



Rt Hon. Nick Thomas-Symonds MP
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Lord Carlile of Berriew CBE KC,
Chair, Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee
House of Lords
London
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2nd July 2025

Dear *Lord Carlile,*

Thank you for your letter of 07 May 2025 in response to my letter of 10 April.

In my last letter I set out that the Government would shortly provide an update for industry on the way forward for veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland. I am pleased that we have now done so. On 19 June, the Government published our paper, **'Protecting Animal Health: the Government's Approach to Veterinary Medicines in Northern Ireland'**. The paper details the progress made to ensure the ongoing supply of veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland following the end of the grace period on 1 January 2026 and the steps the Government will take to support this.

You also ask about discontinuations following the end of the grace period. We expect that only a very small subset of expected product discontinuations would create real risks to animal health and welfare if not addressed. The Government has undertaken extensive engagement with Market Authorisation Holders (MAHs) to understand their intentions from the end of the grace period. While some uncertainty remains and we continue to engage stakeholders, we can see that a significant proportion of the pharmaceutical industry has or is planning to take steps to adjust ready for the end of the grace period.

The Government is clear, however, that it is critical that the needs of animal health and welfare can continue to be met. That is why we are introducing two new support schemes. The Veterinary Medicines Internal Market Scheme will build on existing processes whereby vets can source unauthorised medicines from outside Northern Ireland if this is needed to avoid unacceptable animal suffering based on

their clinical judgment. We are making clear that this flexibility allows vets to source and stock medicines that may be needed under this route, so that they are readily available if and when needed, to prevent unacceptable delays in sourcing medicines for animals under their care. For products coming from Great Britain, we will streamline this by removing any requirements to obtain Special Import Certificates.

The Veterinary Medicines Health Situation Scheme will further build resilience by addressing critical gaps, if any arise. It will allow the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) to permit alternative products from outside Northern Ireland for use in Northern Ireland where animal or public health requires it. Once these temporary authorisations are in place, vets will be able to obtain the medicines on the same basis as any other authorised medicines. Further details on these schemes can be found in the guidance published alongside the Government's paper.

On vaccines, we can also confirm that vets and farmers will continue to be able to rely on certain key critical vaccines including, where necessary, from outside the EU through existing processes. Vets and other stakeholders can reach out to the VMD if they have further questions regarding specific vaccines.

Baroness Hayman, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I regularly attend the Veterinary Medicines Working Group to engage, held most recently on 10 June, to engage on these issues. We will continue to engage the industry, including pharmaceutical companies, retailers, wholesalers and vets, to support them with these adjustments.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Thomas-Symonds', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**RT HON NICK THOMAS-SYMONDS MP
MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE
HIS MAJESTY'S PAYMASTER GENERAL**