

Minutes of the FSA Board Meeting on 26 March 2025

FSA 25/06/01 - 26 March 2025, Doubletree by Hilton, 24 Ferensway, Kingston Upon Hull, Yorkshire, HU2 8NH

Present: Susan Jebb, (Chair); Fiona Gately; Margaret Gilmore; Anthony Harbinson; Rhian Hayward; Timothy Riley; Mark Rolfe.

Officials Attending:

Katie Pettifer	-Chief Executive
Nathan Barnhouse	-Head of Regulatory Compliance Division (For FSA 25/03/06)
Beth Chaudhary	-Director of Strategy and Regulatory Compliance
Jane Clark	-Director of Veterinary Services and Future Borders (for FSA 25/03/04)
Rachel Cooper	-Director of Strategy and Regulatory Compliance
Claire Forbes	-Director of Communications
Junior Johnson	-Director of Operations
Anjali Juneja	-Director of UK & International Affairs
Robin May	-Chief Scientific Adviser
Rick Mumford	-Head of Science Evidence and Research
Ruth Nolan	-Director of People and Resources
Julie Pierce	-Director of Information and Science
James Robinson	-General Counsel
Natasha Smith	-Deputy Director of Food Policy (For FSA 25/03/05)
Rebecca Sudworth	-Director of Policy
Anthony Wilson	-Team Leader - Risk Assessment (For FSA 25/03/05)

1 Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair noted there were no apologies and welcomed Rachel Cooper and Beth Chaudhary who had recently been appointed on a job share basis to fill the post of the Director of Strategy and Regulatory Compliance.

1.2 Eight questions had been received from stakeholders ahead of the meeting in relation to the papers on the agenda. All questions would receive a full answer in writing and points from the questions could also be picked up during the relevant items.

1.3 The Chair declared a new interest having joined Defra's Food Strategy Advisory Group. Other Board Members indicated that they had no new interests to declare since the previous Board meeting.

2 Minutes of 11 December 2024 Board Meeting (FSA 25/03/01)

2.1 No comments were raised on the minutes of the 11 December 2024 Board meeting, and they were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

3 Actions Arising (FSA 25/03/02)

3.1 Fiona Gately noted that Action 4 from the March 2024 meeting included a commitment to provide the Board with information on food contamination from chemical toxins. This information was not included in paper FSA 25/03/05 for this meeting and the action should not be marked as complete.

3.2 No further comments were made on the action log.

4 Chair's Report (Oral Report)

4.1 The Chair confirmed Katie Pettifer's appointment as permanent CE for the FSA.

4.2 There had been 144 applications received for positions as new FSA Board Members with interviews scheduled for April 2025.

4.3 The list of the Chair's external engagements had been published, and the Chair highlighted her attendance at the food systems conference in York and the parliamentary launch of the Food Foundation's Broken Plate Report as well as correspondence with new Public Health Minister, Ashley Dalton and meetings with Defra Minister Daniel Zeichner.

4.4 Defra's work on the Food Strategy, with strong input from the FSA was noted and the Chair noted that she was a member of the advisory group for the Food Strategy. The Board had discussed aspirations for the Food Strategy during their Retreat in January and noted the strength of the FSA's current relationship with Defra.

4.5 The Chair mentioned meetings with Baroness Hayman, which focused on trade and border controls and visits to FSA and Defra counterparts in France and Spain aimed at strengthening information sharing on incidents and food crime. There had been substantial interest from both countries around the approach the UK was taking on Cell Cultivated Products (CCPs) and Precision Breeding (PB).

4.6 The Chair had been impressed by the WHO's new Head of Nutrition and Food Safety Division, Dr. Luz Maria De Regil, and had discussed the implications of the US withdrawal of funding and the importance of securing funding for Infosan.

4.7 The Chair noted the Regulating for Growth action plan unveiled by the Chancellor and that the FSA had responded to the Prime Minister's request for details on contributing to the Growth Mission acknowledging the importance of regulators having clear and measurable KPIs. There had also been a constructive meeting with Minister Valence on pro-innovation regulation and the Chair had been encouraged by the setting up of the Regulatory Innovation Office.

5 Chief Executive's Report (FSA 25/03/03)

5.1 The CE gave an update on issues highlighted in her Report including regulators' contributions to the UK Government's growth agenda; the first wave of guidance on CCPs; the FSA's new role to enable the export of recycled plastic materials for food contact use in the EU; the foundation of the FSA's Innovation Hub; the introduction of the Statutory Instrument for the first wave of market authorisation reforms; and the laying of the statutory instruments for PACE powers for the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU).

