Minutes of the last meeting

1) The minutes of the meeting held 11 October 2017 were accepted as an accurate record.

Surveillance Working Group

2) Kate Sharpe, chair of the Surveillance Working Group, updated Policy Committee on activity. The group had met four times, had received evidence from the production, small animal, equine, and wildlife sectors, and had carried out a detailed survey exploring attitudes to and engagement with the surveillance network across the UK. It was noted that the themes and recommendations in the draft position were very much aligned with the thinking at APHA, where colleagues had been extremely grateful for sight of the headline survey results.

3) Subject to some minor additions previously identified, and the incorporation of a reference to the important issue of antimicrobial resistance in the introductory paragraphs, Policy Committee strongly supported the draft and agreed to recommend the policy position to Council. It was noted that communications surrounding the publication of the position following Council approval would be tailored to ensure the widest possible pick-up across all sectors of the profession.

Farm Assurance Working Group

4) Danny Chambers, chair of the Farm Assurance Working Group, updated Policy Committee on activity. The position on farm assurance schemes, supported by Council in December 2017, had been published in January 2018. The Ethics and Welfare Advisory Panel (EWAP) had suggested some minor amendments to the draft graphic designed to complement the published position, which were currently being incorporated.

5) Policy Committee strongly supported that draft graphic, agreeing that it answered the brief, and agreed to recommend it to Council. It was noted that communications surrounding the publication of the graphic following Council approval would emphasise the value of farm assurance schemes generally, and would include links to further information to assist those wishing to consider the detail.

Brexit: workforce capacity and capability

6) Policy Committee were updated on progress with the Defra-led Veterinary Capacity and Capability Project (VCCP) and associated workstreams. Gudrun Ravetz represented BVA on the VCCP Board.
7) BVA activity around workforce issues was noted and supported, in particular recent submissions to the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC). It was noted that the interim report from the MAC was expected at the end of March and, as it was not the role of the MAC to make recommendations to the Home Office regarding those professions which should be returned to the Shortage Occupation List, BVA would be making separate representations via Caroline Nokes Minister of State for Immigration. It was noted that ongoing communication with members, and more widely, regarding BVA activity around workforce issues remained a priority.

8) Vet-Led Team Working Group
Policy Committee supported plans for the first four meetings of the Vet-led team working group, agreeing that a survey of members relating to the practical application of the principle of the vet-led team would be a useful addition to planned activity.

**Action:** Members to consider Policy Committee representation across the planned working group meetings and notify the secretariat (Note: Huw Stacey would attend meeting 4 on behalf of the Major Employers Group)

bTB review and culling
9) Policy Committee agreed that the existing BVA position on bTB control and eradication should be reviewed once the Defra bTB strategy review, overseen by Professor Sir Charles Godfray, had completed its work (expected end of September 2018).

10) Policy Committee considered the Defra consultation on Revised guidance for licensing badger control areas, which proposed to remove the restriction on the number of licenses issued each year. In discussion the following points were made:

- An increase in number of licenses would inevitably lead to diluted monitoring
- The approach to the control of bTB in the wildlife reservoir should be government-led rather than subject to the number of licences applied for
- Although an industry-led approach worked for endemic disease control programmes (eg BVD) such an approach would not be supported for any other notifiable disease outbreak/public health risk

11) Policy Committee considered the Defra consultation on the Proposals to introduce licensed badger control to prevent the spread of bTB in Low Risk Areas which proposed that the conditions in place for licensed badger control in the Low Risk Area should not be the same as those in the High Risk Area or Edge Area, but specific to the particular circumstances of the LRA. The aim would be to remove and/or vaccinate badgers from an estimated minimum infected area and buffer zone as a precaution. In discussion the following points were made:

- It would be important to define ‘hotspot’
- It was unclear under what circumstances a cull would take place, and how a sustained and intensive cull would be achieved
- Tackling an outbreak should be government-led
- The perturbation effect was likely to be more pronounced when culling in the LRA
- Any plans for the monitoring of disease status were not detailed
- The proposals were lacking in detail and as a result likely to encourage polarised debate

12) Policy Committee agreed that the proposals for culling in the LRA were light on detail. The response was being developed in close liaison with the relevant specialist divisions, and would call for clear criteria for the identification of ‘hotspots’ and the proposed approach to achieving a sustained and intensive cull. The matter would also be discussed at BVA Council on 18 April.

**Action:** Secretariat to circulate draft responses to both consultations on the Policy Committee email loop for further input.
Complementary and alternative medicine

13) Policy Committee welcomed Chris Day President of the British Association of Homeopathic Veterinary Surgeons (BAHVS), Rachael Roberts CEO of the Homeopathy Research Institute (HRI), and Peter Gregory Veterinary Dean of the Faculty of Homeopathy. Rachael Roberts outlined the principles underpinning homeopathy and clarified the terminology, highlighting that homeopathy was a system of medicine which formed part of integrated practice, although it could also operate in isolation. Where conventional medicine tended to treat symptoms, homeopathy was a holistic approach sometimes taken when convention failed, or when the patient was contraindicated. In discussion it was noted that:

- There was currently a paucity of data to support the efficacy of homeopathy
- There had been a number of trials which had demonstrated positive outcomes from homeopathic treatments, but these were limited and needed to be replicated
- A 5-year research programme was due to begin, looking at the mechanism of action of homeopathy

14) A number of studies were cited including Mathie & Clausen 2014 and 2015 systematic reviews, and Camerlink 2010 E.coli piglets study. It was agreed that the discussion had been useful and thought-provoking, and Policy Committee agreed to carefully review the cited evidence before further considering any review of the BVA position. BAHVS and HRI representatives would be kept updated.

Action: Secretariat to circulate the relevant papers for further consideration via email loop.

Standardised approach to policy presentation

15) Policy Committee supported two template forms:

- Policy positions template - intended to facilitate the development of policy positions, ensuring that the final approach and format addressed the key elements and that there was, ultimately, a degree of uniformity across the suite of BVA policy resources.
- Policy positions cover sheet - to be used when recommending policy positions to BVA Council, to provide key information and reassurance to Council regarding due process

It was agreed that templates would be kept under review and developed further as required.

New BVA Working Groups

16) Policy Committee agreed to convene a working group to review the BVA policy on new vet schools and develop a position on funding for veterinary school places, as this had been identified as a priority issue for 2017/2018. A draft scoping document for the new working group would be circulated for input in due course.

Action: Secretariat to work up and circulate a scoping document for the education working group.

Any other business

17) Welfare outcomes assessment

It was noted that, following some recent media interest in BVA support for welfare outcomes safeguards, consideration should be given to developing the BVA position further.

Action: Secretariat to include on the horizon scanning rolling list

18) The next meeting would be held Wednesday 13 June 2018.