



Open Report on behalf of Glen Garrod, Executive Director of Adult Care and Community Wellbeing

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	19 April 2022
Subject:	Avian Influenza Outbreaks in Lincolnshire 2021-22

Summary:

This report provides a review of the response to the avian influenza outbreak in Lincolnshire during 2021-22 by the Safer Communities-Trading Standards Service.

Actions Required:

Members of the Committee are invited to consider and comment on the contents of this report.

1. Background

1.1 What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza (AI) is a notifiable disease. Notifiable diseases are diseases affecting animals or birds that place a legal obligation to notify the Animal and Plant Health Agency when you suspect livestock or poultry are affected.

There are 2 types of AI. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is the most serious and often proves to be fatal in birds. Clinical signs can include any combination of the following:

- sudden and rapid increase in the number of birds found dead
- several birds affected in the same shed or air space
- swollen head
- closed and excessively watery eyes
- lethargy and depression
- recumbency and unresponsiveness
- incoordination and loss of balance
- head and body tremoring
- drooping of the wings and/or dragging of legs
- twisting of the head and neck
- swelling and blue discolouration of comb and wattles
- haemorrhages on shanks of the legs and under the skin of the neck

- loss of appetite or marked decrease in feed consumption
- sudden increase or decrease in water consumption
- respiratory distress such as gaping (mouth breathing), nasal snicking (coughing sound), sneezing, gurgling or rattling
- fever or noticeable increase in body temperature
- discoloured or loose watery droppings
- cessation or marked reduction in egg production

Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) is less serious, and the clinical signs of infection may be less clear. It can cause mild respiratory problems and a reduction in egg production.

4 Strains that have caused concern in recent years are:

- H5N1 since 1997
- H7N9 since 2013
- H5N6 since 2014
- H5N8 since 2016

1.2 How is Avian Influenza Spread?

AI is spread from bird to bird by direct contact or through contact with contaminated bodily fluids, faeces, feed, water or dirty vehicles, clothing or footwear. It is not an airborne virus. It mutates frequently creating new strains.

For keepers of poultry or captive birds, good biosecurity and separation from wild birds are the most effective measures to reduce the risk of infection.

1.3 What happens if Avian Influenza is suspected?



If avian flu is suspected at a premise, it must be reported to the DEFRA Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301. Failure to do so is a criminal offence.

Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) vets will investigate; this usually entails visiting the premises to carry out an enquiry. Initially temporary restrictions may be applied to the premises where disease is suspected by the APHA duty vet. These restrictions will remain in place until the APHA veterinary inspector arrives. These restrictions are put in place to minimize the risk of spreading disease.

If the APHA veterinary inspector suspects avian influenza is present, they will take samples for testing.

The APHA Vet will put restrictions on the premises. Usually this will stop the movement of animals susceptible to the disease on or off the premises. It will also include stopping the movement of anything that can transmit disease, like meat products, equipment or vehicles.

Restrictions remain in place until the investigation is complete and avian influenza is ruled out.

Compensation payments are made where birds are culled following an outbreak of AI. Compensation is not payable as a result of consequential losses or arising from having to comply with the requirements of a disease control zone.

1.4 What Happens when Avian Influenza is Confirmed?

When AI is suspected or confirmed disease control zones are put in place around the infected premises. A range of restrictions on the movement of poultry and material associated with their keeping can be applied. Definitive requirements are set out in a published declaration for each disease control zone. A 3Km protection zone and a 10Km surveillance zone is established around the premise.

An example of the measures in place in a protection zone is attached as appendix 1 and in a surveillance zone as appendix 2.

All birds kept on the premise are normally culled. The carcasses are then removed under licence and the infected premises is subjected to a deep cleansing and disinfection. Premise restrictions will only be lifted when the APHA veterinary inspector is satisfied that this work has been completed to a satisfactory standard.

APHA inspectors will review the location of birds within the protection zone and undertake further testing to ensure that no other kept birds are affected. When this is completed the disease control zone will be removed.

