Management in Confidence

HRA Board meeting minutes (Part 1 – Public Session)

Date:	20 September 2023	
Time:	12.30pm – 2.35pm	
Present:	Professor Andrew George (AG)	Non-Executive Director
	Dr Janet Messer (JM)	Director Approvals Service
	Neelam Patel (NP)	Non-Executive Director
	Becky Purvis (BP)	Director Policy & Partnerships
	Professor Sir Terence Stephenson (TS)	Chair
	Professor Matt Westmore (MW)	Chief Executive
	Karen Williams (KW)	Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Resources
In attendance:	Charlotte Allen (CA)	Quality & Performance Manager
	Matt Balding (MB)	Deputy Director Finance & Estates
	Nicola Beazley-Long (NBL)	Approvals Officer
	Michele Ekins (ME)	Head of People
	Jonathan Fennelly-Barnwell (JFB)	Deputy Director Approvals Service
	Will Griffiths-Stent (WGS)	Engagement Manager
	Katherine Guerin (KG)	Deputy Director Organisational Development
	Paul Mills (PM)	Confidentiality Advice Service Manager
	Lou Silver (LS)	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager
	Stephen Tebbutt (ST)	Company Secretary
	Naho Yamazaki (NY)	Deputy Director Policy & Partnerships
Observers:	Jane Oakley	Danielle Nott
	Eve Hart	Kate Evans
	Peter Hart	Tulsi Patel
	Christine Holmes	Becky Leddy
	Matt Rogerson	Zoher Kapacee
	Beth Hemming	Julia Newman
Apologies:	Richard Cooper (RC)	Non-Executive Director
	Julie Waters (JW)	Chief Digital Transformation Officer
Venue:	Virtual via MS Teams	

No.	Record of discussion	Action owner
1	**Welcome, housekeeping and apologies.** TS welcomed all to the meeting. In particular, TS welcomed Julia Newman, who was participating in the 'Success on Boards' programme developed by Advance HE and Wellcome which the Health Research Authority (HRA) is supporting.	

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	Apologies were noted from RC and JW.	
2	**Conflicts of interest.** None to note.	
3	**Review of minutes from previous meeting** The Board reviewed and accepted the minutes of the previous meeting dated 17 May 2023 as a true and accurate record of events.	
4	**Review of actions from previous meeting / matters arising** TS highlighted one matter arising from the previous meeting. This related to the REC member recruitment metric and whether the target needed rescoring. The Board noted the metrics are in the process of being reviewed however the target had not been modified as yet on the strategic performance report but this would be brought to a subsequent meeting. *Action: REC member recruitment metric to be updated on strategic performance report*	**KW**
5	**Update from the Chair** Appointments On behalf of the Board, TS expressed his congratulations to Neelam Patel on her reappointment for a second term as a Non-Executive Director at the HRA. Similarly, TS congratulated Julie Waters, in her absence, who has been appointed as the HRA's Chief Digital Transformation Officer (CDTO) following a competitive recruitment process after her time as interim CDTO.	
6	**Update from the Chief Executive** Appointments MW echoed TS in congratulating NP and JW. MW was pleased there was continuity for the Research Systems Programme (RSP) with JW in post on a substantive basis. Research Systems Programme MW advised the RSP was at a critical phase with negotiations with the strategic delivery partner aiming to be concluded in the next few weeks. MW advised the Executive Committee had held a number of sessions to discuss how the organisation can be ready to support the successful delivery of the programme. Quality Standards and Design Principles MW was pleased to advise the HRA's new *Quality Standards and Design and Review Principles* come into effect in December 2023. These aim to improve the information given to people who are invited to take part in research and should make a big difference to the participant information and consent process. More information can be found in item 16A Stakeholder Engagement update.	

