
Animal Health Surveillance Governance Board

Review of
Performance and
Future of the Board

2017

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I. Executive summary:

The Animal Health Surveillance Governance Board (AHSGB or “The Board” hereafter) was established to provide strategic advice to Defra and the Welsh Government via the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (AHWBE hereafter), and the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group (WAHWFG hereafter).

Its purpose is to advise Defra and the Welsh Government on the best use of funding, to assist in ensuring England and Wales is provided with effective animal health scanning surveillance which has the confidence of the animal-keeping sectors and enables the UK to meet national and international obligations.

The Board was established as a temporary advisory committee, for a period of three years, with its effectiveness and future to be reviewed in consultation with Policy Directors after no more than two and a half years.

Following the resignation of the Chair, it was agreed that the review of the Board would be brought forward and a permanent Chair will not be appointed until the review is completed.

In November 2016 Defra and Welsh Government Policy Directors commissioned an internal review of the Board’s activity and performance from March 2015 when the Board was formed.

The aim of this evaluation was to:

- determine whether the performance of the Board overall has been effective and succeeded in its intended objectives;
- evaluate the contribution that it can make as an advisory Board;
- make recommendations on governance and capability as laid down in the Board’s agreed Terms of Reference.

A comprehensive review of the Board’s corporate and statutory documents, the minutes of Board meetings, policies currently in place and other additional documents made available for review, as well as information derived from Defra and Welsh Government interactions with the Board members and select members of affiliated departments. This information was obtained by undertaking confidential, attributable interviews with each Board member (both external and ex-officio¹) and key internal and external stakeholders.

¹ Under the Board’s terms of reference the Board should comprise of The Board will comprise the Chair, four external members, the UK Chief Veterinary Officer (ex-officio) and the APHA Head of the Surveillance Intelligence Unit (ex-officio).

1. Summary of conclusions

The AHSGB has a somewhat distinctive nature, remit, structure and organisational model. It is fair to say that it has not yet reached maturity, that there are major prospects for improvement in key areas but that is not to say that the Board has not contributed to the development of scanning surveillance in England and Wales. In addition to medium and longer term challenges which would have been expected to have already been identified by the Board, and wider governance framework needs which require careful planning and consolidation, the review also found several immediate and short-term issues relating to the effectiveness of the Board and its members. These mainly relate to the need to:

- increase the focus and strategic content of material discussed by the Board to allow it to reach its full potential;
- re-evaluate both the membership and method of operation of the Board to streamline activities and to allow the above focus where needed;
- consider whether the use of the current board template as a means of providing strategic advice on scanning surveillance is now the optimal approach.

The in-depth conversations carried out during the reporting period with members, internal and external stakeholders, show a wide and diverse range of views which, given the Board's complex governance and diverse backgrounds of the board members, is to be expected.

Overall stakeholder views indicated that although there are no major Board accomplishments to celebrate at this time, the most recent meetings definitely showed signs of progress and encouraging steps being taken towards the setting of meaningful objectives and building links between industry, the veterinary profession and government. However, for the current Board to reach its full potential and prove its effectiveness in delivery, its approach and procedures must change and improve significantly. Interviewed parties unanimously stated that otherwise the Board will carry on struggling to find its role and that it cannot continue to function in its current format.

When collating these views, it was found that the main areas where there is opportunity and need for improvement relate to: structure, capability and clarity of purpose.

a) Structure

- Readjusting the size of the Board – already having lost a member by the Chair's resignation, the Board was considered to be too small and the structure needs to be fit for purpose.
- Increasing the meeting frequency – the Board meets quarterly and given its remit and the complexity of delivering effective scanning surveillance for England & Wales, external members stated that it is difficult to remain engaged and focused on important issues. This issue could be addressed through either

longer meetings (a minimum of two consecutive days) or more frequent meetings (a minimum of every two months)

- Introducing greater diversity of members - item to be addressed if and when vacancies occur or by co-opting members onto the Board for a defined period of time.

b) Capability

- Expanding the skills of the Board – although all members are experts in their own area of activity for which they have been invited to join the group there is still the feeling that certain gaps need to be filled.
- As well as the required government reviews the introduction of peer review and self-evaluation should be considered – the Board itself needs to make time to evaluate its own performance and that of its Chair. This can be done through self and peer appraisal.
- Making the Board have more impact and greater sustainability – engagement between meetings seems insufficient, due to workload, time constraints and lack of remuneration for work carried out outside the boardroom.

c) Purpose

- Membership induction and responsibilities needed to be explained – given the members' diverse backgrounds it is imperative that at the time of their appointment they are all swiftly brought to the same level of understanding, not only of the complexities of scanning surveillance, but also of what is specifically expected of them.
- Strengthening the focus of the board – spending more time on broad strategic issues related to its purpose of delivering an approach to surveillance that meets the needs of England and Wales (delivered within the context of the GB/UK needs) rather than focusing on operational detail and issues outside the remit of the Board.
- Introducing annual board reporting – to enable an evaluation of Board performance against set targets.
- Clarifying the accountability and reporting lines of the Board – there seems to be continued confusion over the Board's remit. Reporting lines to policy and to the AHWBE and WAHWFG must be clear with a remit clearly stating the Board's consultative / advisory and challenge functions.

2. Summary of recommendations

Regardless of the recommendations below to improve the current effectiveness, there should be a wider consideration given to whether the Board as currently constituted, remains the best governance approach to ensuring an animal health scanning surveillance system that has the confidence of the veterinary profession and animal-keeping sectors and enables Government to meet national and international obligations.

Recommendations for improving the current approach are:

Recommendation #1: that the Board prepares a “ways of working” document, containing the inputs, expected benefits and outputs of the Board.

Recommendation #2: that the Board produces an annual “working plan” clarifying its purpose and explaining its objectives, strategic approach and timeline for completion.

Recommendation #3: that the Board prepares an explicit plan to strengthen regular Board engagement and impact, including a job description for members and an orientation/induction program.

Recommendation #4: that the Board spends less time on operational issues and aims to strengthen the strategic focus and sense of purpose required from the group.

Recommendation #5: that the Board implements a Board accountability process with evaluations of Board meetings as well as an in-depth annual evaluation.

Recommendation #6: that the Board defines the skill and experience and independence mix required for the Board to operate effectively – in the short and longer terms.

