

ANGUS COUNCIL

ITEM No 16

POLICY & RESOURCES EXECUTIVE SUB COMMITTEE – MARCH, 2001
POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 20 MARCH, 2001

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE - ANGUS PRECAUTIONS

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Abstract

This report outlines the precautionary measures taken by Angus Council in support of the farmers of Angus during the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended the Committee:-

- (a) Note the Report
- (b) Take a view on paragraph 6 to the report

2. INTRODUCTION

On 23 February 2001 the UK Government and, in Scotland, the Scottish Executive brought forward measures under the Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983 to halt the movement of cattle, sheep and pigs, initially for a 7 day period. This followed confirmation of the disease in Essex on 19 February later linked to a dealer and stock market in the North of England. The GB wide stand still on animal movements was aimed at containing the disease and providing time for Government veterinary staff to investigate animal contacts with the source of the infection.

As a consequence of confirmed cases of Food and Mouth disease north of the border in Dumfries on 1 March 2001, concern began to heighten among local farmers and the wider community to take steps necessary to contain and eradicate this disease.

In the case of the local authority the main responsibilities are to support Central Government and other agencies engaged in a response and to provide a wide range of resources, both human and material to assist in the control and containment of the outbreak.

Undoubtedly the most significant role this authority has is in regard to enforcing animal movement controls and licensing. Local authorities can also in the avoidance of spreading disease make a declaration prohibiting movement of persons in identified areas.

3. PRESENT SITUATION

At the time of writing the report, there were over 200 confirmed sites of Foot and Mouth Disease in the UK affecting something in the order of 120,000 farm animals. In Scotland the number of confirmed cases 26 and confined to Dumfries and Kirkcudbrightshire. All cases in Scotland can be linked to the initial source in England.

We are advised that the likely spread of the disease is 60% infected animals, 30% through movement of animals, 7% airborne and 3% vehicles.

The Government Minister maintains that the disease is under control although there is some clear evidence in infected areas that the virus has been spreading through the air. The Government has also been criticised for the delays in disposing of carcasses.

A UK wide ban on the movement of cattle, sheep and pigs remains in force, although emergency legislation has now been brought in to licence the movement of animals direct from farm to abattoir to maintain meat stocks and for movement on animal welfare grounds to help with lambing.

4. COUNCIL ACTION THROUGH ITS DEPARTMENTS

Given the confirmed cases in the South West of Scotland and also a number of farms under observation around Scotland, including Angus, the Council has undertaken a number of measures aimed at minimising risk of a spread to Angus.

- Angus Council's Emergency Planning Officer is working closely with other members of the Regional Emergency Planning and Co-ordinating Group (RECAP) Animal Diseases Sub Group in response to the outbreak. This group comprises the Emergency Services, Angus, Dundee City and Perth and Kinross Councils and the Divisional Veterinary Manager from MAFF. The group has met to review the overall response and state of readiness to an outbreak in Tayside in accordance with the contingency plan prepared by RECAP.

As a precautionary measure the group agreed that the emergency/public services should postpone routine inspections/non essential work and only enter farm areas to deal with emergencies

- The Education Department has alerted all Schools to the need to stay away from (or limit visits to) the countryside and in particular has advised that no school trips should be organised at present to nature trails, rights of way, etc. With effect from 5 March 2001 no school conveyance contract vehicles have been entering farms to pick up or drop off school pupils, but instead each such pick-up/drop off point has been changed to be at the foot of the farm road.
- The Public Relations Section has kept the public and rural communities informed of the measures taken by the Council through press release bulletins in the Courier and local newspapers and on Radio Tay.
- In conjunction with the IT Department, information and advice to public and farmers was prepared jointly by the Media Manager and Head of Environmental Health and is displayed on the Council's website.
- The Roads Department has received numerous requests from farmers for authorisation to place disinfectant mats across public roads. The Scottish Executive saw this as an effective precautionary measure but asks farmers to seek agreement to such action from Police and Roads Departments in the case of public roads.

Accordingly Angus Council's Roads Department, working proactively, has agreed to some 30 such requests for straw soaked in disinfectant to be placed by farmers across minor roads. These have all been on the basis that road safety considerations are taken into account.

- The Director of Recreation Services on the 1 March with Committee approval and the support of the local NFU closed public access to a number of Council owned sites in a bid to minimise any risk of the spread of Foot and Mouth to Angus. As this is a disease which affects cloven footed animals including wild deer, Monikie and Crombie Country Parks and Glen Doll car park, picnic areas and forest walks were closed. Also closed due to their proximity to farm animals were the Montrose Basin Nature Reserve and the Elliot and Newtyle Railway nature trails. Notices informing the public of these voluntary closures were posted by Countryside Ranger staff who also dealt with numerous enquiries from farmers, estate managers and the public on access and movement in the Countryside. The Director of Recreation Services has represented the Council at regular briefing meetings held by COSLA and the Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department (SERAD).
- The Environmental and Consumer Protection Department and in particular the Animal Health Unit of the Environmental Health Service has provided a supportive role to other Council Departments and agencies as regards its role under the "Outbreak Plan". Advice to farmers and public has been provided in response to numerous telephone calls and on the Council website. Recommendations regarding Council staff visits to farms and farm lands was provided to Departments and advice provided as to disinfection and hygiene. (Copy attached). Council disinfection facilities were set up with equipment available for Council services requiring to make essential visits into the Countryside.