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7	**Performance Report Quarter 1 2023/24** (including finance report and strategic risk register) The Board received and noted the Strategic Performance Report Quarter 1, summarised by KW, which details the performance of the HRA in delivering the organisational strategy, focusing on four key areas, our people, our customers and stakeholders, our services and finance. KW highlighted a challenge at present related to onboarding key specialist roles to enable RSP. KW was pleased to advise however that the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) had supported two exceptional business cases to recruit interim resources to take forward this important work whilst the substantive recruitment takes place. KW highlighted there had been an increase in the number of Research Ethics Committee (REC) members recruited with further interviews being scheduled. A new system to support the interview process has been introduced which will reduce the administrative burden for the HRA and potential members. The Board noted the Clinical Trials (CT) Regulations would impact on the REC member recruitment target metric and would be consider and reflected in future reports. The Board noted a reduction in performance around combined review timelines, which is the way research teams seek approval for new Clinical Trials of Investigational Medicinal Products (CTIMPs) and combined medicine and device trials. The Board noted several bodies are involved in the review including the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). The Board was reassured the delays where not a result of HRA activity but a delay with the MHRA issuing joint outcomes. The Board noted regular conversations were being held with MHRA who had recently positively advised that the backlog was in the process of being cleared and were confident of delivering to statutory timelines from the beginning of next month. The Board discussed Proportionate Review (PR), a lighter-touch process for research proposals that raise no material ethical issues, noting there had been an increase in the proportion of studies submitted for PR but subsequently sent to full REC review. The Board noted studies would be sent for full REC review if material issues are identified and work was underway to understand why researchers may be selecting PR to provide better guidance to support researchers make the correct selection first time around. Finance report MB presented the finance report which highlighted the financial position as at the end of June 2023. MB highlighted since the report had been published DHSC had confirmed funding would be awarded to cover inflationary pressures on salaries. MB was pleased to highlight the better payments practice code performance target of paying 95% of invoices within 30 days had been met. The Board noted and approved the report.	

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	<u>Strategic risk register</u> ST presented the strategic risk register for Quarter 1 2023/24. ST highlighted two risks had closed following successful mitigation and three new risks had been added. There were: - HRA9: The HRA may not be able to deliver its objectives due to financial pressures. - HRA 10: Delays of approval from other regulators erodes trust in the whole regulatory system, including the HRA. - HRA 11: The HRA is unable to recruit or retain an effective workforce due to the current employment market. The Board discussed the difficulty in recruiting key individuals for RSP and noted other avenues, such as secondments and redeployment from other Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), were being pursued. The Board noted the risk register.	
8	**Portfolio dashboard (Quarter 1 23/24)** The Board received and noted the Portfolio Dashboard and Plan which details the progress being made on the major programmes of change within the HRA's portfolio. The Board agreed the revised format of the report was helpful. The Board noted the overall rating for the portfolio was amber largely due to the significant risks within the digital pillar in relation to the contract work for the delivery partner and also the legacy infrastructure. The Board discussed how the overall Red Amber Green (RAG) rating, and specific pillars' RAG ratings, were scored and noted these are calculated using specific programme management metrics. The Board noted for some of the work which is not centrally managed by the portfolio, such as continuous improvement activity, there is not as rigorous a framework for applying the programme management metrics to decide the RAG rating.	
9	**HRA staff survey report** ME presented the staff survey report, which provides a summary of the key findings derived from the staff survey undertaken during March 2023, including, where possible, benchmarking with other public sector organisations and an exploration of variations across different employee groups. The Board noted the findings largely indicated either a decline or no change on the previous year which was common across other organisations as shown in the benchmarking scores. It was noted this decrease or plateauing was likely as a result of very high scores during the pandemic. The Board noted all staff had been presented the findings and specific sessions had been held with each directorate to explore the findings in more detail. The Board was pleased to note an extensive action plan to tackle the areas of decline has been drafted following engagement with staff and various staff groups and would be brought to the November Board meeting for review.	