5.2 In response to a question from the Board around National Level Regulation (NLR) the CE explained Board Member Mark Rolfe had been present at stakeholder workshops she had attended, and it had been clear from discussions at the events that access to the data from NLR was widely recognised as being a benefit for consumers and would enable better targeting of regulation. There would be a further update for the Board on NLR at the June Board meeting.

5.3 The Board asked about changes to the Code of Practice requiring local authorities to adopt the new Food Standards Model. The CE said it had been hoped that all local authorities would be working to the new model by 1 April when the changes came into force. The complexity of Management Information System (MIS) changes for many local authorities, meant it was likely that the majority of local authorities would not have transitioned by that date; timetables had been received from the MIS providers suggesting two-thirds would move to the new model over the summer. The CE had written to the Chief Executives of those local authorities who were yet to transition to the new model, reminding them that this was a statutory requirement. The Chair reminded the Board that she had held regular meetings with the team to discuss progress in greater detail and that we may need to consider further action with any areas not making the change over the summer. The Business Committee also considered progress through the Performance Report.

5.4 In response to a question about food contact materials and recycled plastics, the CE explained that the EU had introduced a new regime for recycled plastics for use in food contact materials and, in order to export to the EU, businesses now needed to be certified by a competent authority. The FSA had agreed to take on this role and were already doing so for Northern Ireland, where EU law still applied.

5.5 There were questions from Board Members about the next stage of Market Authorisation reforms. Rebecca Sudworth explained that some administrative steps in the process remained which were not essential for food safety. She added an opinion that these requirements were delaying the process and were not in the best interests of the consumers. Proposals for the next phase of reform will be presented to the Board at the next meeting.

5.6 On the Innovation Hub, Rebecca explained Market Authorisations were divided up with teams working on different products. Those teams were now working side-by-side under a single leadership including those working on novel foods, CBD, CCP, precision fermentation and teams working on genetic technologies.

5.7 For CBD, Rebecca explained a number of safety assessments had now been published and those products were now in a risk management phase with an upcoming consultation on the FSA's recommendations. There were a number of additional complexities with CBD due to overlap with the responsibilities of other bodies. Proposals would be brought to the Board once the consultation had concluded.

5.8 On CCPs, the Board asked how consumers would be engaged throughout the approvals process. Rebecca explained that the FSA was planning comprehensive consumer engagement and had included new questions in consumer surveys to better understand consumer thinking about new technologies such as CCPs to inform the FSA's guidance.

5.9 The Chair said it would be helpful for officials to come back to the Board on how thinking had been shaped through the reform journey, covering the responsibility overlap with other departments on CBD; processes for pre-submission guidance; getting user perspectives on the guidance, and setting out next steps.

Action 1 -Policy team to provide an update to the Board on Market Authorisations reform to cover the responsibility overlap with other departments on CBD; processes for pre-submission guidance; getting user perspectives on the guidance and setting out next steps.

5.10 Concerns were raised by Board Members about the implications of the necessary downgrading of the classifications for several shellfish harvesting areas and what could be done given the importance of shellfish as an export product for the government's growth agenda. Rebecca explained that since leaving the EU, the sector had been particularly affected by new requirements for exporting. Changes had been introduced to protect public health and food safety while aiding compliance. The Chair noted a visit with Board Member Rhian Hayward to shellfish harvesters at the Menai Strait, where significant challenges to their business were outlined. The major challenge arose from water quality. Mussels could be a sustainable source of high-quality protein, but improvements in water quality, which was beyond the FSA's remit, was necessary.

5.11 The Chair noted the amount of work covered in the Report and welcomed the added impetus to our work from the Government drive for regulatory reform.

6 Border Target Operating Model – One Year On (FSA 25/03/04)

6.1 The Chair welcomed Jane Clark to the meeting, noting that it was one year since the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) had been introduced. Defra were the lead department for the programme with the FSA working in close collaboration with them.

6.2 Jane outlined Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) controls; the relationship with Food Standards Scotland (FSS); the approach in Northern Ireland; food and feed safety risks for imports into Britain; the Government's commitment to re-set the relationship with the EU; and concerns about illegal meat imports.

6.3 Responding to the themes of some of the questions received ahead of the meeting, Jane said BTOM had contributed positively to our ability to manage risks from imported food and feed since for the first time we had some controls on foods coming from EU. She mentioned that we had carried out four runs of the International Disease Monitoring+ (IDM+) food and feed safety model. This showed the risk from imported food and feed to be broadly stable.

6.4 On West Coast controls, Jane explained the Government had committed to provide a further update on the implementation by the summer of 2025. She noted that the FSA worked closely with counterparts in Ireland to protect the health and the interests of consumers. On the

application of risk categories, the detailed advice already provided to importers remained current and accurate.

