

Animal Health and Welfare Board for England

Note of the meeting on 14 and 15 October 2020

Attendees

Chaired by:

Michael Seals

Members:

Tim Morris

Stewart Houston

Chris Hadkiss (15/10 Only)

Daniel Parker

Yvonne Ball

Claire Horton

Richard Irvine

Gwyn Jones

Jonathan Statham

Gareth Baynham-Hughes

1. Meeting opens (Wednesday 14 October)

1.1 The Chair opened the video conference meeting and welcomed everyone to the 55th AHWBE meeting.

2. bTB Development

2.1 The government's response to the Godfray review sets out its plans to improve the bTB Programme's governance and partnership working.

2.2 Two of the commitments in the government's response were to launch a new TB Partnership group to improve coordination and shared ownership of the programme; and to make full use the TB Compliance and Enforcement group to monitor and promote good compliance and effective enforcement, linking local authorities and central government.

2.3 Recruitment for the new Bovine TB Partnership was expected to be completed by the end of the year. This group will succeed the TB Eradication Advisory Group (TBEAG) and would have different membership and terms of reference.

2.4 Stewart Houston and Michael Seals said they believed the TB team had come a long way and done very good work over the years. They wanted to take the opportunity to thank them for the work on vaccination and controlling TB.

3. Abuse of Animals on Farm

3.1 This item stems from an article published in The Independent on the 27th July 2020, which reported animal cruelty at the UK's leading goat company. An undercover video provided to The Independent showed goats being punched, hit, kicked and 'left lame' at a farm supplying milk to some of the leading UK supermarkets.

3.2 In terms of communication, including through Defra and APHA Press Office, it is always stressed that anyone who has concerns about the welfare of animals needs to report the issue to APHA in the first instance.

3.3 In most animal health and welfare cases of non-compliance, the statutory enforcement body will be the Local Authority (LA). APHA responsibility is to support investigations where necessary. This may include writing statements and appearing as a witness in court.

3.4 Defra Press Office has a very good rapport with a range of journalists, and often go above and beyond when it comes to communications. The difficulty is that there is often very little detail which can be reported on a specific (or on-going) case as this may jeopardise any future action.

4. Animal and Plant Health and Welfare Re-organisation

4.1 Gareth Baynham-Hughes informed the Board that he had now been appointed permanently following a competition and was looking forward to developing his long-term relationship with the Board. The Directorate was under a lot of pressure and had a wide-ranging delivery agenda. Senior leaders in the directorate were concerned with staff wellbeing during this period. A two-day virtual away day in October had helped build ties between teams and create a sense of motivation for the winter challenges ahead.

4.2 EU exit is a priority for the department and resources were being diverted to support a wide range of related activity in APHW and more widely. Defra was preparing for a difficult winter when the risks of COVID, animal health outbreaks and flooding could all coincide.

5. Post Transition: Disease Control and Status

5.1 The Board was informed that the UK SPS Trade and Assurance Office will be operational from 1 Jan. It will comprise a small team focusing on delivering biosecurity functions previously enacted by the Commission. These include managing market access and other related requests from third countries. They also include, for example, safeguarding measures in the event of animal disease outbreaks. Details of the Office will be shared publicly towards the end of the year.

5.2 The PM's speech in October relating to the UK G7 Presidency in 2021 had referenced a five-point plan to prevent global health crises:

- I. Set up a worldwide network of zoonotic research hubs to spot a new pandemic before it starts. About 60% of the pathogens circulating in the human population originated in animals and leapt from one species to the other in a “zoonotic” transmission. Zoonotic research centres would be charged with spotting dangerous animal pathogens before they cross the species barrier and infect human beings.
- II. Develop manufacturing capacity for treatments and vaccines. A strong manufacturing capability, in the UK and around the world, will mean tried and tested treatments and vaccines can be held ready to deploy against emerging threats.
- III. Design a global pandemic early warning system to predict a coming health crisis. This would require a vast expansion of our ability to collect and analyse samples and distribute the findings, using health data-sharing agreements covering every country.
- IV. Agree global protocols ready for a future health emergency. In the coronavirus pandemic, countries have fought 193 different campaigns against the same enemy. A common set of protocols, covering everything from information sharing to PPE supplies, would allow us to respond more cohesively and effectively.
- V. Reduce the trade barriers which have impeded the coronavirus response. Many countries-imposed export controls at the outset of the pandemic, about two thirds of which remain in force. Tariffs on key goods like soap can exceed 30 percent. The UK has committed to lifting tariffs on many COVID-critical products from 1 January.