Recommendation #7: that the Board immediately appoints a permanent Chairperson to permit a longer term leadership effect.

Recommendation #8: that the Board’s suggestion with regards to recruiting a new type of member (possibly from the consumer / retail sector) should be considered, also with the aim of achieving the introduction of greater diversity of interest and expertise amongst the Board members (these might involve different industry or technical skills). There should also be consideration of a public health (One Health) perspective.

Recommendation #9: that the Board formally defines the participation of the AHSGB chairperson as part of the Advisory Assessment Panel process for choosing new Board members.

Recommendation #10: that the Board increases either meeting frequency (a minimum of every two months) or the length of the meetings (minimum 1.5 or 2 days).

Recommendation #11: that the Board reduces hard copies of the paperwork and that all correspondence is received electronically.

Recommendation #12: that the Board's extensive meeting minutes are replaced by a summary of matters discussed and a record of decisions and actions to be taken. The Chairperson can optimise the Board's contribution by balancing strategic, operational and governance items, and prioritising critical issues.

Recommendation #13: that the Board introduces biennial individual (self and peer assessment) evaluation for all Board members to assess performance against set individual responsibilities and Board objectives based on clearly defined and mutually accepted performance goals.

Recommendation #14: for the external members to be evaluated annually as initially planned in the "Role of the Chair and external members of the Surveillance Governance Board" which states *"The performance of the external Board members will be appraised.... This will draw on advice from the Chair of the Board. Feedback on external members will also be sought on an annual basis from relevant stakeholders to help assess their performance"*².

Recommendation #15: that the Board introduces remuneration for members and Chair for in-between meetings engagement: members catch-up sessions, paperwork review, etc.

Recommendation #16: that the Board develops an engagement strategy to improve the effectiveness of its engagement activities.

Recommendation #17: that the Board increase engagement with Policy government policy leads by ensuring that strategic and policy issues are brought up and discussed at the forefront of the Board meetings in order to achieve a strategic "way forward" plan.

Recommendation #18: that the Board set up an internal website / secure portal where all relevant documents are being kept for the members and sponsor departments to keep updated with the Board's progress and developments.

Recommendation #19: That the Chair takes a more active, engaging role towards the rest of the group and produces a post-meeting report which is then shared with all Board members.

Recommendation #20: that the Board produces an annual report for 2015/2016 and continues the practice for each of its operational years.

Recommendation #21: that the Board clearly defines the role and responsibility of all external members.

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Recommendation #22: to develop a stakeholder management plan which would define the basis of key communications and interactions with the two parent committees, and all stakeholders in general.

Recommendation #23: that the Board introduces an “organisational structure” document including the purpose, accountabilities, KPIs and lines of reporting for each function and roles, including of stakeholders.

Recommendation #24: for the Board’s budget allocation and management be reviewed.

II. The Board

In 2012 the then Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA), currently the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), announced the constitution of the independent Surveillance Advisory Group (SAG), tasked to recommend a future delivery model for veterinary scanning surveillance in England and Wales. It included experts from government, the veterinary profession, livestock keepers, farming and private veterinary laboratory sectors. The SAG was created so that the needs of key stakeholder groups were considered in the development of the future model for scanning surveillance.

The group’s efforts culminated in the production of the “SAG report” which set out core recommendations for the design of the new model for the delivery of surveillance in England and Wales.

Included in the SAG report was the proposal for an independent advisory group:

“Recommendation 10: Establish effective internal governance advised by an independent stakeholder group to ensure the new model delivers what is expected and remains fit for purpose in future years”.

Following consultation this was included within the package of measures agreed by Ministers of England and Wales as Surveillance 2014:

“A new governance system for scanning surveillance that includes DEFRA and the Welsh Government, the veterinary practitioner community and representatives from other industry stakeholder organisations to ensure that scanning surveillance is fit-for-purpose, cost-effective and informs risk management in the future”.

The approach taken was for the Board to be a subgroup of the two equivalent appointed Boards in England and Wales, namely the AHWBE and WAHWFG. The Chairs of both Boards offered their support for this approach.

The Terms of Reference were soon after developed following consultation with Defra and the Welsh Government and agreed by the AHWBE and WAHWFG.

This approach, combined with the temporary nature of the Board and distance from Ministerial control, was supported by the Cabinet Office which was content that it did not establish a new non-departmental public body (NDPB). Should the Board's life extend beyond three years, this position may be reconsidered.

The proposal was then submitted and accepted by Ministers which led to the establishment, in March 2015, of the Animal Health Surveillance Governance Board.

III. Evaluation scope and approach

Scope

This report summarises the findings of the review of the Board, which took place between November 2016 and April 2017. It aims to consider whether the overall performance of the Board has been effective and succeeded in its intended purpose, the contribution that it can make as an advisory Board to make recommendations on governance and capability as laid down in the Board's agreed Terms of Reference.

The process employed in this review was designed and targeted to answer questions around the areas of board performance considered critical to overall effectiveness:

1. Objectives

- How well does the Board understand its current role and purpose, and deliver the intended outcomes expected by the 2012 SAG report? Where does it add value?
- Are the existing objectives clearly defined and fit for purpose? Would a change in structure / ways of working be beneficial?
- How does it carry these out? How does it work through others?

2. Composition and dynamics

- Does the Board have the right mix of contributing skills around the table? Is the Board size appropriate for the task?
- Does the group work well together, constructively & productively and is there clarity on individual vs collective responsibility?
- Is there a formal and transparent process for appointing the chair / members?

3. Performance

- Do the Board's practices (agendas, meeting frequency and outputs) add value? Are meetings well utilised and do agendas focus attention on the important / relevant issues? Is the information that goes to the Board relevant and timely?
- Who decides on the agenda?

- Do Board members have individual roles and responsibilities and how effectively have they been delivered? Does the Board effectively utilise the skills, expertise and contacts of the members?

4. Engagement

- What triggers information sharing and collaboration between meetings?
- Is there evidence of constructive engagement between meetings and between members or is it focussed on the meetings only?
- How does the Board engage with APHA and Policy officials?
- Is there evidence of effective consultation and engagement with industry, veterinary profession and other surveillance users?

