



afbi

**AGRI-FOOD
& BIOSCIENCES
INSTITUTE**

**Organistional Action
Plan**

August 2026

Organisational Action Plan August 2026

1. Introduction

This paper sets out an integrated AFBI Organisational Action Plan which combines the strategic narrative with the detailed organisational actions required to address the AFBI review findings, the Minister's immediate priorities, and the wider governance, compliance, commissioning and capability issues that have arisen. The purpose is to provide a single, coherent document that demonstrates how AFBI and DAERA will respond, the rationale for each action, the expected line of assurance, and the proposed timescale for delivery.

2. Background

The independent review of AFBI provided assurance that the Institute continues to perform a critical statutory and strategic role in supporting DAERA and the wider public interest through the provision of scientific research, surveillance, diagnostics and evidence. At the same time, the review concluded that a number of aspects of the current operating model require strengthening, particularly in relation to assurance arrangements, partnership working, commissioning, impact evaluation and organisational effectiveness.

The Department accepted the five recommendations arising from the review and set out a Departmental Response supported by a thematic action plan. Subsequently, additional issues relating to biosafety, laboratory compliance, data security and farm operations have required enhanced oversight and a broader AFBI Organisational Action Plan. This integrated document therefore brings together those review-driven and risk-driven responses in a single framework.

3. Context

AFBI operates in a complex and demanding environment in which high-quality science, diagnostics and evidence are central to the delivery of DAERA's objectives and to wider public confidence. The policy and operating context includes significant pressures in

areas such as animal and plant health, environmental protection, climate change, food security, research integrity, digital resilience and value for money. Within that environment, both DAERA and AFBI must be able to demonstrate not only that AFBI's functions remain necessary, but also that those functions are delivered safely, effectively, transparently and in a manner that is aligned to Ministerial and departmental priorities.

The Minister has also made clear that immediate priority must be given to addressing the findings of the HSE inspection report, strengthening strategic direction, and providing robust assurance on Hillsborough farm operations and related organisational controls. The response in this paper is therefore designed both to address the original review recommendations and to deliver the wider organisational improvements now required.

4. Response to the Review and Organisational Priorities

The integrated response is founded on three principles. First, delivery must be evidence-based, with clear ownership, measurable outputs and a defined route to assurance. Secondly, the response must support a transition from enhanced oversight to a more sustainable partnership model based on trust, clarity and accountability. Thirdly, improvements in governance, compliance and organisational capability must be linked directly to impact, so that AFBI's contribution to public policy, public protection and value for money is more clearly demonstrated.

In this context, the actions below are organised under five broad themes which align directly with the Departmental Response: improving governance, assurance and partnership working; improving science commissioning and strategic alignment; strengthening safety, compliance and regulatory assurance; demonstrating impact and engagement; and driving effectiveness and organisational capability. These themes also absorb the specific organisational action plan elements relating to HSE compliance, Hillsborough, data governance and longer-term sustainability.

5. Review Recommendations

Recommendation One – Assurance on Lengthening the Arm

AFBI and DAERA accept that relationships between the Department and the Institute must be underpinned by a more explicit and systematic approach to assurance. In the immediate term, this requires strengthened governance, clearer reporting, and enhanced evidence that statutory, regulatory and control requirements are being met consistently. As soon as practicable, the aim is to create the conditions in which oversight can move from exceptional scrutiny towards a more sustainable model of delegation, assurance and accountability.

The key response to this recommendation is therefore the development and embedding of an AFBI Assurance Framework based on the Three Lines model, strengthened Board oversight of biosafety and laboratory compliance, and the establishment of agreed evidence-based criteria for de-escalation of enhanced oversight. These actions are complemented by the completion of the HSE action plan, lessons learned activity, and strengthened assurance in relation to Hillsborough and data security. Collectively, these steps are intended to provide a clear basis on which confidence can be rebuilt and sustained.

Recommendation Two – Defining Partnership Working

AFBI and DAERA also accept that partnership working must be more clearly defined, strategically focused and transparently governed. A strong partnership requires clarity on roles, responsibilities and expectations, supported by effective engagement structures and a shared understanding of priorities, risks and outcomes. This is particularly important in a context where AFBI remains a key strategic science partner and where future operating flexibilities will depend on confidence in the relationship and the supporting governance framework.

