Policy Committee meeting

Wednesday 12 June 2019, 11am
BVA, 7 Mansfield Street, London W1G 9NQ

Attendees
Liz Mullineaux – Chair
Sally Everitt
Danny Chambers
Margaret Hosie
Kate Sharpe
Jon Steele
Fiona McFarland
Simon Doherty – BVA President
Daniella Dos Santos – BVA JVP

BVA staff
Sally Burnell
Amelia Findon
Megan Knowles-Bacon
Michael McGilligan

Apologies
Huw Stacey

Minutes of the last meeting
1. The minutes of the meeting of 13 March 2019 were accepted as an accurate record.

Matters arising
2. At the last meeting it had been suggested that the value of developing a position on welfare in horse racing could be considered in light of an incident at Cheltenham. The matter was subsequently raised with BEVA, who were represented on BHA and were satisfied that this provided a good opportunity to influence where needed. It was noted that the industry was already highly regulated and welfare well managed, with the question of racing being primarily an ethical debate. A new welfare board was being launched by BHA. Policy Committee agreed that resources would be better focused on those priority animal welfare problems agreed as part of the Animal Welfare Strategy.

Summary of Council discussions
3. The summary of Council discussions would form a standing item going forward. Policy Committee members were thanked for their contributions to the development of positions on veterinary education, surplus male production animals, and electric containment fences in livestock, all of which had been approved by Council. The positions would be published in due course, supported by tailored communications plans.

Action: Secretariat to also circulate summary of Council discussions as soon as possible post-Council

Discrimination survey
4. It was noted that earlier in the year BVA had launched a discrimination questionnaire with a view to capturing first-hand experiences of vets, vet nurses, students and other veterinary professionals who had either witnessed or experienced discrimination in a work or learning environment. The aim was to identify examples of good practice or ideas for better support and resources. Recognising that the respondents were self-selecting and that no
information on prevalence could be drawn from the results questions were separately included in the spring Voice survey. Although the two pieces were not directly comparable they would, together, provide a fuller picture of what was happening in veterinary workplaces and vet schools.

5. Policy Committee considered the headline findings from the questionnaire and the survey, along with a number of anonymous quotes where permission had been given by the respondent. In discussion the following points were made:

- Many of the incidents described reflected the findings of the AGV wellbeing survey
- The lack of action taken and support provided to those who reported incidents of discrimination was particularly worrying
- Managers were often ill equipped to deal with incidents of discrimination. BVA could play a role in providing guidance
- It was essential that all veterinary workplaces had structures in place to protect staff at all levels
- It would be useful to know whether there was a significant difference in experience within corporate practices with dedicated HR teams, compared to independent practice
- It was important not to assume that incidents of sexual harassment were all committed by men against women
- Discrimination did not just happen to minority groups
- There was a danger that progress made on gender discrimination could slip as women were no longer a minority group in the veterinary profession
- It was concerning to see so many incidents relating to maternity and return-to-work
- Socio-economic factors impacted on the diversity of the profession

Policy Committee’s input would be passed to the Good Workplace Working Group to help inform further discussions.

Good Workplace Working Group

6. The Good Workplace Working Group (GWWG) had been convened by Policy Committee to develop a vision for a good veterinary workplace, supplemented by a “good place to work” voluntary code/standard. The Policy Committee representative on the group was Kate Sharpe. GWWG had met twice to date, with three further meetings planned. Policy Committee reviewed the guiding principles developed by the group and in discussion the following points were made:

- There was a lack of tools available to help employers and employees understand and address discrimination
- Discrimination from clients was also a consideration. Veterinary workplaces should introduce social contracts and zero-tolerance policies
- Bullying and harassment via social media was a growing concern and guidance on handling could be a valuable resource
- The proposed addition of a principle around veterinary workplaces supporting vets and VN’s to uphold the veterinary oaths was strongly supported

Policy Committee’s input would be passed to GWWG to help inform their deliberations.

TB Working Group

7. The TB Working Group (TBWG) had been convened by Policy Committee to develop a position on bovine Tuberculosis in cattle to reflect new and emerging evidence. The Policy Committee representative on the group was Liz Mullineaux (alternate Jon Steele). TBWG had met twice to date, with three further meetings planned. Policy Committee
Policy Committee reviewed the emerging themes developed by the group and in discussion the following points were made:

- There was general agreement that the skin test was a good herd test but a poor individual test
- The management of breakdowns should be tailored and based on sound epidemiology
- There were some legal barriers to the development and use of novel tests.
- There was a lot more research needed before it would be possible to fully understand the complexities of the disease and its spread
- The value of epidemiology should be foregrounded in the emerging themes

Policy Committee’s input would be incorporated into the relevant sections of the themes document to help inform the deliberations of the TBWG.

