

**Minutes of the Meeting of the General Dental Council  
held at 12.30pm on Friday 25 October 2024  
in Open Session at 37 Wimpole Street, London**

**Council Members present:**

Lord Harris (Chair)  
Reshard Auladin  
Ilona Blue  
Donald Burden  
Anne Heal  
Angie Heilmann MBE  
Serbjit Kaur MBE  
Sheila Kumar  
Mike Lewis  
Timea Milovecz  
Simon Morrow  
Laura Simons

**Executive Team Members in attendance:**

Tom Whiting	Chief Executive and Registrar
Stefan Czerniawski	Executive Director, Strategy
Clare Paget	Interim Executive Director, Legal & Governance
Gurvinder Soomal	Chief Operating Officer
Theresa Thorp	Executive Director, Regulation

**Staff and Others in attendance:**

Samantha Bache	Associate Director, Finance
Dave Criddle	Head of Business Intelligence
Colin MacKenzie	Head of Nations and Engagement
Dorian Kennedy	Policy Manager
Madeline Eastwood	Policy and Project Officer
Jill Bischert	Senior Change Manager
Lee Avery	Associate Director, People and Organisational Development
Ian Vaughan	Interim Head of Governance (Secretary)
Rachael Gilleard	Interim Deputy Head of Governance
Joanne Rewcastle	Associate Director, Communications & Engagement

## Others in Attendance

Members of the public, Campbell Tickell and GDC staff attended as observers.

## Apologies

None were received.

### 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including members of the public and staff who had joined to observe. The Chair welcomed Reshard Auladin, to his first meeting as a Council member.
- 1.2 No apologies had been received. It was noted that representatives from Campbell Tickell were observing the meeting as part of the Board Effectiveness Review.

### 2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1 The following declarations of interest were received:
  - a. Item 9 – CCP and Budget - All Council Members and staff present, due to the budgetary provision for staff salaries and Members' fees. Registrant Council Members are expected to declare an interest in respect of any attendant impact of budgetary discussions on ARF levels.
  - b. Item 14 – Chair and Chief Executive Objectives – The Chair and Chief Executive to declare an interest.

### 3. Questions Submitted by Members of the Public

- 3.1 No questions had been received within the required timeframe before the meeting.

### 4. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

- 4.1 The full minutes of the public meeting and the abbreviated minutes of the closed meeting held on September 2024 had been **approved via correspondence**.

### 5. Matters Arising and Rolling Actions List

- 5.1 The Council **noted** that the action regarding sharing the GDC values with Associates remained ongoing and the anticipated date of completion.

### 6. Decisions Log

- 6.1 The Council **noted** that no items had been approved via correspondence.

### 7. Assurance Reports from the Committee Chairs

- 7.1 The Council heard from the Committee Chairs in respect of the assurance taken from work conducted in Committee since the last Council meeting.

#### Finance and Performance Committee

- 7.2 The Chair of the Finance and Performance Committee (FPC) informed the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting.

- 7.3 The Committee discussed organisational performance reporting, the financial implications of the total reward and benefits package, the financial delegations and the final draft of the Costed Corporate Plan (CCP) and budget for 2025 to 2027.

#### Remuneration and Nomination Committee

- 7.4 The Chair of the Remuneration and Nomination Committee (RemNom) informed the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting.
- 7.5 The Committee discussed, amongst other things, talent management and succession planning, the employee engagement survey action plan and had a good overview of the rewards benefits framework. On the GDC pay gap the Committee was informed that it was necessary to increase the quality of the data before more robust information could be provided.
- 7.6 The Committee also received an update on Somerville vs NMC and recognised that there is a lot of work underway with good engagement and input from across the GDC.
- 7.7 The Council **noted** the assurance reports.