The response to this recommendation includes a review of the Partnership Agreement and Engagement Plan, annual joint strategic planning workshops, and clearer arrangements for strategic dialogue between the Department and AFBI. These actions are intended to improve alignment, create a stronger basis for shared planning, and ensure that both organisations operate with a common understanding of intended outcomes and mutual accountabilities.

Recommendation Three – Assigned Work Programme (AWP) and Science Commissioning

The review identified the current AWP and commissioning model as requiring significant reform in order to support more effective planning, prioritisation and delivery. AFBI and DAERA accept that a more strategic, programme-based and outcome-focused model is needed. In particular, there must be stronger alignment between DAERA's policy needs, AFBI's science capability and the longer-term resource decisions needed to sustain both scientific excellence and operational resilience.

The integrated response therefore includes implementation of a joint strategic science planning process, development of a co-design model for science and policy programmes, replacement of the annual transactional AWP with a programme-based commissioning model over a three- to five-year horizon, and the introduction of annual three-year horizon planning to support prioritisation and resource planning. Programme-level commissioning arrangements will then provide the structure for more coherent commissioning across major policy and science areas.

Recommendation Four – Demonstrating Impact

AFBI and DAERA recognise that demonstrating impact is essential if the value of AFBI's work is to be clearly understood by Ministers, stakeholders and the wider public. Impact must be articulated not only through outputs and activity volumes, but also through the contribution that AFBI makes to policy development, environmental sustainability, public and animal health, sectoral resilience and delivery of wider public outcomes. Strong impact evidence is also important in supporting prioritisation and value for money.

To address this recommendation, AFBI and DAERA will implement an aligned impact framework focused on outputs, outcomes and quality, develop a more structured stakeholder engagement approach, and strengthen external validation through peer review and other evidence mechanisms where appropriate. These actions will provide a more systematic basis for reporting the relevance, quality and effect of AFBI's work.

Recommendation Five – Driving Effectiveness

Finally, AFBI and DAERA accept that organisational effectiveness must be strengthened if AFBI is to deliver its strategic ambitions and respond effectively to the changing operating context. This requires action in relation to workforce planning, digital and data capability, estates and infrastructure, financial sustainability and wider organisational

resilience. These are not ancillary matters; they are central enablers of AFBI's capacity to deliver safe, effective and high-quality scientific services.

The response therefore includes development of a Strategic Workforce Plan, delivery of a Digital, Data and Technology Strategy, progression of the estates transformation and investment programme, review of future diagnostics and emergency response arrangements, and development of the infrastructure and business case work required to support future delivery models. Taken together, these actions are intended to improve organisational capability, efficiency and long-term sustainability.

Delivery of the Strategic Review of the AFBI Estate will be a key enabler of future organisational sustainability. Implementation will be progressed in partnership with DAERA and will inform future decisions regarding estate rationalisation, infrastructure investment, specialist laboratory accommodation and wider service delivery requirements. This will ensure that long-term estate planning is aligned with AFBI's strategic objectives, scientific capability requirements and the recommendations arising from the Strategic Review of the AFBI Estate.

6. Integrated Action Plan

The tabled action plan overleaf integrates the original AFBI organisational actions into the thematic structure used in the DAERA Departmental Response. It is intended to provide a practical delivery framework with a clear line of sight from review recommendation to action, rationale, lead responsibility and implementation timescale.

All actions are framed to provide a deliverable milestone by 31 March 2027. Where issues require a longer lead time, the milestone is expressed as an agreed direction of travel, scope, appraisal approach, transition plan or implementation plan by that date, with phased delivery continuing thereafter overseen by the proposed new Business as Usual Governance arrangements as presented by DAERA at the Senior Partnership and Governance Oversight Board in July 2026 which will become the 'Partnership and Governance Group'.

Theme 1: Improving Governance, Assurance and Partnership Working

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
1.1	Approve and embed the refreshed AFBI Assurance Framework (Three Lines Model) ¹ .	Provides a structured basis for assurance, accountability and Board oversight, and supports confidence in the adequacy of governance and control arrangements.	Rec 1	AFBI Board	By 31 December 2026	Refreshed Assurance Framework.
1.2	Review and agree a revised DAERA-AFBI Partnership Agreement and Engagement Plan.	Clarifies roles, responsibilities, expectations and routes of engagement, and provides a stronger foundation for partnership working.	Rec 2	DAERA / AFBI	By 31 December 2026	Final revised Partnership Agreement and Engagement Plan; approval record from both organisations.
1.3	Deliver annual joint DAERA-AFBI strategic planning workshops.	Supports shared strategic direction, alignment of priorities and risks, and better integration between departmental and organisational planning.	Rec 3	DAERA / AFBI	By 31 January 2027	Agreed process and timings for annual planning workshops.

