

## Animal Health and Welfare Board for England

# Note of the meeting on 20 and 21 January 2021

### **Attendees**

#### **Chaired by:**

Michael Seals

#### **Members:**

Tim Morris

Stewart Houston

Chris Hadkiss (20/01 Only)

Daniel Parker

Yvonne Ball

Claire Horton

Richard Irvine (21/01 Only)

Gwyn Jones

Jonathan Statham

Gareth Baynham-Hughes

### **1. Meeting opens (Wednesday 20 January 2021)**

**1.1** The Chair opened the video meeting and welcomed everyone to the 56th AHWBE meeting.

### **2. Post-transition issues**

#### **At the border**

**2.1.** The Christmas period was extremely challenging for Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), mainly due to the COVID-19 outbreak, EU exit and outbreak of AI. The staff have done an amazing job and Chris Hadkiss considers that the immediate operational challenges of the transition to date have been managed.

**2.2.** The Chief Veterinary Officer and other board members took the opportunity to thank all at APHA for their work during this testing period. They have stood up to the task and done an amazing job.

#### **Welfare in Transport**

**2.3.** The Board were updated on welfare in transport issues following EU exit. The welfare in transport team had undertaken extensive communication with industry in the run up to 1st January 2021, to ensure preparedness and clarity of the changes taking place.

**2.4.** There has been an increase in queries from various sectors regarding the changes to the rules for transporting live animals. Republic of Ireland has now started issuing drivers certificates of competence for GB transporters, with APHA reciprocating the process for Irish transporters. The majority of applications for transporter authorisation, which APHA have received from EU transporters have been from pet transporters with low numbers of equines and livestock applications to date.

**2.5.** For movements between GB and NI (exclusively), UK issued transport documents will continue to be valid.

### **3. Trade negotiations/border biosecurity/future imports**

**3.1.** The Board were informed that a trade agreement with the EU has now been finalised with some questions on Northern Ireland outstanding. The conversation continues to iron out those details.

**3.2.** A team has been set up to look at the UK's import check regime from 2022 onwards. They will focus on protecting biosecurity and continuation of trade.

### **4. Avian Influenza**

**4.1.** An update was provided on the November 2020 outbreak of Avian Influenza (AI). Risk of incursion into wild birds in the whole of GB is very high. The overall risk of exposure of poultry in GB remains medium (with stringent biosecurity) to high (where there are biosecurity breaches).

**4.2.** Link to the Rapid Risk assessment on incursion of H5N8 HPAI into housed or non-housed poultry flocks and captive birds is:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/941150/rapid-risk-assessment-H5N8-HPAI-housing-poultry-flocks-captive-birds.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/941150/rapid-risk-assessment-H5N8-HPAI-housing-poultry-flocks-captive-birds.pdf)

**4.3.** The team have been dealing with three concurrent outbreaks of Avian Influenza (i.e. 3 different virus strains (numbers accurate as at 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021):

- 1 x case of H5N2 low path Avian Influenza (Kent)
- 1 x case of H5N1 (European strain) highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (N. Yorkshire)
- 18 cases of H5N8 highly pathogenic Avian Influenza

**4.4.** An Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) has been declared in England (effective from 5pm on the 11 November 2020) with additional housing measures in force from 14 December 2020.

**4.5.** This means all bird keepers in England (whether they have pet birds, commercial flocks or just a few birds in a backyard flock) are required by law to take a range of biosecurity precautions, including housing their birds (except in very specific circumstances).

**4.6.** Anyone keeping poultry or other captive birds, must take action to reduce the risk of disease in their flock by following government advice on biosecurity. Further details of the measures that apply in the Avian Influenza Protection Zone (AIPZ) can be found in the AIPZ declaration (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu#AIPZ> ).

