

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE CEREALS & OILSEEDS (C&O) SECTOR COUNCIL
MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 8.30AM
AHDB BOARD ROOM**

PRESENT:

Tom Clarke (Chair) (TC), David Bell (DB) (Vice-Chair), Tony Bell (TB), Allan Bowie (AB), Polly Davies (PD) (via MS Teams), Julius Deane (JD), Russell McKenzie (RM), Sarah Nightingale (SN), Richard Orr (RO), Cecilia Pryce (CP), James Standen (JS)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Matthew Curry (MC), David Eudall (DE) (Item 13), Tony Holmes (TH), Ollie Johnson (OJ) (Item 9), Ana Reynolds (AR) (Item 10), Roseanne Thomas (RT) (Item 16), Alison Thomas (AT) (minutes), Jenna Watts (JW) (Item 11), Graham Wilkinson (GW) (Items 1-5, 7 & 14), Sarah Woolford (SW)

AGENDA ITEM – CHAIR’S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and in particular Sarah Woolford who had recently joined AHDB as Cereals & Oilseeds Sector Director, and Matthew Curry who was in attendance as an observer, pending ratification of his appointment to the Sector Council by levy payers in the autumn.

Members were reminded that, having served for six years on the Sector Council, this would be Tony Bell’s last meeting. The Chair formally conveyed his thanks to Tony for the significant contribution he had made during this time.

AGENDA ITEM – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Patrick Stephenson and Ken Boyns.

AGENDA ITEM – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair advised that his farm had been successfully selected to participate in the baselining pilot, however he would be declining the opportunity which had the potential to present a conflict of interest. He encouraged other council members in this position to also carefully consider their involvement in the project.

JS also declared an interest as his farm would be hosting three AHDB events this winter with the C&O KE team.

No other new declarations of interest were made.

AGENDA ITEM – MINUTES FROM THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 4 JUNE AND 8 JULY 2024

Referring to the minutes of 8 July, the Chair requested that “Commodity Digital Document Exchange” be amended to “Grain Data Platform”.

Subject to this amendment, the minutes of the meetings held on 4 June and 8 July were approved as an accurate record to be signed by the Chair.



AGENDA ITEM – MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION POINTS FROM THE COUNCIL MEETINGS HELD ON 4 JUNE AND 8 JULY 2024

The matters arising and action points were taken as read with most having either been completed or on future meeting agendas for discussion.

AGENDA ITEM – CEREALS & OILSEEDS SECTOR FINANCIAL REPORT

The financial report for the year ending 31 August 2024 was taken as read. A verbal update on the financial position was provided by TH.

Careful consideration would need to be given to the priorities of the sector when setting the budgets for 2025/26. The first draft of the 2025/26 business plan would help inform these decisions.

The Council recognised that there were a number of variables which might affect levy income including, for example, size of harvest, the impact of the weather and SFI and it was agreed that it would be helpful for analysis of different scenarios to be provided.

Action – Build or utilise a model with variables that can be manipulated to show the impact of seasonal conditions, SFI and reduced plantings (Rapeseed) (SW, DE and TH)

Council members welcomed the level of detail provided in the finance report was helpful, it was agreed that in future.

Action: Workstream financials to be added as an attachment. (TH and SW)

It was also agreed that work would be undertaken to develop visual chart on key metrics to assist the Council and cater for unique styles.

Action: Visual charts on key metrics that are relevant to assist Sector Council visually to cater for unique styles. (TH, TC and SW)

AGENDA ITEM – BUSINESS PLAN

GW gave a presentation providing an update on progress made against the 2024/25 business plan. He was pleased to report that 75% of activities were on track with only one, “Strengthen our work across the Supply Chain” in Cereals & Oilseeds receiving a red RAG rating. This was due to ongoing discussions about the digital passport.

The importance of strengthening stakeholder management across all sectors was noted. The creation of a stakeholder roadmap for C&O would be a particular area of focus for SW as the newly appointed C&O Sector Director.

