

Business Committee performance report for Q4 2024/25

FSA BC 25/06/04 - Report by Ruth Nolan

1. Summary

1.1 The Quarter 4 2024/25 Business Committee performance report is based on the latest executive performance dashboard, discussed with EMT in May 2025 covering data mostly up to 31 March 2025.

1.2 The Business Committee is asked to discuss the FSA performance set out in section 3, with a particular focus on:

1.3 Operational delivery – To note the high volume of incidents this quarter, including a non-routine where listeria was found in hospital desserts (mousses) which required activation of our surge process. Additionally, a new system PRISM (Proactive Resource for Incidents and Signals Management) was delivered to enhance our future response capabilities. We are assessing our current tolerance levels and operational capacity, especially in light of the increasing number of outbreaks being identified by UKHSA.

1.4 Local Authority – To note the rise in the local authority escalations in England indicates they are struggling to manage both their backlog of interventions and new business registrations.

1.5 Market Authorisations – To note the progress on implementing the changes introduced by 1 April 2025 reforms, which is expected to reduce both paused applications and the overall caseload. We are considering whether any adjustments are required to the current service delivery model required in light of wider developments in trade which will need to include the proposed UK EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement.

1.6 Science – To note a new tool is being implemented to monitor research engagement and attention, enabling more robust tracking of scientific impact.

1.7 Trade and International – To note the number of border notifications for imported foods have increased. This is directly linked to the Port Health Authorities (PHAs) undertaking checks on certain categories of EU imports. We are monitoring this carefully for any resource pressures impacting our ability to validate border notifications and send them to Port Health Authorities. The UK-EU Leaders' Summit took place on 19 May 2025. As work progresses on the Government's stated ambition for an SPS Agreement with the EU, FSA will ensure we understand the impact on our work.

2. Introduction

2.1 The aim of the performance dashboard is to enable the committee to fulfil its duties, delegated from the FSA Board, to scrutinise quarterly performance information, and identify and monitor operational and delivery risks, informing the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee if

necessary.

3. Evidence and Discussion – Key themes and insights

Operational delivery (slides 3-6).

3.1 Operational delivery and NFCU remains strong, whilst incident response has been challenging with 861 cases, including a complex listeria non-routine linked to NHS hospital desserts (mousse) which resulted in four deaths, 80% morbidity rate. This involved a significant data and analysis exercise across UKHSA, local authorities, and NHS England.

a) Q4 rounds off a strong year for operational performance, including routine health marking over one billion animals last year – 13 million cattle and sheep, eight million pigs and one billion chickens (3% increase in poultry and pigs, but a reduction in cattle and sheep of 6% from 2023/24)

b) Official Controls: Raw drinking milk in England – routine inspection and sampling at a Hertfordshire farm detected an E.coli (STEC) bacteria in raw cow's drinking milk. Sales were immediately suspended pending investigation. During this time, UKHSA reported two linked illness cases from the same household (onset early-mid January 2025). Following a thorough investigation and resolution of the issues, sales were permitted to resume.

c) FSA Delivery of Official Controls (FSADOC) Q4 data reflects delivery under the previous contract by supplier E&J. The new dual-supplier model (E&J and Hallmark Official Controls Ltd (HMOC)), commenced on 31 March 2025. Transition was successfully completed, including staff transfers, organisation of equipment and future-proofing the changes to FSA systems.

d) Incidents and our response: A minimum viable product for the new PRISM system went live on 28 April, replacing the existing Signals and Incidents Management Systems (SIMS) platform. PRISM will offer a more stable, supported systems with enhanced reporting and management information.

e) Surge capacity was activated twice using an agile approach to support routine incidents. Training continues for the surge cohort, noting a six-to-eight-week lead in time for effectiveness. The Risk and Crisis Management (RCM) Programme has been fully delivered and final lessons learnt conducted in May and the new FSA Emergency Response and Support Team (FERST) process, developed under RCM went live in May to support non-routine incidents.

f) The Executive discussed the broader incident context emerging, alongside the development of the new systems functionality. As this progresses, our ability to drill down into incidents data – particularly around, roles, responsibilities and volumes, is expected to improve. This enhanced visibility will enable a more informed assessment of current tolerance levels and operational capacity, especially in light of the increasing number of outbreaks being identified by UKHSA.

g) National Food Crime Unit – New investigatory powers for food crime officers came into force on 1 May 2025, following the laying of secondary legislation in March 2025. From this date food crime officers will also fall within the remit of the Independent Office for Police Conduct.

