Animal Health and Welfare Board for England

Note of the meeting on 15 and 16 July 2020

Attendees

Chaired by:
Michael Seals

Members:
Christine Middlemiss
Tim Morris
Chris Hadkiss (15/07 Only)
Yvonne Ball
Richard Irvine
Jonathan Statham

Stewart Houston
Daniel Parker
Claire Horton
Gwyn Jones
Gareth Baynham-Hughes

1. Meeting opens (Wednesday 15 July 2020)

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the 54th AHWBE meeting.

1.2 Board Review - progress on DCVO: Richard Irvine has been appointed as the Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer following a round of interviews. The Board welcomed him into his permanent role and are looking forward to working together.

2. Six Day Standstill Review

2.1 An update was provided on work being carried out on the request to change the six-day standstill requirement. The team is currently discussing several ID and movement reporting policy changes with Traceability Design User Group (TDUG). These include:

- Real time reporting and pre-movement notification.
- bovine electronic identification (EID);
- individual recording for slaughter sheep;
- Improving lifetime traceability and;
- paperless movement reporting.
2.2 Defra position is that Livestock Traceability needs to be improved before changes to standstill can be considered. The Livestock Information service will play a significant role in delivering this.

2.3 There was agreement that the issue of changes to six-day standstill needs to be underpinned by improved traceability and that industry could recommend what those improvements might look like to enable decisions on modelling to be made.

3. Scottish and Welsh Governments Response to AWC Opinion on Welfare of Animals During Transport

3.1 Scotland and Wales governments provided a response to the Animal Welfare Committee’s (AWC) opinion on welfare of animals during transport. Westminster (Defra) is yet to respond.

3.2 It was mentioned that the work had highlighted the importance of the period 10 to 14 days post transport and considering animal morbidity and mortality. There needed to be good record keeping to cover this period, so as to accurately assess the effect of the preceding transport. Consideration also needs to be given to the actual stress of transport rather than just the loading and unloading, where such stress is well established.

4. Welfare Update

4.1 Policy reform program is now starting to pick up pace again having been on hold due to COVID-19. However, there is still some outstanding work in relation to COVID-19 which will take place relating to impacts on the zoos and rescue and rehoming sectors.

4.2 Increases to maximum penalties in the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill were introduced into Parliament (Commons) on 5 February. Second Reading is due on 23 October and the Bill will be debated as it is first on the Order Paper. It will increase animal cruelty custodial penalty from 6 months to 5 years. Now a clear manifesto commitment.

5. Abattoir Report


5.2 A recurring concern raised by stakeholders was that the declining number of abattoirs led to an increased distance for animal to travel to slaughter, thus potentially leading to their perception’s poorer welfare for their animals and increased ‘food-miles’. Food Standards Agency (FSA) research into the distance travelled to slaughter- taken
from a survey of approximately 75% of animals arriving at abattoirs of different sizes - revealed similar average transport distances between small, medium and large abattoirs, but increased variability in distances. The Board to play its part in developing the recommended Abattoir Sector Group, which will encourage the sharing of information and support from within the industry.
6. CFSG Big Tent Feedback and UK shortage of Puppies

6.1 The Big Tent meeting in March 2020 saw over 80 stakeholders from the pet industry - boarders, walkers, breeders, pet shops, groomers – come together with charities, local authorities and veterinary organisations to discuss the key issues facing cat and dog welfare.

6.2 Colleagues from the Canine and Feline Sector Group (CSFG) delivered a presentation to the board. It showed that during the COVID-19 pandemic there was a decrease in stray and abandoned dogs. There has also been a reduction in UK breeding which has resulted in an increase in prices, for example the cost of a chihuahua has increased by 100% and cocker spaniel 174%.

6.3 With the risk of smuggled dogs and cats coming to the UK, the CSFG team discussed the issues surrounding import checks and transport. They believe checks taking place at ports could be tightened.

6.4 The Board concluded that the issues raised during the presentation (smuggling dogs and cats from abroad), needs to be investigated further.

7. Pathway Progress Report

7.1 At the April board meeting, it was mentioned that the Defra Animal Health Pathway policy team had been reprioritised to focus on COVID-19. Since then Michael Seals, Gwyn Jones, Stewart Houston and Jonathan Statham have continued the work.

7.2 Stewart Houston updated the group on the Animal Health and Welfare Pigs – There have been fortnightly meetings of the group which are focused on the outcome of their workshop.

7.3 Gwyn Jones met with the Cattle sector which has broken into two main groups, dairy cattle and beef cattle due to the difference in needs and size of the groups – with several smaller groups underneath those.

7.4 Jonathan Statham reported on the Sheep Animal Health Pathway Group. This group is chaired by Charles Sercombe and Fiona Lovatt and thanks to both, were expressed - recognising the diverse nature of the groups they were working with and the excellent work they have done so far. Looking at the bridging connections between sheep and cattle farms has been important as part of those discussions.

7.5 Michael Seals wrapped up the item by thanking Catherine Harrold for attending all the pathway steering group meetings while the Defra policy team have been away. He felt she had help guide the conversations at those meeting. He also passed on thanks to the Secretariat for their support over the same period.
8. COVID-19 Issues and Structure of Directorate after COVID-19 and Funding

8.1 Gareth Baynham-Hughes updated the board members on the work that the directorate has been involved in during COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. He was greatly appreciative to all for the work they have put in, which has meant changing from being an office-based department to move to full home working department overnight. The range of work carried on has been unbelievable in both scope and volume.

8.2 There is a comprehensive spending review will take place shortly to cover the next three years financial 2021/22 – 2023/24.

9. Professionalisation in the industry and the Skills Leadership Group/AHDB Project

9.1 Colleagues from AHDB delivered a presentation to the board on “The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture” (TIAH). Some of the aims of the project are to professionalise the sector through an independent professional framework. It will ensure the provision of industry led training that is “fit for purpose” qualifications and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). They would also like to develop and market clear industry career paths and progression opportunities to provide professional business support.

9.2 This will help to transform the industry into one that is universally capable of creating profit, protecting the planet, embracing progress in markets, innovating and improving productivity via a skilled workforce.

9.3 Some of the benefits for the industry would be, a formalised pathway to drive industry change, a foundation to underpin skills and CPD. All of which provide, an increased recognition of workforce skills and professionalism throughout the Agriculture and Horticulture industry and a mechanism to track change.

9.4 Michael Seals mentioned the project is a long term one. This needs to be kept in mind when working on the project and he wished them all the best with the program going forward.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 14th October (PM) & Thursday 15th October 2020 (AM)