Action: Stakeholder Roadmap and engagement to commence (SW)

GW gave an assurance that all staff were kept informed of progress against the business plan monthly. Work was already underway to establish a new vision for AHDB in December and to bring about culture change within the organisation. Work on the 2025/26 plan had also commenced and the Sector Council was assured by GW that it would have the opportunity to contribute to that.

GW confirmed that gender gap was being dealt with by the Remuneration & Nominations Committee and he was pleased to report that there had been a significant improvement in recent years, as evidenced by the Fair Pay Report contained in the 2023/24 Annual Report & Accounts and the appointment of more women to senior roles within the organisation. It was agreed that graphical representation of the progress made would be shared with the Council.

Action: Graphical representation of the progress made in improving the gender pay gap position to be shared to wider team and look at alternative avenues. (TH, SW and RT)

Emphasising the importance of consistency and continuity for staff and of the sector directors and engagement teams working effectively together, a question was raised by RO regarding changes made to the staffing structures below the Leadership Team. GW outlined these, explaining how some teams would be situated within the C&O directorate and others in the Centre of Excellence. It was agreed that an organisation chart depicting the new structure would be circulated to the Council and that in future more should be done to keep Council members informed of changes.

Action: Organisation charts depicting C&O teams to be circulated to the Council and communications improved to keep Council members informed of changes (SW)



AGENDA ITEM – RB209

DB reminded the Council that a large-scale strategic review of RB209 on behalf of all sectors was currently underway. A Steering Group which he chaired was overseeing the work and its aim was to ensure that the RB209 continued to meet levy payers' needs, was more accessible to them and that its data was accurately interpreted.

OJ gave a slide presentation summarising the outcomes of the review to-date, developments around the Defra Nutrient Management Planning Tool and next steps.

The Council was also made of aware of stakeholders' perceptions of RB209.

Action: Understand the application under the Wales and Northern Ireland authority. (OJ and DB)

The Council was advised Horticulture and Potatoes; these sectors remained relevant to RB209 and were still involved. The AHDB Board had approved the use of some residual potato levy funds to support RB209 work.

AGENDA ITEM – SUMMER EVENTS RECOMMENDATION

OJ drew attention to his paper and outlined in more detail his recommendations for the AHDB summer events programme which included a continued presence at Cereals but at a lesser cost, building on the success of Groundswell, and the use of RL trial sites to host more regional events and attract levy payers who do not currently attend AHDB events. Data collection would be undertaken at the event to understand the demographic and, more importantly, levy payers.

Discussion took place during which some council members questioned the value in AHDB having a presence at Cereals, despite there being recognition that the stand and its content this year was much improved. A motion was proposed that AHDB should withdraw from the event altogether.

PD commented on the success of the "Women in Cereals" feature staged at Cereals 2024 and requested that this be repeated and built upon in 2025.

The Council emphasised again the importance of ensuring that AHDB and its brand received due recognition for its RL work and highlighted the challenge AHDB would face in making such trial plot events unique and attractive to levy payers. Council members highlighted the excellent and knowledgeable talks given by Mark Bollebakker, AHDB Senior Crop Production System Scientist, and encouraged staff to use his expertise in front of levy payer audiences wherever possible. They also suggested AHDB should seek to work more often in partnership with other stakeholders and organisations.

Action: Collaborate with crop health and research on content in the RL Trials to deliver an overview to the sector council including locations and an engagement plan inclusive of communication plan. (OJ, AR, JW, AV).

Action: Explore partnership opportunities for AHDB in the field - share with sector council. (OJ)

Action: Other trial events occurring in regions utilising AHDB Trials from providers ensuring AHDB branding and KEs are present – solutions and outcomes to the sector council. (OJ, JW)

Action: Develop a BI map of all events for internal staff only at this stage and to share with the sector council (OJ, AR)

AGENDA ITEM – RESEARCH & KE

AR reported that at its meeting in August, the Research & KE Sub-Committee had agreed to recommend to the Council the approval of four new project, as follows:

- Fusarium mycotoxins in oats
- Biopesticide performance test-pilot
- Crop physiology – determining variety selection under low-input farming systems
- Decision support for Barley Yellow Dwarf Virus (BYDV)

The Council confirmed its approval for all four projects to proceed.



