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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Ffermio a Bwyd
Deputy Minister for Farming and Food



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA(P)RE/0058/15

Alun Ffred Jones AM
Chair
Environment and Sustainability Committee
National Assembly for Wales

10 November 2015

Dear Alun Ffred,

Further to the email from the Committee Clerk on 28 October, I am pleased to provide a response to the action points raised during my appearance before the Committee on 14 October.

During the scrutiny session I agreed to provide details of the terms of reference for the Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales.

The Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales will include the following membership:

- Independent Chair
- 3 Unite
- 1 FUW
- 1 CLA
- 1 NFU
- 2 Independent experts
- 2 Independent experts (with a background in education)

The Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales (Establishment) Order 2016 is being drafted in such a way as to allow the Panel, once established, to decide on its own code of conduct and decide on the best methods by which it will pursue its remit as defined under the Agricultural Sector (Wales) Act 2014.

The Order stipulates that the Panel will decide as to the method by which it will pursue each aspect of its remit by a majority vote.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Order also includes provisions to establish a permanent sub committee, whose remit will be to assist the core Panel with the functions of promoting careers in agriculture and encouraging up-skilling in the industry.

The timetable for the establishment of the Panel is a combined timetable including the public appointments timetable and legislative timetable. The Coming into Force date for the Order establishing the Panel is 3 February 2016 and the expected commencement date for public appointments is 12 February 2016.

I also agreed to provide confirmation of the number of badger carcasses reported to the Welsh Government in response to its dead badger survey and the number of these infected with tuberculosis. Up until the end of September 2015, 885 badgers were reported. 401 of these were collected, of which 327 were suitable for Post Mortem. 22 have Positive Culture, 253 Negative Culture and 52 are pending results.

The reasons not all reported badgers are collected vary, from,

- Unsuitable subjects - if the carcass is too decomposed, a Post Mortem can not be performed.
- Dangerous location – if the badgers are not safely retrievable, they are not collected.
- Duplication - there are occasions when we are notified by more than one caller for the same carcass.

The scheme has been running a year and it is our intention to produce a report in the New Year. There is, as you can appreciate, a time lag in getting culture results and a report will have to wait for all culture results to be in before being released.

We also discussed the independent evaluation of Glastir advanced and I agreed to share a note on the progress made to date against each of the 10 recommendations:

No	Recommendation	Update
1	Some of the target area maps need to be further refined.	The Welsh Government has worked with NRW to assess the Water Quantity map to ensure better targeting of interventions.
2	Additional procedures are needed to ensure that the objectives addressed are appropriate and the management for those objectives is appropriate and sufficient.	Contract Managers have been encouraged to be more pragmatic in their approach to addressing objectives and to concentrate on delivering beneficial outcomes. Contract Managers have the facility to reject unsuitable objectives and are aware of the need to ensure there is a sufficient package of activity to deliver the objectives. Work is on going in regard to improving procedures and guidance.
3	Contract Managers need more high quality guidance, support and training.	A programme of training has been implemented with specialist training events already undertaken.
4	Some specific actions are needed to avoid the risk that the scheme will promote excessive uniformity of management in woodland and upland habitats.	The Welsh Government has initiated discussions with NRW on uplands and designated sites. The Welsh Government is developing new guidance for grazed woodland for the next round of applications

No	Recommendation	Update
5	Actions for flood risk reduction need to be planned on a catchment scale.	Managers have been given specialist training and the associated maps used to target resources have been reviewed.
6	More needs to be done to encourage and help fund facilitation and partnership working in order to establish landscape scale working where it is needed.	A GIS assessment of the key objective is due to start shortly, this will feed into work undertaken next year.
7	Glastir Advanced is not the ideal mechanism to use for the control of mobile pest species.	Implemented for contracts negotiated after the release of the report.
8	Coordination with other schemes needs to be maintained and improved.	Link between Glastir Advanced and SPG is in place.
9	The wider value of some management needs to be recognised.	Monitoring and evaluation is already in place and is ongoing.
10	Contracts need more follow up visits and advice.	The new Farming Connect services are due to start in the Autumn. A package of support will be made available to all farmers.

In addition, I agreed to provide a note on the impact the Control of Horses Act has had on equine welfare.

As you will recall, the Control of Horses (Wales) Act 2014 was introduced in response to calls for urgent action by local authorities, equine charities and the Police. The Act gives local authorities more effective legal powers to address the issues of fly grazing, straying and abandonment of horses and ponies across Wales. Although recognised that many of the equines found fly grazing have welfare concerns the Act should not be regarded as a panacea for all equine issues. In the event of action being necessary to resolve welfare cases local authorities have the Animal Welfare Act 2006 at their disposal.

Not all local authorities have had problems with Fly Grazing and abandonment so have therefore had no occasion to use the legislation. However, what is known is that over the first 12 months of the life of the Act at least 11 local authorities used the powers contained within the Act to seize some 460 horses. In addition the Welsh Government has supported a number of local authorities through the provision of match funding to enable the removal and disposal of horses and ponies found fly grazing or abandoned on land without lawful authority.

This support has been given on a case by case basis and following the receipt of a detailed business case supporting the course of action to be taken. There have been no recent reports of large numbers of fly grazed or abandoned horses and ponies and as such no requests have been made for funding to deal with such issues. What has been concluded is that in the case of small numbers of fly grazed horses the powers provided within the Control of Horses Act are proving sufficient for local authorities to resolve local issues.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 includes a legal duty on owners or people responsible for equines to take reasonable steps to ensure the animal's welfare needs are met. Partnership working is key to the success in raising standards and compliance in animal health and welfare. The Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework sets out the Welsh Government plan for continuing and lasting improvements in standards of animal health and welfare.

Engagement between local authorities and, in particular, equine charities continues to develop to good effect. Meetings take place between various interested parties, welfare charities, commoners association and local authorities. The Welsh Government continues to promote partnership working and the sharing of resources as the best way forward.

A commitment has been given to undertake a review of the Control of Horses (Wales) Act 2014 within 3 years of it coming into force.

I trust that I have addressed the Committee's queries in full.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca". The script is cursive and fluid.

Rebecca Evans AC / AM

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Deputy Minister for Farming and Food