

Motion submitted by Councillor Tim Taylor
BLUETONGUE & BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS

Council Notes:

1. That Bluetongue is a viral disease, most commonly spread by midges, which primarily affects sheep and, to somewhat lesser amounts, cattle, deer, goats and camelids (such as llamas and alpacas).
2. That vaccination is the standard and most effective measure that farmers can normally use to protect their livestock, but unfortunately there is not yet a vaccine developed which is effective against the serotype currently spreading around Europe.
3. That within England, at the time of writing this motion, 99 bluetongue cases have been identified at 55 premises across 3 counties: Kent, Suffolk, and Norfolk.
4. That the nearest suspected outbreak has been at Emneth, although this has now been found to have been a false alarm.
5. That, worryingly, DEFRA have not yet been able to confirm that the current bluetongue outbreak is being transmitted by midges, which had been the transmission vector for all previous serotypes.

Council Further Notes:

1. That Bovine TB (bTB) results from a bacterial infection, most commonly spread directly between cattle.
2. That bTB is a disease which presents very slowly in infected livestock, months or even years after infection.
3. Given that bTB is a zoonosis (humans can be infected), that bTB is a notifiable disease which is primarily detected through routine testing of cattle rather than as a result of animals becoming symptomatic.
4. That routine tests for bTB in the UK either use a skin test (Single Intradermal Comparative Cervical Tuberculin – SICCT) or they use a blood test (Gamma Interferon).
5. That the frequency of testing depends upon the location of a farm, with Fenland currently being defined as being in a low-risk area. Nevertheless, the ‘edge risk’ area requiring 6 monthly testing now reaches the border of Northamptonshire.

As far as Fenland's farmers are concerned, Council notes:

1. That the risks posed to their herds and flocks is very real.
2. That farmers have a real commitment to the health and welfare of their animals.
3. That farming businesses can be significantly damaged financially in cases of bluetongue or bTB, either in their own animals or even if the outbreak is at another farm in the locality.
4. That farmers are experiencing increasing amounts of stress generally, exacerbated by the threats of bluetongue, bTB and other pressures to the extent that there should be concerns as to some farmers' mental welfare.

Council therefore resolves:

1. To contact our Member of Parliament, Steve Barclay, requesting that routine testing for bTB be conducted using a blood test (Gamma Interferon) rather than a skin test (SICCT) since blood testing is more accurate, produces far fewer false positives, results in fewer uninfected cattle being unnecessarily slaughtered (at considerable cost to farmers) and because blood tests have a quicker turnaround time than using SICCT.
2. To contact our Member of Parliament, Steve Barclay, requesting that testing for bluetongue be allowed to be conducted by any qualified local veterinary surgeon, as opposed to the current requirement for testing to be done only by a DEFRA vet, as the DEFRA vet service currently has a 12 week waiting time for such visits, leading to an increased danger of both intra-flock and onward transmission and increased costs to farmers. Additionally, to request that our MP supports a greater priority being given to developing a vaccine for the current bluetongue serotype.
3. To contact CCC Public Health and the North Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Care Partnership asking them both to include farmers' mental health as a specific item on their register of mental health risks, with a view to generally promoting awareness of mental health risks to farmers together with identifying and dealing with any farmer's mental health issues at the earliest possible stage.