

MINUTES OF THE MEAT HYGIENE SERVICE (MHS) BOARD MEETING HELD ON
THURSDAY 21 JULY 2005 AT THE ROYAL YORK HOTEL IN YORK

Attendees

Chair: Chrissie Dunn

MHS Board Members: Valerie Howarth (Deputy Chair)
Jon Bell
Celia Bennett
Maureen Edmondson
Deryk Mead

Secretariat: David Bramley, MHS

Officials Chris Lawson, MHS

Participating: Jane Downes, MHS
Kevin Goddard, MHS

Officials Attending: Kathryn Davies, MHS (Items 1 – 6)
Kevin Waggott, MHS
Tim Studdert-Kennedy, Defra

Item 1: Introduction and Apologies

1. The Chair welcomed Board Members and officials to the meeting and, in particular, Celia Bennett and Deryk Mead to their first MHS Board Meeting. They had recently been appointed as independent members of the MHS Board. The Chair advised Members that apologies had been received from Alick Simmons, MHS Board Member, and observers from FSA England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
2. The Chair reminded the Board that all members had an equal voice and opportunity to speak to contribute to effective discussion.

3. The Chair also reminded Board Members of their obligation to declare any relevant interests before agenda items were discussed. No Board Members declared any interests in respect of any item on the agenda.

**Item 2: Draft Minutes of the 26 May and 9 Jun 2005 Meetings
(Paper (05) 51 & 52)**

4. Members agreed the minutes as an accurate reflection of the May and June meetings subject to one minor amendment to the May minutes.

Action: Secretariat

Item 3: Actions Arising

(Paper (05) 53)

5. All actions arising from the May and June meetings were complete except the redrafting of the foreword to the Corporate Business Plan. The MHS Chief Executive advised that this would be completed by 29 July 2005. It was noted that the 2005/06 Business Plan had been prepared for the benefit of MHS staff and that consideration will be given in future to whether a version of the plan should be prepared for external stakeholders.

Action: MHS Chief Executive

Item 4: MHS Board Chair's Report

Framework Document

6. The Chair was pleased to report that the MHS Framework Document had now been formally published, following HM Treasury agreement. The Framework Document was provided to Board members.

MHS Open House Meeting

7. The Chair updated the MHS Board on her visit to the MHS Open House session on 5 June 2005 in Chelmsford. The Chair said she had found the meeting very useful and thanked the Chief Executive and MHS staff for the opportunity to attend the meeting. She appreciated that the Open House sessions provided an important opportunity for staff to meet, and express their views directly to senior MHS management. It was noted that the presence of MHS Board Members was unlikely to inhibit discussion and therefore other MHS Board members may wish to attend future Open House sessions, particularly if they were being held at venues local to Board members. The

MHS Secretariat will include details of future open house meetings in mailings so that Board members are aware of dates and venues and can let the Secretariat know should they wish to attend.

Action: Secretariat and Board Members

Induction visits

8. The Chair reported that Chris Pomfret, an FSA Board member, had attended an induction visit to the MHS Headquarters in June. After the visit, he had written to the Chair to say that he found the visit very valuable, better understood the challenges faced by the MHS, and was impressed by the staff, particularly by the commitment of staff in the North Regional Office. Induction visits for two other FSA Board members were being planned – one to MHS Headquarters and one to a plant. Other FSA Board members will be encouraged to attend induction visits. This will help develop the FSA Board's understanding of the MHS. The Chair noted that the induction process will be evaluated regularly and feedback sought from Board members attending induction visits. This will help the induction process to become even more effective.

Item 5: MHS Chief Executive's Report

MHS and the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS)

9. The MHS Chief Executive said that he had hoped to be able to present an information paper in response to points raised by the Chair and Deputy Chair's report of their visit to BCMS in May. Unfortunately, this had not been possible and paper would now be circulated to Board members intersessionally in August.

Action: MHS Chief Executive

10. The MHS Chief Executive noted that the SLA with BCMS was due to be signed on 12 August 2005 and that copies of completed MHS 50 forms were now being sent to BCMS. This had helped improve the flow of information and should help reduce the number of errors in BCMS data.

