

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE CEREALS & OILSEEDS SECTOR COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 8.30 A.M.
CHESFORD GRANGE HOTEL**

PRESENT:

Tom Clarke (Chair) (TC), David Bell (DB), Polly Davies (PD), Russell McKenzie (RM), Cecilia Pryce (CP), James Standen (JS), David Walston (DW)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Allan Bowie (AB), Ken Boyns (KB), David Eudall (DE), Tony Holmes (TH), Will Jackson (WJ), Sara Maslowski (SM), Richard Orr (RO), Ana Reynolds (AR), Fred Sworder (FS), Alison Thomas (AT) (minutes), Jenna Watts (JW)

CHAIR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular Allan Bowie and Richard Orr who had recently been appointed to the Council. Both were in attendance as observers without voting rights pending formal ratification of their appointment by levy payers in November. Fred Sworder, Board Apprentice, was also attending as an observer.

It was noted that CP was only able to be present for the early part of the meeting after which the Council would not be quorate. Approval of decisions required on matters discussed during her absence would be sought via email after the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Tony Bell, Julius Deane, Sarah Nightingale and Patrick Stephenson.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No new declarations of interest were made.

MINUTES FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 24 MAY 2023

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting to be signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION POINTS FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 24 MAY 2023

Most actions had either been completed or were on the agenda for discussion. Updates on others were provided as follows:

Website Development – WJ reported that plans for improvements to the website were already underway and had recently been shared with the AHDB board. The new Data & Architecture Director, Dave Craig, would be closely involved in the project which would incur significant cost due to the need for both redesign and improvement to infrastructure. The importance of an effective website was fully appreciated but of paramount importance in redesigning the site, was a need to fully understand the needs of its end users which would take time. A relaunch of the site was planned for summer 2024, though some changes would be made in the interim to improve navigation. The Council was given an assurance that staff working on the project would have the required skills and that the website was, and would continue to be, fully secure.

C&O Levy Collection Flowchart – a flowchart had been produced and would be circulated to the Council via email following the meeting.

Action: AT to circulate C&O levy collection flowchart to the council



Administration Levy Deduction – KB confirmed that letters had been drafted to send to trade associations and those who collected levy on its behalf regarding possible changes to the level of deduction. These would be issued when appropriate.

Sector Council Roles/Involvement – The Chair confirmed that he had spoken to some members of the council regarding increasing their involvement in areas of work. It was noted that DB would be taking on the role of Vice-Chair of the Council and lead the review of RB209, JS would Chair the Research Committee and RM would provide representation on the RL Board.

LEVY RATE INCREASE

The Council's attention was drawn to the core levy increase comms materials which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. In addition, a slide was presented by KB to clarify queries which had been raised around funding and explain how the gross levy increase of c£2.9m (depending on the size of harvest) might be allocated in 2024/25 if the levy increase was approved.

The Council approved the comms materials subject to two minor amendments: that the front cover photograph of "Funding your Future" was replaced and that the language in the slides and document was updated to reflect reserves would be used in 2024/25 to support the continuation of existing services.

An update was provided by the Chair and KB on recent stakeholder engagement and feedback from discussions was provided. The importance of securing the support of the devolved administrations and the farming unions was highlighted. The council was given an assurance that meetings with NFU, FUW, UFU and NFUS were taking place and that there were regular discussions with the Defra relationship team and devolved administrations.

WJ provided an overview of the comms strategy for publicising and gaining letters of support for the proposed levy increases between 4 October 2023 when the campaign would go live and its closing date of 17 November 2023.

The Council was broadly supportive but questioned plans to stage a live Q&A event on 9 November. It was emphasised by WJ that this was just one element of an overarching plan which would include press coverage, podcasts and other on-farm event opportunities for engagement with levy payers, but that it would be important in demonstrating to Defra and others that AHDB was actively listening and giving levy payers a chance to have their say. After debate, the Council concluded that it would support the event, having confidence in the Chair to work with the staff to deliver a modest but authentic event which would encourage farmer-to-farmer engagement.

It was emphasised that Sector Council members had an important role to play in engaging with levy payers about the levy increase and that sector council representation at the autumn programme of KE events would be arranged.

Action: Sector Council Member representation at autumn programme of KE events to be arranged

Discussion took place regarding the potential impact on AHDB if the levy increase was not approved. It was agreed that the Council should discuss this further in December and, if necessary, at its meeting in spring 2024, should consider future funding projections, a future operating model and potential future funding sources.

Action: Impact of failure to secure levy increase to be discussed at December meeting

RL REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

JW provided context to her report outlining the process which had been followed since November 2022 to conduct the RL Review and the key areas for improvements and development which had been identified.

The Council was pleased to learn that RM would be joining the RL Board, alongside PS and JW, believing this would strengthen representation and ensure levy payers' voices were heard.

Discussion took place regarding the importance of co-ordinated KE in ensuring successful delivery and implementation of the RL review recommendations. This was acknowledged by the executive who gave an assurance that the research and KE teams were already working more closely and very



effectively together. In addition, the Comms team were closely involved in development of the comms strategy and, whilst there was still work to be done, progress was being made.

AB highlighted that other organisations were delivering commercial products and services to farmers and growers and emphasised that AHDB should avoid duplicating work to prevent levy payers effectively paying twice for work. KB acknowledged this and confirmed that AHDB was seeking to strengthen and foster existing relationships with such organisations including, for example, NIAB, so that it could work more effectively in partnership with these bodies in future, ensuring both parties received due credit for their efforts whilst striving to meet levy payers' needs.