The Sub-committee had also approved via email since its meeting, staff evaluations and the commissioning of projects in respect of an update to ergot management guidance and the UK Cereal Pathogen Virulence Survey (UKCPVS).

The importance of raising the profile of the research being undertaken and of communicating it widely and effectively to levy payers was emphasised by the Council. An assurance was given that teams would continue to work collaboratively to maximise awareness of the investment being made and the value derived to levy payers.

Action: Teams to continue to work collaboratively with a communication plan (all channels) and engagement from the Crop Health and KE team to maximise awareness and investment. (OJ, RT, AR, JW, SW)

AR confirmed that work had already commenced on the creation of a strategic roadmap for each stage of a research project which would include a communications plan. It was agreed that this should be reviewed and approved by the Sector Council at its meeting in November.

Action: Strategic Plan for the future for the Sector Council inclusive of a communication plan through the stages of a research project - update to be delivered. (AR, AV, OJ, WJ)

AGENDA ITEM – RECOMMENDED LIST REVIEW UPDATE

JW gave a slide presentation updating the Council on the latest decisions taken by the RL committees in respect of winter crop sowing, and progress made against the high priority objectives identified following the RL Review undertaken in 2023.

The Council was also informed of plans to provide and communicate more comprehensive information on RL trials, bringing the RL protocols to life by following the Norfolk winter wheat trial site throughout the 2024/25 growing season.

It was emphasised by the Council that all too often third parties took credit for the excellent work being done by AHDB on the Recommended List and to help address this, it was agreed that trial provider contracts should be reviewed to ensure their terms included support for AHDB and the need to recognize its brand.

Action: Review trial provider contracts to ensure terms are included to support AHDB deliveries – brand, engagement with KE teams and requests for use outside of AHDBs requirements. (JW)

AGENDA ITEM – MI EVALUATION & ACTION PLAN

DE provided an update on progress following the recommendations of the Teevan report, as discussed with the Council at its meeting in June. He explained that there would be two phases to the action plan with the first focusing on people and staff development.

In recent months, the team had successfully recruited new staff with strong commercial expertise and acumen who could help deliver the more operational elements of the action plan identified for phase two.

Discussion took place regarding the challenges faced by DE in appointing staff with the appropriate skills and experience. Conversations were ongoing with the HR department.

The Council also discussed with DE the key learnings he had taken from the evaluation which included a deeper understanding of how people receive and consume information delivered by AHDB and the importance of disseminating that information in a timely and confident manner through multiple channels. It would take time to establish a team with that ability, but progress was being made and, in time, they could begin to focus more on why particular activities should (or shouldn't) be undertaken.

The Council requested that SW should review the C&O MI budget and present her findings to a future meeting.

Action: SW to review C&O MI budget and present her findings to a future meeting

AGENDA ITEM – RED TRACTOR & ASSURANCE

DE reported that the independent evaluation of UK farm assurance schemes continued to progress well with meetings still ongoing to gather evidence.



Council members were thanked for their feedback on the draft AHDB submission to the Commission which was being incorporated into the final version. The Commissioner's final report was expected to be released in early December.

DE also provided an update on the gathering of assurance methods in the combinable crops supply chain being undertaken by SAOS, which was proving more complex than first thought. Work was ongoing to ensure the report provided sufficient clarity and clear conclusions.

Council members emphasised the importance of this piece of work and that the report must offer explanations rather than justifications. The council requested sight of the draft report before it was finalised. It was agreed that this would be circulated.

Action: Draft report on assurance in combinable crops supply chain to be circulated to the Council

It was also stressed by PD that it represented an excellent opportunity for AHDB to demonstrate the value it was delivering for levy payers, and this must be capitalised upon. DE provided assurance that a comms plan was in place.

AGENDA ITEM – DIGITAL PASSPORT

The Chair reported that the industry Leadership Group was now fully aware of the Sector Council's position on Digital Discussions were ongoing with the Leadership Group but to move the project forward, the Council would need to consider some key points and determine whether or not it was prepared to move from its previously agreed position.