¹ Three Lines Model – from The Orange Book Management of Risk - Principles and Concepts

Theme 2: Improving Science Commissioning and Strategic Alignment

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
2.1	Develop a new AFBI Corporate Plan for 2027–2030 aligned to Ministerial and DAERA priorities.	Provides a clearer articulation of organisational purpose, priorities and intended outcomes, aligned to the wider public policy context.	Recs 2 and 5	AFBI Board and AFBI EMT	By 31 March 2027	Draft Corporate Plan developed aligned to DAERA and Ministerial Priorities.
2.2	Implement a joint strategic science planning process aligning DAERA policy needs and the AFBI Science Strategy.	Improves strategic alignment between policy demand and scientific capability and supports better forward planning.	Rec 3	DAERA and AFBI	By 31 March 2027	Agreed process in place to take forward under the oversight of the Partnership and Governance Group.
2.3	Establish an agreed co-design model for policy and science programmes that aligns with the DAERA Science Strategy, science governance arrangements and structured engagement processes.	Moves the relationship from transactional commissioning towards more collaborative planning, design and review.	Recs 2 and 3	DAERA and AFBI	By 31 December 2026	Agreed process in place to take forward under the Partnership and Governance Group.
2.4	Replace the annual transactional AWP with a programme-based	Supports longer-term planning, clearer prioritisation, reduced administrative burden	Rec 3	DAERA and AFBI	By 31 January 2027	Agreed process in place to take forward under the Partnership and Governance Group.

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
	commissioning model over a three- to five-year horizon.	and greater focus on outcomes and impacts.				
2.5	Introduce an annual three-year strategic planning and prioritisation process between DAERA policy leads and AFBI senior management.	Improves strategic prioritisation, resource planning and early discussion of emerging policy, scientific and operational requirements.	Rec 3	DAERA	By 31 January 2027.	Planning cycle timetable; Agreed process in place to take forward under the Partnership and Governance Group.
2.6	Implement programme-level commissioning structures across major portfolios.	Creates a more coherent and strategic structure for commissioning, replacing line-by-line approaches with programme planning and oversight.	Rec 3	DAERA	By 31 March 2027:	Agreed direction of travel for programme-level commissioning; transition plan, proposed governance structures and reporting arrangements.

Theme 3: Safety, Compliance and Regulatory Assurance

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
3.1	Deliver and close out the HSE (GB) inspection action plan with Board oversight.	Addresses immediate safety and compliance issues and provides assurance that required standards are being met consistently.	Rec 1	AFBI chief executive	By 30 September 2026	Completed HSE action plan; evidence pack for each action; Board closure approval; confirmation of any external regulatory position where applicable to enable re-licensing of work.
3.2	Strengthen board visibility of biosafety, SAPO and laboratory compliance.	Improves oversight of key regulatory and control risks through clearer dashboards, exception reporting and governance visibility.	Rec 1	AFBI oard	By 31 October 2026	Board reporting template or dashboard; schedule of compliance reporting; Board minutes evidencing review; exception reporting process in operation.
3.3	Conduct an externally facilitated lessons learned review following compliance and re-licensing activity.	Ensures learning is captured, embedded and translated into sustainable improvement across systems and behaviours.	Rec 1	AFBI board	By 31 October 2026,	Final lessons learned report; management response; approved improvement actions; evidence that learning

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
						has been assigned and tracked.
3.4	Review the future model for disease diagnostics, surveillance and emergency response with DAERA.	Supports a sustainable and resilient operating model for critical scientific and diagnostic services.	Recs 1 and 5	AFBI and DAERA	By 31 January 2027	Agreed process in place to take forward under oversight of the Partnership and Governance Group.
3.5	Review future containment and specialist laboratory infrastructure requirements. and develop an agreed options appraisal aligned with the Strategic Review of the AFBI Estate and future regulatory, scientific and operational needs.	Ensures future infrastructure requirements for specialist laboratory and containment facilities are clearly defined, evidence-based and aligned with AFBI's long-term estate strategy, regulatory obligations and service delivery requirements.	Rec 5	AFBI and DAERA	By 31 January 2027:	Agreed process in place to take forward under the oversight of the Partnership and Governance Group.
3.6	Complete the Hillsborough review and approve an Improvement Plan.	Provides assurance that farm operations, controls and governance arrangements meet required standards and	Rec 1	AFBI Board	By 31 July 2026	Final Hillsborough review report; approved Improvement Plan; assigned owners and milestones; Board minute confirming approval and

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
		that learning is implemented.				monitoring route and structure.
3.7	Complete the data breach action plan.	Strengthens information governance, security controls and assurance to the Board and the AFBI Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC).	Recs 1 and 5	AFBI Board	By 30 September 2026	Completed action tracker; control evidence; Board or ARAC closure record.