Local Authority (LA) delivery (slides 7-9)

a) LA delivery data: Most data reported (except for the FHRS and LA performance data), is based on April-October 2024 data, with 99.7% Food Hygiene (FH) and 98.9% Food Standards (FS) returns as reported in Q3.

b) Food Standards Delivery Model (FSDM) implementation: As of 9 April 2025, 15 LAs out of a total of 178 have fully migrated to the new FSDM. Most remaining LAs are using it for new interventions. We expect 75% of LAs in England and Northern Ireland to fully migrate by the end of June 2025. The Wales pilot has concluded, and consultation on proposed amendments to the Food Law Code of Practice (FLCoP) for Wales, reflecting the new model, is now live.

c) Work is progressing well on the LA Resource Tool. The purpose of the tool is to help LAs assess the resources they need to deliver their services in accordance with the relevant FLCoP. A food hygiene version of the tool has been developed and has recently passed user acceptance testing with positive feedback from LAs. The next stage is to validate the tool which is planned for May 2025.

d) LA performance and escalation: We continue to engage with LAs, and request action plans where needed. An increase in LAs facing escalations in England (the process by which the FSA contact a LA head of service or more senior officer for not delivering their statutory duties or similar such failures) supports evidence that LAs are unable to keep pace with their backlog of interventions and new business registrations. Further action is being taken by the performance management team.

Market Authorisation of Regulated Products (slide 10)

a) As of 31 March 2025, the annual caseload has increased slightly, from 465 to 494. In Q4, 28 contacts were received, 93% with sufficient evidence to progress, which equates to 13 more applications in the service. No application reached authorisation, and 13 exited via invalidation or withdrawal under strengthened quality measures. This has included applying reasonable, proportionate and consistent deadlines, being firmer with applicants and embedding improved and streamlined processes. SERD concluded 30 safety assessments this quarter.

b) Following the reforms, effective from 1 April 2025, we are progressing with operational changes, including preparing official registers and developing the Ministerial Determination documents now we have removed the requirement to lay a statutory instrument. However, the same limited resources and expertise required for implementing these reforms are also needed to advance current applications through the risk management stage, affecting the pace of progress.

c) As of 9 April 2025, 136 of the 494 applications in the service (28% of the total caseload) have been paused to prioritise resources towards achieving the optimal consumer outcomes. The paused applications include:

- 54 Feed additive renewals
- 29 Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) renewal
- 46 applications pending additional information from applicants
- 7 dormant applications

d) Currently the distribution of applications across stages is as follows:

- Pre-Validation: 247 applications, with 89 paused

- Risk Assessment: 136 applications, with 34 paused
- Risk Management: 111 applications, with 13 paused.

e) The April 2025 reforms, which remove the requirement for pure renewal applications, are expected to reduce the number of paused applications by up to 100 in Q2 2025/26, thereby decreasing the overall caseload.

f) The Executive held a strategic discussion on how the current service delivery model may be affected by the proposed UK-EU SPS agreement. In the interim, we will focus on refining key performance metrics to demonstrate the progress and quality of work within our direct control.

Science (slide 11)

a) The overall position is positive, with work on track. The implementation of a new tool (Altmetric) has improved the FSA's ability to track research impact, including references in media and policy. As a result, two additional impact metrics have now been incorporated into the dashboard. As more data is collected, we will review how to further strengthen our impact.

b) To date, 19 evidence packages, under the risk analysis process, have been completed, including 14 in the final quarter of the year. This is an increase of four compared to last year (15 evidence packages completed).

c) Despite an increase in spend, sampling overall is lower this year primarily due to higher sampling costs. 11,571 samples were taken in 24/25, compared to 13,665 in 23/24.

Trade and International (slide 12)

a) On imported foods we have observed an increase in the number of Border Notifications (BN), which we attribute to several factors. Port Health Authorities (PHAs) are now conducting documentary, identification, and physical checks on certain categories of EU imports, leading, inevitably, to increased failures. Examples include non-permitted pork imports from Romania and Hungary. Additionally, PHAs are currently identifying issues with restricted dairy product imports from China after the FSA re-issued a clarification of the legislation. We are monitoring this carefully for any resource pressures impacting our ability to validate BNs and send them to PHAs.

b) The UK-EU Leaders' Summit took place on 19 May 2025. The FSA will continue to work closely with partners across Government on the proposed SPS agreement and actively consider what impact the SPS Agreement might have on our work. Our current understanding is that the UK Government want to move at pace to conclude negotiations and implement; however, exact timings are not yet clear to us, and we will need to prepare and adapt with equal pace.