Late in the evening of March 2 Scottish Ministers issued an Order under Statute for local authorities to licence the movement of animals from farm to abattoir. From Sunday 4 March onward the Department has had to deal with an intensive stream of enquiries and applications and the processing of documentation to permit such movements. In the initial 5 days over 90 movement licences were processed involving the movement of 719 cattle, 1752 sheep and 2014 pigs.

As a precautionary measure, refuse collection vehicles visiting the countryside have since 2 March not been entering farms and private roads to limit the possible spread of contamination by these vehicles. Countryside dwellers are being asked to place refuse bins at the public roadside for collection.

5. SOME OF THE ISSUES ARISING

In general the public and farming/rural community have been very supportive and appreciative of the measures taken by the Council. The public, in the main, are heeding advice to stay away from sensitive areas, of course recent bad weather has helped in this regard. Time will tell whether this can be sustained. When the situation moves into a period of slow recovery or indeed if it gets worse, further pressures will be placed on the local authority to make the right decisions. Some of the issues already arising include:-

- In the event of the disease spreading to this area the "outbreak contingency plan" will be set in motion, co-ordinating the situation in Tayside
- the possibility of financial penalties (loss of deposit) for cancellation of school trips, etc. with possibly no insurance cover for these losses
- uncertainty of whether or not school ski trips should be cancelled. Currently ski slopes remain open with SERAD stating they see no reason why ski-ing within recognised ski centres should be stopped.
- Arrable farmers and countryside residents are critical of the Council's blanket ban on refuse collection vehicles not going off the public road
- demands from farmers for the public road to be closed when such power does not exist. In fact there have been two incidents relating to illegal barriers being put in place to close public roads - these were subsequently removed.
- there are significant adverse implications for the wider rural communities in terms of lost business, tourism revenues and loss of public amenity where public access to land in rural areas is closed off either on a voluntary or statutory basis
- decision to cancel or postpone sporting or community fixtures is left with the organising body to make a risk based judgment.
- currently Council staff are being advised to postpone all but essential visits to farms and farmland or to conduct business by telephone, fax, post etc. For how long can this continue, particularly if no disease occurs in Angus.
- there is concern in the Environmental and Consumer Protection department that resources could be stretched to the limit trying to fulfill statutory duties including the issue of animal movement licences, supervising proposed stock reception centres and enforcing illegal animal movements and control orders.

6. COUNCIL DECISION REQUIRED

Members will be aware that the normal opening date of the 3 Council Caravan Parks is the last Friday in March, 30 March for 2001. It has been agreed provisionally that Forfar Caravan Park can operate an extended opening period, which for 2001 was Friday 2 March. All costs for this extended opening are borne by Angus Contracts and they keep all income associated with early opening.

Since advance bookings for the first two weeks were comparatively few, there was little adverse effect on usage by the decision not to open. However for the weekend beginning Friday 16 March, Forfar Caravan Park is almost fully booked.

Based upon risk assessment for the Forfar site, which indicates a low risk, the Director advises Members that he has no objection to its early opening.

The Easter opening is generally a busy period for the Councils three caravan parks with healthy advance bookings. Risk assessments on the Carnoustie and Montrose sites also indicate a low risk and the Director advises members that these caravan parks should be opened for the Easter weekend.

A survey of local privately owned caravan parks indicates that they are operating on a normal basis.

The Director of Recreation Services is also currently undertaking risk assessments based upon current guidance from SERAD on all other outdoor recreation areas. The Scottish Executive is advising that appropriate approaches be taken in assessing risk, taking into account veterinary advice and the locus of current outbreaks. This issue was discussed at a seminar/discussion session with all interested national, voluntary and public agencies on 13 March as being the most appropriate method of "re-opening Scotland" for residents and tourist alike.

Further meetings are planned over the next week or so to ensure a co-ordinated message is delivered.

From an Angus Council perspective, once risk assessments are complete, the Director hopes to be in a position to advise Members on the timescale for the reopening of Council outdoor recreational facilities.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Most of Scotland is currently free of Foot and Mouth Disease, a situation we all hope will remain. All advice suggests that the outbreak has some way to go before it peaks and that recovery might well be slow. We must guard against complacency and continue making judgments which are based on the risks involved, while the plain simple message remains for the public to avoid contact with livestock or land on which livestock graze.

The Scottish Executive are asking local authorities and other bodies to take a proportionate risk based approach to preventing the spread of the disease, while allowing the normal life of rural communities, out with infected areas, to continue as far as possible.

