

Report to the Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee

14 February 2019

Farm Inspection and Regulation Review

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Purpose of the report

To update the Committee on the review of farm inspection and regulation.

1. This independent review of farm inspection and regulation was commissioned in February 2018 by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The terms of reference were to identify opportunities, before and after EU exit, for improving farming-related regulation and enforcement, including inspections, in order to reduce burdens on farmers while maintaining and enhancing our animal, plant and environmental health standards. The review applies to England only. The report was published on the 13 December 2018
2. Colleagues from the National Animal Health and Welfare Panel have liaised with review officials. At interim report stage they were very concerned about their understanding of the role of local authorities and the potential risk that the report might recommend local authorities losing this role altogether. Further meetings took place prior to the report being finalised. The final report does better recognise the breadth of the role of local authorities. It is still proposing key changes to the enforcement system though.
3. The most notable paragraph states:-

“We then move on to consider the future role of local authorities. Given the significant delivery difficulties we describe, we consider responsibilities should change. We argue that it is not acceptable or fair for enforcement to depend on locality that the regulatory system should respond consistently to welfare complaints, and that oversight of animal health and welfare should not ever reduce because of local resource pressures. We appreciate there is a cadre of capable and dedicated local authority animal health and welfare staff, albeit numbers are most likely reducing”.

4. *“We propose the regulator should be empowered to commission regulatory activities (such as the first response to welfare complaints) from individual local authorities or other suitable bodies but should do so only where that would be effective as well as efficient. In that way, local authorities that retain animal health and welfare competence and capability may choose to play a role, in line with the regulator’s priorities and expectations”.*

“We propose that the government should review local authority statutory obligations relating to the health and welfare of farmed animals. Of course, local

authorities have much wider responsibilities than just animal health and welfare on farm and will wish to continue to investigate and prosecute within their own areas. In exotic disease outbreaks and other emergency situations they have, and will continue to have, an important and valued role”.

5. In summary, the report also recommends that the Government should:
6. *Create a new independent regulator for farming and land management as soon as possible as outlined in the report.*

Ensure that the design principles and the mature regulatory approaches, described, underpin the regulatory system and single regulator. On leaving the EU, the government should adopt a sophisticated and balanced view of regulation, beyond a mere set of binding rules, so that regulation maximises opportunities (e.g. to enhance the environment) as well as minimising risks of harm.

Require the regulator to report periodically and comprehensively on the extent to which the government’s stated priorities are being met. The regulator should develop measures that enable farmers, land managers and the regulator to jointly track progress and areas of concern, and to help farmers and land managers make key business decisions day-to-day.

7. *Legislate to rationalise farm and land registration requirements and to allow for the creation of a single land-keepers’ register, to be held by the regulator. Current arrangements for registering land parcels should be carefully assessed and simplified as soon as possible.*

Simplify and standardise animal registration, while retaining the use of CPH numbers (for disease control purposes). All poultry should be registered, given exotic disease risks, and the government should consider whether South American camelids and horses should be registered, for endemic disease control or welfare reasons.

8. *Review the Defra group configuration. The Government should retain sufficient field staff with the Environment Agency to enable it to deliver its future remit, but otherwise consolidate and create one field force under the auspices of the new regulator.*

Response from the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers

9. The chair of the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers, as a professional officer body has now written to George Eustice the Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the following terms:
10. *“It is at this unique point in time, as the implications of EU Exit for businesses, enforcers and consumers become clear, that local authorities can provide an invaluable contribution to the future of farming regulation. Local authorities not only have extensive expertise and knowledge of working with the farming and food industry but have also established a reputation for delivering value for money, flexible and knowledgeable regulatory services that can deliver tangible benefits in difficult financial times. They retain a fair approach to enforcement,*

working with partners and impartially considering the needs of the public, businesses and how best to use limited public funds”

Recommendation

11. The Committee is asked to note the information as contained within the report.

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