

Scrutiny Briefing Note

The Communities Scrutiny Panel have asked to monitor progress on the following issues. This briefing contains the latest position as at Currently 7th March 2022.

Subject: Update on the expansion of Port Health

Background

The UK Government announced in February 2020 its intention to impose checks on EU (European Union) goods following the UK's exit from the EU, using a staged approach. Initially Full implementation of Full Import Controls were due to be in place on 1st July 2021, but this was initially delayed and changed to a phased introduction from 1st October 2021 and 1st January 2022. However in November 2021 these were further delayed and amended as follows:

1st January 2022

- Introduction of Customs declarations on all EU imports
- Importers are required to notify the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) through the Import of Products, Animals, Food, Feed System (IPAFFS) of the arrival of any relevant goods (live animals, products of animal origin, high risk food & feed not of animal origin). Apart from live animals and high risk animal by-products, no requirement to import through a port with a suitably designated Border Control Post (BCP).

From 01 July 2022, certification and physical checks will be introduced for the following products: -

- All remaining regulated animal by-products (Port Health Authority (NELC) responsible for official controls)
- All meat and meat products (NELC responsible)
- All remaining high-risk food not of animal origin (NELC responsible)
- All regulated plants and plant products (Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) responsible for official controls)

From 01 September 2022, certification and physical checks will be introduced for all dairy products

(NELC responsible)

From 01 November 2022, certification and physical checks will be introduced for all remaining regulated products of animal origin, including composite products and fish products.

(NELC responsible)

Progress

In readiness for 1st July 2022 the service have a dedicated project group who meet regularly to discuss plans and any issues arising. A cabinet report was presented in June 2021, below is the progress on key workstreams. All key decisions have been approved/and or consulted with the relevant officers.



- **Border Control Post** – The New Border Control Post facility at Immingham has now been built. Due to the pushback in dates, the site is not fully operational and therefore full access to the site for staff is scheduled for May 22. The period between May-July 2022 will be used for training and trialing procedures at the new facility. A lease agreement is currently being drafted by internal legal working alongside ABP legal officers with the aim to have that in place by April.



- **Official Veterinarian Service Provision** – As the port will be approving the full spectrum of product categories (Excluding live animals), this requires specialist expertise to validate POAO (Products of animal origin) consignments other than fishery products and cabinet approval was given to commence a procurement exercise to appoint a service provider for the provision of Portal Official Veterinarian (OV) Services. The procurement exercise commenced in August 2021 however due to the government delay in implementation of full controls, the decision was made to pause procurement until further notice. The revised specification was published for tender in January 2022 with the aim of a March award date, in order to begin training April-July 2022 at the new facility. Background checks are now being carried out on the preferred supplier organisation.
- **Staffing** – The council used data provided by HMRC to estimate the overall staffing requirements to deliver the service. Initial estimations showed an increase of 36 officers across various staff groups increasing the overall size of the team from 17 to 53. The council has taken a phased approach to recruitment that reflects the approach taken by Central Government. Staffing levels continue to be reviewed and monitored using the latest available import data. The need for additional Port Health Support and Business Support staff has been identified and a recruitment exercise is proposed to take place in April 2022 to meet the full staffing levels required, based on the most recent estimates of BCP (Border control post) demand.
- **Funding** – The council have recently been successful in securing £727,945.00 from the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Port Health Transition fund until April 2022 to cover cost recovery from the delay. A forward forecast has also been submitted for the new financial year 2022/2023 and a formal bidding process has now been launched to cover any additional financial support for April – June 2022. Whilst 1st July will see introduction of cost recovery charges for relevant EU imports, full checks & associated charges will not be in place until 1st November 2022, so it is anticipated additional funding will be made available. **It is anticipated that a settled picture on what constitutes a ‘break even’ position may not be clear until 2023-24, due to the likely volatility in trade flows when full import controls are applied.** This funding has enabled the Council to prepare for EU Exit by undertaking the required recruitment of additional staff and putting new systems and processes in place to manage increased volumes, greater consignment complexity and demand on the service. Another grant has also been awarded from the Food Standards Agency of £30,099 to help deliver essential imported food safety training to staff.

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