Consultation Paper: Veterinary Disease Surveillance in Scotland

1. Introduction and Overview

1.1 Introduction

This is a Scotland's Rural College consultation paper on veterinary disease surveillance in Scotland. SRUC is seeking the views of stakeholders during a six week period between 1 June and 10 July 2015.

Surveillance is delivered by SAC Consulting Veterinary Services (SACCVS) on behalf of the Scottish Government. The service is currently delivered from eight SACCVS disease surveillance centres located in Aberdeen, Ayr, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Inverness, Perth, St Boswells and Thurso. Veterinary disease surveillance is part-funded by the Scottish Government through the Veterinary and Advisory Services (VAS) programme and part funded by laboratory fees paid by veterinary practitioners and their clients.

Your views are invited on the proposed changes to the disease surveillance service aimed at ensuring SRUC maintains an efficient, sustainable and robust disease surveillance service for Scotland and the UK.

We would like to hear your views on the proposals outlined in this paper. In section 5 we have set out a number of questions relating to the Ayr and Inverness DSCs on which you may wish to respond but please do not feel constrained by these. We would encourage you to respond to any or all of those areas where you feel you have a contribution to make.

1.2 Background

In 2009, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead, appointed former NFUS President John Kinnaird to Chair a review of Scotland’s veterinary disease surveillance system. The present arrangements have operated for many years and the purpose of the review was to ensure that Scotland has a system for monitoring new and emerging disease that is efficient and fit for purpose.

A review panel was formed which first met on 13 January 2010. Published in November 2011, the Kinnaird Review’s final report (http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/11/09091744/0) set out 15 recommendations for Scotland’s future veterinary disease surveillance. The first three recommendations related to the establishment of a Strategic Management Board (SMB) tasked with setting and implementing the strategy for veterinary surveillance in Scotland.

Another key recommendation influencing the development of the veterinary disease surveillance system is:
• **Recommendation 6: Reducing the number of Disease Surveillance Centres (DSCs)**

The Kinnaird Review indicated that the number of DSCs should be reduced, with decisions made by the SMB on resolution of recommendations 7, 8, 9 and 10.

SRUC delivers veterinary disease surveillance with the support of a grant from the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government sets two parameters through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) – the financial limitations of the grant and the technical specifications of the services to be delivered. SRUC may provide proposals to the Scottish Government detailing how the services will be delivered and these may be accepted, amended or rejected by the Scottish Government. The SMB’s role is to assist the Scottish Government in this process by providing advice on the strategic fit and quality of the proposals. SRUC decides on the delivery of services through its own governance structures.

1.3 Plans for the Veterinary Disease Surveillance Centres

SRUC presented the SMB and the Scottish Government with a series of options for taking forward the Kinnaird recommendation about which it is consulting stakeholders and staff. The options for changes to the infrastructure of the disease surveillance system are as follows:

• Inverness – consult on options to improve the delivery of services to vets and farmers in the north of Scotland which may involve alternatives to an Inverness-based DSC. The options include training and supporting veterinary practitioners to carry out post mortem examinations on farm or at some other convenient location, carcase transportation to the facilities in Aberdeenshire, Perth and Thurso and building a new PM only facility (see section 2 for further information).
• Ayr – provision in the West of Scotland will be developed in conjunction with the University of Glasgow Veterinary School. Options to be considered are to remain at Auchincruive, move to a new site in Ayrshire, or to relocate to the University of Glasgow School of Veterinary Medicine. These changes to be completed by 2017 (see section 2 for further information).
• Aberdeen – will relocate to Thainstone or another site in Aberdeenshire in 2017 (see section 2 for further information).
• Edinburgh – to relocate to nearby Easter Bush in 2017.
• Perth – to remain.
• St Boswells – to remain.
• Thurso – to remain.

1.4 Key Considerations

The key elements driving the decision to implement the proposed changes to the disease surveillance system are:
The need for more efficient service delivery and surveillance within a budget that is reducing in real terms.
- Release funds for active or targeted surveillance to provide an evidence base for decisions to be taken by the livestock industry.
- The maintenance of a critical mass of specialist staff within centres to ensure that they are true centres of excellence.
- Local demand for the services.
- The age and condition of the DSC buildings and the associated costs of refurbishment.
- The opportunity to cover the catchment area for the DSCs by other means or from other sites.
- Provide a service to be fit for the future.
- Retention of skill set wherever possible.