Welfare at Slaughter Working Group

8. The Welfare at Slaughter Working Group (WASWG) had been convened by Policy Committee to develop the BVA position on stun methods and the wider slaughter process (from preparation on-farm to the slaughter process at the abattoir). The Policy Committee representative on the group was Jon Steele. WASWG has met twice to date with four further meetings planned. Policy Committee reviewed the emerging themes developed by the group and in discussion the following points were made:

- Gas stunning of pigs was particularly problematic, with CO2 causing up to 15 seconds of aversive behaviour
- BVA had recently taken part in a roundtable on non-stun, convened by Michael Gove, and attended by all the key stakeholders. Although it was clear that there was no appetite to remove the derogation for non-stun, the discussion had provided a valuable opportunity to reiterate pragmatic asks around a ban on the export of non-stun, and clear labelling

Policy Committee looked forward to the further deliberations of WASWG around such a complex and sensitive area.

Sentencing for animal welfare offences

9. In response to previous government consultations BVA had always been clear that detailed commentary on sentencing policy in relation to animal welfare offences was not the remit of the Association. However, it was also recognised that there was general support amongst members when proposals were made to increase maximum penalties (eg Defra Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Draft Bill, and Scottish Government proposed amendments to the animal health and welfare (Scotland) Act 2006). Policy Committee were invited to advise on the extent to which BVA should comment on matters of criminal justice and sentencing. In discussion the following points were made:

- There were some vets with expertise in criminal justice, including members of BVFLA and AWSELVA. BVA responses to government consultations should recognise this and signpost where appropriate
- Although some individuals had expertise in this area it did not necessarily follow that BVA should make recommendations on sentencing policy
- There was a difference between reactively supporting government proposals to increase penalties and proactively calling for reform
- BVA could explore opportunities for veterinary contributions to education for offenders
The BVA guide to acting as an expert witness should be promoted

Policy Committee agreed that sentencing for animal welfare offences was an extremely emotive subject and it was recognised that some members would hold strong personal views. However, it was not the role of BVA to proactively develop policy in this area nor were the expertise available to do so. In response to specific consultation questions on sentencing, BVA should support consistency across the UK, but be clear that detailed comment on sentencing policy was outside the remit of the Association.

Microchip scanning
10. Since 2016 BVA had recommended microchip scanning on first presentation. There had been ongoing criticism of the profession from campaigners for compulsory scanning – most notably Vets Get Scanning - and those criticisms had been echoed at a recent meeting of the All-party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group (APDAWG) which had focused on pet theft.

11. Since then BVA had met with Marc Abraham (APDAWG) and Debbie Matthews (Vets Get Scanning) to clarify roles and correct some of the inaccuracies aired at APDAWG. The meeting had been extremely positive, with agreement to do more to promote the importance of scanning at first presentation and review the wording on the microchipping poster for practices.

12. Policy Committee considered the proposal that BVA could recommend scanning at every presentation in order to verify the identity of the patient against clinical records as part of good clinical governance. This would be in addition to scanning at first presentation, but would only be to check against practice records, not against the national microchip databases. Policy Committee agreed that a recommendation to scan every time might be excessive, and instead agreed to recommend scanning at least annually (e.g. at the time of annual vaccination) and if admitted for treatment as part of clinical governance. Policy Committee also agreed that the position should call for a single national database, recognising that this was a commercial issue, and also encourage database sign up to EuroPetNet. The BVA position should also recommend scanning of unowned animals, victims of RTAs, and wildlife brought to the practice.

Action: Secretariat to update the position for comment and further development as necessary.

Feather pecking in poultry
13. The issue of feather pecking, cannibalism and beak trimming had been identified as a key concern in the poultry sector, as part of the BVA Animal welfare Strategy, and in response a draft position had been under development in partnership with the British Veterinary Poultry Association (BVPA). EWAP members had raised some concerns regarding the terminology used, questioning whether 'beak treatment' (the term preferred by BVPA) was appropriate when in fact legislation referred to 'beak-trimming'. BVPA had argued that 'treatment' was the more accurate description based on the technologies used and had suggested that to use 'trimming' would be inaccurate and call into question the validity and currency of the position.

14. Policy Committee broadly supported the draft position and in discussion the following points were made:
   - Feather pecking was a significant welfare issue and a blanket ban on beak treatment would cause very real welfare harms
   - The technology used was precise infra-red and was a preventative treatment for the benefit of the flock, similar to vaccination in that respect
• The position should include clarification that ‘trimming’ was used in legislation but that ‘treatment’ was the accepted term in industry, and then use ‘treatment’ throughout
• It should be made clear whether the position related to commercial laying flocks only, or included backyard poultry
• It would be useful to know whether beak treatment took place in backyard flocks
• Prevention should appear before management in the opening paragraphs
• Feather pecking in game birds was also a welfare issue but it was recognised that the approaches were very different. A separate position on feather pecking in game birds could be developed in due course

Action: Secretariat to circulate draft for final comments by Monday 17 June, prior to recommendation to Council in July

Housing rabbits in compatible pairs or groups

15. At the previous meeting Policy Committee had considered a draft position on housing rabbits in compatible pairs or groups, which had been developed with BSAVA and BVZS, and in liaison with LAVA. The position was intended to address a range of health and welfare issues identified as priority welfare problems in rabbits as part of the BVA Animal Welfare Strategy. At the time Policy Committee agreed that the position was not strong enough and the use of “where appropriate” and “where possible” should be removed.

