

## Animal Health and Welfare Board for England

# Note of the meeting on 14 and 15 July 2021

### **Attendees**

#### **Chaired by:**

Michael Seals

#### **Members:**

Tim Morris

Daniel Parker

Ian Hewitt

Richard Irvine (15 July only)

Yvonne Ball

Gwyn Jones

Jonathan Statham

Gareth Baynham-Hughes

Stewart Houston

Christine Middlemiss

### **1. Meeting opens (Wednesday 14 July 2021)**

**1.1** The Chair opened the video meeting and welcomed everyone to the 58th AHWBE meeting.

### **2. Animal Health and Welfare Pathway**

#### **Future role of partnership/industry (co-design between gov and industry) horizon scanning**

**2.1.** The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway was part of the June 2021 progress update to the Agricultural Transition Plan. The team is currently working on a wider communications plan, delivery of the “Annual Health and Welfare Review” and policy development of other Pathway components.

**2.2.** It was recognised that industry communication remains a very important issue. Close working with the Livestock Improvement Programme continues, to ensure good coordination across both these major initiatives. This will be particularly pertinent as the Pathway offer on reducing the impact of specific endemic diseases and conditions develops.

**2.3.** Board members emphasised the importance of engaging existing supportive sectors, but also not excluding those not currently receiving government funding who could contribute to the desired public good and also drive innovation. It was also pointed out that for many issues, the request may not be for direct financial

support, but to change policy nationally or at the border to raise and protect standards.

### **3. Update on Border Control Delivery**

**3.1.** New border controls will be introduced in October 2021, the changes are steppingstones to full control measures being introduced in January 2022.

**3.2.** October 2021 to the end of the year will be treated as an educational period with no physical checks or holds and comprehensive feedback to traders to help reduce documentary errors. Communication and engagement with traders are due to start towards the end of July to help prepare for the changes that will be introduced. Communication to help with preparedness has not only been with traders but have also included EU member counterparts.

**3.3.** Defra is liaising with EU Member States on readiness for the new controls, and how things will operate from a GB perspective. The team are working to join up all activities to provide a smooth transition to full checks at the Border from the start of 2022.

**3.4.** Michael Seals expressed his thanks for the amount of work the policy team for border control have put in over the last year. Michael suggested that one of the Board members could join the Business Readiness Forum and help with communication.

### **4. Current Issues Around the Canine & Feline Sector – Marisa Heath**

**4.1.** Marisa Heath from the Canine and Feline Sector Group (CFSG) attended to present on pet welfare and what happens next. New legislation on puppy imports has tightened the corridor for illegal activity building on Animal Welfare (Licencing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations (LAIA) Regs), Lucy's Law and the Petfished campaign. There has also been a ban on importing dogs with ear cropping and docked tails.

**4.2.** We have seen an increase in dog bite reports and behavioural issues over the last few years - mainly due to COVID and self-isolation issues for the owners. Questions are being asked on how we can tackle this better to avoid relinquishment and social problems.

**4.3.** Marisa also showed the InfoTech that have been developed by CFSG to assist pet owners look after their animals. It was a simple idea but definitely highlighted the main issues about pet ownership. The Board felt these were helpful.

## **5. Call for Evidence, Welfare Labelling**

**5.1.** The team intend to launch a call for evidence in early August 2021, which will focus on cost, impact and delivery of different labelling reforms.

**5.2.** Work on labelling for animal welfare will feed into the wider review of food labelling and Food Strategy White Paper response to Henry Dimbleby's independent review of the food system.

## **6. Vehicle Cleansing and Disinfection at Markets and Abattoirs**

**6.1.** During the first meeting held on vehicle cleansing and disinfection (C&D) there was agreement to create subgroups to tackle, legislation and enforcement with the key stakeholders being Defra, APHA, FSA and local authorities.

**6.2.** Defra is responsible for policy and legislation; AHPA is the regulator and deals with day to day operational policy and have inspection powers. Local authorities have inspection and enforcement powers.

**6.3.** The groups have created a plan going forward which will be shared with Board members once ready. Along with the plan there will be a risk analysis produced.

## **7. Update on the TB Partnership Group**

**7.1.** An update on the partnership board was provided. The board consists of 22 members with a variety of backgrounds and including farmers, veterinarians, academics, NFU, enforcement and government representatives.

**7.2.** The new group is a response to one of the recommendations from the Godfray review; “to develop a new ‘bTB Partnership’ to encourage shared ownership, coordination and decision-making, and be a driving force for further progress with disease eradication”, absorbing the advisory function of the bTB Eradication Advisory Group for England (TBEAG).

**7.3.** The ways of working were covered and using the TB Partnership to drive work on eradication of bTB in England. It will be challenging but the TB Partnership will provide advice and recommendations to Defra’s bTB Strategy Board/Programme Board and, where appropriate, directly to Defra Ministers. The Partnership will work within the strategic framework provided by the bTB Strategy and the government response to the Godfray Review and be mindful of financial and legal constraints.

**7.4.** Michael Seals thanked the team for taking the time to update the Board. Michael also offered support via the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway for promoting the cattle vaccine trial to farmers.

## **8. Update on Welfare Bills**

**8.1.** An update on the Animal Sentience Bill was provided. The Bill will be at committee stage in the House of Lords week commencing 20 July, with the report due October 2021.

**8.2.** The team is also working on implementation planning and work on the secondary legislation that stems from the Kept Animals Bill. One of the policies within the Bill is import of pets and restricting the number that can come in a vehicle or with a passenger, which will include an enabling power to assist with prevention of puppy smuggling. The consultation will be published in August 2021. This will propose increasing the age a puppy can come into England and decreasing the stage at which a pregnant bitch can enter England and stopping the import of animals that have had certain procedures done on them like tail docking and ear clipping.

