in a way that will be easier to manage. This will:

- Provide significant efficiency gains in terms of employing and contracting veterinary services
- Strengthen veterinary management
- Maximise effectiveness of service delivery

OVs will continue to be provided substantially by contractors, and they will become the plant team leader. MHIs and MTs will report directly to the OV, who in turn will report to a new position of Lead Veterinarian (LV).

Employed OVs will continue as before, but with the added responsibility of being a plant team leader, also reporting to the LV.

The SMHI role will change in the new structure. SMHIs will report directly to the LV across the

cluster, and for the first year will focus on assisting and advising the LV in establishing the OV as team leader. Core work will continue to include resource planning and deployment. Most clusters will initially have more than one SMHI, but this figure is expected to be reduced by half over the next two to three years depending on the size of the cluster.

During 2008-2009 we envisage estimated savings of £1.5m and during 2009-2010 estimated savings of £2.9m.

Lead Veterinarians

A new position of Lead Veterinarian (LV) will be established. The LV will be responsible for both technical and managerial business for each cluster. The aim is to employ as many LVs as possible, but those positions not filled by internal candidates will be contracted. A mixture of employed and contracted LVs will provide one element of contestability for the first contract period.

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Advisory Body on the Delivery of Official Controls

The first meeting of the new Advisory Body on the Delivery of Official Controls took place in London on 5th of December. The Body was set up in response to the Tierney Review and its purpose is to create a forum for stakeholders to build co-operation and partnership working on issues concerning the future of the MHS, the charging regime and the regulations covering the delivery of official controls in approved meat plants. The Advisory Body comprises 16 representatives of consumers, food business operators in the red, white and game sectors, primary producers, meat retailers and supermarkets as well as MHS contractors, the MHS themselves, Defra and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The independent chair is Professor Patrick Wall of University College Dublin, and currently chair of the management board of the European Food Safety Authority.

The first meeting discussed the Body's terms of reference and heard from the MHS on progress on the transformation programme. Jane Downes of the MHS set out work done to date to reduce costs, stressing that the MHS was keen to work with industry on possible efficiency gains.

FSA acting Veterinary Director Peter Hewson also gave an update on work to model a pilot for an alternative Control Body. Peter confirmed that a decision to launch, cancel or delay any pilot would be taken by the FSA Board in May 2008, in the light of progress made in transforming the MHS.

Information relating to the new Advisory Body, including papers put to the last meeting, is available at: www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/industrycommittees/abdoc/.

A dedicated e-mail has been set up so that stakeholders can also comment on the papers at DeliveryOfficialControls@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Alternative Payment Methods

Currently, a significant proportion of FBOs pay their MHS charges by cheque each month. While the Finance department are happy to accept payment by this method, we would like to bring to your attention the benefits that could be gained, both by FBOs and the MHS, if charges were paid by alternative methods available.

One method is by **BACS**. The MHS Finance department have the facility to accept payment by BACs (banker automated clearing service) which is a facility that allows a business to credit another business bank account by direct electronic transfer of money. More information on the BACS process can be found at: www.bacs.co.uk/BACS/consumers

Another payment method is by way of the internet. Many, if not most, banking transactions take place on the internet with all major banks providing an **internet banking** service. If you are not already familiar with internet banking it's a relatively pain free process to set up. Just ask your bank to provide you with an account code and password to access your existing account online. This will allow you to make direct transfers to the MHS's account. There are several benefits

of using internet banking compared to cheques:

- Value – internet-only banking services often offer best value for you as they have lower running costs.
- Accessibility – internet accounts are usually accessible 24 hours a day.
- Ease and convenience – those who find it difficult to get to a branch within working hours find internet banking a practical alternative.

Payment can also be made by **debit card**. This can be done by telephoning the number on the back of your monthly invoices and statements where details of the MHS bank account can also be found.

All of the above methods help lower business banking charges; help schedule regular payments and assist the MHS in reducing the costs of processing cheques. If you would like to discuss alternative payment options in more detail please contact Beryl Riley, Revenue Accounting Manager on 01904 455968 or email beryl.riley@mhs.gov.uk

Achieving Consistent Risk-based Enforcement

The MHS has a published enforcement policy (see MOC Chapter 7) which sets out the hierarchy of enforcement. Despite following this process it is sometimes necessary to take formal action. Traditionally this has been dealt with at Regional level and a request for final investigation, with a view to prosecution, has been submitted to the FSA Legal Department.