**4.7.** Disease freedom from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) cannot be regained by UK until 3 months after the completion of secondary Clean & Disinfect (C&D). There are three possible triggers for the start of the 3-month count-down to country freedom:

- Final C&D
- OIE Standard C&D
- Date owner / keeper agrees to cease all poultry activity for at least 12 months and to implement stringent biosecurity

## **5. Legislative Reform**

### **Regulatory Reform**

**5.1.** The Future Farming & Countryside Programme (FFCP) Regulation and Enforcement team exists to implement a new regulatory system post cross compliance. The main objective is to increase compliance with regulatory standards and to improve the customer experience for farmers. The future regulatory system will continue to target;

- Air quality
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Water and the water environment
- Wildlife and wild places
- Production and harvesting of natural resources
- People enjoying and caring about the natural environment
- Exotic diseases and invasive non-native species
- Exposure of people and wildlife to harmful chemicals
- Animal health and welfare
- Soils

**5.2.** The next step towards designing an improved regulatory system will be extensive co-design and engagement activity with the industry, stakeholders and other interested parties.

### **Enforcement**

**5.3.** The current system of cross compliance is inflexible and often seen as unfair. Ministers are keen to replace it with a more proportionate and flexible approach.

**5.4.** The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway should be the starting point to drive high standards of health, welfare and biosecurity, providing advice and positive incentives to the farmer to encourage good practice. Enforcement should more often start with advice and an opportunity to comply, whilst retaining appropriate

sanctions. It is important that the regulator applies the right combination of approaches to the situation.

**5.5.** The team now intend to introduce penalty notices as an additional tool to support improvement of animal health and welfare standards by enabling a targeted and consistent approach to enforcement.

## **6. Animals Bill**

**6.1.** The welfare policy team is planning to introduce an Animals Bill in the second session, which at present, includes 14 important animal welfare and conservation measures, including 5 manifesto commitments.

**6.2.** The Bill measures sit alongside other reforms which might need secondary legislation instead of primary legislation, such as some specific farm animal and other reforms which can be justified on animal welfare grounds, or which might not need new legislation at all but may involve the application of existing powers, such as future farming reforms involving public funds. Timings are yet to be confirmed and announced.

**6.3.** The Bill sits alongside a much wider programme of work across animal health and welfare and conservation. For farmed animals, the Bill will support the current work exploring further improvements to the transport and slaughter of animals, both through our current transport consultation and our review into the Welfare at Time of Killing legislation.

**Thursday 21 January 2021**

## **9. Animal Health & Welfare Pathway Future Direction**

9.1. The board were informed that Ministers have been briefed on the concepts and intention of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway. Ministers are content for work to proceed. The Animal Health Pathway work was part of the Agricultural Transition Plan announcement, so the information is in the public domain and expectations are being built.

9.2. The team have started to think about how the work links up with Environmental Land Management and the Sustainable Farming Incentive. Research is also under way looking at how we can incentivise higher health and

welfare standards and at potential welfare market interventions to provide better consumer choice.

9.3. Work on codesigning the Animal Health and Pathway continues to develop and there has been a welcome increase in the recognition of the Pathway both by stakeholders and across Defra.

## **10. Future Welfare Reforms**

### **On farm**

10.1. Defra's Farm Animal Welfare team outlined work being undertaken on farm animal welfare reforms. Ministers are committed to maintaining our position as world leaders in animal welfare and want to improve and strengthen the regulatory baseline.

10.2. In the Autumn, Lord Goldsmith held a very useful series of discussions with key industry sectors, welfare groups, the AHWBE and the Chair of the Animal Welfare Committee to gather views on priorities for farm animal reform. We are currently examining these priorities, including the evidence around the use of cages for farm animals, in order to agree a work programme for reform.

## **11. Traceability – Movement Control Proposals**

11.1. The traceability team within Defra were asked by The Traceability Design User Group (TDUG) whether the level of improvement to traceability (and compliance) could trigger a change in standstill requirements. It's difficult to put specific values on this with the current data/evidence.

11.2. Relaxing standstill will increase the risk of silent disease spread and so traceability needs to improve from its current level to compensate for this and needs to be commensurate with the risks.

11.3. Defra asked TDUG for views on what level of improvement to traceability and compliance is realistically achievable. Specifically, what changes are necessary to the data that Defra/APHA currently capture, what levels of compliance are realistic and achievable (where and why) and what business types are more impacted by standstill than others.