**8.3.** The Animals (Penalty Notices) Bill, is a Handout Bill selected by Andrew Rosindell MP in ballot, which had a first reading on 16 June. Second reading is scheduled for 29 October. Between now and the second reading the team is working on developing comms and building an engagement plan. The initial comms released had a welfare focus to continue momentum of the Action Plan for Animal Welfare but as penalty notices as an enforcement tool can cover health and biosecurity, this will be highlighted in future comms to cover full scope.

## **9. Pet Theft Taskforce Update**

**9.1.** Defra was asked to set up a Pet Theft Taskforce with Ministry of Justice (MOJ) who own theft legislation and Home Office (HO) who would enforce via the police, which launched on 8 May. The media had been reporting huge increase in pet theft since the start of the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020.

**9.2.** A Pet Theft Reform petition was debated in Parliament in October 2020 to make pet theft a specific offence with custodial sentences. Amendments to tackle pet theft have also been proposed for the Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill, making a pet theft offence, banning cashless sales and making microchip scanning compulsory.

## **10. Microchipping and Related Database Issues**

**10.1.** Delivery of the Government's manifesto commitment to introduce legislation to make cat microchipping compulsory and to deliver the statutory Post Implementation Review (PIR) of the Dog Microchipping (England) Regulations 2015 and finally to deliver improvements to the dog microchipping regime, both statutory and non-statutory. This work is related to England only.

## **11. Plans for Updating Equine ID**

**11.1.** An update was provided to the board on the team's review of the equine ID system in England. The current system has poor data quality. Multiple stakeholders raised a desire for the ID system to better support traceability and public health.

**11.2.** The formal review of the equine ID system in England started in January 2021 with engagement taking place with internal and external stakeholders including the FSA, Local Authorities, British Horse Council (BHC) and Devolved Administrations. Also, the team spoke to bodies such as RCVS. In June all information gathered was collated and shared with consulted stakeholders.

## **12. Future Vet Provision, APHA & Private Practice**

**12.1.** There are currently 24,000 practicing vets in the UK. 12,500 of them are Official Veterinarians (OVs) regulated by APHA. There are approximately 2,000 new vets coming onto the register each year of which just under half have been EU graduates and 900 are UK graduates leaving the remaining 150 being non-EU/UK graduates.

**12.2.** Approximately a fifth of the vets on the RCVS register are EU qualified vets. The long-term average of EU graduates coming on to the register is around 80 per month. This has been fairly stable over the past five years. This year has seen a significant drop in the numbers of vets coming from the EU, down to an average of 20 per month coming onto the RCVS register. This will be monitored over coming months to find out if it is due to COVID or EU exit. However, there are concerns around fulfilling the need for vets in the food industry etc.

**12.3.** The Board concluded the conversation, by agreeing that new veterinary schools and the opportunities and challenges of increasing the use of veterinary technicians along with other efforts to make it seem more of a good career opportunity will help in the long run.

### **13. Future Farming Programme: Regulation and Enforcement update**

**13.1.** The team is working across Defra and with industry to understand the reforms needed and considering how those reforms can meet the objectives of Government's Better Regulation commitments.

**13.2.** Alongside this they are working to explore how they can work collaboratively together to be more effective and efficient. This will help inform the decision on what the opportunities may be for future delivery, and to build a value for money case for more investment as appropriate.

### **14. Consultation on Puppy Smuggling**

**14.1.** The Kept Animals Bill includes puppy smuggling measures, a limit on the number of non-commercial pets that can travel with an owner or authorised person into GB reducing it from five per person to five per vehicle for ferry and rail routes and three per passenger if travelling via air or as foot passenger. An enabling power allows introduction of further restrictions to the commercial and non-commercial movement of pets on welfare grounds. This could include increasing the age that dogs can enter GB and prohibiting the movement of heavily pregnant dames (female dogs) and dogs with non-exempted mutilations.

**14.2.** In order to make progress with secondary legislation, the team have prioritised a range of proposals using evidence from EFRA and NGOs and pulled it together into a consultation document with the hope to launch summer 2021.

### **15. Update on Avian Influenza**

**15.1.** An update was provided on the current Avian Influenza (AI) outbreak which has now been recorded as the largest outbreak of AI the UK has seen to date with 26 outbreaks in total of which 22 have been H5N8, highly pathogenic AI (HPAI); 2 of H5N1 HPAI; 1 of H5N2 low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) and one outbreak of H5N3 LPAI. There have been infected premises in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**15.2.** Although the EU recognise regionalisation to the 10km zone, from 1st January 2021 no EU trade or movement to NI is permitted from the 10km zone for 90 days after effective C&D.

**15.3.** Housing measures were lifted on 31 March but the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) with mandatory biosecurity measures remained in force and were strengthened for any poultry allowed access to outdoor areas. The AIPZ was lifted on 15 March. Shows and gathering for low risk captive birds were permitted from 21 April and all poultry shows from 15 May.

**15.4.** Michael Seals and other Board members took the opportunity to mention that tackling the outbreak during COVID was very well handled and virtual working has taught us a lot. They thanked the team for their hard work during these unprecedented times.

## **16. Implementation of the Live Exports Ban for slaughter and fattening**

**16.1.** Provisions for banning Live Exports of livestock and horses for slaughter or fattening are in the Kept Animals Bill. The ban will not apply to exporting animals for other purposes, such as for breeding or for competitions or shows, nor does it apply to poultry.

**16.2.** The team is now working on how best to implement the ban, with the aim being to create a system which enforces the ban effectively whilst not adding unnecessary burdens to transporters wanting to export animals for permitted purposes. The team is also working with APHA and industry on the type of information/evidence that might be required for those wishing to continue to export animals for permitted purposes.

### **Date of next meeting:**

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021**