Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting. Apologies were received and noted.

**TB Programme Policy update  TB Programme (TBP)**

Cattle controls: Included in the December 2017 TB moment was a commitment to introduce 3 TB cattle control policy changes:

a. Rationalisation of surveillance testing in the HRA, with default 6-monthly surveillance testing;

b. allowing keepers to retain in-calf TB reactors for up to 60 days, subject to a satisfactory VRA and isolation; and

c. paying 50% compensation for reactors that are so unclean they cannot be processed through a slaughterhouse.

A round table discussion, convened by the Secretary of State took place on 15 January. It was an opportunity for leading experts to discuss how we could accelerate eradication of the disease. Key themes raised included the need to take a holistic approach to our bTB eradication strategy involving both cattle and wildlife measures, and make better use of data and social science (e.g. looking at ways of incentivising farmer behaviour. The discussions will help inform future policy development.
Badger Control: Defra are working on a possible consultation on the principle of extending badger control into the LRA where there is evidence of *M. bovis* infection in badgers and linked with infection in cattle. Two papers will be published soon. One presenting the results of TB surveillance in culled badgers in 2016 and the other on the results of testing road-killed badgers in the Shap area of Cumbria.

Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme- the first window for applications closed on 19th January. Four applications were received and Defra have awarded grants to three projects in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire/Leicestershire and Oxfordshire (all of which received funding under the BEVS1 scheme). Badger Vaccination is due to start in summer 2018.

Oral badger/cattle vaccine programme– Following a review of the programme structure, it has been agreed that responsibility for the Cattle Vaccine and Badger Vaccine Project Boards will move from the TB policy team in Defra to APHA and that an overarching Vaccines Programme Board will be created. Progress will be reported at the April TBEAG meeting.

EU Funding – Defra received confirmation that our 2018 Eradication Programme has been approved by the Commission, although overall funding levels have reduced. This is due to a re-prioritization of TB from a ‘high priority’ to ‘low priority’ disease and a reduction in co-financing levels from 50% to 45%. This will equate to a reduction of around £2m per year for Defra.

Stakeholder engagement on interferon gamma testing - Defra and APHA officials recently attended a number of stakeholder meetings to discuss the interferon gamma blood test and its increased use in the High Risk Area, particularly for TB breakdown herds in badger culling areas that have completed two seasons of culling.

Colleagues in APHA have also produced various material to ensure the key points on interferon gamma testing are widely understood, including:

- Articles on gamma testing published on the TB Hub
- Comprehensive slide pack explaining the gamma test and policy developed for stakeholder engagement
- Slide pack distributed to APHA field teams for delivery at stakeholder events
- Presentations on Gamma testing to APHA field staff Slide pack supplied to NFU as a resource for their county advisors
- Currently exploring with communications colleagues innovative ways of raising awareness of gamma testing amongst farmers e.g. animations and videos on the TB Hub
TB Eradication Groups – General discussion on TBEG model and communications

Discussion then took place on the current TBEG model with input from Defra policy on how to make better links with local, county and regional groups. A proposal for a new engagement model was presented.

TBEAG members who are actively involved with a TBEG group were invited to give an update on their local Group.

A fruitful discussion followed and several ideas were put forward for consideration.

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A note from the discussions/suggestions on the current model of TBEG and how to make better links with the local, county and regional groups will be reviewed by the Secretariat. Proposal paper will be brought back to the April TBEAG.

TB Communications Strategy

The presentation covered what has been done so far and the work currently being undertaken to develop a TB Communications Strategy.

In shaping the communication strategy, it will be important to address the issues raised by our key stakeholders. Feedback and ideas regarding TB communications that have been received from TBEAG members and from events such as the Biosecurity away day have influenced the work so far. A series of internal workshop and discussions have been held to inform the forthcoming strategy. The TB comms team will be holding external workshop with key stakeholders in the spring.

A useful discussion followed on:

- The effectiveness of APHA TB breakdown communications to farmers
- Maximising the potential of digital in communicating with farmers whilst recognising that some don’t use the internet
- The importance of the right tone in all communications
- What TB can learn from successful communication campaigns, for example avian flu and how government can work with industry to deliver messages

Role of compliance and enforcement in tackling bTb

The Group was given an introduction to the work of the Local Authorities and their role in tackling Bovine Tuberculosis.
The presentation focused on the overview of TB and the impact on the UK economy. The types of non-compliance and a particular case study of a fraud case.

Enforcement of the TB rules is a Local Authority (LA) function by virtue of the Animal Health Act 1981. There is often confusion over the roles of APHA and the LA in the surveillance for disease and the enforcement role required to help achieve eradication and funding of enforcement activity is an issue.

**The Cornwall Agri Tech Project**

The group was given an introduction of the Cornwall Agri Tech project. It is a three year project part funded by the European Regional Development Fund. The project is based in Devon/Cornwall and has funding to encourage the use of technology. Defra are keen to work with the project.

The aims of the project are:

- Systematic review of risks for cattle - arising from cattle, wildlife and the environment, in relation to bTB, based on current science and knowledge
- Design and develop a statistical, epidemiological and communication methodology to enable farmers and their vets to identify, measure, understand and manage the risks of bTB using disease control programmes specific to their farm
- Develop a user-friendly software tool to improve risk assessment and communication and to support decision making for individual farmers in conjunction with trained vets

**TB strategy evaluation**

The group was given a presentation on two pieces of economic evaluation on the existing TB programme.

A useful discussion followed with members suggesting uses for the evaluation work and other elements that may need to be considered as part of the analysis.

A Report on the benefits of OTF status for England. This piece of analysis will examine the direct and indirect benefits of achieving OTF status for the whole of England.

A useful discussion followed with members suggesting areas for further development and new elements that may need to be considered, for example, the unpasteurised milk market, trade sanctions with third countries and exploring the role of industry.

**TB Advisory Service update on services and progress**

The group was presented with an update on the TBAS service and its progress.
The service has been funded by Defra over a 3.5 year project.

The main aim of the TBAS is to support business in the HRA areas to build resilience to bTB by providing advice on how to improve their on farm biosecurity and reduce the risk from cattle movements and trading. Providing advice to business in the Edge area are on ‘a prevent and protect basis’. TBAS was also going to local and national shows and events to promote the service and sign farmers up.

The group was asked to actively promote and create awareness of this service. One way of doing this would be to insert a flyer when sending out reminders on TB tests to remind farmers and industry of this service.

The group was requested to take the information back to local TB eradications boards, and businesses/charities to refer farmers to the service if they had enquiries about TB.

AOB

The next meeting will be held on the 18 April 2018.