### **8. Chief Executive's Report**

- 8.1 The Chief Executive provided an update to the Council on the areas that he identified as his immediate priority areas. On internal engagement meetings with case examiners, risk and audit and the register maintenance team. Work had also progressed on culture.
- 8.2 Council was advised of the external engagement that had taken place with visits to a BUPA practice and Community Dental Services and meetings with the Association of Dental Groups, Society of British Dental Nurses, Healthwatch and the British Dental Association.
- 8.3 Council was updated on internal developments including the event to be held for the GDC's Leadership Community and the regular meetings that have been arranged between the Associate Directors and the Executive Leadership Team.
- 8.4 Council noted that the next Dental Leadership Network was scheduled for 12 November 2024 and the main theme was 'workforce' and on 22 November 2024, there was a Health Education & Improvement Wales Conference.
- 8.5 The Council **discussed** the following:
- a. Council noted that it had received positive feedback from a number of sources on the external engagement. Council noted that the external engagement remained ongoing and there was a visit to dental schools and hospitals scheduled.
  - b. Council discussed the benefits of the external engagement and the importance of doing it now so as to show the GDC is listening. It had also created an opportunity to discuss with registrants issues within the dental sector such as provisional registration and their understanding of key issues such as the fitness to practise process.
  - c. Council welcomed the all staff event that had been planned and discussed the response to the request for nominations for the staff awards. It was noted that over 200 nominations had been made and the opportunity to celebrate success was being embraced. Council noted that core services and frontline activities would not be affected, and a secondary event would be held for those unable to attend.
- 8.6 The Council **noted** the update.

## 9. CCP and Budget Setting 2025 to 2027

- 9.1 The Chief Executive and Registrar introduced the item, which sought approval from Council to **approve** the CCP 2025-27 plan, the 2025 budget and the decision to retain the current ARF fee levels for 2025.
- 9.2 The Chief Executive added that through broad engagement across the GDC and with the Executive Team he had been able to develop the organisational priorities, identify how to resource them and build them into the delivery of the plan, taking into account capacity and impact.
- 9.3 The Chief Executive advised that the plan was ambitious and did carry some delivery risk, but it was not a financially risky plan. The plan was consistent with the GDC's risk appetite which for improvement of performance or processes was 'open'. The budget envelope in the plan was £140.2m, and the target to deliver 2% efficiency was achievable.
- 9.4 Council noted that financial risks totalling £8.2m and opportunities worth £2.8m had been identified. Forecast free reserves, once adjusted for known weighted risks and opportunities were £11.6m, which was the equivalent of 3.0 months of annual operating expenditure at the end of 2027. This was in line with the policy target refreshed by the Council in June 2024.
- 9.5 On the plan the Chief Executive explained that the priorities work was aligned to delivering the strategic aims. Some of the important improvements that were expected to be delivered included updated standards for education, proposals for new principles of professionalism, improvements to FTP, modernisation of GDC services, embedding the values and delivering a new strategy for 2026 onwards.
- 9.6 The Council **discussed** the following:
- a. Council noted the substantial input from the Council and from the FPC in the development of the CCP and budget.
  - b. The role of the FPC in working with the team to ensure there was a clear strategic plan in place with early collective thinking on the strategic intent behind the plan and guard rails developed and implemented. FPC had four sessions on the development of the CCP and therefore it had been fully considered. FPC scrutiny was on planning strategy and efficiency targets. The FPC had challenged the cost of individual projects, tested the realism around delivery of projects and sought to identify as far as possible the identification of financial opportunities.
  - c. Council noted that the FPC endorsed the CCP 2025-27 plan, the 2025 budget and the recommendation to retain the current ARF fee levels for 2025. The CCP was based on the current policy and Council discussed the need to review it based on the outcome of the Chancellor's budget.
  - d. Council discussed aspects of the plan, including addressing sexual misconduct in professionalism and was satisfied that although no timescale had been provided, scoping work was underway, and the issue would be taken forward.
  - e. The continued development of the strategic risk register was noted and therefore there were caveats around headcount assurance, however headcount would be closely managed as part of the scoping activity and proposed business cases.
  - f. Council discussed the forecast growth in the register and the inputs into it such as the statistical modelling process, historic trend data and horizon scanning tools.

- 9.7 The Chair noted that maintaining the ARF was made possible by sound financial management, reduction of the reserves, use of legislative changes to amend the position on Overseas Registration Examinations fees and continued growth in the size of the registers.
- 9.8 The Chair noted that the Council's priority is public protection, delivery of the GDC's strategic objectives and responding to the needs of the dental sector. As well as continuing to improve core processes and timeliness, the Council would invest in activities that would further increase efficiency and effectiveness.
- 9.9 Noting the Accounting Officer advice and having reviewed the plans for the next three years, Council **approved** the CCP 2025-27 plan, the 2025 budget and retained the ARF at £621 for dentists and £96 for dental care professionals.