SW gave a presentation after which the council was asked to determine what role it wished to play in the ownership group, how it might seek a resolution with stakeholders (particularly those in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Leadership Group), and the extent to which the digital passport system might be used to capture additional data in the future.

After debate, the Council concluded that it wished to maintain its previously agreed position and continue to assert this to the Leadership Group. It agreed that:

- If levy payer funds were to be used for the ongoing operation of the digital passport system once built, AHDB must have a more powerful role on the Ownership Group and not be an equal partner. However, AHDB would be willing to discuss with the Leadership Group and explore alternatives to the proposed consortium in an attempt to move forward constructively.
- The support of all four nations was essential to the success of the project and AHDB should seek to achieve a resolution from key stakeholders, including Scotland and Northern Ireland on the communication plan, engagement and AHDB's future role. Individual stakeholder meetings would be arranged to take place and reaffirm AHDB's position prior to the next Leadership Group meeting.
- AHDB must state its position on digital passport clearly and communicate this effectively to levy payers.
- AHDB should maintain its stance that in order for the project to proceed, there must be openness and transparency around the potential for the system to capture additional data, including environmental data, in the future. The communication plan should be updated to make this more explicit and opportunities to articulate this to levy payers through different avenues identified.
- AHDB should communicate more effectively about the work which is being undertaken separately on environmental data and the data custodian concept.
- Updated costings for the project should be prepared and presented to the Council in November ahead of the submission of the business case to Defra.

Action: Seek a resolution from key stakeholders on communication plan, engagement and role moving forward (SW)

Action: Communication Plan to be finalised and wording referring to future application of DGP to be communicated using the word environment plus other opportunities to be articulated to levy payers via different avenues (RT, SW and TC)

Action: Ownership Group – all equal in voting rights but will identify alternate mediation processes, when agreement is unable to be reached. To be discussed with the LG and to bring



back to the sector council options for resolution prior to working on the final submission to DEFRA. (SW and SB)

AGENDA ITEM – ENVIRONMENT UPDATE (INCLUDING BASELINING PILOT)

The paper was taken as read. CG was pleased to report that since it had been submitted, Defra had confirmed funding for the first year of the pilot.

CG highlighted some of the financial risks associated with the project and plans to mitigate these including capping the size of the farms participating.

PD commented that projects invariably overran and exceeded budgets and requested that risks should be fully assessed at the start rather than the end and that contingency for overspends be built in. It was concerning that AHDB appeared to be bearing all of the risk on the project.

Action: Potential baselining pilot overspends to be captured on risk register (TH & KB)

AGENDA ITEM – COMMS

RT gave a slide presentation and an update on the savings and efficiencies made up until September 2024.

Opportunities for further changes were outlined and the Council asked to consider whether it wished to change or cease some activities.

Council members recognised the need to make savings but were reluctant to make final decisions based on the information as presented and without further evidence to illustrate the demand from levy payers and impact on them if changes were made.

In considering the proposals the Council agreed that the business case for removal of postage for Arable Focus with limited copies printed for distribution at events and online circulation should be formalised. It also requested that consideration be given to implementing a system which would allow levy payers to opt in/out of receiving printed publications via post.

TC confirmed that effectiveness of comms across the organisation would be considered by the Board at its next meeting.

RT also provided an update on the work of the Comms Task & Finish Group.

The Council requested that the comms update be circulated in advance of the meeting in future and that RT continue to work to find ways to utilise available budget to maximum effect for the sector, and acknowledge where things had not worked so well as well as highlighting successes.

Action: Develop a business case for the Arable Focus with various options - removal, online version, online version and handouts at field days and then a transformation into articles in magazines/newspapers.

AGENDA ITEM – FUTURE MEETING DATES

9.30am, Thursday 17 October 2024 – Informal Sector Council Update (MS Teams)

8.30am Wednesday 20 November 2024 – Sector Council Meeting (in person)

AGENDA ITEM – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further business the meeting closed at 2.55pm.

