

Notes of the 'UK Equine Disease Coalition' meeting
Wednesday 4th November 2020
Via Zoom online platform

Attendance:

Mike Anderson MA (Scottish Government)
Martyn Blissitt MBt (Scottish Government)
Mark Bowen MB (Nottingham University)
Marion Collins MC (Scottish Government)
Shane Collins SC (DAERA)
Linda Evans LE (The Donkey Sanctuary)
Alastair George AG (APHA)
Liz Kelly LK (World Horse Welfare)
Roxane Kirton RK (RSPCA)

Joe Latimer JL (Defra)
Ben Mayes BM (private practitioner)
Scott McDowell SM (Scottish Government)
Keith Meldrum KM (Observer)
Richard Newton RN (ex-AHT)
Roly Owers RO (World Horse Welfare) – Chair
Helen Roberts HR (Defra)
Gosia Siwonia GS (Welsh Government)

Apologies:

David Mountford DM (BEVA)

1. RO welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Notes on the previous meeting – Wed 6 May 20 – were agreed as an accurate record.
3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda
 - a. Equine Movements Template. AG confirmed that this has been delayed by other operational issues and is still work in progress. Andy Paterson is progressing it.
 - b. Animal Health Trust. RN explained that as of the end of July the AHT had closed. Some diagnostic and surveillance functions continue, with RN currently employed by BHA. A tendering process for laboratory services received 10 bids, with interviews concluding this week. A group chaired by Dave Rendle (BEVA Junior Vice-President) is due to report on a review of longer-term options for UK equine disease surveillance in mid-November. The Flu Programme has, unofficially, received a one-year extension by the HBLB.
4. Terms of Reference (ToR). Last amended in November 2019, the Coalition's Terms of Reference were approved unchanged.
5. Covid-19 – potential impact
BM said BVA and BEVA had released guidance following the most recent changes to Covid-19 restrictions (which differ across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Equine practice is continuing using risk assessment and risk mitigation measures (PPE, social distancing etc.) as now. This is working well and practices are busy. To date there has been no increase in autumn euthanasia and the market for sports horses is buoyant, possibly due to some evaluation of lifestyles by the sector. This overview was reaffirmed by MB. RO reported that while the welfare organisations were predicting a grim winter, all had been steady to date with rehoming doing well.
6. Disease update
 - a. Equine Influenza. RN reported that there had not been much activity in the UK (3 outbreaks, all unvaccinated), with disease continuing to circulate at low levels in Europe. However, the US had had 24 outbreaks, 14 since August, particularly on the West Coast including some

deaths in burros in California. This is likely to be Florida Clade 1. Not much has been reported from Africa. There has been no further progress on vaccination protocols but it is hoped that the benefits of vaccination have been recognised by those moving and mixing horses.

- b. Equine Viral Arteritis. HR said that the review of the 1995 EVA Order continues to be delayed due to other operational pressures. RN informed the group that a focus article on EVA would be appearing in the Defra Equine Quarterly Disease Surveillance Report and thanked HR and her Defra colleagues for their work.
 - c. Equine Herpes. In DM's absence the update on guidance for vaccination will be carried forward.
 - d. African Horse Sickness. HR sits on the EFSA working group currently reviewing the AHS control measures and modelling them. She stated that the measures may change allowing more flexibility for example in movements/zone sizes. The outbreak in Thailand has since spread to Malaysia. The OIE believe the origin to be imported zebra from South Africa. Thailand continues with its vaccination programme using different live serotypes and the last reported case was in June. RN said that Australia was worried about the situation and he has been invited to attend a webinar and will report back.
 - e. Equine Infectious Anaemia. AG updated the group on the process of handling non-negative/false positive Elisa tests. These reports are coming from one laboratory but are not a regular occurrence (2-3 annually). Each case is subjected to a full investigation using the Coggin's test to negate and a review has considered utilising a lighter touch approach (e.g. by resampling or using the same sample for a Coggin's test). This concluded that unless the situation was very low risk, a full investigation was needed. RN said that at the AHT (and possibly elsewhere) each non-negative was taken on its merits and non-negatives would be Coggin's tested with a note to that effect to the submitting clinician.
 - f. West Nile Virus. HR confirmed that following concerns raised on the clarity of the guidance on the testing regime for WNV, Defra will look at them again. She explained that there are two ways of testing – a genuine report case and testing to exclude. RN briefly discussed the changing pattern of the disease in some European countries (Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Hungary and Spain) and in North America. A new guideline on WNV is being added to the HBLB Codes of Practice for 2021.
 - g. Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM). MBt gave an update on work following the case in Scotland, the first using the pilot protocol with its changes in industry responsibility. A limited internal 'lessons learned' exercise had been done and will be shared with EDC in due course – it has been delayed due to other operational pressures. RN stated that industry had also discussed the outbreak and had made some suggestions for amendments to the HBLB Code of Practice for CEM for the next breeding season – reflecting the increased sensitivity of the PCR and screening of stallions donating semen.
7. Regulatory update
- a. Equine ID and CED. LK reported that the deadline for microchipping in England had now passed, with deadlines in Wales and Scotland coming up in February and March next year respectively. There continue to be challenges around ensuring data held by the Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs), the Central Equine Database (CED) and in the passport is all the same. It is still anticipated that owners will be able to update their PIO via the digital stable

in England and Wales, which will hopefully ensure records held on the CED are up to date. The Digital Stable has now been rolled out more widely. There have been concerns that the registration process is too onerous. These checks are in place to ensure that the system is not open to identity fraud.