5. Procedures

- Is there an agreed timeframe for meeting agendas and minutes?
- Is there a protocol for completing a Chairperson's report following meetings which is then shared with all Board members?
- Was there an annual Board report produced for 2015/16?
- Are there regular feedback sessions between the Board and the Animal Health Welfare Board for England / the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group and to Policy leads.

6. Governance and management

- To whom does the Board see itself as accountable?
- Are the reporting lines clear?
- Are the terms of reference for secretariat function clear?

7. Conflict of interests

- Are Board members proactively identifying Conflicts of Interest?
- Is a Conflict of Interest policy and escalation process agreed?
- Is there evidence of the Conflict of Interest process working well or otherwise?

8. Value for money

- What is the annual cost of running the Board? What is the opportunity cost to the secretariat function?
- What are other options available to deliver its purpose and what is required to deliver that?
- Is the approach good value for money? Why or why not?

Approach

The purpose of this review was to evaluate the format and effectiveness of the Board and to shape its development / future improvement. The purpose was not to evaluate individual Board members, but the processes of the Board as a whole. It was structured to focus on:

- Desk based research
- Consultation with key stakeholders
- Assessment
- Peer review

The approach followed the principles of the [Magenta Book](#)³, which is the recommended central government guidance and present standards of good practice in conducting such evaluations.

Guiding principles are directed to satisfy both values and criteria. These principles are independence, inclusivity, transparency and robustness.

The review was undertaken jointly by policy leads in Defra and Welsh Government with research and interviews being conducted by a senior APHA staff member on secondment to the project team for the duration of the review.

The approach included:

- a. Conducting a desktop review of key Board governance documentation including: Terms of Reference, minutes of meetings; Board papers and Member biographies;
- b. Observation of two board meetings;
- c. Conducting confidential 45-60 minute one-on-one discussions with all members in March 2017; and
- d. Conducting confidential 20-30 minute one-on-one discussions with key internal and external stakeholders also in March 2017.

³ [HM Treasury's Magenta](#) Book provides in-depth guidance on how evaluation should be designed and undertaken.

IV. Findings, conclusions and recommendations

1. Objectives

The AHSGB's webpage presents the Board as follows:

“The AHSGB is a partnership Board between government and the livestock industry, recognising that animal keepers and allied sectors, including the veterinary profession, are providers of data and information to the system, and are beneficiaries of the intelligence, reports and advice that are produced.

The benefits of animal health scanning surveillance are jointly owned, reflecting the shared responsibility and risk ownership of changes in animal-related threat status and disease trends and profiles. It is intended that the structure, membership and actions of the AHSGB reflect this.

Whilst the Board's primary responsibility and focus is animal health 'scanning surveillance' in England and Wales, the Board is mindful of the linkages and dependencies between 'scanning surveillance' and other components of the overall surveillance system in Great Britain.”

Furthermore, the role of the board is defined as such:

“The AHSGB provides strategic advice to Defra and the Welsh Government and their advisory bodies, the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England and the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group.

Responsibilities of the group are described in the Terms of Reference”

Those Terms of Reference defines the Board's role as follows:

“The Animal Health Surveillance Governance Board (AHSGB) is constituted to advise Defra and the Welsh Government on the best use of the funding they make available to provide England and Wales with an effective animal health scanning surveillance system which retains the confidence of the animal-keeping sectors, and enables Government to meet its national and international obligations.”

As for responsibilities, the same Terms of Reference say:

“The Board will be responsible for strategic advice and oversight of scanning surveillance in all animal species in the context of the complete animal health surveillance system, but will initially focus on the scanning surveillance of farmed livestock.

- *To provide strategic advice to Defra and the Welsh Government and their advisory bodies, the Animal Health & Welfare Board for England and the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group.*

- *The Board’s primary responsibility and focus is “scanning surveillance” in England and Wales, but the Board will be mindful of the linkages and dependencies between “scanning surveillance” and other components of the overall surveillance system in Great Britain. The Board will provide strategic advice, and where appropriate recommendations, on animal disease surveillance approaches, taking into consideration interests and contributions of the veterinary profession, animal keepers, livestock industries, wider food chain and Government, that aim to ensure that the surveillance system meets the needs of all who benefit from them. This Board will draw on specific sectorial or technical expertise as required.*
- *Accountable to Policy Directors responsible for animal-related new and re-emerging threats and for advice and guidance on the development of their animal disease surveillance strategy: whether the surveillance systems in place are fit for purpose; are assessed and updated in light of developing science; and are supported by the appropriate expertise and resource. The Board will provide strategic advice on the priorities for surveillance in light of available funding for scanning surveillance, and will advise on the impacts of changing budgets, risks and threats.*
- *Advising the Chief Executive of the Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) on whether the commission from Defra, to reflect the interests of Defra and the Welsh Government, is aligned with the scanning surveillance priorities recommended by the Board.*
- *Advising Policy Directors (Director for Animal and Plant Health and CVO Wales) on whether the surveillance delivered provides effective threat identification and characterization, and whether good data and intelligence analysis and communication is in place to enable response by both government and animal keeping sectors.*
- *Providing leadership and communication to delivery bodies, animal keeping and allied sectors and the veterinary and pathology professions at a strategic level, and working jointly with SIU, to promote their engagement with the continuing development of scanning surveillance in England and Wales, including promotion of working in partnership so that the scanning surveillance system supports industry and societal needs.”*

The Board dedicated extended time during its first 2-3 meetings (6-9 months) to mostly focus on putting these Terms of Reference together.

Solely based on a desk-based review of the Terms of Reference it seems that whilst the intention is clearly explained, they do not touch on the way in which the objective should be approached.

Recommendation #1: That the Board prepare a “ways of working” document, containing the inputs, expected benefits and outputs of the Board. This document is meant to direct and inspire the Board by establishing broad written guiding principles. It should be built around a clearly defined statement of their purpose, the principles which need to be followed and desired/expected outcomes in such a way as to ensure continuance of governance capability. These guiding principles can be re-evaluated and changed at any time as long as the Board continues to conform to those presently in force.

The Board’s specific job outputs are those that ensure appropriate organisational performance:

- Governance process: specification of how the board conceives, carries out and monitors its own task;
- Outcomes: the Board’s impact, benefit, recipients, beneficiaries, impacted groups;

Recommendation #2: That the Board produces an annual “working plan” clearly explaining its objectives, approach to achieving them and with a timeline for completion.

