

Individual Decision

Title of Report:	Animal Health Service Level Agreement		
Report to be considered by:	Councillor Billy Drummond	on:	02 August 2004
Forward Plan Ref:	ID0819		

Purpose of Report: To outline the proposed Service Level Agreement with Defra for the enforcement of animal health and welfare legislation.

Recommended Action: To approve the Service Level Agreement prior to final agreement with Defra.

Reason for decision to be taken: Additional funding for animal health and welfare enforcement is dependent on entering into a SLA with Defra.

List of other options considered: Not entering into an agreement

Key background documentation:

- Outline of an animal health & welfare strategy for Great Britain
- A framework for the delivery of services in Animal Health & Welfare

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Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 The Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak in 2001 touched everyone in Britain in one way or another. For many this was the first time they had ever considered animal health and welfare controls and the effect that a breakdown in controls can have. With FMD following on the heels of the BSE crisis of the late 80s and early 90's and the Swine Vesicular Disease outbreaks of the late 90s consumer confidence fell to an all time low.
- 1.2 By late 2001 FMD was brought under control and the Industry hoped for better times. Sadly Bovine TB is increasing, lameness in sheep and cattle are at worrying levels; and new pig diseases are causing widespread loss in the pig industry.
- 1.3 In response to the lessons learnt during the FMD crisis, and after extensive consultation with all stakeholders, Defra has produced an outline 'animal health and welfare strategy for Great Britain'. Part of this outline is the formation of a Framework Agreement between Defra and each Local Authority Trading Standards Service for the ongoing delivery of animal health and welfare enforcement.

2.0 Outline of the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy

- 2.1 The stated aim of the strategy is "To improve the health and welfare of animals kept by man, and protect public health from animal disease". This has to be delivered within the context of protecting the interests of the wider economy and society, and securing opportunities for trade.
- 2.2 The strategy deals mostly with farmed livestock reared for human consumption and concentrates on the areas where the problems are most serious. However it also covers horses and touches on pets and wildlife.
- 2.3 Sustainable development is at the heart of the strategy. In the context of this strategy it means addressing animal health and welfare issues taking into account the economic, social and environmental impacts and risks and to look for long term benefits in all areas. The health and welfare of farmed animals contributes to the sustainability of farming and food production sector as well as rural communities such as large parts of West Berkshire.
- 2.4 The development of the strategy has been an inclusive process in the sense that the activities and priorities have been agreed following extensive consultation between stakeholders and Government. This new partnership approach, is not just about the enforcement bodies working together; but farmers' unions, farmed animal welfare groups and the farmers themselves being committed to ensuring the welfare and health of farmed animals and the safety of the human food chain.

3.0 Animal Health Service Level Agreement between Local Authorities and Defra

- 3.1 Local Authorities have a long-standing statutory responsibility for the enforcement of animal health and welfare legislation. It is a role we have to take seriously as the potential impact of non-compliance with legislation, especially that relating to disease control can be significant. For example non-compliance with movement restrictions or biosecurity and transport requirements could have a serious and detrimental effect on the rate of spread of disease. Recent history shows this all too well.

- 3.2 Furthermore the 2001 FMD outbreak not only highlighted the extent to which Defra is accountable for animal health controls, but the important role local trading standards services play and how vital their ongoing partnership with Defra is. The role played by Local Authorities through their Trading Standards and Countryside Services during the FMD outbreak was significantly under-reported and sadly largely unrecognised. In the period since the outbreak, the initiative has been taken to develop this partnership further, and in so doing build the profile of the LA role. The task was to find a solution to enable a consistent approach to animal health and welfare enforcement across the country while allowing some flexibility to reflect the size, diversity and structure of each local authority area.
- 3.3 In order to develop the framework an extensive consultation with interested parties such as local authority representatives and the farming industry was followed by a series of pilots in predominantly county authorities. From this process the final version of the framework was produced. It includes familiar aspects of any service level agreement, such as performance indicators to allow national and regional benchmarking; management information and facilities for auditing. It allows for three levels of service to be provided by each Authority across a range of functions, these equate to minimum, good or better practice. It is for each Authority in consultation with their Division Veterinary Manager to agree a suitable level for each function within their area dependent on local factors.
- 3.4 This framework will operate alongside both the DTI National Performance Framework for Trading Standards and the Food Standards Agency Service Level Agreement, to avoid duplication of information provision.

The key objectives of the framework are:

1. Improve communication between Local Authorities and Defra by working more in partnership
2. Introduce a more risk-based and focused approach to enforcement
3. Achieve greater consistency
4. Develop best practice
5. Give clear direction and achieve better planning
6. Have better informed people
7. Produce better management information
8. To raise the profile of animal health & welfare work

The aim is to achieve the following outcomes from a well-developed framework:

1. Effective disease control
2. A well educated and compliant farming industry, capable of greater self regulation
3. Sound welfare practices
4. Identifying and dealing consistently with breaches of legislation and best practice
5. Sound evidence to provide assurance to central government and to support the Public Service Agreement objectives

- 3.5 In West Berkshire a preliminary discussion has taken place with the Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM). From these discussions we have produced a draft SLA on how we would approach enforcement in respect of West Berkshires' 600-650 animal holdings. A copy of this draft framework is attached to this report. In most areas the level of provision is set at the minimum deemed appropriate by Defra. In a few selected areas where we have already developed, or have plans to develop, the service the level of provision is set at 'good'. The proposed levels of provision are those that are felt to be appropriate at this time following consultation with the DVM and reflect local circumstances. For completeness, all functions of the framework have been included, and those where the function does not apply to West Berkshire, for example markets, have been marked 'not applicable'.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Draft SLA Agreement between West Berkshire Council and Defra

Implications

Policy:	Cost cutting Cross Cutting across all policies relating to rural sustainability.
Financial:	<p>Currently 70% of one fte enforcement officer post is funded directly by Defra - and has been for the last two years. The remaining 30% is match funded by the Council. With effect from 2005/6 Defra have indicated they may fund this work through the FSS.</p> <p>Approval of the SLA will commit West Berkshire Council to the agreed service level for this year. If in 2005/6 we agree the same service level and the funding forms part of the FSS then a budget pressure of £20K will need to be funded from future agreed E&PP cash limits.</p>
Personnel:	The SLA will be delivered within the existing resource level. There are training requirements but the funding will be claimed back from DEFRA.
Legal:	Enforcement of Animal Health legislation is a statutory requirement on the Authority
Environmental:	There is an environmental protection element to a number of aspects of animal health enforcement in particular disposal of carcasses and other by-products. Enforcement of the relevant legislation will reduce the impact on the environment.
Equalities:	None
Partnering:	None
Property:	None
Risk Management:	None
Community Safety:	None

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council:	None
Select Committee Chairmen:	None
P&L Committee Chairman (where appropriate):	Not applicable
Ward Members:	Not applicable
Opposition Spokesperson:	Incorporated in report

Advisory Members: Not applicable

Local Stakeholders: Discussed with Divisional Veterinary Manager and proposals incorporated in draft plan.

Officers Consulted: Sandra Pugh – Group Accountant – response incorporated in report.

Trade Union: None