2. The National Picture

2.1 Avian Influenza Prevention Zone

An Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) came into force across Great Britain on the 3rd of November 2021 and was extended to include compulsory housing measures across the United Kingdom on 29th November 2021. The effect of these measures was to establish a

legal requirement for all bird keepers, including commercial and backyard flocks and pet birds, to keep birds indoors and follow biosecurity provisions to minimise the risk of infection.

The APIZ required bird keepers to:

- House or net birds to keep them separate from wild birds
- Cleanse and disinfect clothing, footwear, equipment and vehicles before and after contact
- Reduce the movement of people, vehicles and equipment to and from areas where birds are kept
- Thoroughly cleanse and disinfect housing on an ongoing basis
- Keep fresh, correctly concentrated disinfectant at all farm and bird housing entry and exit points
- Minimise direct and indirect contact between poultry and captive birds and wild birds including ensuring feed and water is not accessible to wild birds.
- AI controls, including these APIZ and housing measures are enforced by the Local Authority Animal Health Function. In Lincolnshire enforcement is undertaken by the Safer Communities-Trading Standards Service.

2.2 Cases in the UK

At the time of writing 83 cases of AI have been confirmed in England. There are 2 further cases centred around premises in Wales and 2 in Scotland where the disease control zones extend into England. There have been 6 cases confirmed in Scotland, 5 in Wales and 6 in Northern Ireland.

All areas of the UK are at risk of AI in wild birds. However, APHA have identified “Higher Risk Areas” linked to areas where wild birds, particularly gulls and wild waterfowl, gather such as lakes, marshes or estuaries. Appendix 3 is a map showing the higher risk areas in Lincolnshire and neighbouring authorities. These areas are designated high risk based on previous AI outbreaks, and scientific and veterinary opinion that indicates migratory wild waterfowl (ducks, geese and swans) and gulls pose a continual threat of introducing AI into premises where poultry, pet or captive birds are kept.

3. The Regulatory Framework

3.1 Legislation

Legislation governing measures to minimize the potential for initial infection, manage biosecurity, and to respond once the presence of disease is confirmed is made under the Animal Health Act 1981 and is made up of the following orders and regulations:

- The Avian Influenza and Influenza of Avian Origin in Mammals (England) (No.2) Order 2006
- The Avian Influenza (H5N1 in Poultry) (England) Order 2006
- The Avian Influenza (H5N1 in Wild Birds) (England) Order 2006
- The Avian Influenza (Preventive Measures) (England) Regulations 2006
- Avian Influenza Prevention Zone

4. The Outbreak in Lincolnshire

4.1 Premises Affected

Between the 11th of December 2021 and 9th of January 2022 there were 15 confirmed cases in Lincolnshire. Appendix 4 sets out in table form the Local Authorities affected in England and the number of cases. Lincolnshire has been the worst affected local authority nationally. A further 4 suspect cases were negated.

All infected premises were in East Lindsey, predominantly clustered around the Alford area where there were 10 confirmed cases. Smaller outbreaks affected 2 premises near Louth and 2 near North Somercotes with a further case being confirmed close to Mablethorpe. Most premises affected were commercial poultry units with only 1 case confirmed in a backyard flock. Appendix 5 is a map showing the locations of the infected premises in Lincolnshire and associated 3Km protection zones.

Approximately 1.2 million birds have either died as a result of infection or have been culled as part of the response in Lincolnshire alone.

4.2 The Role of Trading Standards

APHA lead the response to all confirmed cases of notifiable animal disease including AI. The Trading Standards Service role is to support APHA at a local level and to carry out any enforcement of the regulatory framework should the need arise.

Primarily this involves providing advice and guidance to both the farming community and to members of the public regarding the control measures in place. Enforcement action is usually limited to responding to complaints about birds that have not been housed or poor biosecurity. In the first instance Trading Standards will offer advice and guidance in writing with inspections being undertaken if there is repeated noncompliance or we are unable to establish the identity of the person responsible for the birds in question.

In addition, Trading Standards may be called upon to serve statutory notices or issue licences if requested to do so by APHA. This has not been necessary during the current response.

