

## **Animal Health and Welfare Board for England**

### **Protocol for working with the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) and other Defra Executive Agencies**

*Author: Animal Health and Welfare Board for England Secretariat  
Revised: 25 April 2012*

#### **The remit of the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (AHWBE)**

The AHWBE is the principal source of Departmental advice to Defra Ministers on strategic health and welfare matters relating to all kept animals in England; its focus is on strategic, longer term and cross-cutting matters with a potentially high impact on animal keepers and where communications with and input from the various sectors are key to success.

The AHWBE has strategic oversight of Defra policy and delivery in England in relation to:

- Animal health;
- Animal welfare<sup>1</sup>;
- Those public health implications of animal diseases that fall within Defra's remit;
- Transmission of disease to humans via animals; and
- All kept animals (including companion animals and aquaculture).

The full terms of reference for the AHWBE are available on the Defra website<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Working with the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA)**

In order to carry out its remit to provide strategic oversight of delivery in the areas of animal health and welfare as set out in its terms of reference, the AHWBE—provides the England oversight of AHVLA, an executive agency working on behalf of Defra, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly. AHVLA's role is to safeguard animal health and welfare as well as public health, protect the economy and enhance food security through research, surveillance and inspection.

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<sup>1</sup> The health of circus and zoo animals falls within scope in relation to disease prevention matters only. Advice on the welfare of circus and zoo animals is covered by officials in Defra.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahwbe/about/terms-of-reference/>

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### ***How is the relationship between AHVLA and central Defra structured and managed?***

AHVLA's relationship with Defra and its strategic direction is set out in a number of key documents including the Framework Document<sup>3</sup> and its annual corporate and business plan<sup>4</sup>. The Secretary of State for Defra as Departmental Owner of the Agency, and in consultation with colleagues in the Devolved Administrations, is responsible for the overall policy and financial framework within which AHVLA operates. The Defra Minister of State normally acts on behalf of the Secretary of State in all ownership matters related to AHVLA. In practice, the Defra Permanent Secretary nominates two senior officials to play key governance roles:

- The **Corporate Owner** (the DG Chief Operating Officer) provides line management of the Agency Chief Executive, holds AHVLA to account for delivering against headline targets, and takes a longer term strategic view of the agency's interaction with Defra. The Corporate Owner is supported in that task by a **Strategic Advisory Board (SAB)** which he chairs, and which includes colleagues from all three devolved administrations as well as non-executive directors; and
- The **England Corporate Customer**, a Defra Director with a policy interest in AHVLA's business (the Defra Director for Animal Health and Welfare Policy: Disease Control) ensures that all policy customer interests are represented effectively (including working closely with the Devolved Administrations).

It is the responsibility of the Agency's **Chief Executive** to seek to reconcile the different demands on it from the various Government (including other EU member States), Devolved Administration and commercial customers and to advise the Corporate Owner accordingly. To facilitate this, the Chief Executive has nominated a senior member of the management team to chair an **AHVLA Customer Board** to discharge that function, in respect of Defra, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

### ***How will the AHWBE and AHVLA work together?***

In order to ensure a close working relationship between AHWBE and AHVLA a number of arrangements have been agreed:

- AHVLA's Chief Executive is an *ex officio* member of the AHWBE, with other agency staff being called to attend at the Chief Executive's discretion;

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla/files/framework-doc.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla/files/corp-business-plan1112.pdf>

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- The Defra Corporate Customer and the other Defra Director responsible for policy delivered by AHVLA are executive members of the Board; and
- AHWBE aims to meet at AHVLA premises at least once a year.

As with advice from the core Department, AHWBE agrees at the close of each meeting the confidentiality status of information presented by AHVLA so that AHWBE members are clear how it should be handled. AHVLA does not present information pertaining to the devolved administrations to AHWBE without prior authorisation from the relevant administration(s).

#### ***How will AHWBE provide “oversight” of delivery through AHVLA?***

As set out in its Terms of Reference, the AHWBE has a role in approving AHVLA’s operational plans in relation to animal health and welfare in England and monitoring the delivery of those plans. This includes:

- Advising Defra Ministers on approval of AHVLA’s annual business plan; and
- Reviewing contingency plans for dealing with new disease outbreaks on an annual basis.

The England Corporate Customer ensures that AHWBE views are fed into AHVLA governance mechanisms, by attending the Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) which is the high-level ownership board for AHVLA, and by attending the AHVLA Customer Board. The agendas and minutes of these meetings will normally be provided to AHWBE, with the agreement of the Chair and Devolved members.

AHVLA and the core Department have day-to-day relations at working level. The agreement and management of England Service Level Agreements takes place at a working level between the respective core Departmental and AHVLA teams, with sign off by the England Corporate Customer and Agency England Director. These SLAs are provided to AHWBE members for their information.

#### **Working with other Defra Executive Agencies**

As stated in its Terms of Reference, the AHWBE also has a role in approving the operational plans of other delivery partners in respect of animal health and welfare in England. This means it has established a relationship – of varying degree – with Defra’s other Executive Agencies: the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) including the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS); the Veterinary Medicines Directorate

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(VMD), the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA); and Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS).

In practice it may:

- Advise Defra Ministers on approval of the relevant sections of these agencies' business plans;
- Receive copies of relevant extracts of Service Level Agreements; and
- Call on the expertise of other Defra Executive Agencies, in which case it will be for the Chief Executive Officer of each organisation to decide on the most appropriate representative to meet such a request.

The relationship between the core Department and each of these agencies is governed in a broadly similar way, with nominated corporate owners and customers.

The Board has also established a relationship with non-Defra delivery partners in respect of animal health and welfare in England such as the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The AHWBE has a protocol for working with Devolved Administrations, other government departments and advisory groups, which covers the relationship with the FSA.

The AHWBE is a new and innovative approach to policy making. It will keep this protocol under regular review to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose.