

Priorities for the Climate Change, Environment, Sustainability and Rural Affairs Committee

Question 1:

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Seventh Senedd, and why?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

BVA Welsh Branch considers the Committee's main priorities for the Seventh Senedd should be to develop a Sustainable Farming Scheme that supports good animal health and welfare outcomes; to strengthen the veterinary workforce; and to support evidence-informed disease preparedness and control.

Vets are central to Wales' food system, rural communities, public health and environmental outcomes, and their expertise should be built into policy design and delivery from the outset.

The forthcoming Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) is a key opportunity to ensure public funding supports good animal health and welfare outcomes, including the principle that animals should have a good life. Better health and welfare can improve productivity, reduce avoidable losses, and support more sustainable use of resources. High standards of animal health and welfare strengthen Wales's reputation for responsible, sustainable and high-quality food production, building public and consumer trust and supporting the long-term resilience and competitiveness of Welsh agriculture. This requires strong veterinary involvement in the development and implementation of the scheme.

Workforce pressures, particularly in rural areas, also need urgent attention. Without sufficient veterinary capacity, Welsh Government ambitions on animal health, welfare, disease control, food safety and trade will be harder to deliver. The Welsh Government should make vets central to delivery of animal health and welfare policy, incentivise job creation and opportunities for private and government vets, and continue to support the development of Wales' veterinary education capacity, including Aberystwyth University's veterinary school.

Disease preparedness and control should also be a major focus. BVA Welsh Branch supports collaborative, evidence-based and impactful national programmes as exemplified by Arwain DGC and the Pembrokeshire and North Wales bTB projects. Supported by a fully functional Multispecies Wales database, disease control in Wales requires enhanced data sharing between government and private vets, good biosecurity, and careful evaluation and wider application of lessons from pilot projects.

The Committee should also prioritise responsible use of antibiotics and parasiticides, and strengthened oversight of animal activities licensing through a clear, enforceable and outcome-focused regime.

Question 2

What is your highest priority (Priority 1)

Developing a Sustainable Farming Scheme that supports good animal health and welfare outcomes.

Please explain why this should be a priority for the Committee.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Developing a Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) that supports good animal health and welfare outcomes should be a priority as it is one of the most significant levers available to shape farming, rural resilience and public confidence in Wales. Healthy animals are fundamental to sustainable agriculture: they are more productive, require fewer avoidable interventions, make better use of feed, water and land, and are less likely to suffer preventable disease. Improving animal health and welfare therefore supports climate and environmental objectives, food safety, public health, antimicrobial stewardship and the strength of Wales' rural economy.

A central issue is whether the SFS will preserve the original purpose of Universal Action 12 and the Animal Health Improvement Cycle (AHIC). The AHIC is a veterinary-led improvement programme intended to ensure participating farms receive regular veterinary input focused on disease prevention, productivity, biosecurity, medicines stewardship and continual welfare improvement. This proactive approach is essential to sustainability because preventing disease and improving welfare reduces waste, avoidable losses and inefficiencies across the farm system. Alignment with farm assurance schemes can help reduce duplication of effort where equivalent information is already collected, but they should not be treated as equivalent to UA12. Assurance-based compliance models are valuable, but cannot deliver all the outcomes the AHIC was designed to achieve.

The negative response from the veterinary profession to the recently announced 2026 transition arrangements underlines why this scrutiny is needed. Allowing farms registered with qualifying assurance schemes to access SFS funding without undertaking the anticipated AHIC veterinary visit risks weakening precisely the preventative, veterinary-led work needed to make farms more resilient and sustainable. Veterinary practices prepared in good faith for UA12 by training staff, recruiting vets and support staff, expanding capacity and planning for the anticipated AHIC workload. Sudden changes midway through the scheme year risk leaving practices to absorb financial and reputational consequences of government policy decisions, while also undermining trust between farmers, vets and government. BVA Welsh Branch very quickly proved the number of AHICs completed or underway to be significantly higher than Welsh Government believed, highlighting the value of meaningful consultation. To avoid additional unintended consequences of the Red Tape Reviews' recommendations, the Committee should examine who was consulted, what evidence informed the transition arrangements, whether veterinary impacts were assessed, and how the changes align with the original objectives of UA12.

