

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE CEREALS & OILSEEDS SECTOR COUNCIL MEETING  
HELD ON 24 MAY AT 8.30 A.M.  
AHDB BOARDROOM**

**PRESENT:**

Tom Clarke (Chair) (TC), David Bell (DB), Polly Davies (PD), Julius Deane (JD), Russell McKenzie (RM), Sarah Nightingale (SN), Cecilia Pryce (CP), James Standen (JS), Patrick Stephenson (PS), David Walston (DW)

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Millie Askew (MA), Ken Boyns (KB), Stephen Briggs (SB), David Eudall (DE), Tony Holmes (TH), Will Jackson, Sara Maslowski (SM), Ana Reynolds (AR), Tim Rycroft (TR), Alison Thomas (AT) (minutes), Jenna Watts (JW)

<b>CHAIR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS</b>
TC welcomed everyone to the meeting.
<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>
There were no apologies for absence.
<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>
No new declarations of interest were made.
<b>MINUTES FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 1 MARCH 2023</b>
The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting to be signed by the Chair.
<b>MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION POINTS FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 1 MARCH 2023</b>
Most actions had either been completed or were on the agenda for discussion. Clarification on actions arising from the last meeting and the Away Day in February was provided:
<b>GreatSoils</b> – work being undertaken on soils research had been shared with the council during the Project Monitoring meeting held on 9 May. It was agreed that a proposal on future work on soils would be provided later in the year, once the new Farming Systems Director and Head of Farming Systems & Agronomy were in post.
<b>Action: Proposal on future work on soils to be presented to the council later in the year.</b>
<b>Website</b> – WJ confirmed plans were in place to conduct a website development scoping exercise during the summer and explained that lack of resource and internal skills prevented earlier completion. The council expressed concern that longstanding issues with the website had still not been addressed and requested that the creation of a dynamic website, using external expertise if required, be prioritised. It was agreed that an update on timeline for delivery and costs would be provided to the council by WJ at its next meeting.
<b>Action: Timeline for delivery and costs of website development to be provided to the council by WJ at September meeting.</b>
<b>“Megatrends” concept:</b> discussions regarding the concept were continuing and ideas evolving. DE expected to be able to present a proposal to the council in September.
<b>Action: “Megatrends” concept to be presented to the council in September</b>



**Provision of evidence to policy makers:** it was confirmed that the directors and corporate affairs team were developing a centralised monitoring system to improve the co-ordination and publication of work to council members and levy payers.

## **RESEARCH/KE DELIVERY AND DEVELOPMENT**

KB gave a presentation setting out the proposed model for future delivery and development of research and KE, explaining that the proposal's success was dependent upon successful approval of a levy increase.

Discussion took place, and the following points were noted:

- AHDB should adopt a more aggressive stance in its approach to research work, applying pressure more effectively on behalf of levy payers to ensure their needs were met.
- the AHDB brand should be built to ensure it received due credit for its work and the position on IP should be revisited.
- where AHDB funded research, clear outputs should be required and monitor and strategic farm events used more effectively as platforms for researchers to showcase work to farmers
- the establishment of a research sub-committee was supported but the council requested full visibility of all research work considered by it (supported and unsupported)
- although in favour of levy payers' views being considered when deciding what work should be undertaken, the council noted that which decisions should be taken through a levy payer vote process needed careful thought and should be considered again in September, after deliberation by the research sub-committee.
- delivery of research and KE was fundamentally important and if a levy increase was not successfully secured, costs should be examined, and the council should consider making cuts elsewhere so as not to impede the implementation of this approach.

Forthcoming new legislation relating to Ergot was highlighted and it was agreed that the C&O risk register should be reviewed and updated as soon as possible to reflect this and other new risks to the industry.

### **Action: C&O risk register to be reviewed and updated as soon as possible**

The council confirmed that it was very supportive of the proposed direction of travel for R&KE as set out and unanimously agreed to the establishment of a research sub-committee, to consider the points listed above and to further refine and develop the approach. A revised proposal would be presented to the council for approval in September.

### **Action: The Research Sub-committee to be set up and a revised proposal presented to the council for approval in September.**

The council considered the short-term research priorities which had been identified for its previously approved spend of surplus reserves. It agreed that responsibility for a decision on the Glyphosate Resistance Rye Grass work should be delegated to the new research sub-committee. All other decision-making processes were approved as stated in the paper.

### **RL Review Update**

JW provided the Council with an update on recent RL review activity. Recommendations made by the consultant were still being evaluated and the summer events programme would be used to share findings and gather feedback from levy payers, following which a full set of recommendations would be put forward to the council and the RL Board for its consideration.