The Council requested an update on progress on the two rapid evidence assessments for fungicide programmes and nutrient use which had been approved in May. It was confirmed that development work had been done but neither had been commissioned yet due to pressure on the team and workload. A report on progress would be provided at the October 2023 meeting.

Attention was drawn to the eight RL review recommendations. The top three priorities and proposed activities for addressing them were outlined. These were:

1. Improve communication of the RL
2. Provide information on the performance of varieties under lower inputs
3. Better recognize the importance of pest and disease resistance

It was confirmed that activities to address the remaining 5 priorities would be presented to the Council in December 2023.

The Council members in the room approved the priority order and associated activities as outlined in the paper.

EXPORTS STRATEGY

DE provided context to his paper outlining current C&O export work, the outcomes of the review which had taken place over the summer with key stakeholders and proposals to adopt a new strategy for future C&O export activity.

The proposals were debated with the Council emphasising that the Shape the Future campaign results had shown that levy payers valued work on exports and that it was important AHDB could demonstrate delivery in this area.

The Council confirmed that whilst it was broadly supportive of the direction of travel outlined in the paper, activities should be more specific and targeted. The Council requested that more detail, clarity and articulation of the role AHDB could effectively play to deliver benefits to levy payers through its exports work and requested that an update be provided at its meeting in March 2024.

Action: Further detail, clarity and articulation of AHDB's role in exports to be presented in March 2024

The Council acknowledged and was supportive of structural changes which the executive would be implementing to transfer responsibility for C&O exports work to the Economics & Analysis Director.

CEREALS EVENT & GROUNDSWELL 2024

MG gave an overview of AHDB's activity at the Cereals and Groundswell events in 2023. He outlined the practical improvements which were proposed for its presence at the Cereals event in 2024 which included an enhanced stand design, more central location, and better presentations and demonstrations to boost opportunities for levy payer engagement.

The Council was supportive of the proposals outlined but emphasised that AHDB's presence at events needed to be relevant, beneficial to the majority of its levy payers and cost effective.

DIGITAL GRAIN PASSPORT (DGP)

DE provided an update on DGP developments explaining that some of the content and the timeline in his paper had been superseded following a meeting of the industry Leadership Group on Friday 22 September.

Work to finalise the business case was ongoing and this was likely to be in the public domain from early November, when the Sector Council would have an opportunity to examine it.



The Chair reported that AHDB was being asked to own and deliver the operating model. He had sought and obtained the AHDB board's approval for Sarah Pumfrett, Chair of ARAC, to attend a future Council meeting to advise on risks associated with this.

The Council reaffirmed its position that it would consider the business case and a request for funding when presented by the Leadership Group but would need to be confident that the proposal had the support of the majority of the industry and that any funds allocated would deliver value for money to its levy payers.

DASHBOARDS – MEASURABLES & KPIs

Attention was drawn to the workstream dashboard with the executive acknowledging that there was still work to be done to develop it further. Staff were engaged in the process, but progress had been delayed due to competing priorities and staff absence during the holiday season. The dashboard would be refined, and a RAG status applied to all workstreams prior to being presented to the Council in December 2023.

Action: Dashboard to be refined further to apply RAG status to all workstreams prior to presentation to Council in December 2023.

The Council requested that greater emphasis be placed on the IPM and Reputation workstreams and that in future and for ease of reference, KPIs should be included within individual council papers to support performance monitoring.

Action: KPIs to be included within individual council papers to support performance monitoring

SM was thanked for her work to date with the council recognising that the dashboard and KPIs would enable them to track and challenge performance more effectively going forwards.

MI Evaluation

DE drew attention to his report and in particular the aims of the MI evaluation and its scope which had been drawn up following consultation with SN and DW.

Debate took place regarding the inclusion of analysis of the accuracy of dials on market reports and/or their accuracy when compared to commercial providers of the same information, and whether such analysis would allow clear conclusions to be drawn. Following discussion, the Council concluded that the element should be included since it was important that AHDB provided not only independent but, more importantly, accurate information, and the analysis might indicate that resource spent on this work would be better deployed elsewhere.

On agreement of the final scope, it was confirmed that the opportunity to tender for the work would be advertised on the open market. It was suggested and agreed that the successful tenderer should be invited to report their findings directly to the Council in the Spring.

The Council members in the room approved the aims and scope of the MI evaluation and the delegation of its authority to DW and SN to work with the executive to finalise the scope prior to the tender being advertised.

CEREALS & OILSEEDS FINANCE UPDATE

Management Accounts

TH provided an update on the latest financial position reporting as at 31 August 2023.

The Council commended TH on the clarity of his report and the level of detail provided for each workstream.

SECTOR LEAD'S REPORT

The report was taken as read.

KB provided background to the United Kingdom Cereal Pathogen Virulence Survey (UKCPVS) explaining that work was already underway to establish an advisory/review group to oversee development of recommendations following an independent evaluation of the project in 2023 which had concluded that whilst the project delivered value for agronomists and breeders, the direct benefit to levy payers could be increased. To ensure continuity of service whilst the recommendations were implemented it was proposed that the project be extended by one further year (until March 2025).



This was approved by the Council members in the meeting room, but on the basis that the research committee would consider it in future and Council members were asked for volunteers to sit on a review group to evaluate it before the research committee considers it.

COUNCIL MEMBER AND LEVY PAYER FEEDBACK

No levy payer feedback was reported by council members.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was confirmed that AHDB's Grain Market Outlook Conference would take place on 28 November 2023 at York Racecourse. Further details would be made available on AHDB's website later this week and a marketing campaign already underway to promote the event to levy payers in the north-east.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- Monday 16 October 2023 (Virtual)
- Wednesday 6 December 2023

CLOSE

The Chair closed the meeting at 2.00pm

