

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
General Dental Council
held at 10:30am on Friday 23 June 2023
in Open Session at 37 Wimpole Street, London**

Council Members present:

Lord Harris, Chair
Terry Babbs
Ilona Blue
Donald Burden
Anne Heal
Angie Heilmann MBE
Jeyanthi John
Sheila Kumar
Caroline Logan
Simon Morrow
Laura Simons

Executive Directors in attendance:

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| Ian Brack | Chief Executive and Registrar |
| Gurvinder Soomal | Chief Operating Officer |
| John Cullinane | Executive Director, Fitness to Practise |
| Stefan Czerniawski | Executive Director, Strategy |
| Lisa Marie Williams | Executive Director, Legal and Governance |

Staff and Others in attendance:

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| Madeline Eastwood | Policy and Project Officer (item 9 only) |
| Toby Ganley | Head of Right Touch Regulation (item 9 only) |
| Rebecca Ledwidge | Deputy Head of Governance |
| Rebecca Lucas | Policy Manager (item 8 only) |
| Joanne Rewcastle | Associate Director, Communications and Engagement |
| Ross Scales | Head of Upstream Regulation (item 8 only) |
| Katie Spears | Head of Governance (Secretary) |

Others in Attendance:

Sir Ross Cranston Chair of the Statutory Panellists Assurance Committee (SPC)

Members of the public attended as observers.

Apologies:

Mike Lewis

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including members of the public who had joined to observe, and noted apologies from Mike Lewis.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1. All Members present made a declaration in respect of the item on the correspondence agenda – the Governance Manual.

3. Questions Submitted by Members of the Public

- 3.1. No questions had been received.

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 21 April 2023 had been approved via correspondence.

5. Matters Arising and Rolling Actions List

- 5.1. The Council agreed that the one action marked 'suggested complete' should be considered complete.

6. Decisions Log

- 6.1. The Council noted that two decisions had been taken by correspondence since the last Council meeting:

On 11 May 2023, the Council approved the update to the Delegation Framework in respect of strategic risk appetite.

On 21 June 2023, the Council approved minor updates to the Governance Manual.

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.

Audit and Risk Committee

- 7.2. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) updated the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting and had considered an update from the Chief Executive, and the Strategic Risk Register (SRR). The Committee had sought additional assurance on the escalation process from the operational risk registers to the SRR and on the implementation of the EDI Strategy. It had sought an update from the Finance and Performance Committee (FPC) on its assessment of progress within the Fitness to Practise (FtP) directorate, as far as it pertained to organisational risk. An additional meeting was planned to take place in August to consider some of these issues further.

Finance and Performance Committee

- 7.3. The Chair of the FPC updated the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting and had discussed the Costed Corporate Plan and Budget for 2024-2026. The Committee had probed the emphasis within planning of the delivery of business-as-usual work as against project delivery and any changes to approach would be reflected in the next iteration of the work.
- 7.4. The Committee had also considered the ongoing recruitment and retention issues within the organisation, which were having an impact on the delivery of operational plans. There was a need to ensure that organisational policies supported effective recruitment and delivery. The Committee was supportive of the approach to adjust the Financial Delegated Authority to enable flexibility, within budget, to recruit and spend money in year and allow delivery at pace.
- 7.5. The Council heard that the Committee continued to monitor FtP performance closely and noted there were positive signs about the direction of travel. Changes to resourcing, process improvements, and a robust approach to management and leadership appeared to be bearing fruit and numbers were reducing steadily. There continued to be a delicate balance around allocation of resource to old and new cases and the Committee would liaise with the ARC, as appropriate, to support its assessment of risk mitigation in this area. It was noted that the Committee had no concerns about the quality of decision making and took assurance on this through a variety of quality control assurance mechanisms.
- 7.6. The Council heard that the Committee had considered the interdependencies between large projects – such as Estates, Total Reward and workforce development – and noted that the Council would consider some of these issues at its away day. The Committee had also conducted an in-depth review into the Dental Complaints Service (DCS).

Remuneration and Nomination Committee

- 7.7. The Chair of the Remuneration and Nomination Committee (RemNom) informed the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting. The Council heard that the Council Member appointments process remained on track and that the Professional Standards Authority considered the process followed to be robust and fair. A thorough induction process was being planned to support the new Members of Council and, if timings coincided, they would be invited to observe the summer Council away days. The Committee had also considered verbal updates on workforce development and total reward and would consider this work more fully at its June meeting, including an update on succession planning.

Statutory Panellists Assurance Committee

- 7.8. The Chair of the Statutory Panellists Assurance Committee (SPC) informed the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting. The Council heard that the Committee had visited some panellists training, had been updated about two large recruitment exercises (in respect of legal advisors and panellists) and were receiving updated reports, with more granular detail, on panel decision making.
- 7.9. The Council heard that, in respect of the administrative separation of the Hearings function, the work had progressed well but there were small technical elements that had been held up due to resourcing issues within the IT function. At its next meeting,

the Committee planned to discuss potential approaches to running panels and case management.

7.10. The Council **noted** the assurance reports.

Sir Ross Cranston left the meeting. The Head of Upstream Regulation and the Policy Manager joined the meeting.