The majority of council members voted to approve the completion of rapid evidence assessments for fungicide inputs and variety nutrition requirements, requesting that the process be streamlined and speeded up where possible, to allow work on these consultant recommendations to progress at pace. Other potential areas of spend would be presented to the council for its formal consideration in September.

Discussion took place regarding AHDB's representation on the RL Board, its role as a consortium member in appointing the chair and some board members, and its ability to influence the decisions taken, given the level of funding it provided. **(Post meeting note: appointment/reappointment annually of the RL Board Chair, who is remunerated by AHDB, has since been confirmed as a joint act between**



AHDB and BSPB). The council emphasised the importance of the RL to AHDB and noted that partners contributed significant time, input, data and effort to the RL and that it was a genuine collaborative effort, albeit AHDB provided the cash funding for it to operate.

**Action: Review the AHDB representation on the RL Board**

#### ***Extension to Fungicide Performance Project***

JW drew attention to her paper setting out a proposal for a two-year extension to the fungicide performance project for wheat, barley and oilseed rape which was due to conclude on 31 March 2024. It was emphasised that the long-term future of the project would be considered as part of the IPM programme review.

Recognizing the importance of the work, the council unanimously supported the extension of the project but requested that this be on a 1 + 1 year contract basis to allow for a review, and that the contract should include a robust external communication clause. The council also requested that AHDB explore opportunities for partnership working and co-funding of work. KB confirmed this as a key area of focus for the new Farming Systems Director.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 7 – DIGITAL GRAIN PASSPORT (DGP)**

SB and DE provided the council with a comprehensive update on the digital grain passport and progress made following the establishment of the development and data working groups and overseen by the industry Leadership Group, chaired by SB.

Work to prepare the business case, using the template previously agreed by the council, was well underway. The timeline for its delivery was shared indicating that the business case would be built over harvest, presented to the Leadership Group in September for industry consultation in October/November, before being presented to the sector council for a final decision in December.

It was confirmed that Stephen Briggs would continue to chair the Leadership Group until a decision was taken on whether to proceed with the DGP. Tom Clarke would be regularly invited to attend its meetings.

The council was satisfied that progress was being made. The council reiterated its position that it would not decide on whether the DGP should proceed until it was presented with the full business case. It was agreed the council would receive a further update at its September meeting.

**Action: Council to receive an update on DGP at its September meeting**

#### **AGENDA ITEM 8 – CEREALS & OILSEEDS SECTOR PLAN – MEASURABLES & KPIs**

KB drew the council's attention to the first iteration of the RAG rated performance dashboard which was designed to help the council review AHDB's performance in achieving the goals set out in the sector plan. Comments on the format and content were invited.

Discussion took place during which the council:

- Questioned whether some of the RAG ratings were appropriate eg MI.
- Questioned whether expenditure in MI delivered sufficient reach to give value for money and payers and requested that the KPIs be reconsidered.
- Suggested that MI's valuable work to support non-growers eg supply chain levy payers and Defra should be emphasised and reflected.
- Questioned the value of Arable Business Groups and requested that the workstream title be changed,
- Requested that return on investment be made clearer.
- Requested that work be undertaken to develop the content of the Exports workstream.

The council concluded that it was broadly supportive of the format of the dashboard subject to some refinement. Given that MI had dominated the discussion, it was suggested and agreed that this area should be the first to be evaluated and that a small working group to include sector council member representation should meet to help scope out the evaluation specification.

**Action: Dashboard, KPIs and measurables to be refined**



**Action: Working Group to include sector council member representation to meet to discuss evaluation specification for MI**

## **CEREALS & OILSEEDS FINANCE UPDATE**

### ***Management Accounts***

TH reported on the financial position for the full year ending 31 March 2023

PD expressed her thanks to TH for the quality and clarity of his finance report.

### ***Update on HGCA Pension Scheme Valuation***

TH provided an update on negotiations with the scheme's trustees following the HGCA pension scheme triennial valuation dated 31 March 2023.

### ***9.3 Levy Collection Review***

It was agreed that a flow chart should be produced to give greater clarity of levy collection process.

### **Action: Cereals & Oilseeds sector levy collection flow chart to be produced**

KB highlighted Defra's decision following its consultation on changes to AHDB's statutory instrument to replace the existing fixed 5% administration levy deduction with a more flexible rate. This matter would be raised with industry stakeholders by the Chair and KB in their preliminary discussions about increasing the levy rates.

### **Action: Administration deduction to be raised with industry bodies**

## **LEVY RATE INCREASE**

KB drew attention to his paper and the draft business case setting out the rationale for a levy rate increase.