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10	**People Strategy: Year One report** ME presented the People Strategy year one report which accounts for the activities, initiatives and interventions undertaken by the Human Resources, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), and Learning and Knowledge Management teams during year one to support the HRA's people ambitions. The Board noted the report and was pleased to see the considerable achievements undertaken in the first year of the People Strategy.	
11	**Equality, Diversity & Inclusion: Looking back, planning forwards** LS presented the report which provided a summary of EDI activity and plans for the future. The Board was pleased to note the work undertaken and the stepped change in a number of areas. The Board noted this report was for staff however questioned whether there were plans to support the other areas of the organisation such as our volunteers and public contributors. The Board noted the HRA was conducting an EDI survey of its volunteers which would give some benchmark data to allow future consideration as to what activity can be done to support our volunteers further. The HRA is also working closely with the MHRA to look at the EDI data for research participants and how this can be improved with a paper to be published for wider consultation later this year or early next year.	
12	**Respect video** The Board agreed to defer this item to the November meeting.	
13	**REC Annual Report 2022/23** The Board received and approved the REC annual report for 2022/23. The Board noted the report provides a summary of the membership, activity, and performance of RECs in England in 2022/23. The Board noted the decrease in number of applications in comparison with the previous year, 2418 applications in 2022/23 compared with 2674 in 2021/22. The Board noted whilst there had been a decrease in numbers the complexity of the studies appeared to be increasing. TS requested further details of the numbers since 2018/19 be provided. *Action: CA to provide TS with yearly breakdown of application numbers*	**CA**
14	**CAG Annual Report 2022/23** The Board agreed to defer this item to the November meeting.	
15	**Business Continuity Annual Report 2022/23** The Board received and noted the business continuity annual report which describes the activities the HRA has taken to maintain and improve its Business Continuity and Emergency Management Systems in 2022/23.	

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16	**Strategic engagement update** The Board received and noted the latest strategic engagement update which provides an overview of the HRA's strategic engagement activity from early June to early September 2023 to support our strategic objectives.	
17	**HRA Non-Executive Director Succession Planning** The Board reviewed the paper which set out the current position of the HRA's Non-Executive Director (NED) terms of office and proposed how to manage succession planning for the NEDs in the coming years. The Board supported the proposals.	
18	**Audit & Risk Committee update** The Board received and noted the 10 August 2023 HRA Audit & Risk Committee meeting summary.	
19	**Staff Voices update** ST, on behalf of NBL gave the following update: - We are pleased to report that as of May 2023 for the first time in around two years we have a full complement of reps, with 2 assigned to each office location and 2 representing home workers. Two members will be leaving shortly as their terms have ended and we have just been informed that after advertising these roles we have received 4 EOI's which is unprecedented and suggests that the rebrand and subsequent levels of engagement and visibility have been successful. - Most recently the Staff Voices (SV) reps have been collaborating with the Learning and Development (L&D) team on an online working guide which looks to provide a wealth of support, ideas and practical tips that colleagues need to make working online a positive experience. The content has been developed by SV representatives in two face-to-face sessions which generated a huge amount of quality output and reps will continue to have ongoing ownership in maintaining and updating content alongside L&D. - As mentioned by ME, SV reps will be involved in prioritising actions from the staff survey review and the action plan is on the agenda for discussion at the next full SV meeting in a couple of weeks. - Through the new central SV inbox reps have already been approached by several colleagues to comment on or provide input into various documents and projects including a review of the incident management policy and planned future involvement in a project on board transparency, visibility and accessibility which is heartening. - How we report back to colleagues on outcomes and actions from topics discussed at the meetings has been refreshed and we now produce a newsletter shortly after each meeting which is distributed through HRA News and supplemented on the intranet with a 'you said; we did' page clearly showing SV achievements following suggestions or queries from colleagues. This includes items such as the opening of a 2nd buying and	

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	selling A/L window, an update to the Expenses Policy removing the time restriction from the over 10 hours subsistence limit and clarity to the policy covering eye test provisions to make it clear that reasonable adjustments can be applied to the two-year timeframe. We do have a couple of items with finance/senior exec team to take decisions on (details of these are in the action log in teams) - As part of our remit to support staff wellbeing and foster a positive atmosphere the team are ramping up voluntary engagement activities for colleagues and are in the progress of launching initiatives such as a team steps challenge and a Camera club (which has just launched in HRA news today). Discussion around creating a year-long programme of activities is on the agenda for the next full SV meeting. The Board thanked NBL for the update. The Board agreed the SV update should be placed earlier on future Board agendas. ***Action: ST to place SV update earlier on future agendas.***	**ST**
20	**Out of session items / items for Board interest to note.** None to note.	
21	**Any other business** None to note.	
22	**Questions from members of the public** None to note.	
23	**Date of next meeting:** 15 November 2023, venue – London / virtual	