A review of the meeting agendas and papers produced by the group suggests that the Board tends to feel it must spend a disproportionate time dealing with operational related information and issues rather than pursuing a strategic vision.

All members agreed that the Board lacks a formal “code of practice” document laying down specific responsibilities attributed to each member. Upon being invited to join the group, although provided with material, an induction on “guiding principles” and protocols was not conducted. As a consequence, not only did it take too long (over two years) for the Board to “find its feet”, but it also caused great confusion with regards to its specific purpose. The impression is that it was never decided between all parties on what this Board was meant to be. In addition, certain stakeholders seem to feel that this Board was going to run surveillance, which was never the case. The Board was always going to have advisory and consultative duties and aimed to engage with policy teams to provide support, challenge and communicate in the context of scanning surveillance delivery, but this appears not to have been communicated to/understood by all stakeholders.

Ex-officio members both support and challenge the decision-making process on the Board and, ultimately, the formulation and execution of the Board’s strategy.

Recommendation #3: that the Board prepare an explicit plan to strengthen board effectiveness and engagement, including a job description for members and a strengthened orientation/induction program.

As previously stated, it appears that the Board tends to spend much of its dedicated meeting time in discussing operational issues. Whilst this is all important in the context of scanning surveillance delivery, it is also not considered as primarily relevant to the

work of this group. More time needs to be invested and efforts channelled towards producing an annual strategic plan, including setting immediate objectives against which performance can be measured also on annual basis.

The Board is comprised of persons drawn from many different governance environments and some members have not had prior experience serving on boards. As well, many have quite detailed knowledge of the workings of the industry and so may be easily drawn into the detail. Indeed, the general consensus is in fact that the Board is spending too much time looking into the detail associated with the rollout of a new means of delivering surveillance operationally.

Recommendation #4: that the Board spends less time on operational issues and aims to strengthen the strategic focus of the group.

Recommendation #5: that the Board implements a board accountability process with evaluations of each board meeting as well as an in-depth annual board evaluation.

2. Composition and dynamics

Selection of the Board followed the principles laid down by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA). Not being an autonomous body, the appointments were not required to follow the OCPA processes in full. However, Defra committed to following the principles of selection by merit, in a fair and open manner.

Posts were advertised via the Cabinet Office Public Appointments, inviting applicants to submit applications, including a CV and Statement of Suitability.

The AHWBE and WAHWFG were asked to encourage suitable individuals to apply.

The applications were then sifted, assessed on merit and the shortlist invited for an interview. The interview panel comprised of the Chairs of the AHWBE & WAHWFG and a Senior Civil Servant.

This recruitment process culminated in four external members and a Chairperson being appointed for a period of three years (March 2015 to March 2018).

Opinions of the Board were divided on whether the current mix of skills is appropriate to carrying out the Board's tasks. All members are prominent figures in their respective sectors, albeit not representatives of their sectors. Their backgrounds include the livestock keeping and farming industry, the veterinary profession and the commercial sector, which seems to satisfy the requirements needed to fulfil the challenging role that this Board aims to accomplish. Two of the Board members were previously involved in the SAG evaluation, adding even more value to the Board through knowledge and experience.

Whilst the current composition of the Board was considered appropriate, the Board should plan for the next few years to build on its relevant skills and competencies.

One suggestion is to encourage each Board member to propose an area in which he/she would like to enhance their knowledge of the business in the coming year. Typically, this would be agreed with the Chairperson. Occasionally too, participation in an external training event or seminar would be valuable.

Recommendation #6: That the Board formally define the skill and experience and independence mix required for the Board to operate effectively – in the short and longer terms.

The acting Chairperson is described by all members as inclusive, effective and engaging. He is commended for his commitment to the works of the Board and proactivity in engaging and deepening relationships with stakeholders and other relevant sectors.

During the two meetings observed in the process of conducting this evaluation it was noted that the Chair led many of the discussions with questions and comments, and asked specifically for input on relevant topics.

Interviews conducted during this assessment exercise revealed the prevalent opinion that the current size of the Board is an issue in effectiveness.

Following the initial Chair's resignation in 2016 the Board reduced its size by 20%, going from five external members down to four. Two options for replacing the Chair were considered. Option 1 was for the CVO(UK) to chair and option 2 was for one of the Board members to act as chair, either permanently or on a rotating basis. It was then unanimously agreed that one of the remaining four external members should stand in as interim acting Chair in order to preserve the independent nature of the group, which has now been in standing order since September 2016.

Small Boards, provided they satisfy the skill needs discussed earlier, are easier to manage and contribute more to the strategy and direction of the organisation by being able to have deeper discussion of issues. Most interviewees are in favour of a small Board as it encourages accountability and participation. However, in this case it was felt that the AHSGB was too small for the scale of the task in providing strategic advice on scanning surveillance.

In order to address this issue, one of two options could be considered: either recruit new members (suggestions from interviews on this to follow below) and keep the acting Chair on permanent basis, or appoint a new Chairperson allowing the acting Chair to return to external member duties.

Recommendation #7: That the Board immediately appoints a permanent Chairperson. His/her management of the key stakeholder engagement and his/her ability to gather intelligence and balance agendas is critical. This entails

significant commitment, time, experience, and protocol, in order to build trust and understanding internally and externally.

In evaluating expansion of its membership, Board members reaffirmed that the AHSGB's purpose is to provide the link, or to act as a bridge, between Government and industry, to advocate for change as well as inform how to work, communicate, share information and develop in partnership; to provide through its members external accountability and support for the development of scanning surveillance.

In this context the members identified a potential gap in the Board's composition, specifically lack of representation from the Producer / Retailer / Public Health sector. The Board's views on skills gaps that should be addressed are important as only the members themselves can say whether (and which) skills are lacking. For this reason we suggest that the Board participate in the selection of potential new members.

Recommendation #8: That the Board's suggestion with regards to recruiting a new member (possibly from the consumer / retailer/public health sector) should be considered, also aiming to achieve introduction of greater diversity amongst the Board members (These might involve different industry or technical skills).

Recommendation #9: That the Board formally define the participation of the AHSGB Chairperson as part of the process for appointing new board members.

