

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE CEREALS & OILSEEDS (C&O) SECTOR COUNCIL  
MEETING  
HELD ON FRIDAY 7 MARCH 2025 AT 8.30AM  
AHDB BOARD ROOM**

**PRESENT:**

Tom Clarke (Chair) (TC), David Bell (DB) (Vice-Chair), Allan Bowie (AB), Matthew Curry (MC), Julius Deane (JD), (via MS Teams), Russell McKenzie (RM), Sarah Nightingale (SN), Richard Orr (RO), Cecilia Pryce (CP) (by TEAMS), James Standen (JS), Patrick Stephenson (PS)

**APOLOGIES:** Polly Davies (PD), David Walston (DW)

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sarah Woolford (SW), Sarah James (note taker), Nicholas Saphir (NS) (Item 3 by TEAMS), Will Jackson (WJ) (Item 13 by TEAMS), Roseanne Thomas (RT) (Item 13 by TEAMS), Jenna Watts (JW) (Item 14), Ken Boyns (KB) (Item 16), James Taylor (JT) (Item 16), David Eudall (DE) (Items 11 and 15), Tony Holmes (TH) (Item 9,12), Colin (Turner (CT) (Item 12), Amanda Bennett (AB) (Item17), Graham Wilkinson (GW) (until lunch), Rebecca Loveday (all meeting), Janine Hayter (all meeting)

<b>AGENDA ITEM 1 – CHAIR’S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION</b>
The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He welcomed JH and RL who were joining to introduce their new roles at AHDB and stay for the duration of the meeting as observers.
<b>AGENDA ITEM 2 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>
Apologies received from PD and DW
<b>AGENDA ITEM 3 – Farewell – Nicholas Saphir</b>
NS advised the council that he leaves his post as chair at the end of the month and the process of appointing his successor is well advanced. NS gave his thanks to the chair and the C&O Sector Council for the significant role they play within AHDB, and he has enjoyed the relationship. NS was grateful to the council for the opportunity to say farewell but his commitment to agriculture will continue. The council expressed their thanks to NS for his hard work and dedication and the chair commented on the sterling service and the significant achievements made at AHDB under his leadership.
<b>AGENDA ITEM 4 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>
No new declarations of interest were made.
<b>AGENDA ITEM 5 – MINUTES FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 17 January 2025</b>
The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2025 were approved as an accurate record
<b>AGENDA ITEM 6 – MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION POINTS FROM THE COUNCIL MEETINGS HELD ON 17 JANUARY 2024</b>
Most action points were completed or on future agendas. No points were raised.
<b>AGENDA ITEM 7 – INTRODUCTIONS</b>
JH thanked the council for the invitation to join the meeting and sees her role as an opportunity to support the organisation and bring to life culture and transformational change. There is great talent across the organisation, with staff motivated to deliver for the ley payer and she sees her opportunity to bring to life shared standards and processes, reward, recognise and drive performance to support effective transformation.
RL thanked the council for the opportunity to join the meeting being three months into her role and sees it as very much ‘hand in glove’ with JH. Drawing on her experiences in legal, central government,

compliance and corporate services, JH in working with the leadership team and staff, will drive compliance and effective decision making within AHDB.

The chair thanked JH and RL for attending the meeting, introducing themselves to council, and identifying many things the council have raised in the past and it will be good to see it now coming into fruition.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 8 – CEREALS & OILSEEDS SECTOR BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 24/25**

GW talked through the 2024/25 Key Essentials and Activities referring to the status. GW advised the council there is two months left on the plan and confirmed the teams are behind the ambitious plan and there is a total of one hundred and thirty-two activities with ninety-one completed. Of the forty-one in progress thirty-two are on track and nine require extra focus. GW is confident that where many areas on the plan are green and on track will turn blue to completed and from amber, extra focus to green on track.

SW talked the council through the four Essentials 1. Trusted variety and product testing, 2. independent research and analysis, 3. Knowledge Exchange and 4. Strengthen our work across the supply chain - there were no areas of concern and the Council were given the confidence that status in relation to the activities was accurate and relevant. The council made no comment or question in relation to the status and Chair gave thanks for the comprehensive update.

***Action: Inclusion of the workstreams to the business plan for implementation in 2025/26 and include the financial year into the pages (TH)***

#### **AGENDA ITEM 9 – CEREALS & OILSEEDS SECTOR FINANCE UPDATE 24/25**

No concerns raised around current financials, and the council commented on forecasting which will be covered by DE – agenda item 11. There was a detailed discussion on staff costs and now being attributed to workstreams due to the changes in Agresso and timesheets.

***Action: Change to the pie charts to include Core Shared Services (going forward not aligned to the Shape the Future) (TH)***

#### **AGENDA ITEM 10 – CEREALS & OILSEEDS SECTOR BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 25/26**

GW expressed to the Council a key aim is to make the Business Plan 25/26 sharper and even more representative of the work we do.

SW talked through the four pillars focusing on the related activity, KPI's and measures to Unlock Value for Cereals & Oilseeds.

