

# Animal Health and Welfare Board for England

## Protocol for working with the Devolved Administrations, other Government departments and advisory groups

Author: AHWBE 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 devolved administrations, other Government departments and committees/advisory bodies**

Animal health and welfare policy and its delivery are devolved matters and the AHWBE formulates a view on the England position. The AHWBE considers the England perspective on issues affecting the UK and works with the devolved administrations to help it in its deliberations. The Defra Chief Veterinary Officer, who maintains a UK perspective on animal health and welfare policy issues, is an *ex officio* member of the AHWBE.

Defra is responsible for establishing a UK position in relation to developing policy positions for negotiations at EU or international level, consulting and taking account of the views of the devolved administrations as well as the view of the AHWBE on

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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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the England position. If agreement cannot be achieved at official level, Ministers are consulted and the matter may be referred to the Joint Ministerial Committee (Europe).

Animal health and welfare policy and delivery affects, and needs to take account of, other departmental interests - notably the Department of Health and Food Standards Agency (FSA) in relation to public health and food safety. So the AHWBE works with such departments in order to meet its aims. The AHWBE also draws upon the support and advice of a range of existing stakeholder and advisory groups focused on specific, relevant topics (for example, particular diseases, animal sectors, trade issues).

There is ongoing liaison on animal health and welfare issues at official level between Defra, devolved administrations, other government departments and advisory groups. Relevant information and advice resulting from that liaison is provided to the AHWBE, when appropriate, to help it in its deliberations; and is reflected in resulting advice to Defra Ministers on the England position.

Where any strategic and cross-cutting issues that the AHWBE is discussing require direct input from devolved administrations, other government departments or advisory groups, AHWBE invites a representative from that government, department or advisory group to attend a meeting to give their advice or be co-opted onto the AHWBE for the duration of the debate on that issue, depending on the level of input or advice needed. The AHWBE Secretariat notifies devolved administrations, other government departments or advisory groups when such issues are to be discussed at meetings and where there is a need, invites them to attend. In addition, the Secretariat ensures that the AHWBE forward work plan is published on the Defra website<sup>3</sup> to ensure that all AHWBE's stakeholders can see what future business is to be discussed. Summaries of meetings are published on the Defra website. Members of devolved administrations, other government departments (including the FSA) and advisory groups may request to attend AHWBE meetings to give their advice, or sit as observers.

Advice from devolved administrations, other departments or advisory bodies is treated with whatever confidentiality restrictions they request.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahwbe/>

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It should be noted that FSA advice on food safety is provided directly to Defra Ministers. Defra Ministers then seek the advice of the AHWBE to inform their decision making, and whilst FSA's advice could be part of that consideration by AHWBE, it is also part of the final policy consideration by Defra Ministers. FSA is the sole provider of advice on food safety, and this advice is not subject to modification by AHWBE.

The AHWBE holds at least one annual open meeting, to present its annual report and discuss its objectives for the forthcoming year.

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.