Veterinary Disease Surveillance Q&A

This document is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the current situation with the Veterinary Disease Surveillance System.

1. Where are the SACCVS Disease Surveillance Centres (DSCs) currently located?

The Scottish Government Veterinary Disease Surveillance programme is currently delivered by SAC Consulting Veterinary Services from eight disease surveillance centres located in Aberdeen, Ayr, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Inverness, Perth, St Boswells and Thurso.

2. What services do the DSCs currently provide?

Veterinary post mortem examinations are currently carried out at all 8 DSCs. These help local veterinary practitioners diagnose the cause of disease or losses affecting their clients’ animals. DSC staff remain vigilant for any new or unusual presentations of disease so they can inform Government and other stakeholders of new disease threats, (e.g. Schmallenberg Virus, Bleeding Calf Syndrome). A comprehensive range of diagnostic laboratory tests are carried out to assist practitioners investigate disease outbreaks. Many of these tests are undertaken locally at the DSCs but increasingly testing is centralised in Edinburgh. Some low volume, specialist tests are carried out by Moredun Research Institute. In addition, SACCVS carry out testing in support of flock and herd health schemes and analytical testing of soils, plants and animal feedstuffs.

3. Why is change being proposed?

In 2009, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment asked former NFUS President John Kinnaird to chair a review of Scotland’s veterinary disease surveillance system which had been in place for many years. The review’s aim was to ensure that Scotland has a system for monitoring new and emerging disease that is efficient and fit for purpose. A panel, led by John Kinnaird, first met on 13 January 2010.

Published in November 2011, the Kinnaird Review set out 15 recommendations for future veterinary disease surveillance in Scotland. The first three recommendations related to the establishment of a Strategic Management Board (SMB) tasked with setting and implementing the strategy for veterinary surveillance in Scotland. The SMB’s members are Freda Scott-Park, Dominic Mellor and Colin Manson.

A number of additional recommendations were made, the key ones being:

**Recommendation 5: A Single Central Laboratory:** To be at a location close to one of the three major veterinary research centre in Scotland. SRUC has indicated to the SMB that the central laboratory will be built at Easter Bush, near the University of Edinburgh’s Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies.

**Recommendation 6: Reducing the number of Disease Surveillance Centres (DSCs):** The Kinnaird Review indicated that the number of DSCs should be reduced.

4. What are the proposed changes?
In response to the Kinnaird Review recommendations SRUC presented the SMB and the Scottish Government with a series of proposed options. The Scottish Government has asked SRUC to consult internal and external stakeholders about these options.

- Inverness – it is proposed that the DSC could close in 2015 with arrangements made to serve the region from Thurso, Perth and Aberdeenshire.
- Ayr – options to be considered are to remain at Auchincruive, move to a new site in Ayrshire or relocate to the University of Glasgow School of Veterinary Medicine. These changes to be completed by 2017.
- Aberdeen – could relocate to a site in Aberdeenshire in 2017. Six options are currently being considered, including Thainstone, Inverurie and Kintore.
- Edinburgh – to relocate to Easter Bush in 2017 alongside a new the Central Laboratory facility shared with the University of Edinburgh’s Royal (Dick) Schools of Veterinary Studies. It is intended that the new facility will open in 2017. The central laboratory will accommodate the full range of SACCVS laboratory services (Biochemistry, Chemistry, Haematology, Microbiology, Molecular biology, Parasitology, Pathology, Serology). It will also house the Edinburgh post-mortem facility.
- Perth, Dumfries, St Boswells and Thurso DSCs will remain in place.

5. What were the priorities considered when proposing this model?

The key elements were:

- More efficient delivery of service and surveillance with in a budget that is reducing in real terms.
- Maintenance of a critical mass of staff within centres to ensure that they are true centres of excellence.
- Local demand for the services
- The age and condition of the DSC buildings and the need to provide improved working conditions for staff
- The opportunity to cover the catchment area for the DSCs by other means or from other sites
- The cost of refurbishment
- Optimising the Aberdeenshire site in relation to livestock density

6. Why was the Inverness DSC earmarked for potential closure?

The region covered by the Inverness DSC contains 25% of livestock holdings in Scotland but the Inverness DSC carries out fewest post mortems than the other DSCs. In addition, approximately 240 post mortems carried out each year on farm livestock submissions, the majority come within an hour’s drive of Inverness. These facts suggest that there may be more effective means of delivering disease surveillance in the region.

7. Won’t the closure of Inverness lead to greater risk of diseases spreading?

We are seeking through the consultation to identify the ways in which a robust disease surveillance services could operate in the region. Depending on the consultation outcome, this
may not involve a central DSC in Inverness but other options such as post mortems carried out by local vets, a more active role for veterinary investigation officers in on-farm investigations and the introduction of carcase collection services. We would ensure biosecurity protocols are followed by all SRUC employees and external contractors in any agree arrangement.