5.3 There is a recently formed Global Animal Health (GAH) team in APHW Directorate in Defra. The GAH team vision is for the UK to play a leading role in global animal health and welfare, across science and evidence, trade, domestic and international standards, engagement and overseas development.

5.4 The GAH team works closely across Defra, with other government departments OGDs, Devolved Administrations, Agencies and arm’s length bodies ALBs, UK livestock & food industries, public & private sector research organisations, our overseas embassies, Third Country Competent Authorities, international partners and multilateral organisations, as well as playing a key role in the UK’s ‘One Health’ agenda.

5.5 The GAH team in Defra also provides a seamless policy interface that enables UK Industry to export animals, products of animal origin (POAO), genetics and animal by-

products (ABPs) to non-EU (or Third) Countries across the globe, while ensuring high standards of animal welfare and food safety as the UK's Central Competent Authority.

5.6 Michael Seals concluded by thanking presenters for an insightful afternoon into the evolving development of policy to deliver political aim.

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6. End of Transition

6.1 The EU has indicated that if the UK provides all the assurances required, then the UK should be listed for Third Country trade. UK legislation would list the EU Member States for imports from the EU.

6.2 Registered horses coming into the UK from the EU will require health certificates, but not blood tests. There would be some difference in requirements between temporary and permanent moves.

7. Policy Work: Animal Health and Welfare Pathway

7.1 The Pathway team have used strawmen produced by sector groups in the last few months to hold detailed discussions with Ministers on how the Pathway could be structured, how it interconnects with other departmental priorities and initiatives, and the incremental nature of the Pathway .

7.2 7.3 Animal health and welfare financial incentives (grants) are proposed to launch by 2022. Small and large grants would support livestock farmers to make investments to improve animal health and welfare above the regulatory baseline.

7.3 Universal participation in the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway will be critical to success. Countries (e.g. Republic of Ireland & New Zealand) which have successfully addressed endemic diseases have involved all keepers; this matches our own experiences in the UK.

7.4 Environmental Land Management currently has three components, with the first, Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), focusing on helping farmers become more sustainable. The second, the Nature Recovery Programme, focuses on farmers, landowners, national parks and other private land. The final one focuses on landscape change. In 2021, Environmental Land Management is will launch a limited SFI offer for BPS recipients as well as piloting the fuller scheme, expanding the offer over the three years that the pilot runs for. Full rollout of Environmental Land Management will be in 2024.

8. AHW Pathway Workshops with External Stakeholders

8.1 Pig Sector: the combination of public good and improved productivity incentivised an industry led partnership, with Defra, to develop a national plan to control or eradicate an agreed priority list of endemic diseases, using Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome virus (PRRSv) as a proxy indicator. It also includes communication, registration and disease prevention for all pig keepers, leading to sustained behaviour change, more efficient production and better welfare.

8.2 The strategic plan is to maximise producer and industry engagement in improving pig health & welfare through the Pathway and the development of a one registration process, maximising the opportunity to deliver public good, efficiency and better welfare.

8.3 The primary aim of the Sheep Pathway is to improve the health and welfare of the national breeding flock, the vision being to create a world leading sheep industry with evidence to support this. It aims to do this by increasing ewe survival and longevity, improving sheep health and productivity, reducing endemic disease and ensuring the responsible use of medicines on sheep farms. To measure and monitor these improvements, it will be necessary to collect reliable flock data.

8.4 The sheep pathway strawman proposes a 4-stage plan: -

- Engagement and registration
- Investigation and health planning
- Active Management
- Monitor and review

8.5 Gwyn Jones provided his update for cattle work completed with stakeholders for the Pathway. The sector has a six-year plan. One of the issues faced by the dairy sector is lameness and calf rearing. They are also working on controlling Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD), an issue which impacts both dairy and beef sectors.

8.6 Michael Seals summed up the conversation by saying that the Board members have done a great job in creating interest in the Pathway from farmers and Industry over the last two years.