16. Since then the position had been developed further, removing the exceptions from the recommendations. BSAVA had subsequently raised concerns that the position should not appear to insist on the neutering of both male and female rabbits when paired and proposed that the advice should be neutering of the female with neutering of the male being considered where necessary.

17. Policy Committee strongly supported the revised draft position. It was agreed that the section on neutering should be amended to reflect the BSAVA position on neutering rabbits, recommending the neutering of both male and female rabbits and highlighting the benefit of reducing undesirable sexual mounting behaviour and hormonally related aggression in the male.

Action: Secretariat to make final amendments to position prior to recommendation to Council in July.

Fireworks

18. At the last meeting Policy Committee had agreed that it would be useful to review the science and evidence in relation to decibels and pitch, as well as reviewing the wider one health issues associated with fireworks. Since then a summary of the available evidence had been made available, with the references all demonstrating the negative welfare impacts of fireworks on animals. However, there seemed to be a paucity of evidence around what would be an acceptable noise level for animals.

19. Based on the recent response to the Public Petitions Committee Fireworks inquiry, and recent response to the Scottish Government consultation on fireworks, Policy Committee agreed to revise the existing position along the following lines:

- support setting the maximum noise levels of fireworks intended for public use and sale to 97 dB at 15 meters, in line with the RSPCA’s recommendation
- clear labelling of fireworks at point of sale to indicate their noise level to the consumer eg. ‘animal friendly firework’
- support the restriction of private use of fireworks to agreed traditional dates to bring
controls on use in line with controls on sale
- support tighter restrictions on the sale of fireworks around Bonfire Night, similar to those for other traditional dates set out in fireworks legislation
- licensing of all public displays and organised events using fireworks by the relevant authority
- responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Acts and using fireworks to intentionally cause harm to animals
- specific penalties where fireworks are used to cause harm to working horses or dogs when in public service or where employed to provide assistance to individuals with disabilities or medical conditions
- setting up an on-line registration system for private or residential users of fireworks who intend to hold a private event involving fireworks, other than Category 1, very low hazard fireworks
- encouraging the public to think before using fireworks

It was noted that SavsNet and the BVA Voice survey had gathered data on fireworks impact and harms to animals.

Action: Secretariat to circulate draft position for further development

Obesity

20. In 2018 BVA had been invited to sign up to the Global Pet Obesity Initiative Position Statement. At the time Policy Committee raised concerns regarding the unintended consequences, from an insurance point of view, of recognising obesity as a disease. BSAVA subsequently agreed to support the position, although had not discussed the unintended consequences as part of the decision-making process. Separately and more recently the Brachycephalic Working Group had been developing a position on obesity in dogs with brachycephaly, and as members of the group there was some expectation that BVA would support the position.

21. In discussion Policy Committee members made the following points:
- It could be useful to compare the approach taken in the human medical field, and in the US, although it was recognised that the influencing factors were potentially very different
- It could be useful to get views from the insurers. PetPlan and Agria could be approached for advice
- The implications needed to be carefully considered – it could result in insurance policy exclusions for endocrine, heart, and musculoskeletal conditions
- There was a commercial interest in labelling obesity as a disease
- How obesity was defined and diagnosed was also a consideration
- The potential impact on owner behaviour should be considered
- Marge Chandler (Glasgow) and Dan Chan (RVC) were experts in the field
- BVA could support the BWG statement subject to removal of the references to “a disease”

It was noted that Alex German would be speaking on obesity at London Vet Show, and there was a Vet Record/BVA roundtable debate in association with Mars Petcare taking place on 20 June.

Action: Secretariat to propose amendments to BWG statement
Action: Secretariat to gather evidence for further discussion on glasscubes
Horizon scanning

22. It was noted that there was a growing interest amongst clients in the use of products containing cannabidiol. The VMD position was that such products were veterinary medicines and should be regulated as such. Policy Committee supported the VMD position.

23. It was suggested that welfare of animals at county shows and fetes should be added.

Any other business

24. Glasscubes: a permanent move to glasscubes as the communication tool for BVA groups and committees was broadly supported. There were difficulties accessing zip files via the app, and it was agreed that it would be useful if attachments could be included with notifications rather than requiring the user to login.

25. Committee vacancies: it was noted that five members of Policy Committee were coming to the end of their term of office. D Chambers, H Stacey, F McFarland, and M Hosie were all entitled to apply for a second term and would need to complete the application form when the vacancies were advertised in July. K Sharpe had come to the end of her second term and could only seek re-election for a third term following a break in service of one year. K Sharpe was thanked for her commitment and contributions, and for leading the work of the Surveillance Working Group.

Date of the next meeting

26. The next meeting would be held Wednesday 4 September 2019 at 9.30am by teleconference.