

## **Terms of Reference for the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England**

**The Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (“the Board” or “the AHWBE”) is responsible for strategic animal health and welfare policy and oversight of its delivery in relation to England, taking account of public health considerations**

### **Role**

The Board is the principal source of Departmental advice to Defra Ministers on all strategic health and welfare matters relating to all kept animals in England.

The Board’s role is to set the broad strategic policy framework as the basis for day-to-day advice to Ministers and for day-to-day operational actions. It operates within the broader departmental framework (see “Governance” section below).

The Board’s responsibilities include

- setting the strategic policy and budget priorities within the available budget envelope;
- development of key policies and how they should be funded (including where appropriate charging regimes for funding these policies);
- assessment of the risk of threats from animal disease and how to manage these;
- determining what the surveillance and research priorities should be;
- the implementation of policy, commissioning its delivery and ensuring value for money by the relevant Defra agencies and other delivery organisations;
- the effectiveness and proportionality of the regulatory framework;
- approving the operational plans of the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency in relation to animal health and welfare in England and monitoring the delivery of those plans;
- approving the operational plans of other delivery bodies in respect of animal health and welfare in England (e.g. CEFAS and FSA);
- the contingency plans for dealing with new disease outbreaks and for reviewing these plans on an annual basis (or as circumstances require). These should provide for speedy and effective day-to-day management of the outbreak by officials.

The Board will focus 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.

Ministers expect to accept advice offered by the Board where that advice is the agreed view of all the Board members. If, in exceptional circumstances, they decide not to do so, they will make public the reasons for taking a different view.

Where the Board cannot reach an agreed view the Board will present options to Ministers for consideration.

The Board will draw upon the support and advice of a range of stakeholder and advisory groups focused on specific topics (for example, particular diseases, animal sectors, trade issues), including those already in existence. The Board will be able to set up new such groups if they require more support and detail on a particular issue, and advise on change to existing ones. As appropriate such stakeholder and advisory groups will have direct access to Ministers.

## **Scope**

The Board 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).

## **Governance and reporting lines**

The Board's authority derives from the Ministerial commitment that this should be the principal source of advice on strategic health and welfare relating to all kept animals in England. As such the Board is ultimately responsible to Ministers who are legally responsible for their decisions taken on the Board's advice and, as now, will be accountable to Parliament.

Operationally, the Board is part of the decision-making process of Defra.

Its members (see below) will include the Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) with appropriate executive authority within Defra on animal health and welfare and with responsibility for the relevant budgets relating to animal health and welfare policy and its delivery.

Following agreement by the Board and Ministers (where appropriate) the SROs will action matters for Defra. They will where necessary progress these matters through the normal Departmental approval channels (for example, financial approvals). The SROs will report to the Board on the actions they

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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 will be covered separate to the board, by officials in Defra.

have taken. In this way the Board will submit its agreed proposals about the spending of resources to the wider Departmental and government financial planning processes. This will include specific current year spending programmes and determining future spending. The Accounting Officer will still be ultimately responsible to Parliament for ensuring that Defra policies and programmes are delivered as economically, efficiently and effectively as possible. As such the Accounting Officer will retain the right to provide independent separate advice to Ministers as part of this role in accordance with the principles set out in “Managing Public Money” (HM Treasury).

The Board’s activities will be undertaken within the context of the wider Whitehall and Government structures and policies. Ministerial responsibilities and civil servant accountabilities will remain as before.

The Board will work with stakeholders through communication and engagement channels with relevant sectors and interests and open reporting of their work (see “Reporting” section below).

The Board will provide the England oversight of the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) whose Chief Executive will attend Board meetings. It will also oversee the operational plans of other delivery bodies in relation to animal health and welfare.

The Board will be served by a secretariat based within Defra.

## **Membership**

The Board is made up of both senior Defra officials and ‘external’ (i.e., non-Defra) members, with not less than 10 and not more than 14 members.

The Chair will be an external member.

The Defra officials on the Board will be the SROs in Defra with responsibility for the relevant programmes and budgets relating to animal health and welfare policy and its delivery. The Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) (in his/her role as CVO for England) and the Chief Executive of the AHVLA will be *ex officio* members.