3. Performance

One of the issues identified during the evaluation exercise was the concern over meeting frequency. The overwhelming majority of members agreed that meeting frequency either needs to increase or keep the frequency but have longer meetings instead.

At the moment the board meets only four times each year, with the average length of a meeting being of approximately four hours. This, combined with the large amount of items on the agenda, makes it not only difficult to keep abreast with the issues at hand, but also to remain engaged and focused on its targets in between meetings. The extensive agendas and short meetings mean that there is no time for in-depth discussions, all seeming slightly rushed to fit everything in.

A typical example for a two-day meeting would be that the Board meets in the early afternoon, spends several hours focusing strictly on strategic topics, thus allowing sufficient time for discussion. This would allow the external members to spend time together outside a formal Board meeting and have the opportunity to bond and would be the perfect way to conclude the first day. The second day would be entirely dedicated to the formal Board meeting.

Recommendation #10: That the Board increases either meetings frequency (min every two months) or the length of the meetings (min 1.5 or 2 days).

The Secretariat is provided by APHA. From the beginning it was intended to have functions in preparing for, and managing Board meetings, as well as managing the administration of Board members. It is involved in liaising with other surveillance providers, particularly in following up outcomes from the Governance Board meetings.

During the interviews it was made clear by the Board that the Secretariat is one of the strongest assets of the group, it is proactive and efficient and the Board asked for reassurance that current arrangements will remain in place for the foreseeable future, this view is supported by the review team.

The Secretariat organises the meetings, venue, catering, security passes etc. for each meeting, and other administrative type matters. About a month before the meeting the secretary organises for the Chair and APHA's Head of the Surveillance Intelligence Unit to meet, where the actions and minutes from the last meeting, the agenda and papers needed by the Chair are discussed. The Secretariat also attends and minutes meetings with the sponsor committees, industry sectors among a few others, prepares the letters that invited responses from the sector councils, and coordinates the replies, prepares the note of the meeting. Meeting notes are now also published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The papers are circulated two weeks before the meetings which also include hard copies sent to the external members. We believe that this practice is outdated and suggest ceasing it, with all correspondence being sent electronically.

Recommendation #11: That the Board no longer circulates hard copy versions of the paperwork and that all correspondence is received electronically.

The Secretariat devised the system for numbering and referencing the minutes, agenda, papers, actions etc. and maintains a log of all actions as well. Secretariat follows up on actions with whoever is responsible and ensures they are taken forward before the next meeting. The Secretariat is also a central point of contact and set up an AHSGB email address which is monitored daily.

It is estimated that the Secretariat spends around 3 days per month on AHSGB related matters/administration, which is approximately 24 hours. However, it is not an insubstantial commitment, and the meeting alone is a full day, and the minutes usually take a day to complete and circulate for comments.

Members are well briefed. Agendas are timed, and papers from APHA, which are considered comprehensive and high quality by all members, are summarised, and can be taken as read during meetings. There is a transparent information flow between executives and the external members, with members receiving relevant briefings and answers to questions between meetings.

The agenda includes some standard items such as: the closed parts, review of the conflicts of interest, review previous minutes and actions. The rest of the agenda is decided by the Chair working closely with APHA, and the Chair has the final say.

There is a small area where improvements can be made and this refers mainly to meeting minutes.

The Minutes are the written formal record of each meeting of the committee. Their purpose is to record clearly and concisely:

- The list of members and other persons present at the meeting;
- The sequence of items of business considered by the committee at the meeting, along with, in relation to these items:
 - any papers (or any other items of information, such as oral reports) received;
 - the key points or matters noted by the committee;
 - the committee's formal decisions (which may include recommendations to another committee) along with any other action(s) agreed;
- Any other items of information that the committee received and noted for the record (e.g. the date(s) of the committee's next meeting(s)).

Minutes are categorised as follows:

Draft – as initially written by the Board secretary after the meeting has taken place and before approval by the Chair;

Unconfirmed – draft Minutes that have been agreed by the Chair for circulation to members;

Confirmed – Minutes that have been formally approved by the Board at its next scheduled meeting, incorporating any amendments that have been agreed.

Current processes lead to long, operationally focused agendas and, although we understand these become a published public record and open to scrutiny, we suggest ways to change this and reduce unnecessary workload.

We recommend a reconsideration of the practice of providing extensive meeting minutes and suggest providing a record of decisions or requests and a short summary of the matters discussed instead.

Recommendation #12: That the Board's extensive meeting minutes are replaced by a summary of matters discussed and record of decisions. The Chairperson can optimise the Board's contribution by balancing strategic, operational and governance items, and prioritising critical issues.

As discussed elsewhere in this report, we do not believe that Board members' responsibilities have been well defined or that the skills are exploited to their full potential. Additionally, although people were encouraged to apply, as this was an open competition, it was only possible to select from the pool of applicants and it is thus unsurprising that there are still (very few, admittedly) voices which do not believe that the skills, experience & background requirements have been completely satisfied.

In addition to Recommendation #1 we also suggest the introduction of a formal Board member appraisal process. This needn't be an annual exercise given the limited

number of meetings but instead completed every two years with an assessment of the Board as a whole in between. This would also include the assessment of the Board's Chairperson.

One of the best ways a Board can improve its effectiveness is by creating a formal process for evaluating their own performance. Self-assessments of Board members would help:

- identify important areas of board operation that need improvement;
- measure progress toward the board's existing plans, goals, and objectives;
- define the criteria for an effective and successful board of directors;
- build trust, respect, and communication among board members;
- enable individual board members to work more effectively as a team.

The assessment of the Board's performance is conducted by focusing on individual members in one year and the Board as a whole in the following year.

Members should provide anonymous feedback on their peers' performance and individual contributions to the Board, which is passed on to the Chairperson. In respect of the Chairperson's performance, members provide feedback directly to the Chairs of AHWBE / WAHWFG to be passed on anonymously to the Chairperson. The involvement of an independent third party (parent committees) aims to assist in ensuring that the evaluation processes are both rigorous and fair.

The evaluation of individual members should focus on the contribution of the Member to the work of the Board and the expectations of members as specified in the "code of practice" document (Recommendation #3). The performance of individual members is assessed against a range of criteria, including the ability of the member to:

- Unfailingly pursue the perspective of creating "shareholder" value;
- Contribute to the development of strategy;
- Dedicate the time required to fulfil the role and perform their responsibilities effectively;
- Seek to increase engagement with their respective sectors promoting the works of the Board.

Recommendation #13: That the Board introduces biennial individual (self and peer assessment) evaluation for all Board members to assess performance against set individual responsibilities and Board objectives.

Recommendation #14: For the external members to be evaluated annually as initially planned and requested in the "Role of the Chair and external members of the Surveillance Governance Board" which states *"The performance of the external Board members will be appraised by the Minister. This will draw on advice from the Chair of the Board. Feedback on external members will also be sought on an annual basis from relevant stakeholders to help assess their performance"*.

4. Engagement

Although the Board meets quarterly, review feedback indicated that value should also be placed on being able to touch base in between the meetings, staying focused and engaged and keeping a momentum to delivery. Board members should be in a position to continuously scan the horizon for emerging issues and raise these with the Board. Keeping members informed also saves background time that would otherwise slow the already crowded Board meetings. It is up to the members to decide on the rhythm and frequency of these catch-up sessions.

Whilst it is appreciated that the external members are busy professional individuals and their time is not only valuable but also a limited asset, we still believe that such a commitment should have been accepted and assumed by all upon appointment. However, our findings suggest that time for engagement between the external members in between meetings is almost non-existent.

The majority of the members' view is that they are being paid for Board meetings and not able to claim for any time dedicated to AHSGB work in between meetings. For this reason they find it difficult to allocate time and prefer to work for their employer / business, activity for which they are being remunerated.

In order to address this issue one option would be the introduction of a fee schedule that offers some compensation for the time and commitment required outside formal meetings.

The total compensation paid to the Chairperson should be higher, reflecting the greater time commitment required of them.

With regards to the acting Chair's engagement, evidence shows a dramatic improvement particularly since September 2016 and several meetings were indicated to have been successful in placing the Board on the map with the targeted industry sectors. Likewise, communication and engagement efforts were noted between AHSGB - through its acting Chair and Defra, APHA, policy Customers, Welsh Government and the AHWBE.

Recommendation #15: That the Board introduces remuneration for members and Chair for in-between meetings engagement: members catch-up sessions, paperwork review, etc.

It must be noted that in addition to the activity of the Chair, other members have been proactive in engaging with different sectors, aiming to present the workings of the Board and raise awareness to different industry meetings. Feedback was mixed, possibly because the Board's achievements portfolio lacks substantial achievements. This issue cannot be rectified in the absence of a strategic vision (short and long term), objective setting, self-assessment and Board reporting, aspects covered in other parts of this report and including recommendations.

Overall however, the Board was not considered by the interviewees to have spent sufficient time engaging with the industry, which was always going to be one of the most important requirements of its mandate. Again, it is a relatively newly established Board and it may be that more time is needed to develop effective and strong relationships with the sectors to the scale required for the Board to be formally recognised.

At the moment there is the feeling that except for very small specific groups the Board's existence is unknown. However, due to the newly appointed acting Chair's efforts and meetings with the different sectors, progress has been noted in this area. Industry Sector Councils have been contacted by the Board and lines of communication opened. Positive and encouraging feedback was received with hopes for these relationships to grow stronger over time.

It is suggested that the Board's efforts to engage with industry and, the veterinary profession and the private sector components of scanning surveillance must evolve, and this should be considered a major priority. It should involve actively seeking opinions about specific scanning surveillance issues on Defra and the Welsh Government's behalf, raising awareness about the Board's existence and purpose, providing updates on the Board's progress and listening to concerns raised by industry.

Recommendation #16: that the Board develops an engagement strategy to improve the effectiveness of its engagement activities.

Stakeholders reported varying levels of trust and support in the Board's capabilities for engagement and feel that until recently it was more about "communicating" rather than "engaging". Due to the certain low levels of trust reported from internal and external stakeholders it is not surprising that most groups prefer engaging directly with APHA and policy teams rather than through the Board.

In order to achieve the much needed strategic vision it is recommended that the Board engages more with government policy leads directly. This could be achieved by separating the Board meetings in two parts, one focused on strategy (including policy) and the other on operational issues (APHA and other suppliers of surveillance intelligence and data), in such a way that a healthy balance is obtained. *Impromptu* sessions between the Chair and policy representatives should also be encouraged.

Recommendation #17: Increase engagement with government policy leads by ensuring that strategic and policy issues are brought up and discussed at the forefront of the Board meetings in order to achieve a strategic "way forward" plan.

5. Procedures

A surprising finding of this review was the fact that the sponsor committees only attended one of the Board's meetings so far, specifically its latest one in March 2017. Even then, a representative from only one of the two committees attended. Looking back through the Board's papers it was found that there were traces of communication but no engagement considering that the AHWBE and WAHWFG are considered parent bodies of the Board. There was a meeting between the Chairs of AHSGB and AHWBE in early 2017 with an encouraging outcome. Whilst this is considered to be a positive step, it cannot overlook the fact that the Board had little engagement with its sponsors for the past two years.

We witnessed the role of the parent Boards starting at the very origin of the project. Both AHWBE and WAHWFG led the project through the selection process to the point where it was formally authorised, but what should have happened was for them to continue playing a crucial role in the development of its initial scope and mandate.

At the same time, sponsors could have acted as liaisons to the organisational stakeholders, communicating how the project integrates into their overarching strategy and goals; effectively communicating the Board's vision, goals and expectations to the relevant audience throughout the Board's mandate without crossing the line into micromanagement. Roles and responsibilities should have been discussed and agreed from the very beginning as to ensure a productive relationship.

We would have also expected for the AHWBE and WAHWFG to advocate for the Board.

None of this happened however, and is no fault of the Board. Invitations to meetings and further engagement were made.

We are not suggesting that regular wash-up sessions are necessary. However, the sponsor committees need to have permanent open access and show willingness to keep updated with the Board's progress and works. In this sense we suggest the setting up of a secure internet site/portal, accessible to Board members, AHWBE and WAHWFG Chairs and government policy leads. This website should be a repository of all paperwork relevant to the works of the Board and maintained by the Secretariat so that all interested parties have permanent access to the latest developments, a single, readily available source for all the information that they require and indeed a destination for information they may wish to share.