8. Promoting Professionalism

8.1. The Head of Upstream Regulation and the Associate Director, Communications and Engagement presented the paper that outlined the proposal to conduct exploratory engagement with stakeholders on an approach to updating guidance in respect of professionalism. This engagement was not planned as a formal consultation, but as an informal way of testing the organisation's thinking and gathering insight to enable the Council to take future decisions. There was a phased approach that would allow the team to pause and consider the feedback given at each stage, and progress or amend the proposed approach as appropriate. The first phase of work would start in the summer of 2023 and lay the groundwork for more structured conversations in September.

8.2. The Council discussed the following:

- a. It was likely that there would be no universally popular approach and the Council would focus on how best it could equip dental professionals to do the best for their patients.
- b. The Council noted that there would be a need to exercise judgment when considering the evidence gathered by this exercise. Ensuring that people could envisage the changes required to implement a new system was paramount. Ideologically, a move to a principles-based approach might be appealing, but it would need to be practicable. The Council welcomed the fact that the approach to understanding feedback would be iterative and that there were pause points that could be used if needed.
- c. Feedback would be critically analysed, and it would be vital to understand the impact of any changes in approach on operational delivery within Fitness to Practise.
- d. A more limited programme of minor reviews to the existing Standards should be considered, should the work falter at any one of the stages.
- e. There was a need to ensure consideration was given as to how to access 'hard to reach' groups and it was noted that practitioners at the end of their foundation training might offer more insight than students, as they would have more experience in applying the Standards. It was also noted that 'patient or person centred' might be a more useful term than 'holistic' which could be interpreted in a more nebulous way.
- f. The team should consider the need to progress this work as expeditiously as possible and ensure that timelines were focused appropriately. Registrant Members of Council were keen to be involved in helping understand the impact of the proposed materials for dental professionals and whether they were formulated in an accessible way.

- 8.3. The Council **approved** the approach to conducting exploratory engagement as outlined in the paper and **noted** that it would receive a progress update at the end of Stage 1 of the engagement (Q2 of 2024).
- 8.4. The Head of Upstream Regulation and the Policy Manager left the meeting, and the Head of Right Touch Regulation and Policy and Project Officer joined the meeting.

9. Comprehensive Complaints Resolution Model

- 9.1. The Head of Right Touch Regulation presented the paper that provided an update on the review of complaints handling by the Dental Complaints Service (DCS) and on the progress of this corporate project.
- 9.2. One of the areas of focus for this work was to ensure that complaints were effectively triaged into whichever organisation was best placed to address them and to facilitate lower-level complaints to be handled locally. The DCS had been created to manage complaints about private dental treatment and had filled a gap in the complaints-handling landscape. The team had explored whether there was potential benefit in the DCS considering complaints about NHS dental treatment but had concluded that this would be an intrusion on the existing NHS Complaints system and disproportionately costly.
- 9.3. The Council heard that the DCS provided a valuable function in signposting complainants to the appropriate NHS complaints handling body and this work was designed to promote confidence in the dental professions, avoid matters being drawn unnecessarily into the FtP process and supported patients with the effective resolution of complaints.
- 9.4. The Council **discussed** the following:
 - a. Efforts to work with other stakeholders to improve the consistency of signposting across the healthcare system were welcomed.
 - b. There was potential to gather useful intelligence in respect of the dental landscape through these complaints handling functions and the relationships built with other organisations were important. There was also a nuanced interaction for the organisation around the work of the dental body corporates – who may have more developed local complaints handling processes than smaller practices.
 - c. The FPC had conducted an in-depth review into the performance of the DCS at its most recent meeting. It had discussed whether there was benefit in more clearly signposting that the organisation handled only complaints in respect of private dental treatment but noted that there was value in the triage work that took place. It was also noted that the Committee had scrutinised the trends in complaints, the resourcing of the DCS, its interaction with the fees policy and the role it played in managing workflows into FtP.
- 9.5. The Council **noted** the update.

The Head of Right Touch Regulation and Policy and Project Officer left the meeting.

10. Communications and Engagement Strategy – Review of 2022

10.1. The Associate Director, Communications and Engagement presented the paper that outlined a review of progress in relation to the implementation of the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

10.2. The Council **discussed** the following:

- a. There was evidence of good progress here in respect of delivery against ambitions and the Council congratulated the team on their achievements to date. The Council welcomed hearing that the registrants' monthly newsletter had good reach.
- b. The stakeholder engagement programme – particularly by the Chair – was creating good opportunities for the organisation to engage positively with the professions and the public. There was also important work that was ongoing in delivering key messages about the role (or otherwise, given its statutory remit) that the organisation could play in improving access to NHS dentistry.
- c. It would be useful to understand more fully the groups that were less straightforward to reach and whether there were different ways to approach communicating with them. The evaluation work that took place after events would be valuable in assessing their utility and help future planning.
- d. The Council noted that there was a difference between the capacity and capability of a team to deliver and noted that there would be discussions about the appropriate resourcing levels for the team during the planning rounds for the Costed Corporate Plan and budget. There was a need to 'catch up' with the external world around the use of digital communication.
- e. Council Members noted that they were willing to be involved in engagement work and agreed that it would be important to make considered choices about which events were best suited for individual Members.

10.3. The Council **noted** the update.

11. Any Other Business

11.1. There was no other business.

11.2. The meeting was closed at 12:35pm.