

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Veterinary Medicine Working Group (VMWG)

1. Purpose of Veterinary Medicine Working Group

- 1.1. The purpose of the Veterinary Medicines Working Group (VMWG) will be to advise the UK Government (UKG) on the solutions that agricultural and pharmaceutical industries, as well as private animal owners and keepers, will require to aid in ensuring the continued availability and supply of veterinary medicines into Northern Ireland.
- 1.2. UKG will prepare and present papers setting out options and/or updated analysis. The VMWG will aim to consider the evidence provided by UKG.

2. Key Objectives of the Veterinary Medicine Working Group

- 2.1. The key objectives of the VMWG are:
 - Establishing a shared understanding of issues facing the supply and availability of veterinary medicines to Northern Ireland following the end of the grace period (31/12/2025).
 - Reviewing evidence with a view to providing advice to UKG on measures to safeguard the supply of veterinary medicines and mitigations for the impact of potential supply changes on end users, recognising the urgency of the issue and the need to keep affected sectors informed, as appropriate.
 - Keep the Terms of Reference and membership of the Veterinary Medicines Working Group under review.

3. Governance of the Veterinary Medicine Working Group

- 3.1. The VMWG will provide advice on flexibilities and options to UKG when they have been agreed within the working group. The co-chairs of the VMWG will be Minister Thomas-Symonds (Cabinet Office - Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations), Minister Benn (Northern Ireland Office - Secretary of State from Northern Ireland) and Baroness Hayman (DEFRA - Minister for Biosecurity and Animal Welfare).
- 3.2. Government officials from DEFRA, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Windsor Framework Taskforce (Cabinet Office) will also attend the Working Group sessions. The secretariat will be provided by UKG, who will manage the logistics of the meetings and circulate minutes. The VMWG must respect the impartiality of the Civil Service. Civil Servants cannot, for example, be commissioned for work by any member of the group who is not a Minister.

- 3.3. The Government’s objective for VMWG is to provide recommendations on how to ensure the continued availability and supply of veterinary medicines into Northern Ireland. The recommendations should be made in a timely manner, conscious of the grace period in place until 31 December 2025. These timelines will be kept under review, balancing the need to make swift progress and the importance of members having sufficient time to consider the evidence.
- 3.4. A copy of these Terms of References will be deposited in the House of Commons and House of Lords libraries.

4. Working Group Members

- 4.1. The VMWG is by invitation only. Membership of the working group is restricted to those shown below. Should any required attendee be unable to attend then a nominated deputy should be sent in their place, with full delegated authority.
- 4.2. Membership has been selected based on expertise, experience and position. It includes the relevant ministers representing UKG and the NI Executive, as well as pharmaceutical manufacturing representatives (with the trade association NOAH representing more than 97% of the industry and APHA representing the Irish pharmaceutical industry), distributors associations (AHDA and VSSCo), farming representatives (UFU), and veterinary experts (NIVA), as well as elected representatives, including those in Northern Ireland, with an interest and expertise in agriculture and veterinary medicines. The panel provides a balance across the range of different operators interested in a solution as well as across political views.
- 4.3. Membership is on a voluntary basis and is not paid. Meetings will be held virtually by default (however where sensitive information is shared in hard copy only, the group will meet in person) and expenses will therefore not be paid.

Table 1: Members of the Veterinary Medicines Working Group

VMWG Member	Organisation	Type of stakeholder
The Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds, Paymaster General and Minister of State for the Cabinet Office	Cabinet Office	Government
Baroness Hayman of Ullock, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defra	DEFRA	Government
The Rt Hon Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Office	Government
Andrew Muir MLA, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	DAERA	Devolved Government
Dawn Howard	National Office for Animal Health (NOAH)	Pharmaceutical manufacturing representatives
Bryan Lovegrove	Animal Health Distributors Association (AHDA)	Pharmaceutical distributors representatives
William Sherrard	Veterinary Surgeons Supply	Pharmaceutical distributors

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	Co. (VSSCo), Managing Director	representatives
John Keogh	Animal and Plant Health Association (Ireland)	Pharmaceutical manufacturing representatives
Alexander Kinnear	Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)	NI farming representatives
Sharon Verner	Northern Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA), President	Veterinarian
Mark Little	Northern Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA)	Veterinary practitioner
Dr Rob Williams	British Veterinary Association, Junior Vice President	Veterinarian
Carla Lockhart MP	Democratic Unionist Party	Elected representative
Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick	N/a	Former elected representative / member of the House of Lords
Dr Neil Hudson MP	Conservative Party	Elected representative / veterinary expert
Lord Trees <i>Accompanied by Dr Fiona Shuttleworth (veterinarian)</i>	Crossbench	Member of the House of Lords/ veterinarian
Brian Doohar	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)	Chief Veterinary Officer for Northern Ireland
Christine Middlemiss	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)	UK Chief Veterinary Officer

4.4. Others may be invited to attend to support discussion with subject matter expertise, where appropriate. The table below (Table 2) will be updated when people are invited to attend but are not working group members. For instance:

- Veterinary surgeons with a specialty in a specific disease, condition or species;
- Companies producing veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland;
- Meat processors selling meat from animals which have been treated with veterinary medicines;
- Other relevant individuals from the Northern Ireland Executive.

Table 2: Additional Members (to be updated)

VMWG attendee	Job Title	Deputy if applicable

5. Mode of Operation of the Veterinary Medicine Working Group

- 5.1. The working group will meet on an ad hoc basis. The Secretariat will undertake all functions in respect of the organisation and administration of the working group meetings.
- 5.2. UKG will circulate papers for discussion, where relevant, at least 48 hours in advance. Where papers have specific policy sensitivities, they will be provided in hard copy on the day.
- 5.3. The Secretariat will circulate minutes after each meeting and assign actions. All decisions, whether taken in the meeting or via correspondence, will be recorded by the Secretariat.

6. Information Sharing

- 6.1. The Government will provide their assessment of the issues around Northern Ireland supply as well as its assessment of the potential options for resolving such issues. All information shared with the VWMG is subject to the conditions set out in the Memorandum of Understanding and cannot be shared further without the Government's permission. Members of the VMWG must sign the MoU ahead of attending their first meeting of the group.

7. Agenda Items at the Veterinary Medicines Working Group

- 7.1. An agenda will be circulated at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting. This may include discussion points, presentations and a review of previous actions/minutes.