1. Supporting arable farming to maximise return
2. Deliver independent research and evidence for the arable farming sector
3. Strengthen and develop co-operation among stakeholders
4. Anticipating future challenges

The **council approved the plan** and the chair thanked SW and the team for their hard work in producing a targeted and measured draft plan to council. There was an overall message to empower staff and engagement in the field and the council provided some considerations for SW:

- Support Arable Farming
- OSR be explicit on the activity and role of AHDB. Head of the curve thinking around plant protein – going forward levy/R&D work. Investigate research opportunities
- Deliver Independent Research
- KPIs to be stronger around Fungicide Recognition and Roundtable discussions
- Piece of work around understanding labels on crop protection – simplify and watchouts for farmers to be made aware of
- Strengthen Stakeholder Cooperation
- Crop Protection regulation need to ensure AHDB engages with more than the parties specified
- Anticipate Future Challenges
- HRMC real focus for C&O on exports and imports with extrapolating data faster but also execution out to the market from AHDB

***Action: to look at ambition levels that may impact plan and timings (GW & SW)***



**Action: Strategic discussion on 'Oilseeds' (ALL)**

**Action: to review Farmbench and bring recommendations to council (SW)**

**Action: Council were invited to feed into the review (Recommended List) and contact PS**

**Action: To ensure we have listed all relationships and additional contacts within the activity - Representing levy payers in crop protection and regulation in the UK. SW to check in with SN for her input**

#### **AGENDA ITEM 11 – C&O LEVY BACKGROUND AND FORECASTS**

The Chair welcomed DE and, on the Councils, behalf congratulated and wished him good luck in his new job role. DE explained to the council the levy income forecast process, stressing on its complexity in relation to data sources, insights, production volatility and other variables such as weather. DE also pointed out the complication on predictions due to the cross over of crop years and financial years. The financial year is to March and crop year July to June. DE further explained confidence levels and that they are built into the estimates and 95% confident that predictions are going to be in range of 3-4%, with a swing either side. The Council thanked DE for the insight and the discussion raised confidence in the forecasts. There was an acceptance of the need to think in terms of a broad range (multiple year total) rather than a specific year and the Chair confirmed the discussion is very helpful to assist in the making of budgetary decisions. The Council was satisfied that the levy income forecasts were conservative, but they were not pessimistic. Many were pessimistic about the upcoming harvest, but further confidence would be sought by managing expenditure under our control within the budget, rather than relying solely on making the forecast income lower.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 12 – 3-year BUDGET**

SW took the Council through key messages: The **Council approved the budget** with no changes and agreed to the 10% efficiency target.

**Action: The Council were also aligned with DDAT and would like to see funds back for website and drive efficiencies. SW to report back**

#### **AGENDA ITEM 13 – COMMUNICATIONS – STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

WJ and RT went through the fully worked Communications Strategy proposal. The **Council agreed the strategy** and are keen to start seeing the deliverables once the AHDB Board signs off on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 14 – R&KE NEW PROJECTS**

JW talked the Council through Winter wheat varietal choice and agronomy for improved nitrogen use efficiency project **Council approved**

JW went through the Developing guidance for winter wheat variety blends on UK farms project starting August 2025 for 48 months. **Council approved**

JW informed Council of the two research projects on-hold pending further development, co-funding, and budget position:

1. Optimising cover crop mixes for weed control
2. Developing a comprehensive management programme for CSFB in oilseed rape

**Council now aware** of the two projects on hold

JW assured Council that opportunities will be investigated during project development for partnerships & co-funding. The council thanked JW and were keen for ways to extend the budget on projects to be explored.

SW gave a Contractual Update on IP to the Council and explained the work currently taking place with our Legal and Procurement departments to understand current standard terms and conditions – AHDB, or if they are negotiated individually based on contract requirements and/or parties, work through future contract negotiations and revised standard terms & conditions if required.

**Action: Update to Council as work progresses (SW)**



## **AGENDA ITEM 15 – SAOS REPORT UPDATE**

The Chair requested DB to leave the room due to a potential conflict of interest

DE updated the Council and **Council agreed the proposal**

**Action: Council to be kept informed on progress of negotiations (DE/SW)**

## **AGENDA ITEM 16 – RESPONSE TO FARM ASSURANCE REVIEW**

KB advised council of the purpose of the discussion:

1. To obtain Sector Council feedback on our analysis of the FAR recommendations
2. To outline our plan and resource implications
3. To ascertain the Sector Council's view on questions raised

The Council on Farm Assurance are aligned but costs and bringing most parties on the journey is imperative to AHDB. **The Council agreed** on the next steps relating to point one from the Farm Assurance work.

**Action: to write the specification for the new report and include the sector council in agreeing/sign off after lessons learnt (KB/JT)**

## **AGENDA ITEM 17 – RB209 – NEXT STEPS**

AB presented a review of the Nutrient Management Guide (RB209) with a focus on Priority topics identified from levy-payer and stakeholder feedback and Recommendations for activities proposed, now with RB209 Review Committee. AB highlighted to the Council related activity for Cereals & Oilseeds R&KE. The Chair thanked AB for the comprehensive update.

## **AGENDA ITEM 18 – DGP Update**

SW advised Council of new video available from the communication team and that business case version three is going to Defra/Minister over the coming months

**Action: Link to new video to be shared with the Council (SW)**

## **AGENDA ITEM 19 – FUTURE MEETING DATES**

**Face to Face:**

a. Wednesday 18 June 2025 - SCM

**TEAMS Online: Informal Update**

a. Monday 24 March 2025 - Strategy Session

b. Wednesday 7 May 2025 - Update Session

## **AGENDA ITEM 20 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

20.1/25 SW – Administration Levy. The Council were advised that AHDB are seeking further legal guidance from Defra in relation to the duties covered under the Administration Deduction and AHDB to sign an NDA to ensure information shared by businesses is not disclosed under a FOI.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 2:45pm.