11.4. TDUG convened a workshop on 21 September 2020 to consider Defra's request. They provided a range of feedback, most notably they would like to see:

- Farm to fork traceability
- Real time reporting of movements
- Fast, accurate data reporting to underpin compliance
- A service that enables efficient business operation and underpins competitive market requirements
- Benefits aligned to the farmer and industry as well as enabling effective control of disease
- Individually identified livestock to be moved in batches where safe to do so
- Livestock movements within businesses not to be subject to standstill
- Digital ways for hauliers to manage livestock movements and integrate with sender consignment data

11.5. Next steps involved the need to understand better what level of compliance is needed to deliver the traceability required to manage disease outbreaks effectively.

## **12. Industry Initiatives**

### **Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS)**

12.1. The Board has been kept informed of the progress of the RDPE PRRS project for quite some time. Stewart Houston was sorry to inform the Board that the project will no longer go ahead. Only one bid was received in response to the second Invitation To Tender (ITT) and that failed to gain enough points in the assessment to allow it to proceed.

12.2. Michael and the Board took this opportunity to thank Stewart Houston for his work and dedication to the project.

### **Skills Institute**

12.3. A member of staff from the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) attended to present the Board with an update on The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH).

12.4. The strategic aims for TIAH are:

- To professionalise the sector through an independent professional framework
- To ensure the provision of industry-led, fit-for-purpose qualifications and CPD
- To develop and market clear industry career paths and progression opportunities

- To provide professional business support

12.5. The main objective of TIAH is to transform the industry into one that is universally capable of professional protecting the industry, embracing progress in markets, innovating and improving productivity via a skilled workforce.

12.6. 2020 has been a very productive year for developing the TIAH initiative, which saw much industry consultation taking place. A business case was developed, Ministerial meetings took place to keep them up to date with the process and a TIAH development board was developed, independent from AHDB.

12.7. The Board thanked the presenter for taking time to attend the meeting and considered the work of TIAH to be key to everything they are working towards; education being the key to all change.

### **Non-notifiable exotic disease**

12.8. An AHDB Board member attended the meeting to present on the gap between exotic notifiable disease which is managed by the Government exercising its statutory duty and exotic non-notifiable disease which is managed by industry.

12.9. Work is currently taking place within AHDB on how a non-notifiable exotic disease incursion should be managed and how to avoid a non-notifiable exotic disease becoming endemic.

12.10. Some of the conditions set up for success are:

- Requirement to report
- Ability to order slaughter
- Compensation regime
- Up front funding
- Retrospective levy
- UK view
- Speed

12.11. Christine Middlemiss mentioned that work similar to this project has been undertaken previously. She was open to the idea of such a project and happy to help but warned a rigorous evidence-based approach is required. The Board would welcome from AHDB a more detailed proposal with supporting evidence .

## **13. Industry Resilience**

13.1. Daniel Parker and Stewart Houston had been asked to gather information on challenges for industry during COVID-19, Avian Influenza outbreaks and EU Exit.

13.2. COVID has presented significant challenges especially to the poultry meat sector. Two processing plant closures due to staff infections and one partial closure resulted in approximately 600,000 birds having to be killed on farm to avoid welfare issues related to overstocking.

13.3. Review needed on how Government and industry interact on Avian Influenza as the highly integrated nature of poultry meat production presents different challenges to more traditional livestock industries.

13.4. EU Exit has raised many challenges which have been covered at previous meetings. However, one of the biggest is financial costs which have arisen from EU Exit changes which are causing smaller businesses to close.

#### **14. Strategic direction – Resourcing and priorities for 2021/22**

14.1. The Animal Plant Health & Welfare directorate is still very focused on the Avian Influenza outbreak, ongoing work on EU-Exit and the COVID response.

14.2. Priorities going forward are biosecurity (taking control of our borders as a sovereign country and all the policy that lies behind effective biosecurity at home and abroad), transformative policy making domestically (such as the Pathway, bTB eradication and a new Animals Bill) and global animal health, including science.

14.3. Claire Horton wished to take this opportunity to thank the welfare team under Marc Casale who helped with pushing work forward during the COVID outbreak.

#### **Date of next meeting:**

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> and Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021**