



APHA Briefing Note 03/15

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) has today confirmed the award of contracts for the supply of a flexible package of veterinary services across five regions covering England to improve our ability to detect animal disease.

From 1 May 2015 all new TB testing and other Official Veterinarian (OV) work will be undertaken by five regional suppliers, who will be responsible for allocating local vets and ensuring testing is carried out to a high standard. This will help to drive up standards and ensure the ongoing quality of testing for animal disease.

The new arrangements provide higher levels of assurance about quality of testing and value for money. Testing will continue to be performed by fully qualified vets and APHA will carry on working in close partnership with the veterinary profession.

The successful suppliers in England (to be known as 'Delivery Partners') are:

REGION	DELIVERY PARTNER
South West 1	XL Farmcare Devon and Cornwall Ltd
South West 2	XL Farmcare Wessex Ltd
South East	XL Farmcare South East Ltd
Midlands	XL Farmcare Midlands Ltd
North	XL Farmcare North Ltd

Each of the successful bidders is a distinct business entity consisting of a consortium of practices within the particular region, and will allocate testing work through a network of eligible veterinary businesses. The contracts have been awarded for a three year period, with the option to extend up to a further two years.

Farmers and livestock keepers will continue to be responsible for ensuring that TB testing is completed on time but in future will need to contact their regional Delivery Partner to make

the arrangements. Delivery Partners will then be responsible for allocating the actual testing activity through their network of practices, and for assuring the quality of the work performed.

In recognition of the important relationship between farmers or livestock keepers and their vets in preventing and controlling disease and for ensuring the health and welfare of animals, the new contracts require Delivery Partners to offer testing work to eligible veterinary businesses operating within their geographical regions.

Work that has already been assigned to Official Veterinarian (OV) practices under existing arrangements will be completed by those practices but from 1 May all new work will be undertaken by delivery partners.

When making arrangements for tests, farmers and livestock keepers can express a preference to use a specific veterinary practice from within the Delivery Partners network to undertake their testing, and this preference will be honoured where possible. Farmers and livestock keepers who would prefer to use a practice that is not part of the Delivery Partners network retain an option to pay for the testing privately.

APHA will work to ensure that the livestock industry and veterinary profession are given information and support in preparation for the introduction of the new processes. We will be working with each of the Delivery Partners to establish joint plans for transition and communication of what the changes mean in detail, and further information will be published before the new arrangements commence.

Contract awards for two regions covering Wales were announced on 27 January. The changes do not apply in Scotland.

Background

In July 2013 AHVLA (now APHA) announced plans to modernise its relationship with suppliers of veterinary services in order to ensure their delivery in a way which is demonstrably more effective and efficient in meeting the needs of taxpayers, the farmed livestock industry, other animal keepers and the veterinary profession.

In developing the tender APHA sought, and acted on, feedback from the veterinary profession and livestock industry. This is reflected in key elements of the new arrangements:

- As accurate tuberculin testing is a foundation for controlling bovine TB the contract focuses on the quality of service to be delivered, whilst ensuring best value for the taxpayer.
- APHA recognises the importance of a strong working relationship between livestock keepers and their vet. For this reason, Delivery Partners are required to sub-contract work to local businesses provided these businesses are able to work to the required quality assurance standards and offer a competitive price. Delivery Partners are also required to allow animal keepers to select their preferred vet from these sub-contractors; this preference will be respected whenever possible.
- The standards of service livestock keepers can expect are clearer than they have been in the past. Delivery Partners must work with keepers to make sure that a suitable vet is available when required, and levels of customer satisfaction will be monitored by both APHA and Delivery Partners.
- Delivery Partners must implement rigorous quality assurance systems, in particular to ensure that TB testing is done to the required standard. They must also have to adhere to a health and safety policy which includes cattle handling. Vets working for Delivery Partners will therefore expect a good standard of handling facilities, and sufficient handler support, so that the work can be done safely and efficiently.

Issued: 16 February 2015