MA confirmed that updating the system via the Digital Stable will not be open to those with an equine registered with a Scottish PIO, as Scotland does not recognise the Digital Stable – and are using ScotEquine instead. Guidance has been sent to all keepers registered on ScotEquine, which has clearly highlighted that keeper data is not being kept up to date.

SC raised the difficulties in the transfer of NI data held by RIO PIOs and the Central Equine Database, due to a mixture of GDPR and IT issues, with not much optimism that these are easily resolved.

GS said that the current priority in Wales is the microchip deadline of 12 February 2021, with a comms campaign to all keepers on the CED plus updating the current Welsh Equine regs. Communications with industry have allowed the PIOs sufficient time to process passport microchip details ahead of February 21.

- b. Animal Health Law (AHL). HR reported that Defra were looking at the requirements next week. MA and SC raised the proposed EU implementing legislation for equine ID and changes, for example, use of a country code on microchips, format of smartcards, changes to the format of the paper ID document and registration of equine premises. In Scotland Ministers want to align as closely as possible to the AHL. SC commented that the AHL legislation is included in Annex II to the NI Protocol and will apply in Northern Ireland when introduced. RO said that a digital solution for movement of racing and elite horses was being discussed (UK/Ireland/France) for post 31 December 2020. Additional key dates other than the end of the transition period at the end of the year are April, when the AHL comes into force, and end of July, when the UK process for travel changes.
- c. Animal Welfare (Licensing of activities involving animals) (England) Regulations 2018. BM reported that all current RCVS courses have been paused. The top line RCVS guidelines have been completed and are being reviewed. A meeting will take place shortly to re-evaluate training options. On practical inspections – these have been disrupted by Covid-19 (in particular the main inspections carried out by Local Authorities), with the vets continuing with the horse/pony inspections in riding schools. BM said that a BEVA rep was needed for the RCVS Riding Establishments sub-committee.
- d. Traceability Design User Group (TDUG). Nothing additional to report.
- e. Proposed Licensing of Sanctuaries and Rehoming Centres in England, Scotland & Wales. LK reported that in England the response to Covid-19 has caused a delay in the planned public consultation – but Defra are still keen to progress. In Wales the voluntary code of practice for animal welfare establishments, drafted by the Animal Welfare Network for Wales, has been published <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-09/animal-welfare-establishments-code-of-best-practice.pdf>. In Scotland a draft SI has been published for comment on Licensing of Activities involving Animals.
- f. Welfare in Transport. RO noted that both Defra and Scottish Government will be publishing consultations in the next few weeks, following the FAWC report. The European Commission is also reviewing the transport legislation, on a longer timescale.

8. EU-UK future relationship. The deadline for the end of the transition period currently remains at 31 December 2020. Negotiations continue.
9. Biosecurity Behaviour Change Project. LK reported that the project is on hold due to the Covid-19.
10. Equine Medicines. No Covid-19 related shortages were noted.
11. Update from related groups/initiatives
 - a. Animal Health and Welfare Board for England. RO reported that Michael Seals and Tim Morris come to the end of their terms on the Board at the end of 2021. The Board is likely to continue but with a focus on the development of Animal Health and Welfare Pathways for the different species, including equines. This is a 10-year vision for government (England only initiative at the moment) and industry to work together towards a long-term goal. The British Horse Council have had a couple of meetings about an Equine Pathway and this will be raised at the main December meeting.
 - b. British Horse Council. RO reported that discussions continue with Defra on equine ID issues. There is reluctance at this stage to move away from EU legislation, but there is talk of a digital solution being looked at next year. The next meeting of the Council (via Zoom) is on 11 December.
 - c. Equine Stakeholder Group for Scotland. The Group is now active again, having met on 20 October and next due to meet on 23 February 2021.
 - d. DAERA strategy development. SC reported that the Deloitte report recommended that an Equine Forum is established. The Minister has approved an interim forum (meeting on 5 November) with representation from all sectors of the equine industry. There is veterinary and welfare representation – the latter through the BHS and the One Equine umbrella (for equine assisted therapy and learning). A webinar on the launch of One Equine and the plans for development of NI as a recognised place for equine assisted learning therapy and education can be viewed here: https://youtu.be/fZ01J_ry2wE.
 - e. Equine Industry Committee. RN confirmed that the biannual meetings of the Committee continue (last meeting 16 September). The meeting discusses predominantly infectious diseases, surveillance, vaccines and research, with international representation (Ireland, France, Germany and Italy). The next meeting is scheduled for 17 February 2021.
12. AOB. KM raised the forthcoming auction for disposal of assets of the AHT, in particular the large collection of books from the library, being sold in two lots by 12 November. This collection may be of interest to academia and KM can supply details if of interest.
13. Date of next meeting – 9.30am on Wednesday 12 May 2021– either via Zoom or at the BHA offices.