Assessing when to reopen our outdoor facilities will be a difficult process to match the needs, expectations and support of farmers against the other economic needs of tourism operators and the general public.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Failure to open on the Caravan site on the 16th will result in loss of income to the Council of approximately £1,600 and possible loss of repeat business. There may also be a consequential loss to a number of local businesses, although this cannot be quantified.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

There are no human rights issues to be addressed as a result of this report.

10. CONSULTATION

The Director of Finance, Director of Law & Admin., Director of Env. & Consumer Protection, Director of Recreation Services, Director of Roads, Director Planning & Transport, Director of Education, have been consulted on the contents of this report.

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

IW/JAS
12 March 2001

ANGUS COUNCIL FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE – ADVICE TO COUNCIL STAFF REGARDING FARM AND RURAL VISITS

Before visiting farm/farmland you should consider if your visit is absolutely essential? Consider other means of doing business with farmer etc.- telephone, email, letter, or meet at your office.

Appointments or visits should be rearranged or arrangements made over the 'phone, by fax or e-mail. Should you still proceed with a visit follow all the procedures requested by the owner of the premises. This could include leaving your vehicle outside the farm, disinfecting footwear and wearing boots or other protective clothing supplied by the farm;

Infection could be introduced as soon as you get out of your vehicle, so check what precautions are required before getting out;

Information regarding your previous contact with livestock and what disinfection took place are likely to be requested;

Restrict your movement between farms. Disinfection will be required. Advice on approved disinfectants and equipment for Council staff visiting farms is obtainable from ECP Department contact Ext 3606.

If the area you intend visiting is subject to a “control” order you will not be permitted to enter. Notices will be in place to this effect.

On the farm

Do not visit the farm if it has not been possible to contact the owner beforehand. Delay the visit.

Whilst on the farm, visit only those locations that are essential. Avoid contact with livestock on farms and only visit stock if it is essential and then, only with the owner's permission. **Do not wander around buildings;**

Take responsibility for you actions. Arrive at the farm clean and ensure the highest standards of personal disinfection and cleanliness at all time. Wear wellington boots or washable footwear. Keep your vehicle clean.

On leaving the farm: -

Ensure that all mud, slurry or manure is washed off footwear and vehicles before leaving the premises.

Apply disinfectant after washing. Spraying is the most effective method, not forgetting tyres and the underside of the vehicle. Spraying should be carried out even if there is a wheel dip or disinfectant mat in place. NB.concentrated disinfectant may be caustic, read instructions regarding the use of protective equipment.

Consider personal cleaning and disinfection. Ideally disposable or washable clothes that fully cover your clothing should be worn. Disposable items should be left on farm or sealed in a plastic bag.

Ensure all footwear is disinfected before they are put into the vehicle. A foot dip or spray should be provided.

It is essential that all visits to farms and possible contact with livestock are recorded. Should disease occur on a farm, these records will be used to trace movements and possible spread of disease. Records should include the date and time of visits.

FOOT & MOUTH DISEASE PRECAUTIONS

FARM / FARMLAND VISITS

- Before visiting farm/farmland you should consider if your visit is absolutely essential. Pre-arrangements should be made by phone and follow all the procedures requested by the owner of the premises
- This should include leaving your vehicle outside the farm.
- Arrive at the farm clean and ensure the highest standards of personal disinfection and cleanliness at all time.
- Wear wellington boots or washable footwear.
- Have your vehicle clean.
- **Before entering farm** disinfect footwear and vehicle wheels & underside with spray.
- Ideally disposable or washable clothes that fully cover your clothing should be worn. Disposable items should be left on farm or sealed in a plastic bag.
- Whilst on the farm, visit only those locations that are essential. Avoid contact with livestock on farms and only visit stock if it is essential and then, only with the owner's permission. **Do not wander around buildings;**
- **On leaving the farm:** - Ensure that all mud, slurry or manure is washed off footwear and vehicles before leaving the premises.
- Apply disinfectant after washing.
- Spraying is the most effective method, not forgetting tyres and the underside/wheel arches of the vehicle.
- Spraying should be carried out even if there is a wheel dip or disinfectant mat in place. NB. disinfectant may be caustic, read instructions regarding use on the information supplied with this pack.
- It is essential that all visits to farms and possible contact with livestock are recorded. Should disease occur on a farm, these records will be used to trace movements and possible spread of disease. Records should include the date and time of visits.

DISINFECTATION GUIDANCE

- The disinfectant available to Council staff visiting farms is " Deosan Iodel FD" a liquid iodophor based disinfectant manufactured by Diversey Lever.
- This will be supplied ready to use - diluted 1:100 parts of water in a 5Lt capacity spray.
- The spray kit includes Safety Data Sheet and directions on use. **Please read**
- While the disinfectant has been diluted for you to use directly, follow the safety and first aid guidance on the Data Sheets – avoid contact with eyes & skin (wear gloves); do not mix with other chemicals; avoid contact with galvanised or aluminium surfaces.
- Rinse down / wash off mud on footwear etc. prior to applying disinfectant by spray as above
- Spray kit must be return to the issuing centre immediately after use