8. How could a move from the Ayr DSC to Glasgow University Vet Schools bring benefits?

A closer relationship with the University of Glasgow’s vet school could bring benefits to both DSC clients and veterinary students. Farmers north of Glasgow will have easier access to the post mortem facilities at the Garscube campus while students will see pathology and disease syndromes that are more representative of routine veterinary practice. This will prepare them better for work in farm animal practice.

9. Isn’t a move from Ayr just about further reducing SRUC’s presence on the Auchincruive Estate?

No decision has yet been taken on whether the DSC will in fact relocate – a decision will be made following the consultation period and in discussion with the Strategic Management Board and the Scottish Government. The decision will be based on identifying best way to provide disease surveillance for the local region.

10. In Inverness what could the impact be upon:

Staff?

SRUC is retaining its research and consultancy functions in Inverness in a new facility on the new Inverness Campus. If the decision is made to close the Drummondhill site SRUC would hope to redeploy many members of SACCVS staff to the new and expanding research facility. Other members of staff could be redeployed to the remaining DSCs in the Veterinary Services Group. Any who are unable to be redeployed or are unable to move to a new location, will be assisted in finding new employment.

Stakeholders, including farmers, veterinary practices and relevant agencies?

Many of the services provided from Inverness would be available from our DSCs in Aberdeenshire, Perth and Thurso or at a central laboratory in Edinburgh as before. We would engage with veterinary surgeons, farmers and other stakeholders to determine the most appropriate means to support practices and provide post mortem examination services in the area. This may be through a combination of training and support for veterinary surgeons in practice and a courier or carcase collection and transportation service. We will identify the appropriate location for the office of Premium Sheep and Goat Health Schemes. Ideally it would be alongside the laboratory carrying out the testing of samples.

11. What arrangements would be proposed to collect and deliver samples or carcasses previously dealt with in Inverness?
There are several options to meet the requirements of veterinary surveillance and stakeholders. We will engage with staff and stakeholders to determine the best solution or solutions.

12. In Aberdeen what could be the impact be upon;

Staff?

We would not anticipate any loss of staff caused by the relocation of the Aberdeen DSC. There are opportunities for staff to relocate to the new Aberdeenshire DSC from the Inverness DSC. The proposed new site is only a few miles from its present location and would be close to any new SRUC Campus and the SAC Consulting office.

Stakeholders including farmers, veterinary practices and relevant agencies?

The move from the Craibstone site would be made in the best interests of disease surveillance, which will ensure good access for many veterinary surgeons and farmers within Aberdeenshire. The new City Ring Road under construction will also greatly enhance access from the south of Aberdeen. The new facility would be more economical and efficient to maintain and so improve the service to clients and the quality of the working environment for staff. Many clients will be familiar with and use other facilities at the Thainstone Centre.

13. In Ayr what could the impact be upon:

Staff?

SACCVS is committed to engaging with staff and stakeholders, including the University of Glasgow, to determine the best option to deliver veterinary surveillance in the west of Scotland. The options include retaining and refurbishing the existing facility at Auchincruive, relocating to the University of Glasgow, School of Veterinary Medicine, Garscube Estate, Bearsden or another site in Ayrshire. There could be a reduction in the number of staff but SRUC hopes that many members of staff will be redeployed to the remaining DSCs in the Veterinary Services Group. Any who are unable to be redeployed or are unable to move to a new location, will be assisted in finding new employment.

Stakeholders including farmers, veterinary practices and relevant agencies?

On average the Ayr DSC receives some 650 farm livestock submissions each year for post mortem examination. Most (400) are mammals (e.g. cattle) while 250 are poultry and gamebirds and come from within a radius of 50 km of Ayr. A move from the Auchincruive site to the University of Glasgow, Garscube Estate, Bearsden will inconvenience those farmers and veterinary practices in Ayrshire but a location north of the Clyde will make access to the laboratory easier for many other veterinary surgeons and farmers. A facility at the veterinary school will be more economical to run than a stand-alone DSC and the service to clients will benefit from the close working relationship between SACCVS and researchers. University of Glasgow Veterinary student would also benefit from enhanced training opportunities.
14. What will having a central laboratory mean for customers sending samples? E.g. will results take longer to come back?

SACCVS has progressively centralised its testing over the past 10 to 15 years. This has enabled automation to improve the accuracy of testing and reduce turnaround times and costs of many tests. In addition we have expanded the range of diagnostic tests and procedures available to veterinary surgeons and their clients so that they have access to the most up to date diagnostic testing available. We are unable to provide this level of service from eight local sites. However all eight sites are linked by an overnight courier network to minimise delays caused by sample transportation. In addition we have been taking steps to allow practitioners to deliver their samples direct to the central facility.

