

Animal Health and Welfare Board for England
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To: Minister of State for Agriculture and Food
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A NEW MODEL FOR DELIVERY OF SURVEILLANCE IN ENGLAND & WALES

1. On 8 May 2012, AHVLA invited the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England to agree the recommendations from the independent Surveillance Advisory Group (SAG) report¹ and how they could be taken forward with stakeholders.
2. The Board invites you to note that it agreed the SAG's recommendations. It also highlighted the need for AHVLA to develop a communications plan and offered to assist. The Board said that it was vital for AHVLA to have a project plan and a business case before it progressed the proposals. It encouraged AHVLA, Defra and the Welsh Government to work together in developing proposals for mutual benefit.

Background

3. Professor Dirk Pfeiffer, the Chair of the SAG, and the AHVLA project team briefed the Board on the recommendations. AHVLA said that SAG had considered previous reports, information from an online survey, outputs from a staff workshop and contributions from industry. Prof. Pfeiffer said that given the time constraints, he was pleased that the SAG had been able to agree recommendations although he recognised that a lot more work was needed on the detail.
4. AHVLA said that it welcomed the report, had accepted its recommendations, and was now moving into the design phase. It was launching a new project to look at issues such as IT and ways of working. It proposed a staged approach to implementation including further consultation with the industry, the veterinary profession and AHVLA staff, with the possibility of initial changes within a year. Further work with universities would be needed in terms of recommendations on integrating surveillance into veterinary training.
5. The Board had a wide ranging discussion in which it agreed the SAG recommendations and the following points were made:

¹ http://vla.defra.gov.uk/science/docs/sci_sag_final_report.pdf

- Prof. Pfeiffer and AHVLA confirmed that the recommended approach would improve the infrastructure for scanning surveillance.
- The Board agreed that it would not be possible to retain both the existing model and introduce a new one. A changing and evolving industry would benefit from a changing and evolving surveillance system. Developing and protecting capability and expertise for the longer term was an important underpinning principle.
- Veterinary schools had welcomed the recommendation to develop the veterinary skills base.
- Whilst sending samples around the country was usual for companion animals and horses it might not yet be in the mindset of livestock farmers.
- AHVLA said that the proposed centres of excellence would provide access to the best expertise in the country, whilst maintaining local contacts via veterinary practices.
- AHVLA confirmed that the rationale for the SAG recommendations was to improve surveillance. Further work was needed to assess the financial implications. The current approach was not good value for money. The proposed approach was a better surveillance model and was expected to be better value for money. The Board asked AHVLA to develop a business case to support its proposals and to avoid additional costs.
- The Board asked about stakeholder feedback on the report. AHVLA summarised the feedback in the veterinary press and the initial feedback from AHVLA staff. It noted the SAG recommendation on governance and partnership working.
- The Board asked about Ministerial, staff and stakeholder engagement. AHVLA said that it was planning regional stakeholder discussions. It expected that stakeholders benefiting from the current service would be most resistant to change and keenest to engage; stakeholders with limited access to the current service would be less likely to engage. The Board said that this would be important in assessing feedback. It considered that a communications plan was essential, highlighting the key objective of improving surveillance coverage.
- The Board noted that while the Board's remit covered England, the recommendations applied to England and Wales. The Board emphasised the importance of a joined-up approach to surveillance and the need for close working with the devolved administrations.
- The Board commented on specific proposals for locating regional collection points. AHVLA said that further work was needed at regional level to refine the proposals noting that increasing access would increase sample throughput.
- The Board noted the importance of having a surveillance network with good overseas links to provide early warning of new threats.
- The Board asked about the role of private laboratories. AHVLA said that private laboratories were represented on SAG and had a role in non-statutory testing and a possible role in statutory testing. For example, AHVLA had tendered for TSE testing in private laboratories.

Michael Seals, Chair of Animal Health and Welfare Board for England