Over Thirty Month (OTM) Breaches

11. The MHS Chief Executive said that he had reported at the May MHS Board meeting that there were no known breaches at that time in April and May. However, the subsequent validation exercise had shown that there had been a

breach in April involving an animal three days over thirty-months old. The breach had occurred because procedures had not been followed correctly. The validation exercise had confirmed no breaches during May. Overall, there had been a downward trend in the numbers of breaches. In the five months since January there had been just three breaches and in the previous four months there had been seventeen. New instructions had had a positive effect. Although it was impossible to guarantee 100% compliance, the MHS would continue to work towards it. The Chief Executive said that in the last five months 89 possible breaches had been identified and stopped. Half of these had been picked up by plant staff and half by MHS staff. All breaches since November 2004, except one, had been recommended for prosecution of the plant operator. Everyone in the supply chain from producer to plant operator needed to take responsibility for ensuring that animals over-thirty months did not enter the food chain. One member noted that the MHS should not be regarded as a backstop.

12. In discussion the following points were raised:

- It was crucial to send strong signals to the supply chain to reinforce their responsibility to consumers.
- The MHS Board would receive information on prosecutions and consideration would be given to what information on prosecutions should be made available to the public.

Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

13. The Chief Executive updated the Board on the position of SLAs that the MHS holds with other Government organisations.

- The SLA with Defra had been revised to pull together the previous individual agreements into a single SLA with a number of task-specific annexes. The single SLA and the annexes would be updated in light of the prioritisation exercise (considered under Item 7);
- The SLA with FSA was the subject of ongoing discussions. It was hoped that the new general SLA would be finalised by the end of September, followed by the detailed annexes;
- The SLA with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and BCMS [merged into a single organisation from 2003] was due to be signed off in the next month, until when the previous signed SLA would remain in force; and
- The SLA with VMD was signed and operating.

The Chief Executive undertook to keep Board members informed of the position on SLAs

Action: MHS Chief Executive

MHS Financial Position

14. The Chief Executive reported that there was currently an adverse variance of £200k against budget. Income from Specified Risk Material (SRM) controls had reduced and the reason for this was currently being investigated. The pensions impact was around £1m on the budget because of the FRS 17 reporting requirements.
15. In discussion, it was reported that the MHS staff turnover rate was 6-7%. The number of vacancies and short term cost of training new staff had been allowed for in projections.

Annual Report and Accounts

16. The Chief Executive reported that the annual report and accounts had been laid before Parliament on time and thanked all the MHS staff for their efforts.

Pay and Grading

17. The Chief Executive updated the Board on the progress of the pay and grading review which was awaiting consideration by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Kathryn Davies, MHS Director of Corporate Services, had written to HM Treasury officials to underline the need to make urgent progress.

Ombudsman Enquiry

18. The Chief Executive updated the Board on a complaint that the Ombudsman was handling that the MHS had not taken sufficiently seriously an allegation about illegal export of wild game. The Chief Executive undertook to keep Board members informed of progress.

Second DNV Report

19. The second DNV report had been issued at the end of June. The MHS Chief Executive and the FSA Chief Executive would meet shortly to discuss the way forward and would prepare a paper for the Board. If necessary, this would be

put to the Board intersessionally. In the meantime, the Board would be kept updated of progress.

Newcastle Disease

20. The Chief Executive reported that an outbreak of Newcastle Disease (a notifiable viral disease affecting the nervous system of birds) had been detected in Surrey in pheasants received from France. There were no production facilities within the disease area and Defra had confirmed that no activity from MHS was required at this stage.

Possible Withdrawal of Service

21. The Chief Executive updated members on a possible withdrawal of MHS inspection service. The operator of a plant had been successfully prosecuted last year for several offences. As a result, the operator was jailed and prohibited from involvement in the management of a food business for seven years. However, it now appeared that this person might again be actively involved in the management of the plant. This was currently the subject of investigation.

22. In discussion the following points were raised:

- It was important to send clear signals to plant operators that protecting public health, and animal health and welfare, was vital. This would help reassure consumers;
- An assurance was given that the FSA has provided full legal support;
- The plant itself was not shut down as the licence relates to the premises and not the plant operator; and
- The MHS Board would be informed if MHS services were withdrawn.

Action: MHS Chief Executive

Item 6: Agreeing Themes for the September Stakeholder Meeting (PAPER (05) 54)

23. The Chair invited Kevin Goddard, Head of the MHS Business Development Unit, to the table to introduce this paper. The paper set out potential themes for the September Stakeholder event, which would now be informed by the Board workshop held before this Board meeting.

24. In discussion, it was agreed that:

- The main theme of the day should be: 'Future of the Meat Hygiene Service: Working Together';
- A short presentation on the role of the MHS, including an overview of the MHS Board, would be helpful;
- Consideration should be given to whether more time is spent on the question and answer session;
- Possible change to the Over-Thirty Month rule may make a good topic; and
- It would be inappropriate to discuss charging policy at the meeting because this is an FSA Board responsibility.

25. The Board agreed that:

- The event would be held on 22 September 2005, starting at 1200 noon with a buffet lunch and finishing at 1530;
- The meeting should focus on a small number of items of relevance to a wide-range of stakeholders;
- The meeting should begin with a short presentation on the role of the MHS, reminding the audience of the purpose of the MHS. This should also include the role of the MHS Board;
- The bulk of time should be spent listening to and gaining views of stakeholders possibly considering what success looks like for the MHS;
- The outcome of the meeting needed to be carefully captured to ensure none of the contribution from stakeholders is lost;
- The facilitator of the workshop held on 21 July 2005 would be a good possible candidate to facilitate the meeting; and
- Invitations for the event should be sent by Friday 29 July 2005 if possible.

Action: Board Secretariat

Item 7: MHS Prioritisation

(PAPER (05) 55)

26. The Chair invited Jane Downes, MHS Director of Veterinary and Technical Services, to the table to introduce this paper. She explained that the initial prioritisation was based on science and was risk-based. Subsequently, however, priorities had been adapted to reflect other significant factors including, for example, legal requirements and political/public perceptions.

27. **All** members of the MHS Board congratulated the group on the development of the paper which provided a good model for cross-departmental working and future determination of MHS priorities.

28. In discussion the following points were raised:

- It was confirmed that the paper covered MHS work for all Government customers including the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Rural Payments Agency.;
- It was for customers to agree priorities for individual tasks, rather than the MHS Board.
- Where adjustments were made to priorities to reflect other factors, these factors and the reasons for them needed to be clearly identified;
- It was noted that the paper's remit did not cover resource allocation to tasks. However consideration should be given to whether this could be included in future iterations;
- Care needs to be taken in building in the risk to the consumer; and
- It was noted that this work would inform the setting of Targets and Key Performance Indicators

29. The Board asked to be kept informed as the MHS prioritisation of tasks is discussed further with customers.

Action: Jane Downes

Item 8: Monitoring MHS Corporate Targets

(PAPER (05) 56)

30. The Chair invited Kevin Goddard, Head of the MHS Business Development Unit, to the table to introduce this paper. Kevin explained that this was the first report against 2005/06 targets and feedback on the presentation and structure of the report would be particularly welcomed. In future, further textual analysis would be added to help explain the context and significance of progress towards targets.

31. In discussion the following points were raised:

- For ease of reference, it would be useful to summarise the headline targets on a single sheet;

- Concern was expressed that long-term sickness was increasing although it was noted that this was only the first quarter. It was confirmed that there was a more detailed breakdown of sickness absence which enabled trends for certain types of staff to be identified, and to benchmark sickness absence against counterparts in other Government Departments;
- Aim 1 indicator 1.21/1.22 shows a drop in total numbers of casualty animals between November and December 2004 because a new instruction was introduced which reduced the number classified as casualty animals; and
- In Aim 2 indicator 2.2, it would be helpful to clarify how debtor days are calculated and monitored for efficiencies.

Action: Kathryn Davies

- A number of presentational improvements were identified.

Action: Kevin Goddard

Item 9: Any Other Business

32. No items were raised under AOB.

Date of next meeting

33. The next MHS Board Meeting will be the stakeholder meeting on 22 September 2005 in York.

MHS Board Secretariat

September 2005