Enforcement action for failing to comply with the conditions of a licence issued by APHA would also be undertaken by Trading Standards Officers if this were reported by APHA Inspectors.

When a case of AI is confirmed at a premise Trading Standards Officers are asked to undertake foot patrols within the 3Km protection zone. Each zone is broken down into approximately 40 1Km square tiles. An example of this can be seen in appendix 6.

Officers are required to visit all premises and fields within each tile to identify and record the location of all stock that is susceptible to AI and any livestock. In built up areas this may be reduced to visiting to every other or every few properties. The information gathered is then passed back to APHA who use it to determine where clinical testing should be undertaken within the zone.

4.3 Responding to the Current Outbreak

The Trading Standards Service identified that there was an increase in the number of confirmed incidents of AI early in the national outbreak and took steps to prepare for an outbreak in Lincolnshire.

The Lead Officer for animal health and welfare recorded a training video and produced a presentation that all Trading Standards Officers were asked to view to familiarise themselves with their role and responsibilities in the event of AI being confirmed in the County.

The Service undertook a stocktake of equipment and documentation required to respond to an outbreak. This included ensuring Officers had access to PPE and lateral flow tests to ensure that the service was operating in a COVID safe way to minimise the risk to colleagues and members of the public.

Since the introduction of the National Avian Influenza Prevention Zone the Trading Standards Service has regularly issued communications through the media and our social media accounts promoting the need to house birds and take measures to ensure biosecurity.

AI in Lincolnshire was covered widely in local and national press, with Lincolnshire Trading Standards' advice and role featuring on:

- BBC (online, Radio Lincolnshire, Look North)
- The Lincolnite
- Lincolnshire Echo
- Grimsby Telegraph
- Louth Leader
- Skegness Standard
- Norfolk Live
- Leicestershire Live
- Chartered Trading Standards Institute press hub

Between the end of November 2021 and the end of February 2022 posts on the Trading Standards Facebook page regarding AI reached 43,985 people, a 78% increase on the previous 3 months. One post reached more than 8,000 people alone.

The Trading Standards Twitter account reached 34,800 people in December, 54,000 in January and 19,200 in February. This is comparable our average reach of 20-30,000 per month except for January which saw a significant increase.

The Trading Standards Service has responded to 63 complaints and enquiries regarding the housing of birds since the national restrictions were introduced.

During the current outbreak Trading Standards Officers have undertaken foot patrols in all the areas shaded yellow on the map of Lincolnshire outbreaks and associated 3Km protection zones (Appendix 5). The foot patrols were undertaken between 16th and 23rd Dec 2021 and 4th and 22nd Jan 2022. Due to the overlap in the protection zones the area covered equated to 293Km². This represents just under half of the potential 600Km² had each zone appeared in isolation.

Trading Standards Officers closed a small number of footpaths where they ran close to infected premises to minimise the risk of walkers or their pets inadvertently picking up and spreading disease.

Although not normally a role undertaken by Trading Standards Officers attended the culling of a backyard flock to offer support to the owner of the birds.

4.4 Other LCC Services & Partners

Several other LCC Services have assisted in the response to the AI outbreaks and the Trading Standards Service would like to offer their thanks for this support.

Emergency planning have utilized the mapping capability through Resilience Direct to plot the location of each outbreak together with the 3Km and 10Km protection and surveillance zones. This has allowed the Trading Standards Service to produce its own maps for the protection zone tiles which was invaluable as APHA were experiencing delays in producing their maps for us due to the sheer scale of the national outbreak. Waiting for their maps would have delayed the Trading Standards response by days if not weeks.

The Emergency Planning Team were also liaising with Public Health England and Public Health Colleagues to ensure that employees working in infected premises had access to antiviral medication.

LCC Communications Team liaised with APHA on direct communications as well as issuing updates on behalf of Trading Standards through local press, the LCC website and both LCC and Trading Standards social media accounts.