9. Small Grants for Welfare

9.1 The grants teams within Defra are reviewing feedback from stakeholder engagement earlier this year, meetings with animal welfare committee (AWC), farm assurance groups, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs), British veterinary association (BVA), royal college of veterinary surgeons (RCVS), sector specific workshops (including representation from AHWBE) comprising pigs, sheep, goats, dairy and beef cattle, laying hens and meat chickens, and they are also meeting with large supermarkets. They are assessing how the grants scheme could be integrated with other offers across the wider Future Farming programme, including for Productivity, Animal Health, Environmental Land Management and Payment-by-Results.

9.2 Next steps going forward include continuing to work on the fit within Future Farming, integration within the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, restarting stakeholder engagement, and reviewing/developing policy options for the grant scheme.

10. One Health-Next Steps Update

10.1 A presentation was made on One Health and Covid-19 in animals given the animals that have so far tested positive:

- March – Hong Kong, dogs; USA, tigers and lions; Belgium, cat (reported to OIE)
- April – Netherlands, farmed mink
- May – France, cats; Spain, cats and farmed mink; Germany, cats; Russia, cats;
- June – Denmark, farmed mink
- July – UK, cat
- August – Japan, dog
- September – USA, farmed mink

10.2 Sequence data suggests pangolins and rhinophid bats and 14% of cats in Wuhan tested positive for antibodies. Experimental infections in cats, dogs, ferrets, rabbits, fruit bats, raccoon dogs, certain hamsters and monkeys but not poultry; cattle or pigs unclear as computational modelling predicts susceptibility and experimental infection results in very low-level virus replication / seroconversion.

10.3 COVID-19 in food preparation includes outbreaks in meat packing plants, poultry producers, pig slaughterhouses. At one point there were 28 clusters of outbreaks in North Carolina, with 2,772 confirmed cases and in the USA - 23 States, 239 facilities and 16,233 cases.

10.4 Prime Minister's speech at the UN General Assembly resulted in a five-point plan which includes setting up a global network of zoonosis hubs, with strong leadership from the UK. Upcoming events to promote this work: G7 and Leaders' Pledge for Nature.

10.5 Michael Seals was grateful for the presentation to the Board and also mentioned that the presentation served as a reminder of the depth of knowledge that is within the department.

11. AHPW Pathway: Influencing farmer behaviour – Ruth Little (Sheffield University) and Gareth Enticott (Cardiff University)

11.1 Dr. Ruth Little is a lecturer in Human Geography, University of Sheffield, researching farmer behaviour in relation to bovine TB and animal disease in the UK & US, and currently leading a research project on the co-design of Environmental Land Management. Dr. Gareth Enticott is a reader in Human Geography at Cardiff University, researching farmer and vet behaviour in relation to bovine TB and animal disease in the UK & NZ.

11.2 Ruth presented to the Board on behavioural insights, starting with the example of washing hands during the Covid pandemic and how this had been built into people's habits. 11.3 Ruth also spoke about a concept called Mindspace which is influenced by:

- Messenger – we are heavily influenced by who communicates information
- Incentives – responses to incentives shaped by predictable mental shortcuts (avoiding losses)
- Norms – we are strongly influenced by what others do
- Defaults – we 'go with the flow' of pre-set options
- Salience – our attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant to us
- Ego – we act to make us feel better about ourselves

11.3 Another concept the influencing behaviour team came up with is called EAST: - easy, attractive, social and timely. This will help harness the power of defaults, attract attention, show that most people perform the desired behaviour and prompt people when they are most likely to be receptive.

11.4 Final thoughts from Ruth were that social systems are critical for animal health and welfare. Behavioural Insights offers simple frameworks to think about designing more effective interventions. It may not be enough in terms of 'nudging' behaviour – when should a 'shove' be considered? Multiple interventions may be required and targeted differently to different parts of the industry and developing 'with' rather than 'for' is important – aim for genuine co-design.

11.5 Michael thanked Ruth and Gareth for attending and said the information they shared will help with reaching out to all in industry.

12. Haulier Disease Prevention

12.1 It is well recognised that animal transport vehicles are a serious risk vector for disease transmission during a disease outbreak (notifiable and endemic). Cleansing and disinfection of vehicles is, therefore, very important. The Board agreed that Defra, APHA, FSA and other agencies involved should work together to reduce the risks as far as possible.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 20th January (PM) & Thursday 21st January 2021 (AM)