Reputation and Communications (slide 13)

a) In Q4 we received the latest figures from our regular Food & You research, including figures on trust in the FSA. The results show that trust declined slightly during the most recent period (from 72% down to 69%), but other related measures, such as familiarity with the FSA and reputation, remain constant. The communications team has been working with the social science team to understand more about what drives trust in the food system and the FSA and the findings will help to underpin our future communications.

b) During the quarter there were some high-profile news stories, including the launch of the Regulatory Sandbox for Cell Cultivated Proteins, which generated ten pieces of national and

broadcast coverage. The coverage gave us good insight into the areas of most interest to the press (and potentially the wider public) and this will help inform future communications.

Separately, the FSA's investigations into a listeria outbreak linked to hospital desserts, was the top news item for the quarter, with 38 items of coverage reaching a potential of 62m people.

c) Our 'Updated industry guidance issued for food allergen information in the out-of-home sector' generated 12,365 page views, helping to increase visits and engagement overall to food.gov, reversing a slight dip in visits during Q3 (including the Christmas/New Year period).

d) Many topical issues are regularly shared via our Stakeholder Newsletters, which have experienced a decline in audience growth. To counteract that, we recently created a newsletter 'hub' on food.gov, which should help to increase the number of subscribers. The hub details the various newsletters we send out and informs users how to subscribe to them.

Resources (slide 14)

a) Overall FSA FTE levels remain broadly stable at the end of the last quarter, with a slight reduction in Westminster levels (9.4 FTE) and Northern Ireland (5.8 FTE) and a small increase in Wales (1.6 FTE). These represent small day to day movements in our staffing levels. Historically we would expect to be lower at year end due to business planning and the end of fixed term contracts.

b) The diversity and representation of our workforce remains above wider Civil Service benchmarks in all categories apart from ethnicity. Following EMT's review of the ethnicity deep-dive, a number of actions are now being taken forward including, linked to our Speak Up Campaign 2025, running regular campaigns to ensure our protected characteristic data is kept up to date particularly targeting new starters so that our records reflect the high representation shown in our recruitment data and showcasing diversity to external candidates.

c) As of 31 March 2025, the FSA's provisional year-end outturn was £141.4m against available funding of £145.0m, representing a £3.6m (2.5%) net underspend for the Agency as a whole (£2.8m Westminster, £0.7m Northern Ireland and £0.1m Wales). The provisional outturn for each spend category falls within all respective HMT control limits.

d) The Westminster underspend can be broken down as a £1.8m (1.6%) resource expenditure (RDEL) underspend, and a £1.0m (9.1%) capital expenditure (CDEL) underspend. This represents the lowest Westminster total underspend (RDEL plus CDEL) in both cash terms and as a proportion of budget in the last five years, and the second lowest Westminster RDEL underspend in the last five years.

e) This is a provisional outturn position, subject to both final year-end adjustments, and to adjustments following any audit findings later this year, all of which could result in a reduction to the underspend position.

f) The performance metrics for our financial operations demonstrate our core operational processes and controls are working well. A new metric introduced for Q4 shows that the FSA's forecasting accuracy is below target. A significant proportion of this is due to conscious decisions to hold contingency. The remaining movements will be reviewed and lessons learnt will be applied to future forecasting.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The Business Committee is invited to review and note the performance update, with particular attention to key operational and strategic developments, including:

- a) Operational Delivery: This quarter saw a high volume of incidents, including a significant listeria case that triggered surge protocols. The successful launch of the PRISM system is expected to strengthen future response capabilities.
- b) Local Authority Escalations: Escalations in England have increased, reflecting ongoing pressures in managing backlogs and new registrations.
- c) Market Authorisations: Reforms effective from 1 April 2025 continue to progress and are expected to ease caseload pressures. The UK-EU SPS Agreement will be incorporated into future service delivery planning.
- d) Science and Research: A new tool has been implemented to improve tracking of research engagement and scientific impact.
- e) Trade and International: Increased border notifications from Port Health Authority checks on EU imports are under close review to assess potential resourcing implications.
- f) Reputation and Communications: Public trust declined slightly (from 72% to 69%), though other key measures remain stable.
- g) Resources and Finance: Resource levels, including FTEs, remain broadly stable. The provisional year-end outturn was £141.4m against available funding of £145.0m.

Performance Report for Q4 2024/25

PDF

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