1.5 Delivery of the Disease Surveillance Service

The veterinary diagnostic service provided by SACCVS would continue to be delivered to a high quality accredited by UKAS to ISO 17025. SACCVS staff are highly trained and their expertise is respected by their clients and Government agencies. We will engage with veterinary practices in those areas which no longer have an actual centre to provide services in a different manner to ensure that where possible no new or unusual presentation of disease remains undetected.

Disease surveillance information from Scotland will continue to be assessed alongside information gathered by APHA in England and Wales, where the number of surveillance centres has been recently reduced from 14 to 6, because disease does not respect national boundaries. However we will continue to look for ways to maximise the value of the Scottish data to the benefit of stakeholders in Scotland through working in partnership with other bodies including the universities, SRUC researchers, Moredun Research Institute and veterinary surgeons in practice. These planned changes to the surveillance network in Scotland provide a uniquely Scottish solution to the problem of tighter budgets and increased disease threat. In England and Wales APHA has worked with several contractors to provide a service to replace that provided by the APHA network of regional laboratories.

The advantages of the Scottish approach are:

- Veterinary and technical expertise of SACCVS staff is retained.
- Larger teams of staff provide opportunities to develop specialist expertise and services, more resilience and critical mass.
- Closer working with researchers in the universities, the Moredun Institute and SRUC.
- Economies of scale to compare favourably with other providers of similar services across Europe.
- Better working conditions for staff.

1.6 Scottish Government Funding
The costs of SRUC providing veterinary disease surveillance is partly met by the Scottish Government through the Veterinary and Advisory Services (VAS) programme and partly met by laboratory fees paid by veterinary practitioners and their clients. In addition the Scottish Government provides some funds to the Moredun Institute (about 6% of the total) to support SRUC in delivering the programme. The options to be considered in consultation with vets and farmers are designed to bring the costs of providing the VAS programme in line with the available budget. Currently the delivery of veterinary surveillance is estimated to be underfunded by a minimum of £400k per year, in running costs. However, it should be borne in mind that building maintenance and compliance works also need to be taken into account the longer it takes for decisions on the preferred options to be achieved.

2. Proposals for the Inverness, Aberdeen and Ayr DSCs

The DSCs currently based in Inverness, Ayr and Aberdeen would potentially be most heavily impacted upon by any agreed changes to the disease surveillance service. The options for each centre are detailed below.

2.1 Inverness

The new HIE Inverness Campus opened on 15 May 2015. SRUC Research and SAC Consulting Solutions at Inverness will move into their new accommodation on the campus in early January 2016. The existing Drummondhill Campus, which also houses the current DSC, may be put on the market with the intention that it may be vacated entirely by the end of January 2016, depending on the outcome of the consultation. The potential sale of the existing SRUC Drummondhill Campus, which also houses the current DSC, is necessary to fund some of the costs to facilitate the move to the new campus. This provides the opportunity to consult on options for the better delivery of surveillance and diagnostic services in the region served from Inverness. This region contains some 25% of holdings in Scotland but the Inverness DSC carries out fewer post mortems that most of the other DSCs. This suggests there may be more effective means of delivering disease surveillance in the region.

The SACC Veterinary Services DSC staff at Inverness have been informed of the agreement of the SMB for SRUC to consult on options for the future delivery of veterinary surveillance in the region. These options include:

- Provision of training and support to veterinary practitioners to carry out post mortem examinations on farm or at some other convenient location,
- Carcase transportation to the new facility in Aberdeenshire, Perth and Thurso
- Building of a new “PM only” facility

Currently SACCVS carries out a significant amount of commercial activity from the Inverness DSC. Much of this work needs to be relocated to improve the efficiency of the service and drive down costs and also to minimise the costs of building any new facilities. SRUC would hope to redeploy many members of SACCVS staff to the new and expanding research facility. Other members of staff could retrain and/or be redeployed to the remaining
DSCs in the Veterinary Services Group. Any who are unable to retrain and/or be redeployed or are unable to move to a new location, will be assisted in finding new employment.

