

## **Lesley Griffiths MS**

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs

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15 February 2021

Dear Minister,

The Committee has recently undertaken a short piece of work on animal health and disease prevention. The purpose of this work was to explore current issues within this policy area and, potentially, pave the way for a more substantive inquiry by our successor in the Sixth Senedd.

We do not intend to report on our work. However, stakeholders raised a number of issues that we believe warrant further consideration. As such, we would welcome a response from you on the matters set out below.

### **Measuring progress towards targets for reducing antibiotic use**

We heard positive reports from stakeholders about progress made in reducing antibiotic use in food-producing animals and delivering the Welsh Government's Five Year Implementation Plan on antimicrobial resistance. We welcome this and hope the incoming Welsh Government, working with the industry, will build on progress made to date.

We were pleased to hear the target to reduce UK antibiotic use in food-producing animals by 25% between 2016 and 2000 was exceeded ahead of time. We note that usage is monitored by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and reported in the Veterinary Antimicrobial Resistance Sales Surveillance. Data in the report is provided at a UK level.

**1. Can you clarify whether data on the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals is only available at a UK level? If so, how confident are you that the data provides an accurate picture on usage in Wales?**



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**2. What arrangements are in place at a Wales level to collect and measure information on the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals?**

**3. What work has been undertaken to date to define the 2025 target (as set out in the UK's five year national action plan, *Tackling antimicrobial resistance 2019-2024*) and when will the new target be in place?**

### **EU legislation**

We note that Regulation (EU) 2019/6 on Veterinary Medicinal Products (VMP Regulation) and Regulation (EU) 2019/4 on Medicated Feed (MF) will apply in the EU from January 2022. These regulations provide for a range of measures to fight antimicrobial resistance, including prohibiting preventive use of antimicrobials via medicated feed and in groups of animals. There will also be restrictions on metaphylactic use of antimicrobials, and the possibility to reserve certain antimicrobials for human use only.

**4. Can you clarify whether the above regulations have become retained EU law and will therefore apply in the UK? If not, what consideration has been given to legislate to introduce comparable measures in the UK?**

### **Sheep scab**

In January 2019, the Welsh Government announced it was committing £5 million to establish an industry-led project to help eradicate sheep scab on farms in Wales. We understand this project has yet to be established.

**5. Can you explain why the sheep scab eradication project has yet to be established and how funding for the project has been repurposed?**

**6. Can you confirm it is still your intention to establish the project and provide an indicative timeline for this?**

### **Avian flu**

During the course of our work, a case of High Pathogenic Avian Influenza was confirmed in Anglesey. The Welsh Government announced it was extending the all-Wales Avian Influenza Prevention Zone and that it was mandatory for all bird keepers to house their birds.

We heard from stakeholders about the need to ensure all bird keepers, regardless of the size of their flock, understand the disease risk and maintain good biosecurity to prevent the disease. Effective communication is central to this.



**7. Can you explain what arrangements are in place to communicate on going developments in relation to Avian Influenza with bird keepers in Wales?**

**8. What are the challenges associated with communicating with small backyard flock holders or those who keep birds as pet, and how are you working to overcome these?**

### **Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD)**

We heard positive reports about the Gwaredu BVD screening programme, which comes to an end in March 2021. There was support from stakeholders for the introduction of a mandatory programme to ensure the benefits derived from Gwaredu BVD are not lost when it comes to an end.

**9. Can you set out your future plans towards eradicating BVD, including proposals to introduce mandatory screening?**

### **Animal health surveillance**

We recognise the critical role of animal health surveillance in detecting and investigating new or re-emerging animal diseases, including the contribution of the veterinary sector and farming community. We heard the UK surveillance system is under financial pressure. Stakeholders emphasised the need to ensure an appropriate level of investment in the system. This is particularly important now that the UK has left the EU, to avoid a reduction in animal health standards and protections and to enable trade in animals and animal products.

As a member of the EU, the UK benefitted from shared surveillance systems. Stakeholders emphasised the need to ensure that this shared surveillance continues as a priority, with structures in place to ensure ongoing collaboration and cooperation between the UK and EU.

**10. Can you provide a view on the current level of investment in the UK animal health surveillance system and the need to increase investment now that the UK has left the EU?**

**11. Can you outline the structures in place, or that will be put in place, to ensure ongoing collaboration and cooperation between the UK and EU in relation to animal health surveillance, including disease notification?**



## **Livestock movement controls and quarantine units**

The Six Day Stand Still (SDSS) rule, which aims to prevent disease outbreaks and minimise the spread of disease, has been in force for two decades. There was some support from stakeholders for a review of the SDSS rule.

We heard about the importance of Quarantine Units as an effective biosecurity measure and a means of improving animal health. Despite this, stakeholders reported that take up of the Welsh Government's QU scheme among farmers is low. According to stakeholders, this is because QU requirements and operational rules are impractical and costly.

We note that recommendations were made following the milestone review of QUs in 2018, which aim to make it easier for farmers to get and maintain a QU. The recommendations were due to be implemented throughout 2019-20.

**12. Can you set out what work has been done to review the effectiveness of the SDSS rule since it was first introduced in 2001?**

**13. What consideration have you given to reviewing the SDSS?**

**14. Can you provide an update on implementation of the recommendations made following the milestone review of QUs?**

**15. Can you clarify whether the Welsh Government has any further plans to work with the industry to promote the benefits of QUs and increase take up?**

I should be grateful if you would provide a response as soon as possible, and by **Monday 8 March** at the latest.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Hedges MS

Chair of Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg  
We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