Recommendation #18: That the Board sets up an internal website/portal where all relevant documents are being kept for the members and sponsor departments to keep updated with the Board's progress and developments.

In order to help with the flow of information and keep focus on the important strategic issues our recommendation would be for the Chair to complete a post-meeting report, summarising key points which should then be shared with the Board members.

Individual members should be encouraged to give feedback and/or context to the Board or to the non-executive members-only session on any internal and external meetings which relate to the Board's agenda.

Increased one-to-one communication by the Chairperson to the non-executive members between meetings will also help with the flow of information.

Recommendation #19: That the Chair takes a more active, engaging role towards the rest of the group and produces a post-meeting report which is then shared with all Board members.

Another concerning finding of this exercise was the failure to produce an annual Board report for 2015/2016. Annual reporting aims to highlight the Board's work and engagement with the different stakeholders throughout the previous year. It should be structured around the Board's objectives as a focal point and include a summary of recent accomplishments and current activities, plus a list of activities in progress and upcoming events.

This report must be produced and used as an opportunity to get the message right, stimulate discussion internally and create an overarching communications framework that can be used both internally and externally. It needs to look towards the future, connect effective governance, approach and leadership, ultimately helping to promote the Board, shape its reputation and build confidence with stakeholders.

Recommendation #20: That the Board produces an annual report for 2015/2016 and continues the practice for each of its operational years.

6. Governance and management

With other aspects of governance - such as the systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction and effectiveness – having been covered previously, this section aims to focus more on the accountability of the Board, understanding the difference between governance and management and who is responsible for each.

With clarity on accountability being one of the foundation blocks for Board effectiveness it was surprising to find in our interviews that there are still voices who do not believe that the Board now fully understands its roles and responsibility, with a particular accent on not being clear about to whom it is accountable.

An example is the common opinion between the interviewees that the role of some stakeholders, particularly that of the independent members, is still not clearly defined. Finding ways to better communicate and align the different views on accountability is of paramount importance, otherwise the group is likely to be pulled in different directions and vulnerable to conflict, an issue already reflected in the opinion that this ambiguity could allow changes to delivery and governance.

While it is accepted that constantly changing influences may, at one point or another, not be necessarily aligned with the wellbeing of the Board, we believe that changing interests should never be dismissed and must be immediately addressed.

As previously mentioned, the independent members have been selected as outstanding representatives *from* their sectors, yet not *of* their sectors, which makes it clear that their independent views and input are the most valuable assets of their appointment. The risk of carrying the burden of any sectorial interests is therefore quickly put to rest. However, this must apply to all those present around the table and, irrespective of their “representative” position, their allegiance must always remain dedicated to the interests of AHSGB.

Recommendation #21: That the Board clearly define the role and responsibilities of external members.

Unlike governance, management refers to the act of directing and supervising a group of people for the purpose of coordinating and guiding the said group toward accomplishing a common goal, beyond the scope of individual effort.

This is yet another critical control point where the leadership of the Chair and parent bodies becomes crucial to the effective functioning of the Board. Given the short tenure of the initially appointed Chair, the lack of a permanent one, combined with a lack of engagement with the AHWBE and WAHWFG, it is not surprising that the Board suffered greatly from a lack of managerial input. In order to address this efficiently the Board needs to be both supported and challenged by its parent bodies.

Recommendation #22: To develop as a priority a stakeholder management plan which would define the basis of communication and increase the low Board interaction with the two parent committees and all stakeholders in general.

With regards to reporting lines, the Terms of Reference state that *“The Board will be a subgroup of a combined college of the Animal Health & Welfare Board for England and the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group, acting jointly and in equal measure. It will be accountable to Defra and the Welsh Government through this college.”*

Initially attached to the Terms of Reference was an “Organisational Chart” which included representation of reporting lines. However, the document was considered to be confusing and was subsequently disregarded for this reason. Upon analysing the chart we found that although extensive and complex, the diagram accurately represented the organisational structure which is intricate in itself, reason for which we recommend its review and official reintroduction. It could even be taken a step further and transformed into a “organisational structure” document, defining – in addition to lines of reporting responsibilities - the purpose, accountabilities, and key performance indicators (KPIs) for each function and role. Unlike an organisational chart which is focused on people and titles, it should be designed with focus on the functions performed.

Recommendation #23: That the Board introduces an “organisational structure” document including the purpose, accountabilities, KPIs and lines of reporting for each function and role, including stakeholders.

7. Conflicts of interest

The Board has procedures in place to identify, authorise and manage conflicts of interest, and these procedures have operated effectively during the year.

All potential conflicts authorised by the Board are recorded in the Conflicts Register which is maintained by the Board Secretariat and reviewed by the Board at each meeting. Members have a continuing duty to update the Board with any changes to their conflicts of interest.

We have reviewed the interests declared by Directors which could conflict with those of AHSGB and we are satisfied that the Board’s powers to authorise potential conflicts is operating effectively.

8. Value for money

By “value for money” we perceive the relationship between cost, performance and quality of the service being provided. Value for Money is high when there is an optimum balance between all three such that the group provides services at a relatively low cost, with high productivity (performance) and with successful outcomes (quality).

Whilst cost can be reduced through improving budgeting practices and productivity maximised by setting a viable strategy for meeting a purpose and objectives which are fit for purpose in satisfying customer requirements, the quality of the service is more difficult to quantify. One suggestion could be the introduction of defining specific expected outcomes and benefits for the Board (Recommendation #1).

The current budget for the Board is £7.5k – Fees £4.6k, T&S £2.5K, Misc. £0.4K. Members are being paid for each day they attend a quarterly Board meeting at the rate of £250/day. The Chair is being paid £400/day to recognise the additional preparation and responsibility. Chair / Members are expected to carry out representational / engagement work with people across the sector without additional remuneration.

The budget is held by APHA. The Secretariat has not been involved in budget management thus far and the Board members considered that this should be reviewed, and give consideration to whether the Secretariat should have a higher degree of control over it.

Expenses are submitted by members using an APHA form and receipts accompanied by a request for the day's fee. This information goes directly to a business administrator and processed through APHA's finance system.

There has been some remuneration offered for meetings other than the regular AHSGB ones, and in the latter part of this financial year these refer mainly to meetings attended by the acting Chair with industry sectors and AHWBE on behalf of AHSGB.