SACCVS will prepare a tender for contractors to transfer carcases from farms in the Inverness DSC catchment area to the Aberdeen, Perth or Thurso DSCs and proposals for a courier service to serve local Inverness-shire practices.

SACCVS can provide post mortem skills CPD in September/October 2015 if Scottish Government financial support is made available and the PVS request such training.

2.2 Ayr

SACCVS managers will work with the University of Glasgow in consulting with staff and stakeholders over plans to establish a closer working relationship between SACCVS and the University of Glasgow Veterinary School in the provision of disease surveillance in the west of Scotland. Two options will be discussed:

a. Maintaining the DSC at Auchincruive but modifying the facility to enable its use by veterinary undergraduates from the University of Glasgow.

b. Closing the Ayr DSC and relocating the veterinary staff to the University of Glasgow Veterinary School Garscube Campus. A carcase transportation service could be offered to farmers in the areas that would experience increased transport times as a result of the relocation.

Other options may emerge in the course of consultation. However both of these scenarios would require capital expenditure and until the consultation with staff and stakeholders is complete it is not known which option is preferred.

2.3 Aberdeen

Last year SRUC announced its intention to explore the move of the Education and Research activities currently undertaken at the Craibstone Campus Aberdeen to a new campus at Thainstone. Although such a move is yet to be finalised, with the agreement of the Strategic Management Board we propose to relocate the DSC to a new site yet to be identified in or around Thainstone, Inverurie.

Staff have been informed of the intention to relocate the DSC at Craibstone to a new facility near Thainstone, Inverurie. We do not anticipate the move causing any problems to clients or staff. Many may find the new facility more convenient that the existing one that is now located within the suburbs of Aberdeen due to the expansion of the city.
3. Veterinary Pathology Skills CPD

Private Veterinary Surgeons (PVS) show increasing interest in obtaining training in veterinary pathology skills. This interest is driven by the restructuring of disease surveillance in England and Wales but we recognise that many PVS in Scotland are remote from the existing DSC network. Any reduction in this network may further disadvantage PVS and farmers in these remote areas.

Last year APHA coordinated a survey into the demand for diagnostic and pathology skills continuing professional development (CPD) among PVS throughout Great Britain. The survey confirmed that there was a demand for CPD in gross pathology skills and that PVS already carry out some post mortems principally on cattle and sheep.

SACCVS has considerable expertise in providing CPD for PVS. Many of the courses are supported by the Scottish Government through the Veterinary and Advisory Services Programme.

SACCVS is well placed to provide practical classroom style CPD and pathology skills through its network of DSCs. The Scottish Government declined an approach to support a pilot course but a one-day course with 6 delegates from England and Wales was run at the Dumfries DSC in February 2015.

The delegates’ feedback showed that they appreciated the personal training facilitated by the small group size and the expertise of the SACCVS Veterinary Investigation Officers. They would like the course to be over two days with more pathological material available for their examination.

4. Development of a Carcase Collection Service

4.1 Introduction

Currently the responsibility for carcase delivery lies with the farmer. This arrangement does present problems for those farms that lie over an hour’s drive from the network of DSCs. The SMB received an encouraging report from APHA on their carcase collection service introduced following the restructuring of the laboratory network in England and Wales. Therefore we propose to explore two approaches to carcase collection and transfer with stakeholders and contractors. These approaches are:

i) Tender for carcase collection services throughout Scotland divided into seven lots appropriate to the remaining DSCs. The specification is based on the Defra/APHA tender for similar services. This approach will allow us to determine the costs of improving access to the DSC network throughout Scotland and enabling SACCVS to move carcases between DSCs in the event of a lack of staff at one site.

ii) Determine whether practices would wish to become carcase collection points. A courier service could be established that would allow small carcases and other samples to be collected on a regular basis.
4.2 Inverness DSC

The Inverness Disease Surveillance Centre handles an average of 195 small carcase submissions and 69 large carcase submissions each year, a ratio of approximately 3:1. These figures are the mean number of submissions over 6 years and do not include non-chargeable submissions such as welfare submissions or wild birds. A submission may comprise one or more carcases. Large carcases are defined as all cattle and all pigs >6 months. Small carcase submissions are defined as all sheep, all foetuses, all poultry, all pigs< 6 months and all game birds.