External Board members will serve in an individual capacity as non-executive members rather than as formal representatives of particular sectors or organisations. Their key roles will be:

- to contribute actively and constructively to the deliberations and work of the Board;
- to reach agreed and soundly-based views and decisions with due regard to value for money;
- to build good working relations with other members of the Board, and with officials;
- to ensure the effective working of the Board;
- to take a ‘portfolio’, namely lead responsibility for effective engagement and communication with a sector (or sectors) of the livestock industry and/or animal keepers, and/or other interested groups;

- to represent the Board, communicating its work, views and decisions to stakeholders and to the general public.

External members will be individuals who have the confidence, trust, and support of major stakeholder interests and experience and knowledge of animal-keeping. Collectively, they will bring knowledge and experience of the relevant businesses, customers and wider interests in animal health and welfare, be able to articulate the views and concerns of those groups and interests to the Board and the Minister, and report back to those groups on the work, the thinking and the agreed view of the Board.

The Chair and other external members of the Board are appointed by the Minister for fixed terms. The appointments process will be transparent and open and the appointments will be publicly advertised. Member's interests will be published and any potential conflicts will be dealt with in the appropriate way.

All members are responsible for the decisions of the Board.

### **Performance and Evaluation**

The Board will establish a regular performance reporting cycle to the Management Committee of the Department and the Minister as appropriate.

External Board members will be responsible to the Minister for their individual performance which will be appraised at least annually, with advice on their performance from members of the Defra Management Committee as appropriate.

The performance of the Board as a whole will be evaluated 2 years after its establishment and will be measured against the benefits it is expected to achieve.

### **Meetings and Ways of Working**

The Board will meet between 6 and 10 times a year. The Board's agenda will be aligned to the Defra and wider Government business cycle, such as the financial and business planning cycles, so that it can make decisions effectively and at the appropriate time.

The Board will have procedures for dealing with time-critical issues. These will include how decisions that need the Board's strategic input are taken to meet timescales for European business.

The Board's decisions will be consistent with Better Regulation principles.

The Minister will regularly meet with the Board and its Chair.

### **Reporting**

A key part of the job of external members will be to communicate regularly with their relevant sectors as part of their 'portfolio' responsibilities in order to

be able to articulate the views and concerns of those groups and interests. External members will also be responsible for communicating to the relevant sectors the implications of Board decisions for those sectors. External groups or stakeholders may be invited to address the Board if relevant.

Communication and engagement channels will be established for each sector covered by the Board with input from the relevant sectors, members of the Board and Defra officials (if needed). The channels will:

- be owned, run and supported by the sector;
- provide a good channel of communication to the main groups/organisations/individuals;
- co-ordinate views on strategic policy issues relevant to the sector;
- link into relevant stakeholder groups.

A public report by the Chair will be published after each meeting of the Board. The Board will produce a public annual report, including input from the various sector groups that feed into it. The Board will be expected to agree, with the Management Committee of Defra, an annual forward plan for its work (including appropriate outcomes and scope for emerging issues) to fit in with Defra's business planning processes. The annual report will include information on its performance against its work plan.

The Board will hold at least one annual meeting open to all to present its annual report and discuss its objectives for the forthcoming year.

### **England, the UK and international issues**

Animal health and welfare policy and its delivery is a devolved matter. The Board will consider UK and international issues and will formulate a view on the "England" position. The Board will be informed of views in other parts of the UK to help its deliberations. Ministers will receive advice from CVO (UK) and Defra officials on UK matters taking account of the views of all four administrations.

### **Interdepartmental arrangements**

Animal health and welfare policy and delivery affects, and needs to take account of other departmental interests (notably the Department of Health and FSA in relation to public health and food safety). Current liaison arrangements at official level will continue as now. Relevant information and advice resulting from that liaison will be provided to the Board, when appropriate, to help them in their deliberations; and will be reflected in resulting advice to Ministers. Where necessary, officials from other government departments will attend Board meetings to give their advice if they request to do so.

Advice from other departments will be treated with whatever confidentiality restrictions they request. Board papers can remain confidential and external members will be required to abide by confidentiality requirements.