Recommendation #24: That the Board's budget allocation and management be reviewed.

Acknowledgements and conclusions:

The evaluation committee would hereby like to express appreciation to the Board for the time, trust and valuable input offered to us in the process of carrying out this review.

We encourage the Board to absorb as much of this report as it finds acceptable.

Although those interviewed tend to express very different views on certain performance areas, it was unanimously agreed that the existence of an independent board represents a huge positive step towards strengthening that much needed partnership between industry and government and challenging procedures on scanning surveillance delivery.

The recommendations laid down in the SAG report are still very much relevant, maybe more so now than ever and although it is difficult to say how much time is needed for a newly established Board to reach its maturity we believe that there are encouraging signs. Over the past two years much has been invested in this Board, with significant progress noted particularly over the past 12 months, reasons for which we are confident that the Board has potential to fully develop and deliver if properly resourced.

However, it is also true that many expressed a previous lack of trust in the workings of the Board and although potential is there, failure to deliver tangible accomplishments tends to support this view.

It is not within the scope of this exercise to determine whether or not the Board's format is still relevant and still satisfies the initial requirements especially given the constant changes in the important and substantial project of scanning surveillance delivery, but it should be given consideration for completeness. That is for the consideration of the bodies that initially conceived and approved the Board's original establishment. Our recommendations are based on the presumption that the structure – as initially envisaged – is still expected to be the vehicle for its intended purposes and refers to evaluating Board performance only.

Annex 1 - List of interviewees:

i) External Board Members:

Dirk Pfeiffer – Former Chair

Paul Roger (Acting Chair)

Paul Burr

Ian McGrath

Nigel Fenwick

ii) Ex Officio Board Members

Nigel Gibbens – Chief Veterinary Officer (UK)

Christianne Glossop - Chief Veterinary Officer (Wales) and Policy Lead

Richard Irvine – Head of Surveillance Intelligence Unit

iii) Representatives of Ex Officio Members and Policy leads

Gordon Hickman – Defra Policy Lead for Surveillance

Gavin Watkins - Senior Veterinary Adviser Lead for Surveillance

Tony Joss – Welsh Government Policy

iv) Secretariat

Jane Tennant - Secretariat

v) Animal Health Welfare Board for England & The Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group

Michael Seals – AHWBE Char

Peredur Hughes - WAHWFG Chair

vi) Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)

Simon Hall – APHA Veterinary Director

Kath Webster – Director Scientific Services

Annex 2: Interview Structure:

a. External board members

Board Objectives:

- Can you describe what the role of the Board is and why was it established?
- How does the Board decide on the issues it needs to focus on and address?

- Do you consider this process as being effective in its purpose? Would you suggest another approach?
- What positive outcome would you expect from this approach?

Board Governance

- Do you understand the Board's accountability and reporting lines?
- Do you understand the respective roles of the Animal Health & Welfare Board for England and Welsh Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group and how they interface with Defra and Welsh Government?

Board composition, responsibilities, dynamics and conflicts of interest:

- How was it that you were appointed a member of this Board?
- Had you previously been acquainted with all the other members?
 - If not have you had the opportunity to engage with the others?
 - Would you say you work well together?
- Can you tell me about your role as a Board member?
 - Do you understand the responsibility of your colleague members?
- Do you believe you had the chance to perform and deliver in this role?
 - Have the other members fulfilled their responsibilities?
- How are you managing to balance between these obligations and your other work / responsibilities?

Board performance and engagement

- To what extent do you believe the Board has been successful in fulfilling its objectives or is it too early to say?
 - Can you give me an example to support this?
 - Can you think of other positive impacts it's had?
 - Can you think of other outcomes?
- Would you say the Board succeeded in effectively engaging with the stakeholders?
 - Accurately communicating implications of policy decisions to industry
 - Successfully developing the relationship between government and industry
 - Seeking support and advice from its sponsor departments (AHWBE & WAHWFG)

Recommendations for improving effectiveness

- Do you believe the Board has proved its effectiveness and do you believe its operations should continue?
- What should its immediate actions be focused on?
- Could you make any recommendations to improve the Boards effectiveness?

b. External stakeholders

Board objectives

- Can you tell me about the Board and why the Board was formed?
 - How do you see its role?
 - What expectations do you have of it?
- Are you aware of the things the Board has been focusing and working on?
- Are you aware of the processes in place meant to communicate with external stakeholders about the Board's activities?

Board interactions

- Have you had regular interactions, meetings with the Board?
 - How did you find these experiences?
 - What was the nature of the issues discussed? (advise seeking, decision informing, action required)
 - Did you engage with an individual or the Board in its entirety?
 - Any positive result from that meeting?

Board performance and engagement

- To what extent do you believe the Board was successful in fulfilling its objectives?
 - Can you give me an example to support this?
 - Can you think of other positive impacts it's had?
 - Can you think of other outcomes?
- Would you say the Board succeeded in successfully engaging with the stakeholders?
 - Accurately communicating implications of policy decisions to industry
 - Successfully developing the relationship between government and industry
 - Seeking support and advice from its sponsor committees (AHWBE & WAHWFG)

Recommendations for improving effectiveness

- Do you believe the Board has proved its effectiveness and do you believe its operations should continue?
- What should be its immediate actions be focused on?
- Could you make any recommendations to improve the Boards effectiveness?

c. Internal Defra / Welsh Government / APHA

Board objectives

- Can you explain what the role of the Board is and why was it established?
- How does the Board decide on the issues it needs to focus on and address?
 - Do you consider this approach as being effective in its purpose? Would you suggest another process?
 - What positive outcome would you expect from this approach?

Roles & Responsibilities

- Can you tell me about how your role and responsibilities relate to those of the Board?
- What processes are in place which allows you to work with / through the Board?
 - How efficient have these been so far?
- Is there anything you would change about how the Board operates to enable you to fulfil your role? Can you give me an example?

Board impacts to-date

- What do you think the positive outcomes have been so far? Can you give examples?
- Are there any outcomes which you have observed?

Recommendations for improving effectiveness

- Do you believe the Board has proved its effectiveness and do you believe its operations should continue?
- What should be its immediate actions be focused on?
- Could you make any recommendations to improve the Boards effectiveness?