

**Draft Minutes of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) Board Transformation
update meeting held on Thursday 24 July 2008 by videoconference**

Attendees

Chair: Ian Reynolds

MHS Board: Tim Bennett
Maureen Edmondson
Nigel Gibbens
Steve McGrath
Tim Smith

Officials Jane Downes, MHS

Participating: Mike McEvoy, MHS
Kevin Goddard, MHS
Peter Hewson, FSA
Javier Dominguez, FSA
Elsbeth MacDonald, FSA Scotland
Mike Pender, FSA Wales
Jim Ross, FSA Northern Ireland

Secretariat: David Bramley, MHS

Item 1: Introduction and Apologies

1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Margaret Gilmore and Clive Grundy.
2. The Chair noted that Deryk Mead and Celia Bennett's terms of appointments to the MHS Board ended at the beginning of June and that their contribution over the previous three years had been greatly valued by the Board.

Conflicts of interest

3. No material conflicts of interest were declared.

**Item 2: Minutes of the 29 May and 17 June 2008 MHS Board meetings
(Paper (08) 31 & 32)**

4. MHS Board members agreed the minutes as accurate records of the MHS Board meetings held on 29 May and 17 June 2008.

**Item 3: Actions arising from the 29 May and 17 June 2008 MHS Board meetings
(Paper (08) 33)**

5. The MHS Chair noted that all actions from 17 June 2008 MHS Board meeting had been completed and that actions from 29 May 2008 were in progress.

Item 4: MHS Transformation Update (Paper (08) 34)

6. Jane Downes introduced the paper. In discussion:

Policy and operational changes

- MHS were continuing to press for SRM changes to be introduced to maximise savings accrued throughout the financial year.
- It would be helpful for FSA to set out the programme of policy changes to enhance coordination of policy and operational changes.
- The MHS were working with the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers to roll out the Business Service Agreement with FBOs. The agreement aimed to emphasise a partnership approach between FBOs and the MHS.
- The MHS and Defra were working to identify areas where policy could be adapted to reduce MHS costs without putting public health or animal health and welfare at risk.
- MHS charges could only be proposed for the next financial year because there was uncertainty about future base costs.

EC seminar on modernising inspection in slaughterhouses

- A seminar on modernising inspection in slaughterhouses had been held in Lyons between 7 to 11 July and had been attended by FSA, MHS and industry representatives.
- The seminar had been positive and taken a risk-based approach to meat inspection and recommendations from the seminar would be presented to Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) in October 2008.
- Whilst changes to post- and ante-mortem inspection may not affect public health, CVOs may be reluctant to agree changes as these inspection points could be helpful to identify disease outbreaks. It was important that the FSA ensured that there was robust and evidence-based case to support any proposed changes.
- Pilots would need to be approved by the EC and were limited to provisions contained within the annexes of the legislation, rather than the main articles. The veterinary profession, including academics, should be involved in any pilots to ensure that they supported the methodology and results of pilots.
- The effect of any changes on exports outside the EC would need to be considered. This could affect some sectors more than others. For example, the pig industry export widely and could be affected significantly by any changes.

Staffing changes

- Funding for additional staffing efficiencies through voluntary early retirement and voluntary severance was available. Previous applications from Senior Meat Hygiene Inspectors would be reconsidered against business needs.
- The current positive MHS financial outlook would allow the MHS to supplement spending on MHS transformation. However, additional investment would be needed to fund any further significant changes in staffing.
- The pace of changes to staffing levels was a priority. FSA would work with HM Treasury to secure additional funding. This was likely to be supported by HM Treasury because of the short payback periods involved and the fit with the wider-government agenda of reducing public sector spending.

Miscellaneous

- There are good informal relationships with DARD but there are opportunities to improve the formal relationship between DARD, FSA and MHS.
- The Optimisation team would visit a small number of plants in Northern Ireland, which would enable comparison between staffing in Northern Ireland and GB.
- DARD had made a commitment to reduce their costs by 17% during the Compulsory Spending Review period.

Item 5: Any Other Business

Cost of additional FMD controls in Scotland

7. The MHS Chief Executive confirmed that £230k relating to additional FMD controls carried out in Scotland had not been paid. Discussions were continuing and the money was expected to be paid by either Defra or the Scottish Government.

Forward agenda for the MHS Board

8. The MHS Chair said that he would circulate a list of proposed discussion items for the MHS Board to consider during this financial year.

Action: MHS Chair

Date of next meeting

9. The next MHS Board meeting would be a full Board meeting in York on 1 October 2008.