

Summary	
Meeting	Council
Date	20 January 2022
Title	Preliminary Investigation Committee Report to Council
Summary	This report describes the work of the Preliminary Investigation Committee since RCVS Council's last meeting, including by reference to key stage indicators, and provides information about the nature of concerns being considered by the RCVS.
Decisions required	None
Attachments	None
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Classifications		
Document	Classification¹	Rationales²
Paper	Unclassified	n/a

¹Classifications explained

Unclassified	Papers will be published on the internet and recipients may share them and discuss them freely with anyone. This may include papers marked 'Draft'.
Confidential	Temporarily available only to Council Members, non-Council members of the relevant committee, sub-committee, working party or Board and not for dissemination outside that group unless and until the relevant committee or Council has given approval for public discussion, consultation or publication.
Private	The paper includes personal data which should not be disclosed at any time or for any reason, unless the data subject has agreed otherwise. The Chair may, however, indicate after discussion that there are general issues which can be disclosed, for example in reports to committees and Council.

²Classification rationales

Confidential	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To allow the Committee or Council to come to a view itself, before presenting to and/or consulting with others 2. To maintain the confidence of another organisation 3. To protect commercially sensitive information 4. To maintain public confidence in and/or uphold the reputation of the veterinary professions and/or the RCVS
Private	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To protect information which may contain personal data, special category data, and/or criminal offence data, as listed under the General Data Protection Regulation

Preliminary Investigation Committee

Report to Council 20 January 2022

Introduction

1. This report provides information about the activities of the Preliminary Investigation Committee from November 2021 to January 2022 (10 January 2022 being the date of writing the report).
2. Since the last Report to Council (which gave information to 1 November 2021), there have been four Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) meetings: 10 November, 1 December, 15 December and 5 January.

New cases considered by the PIC

3. The total number of new cases considered by the Committee at the four meetings referred to above is 16. Of the 16 new cases considered:
 - 8 were concluded at first consideration by the Committee. Of these:
 - 5 cases were closed with no further action, and
 - 3 cases were referred to DC.
 - 8 were referred for further investigation, that is, further enquiries, visits and/or preliminary expert reports.
4. No cases have been referred to the RCVS Health or Performance Protocols in the reporting period.

Ongoing Investigations

5. The PI Committee is currently investigating 38 ongoing cases where the Committee has requested statements, visits or preliminary expert reports (for example). This figure does not include cases on the Health and Performance Protocols.

Health Protocol

6. There are two veterinary surgeons either under assessment or currently on the RCVS Health Protocol.

Performance Protocol

7. There are no veterinary surgeons currently on the RCVS Performance Protocol.

Professional Conduct Department - Enquiries and concerns

8. Before registering a concern with the RCVS, potential complainants must make an Enquiry (either in writing or by telephone), so that Case Managers can consider with the enquirer whether they should raise a formal concern or whether the matter would be more appropriately dealt with through the Veterinary Client Mediation Service.

9. In the period 1 November 2021 to 10 January 2022,

- the number of matters registered as Enquiries was 566, and
- the number of formal Concerns registered in the same period was 91.

10. The table below shows the categories of matters registered as Concerns between 1 November 2021 and 10 January 2022.

Concerns registered between 1 November 2021 and 10 January 2022

Description of Category	Number of Cases
- Advertising and publicity	0
- Certification	0
- Client confidentiality	0
- Clinical and client records	0
- Clinical governance	1
- Communication and consent	4
- Communication between professional colleagues	0
- Conviction/notifiable occupation notification	0
- CPD compliance	8
- Delegation to veterinary nurses	0
- Equine pre-purchase examinations	1
- Euthanasia of animals	0
- Giving evidence for court	0
- Health case (<i>potential</i>)	0
- Microchipping	0
- Miscellaneous	4
- Practice information, fees & animal insurance	0
- Referrals and second opinions	0
- Registration investigation	0
- Restoration application	0
- Social media and networking forums	0
- Treatment of animals by unqualified persons	0
- Use of samples, images, post-mortems and disposal	0
- Veterinary care	70
- Veterinary medicines	1
- Veterinary teams and leaders	0
- Whistle-blowing	0
- 24-hour emergency first aid and pain relief	2
- Unassigned	0
Total	91

Data source – Profcon computer system concerns data.

Referral to Disciplinary Committee

11. In the period 1 November 2021 to 10 January 2022, the Committee has referred 4 cases involving 4 veterinary surgeons to the Disciplinary Committee.

Veterinary Investigators

12. The Chief Investigator has undertaken one visit since the last report. This was to serve disciplinary papers on a veterinary surgeon who had failed to respond to written correspondence sent in the post.

Concerns procedure

13. At Stage 1 of the process, the aim is for the Case Examiner Group to decide 90% of cases within four months of registration of complaint (the Stage 1 KPI). In the two months since the last Report to Council the KPI has been met in 76% and 66% of cases respectively. As explained in the last report, we are currently implementing a number of measures to improve these, but they have yet to fully take effect, while the number of cases remains high. As reported previously, several Case Managers left over a period of months, meaning that cases had to be reallocated between a smaller team, and resulting in extra pressure on those who remain. We have recruited more Case Managers, with two starting at the end of November and a further three starting at the beginning of January. We anticipate that this increase in staff numbers will help significantly, however, the new members of staff are understandably still learning the ropes and so it is very early days for them and for their impact to be felt. Two members of the administrative team left at the end of last year and have been replaced and while they are settling in well, this has again led to some unavoidable disruption. In addition to this, both Christmas and Covid have meant that we have had staff absences that have created additional pressures within the team. As always, we are working very hard within the department to assist new and existing staff members by means of training, supporting and helping out wherever and however possible.
14. The Stage 2 KPI is now for the PIC to reach a decision on simple cases before it within seven months, and on complex cases within 12 months. A case is deemed to be complex where the PIC requests that witness statements and/or expert evidence be obtained.
15. In the period 1 November 2021 to 10 January 2022, the PIC reached a decision (to close, hold open or refer to DC) within the relevant KPI in 3 out of 7 simple cases.
16. 9 complex cases were decided, of which 6 met the 12-month KPI. As the number of cases involved during this time period is small, percentages are less meaningful than sometimes. In accordance with normal practice, these cases (and KPI's in general) will be reported and discussed in detail at the PIC/DC Liaison Committee meeting.

Operational matters

17. As explained above, we have been very busy with welcoming new staff members and supporting existing ones with their workloads to try to ensure that cases are dealt with thoroughly and expeditiously. While the figures are not where we would wish them to be, we are optimistic that the new staff members will help us to improve these in the months to come.

18. While PIC met in person in November, the Government guidance that everyone should work from home where possible meant that the plan to return to in-person meetings once a month has been temporarily shelved. This will be reviewed in light of changing guidance, however, the Committee continues to work effectively on remote platforms. Training is in the process of being arranged in February for all PIC and staff members.