

## Optimisation Team visits slaughterhouses

As announced in Link issue 6, the joint MHS, FSA and industry Optimisation Project Team has started to visit slaughterhouses to review reasons for differences in the deployment of MHS resources. The team will also identify best practice and potential opportunities for improvement for the MHS and Food Business Operators (FBOs), and areas where FSA implementation of national measures via pilots would allow a departure from European Food Hygiene legislation requirements.

The team, under the leadership of Kenneth Clarke FSA Veterinary Adviser, includes Asier Pagazaurtundua, MHS Veterinary Manager, and Peter Boyes, Technical Manager of Dovecote Park representing the industry. A BPC representative will join the team for visits to poultry plants.

Around 20 slaughterhouses across England, Scotland and Wales representing different industry segments will be visited by the end of August. Nine visits have been completed to date. Premises are being selected based on an analysis of variations in MHS attendance at establishments which are otherwise similar in terms of throughput and species processed. The focus is on the following areas:

- Flexibilities currently not permitted by EU legislation, but where changes to the legislation are deemed desirable
- Operational efficiency of the MHS
- FBO's working practices that impact on the efficiency of MHS staff deployment
- Non-statutory tasks performed by MHS staff.

The team will agree the date of the visit with the operator and inform the MHS staff beforehand. Individual feedback reports will be distributed to the FBO, the MHS Business Manager and Lead Veterinarian and other relevant parties within the MHS and FSA.

*"So far we have received very positive feedback from the industry and other stakeholders. There is a strong commitment on all sides to work together on this initiative. The team was well received during the first visits and we had some very constructive discussions. We believe operational improvements can be achieved with a joint MHS-industry effort without compromising public health and animal health & welfare".* Kenneth Clarke, Optimisation Team Leader.

A final report summarising high level findings will be shared with a wide range of stakeholders in September. Steve McGrath, Chief Executive, will ultimately make decisions regarding MHS resourcing, including implementing the recommendations in the final project report.

For more information see the Advisory Body meeting paper of the 6th June which is available on the FSA website at:

[www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/abopt.pdf](http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/abopt.pdf) or e-mail Kenneth at [kenneth.clarke@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:kenneth.clarke@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)

### Inside this issue...

- P2 **Charging update**
- P2 **The Lead Veterinarian role**
- P3 **New supplier contracts from 2009**
- P4 **MHS regional office closures**
- P4 **August Bank Holiday lab closures**

## An update on charging

Work is continuing to introduce a new charging system for use by the MHS. There has been significant internal and external stakeholder consultation throughout the development of the options for a new charging system, including written communications with all FBOs and four meetings of the Stakeholder Charges Working Group, which includes a high level of representation from industry. The consultation resulted in majority support in principle for a move away from the Maclean charging formula and onto a system based on actual time costs subject to appropriate checks and balances on attendance levels. It is fully accepted that these checks and balances need to be in place and that these must include a robust challenge process so that FBOs may question the level of official control resources in their premises.

Abattoirs in the UK are private commercial businesses, but all receive support from the taxpayer in the form of reduced charges that have amounted to over £200m during the last seven years. The new charging system aims to make the system more equitable and to ensure that the cost of regulation is no more than it needs to be. The FSA Advisory Body for the Delivery of Official Controls met for its fourth meeting in June and included a discussion on the charging proposals for 2009/10. There was agreement with the principle of time-based charging though it was recognised that to be effective, this needed efficient use of MHS resources. Emphasis was placed on the need to develop a mechanism to encourage contractors to improve efficiency and reduce hours. The Advisory Body agreed with the MHS/FSA decision not to propose charging levels for the period beyond 2009/10 so that a more accurate assessment of potential charges could be made once the new charging structure is in place.

Although operators will see their subsidy fall, the FSA has given assurance that industry will continue to receive support where it is needed most. The FSA is not looking for full cost recovery from all businesses. The proposed increase of 12% in 2009/10 would bring total UK meat hygiene charges in 2009/10 up to an estimated £28m from £25m in 2008/09, which would still only represent approximately 50% of the actual cost. This is significantly less than the total charges to industry of £45m (at today's prices) that applied in 1999/2000 prior to the introduction of the current charging system. The proposed increase will potentially result in official control charges to a typical micro red meat slaughterhouse of about £800 against a full annual cost of just over £9,500 – a discount of 91%. As part of the MHS's continuing transformation, operational costs will be cut from £91m to £74m in real terms over the next five years.

Time-based charging will introduce a commercial discipline for all parties to make effective use of official control resources. It will also reward businesses that improve their standards if official control time can be reduced. By working together with industry the MHS aims to deliver a fair charging policy that will facilitate a value-for-money service. Now that the charging proposals have been considered and agreed for consultation by the FSA Board on 17 July, a formal consultation will be held on the proposed new system during which stakeholders and food business operators will be able to comment further.