4.3 Tender

A tender could invite quotes from knackeries and rendering plants that can meet the operational standards specified to collect carcases of any size (small and large) from farms within specified geographical areas of Scotland to the appropriate DSCs and for transfer between DSCs. Large carcases will require a large lorry, fitted with a hoist and/or winch to move heavy loads safely.

4.4 Small Carcase Collections

Smaller carcases may be man-handled into appropriate containers with the aid of a winch. Authorised collection points would be required, equipped appropriately. Some Veterinary Practises may wish to become collection points for small carcases. This possibility will be explored during the consultation process. However practices may be unable or unwilling to provide suitable facilities for collection points.

5. Consultation Process

SRUC is inviting written responses to this consultation paper by 10 July 2015.

You may wish to comment specifically on the following areas:

1. The consultation provides 3 options for the provision of disease surveillance and diagnostic services in the areas served by the Ayr DSC. These are:

   i. Remain at Ayr
   ii. Relocate elsewhere in Ayrshire
   iii. Relocate to the University of Glasgow, Garscube Campus

   a) What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal?

   b) The current range of services available at Ayr may be greatly reduced in the event the facility were to remain in Ayrshire. Does this alter your answer to the previous question?

   c) Are there other options that should be considered within current budgets?
d) Would relocating the service to the University of Glasgow, Garscube Campus improve or obstruct the early detection of a specific new or re-emerging disease threat?

e) Relocating the DSC to the University of Glasgow, Garscube Campus would increase the distance some holdings are from their present DSC. It may be Dumfries or Edinburgh. What steps do you suggest to mitigate any loss of disease surveillance or service in these areas?

f) Private veterinary surgeons might be willing to support the modified network by carrying out post mortems either on farm or at alternative premises. Do you think that this is a practical alternative and what support would private veterinary surgeons need?

g) Do you have any other views on the provision of disease surveillance and diagnostic services from the Ayr DSC?

2. The consultation proposes that if the Inverness DSC were to be relocated that the DSC’s at Aberdeen, Perth and Thurso would pick up the workload.

a) How will this proposal impact on disease surveillance and diagnostic services in the region?

b) What steps could be taken to mitigate any loss of disease surveillance or diagnostic services in the region?

c) Private veterinary surgeons might be willing to support the modified network by carrying out post mortems either on farm or at alternative premises. Do you think that this is a practical alternative and what support would private veterinary surgeons need?

d) If the Inverness DSC were not relocated, the region would be served from Aberdeen, Perth and Thurso DSC. Would this change improve or obstruct the early detection of a specific new or re-emerging disease threat?

e) Are there other options that should be considered within current budgets?

f) The throughput of the Inverness DSC is low in comparison with other DSC’s. This may reflect the specific logistical issues affecting enterprises in the region. How could services and throughput be increased?

g) Which of the existing services provided from Inverness DSC do you most value?

h) Do you have any other views on the provision of disease surveillance and diagnostic services from the Inverness DSC?

Please send your comments with the completed Respondent Information Form on the page 10 of this document to:
Brian Hosie, Head of SAC Consulting Veterinary Services, Allan Watt Building, Bush Estate, Penicuik, EH26 0PH. Email: brian.hosie@sru.ac.uk.

If you have any queries please contact Lorna Drysdale, Business Support Manager, on 0131 535 3139 or by email at lorna.drysdale@sac.co.uk.

All respondents should be aware that SRUC is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. We would therefore have to consider any request made to it under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation exercise.
RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form should be returned with your postal response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately. If responding by email, please provide the information requested in this form.

1. Name/Organisation
Organisation Name

Title Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  Please circle as appropriate

Surname
Forename

2. Postal Address with Postcode

Phone:
Email:

4. Permissions

a. I am responding as (Please circle as appropriate)

An Individual  An Organisation

b. SRUC will share your response with the Scottish Government and the Strategic Management Board. They or SRUC may wish to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise. Are you happy to be contacted again? Please circle as appropriate

Yes  No