## 10. Annual Report and Accounts

- 10.1 The Executive Director, Strategy, introduced the item, defining the Annual Report and Accounts as a critical accountability document. The challenges faced in the 2023 report included having three different Chief Executives. Noting that the preparation of the report is a substantial piece of work it was considered timely to step back and make sure Council and the GDC adopt the correct process.
- 10.2 The Annual Report and Accounts whilst of value, is not a universal communication tool because it is a backwards looking document reporting on the previous year. For significant issues, the communications would have already taken place.
- 10.3 Having reflected on lessons learned from last year's process and following a helpful interaction with ARC, proposed changes to the process were presented to Council. These changes included telling the overall operational story more clearly with a lifecycle approach describing the work of GDC and adopting more visual changes to the report. More substantial changes to the structure and content could be considered from 2025, using the 2024 report to stabilise the process.
- 10.4 The Council **discussed** the following:
- a. The look and feel of the report and what could be done to improve the cohesiveness of it, reflecting on that fact that it should be a comprehensive report on the work of the GDC and with a greater focus on people.
  - b. Council welcomed the lifecycle change, the proposed change to the overall narrative and felt the proposals were sensible. The length of the process was discussed and there was a view that the overall timetable was too long. Four to six months was considered a more appropriate timeframe.
  - c. Noting the statutory purpose of the report, Council discussed the introduction of a short easy read version, stressed the need for the Report to be written as clearly as possible and with impact measures.
  - d. Council reflected on the fact that there would be changes to the auditing process and potentially a strain on NAO resources. This could in turn have an impact on the GDC.
  - e. More broadly Council discussed issues such as having a dedicated EDI section and changes to the performance section of the report. Council noted that the Report was the document of record and there were numerous ways to communicate the work of the GDC.

- f. Council stressed the importance of having a single cohesive voice throughout the document and noted that the narrative would be set by the Head of Nations and Engagement with the Executive Director, Strategy, providing the necessary authority where necessary, but noting that ELT were collectively responsible for the document.
- 10.5 The Council reviewed, **approved** and provided clarity and direction on the plans and proposed approach for the Annual Report and Accounts for 2024.

## 11. External Auditor Update

- 11.1 The Associate Director, Finance introduced the item and explained following the Council's decision to appoint the National Audit Office as the future independent external auditor to the Council, we had received the formal and expected resignation of Haysmacintyre LLP as the independent external auditor of the Council and advised that no fees or penalties were incurred.
- 11.2 The Council wished to place on record its thanks to Haysmacintyre LLP.
- 11.3 The Council **noted** the formal and expected resignation of Haysmacintyre LLP as the independent external auditor of the Council.

## 12. Update on Specialist List Assessed Applications Regulation Changes

- 12.1 The Policy Manager and the Policy and Project Officer introduced the item. The consultation on the proposed changes ran for 10 weeks, between the 4 July and the 12 September. Responses were made via the GDC website and by email.
- 12.2 Key stakeholders, including professional associations, specialist advisory committees and training institutions, were notified at the outset and sent reminders throughout the consultation period.
- 12.3 341 responses were received and there was a relatively equal split between respondents who were dentists identifying themselves as 'not on a specialist list', 'on a specialist list' or 'planning to join a specialist list' in the future. Overall, there was a good level of support and a view that the changes would lead to a better system.
- 12.4 Some of the concerns raised, although not directly part of the consultation, were around the equivalence of candidates being assessed through different processes, something that would be reflected on. Issues around maintaining the standards for those on the specialist list were also raised.
- 12.5 The Council **discussed** the following:
- a. The merits of introducing a membership exam and the likely response to it. It was considered that colleges would be largely supportive of a membership exam. The option of membership examinations alongside a portfolio of clinical cases was also discussed.
  - b. The case for bringing specialist arrangements for oral surgery and orthodontics into line with the domestic specialties was discussed and why the recommendation was adding an additional route to listing for applicants who had trained in the UK but not been awarded a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training. Council noted that it was not the qualifications that were being questioned, just a desire to have a cleaner process for all recognising the very small number that would be adversely impacted, with better overall process by getting out of the European led notices and different requirements for the two different specialists.

- c. Council welcomed the high level of interest and was satisfied that there was sufficient resource in place to deal with a significant increase in applications.
- 12.6 The Council **approved** the proposed the draft GDC Specialist List Regulations, **made the Regulations** and **noted** the outcome report on the consultation on replacing the previous routes for assessed applications as set out in the GDC's Specialist List Regulations 2008.