6.5 Anjali Juneja added that she had spoken with the Chief Executive of CIEH who had raised concerns about BTOM. It was agreed that, together with Defra, the FSA would meet with her to discuss those concerns in greater detail.

6.6 The Chair flagged that the rollout had been slower than had been hoped and noted that there was a lack of controls at the West Coast ports. The model should be considered a work in progress and this position was understood by Defra and other colleagues in the food system. She suggested that discussion focus first on the BTOM itself with a separate discussion on illegal imports.

6.7 In response to questions from the Board on engagement with the industry, Anjali said that the team were engaging with Port Health Authorities (PHAs) and industry for intelligence on activity and case studies had been included in the paper. Defra had also held a number of working groups with industry and PHAs.

6.8 The Board raised a point about high-risk foods not of animal origins (HRFNAO). Anjali explained that this was a different issue with these commodities legislated for separately with Port Health Authorities looking at pre-notifications to determine where to target. The FSA owned that policy with PHAs carrying out the checks to ensure seamless delivery; BTOM covered Products Of Animal Origin (POAO) and not HRFNAO.

6.9 The Board asked Anjali to comment on plans and the timeline for the West Coast ports in Wales. Anjali explained that the Government intended to give an update in the summer of 2025 and there were further Ministerial meetings planned. The FSA was working closely with Welsh Government officials and the FSA's responsibilities in Northern Ireland had also helped create a close relationship with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI).

6.10 In terms of PHAs in Wales having access to the Import of Products, Animals, Food and Feed System (IPAFFS) Anjali explained that this was being addressed, and the necessary access was being sought from Defra who owned that database. Jane added that Defra were working with the FSA and PHAs to assess and improve data quality across IT systems, including IPAFFS, ensuring the systems could interact with each other to allow the data to be used by the different authorities

6.11 In response to a question from the Board, Anjali explained that it would be a decision for Ministers on whether to roll the trusted trader pilot scheme out more widely.

6.12 In response to a question from the Board on intelligence around the Short Straits, Jane explained that there would always be a challenge with the just-in-time supply lines and high volumes around this area. The Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee had attended Dover, Bastion Point and Sevington the previous week. The FSA's Head of the BTOM Programme Simon Dadd had accompanied the Committee and had taken the opportunity to talk to Ashford PHA colleagues to understand how they used their intelligence. Increasing understanding of the patterns of trade and compliance was also being sought through the PHAs.

6.13 In response to a question about stakeholder concerns about the burden on inland local authority officials, Jane explained that there was currently no direct evidence that this was increasing, and work was ongoing with local authorities to discuss the powers they had to deal with non-compliant imported products. Defra and the FSA had written to inland local authorities to explain those powers in relation to animal health risks and that these were also linked to imported food and feed safety risks.

6.14 The Chair suggested discussion on the issue of illegal imports acknowledging media attention given to the issue. She noted the non-commercial routes these imports often took meant they would not be impacted by BTOM.

6.15 Anjali highlighted cooperation between her team and the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) on work to understand the routes illegal imports tended to take. Work was also ongoing to better understand the demand for these products to enable the targeting of specific consumer groups with communications activity. Junior Johnson added that, because of the NFCU sharing intelligence, changes had been made to stakeholder system approaches. The importance of enforcement work, to act as a deterrent, was also highlighted, also noting the challenges this presented because of delays in the court system

6.16 Responding to a point raised by the Board about separating the issue of illegal imports from the BTOM programme, the CE said it was important to acknowledge the number of partners involved and the role for FSA in supporting Defra on both BTOM and animal health issues; the latter being a major risk from illegal imports. At an operational level, the FSA provided intelligence gathered from NFCU operations, to those able to act on it at the border such as Border Force.

6.17 The Chair considered the idea of liaising with Defra to help them develop a strategy should be taken forward as an action from this discussion.

Action 2 -FSA BTOM and Operations teams to engage with Defra officials about the development of a strategic approach to address illegal imports.

6.18 Junior added it would be important to continue to share intelligence to ensure the strategic approach would be evidence-based and to allow it to adapt as criminal routes evolved.

6.19 The Chair noted that the country was in a better position than a year ago with respect to the safety of imported food and feed but that there was more to do. The SPS discussions and negotiations were also at an early stage and would add further complexity, meaning maintaining links with Defra, at Ministerial and at official levels, would be key.

