Attendees

Chaired by:

Michael Seals

Members:

Christine Middlemiss
Tim Morris
Chris Hadkiss (17/10 Only)
Yvonne Ball
Jonathan Statham

Stewart Houston
Daniel Parker (16/10 Only)
Claire Horton
Gwyn Jones
John Bourne (16/10 Only)
Graeme Cooke (16/10 Only)

1. Meeting opens (Wednesday 17 October)

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the 51st AHWBE meeting.

2. Future Farming Welfare Grants

2.1 The Defra animal welfare policy team attended to present on the scoping work that they have been doing on a potential Animal Health and Welfare grant scheme. This work stemmed from “The Health and Harmony” consultation, which demonstrated strong public support for the use of public money to improve animal welfare.

2.2 Michael Seals concluded the conversation by thanking Board members for their support and expressed the value it brings and made the welfare policy team aware that Board members are always available to offer their expertise and support.

3. National Food Strategy

3.1 The independent review of the National Food Strategy is first of its kind for 75 years. The purpose of the National Food Strategy is to set out a vision for the kind of food
system we should be building for the future, and a plan for how to achieve that vision. A call for evidence opened on the 17th August 2019 and closed on the 25th October 2019. Key principle is engagement. Currently talking to stakeholders, town hall events etc. and establishing citizen’s assemblies ready for March 2020 to test policy options.

3.2 The National Food Strategy will build on the work underway in the Agriculture Bill, the Environment Bill, the Fisheries Bill, the Industrial Strategy and the Childhood Obesity Plan. It is intended to be an overarching strategy for government.

4. Aquaculture through the One Health lens

4.1 The Board were presented with an interesting item that tracked the growth and improvements of the aquaculture industry. It showed, that the post-industrial revolution capture fishery has led to damage to marine environment and biodiversity, with unequal distribution of wealth and food.

4.2 The presentation concluded that aquaculture will form the major contributor to global aquatic food supply by 2050. Food production systems can (should) be decoupled from environmental damage. Food systems may be designed through the lens of One Health (with sustainable food as the outcome).

4.3 The International Conference on Ocean Energy (ICOE) are comprised of approximately 160 staff. These are across a range of deep specialisms (including pathology, pathogen taxonomy, epidemiology, molecular diagnostics, invasive species, microbial human health hazards, harmful algal toxins, anthropogenic contaminants and, a Fish Health Inspectorate with direct interaction with Government and, industry).

4.4 Michael Seals thanked Cefas for their presentation which was a great eye-opener in regards to the potential of the aquaculture sector. Daniel Parker congratulated Cefas for their efforts on the work they have done showcasing the expertise we have in the UK.

5. bTB

5.1 The bTB team presented the Board with a summary of the draft government response to the Godfray review of England’s 25-year BTB eradication strategy.

5.2 Board members looked forward to reading the published government response in due course.

6. Animal Activities Licensing

6.1 There was an update on the review of “The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018”. This covered a number of areas. Local Authority (LA) licensing has advantages such as flexibility and local knowledge but also means, there is can be variation in approach across LAs.
6.2 On the horizon is the potential licensing of sanctuaries/ rescue centers, looking in particular at dogs, cats, equines and primate rescues. This sector has never been licensed before. The intention would be to ensure the sector complies with minimum welfare standards. Factors to consider include the size of businesses/rescues and understanding impacts. If licensing is brought forward, Defra will need to eliminate unforeseen consequences, especially for small-scale rescues.

6.3 Board members agreed that there was a need to look at what was appropriate and balanced. It was commented that there also needs to be a support mechanism in place before policy rollout and where this had a wider effect, there needs to be more consideration of resourcing to support any proposed changes.

7. Animal Health and Welfare Pathway

7.1 The policy team has been working on co-design of schemes to help improve the health of livestock. During discussions with industry groups, public goods, in the context of the pathway, has been an important subject. Engagement has been received positively.

7.2 Initial proposals are starting to emerge from the livestock sectors, with more developed proposals from the pig and sheep sectors in particular. There are fundamental decisions being considered by the sectors around cross-cutting proposals that work for multiple sectors and whether each sector should target a specific disease or take a broader health screening approach. The importance of the keeper/vet relationship has been consistently raised during co-design.

7.3 Gareth Baynham-Hughes said it was good to hear the views of external partners. The team is doing a great job.

8. EU Exit Update

8.1 Gareth Baynham- Hughes provided an update on EU exit. The UK had successfully worked with the European Commission to confirm the UK’s immediate listing as a third country for imports/exports of animals and products of animal origin in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement.

8.2 Defra was operating on the basis that a No Deal exit could happen given it was the legal default. In the event of a withdrawal agreement being agreed and ratified, there would be an implementation period which could be extended by two years under the terms of the previous draft withdrawal agreement. If there were no agreement reached on the longer-term relationship during the implementation period, this would be similar to a No Deal scenario.
9. Future Veterinary Capability and Capacity Project

9.1 Defra Veterinary professional services policy team provided an update on the work since the previous board. The long term project on Veterinary Capacity and Capability in UK (VCCP) sees Defra, BVA, RCVS and other stakeholders working together around improving UK veterinary capacity, including regulatory reform and the role of para professionals and the veterinary education system.

9.2 The RCVS conducted a review of minor procedure regime and have made recommendations on how para professionals are regulated ensuring that the right regulations are in place particularly in places where there are grey areas.

9.3 The RCVS are also conducting a wide ranging review of the regulations in many areas including the role of veterinary nurses. DEFRA looks forward to receiving their recommendations in the spring.

9.4 The veterinary team has been having conversations with their stakeholders about whether they think there is merit in pursuing degree apprenticeships in the veterinary industry. We are interested in views on this and in particular how changes to the veterinary education in the UK could address the short fall of vets in the UK.

9.5 APHA has been involved in the apprenticeship scheme for a long time and they have experienced motivated staff who come and stay with APHA and have been very good contributors.

10. Funding in Defra going forward

10.1 Gareth Baynham-Hughes said that the financial position for Defra remains tight. The spending round had resulted in a small uplift (including bTB and Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR)). The Department would need to complete business planning to confirm full allocations across Defra. Work was underway to ensure the Department met control totals for 2019/20 given overall spending pressures.

10.2 The expected multi-year spending review has not happened. The delay provided an opportunity to further invest in developing the right case for spending under a multi-annual settlement, recognizing that all of Defra and the rest of Government would be making its pitch for resources.

Date of next meeting:
Wednesday 15 January (PM) & Thursday 16 January 2020 (AM)