### 13. GDC Values

- 13.1 The Chief Operating Officer introduced the item and advised Council that values testing of the provisional values had been undertaken with staff and the findings and recommendations were being presented.
- 13.2 The Senior Change Manager updated Council on the significant amount of values testing that was undertaken. This included seventeen workshops which were delivered and attended by more than half of the organisation with representation across all directorates and therefore represented a good base line. The major themes that came through included a lack of consistent behaviour, capacity and the number of ongoing projects and the need for improvements and providing recognition instead of blame.
- 13.3 The Senior Change Manager explained how the adoption of a broad approach to cultural development could increase values adoption and realise the operational performance benefits associated with increased morale, decreased staff turnover and lower sickness and stress levels. Council held the 'unlocking key' and by taking on the feedback from staff it would demonstrate Council was listening and positively impact morale and generate support for future change.
- 13.4 The Council **discussed** the following:
- a. The high level of staff engagement was welcomed, and Council noted that it was important that they were heard.
  - b. The 'purposeful' value was discussed with Council keen to understand what it meant in practice. Purposeful encapsulated all the feedback from staff, an action oriented and forward-looking value that resonated with the performance discussion happening in regulation. Whilst accountability was accepted as an important requirement within the workplace, it would be difficult to measure and could lead to a blame culture. Purposeful was also recommended as an external facing value, and it was noted that the new values had been assessed against existing external perceptions and held up well.
  - c. Council discussed why accountable and efficient did not resonate with staff and why the previous values were not well embedded either. Council considered whether there were wider process issues that needed to be addressed and what would need to be done to underpin the values. The role of the wider people and culture programme was discussed and the impact it could have on the changes to behaviour and mindsets. It was also noted that efficiency and accountability were outcomes that could be achieved as part of the values and people and culture work.
  - d. Council discussed the development of the values and how the articulation of the values had created a 'buzz' in the business, and this would be supported by a systematic approach to addressing the culture in order to drive the business. The development of a behavioural framework with consistent language and the tools to manage against that framework would all support operational development and process change.

- e. Council supported plans to celebrate success and discussed performance management and whether there were concerns about the application of accountability. It was noted that the focus had been on performance management with less of a focus on recognition and therefore there was a need to redress the balance. Council noted that within the CCP there were plans to review governance, delegations, systems and processes.
- f. Council noted the richness of the empirical data that had been collected as part of the process and recognised that by acknowledging and responding to the feedback, further work could be undertaken to understand the drivers behind the responses.
- g. Council was informed that the People and Culture programme would continue to explore and address these issues with renewed investment in people and leadership. The importance of maintaining the momentum was noted.
- h. Council reflected on the values and discussed what it meant for them as a collective group, and the need to ensure they were also embedding the new organisational values.

**Action: Embedding the values to be considered by the Council in the next Board Development session.**

- 13.5 Council **agreed** the values, based on the rationale for each of the four options considered by the Executive Leadership Team.

#### **14. Chair and Chief Executive Objectives Setting**

- 14.1 The Head of People Services introduced the item, explaining the role of RemNom in scrutinising and approving the objective setting process and Council approving the objectives.

- 14.2 The Council **discussed** the following:

- a. Council noted that the EDI section was largely internally focused and recommended updating the objective to also have more of an externally facing element for regulatory activity. Council felt that customer services and EDI objectives should be separated.
- b. For the Chief Executive it was suggested that there could be more quantifiable elements, adding quantifiable metrics where possible.
- c. On governance changes, Council sought further clarification on whether the changes were to governance processes or the governance framework. Council also suggested adding delivery of the values to the objectives.
- d. It was noted that the sequence around the approval of the objectives might not be right, in light of the need for the objectives to reflect the corporate plan.

**Action – RemNom to review the sequencing of the objective setting process for 2025.**

- 14.3 Council **approved** the proposed objectives for the Chair of the Council and **approved** the proposed objectives for the Chief Executive and Registrar subject to the comments received.

#### **15. Any Other Business**

- 15.1 There was no other business.

**16. Date of Next Meetings**

13.1 The Council **noted** the date of the next meeting – 6 December 2024 at Wimpole Street, London.

The meeting closed at 15.05.