

Notices of Motion

1. Meeting packs/agendas

At present, meeting agendas and pre-reading are usually released around seven days prior to meetings although it can be less than this. Many council members have multiple roles and a longer period would give more time for material to be read, contemplated and researched around prior to discussions. This would act to improve governance by enabling us to have more considered views, acting to reduce risk to the organisation as a consequence.

This motion could be seen to add burden to RCVS staff regarding getting meeting packs prepared in time especially regarding contributions from external organisations however, apart from a shift in mindset, the level of work involved is the same. External organisations can be told that there is a deadline to submit information by and we need to have the organisational self-respect to stick to such deadlines, so this issue cannot be a problem.

Whilst this may take a little time to adapt to, it is my belief that it would be a wise move to at least consider this proposal if we are serious about good governance. It is not a question of 'what is common practice' and that being enough, but whether the Council feel that this proposal might improve how we operate.

I propose that Council look into moving to a system where meeting agendas and pre-reading is released a minimum of two full weeks ahead of a meeting except in truly exceptional circumstances.

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2. DC Outcomes

Whilst I feel that the early stages of the complaints system have their issues and are too fear-inducing, I am concerned that the DC often make decisions which seem very lenient.

For example, a vet who was caught drug driving given a 20 month driving ban by the courts, and recently judged by the RCVS' DC as unfit to practice was only given a six month suspension, leading one of my colleagues to remark 'so there's an amount of cocaine we are allowed to take?'. There have been a number of similar decisions over the years where vets are regularly not removed from the register despite being found guilty of disgraceful conduct or serious professional misconduct. Over the years I have noticed that this can involve stealing puppies, falsification of official documents/certification and laboratory reports and, as above, abuse of controlled substances despite the fact that vets are responsible for controlled substances. How do we feel about such cases? How do we think the public feel about such cases?

Contrast this with other regulators, for example nursing, where being caught cheating in examinations can result in removal from a register, setting a very clear example that professionals have to have to be both trustworthy and competent and this is not just whilst on shift. That healthcare professionals do the right thing- not even if it's hard but especially when it's hard, rather than the easy option or just looking out for themselves. If they cannot be trusted outside work, how can they be trusted within it. That being a professional means that, whilst you are still a fallible human, you have chosen to live by a higher standard.

There is a balance between being a compassionate regulator- which we really need to get right in the early stages of complaints- and risking being a soft touch with really serious cases. The public need to be able to trust that as a regulator, we are doing our jobs and ensuring they can trust their vets. Vets need to be able to trust that as a regulator, we are protecting the reputation of the profession. There is a real risk, especially in light of the CMA investigation, that we could be viewed as ineffective rather than upholding the standards we espouse.

I propose that Council direct a new working group to review/audit disciplinary cases - focused on their outcomes and decisions- relative to other regulators in healthcare settings such as nursing, medicine and dentistry, and including meaningful surveying of the veterinary professions to determine as far as reasonably practicable, whether the decisions made at DC level can be considered appropriate, harsh or lenient. This will enable us to demonstrate that we take regulation seriously and expect our veterinary professionals to stand tall in society.

(Received from Mr W A S Wilkinson, 3 June 2025)