The Committee should scrutinise whether the SFS provides sufficient incentives, clarity and implementation support to deliver real improvements for animal welfare, including through UA12 and the optional and collaborative layers. It should also consider how the scheme aligns with wider Welsh Government goals on disease control, antimicrobial resistance, biodiversity, climate change and sustainable food production. If designed and governed well, the SFS can bring true One Health benefits, supporting farmers to deliver measurable improvements in animal health and welfare while contributing to climate, biodiversity,

disease control, antimicrobial resistance and sustainable food production goals. If weakened, it risks losing momentum, discouraging delivery of veterinary recommendations and damaging confidence in future Welsh Government schemes.

Question 3

What is your second highest priority (Priority 2)

Strengthening the veterinary workforce

Please explain why this should be a priority for the Committee.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Strengthening the veterinary workforce in Wales should be a priority as vets are essential to the delivery of Welsh Government priorities across animal health and welfare, public health, food safety, environmental sustainability, trade and rural resilience. BVA Welsh Branch is concerned about veterinary provision, particularly in rural areas of Wales, where workforce pressures can affect access to farm animal veterinary services and the ability to deliver proactive disease prevention and welfare improvements.

The Welsh Government should make vets central to the delivery of animal health and welfare policies and should support job creation and sustainable career opportunities for both private and government vets. Policy ambitions will only be deliverable if there is sufficient veterinary capacity on the ground. The Committee should therefore consider workforce planning, rural recruitment and retention, and the role of veterinary expertise in delivering programmes such as the SFS, bovine TB control, BVD eradication, medicines stewardship and animal licensing.

BVA Welsh Branch supports continued work with Aberystwyth University to develop Wales' only veterinary school, including increased funding where necessary. A strong Welsh veterinary education pipeline can help attract students with a commitment to Welsh communities, rural practice and farm animal work, while supporting research, innovation and local workforce resilience. Strengthening the veterinary workforce is therefore not only a professional issue; it is fundamental to Wales' ability to deliver its animal health, welfare, food and rural policy goals.

To help strengthen the veterinary workforce, reforming the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 is also important. The Act is outdated and no longer reflects modern veterinary practice, multidisciplinary teams, new models of service delivery, or the evolving role of veterinary nurses and allied professionals. Reforming the Act at UK level would support a modern, flexible regulatory framework that protects animal welfare and public confidence while enabling the profession to respond to current and future demands. The committee should help to ensure that Wales has a clear voice in those reforms.

Question 4

What is your third priority (Priority 3)

Committing to evidence-based disease preparedness and control

Please explain why this should be a priority for the Committee.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Committing to evidence-based disease control should be a priority because endemic and infectious diseases have major consequences for animal welfare, farm productivity, farmer wellbeing, public finances and public confidence. Whilst disease surveillance is not a devolved matter, Welsh Government have a significant role to play in ensuring Wales has the capacity and resilience to manage a disease outbreak. The recent Bluetongue outbreak has highlighted significant weaknesses in Welsh infrastructure, including limited diagnostic and laboratory capacity, and the need for integrated animal health data systems for rapid disease surveillance, tracing and control across species.

Disease control policy must be grounded in veterinary expertise, robust evidence, transparent evaluation and collaboration between government, private vets, farmers and other stakeholders.

Bovine TB is a clear example of where action is needed. Wales needs a collaborative approach that recognises the complexity of the disease and supports practical action on farms. BVA Welsh Branch supports enhanced data sharing between government vets and private vets, and rewarding farmers for good biosecurity practices, including safe sourcing, through earned recognition. The projects in North Wales and Pembrokeshire should be thoroughly evaluated, with lessons and recommendations rolled out across Wales where evidence supports this.

