

Report on	Consultation Paper: Draft NI Animal Health & Welfare Strategic Framework
Date of Meeting	10 th September 2019
Reporting Officer	Fiona McClements, Head of Environmental Health

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs are seeking views on their proposals for the NI Animal Health and Welfare Strategic Framework. The consultation document invites responses from stakeholders - including the farming and agri-food industry, keepers of both farmed animals and domestic pets, veterinary practitioners, animal welfare groups and other interested bodies and individuals - on proposals for a new approach to developing and delivering animal health and welfare policy.
1.2	<p>A set of animal health and welfare outcomes is proposed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We keep our animals healthy and treat them well. 2. We have a competitive, innovative livestock industry that contributes to our economic prosperity. 3. We protect public health and our food from animal related disease. 4. We take a sustainable approach to the farming of animals that respects the environment. 5. We have animal health and welfare safeguards that are widely recognised and trusted.
1.3	A number of questions have been set out in this consultation, and these are included in Appendix 2 of this report. Although the consultation relates mainly to the farmed animals sector, the scope also covers companion animals such as dogs, cats and horses etc which are kept as pets and for which the District Council does have responsibility.
2.0	Background
2.1	NI has almost 25,000 farms and, over the past 50 years, has changed from a mixed farming economy to one largely dependent on grazing livestock. The structure of the agriculture sector in NI is very different to that found in other parts of the UK, with cattle and sheep farms making up 80% of all farms, compared with 43% in England. The health and welfare status of NI's farmed animals is vital to the sustainability of the local livestock industry, the wider agri-food sector and the economy as a whole.

2.2	Primary agricultural production and processing are important economic activities within the NI context. There are almost 50,000 workers involved in primary agricultural production in NI. There is also a greater proportion of the working population here employed in agriculture compared to other parts of the UK. Some 16,000 people in NI are also employed directly in the processing of meat and animal products.
2.3	Livestock and related products (including milk and eggs) comprise almost 84% of NI agricultural gross output, estimated at a value of £1.79 billion for 2018. In the UK as a whole, however, livestock and related products contribute less than 50% to total agricultural gross output (2017).
2.4	The strong correlation between animal health and welfare is widely recognised – animals that are kept to high welfare standards are more healthy and productive. Safeguarding the health and welfare of animals is, however, about much more than economic output. Society has a responsibility to ensure that animals are properly cared for. As well as impacting on animals, their keepers and the livestock industry, animal health and welfare issues are of wider public concern.
2.5	NI's animal health and welfare system has a strong international reputation, underpinning trade and external sales in animal and related products. Government, industry and other stakeholders work in close collaboration to deliver disease control programmes and health assurance schemes that contribute to achieving and maintaining these high standards, which in turn deliver a range of broader environmental and societal benefits.
2.6	Responsibility for animal health and welfare policy and strategic direction in Northern Ireland rests with DAERA. Compliance with regulatory requirements is necessary in order to demonstrate disease freedom, appropriate standards of animal welfare and quality assurance for trade purposes. The current regulatory framework arises largely from EU legislation and international obligations. The EU (Withdrawal Act 2018) will convert the relevant EU law, as it stands on the day of exit, into domestic law, and will preserve laws made in NI to implement EU obligations.
2.7	Many of the rules relating to surveillance, disease control, welfare standards, certification of animal and related products and trade has been set at EU level and are applied UK wide. This has generally resulted in a common approach to addressing animal health and welfare issues within the UK and in other EU countries.
2.8	As exit from the EU approaches, the devolved administrations and the UK Government are working together to determine where common frameworks to maintain UK wide approaches need to be established in areas currently governed by EU law but that are otherwise devolved.
2.9	The NI livestock industry relies heavily on the export of live animals and animal products. It is important that our approach is co-ordinated with our main trading partners particularly in view of the challenges that that may arise following the departure of the UK from the EU.

2.10	At present, there is no overall framework or strategy in place for animal health and welfare in Northern Ireland. It is therefore timely within the context of exit from the EU that a new approach is developed.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>This consultation paper sets out proposals for a new approach to animal health and welfare policy in Northern Ireland (NI), summarised as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The implementation of a long-term framework, with a lifespan of ten years, for animal health and welfare, agreed and delivered by government and stakeholders working together; 2. The adoption of an outcomes-based accountability model. 3. The identification of animal health and welfare outcomes, to help determine what 'success' looks like and to provide direction for animal health and welfare policy, 4. Aiming to encourage a stronger focus on impact rather than delivery. 5. The identification of animal health and welfare outcomes, to help determine what 'success' looks like and to provide direction for animal health and welfare policy, aiming to encourage a stronger focus on impact rather than delivery. 6. The introduction of an annual cycle of planning, monitoring and reporting; and the establishment of a new structure to facilitate stakeholder engagement and oversight of delivery of the framework.
3.2	<p>Although it is proposed that the Animal Health and Welfare Strategic Framework should be concerned mainly with farmed livestock, it would extend to other animals including companion animals and wildlife where there is a potential impact on human health or on the health of farmed animals.</p> <p>It is suggested that the scope of the Framework should include the following:</p>
3.3	<p>Farmed animals</p> <p>Livestock including beef and dairy cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry (including egg production) and all other animals reared for food, breeding or other animal products (such as fleece and hides).</p>
3.4	<p>Companion animals</p> <p>Dogs, cats, horses and other animals (including exotic species) kept by people as companions.</p>
3.5	<p>Animals used for work, sport, recreation or display</p> <p>Non-farmed animals kept in zoos, by circuses, pet shops and for display such as ornamental fowl, as well as animals bred for sporting and other recreational pursuits, including game animals and birds initially reared in captivity, which may pose a risk of transmitting disease to farmed animals or humans, or to and from wildlife.</p>

3.6	Wildlife Including wild birds and other wild animals where there is a risk of disease transmission to farmed animals or humans and where the health and welfare of wildlife may be affected by animal disease control practices.
3.7	Aquaculture The hatching and rearing of fish and shellfish, not only for food but also for sale in the ornamental trade and for eventual release into stocked fisheries.
3.8	Recognising the relationship between animal health and welfare and food safety, public health and environmental sustainability, it is proposed that the Framework should also include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal feed and veterinary medicines where animal and human health may be impacted; • Animal by-products and waste where there may be consequences for animal and human health, and the environment.
3.9	Questions relating to the proposals are set out in Appendix 2 of this report.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: N/A
	Human: N/A
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	It is recommended that the draft responses outlined in Appendix 2 are considered and approved.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1 – Consultation Paper: Draft NI Animal Health and Welfare Strategic Framework.
6.2	Appendix 2 – Consultation Questions and suggested responses.