Discussion took place during which the council confirmed that it agreed with the key points and arguments contained within the business case. It requested that the language be simplified and refined, and the arguments presented more positively with greater emphasis on how the additional levy income would be spent in future, and not referencing what had gone before. It also agreed that the DGP should not be referenced in the levy rate business case as no decision had been taken, and emphasised the importance of a clear comms plan for DGP should the decision to proceed with it be taken. It was confirmed that drafts of the levy increase documentation would be shared with council members over the summer, in advance of them being finalised.

### **Action: Final drafts of the levy increase documentation to be shared with council members**

The council unanimously supported the proposed increase of 12p per tonne for cereals growers (and equivalent amounts for the other levies c. 26%) ideally with effect from 1 April 2024. It also requested that AHDB work with Defra when appropriate to change the Statutory Instrument to enable more frequent and flexible changes to the levy rate.

The Chair confirmed that he and KB would be meeting with key industry stakeholders to discuss the levy rate increase and he encouraged sector council members to begin socialising the prospect with their contacts.

### **Action: Levy Rate Increase case to be refined and circulated**

## **SECTOR COUNCIL MEMBER ROLES**

The Chair referred to a discussion which had taken place at dinner the previous evening regarding the role of the sector council and how its members might contribute more towards the work and success of AHDB, if they wished to. A slide listing specific areas of work where greater input from council members would be helpful was presented. It was agreed that the opportunity to support the evaluation of MI work should be added.

### **Action: MI Evaluation to be added to list of areas of work where council members might provide input**

The Chair advised the council of his intention to seek AHDB board approval for the appointment of a sector council vice-chair. If agreed, the vice-chair would not assume any AHDB main board responsibilities.



The Chair confirmed that he would contact individual council members to discuss their areas of interest and the extent to which they were able to provide support. To help inform discussions and give greater clarity about members' competences, AT would circulate a skills matrix for completion.

**Action: Chair to contact individual council members to discuss opportunities for increased involvement**

**Action: Skills matrix to be circulated to council members for completion**

Council members were reminded that they were remunerated for up to 24 days per annum. Any involvement in activities which would result in this number of days being exceeded would require prior agreement of the Sector Lead or Sector Chair. The Chair confirmed that the Remuneration Committee, of which he was a member, was holding discussions regarding sector council expenses and remuneration.

The Chair reported that recruitment of a new Cereals & Oilseeds sector council member was underway with applications from maltsters and levy payers in Northern Ireland in particular being encouraged. Links to all sector council vacancy advertisements would be circulated and council members asked to draw the opportunities to the attention of any contacts who might be interested in applying.

**Action: Links to Sector Council vacancy advertisements to be circulated and council members to alert contacts to the opportunities**

## **SECTOR LEAD'S REPORT**

KB requested that his paper be taken as read but drew attention to the approach which AHDB had received from the British Farming Union requesting support for the exploration and potential delivery of a new, lighter touch assurance scheme for grains and oilseeds. The council confirmed its willingness to consider any legitimate requests from levy payers and as such would be happy to receive more details of BFU's proposal at a future meeting, once the Executive had received further clarification in writing to facilitate a better understanding of the request.

### ***Exports Review***

The report was taken as read. DB, CP and SN were thanked for their support with the review to-date.

The council was advised that discussions would take place over the summer with the industry to review the export work it required AHDB to undertake in future. A formal proposal on future C&O export work would be presented to the council at its September meeting.

### ***What Works Centre***

KB provided the council with a brief update on recent discussions regarding the What Works Centre and highlighted similarities between the approach to that concept and the approved approach to the future development of research and KE. It was suggested and agreed that AHDB should continue to have conversations with stakeholders about WWC and that if there was support and clear benefit for levy payers, WWC could provide an opportunity to trial the new way of working if funding from Defra could be secured.

## **COUNCIL MEMBER & LEVY FEEDBACK**

No levy payer feedback was reported by council members.

## **GOVERNANCE SCHEDULE AND DRAFT TIMELINE 2023/24**

The governance schedule and timeline mapping out key C&O activity for 2023 and 2024 were provided for information.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

As an active council member, RM was surprised to have been invited to participate in a survey examining engagement with AHDB. It was agreed that KB would advise the Comms team and request that sector council members should be removed from researchers' contact lists.

Plans for AHDB's presence at the Cereals and Groundswell were progressing. The core messaging on its stand, which would be smaller than in previous years, would focus on RL, RB209 and carbon markets.



<b>DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tuesday 26 September 2023</li><li>• Wednesday 6 December 2023</li></ul>
<b>CLOSE</b>
The Chair closed the meeting at 2.00pm