We have just completed a successful pilot exercise where any referrals from OV's in North and Scotland have been submitted to the Veterinary & Technical Department in York instead. The veterinary team has convened a case conference with the locally based staff, and in some cases the FBO, to agree a way forward. There are four options:

- FSA for revocation or suspension
- FSA for investigation
- MHS for intervention by senior management
- Reject -advise OV on action / procedure

By going through each case with the OV we are ensuring that the appropriate visits have been considered and risk assessment has been applied consistently across Great Britain.

While we will try to avoid final action through working with the FBO, we are satisfied that the new system will ensure enforcement is properly directed towards those who fail to achieve satisfactory standards and bring the meat industry into disrepute.

Manual for Official Controls CD Rom Pilot

As part of the MHS Transformation project we are currently developing options for the introduction of an IT enabled Manual for Official Controls (MOC). One of the options being considered, as an interim measure prior to the development of the electronic version, is to reduce the cost of issuing manuals to our staff, contractors and external stakeholders by replacing the current version of the MOC issued to our front-line operational staff, with a CD Rom version. This has been piloted, since November, in 34 plants.

Replacing the existing copies of the MOC with a CD Rom has seen the removal of 170 hardcopy MOC folders. This has resulted in a significant reduction in resource, print and distribution costs. We intend to continue the pilot for a further three months, during which time we will be sending questionnaires to the 34 plants asking for feedback to help inform the business as to whether the future anticipated savings will be realised. Further measures will include an expansion of the access to an on-line version of both the MOC and Meat Industry Guide to Food Business Operators and other external stakeholders via the internet.

Food Safety Management Diary

In December 2006, the FSA launched the Food Safety Management Diary. Use of the diary is voluntary, but it is designed to help meat plant operators to record food safety management activities. The Diary has three sections where FBOs can keep important information about the hygienic operations: the contact detail section, Records of Management checks (including HACCP plan templates) and other information.

Operators who received the 2007 diary will automatically receive the new diary in December. If you would like a copy of the 2008 diary, please email the mailbox at: meatindustryguide@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk. It is also available to download on our website at: www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/meat/haccpmeatplants/

For any further queries, please contact Miss Wing-Man Chan on 020 7276 8384 or email: wing-man.chan@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Transformation Programme Update

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Business Managers

The LV will report to a new position of Business Manager (BM). There are likely to be 12 business managers, but this figure is subject to change depending on the final number of clusters. The BM will report to a new role of Business Director. Responsibilities of the BM will include:

- Management of a number of clusters, ensuring the optimum use of staff, employed and contracted
- Stakeholder relations
- Leadership and performance management
- Financial management
- Contract management

Business Directors

There will be two Business Directors (BD) each taking responsibility for half of GB. The BDs will have responsibility for all aspects of operational delivery across GB.

What this means for the future structure of the MHS

As a result of the new management structure, the roles of Regional Director, Regional Veterinary Advisor, Area Official Veterinarian and Area Manager will no longer exist and the Regional Offices will close by 31 March 2009. There will be a small support team for the Business Director based locally and support for the Business Managers will be provided by a reorganised Operations HQ support team. Human Resource Advisors and Health & Safety Advisors will continue to be locally-based across GB and report to the HR department in HQ.

The changes outlined above are substantial and will quickly lead to an overall reduction in staff numbers and management overhead. The MHS has already begun to make savings in its corporate services, which have seen a reduction in staffing numbers since March 2007.

Letter from the Editor

I hope you have found this edition of Link newsletter helpful. We aim to keep FBOs up to date on the latest news and information from the MHS.

Link will keep you up to date on EU policy changes, notifiable diseases, changes within the MHS, and other issues that affect your business, as well as providing advice on compliance and best practice, so we can work together effectively to ensure that you produce safe meat. In response to your feedback, we now issue the newsletter on a monthly basis. We want Link to be a useful and informative publication. Please contact us with any suggestions, comments or ideas for articles via the dedicated Link mailbox link@mhs.gov.uk or call 01904 455558. This is your opportunity to tell us about the issues most important to you. Please also contact us on the numbers above if you would like to receive Link in a different format.

We look forward to hearing from you.



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