## The Lead Veterinarian

The Lead Veterinarian (LV) role is best described as having a mixture of both technical and business management responsibility within their cluster. LVs act as line manager for the OVs and SMHIs, and will themselves report to their Business Managers and Veterinary Managers. For the Food Business Operator, the usual lines of communication continue as previously, with your first point of contact being the OV. Our aim is to provide you with a visible, approachable and effective manager who can provide support on technical and business matters across a cluster whilst striving for efficiencies to the benefit of all. We have appointed 14 LVs. One MHS-employed LV is operating in each Business Manager area. Contract LVs employed across clusters will have the same role and responsibilities as MHS-employed LVs. However, MHS-employed LVs will have additional responsibility for the recruitment and selection of MHS plant staff, contract management and MHS business planning. If you have any questions regarding the LV role please consult your MHS Business Manager.

## New supplier contracts from 2009

Over the last few months, existing and potential suppliers have been invited to a series of meetings to introduce them to the cluster approach to contracting out services. The meetings have provided an opportunity for the exchange of good ideas to improve on the current operational management structure.

In issue 6 we gave you an update on plans for the procurement exercise for the supply of contract OVs and MHIs from the beginning of 2009. The first phase of the open and competitive process involved a pre-qualification process to secure the selection of approved suppliers who have the quality and capability to meet our transformed service expectations. This phase concluded in mid-June. The following organisations have been approved to go through to stage two of the procurement process and will be invited to tender for the provision of services:

**ARO Co. Ltd**  
**Avenue Veterinary Centre**  
**Beth Newman**  
**Bodrwsiwn Veterinary Group**  
**Carlton Professional Ltd**  
**Carrick Veterinary Centre**  
**City of London Corporation**  
**Clyde Veterinary Group**  
**Cornaig Veterinary Practice**  
**Eville & Jones Ltd**  
**FCI Ltd**

**Grants Veterinary Services Ltd**  
**Hall Mark Meat Hygiene Ltd**  
**Hector A Low**  
**Hygiene Audit Ltd**  
**Lerwick Veterinary Practice**  
**Malcolm J Wheeler**  
**Mount Services Wellington Ltd**  
**Southern Isles Veterinary Practice**  
**STA Vets**  
**VMHS Ltd**

The invitations to tender will be issued to these approved suppliers in July and the process will be concluded in November when new contracts will be awarded to take effect from 2 February 2009.

On 10 July we held a workshop with approved suppliers to clarify the key features of the new contract, including veterinary roles in the new veterinary management structure, the training and development framework for contracted staff and an indication of how we will measure success against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Using the MHS's revised model of geographic clusters and with the aim of having a single contractor providing all contracted services within a whole cluster, we expect to be able to significantly improve the efficient use of resources, reduce resource costs and improve our operational management. We can confirm that some Scottish islands will be tendered separately.

We are taking steps to ensure that FBOs are not unduly disrupted as a result of the impending contractor changes and there will be a 3 month transition period between November and January to help ensure the smooth integration of contractors across the clusters.

If you have any questions about the procurement exercise please contact Linda Barnes, MHS National Contract Manager at [linda.barnes@mhs.gov.uk](mailto:linda.barnes@mhs.gov.uk) or on 01904 455 971. If you have any questions about how the changes may affect you in particular, please contact your MHS Business Manager.



## Regional office closures

As you will be aware, all MHS regional offices were due to close by the end of September 2008. We have actually been able to bring forward this date with the York and Cardiff offices closing on 31 March; the Edinburgh office closing on 31 May and the Taunton office closing on 30 June. Our Wolverhampton office will be the last regional office to close and this is scheduled for 31 July.

Our aim is for the closure of the regional offices to have no impact on the services provided by the MHS to FBOs. Your MHS Business Manager is responsible for ensuring that your requirements are dealt with efficiently. All administrative and financial services, previously handled by a regional office are now processed centrally from MHS headquarters in York.

## Laboratory closures over the August Bank Holiday

LGC, VLA (Veterinary Laboratories Agency) and the Scottish Agriculture College (SAC in Scotland) will be operating restricted hours over the August Bank Holiday (25 August 2008). The following information shows how these arrangements may affect you:

### Cattle TSE & Suspect Animals (Residues in Meat) – LGC

- Results for samples received by the laboratory on Friday 22 August will be available within normal timescales.
- Samples will not be accepted between Saturday 23 and Monday 25 August. The laboratory will not be open for testing until Tuesday 26 August. This also applies to normal RIM sampling.

### Sheep TSE (Brain Stems & Dead on Arrival/Dead in Lairage) – VLA/SAC

- Results for samples received by the laboratory on Friday 22 August will be available within normal timescales.
- Samples will not be accepted on Monday 25 August. The laboratory will not be open for testing until Tuesday 26 August.

### Trichinella & Campylobacter - VLA

- Sample submission and reporting arrangements remain unchanged up to and including Saturday 23 August.
- The laboratory will be closed on Monday 25 August and normal service resumes on the Tuesday 26 August.

If you have any queries about these arrangements, please contact your OV or SMHI.

*Information correct at 17 July 2008.*

## Contact us

We want Link to be a useful and informative publication. Please contact us with any suggestions, comments or ideas for articles. If you would like to receive Link in a different format, please let us know. You can contact us at [link@mhs.gov.uk](mailto:link@mhs.gov.uk) or call 01904 455558. This is your opportunity to tell us about the issues most important to you. We look forward to hearing from you.

### MHS Communications.



The Meat Hygiene Service is an executive agency of the Food Standards Agency