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue made available the Fire Stations at Alford and North Somercotes for Trading Standards. In previous outbreaks APHA have had a forward operating base at Ceres House located on Nettleham Road in Lincoln. This was not available during this outbreak. The availability of this accommodation at short notice and close to the zones was greatly appreciated and secured savings in terms of the time taken to complete the patrols and the mileage travelled by Trading Standards Officers.

Lincolnshire Highways ordered replacement road signs and ensured that they were placed at appropriate points on main roads entering the surveillance zones around the County. They also provided Trading Standards Officers with accommodation to use as a base of operations at Manby whilst the foot patrols were undertaken in the Louth area.

Business Support were able to provide staff to assist with foot patrols.

Lincolnshire Police assisted with communications which included use of their wide screen billboard van that was brought into the protection zone to promote the work being undertaken by Trading Standards Officers carrying out foot patrols.

Police response officers also accompanied our officers on revisits where residents believed to be keeping birds had not been cooperative.

5. Trade, import and export issues

5.1 World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) Disease Freedom

Following the initial confirmation of the presence of disease, the UK is no longer free from avian influenza under the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) rules. As a result, some restrictions are placed on exports of affected commodities to third countries. Trade in poultry and poultry related products with third countries that do not require whole UK avian influenza country freedom may continue on the basis of the conditions included the export health certificates, unless otherwise notified by the importing country.

Agreed export health certificates between the UK and importing countries are considered and issued on a case-by-case basis and can be certified by an Official Veterinarian only if the consignment meets the requirements set out in the export health certificates in full.

5.2 Exports to the EU

Exports from Great Britain to the EU of live poultry or poultry products are not permitted from disease control zones. There are no restrictions on exports to the EU from outside the disease control zones.

To avoid disruption to trade, the European Commission has requested that EU countries consider continuing to accept certified poultry and poultry products from the UK, if they originate outside the restricted areas.

EU trade relies on strict certification for movement of live poultry, day old chicks and hatching eggs. Products such as poultry meat, table eggs and poultry products are not subject to certification within the EU.

6. Conclusion

At the time of writing the 15 disease control zones in Lincolnshire have just been lifted. One partial zone remains, centred around an outbreak in North Lincolnshire (near to Brigg). Any outbreak of avian influenza has significant consequences. Unaffected farms may be unable to export or find their operating practices disrupted due to restrictions placed upon them.

It is estimated that the costs to the Trading Standards Service from the response exceed £10,000 arising from additional mileage travelled and additional hours pay. The service has lost in the region of 210 officer days from front line service delivery. This has resulted in delays to programmed inspection work and on-going investigations which we are working to recover.

With 1.2 million birds affected there will be significant compensation payments made to the owners. These payments, taken from central government funds, will run into several million pounds in Lincolnshire alone.

The whole of the Trading Standards Service was involved in our response. Those not directly involved with undertaking foot patrols or returning information gathered to APHA were providing a skeleton service to ensure that incoming complaints and enquiries were

reviewed and acted upon where necessary. Other routine work was suspended while the service completed the work assigned to us as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The Trading Standards Service has reviewed the response and sought feedback from the officers involved. This information will be used to help prepare for future outbreaks.

This will include:

- Providing refresh training in October before potential outbreaks are anticipated with a focus on documentation
- Completing an audit of PPE and resources to ensure we have adequate stocks
- Ensure all staff have access to What3Words which was invaluable for locating livestock and premises where birds were kept
- Ensure that all documentation provides contact details for Trading Standards rather than the APHA hotline to reduce the number of revisits required when no one was home.
- Looking at the use of mobile technology to complete forms rather than carrying several paper versions.
- Review Business Continuity plans to ensure that we can respond over the weekend if there are IT problems.

7. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

Not Applicable.

8. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Protection Zone
Appendix B	Surveillance Zone
Appendix C	Higher Risk Areas in Lincolnshire and Neighbouring Authorities
Appendix D	Number of Confirmed Cases in English Local Authorities
Appendix E	Map of Lincolnshire Outbreaks and Associated 3Km Protection Zones
Appendix F	Example of a Protection Zone with Foot Patrol Tiles

9. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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