15. Will any services change at those DSCs which are remaining and will any staff in these centre be impacted upon?

The centres at Thurso, Aberdeenshire and Perth could see an increase in the level of submissions from the area previously served by the Inverness facility, should it close. In addition the veterinary staff and scientists in these centres would engage with the practitioners from the wider catchment area.

16. Isn’t this about the need to save money taking precedence over the quality of services?

SACCVS requires to work within the budget provided by Government for disease surveillance. The service is part funded with approximately 75% of funding coming from Government and 25% coming from veterinary practices and their clients. Experience outwith Scotland has shown that the demand for the service is price sensitive. Significant savings can be made by reducing the number of DSC facilities throughout Scotland. These savings are in the costs of maintaining and refurbishing sites.

The veterinary diagnostic service provided by SACCVS would continue to be delivered to a high quality accredited by UKAS to ISO 17025. Our staff are highly trained and their expertise is respected by their clients and Government agencies. We will engage with veterinary practices in those areas affected by the reduction in service to ensure that where possible no new or unusual presentation of disease remains undetected.

17. How much less will the Disease Surveillance Service cost to run annually should the proposed changes be introduced?

The current annual cost of the disease surveillance services is £5 million, £3.8 million of which comes from Scottish Government and the rest through client fees. It is anticipated that annual savings of £400,000 could be made as a result of the proposed changes in Inverness and Aberdeen. These savings would come from reduced premises costs, salaries, equipment and consumables. Further savings may be achieved by a relocation of the Ayr DSC to Glasgow. Aside from monetary savings, the planned changes could bring benefits and greater opportunities for staff through the provision of more efficient and pleasant working environments.
18. Would charges to clients increase?

As a high proportion of the cost of the disease surveillance service is met by Scottish Government, the prices charged to clients is very much dependent on the continuing level of support from Scottish Government. The Health Schemes and other services provided outwith Government support will be maintained at highly competitive pricing levels.

19. How would the proposed changes affect the specialist work of SACCVS staff?

By grouping our staff into a smaller number of larger teams we will create opportunities for individual vets and scientists to specialise and so provide an enhanced service to our clients.

20. What will happen to the Marine Animals Stranding Scheme presently based in Inverness?

The marine strandings team investigate strandings around the entire coastline of Scotland including Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides. Much of their work is carried out on the north and west coasts. We will discuss the most appropriate location for the team’s base with the members of the marine strandings team.

21. Will SACCVS staff qualify for a redundancy package?

Any staff who are unable to be redeployed or are unable to move to a new location or retrain, will be assisted in finding new employment.

22. Will the existing management model for the majority of veterinary surveillance labs continue or will the Thurso model, where external vets are employed, be adopted more widely?

We believe that the Thurso model is an efficient and effective means of delivering veterinary surveillance in the north of Scotland because of the high level of engagement with the local veterinary practices and the markedly high stocking levels of beef and sheep along the Caithness coast. While we will explore the opportunity to extend this model to other similar, remote locations with stakeholders it is unlikely that this approach would find favour in other intensively farmed areas.

23. What guarantees are there about the quality of surveillance offered by the proposed new arrangement? Will Scotland be more vulnerable?

The veterinary diagnostic service provided by SACCVS would continue to be delivered to a high quality accredited by UKAS to ISO 17025. Our staff are highly trained and their expertise is respected by their clients and Government agencies. We will engage with veterinary practices in those areas affected by the reduction in service to ensure that where possible no new or unusual presentation of disease remains undetected.

24. How have DSC staff been informed about this?
Meetings of the staff in the 3 DSCs principally affected by the changes took place on Tuesday 2 June and follow-up communication will take place on a regular basis.

25. How have clients been informed?

A letter detailing the proposed changes and plans for consultation was sent by email to all client practices on 2 June 2015 and client meetings have taken place in the regions most affected by the proposals.

26. Is this a fait accompli?

No. Following the consultation, the feedback will be thoroughly considered by SRUC, the Strategic Management Board and the Scottish Government before any final decisions are made.

27. When will the public be made aware of the consultation’s outcome?

This is entirely dependent on SRUC’s discussions with the Strategic Management Board and the Scottish Government.

28. How may I respond to the consultation about the future of Veterinary Disease Surveillance?

SRUC is running a consultation between 01 June and 10 July 2015. For further information please visit: [http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120107/veterinary_services/1520/veterinary_disease_surveillance_consultation](http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120107/veterinary_services/1520/veterinary_disease_surveillance_consultation)

Tuesday 07 July 2015