FAQs

Future Procurement of Professional Veterinary Services

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why has Animal Health decided to go out to tender?
A: To comply with European Directive [2004/18/EC], and the UK Public Contracts Regulations [2006], all public contracts for services must be subject to competition. As such, there is a legal requirement for us to adequately advertise our requirements, which must include a technical specification, and clearly defined criteria as to how operational capability and price will be evaluated. We also have to obtain and demonstrate both value-for-money and the quality of services provided.

Q: Can a competition be run but with a limited participation from suppliers i.e. competition restricted to existing Official Veterinarian practices?
A: No, as this would not constitute fair and open competition and would be open to a material challenge.

Q: When will the procurement process start and how quickly can it be concluded?
A: In broad terms the programme is likely to proceed in accordance with the following indicative timetable:

- Planned engagement on the proposals with profession/industry and other stakeholders is likely to take place early in 2011
- Invitations to tender to be issued later in 2011, with a view to award of contracts during late 2011
- Allowing for a transitional period, the new arrangements are unlikely to come into effect before spring 2012.

Detailed proposals for Scotland and Wales will not be available by early 2011. In Scotland the time table is extended because the Scottish Government is currently reviewing their TB surveillance strategy, and Animal Health needs to accommodate the provision of services for the remote areas and islands.

Q: Will existing suppliers be invited to tender? If so, will suppliers know how to respond to tenders?
A: Yes, the law requires that a level and inclusive playing field is created for the competition to include all potential suppliers of professional services. In order to help all businesses, irrespective of size, to understand the tendering process and its requirements, we are considering how we can make this information available to all potential bidders. The aim will be to ensure that all current OV practices, and any other potential suppliers, are given the opportunity to receive practical advice on responding appropriately to a tender.

Q: What areas of work will be included within the tender process?
A: Tenders will initially cover two areas of work: bovine TB testing (Panel 1a), and the supply of contingency veterinary services. All other areas of work will initially be excluded from the tender.

Q: Will bidders be required to bid for both bovine TB (bTB) testing and contingency veterinary services?
A: No, bidders can compete for bTB testing and contingency work, or either bTB or contingency veterinary services.

Q: Will the tenders be just for routine TB tests or all TB testing including short intervals tests, pre- and post-movement tests?
A: All TB testing paid for by the tax-payer and carried out by OVs will be included. Privately funded tests, including pre- and post-movement tests, will not be included in the tender.

Q: What is meant by 'contingency veterinary services'?
A: This includes provision of veterinary reserve personnel to Animal Health principally in an outbreak or whenever there is a need for additional supplementary resource.

Q: What about areas of work currently performed by OVs but excluded from the tender?
A: Arrangements for commissioning work not included with the tender will be reviewed, but for the present will continue as now.

Q: How will tendering affect OV work such as export services for which the OV is paid by the client?
A: The procurement of services (such as export certification and pre-movement TB testing) from OVs by private clients, rather than by government, is not expected to change. However, the role Animal Health plays in these arrangements will be subject to review.

Q: How will the tender process be run?
A: Work is on-going, however it is likely that Animal Health will make support available aimed specifically at assisting small and medium sized businesses to understand, and be in a position to respond to, the tendering process.

Q: Do we know how many suppliers will be required?
A: Not yet. A formal procurement strategy will be produced which will examine all options available for procuring OV services. Initial thinking is that tenders will be issued for work lots which seek to maximise economy of scale benefits. This is likely to result in work being tendered for by geographical areas that are larger than those served by most current official veterinarian practices. Existing suppliers who may wish to tender will need to assess how they would deliver a larger volume of work across wider geographical areas.

Q: What arrangements will be made for quality assurance?
A: Contractual terms will require bidders to demonstrate how quality assurance requirements will be met and maintained. Winning bidders will be contractually committed to deliver to the required quality standards and will be subject to audit and assessment by Animal Health. Our key objective in introducing the changes, in addition to complying with the law, is to better enable us to demonstrate value-for-money, not simply cost saving. Ensuring the delivery of a consistently high quality service is essential to be able to do this.

Q: Will quality of the service be compromised by businesses driving down costs in order to win contracts?
A: Quite the contrary. The new contracts will include strict quality control protocols and successful suppliers will be required to demonstrate their ability to consistently deliver a quality service.

Q: How will appointments of individual veterinarians be made to OV panels?
A: It is envisaged that Animal Health will retain responsibility for appointment of individuals to panels.

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Q: Are you denying keepers the choice to work with their own vet in respect of TB testing?
A: Animal Health understands the value that farmers place on having their own vet carry out TB testing on their herd. However, at this time of stringent controls over public expenditure, it is very important that the taxpayer’s interest is protected and that it can be demonstrated that veterinary services are delivered in a cost effective way.

Q: By potentially removing the livestock keeper’s own vet from involvement in TB testing are you not increasing the risk that clinical problems will not be properly reported or dealt with?
A: The reporting of clinical problems will be covered in the contract, but the precise mechanism needs to be worked out. As a minimum, the livestock keeper would be advised to contact their own vet, and if an issue governed by statute is involved, Animal Health.

Q: Won’t local knowledge be lost if local practices don’t do this work?
A: This will depend on whether local veterinary practices successfully compete to provide the service. Animal Health are currently looking to engage with the veterinary profession for their views on how the future model might be shaped to ensure that small businesses are not disadvantaged by the tendering process.

Q: What are the implications of the proposals for the delivery of disease eradication programmes?
A: Delivery of disease eradication programmes will still depend partly, even largely, on services provided by OVs. The role of the OVs in these programmes does not change, only the process for engaging a certain OV.

Q: Will only fully qualified veterinary surgeons be able to act as OVs?
A: Only veterinary surgeons registered to practice in Great Britain are able to undertake the testing work, and only once trained and approved by Animal Health to do so.

Q: How much notice is going to be given to the issues and concerns raised by the industry and veterinary profession?
A: The work of current suppliers (official veterinarians) is greatly valued and care is being taken in order to ensure the best possible procurement model is introduced. Various options have been developed and are being assessed. For this reason a firm timetable for future developments has not yet been published, as it is necessary to properly weigh all ideas and contributions generated or received to date. Animal Health’s approach is subject to agreement by both Defra and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Q: Will Scotland be included in the tendering process?
A: Plans for tendering in Scotland are currently on hold until a review of TB surveillance, in view of OTF status, is carried out and recommendations have been made. It is impossible to have meaningful plans on tendering unless the volume of work has been clarified.