Theme 4: Demonstrating Impact and Stakeholder Engagement

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
4.1	Implement a DAERA-AFBI aligned Impact Framework focused on outputs, outcomes and quality and their effective communication.	Creates a more systematic and transparent basis for demonstrating how AFBI contributes to policy, public outcomes and value for money.	Rec 4	AFBI and DAERA	By 31 March 2027	Approved Impact Framework; agreed metrics and reporting cycle; baseline or pilot report; evidence of Board and DAERA review.
4.2	Put in place a stakeholder engagement plan, including sectoral forums where appropriate.	Strengthens communication, improves stakeholder understanding of AFBI's role and supports feedback and co-production.	Rec 4	AFBI	By 15 December 2026	Approved stakeholder engagement plan.

Theme 5: Driving Effectiveness and Organisational Capability

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
5.1	AFBI will develop a comprehensive Strategic Workforce Plan, to help ensure the organisation has the right skills, leadership development and capability, and talent management provisions in place to meet current and future needs. ²	Ensures AFBI has the leadership, capacity and specialist capability required to sustain safe and effective delivery.	Rec 5	AFBI	By 31 March 2027	Production of an approved Strategic Workforce Plan; workforce gap analysis; progress on an implementation plan with owners; Board or EMT monitoring record.
5.2	Building on previous scoping work, develop a 5-year Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy by 31 March 2027 aligned with the ambitions set out in the AFBI Science Strategy 2030. ³	Improves digital resilience, data capability, operational efficiency and the quality of scientific and corporate information.	Rec 5	AFBI and DAERA	By 31 March 2027	Approved strategy and delivery plan; prioritised roadmap; progress report against milestones; governance record confirming delivery status.
5.3	Review and progress implementation of the	Supports delivery of a sustainable, fit-for-purpose estate that	Rec 5	DAERA and AFBI	By 31 January 2027:	Agreed process in place to take forward under

² KPI 15 in AFBI Business Plan 2026-27

³ KPI 18 in AFBI Business Plan 2026-27

Ref No.	Action	Rationale	Link to Recommendation	Lead	Timescale	Evidence required to close action
	Strategic Review of the AFBI Estate.	enables AFBI to meet its scientific, diagnostic and corporate objectives through estate rationalisation, infrastructure investment and modernisation of facilities.				the Partnership and Governance Group.

7. Monitoring and Assurance

Progress against the integrated action plan will be monitored through strengthened governance arrangements that provide clear ownership, regular reporting and timely escalation of risks or slippage. In the immediate period, oversight should continue through the enhanced governance arrangements that have been put in place, including the Senior Partnership, Governance and Oversight Board and routine reporting to the AFBI Board and ARAC. Reporting will focus not only on completion of actions, but also on the quality of delivery, the evidence produced, and the extent to which intended improvements are being embedded.

Formal closure reports will be submitted to the Senior Partnership, Governance and Oversight Board for each recommendation, setting out the evidence relied upon to support closure and any residual matters requiring continued oversight.

As implementation progresses, monitoring should transition to business-as-usual governance structures where appropriate, supported by a clear set of evidence-based criteria for de-escalation of enhanced oversight. The AFBI board and its ARAC and DAERA should continue to receive regular updates on delivery status, emerging risks and assurance

evidence. This will enable AFBI and the Department to assess, in a transparent and structured way, whether the conditions are in place to move to a more delegated and sustainable partnership model.

8. Conclusion

This integrated narrative and action plan provides a single framework for responding to the AFBI review, the Minister's immediate priorities and the wider organisational issues that have arisen. It is designed to improve clarity, strengthen alignment between DAERA and AFBI, and provide a stronger assurance trail from recommendation to delivery.

Subject to endorsement, the document can also be used as the basis for monitoring both by the AFBI Board (including through its ARAC) and DAERA and for reporting progress to the Minister, with further enhancement through milestone tracking, RAG ratings and explicit evidence indicators where required.