1. Introduction

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

2. TB Programme Update

The Deputy Director gave an update.

- Cattle measures: Commitment to introduce the three TB Cattle control policy changes relating to compensation from 1 November 2018.

- A discussion on the value and uptake of Cattle Health Certification Standards Scheme (CHeCS) TB followed.

- Compliance and Enforcement: TB Enforcement & Compliance Working Group meeting held in June. The Group is considering how to feed into the review of farming regulation chaired by Glenys Stacey.

- Wildlife Control: The Deputy Director updated the group on the forthcoming badger culls in the HRA of England.

- Badger Vaccination: BEVS II – grants for three projects in Berkshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire/Northamptonshire were awarded in January 2018 and vaccination using Intervax BCG vaccine has commenced.

- Strategy Review: The bTB Strategy Review is underway and the call for evidence closed at the end of May. The Strategy Review group have held several stakeholder meetings. There will be opportunities to engage with TBEAG members as the Review progresses, i.e. involving some members as part of the ‘peer review’ process.

- Biosecurity and RBT: Defra is hopeful of gaining agreement on the joint Government- Industry biosecurity progress report, which reviews the biosecurity actions taken since 2014.

- EU matters: The new Animal Health Regulation expert working group met on 12 June to discuss the details of new regulations for disease eradication programmes including bTB, although they did not cover bTB issues on the day.
3. TB Eradication Strategy Review

The TB Strategy Review team lead and member of the review team introduced the sessions and the terms of reference, the make-up of the strategy review board and timetable of the TB Strategy Review independent group led by Sir Charles Godfray. The final format of the report is likely to present a series of protocols or strategies for each area of the Strategy rather than specific recommendations. The Group is working closely with the Devolved Administrations and experts in the Republic of Ireland. Once the review’s report is published in September, it is expected that there will be an implementation period.

The Review team were grateful for the opportunity to hear TBEAG members’ views.

The group discussed surveillance, governance and roles and responsibilities for disease control.

TBEAG members were invited to send any additional views or comments to the Review secretariat who would consider further ways to engage TBEAG as the Review progressed.

4. Proposal for a new bTB statistics dashboard

The Group was grateful for this dashboard, which brings headline bTB statistics together on one sheet of paper. They still want to see the monthly graphs showing the incidence and prevalence trends by county, which is circulated to TBEAG members by the Stats team.

5. Update on Knowledge Exchange project

Presentation was given by Andy Robertson on the three-year NERC funded Knowledge Exchange Project. The project aims to increase the relevance and impact of scientific information related to bovine TB, while also learning from the experience of the various stakeholders affected by the disease. The project started in April 2017 and was introduced to TBEAG in August of that year. The focus of his work so far has been on Cornwall, but this can be replicated elsewhere. The various aspects of work undertaken to date includes:

- Working with TBEG groups in Cornwall, Devon and other counties.
- Presentations and discussions with farmers on badger vaccination
- Easily digestible information with the creation of a series of information/factsheets to explain different aspects of bovine TB science
- Development of an interactive dashboard and graphic tools to communicate bovine TB statistical data
- Ongoing work to create a tool for predicting badger visits to farms
The presenter invited comments and views from TBEAG members on the areas covered as well as ideas for future work would be appreciated. One member noted that research into the cost of a TB breakdown would be welcomed. Defra has just commissioned such research, which is due to begin shortly.

6. Update on Edge Area bTB epidemiology

An update was provided on the epidemiology of bovine TB in the Midland Edge Area of England, with an additional briefing on the Welsh: English cross border bovine TB cluster in NW Shropshire/SE Cheshire/Clwyd. The presentation stimulated the following discussion points:

- Edge Area policy changes per county that were introduced in January 2018 – i.e. six-monthly surveillance testing in some parts of the Edge Area, which will start to happen from July 2018, further roll out of interferon-gamma testing for OTFW herds in the expanded Edge Area

- Policy forward thinking – Defra’s current thinking to reverse the trend of incidence/prevalence increasing in the Edge Area i.e. Post-movement testing in the annual testing parts of the Edge Area, introduction of earned recognition of low risk herds that would be tested annually rather than six-monthly to drive more risk based trading, etc.

7. Proposals for dealing with non-bovine herds under long-term TB restrictions

The presentation set out the proposal for dealing with non-bovine herds under long term TB restrictions and the issues APHA have with dealing with non-bovine herds in badger control areas.

Some members noted that there was a lack of awareness of biosecurity measures on some of the outdoor pig farms in SW of England. There is a role here for cattle farmers, NFU and wildlife groups to encourage affected non-bovine herd owners to become involved in local TB eradication groups and understand the wider bTB Strategy.

8. Feedback on Exeter Customer Service Centre visit

Three members of the TBEAG board visited the Exeter Customer Service Centre (CSC) to learn more about the way the centre operates following queries raised by members at earlier TBEAG meetings on the service delivery provided by APHA colleagues. They had the opportunity to meet CSC staff who carry out the essential administrative work required for APHA to deliver a wide range of official bTB controls as part of Defra’s TB Strategy for England. CSC staff also answer the large volume of calls relating to bovine TB controls received via the Defra Rural Services helpline.
CSC managers delivered a presentation to TBEAG members describing the work carried out by CSC staff, handling of customer calls and quality assurance. TBEAG members provided useful feedback on enhancing the customer experience, particularly in relation to modernising the way that APHA interacts with customers through digital channels. TBEAG members then met the CSC teams including reactor removal, call handling and radial testing.

TBEAG members found the visit extremely worthwhile and they were impressed by the professionalism of the CSC teams, and the drive and commitment to continuously improve the customer experience. They expressed that visiting the CSC and interacting with the teams in their working environment gave them a real sense of the sheer scale and complexity of the bTB work carried out by APHA and helped to put it into context.

A follow up visit will be arranged so that the members can hear more about the veterinary related work that is carried out.

9. AOB

Next meeting will be on the 23 August 2018.