The continued delays to the introduction of a fully-functional multi-species Wales database risk undermining many of the ambitions of Welsh Government disease control policy. Ensuring this database is fit for purpose across farmed species should be a priority in order to ensure Wales' animal disease preparedness and resilience is strengthened particularly in light of the ever-increasing threats of exotic disease incursion as illustrated by recent BTV-3 and Avian Influenza outbreaks.

Wider disease control should also include continued funding and expansion of highly successful collaborative schemes such as Arwain DGC and the Wales Veterinary Science Centre (WVSC), which demonstrate the importance and impact of partnership working across sectors and delivery partners.

The Committee should scrutinise how Welsh Government uses evidence, evaluates interventions and ensures veterinary expertise informs policy decisions. Disease control must not be reactive or fragmented; it should be preventive, adequately resourced and integrated with the SFS, medicines stewardship and animal welfare policy. This approach will help protect Welsh livestock, support farm resilience, reduce avoidable losses and promote public confidence in Welsh agriculture.

Question 5

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Committee's priorities, its future work programme, or how it carries out its work?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

BVA Welsh Branch would welcome a Committee work programme that takes a joined-up One Health approach, recognising the connections between animal health, human health and the environment. The Committee should ensure that animal health and welfare are considered across climate, environment, sustainability and rural affairs policy, rather than treated as a standalone issue. We would particularly encourage scrutiny of how the SFS will deliver measurable health and welfare outcomes, how veterinary expertise is being used in policy development, and how rural veterinary capacity is being supported.

The Committee should also examine responsible medicines use, including continued support for the Arwain DGC programme to reduce antibiotic use and tackle antimicrobial resistance. This work should be expanded to address parasiticide use in companion and farm animals, where resistance and environmental impacts on biodiversity and soil health are growing concerns.

Animal activities licensing should also form part of the Committee's agenda. BVA Welsh Branch supports a clear, enforceable and outcome-focused licensing regime that safeguards animal welfare while remaining workable for different types of activities, including small charities with limited administrative resources.

In carrying out its work, the Committee should actively engage with veterinary professionals across Wales, including those in rural and mixed practice, government veterinary roles, academia and specialist fields. Evidence sessions, stakeholder roundtables and visits to veterinary practices, farms and education providers would help ensure policy scrutiny reflects practical realities. The Committee should also seek clear evidence from Welsh Government on implementation timelines, funding, data use and evaluation of animal health and welfare policies. This will support accountability and help ensure that commitments translate into meaningful outcomes for animals, veterinary teams, farmers and the wider public.

Question 6

Anything else?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With around 19,000 members, our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the United Kingdom's veterinary profession. We therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.

BVA Welsh Branch represents nearly 1000 members in Wales, bringing together representatives of specialist and territorial divisions, government, academic institutions and research organisations in Wales. The branch advises BVA on the consensus view of members in Wales on Welsh and UK issues.

BVA Welsh Branch would be pleased to support the Committee's future scrutiny by providing veterinary evidence, member insight and practical examples from across Wales. Vets work at the interface of animal welfare, food production, public health, trade, rural economies and environmental sustainability, and can help the Committee assess whether policy proposals are deliverable and likely to achieve their intended outcomes. We encourage the Committee to maintain regular engagement with the veterinary profession throughout the Seventh Senedd, particularly on the SFS, veterinary workforce planning, disease control, bovine TB, BVD, antimicrobial resistance, parasiticide stewardship and animal activities licensing.

The Committee should also consider how Welsh policy aligns with UK-wide regulatory reform, including reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, while ensuring Welsh needs and rural circumstances are properly reflected.

Above all, the Committee should prioritise evidence, transparency and collaboration. Policies affecting animals, farmers, veterinary teams and the public must be designed with those who will deliver them. Meaningful engagement with vets and other stakeholders will help Wales build a resilient animal health and welfare system that supports sustainable agriculture, protects public health and delivers better outcomes for animals and communities.

You may find useful our Manifesto for Wales: animals, vets and public health
<https://www.bva.co.uk/media/6561/bva-welsh-manifesto-26-31-oct-2025.pdf>