7 Foodborne Disease Monitoring (FSA 25/03/05)

7.1 The Chair welcomed Natasha Smith and Anthony Wilson to the meeting noting that foodborne disease monitoring was core to the FSA's mission. Natasha introduced the paper covering discussions at the March 2024 Board meeting; the conclusions from that discussion and the proposed activities for monitoring foodborne disease; changes in sampling and reporting arrangements; cross-government engagement; the value of thresholds; key changes around *Salmonella*, Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli*(STEC) and *Listeria*; and recommendations for reviews of the thresholds.

7.2 The Chair suggested that the discussion should focus on thresholds initially, followed by discussion about changes in the patterns of infection.

7.3 Robin May, Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA) expressed support for the recommendations in the paper and responded to questions from the Board about the circumstances under which a threshold could be reviewed before five years. he CSA explained that the threshold being crossed should prompt a review of that pathogen. There could also be other reasons to review it, such as a significant incident, which did not tip the yearly data above the threshold. Anthony Wilson added that were an annual review of thresholds to be implemented, an increase over many years could cause the thresholds to rise gradually without proper review, leading to a position in which overall risk had inadvertently been allowed to rise. It was important to note that, if a hypervirulent strain were to emerge, the FSA would not be constrained to wait for the next review but could act in advance of the five-yearly timeline.

7.4 The Board asked a question about monitoring the wider spectrum of foodborne disease. The CSA agreed the FSA should look at both individual pathogens and pathogens as a group. These would be discussed with UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) in line with data from the third study of infectious intestinal disease in the UK (IID3). This was a very large national survey of infectious intestinal disease, which would have detailed data on the prevalence of a broader number of pathogens than the four considered in the paper. The survey would report in 2026. When that data was received the FSA and UKHSA would look in detail at pathogens that may not currently be monitored. Monitoring and threshold revision would be based on those discussions.

7.5 The Board asked about the potential for new testing techniques and methodology to reveal a greater number of cases already present in the food system. The CSA explained that improved methodologies could lead to an apparent increase in numbers, either due to enhanced detection or to improved attribution (previously 'undiagnosed' illnesses now being attributed to specific pathogens).

7.6 The Board noted the end of the PATHSAFE project and asked about the contribution of the FSA's science and research to determining thresholds. The CSA explained that work around PATHSAFE was finishing in March 2025; roughly half of the pilot projects to emerge from it would continue in some capacity with either the FSA or other Government departments. Anthony added that there was a subgroup still operating, which looked at ways to inform risk assessment.

7.7 The Chair noted that the Epidemiology of Foodborne Infections Group (EFIG) was chaired by Anthony and included other agencies involved in food chain risk, from and feed contamination, to livestock infections, to detections in food and clinical cases. EFIG would also contribute expert advice on thresholds and work on pathogens.

7.8 The Chair said the issue should come back to the Board for a wider discussion about foodborne disease when the IID3 report was published and asked if Board Members had any questions on that topic they would like to raise now, noting recent incidents.

Action 3 -Paper on wider topic of Foodborne Disease to be brought to Board following the publication of the IID3 report.

7.9 In response to a Board Member's question about *Listeria* in hospital settings, Junior Johnson said that there had been several incidents of this in the last few years. Work was ongoing with UKHSA and NHS England to help with the management of incidents through what are complex supply chains. Assurances had been received that specific products were being identified and removed from the hospital setting. The inquest report in 2019/2020 identified a way forward for addressing systemic issues, once the current incident was addressed. Managing food in hospitals was an NHS England lead with UKHSA leading on the current incident. The *Listeria* levels were first identified by one of the NHS Trusts, which led to the identification of a cluster. The controls in place for the supply chain needed to be particularly strong given the vulnerability of the people impacted. The updated guidance was clear and was a statutory responsibility for NHS Trusts.

7.10 The Chair noted the use of new science to inform prevention; and ensuring that the FSA's management of incidents was as good as it could be, were two key elements of dealing with foodborne disease. She highlighted the necessary coordination between the different bodies involved with different responsibilities, giving the potential for things to be missed. She welcomed the proactive role the FSA was playing in trying to bring the supply chains together as well as those with responsibilities for management. The Board were content with the plan for thresholds, welcomed the work of the EFIG group, and looked forward to hearing advice on how to handle the issue following the IID3 publication.

8 Local Authority Cost-Recovery, Initial Findings and Proposed Way Ahead (FSA 25/03/06)

8.1 The Chair noted that Board Member Mark Rolfe, had a declared interest relating to his employment with Kent County Council, she said it would be helpful for the Board to draw on his experiences in considering this item and, as there were no decisions being made in this discussion, it would not be necessary to ask Mark to recuse himself.

8.2 The Business Committee had discussed local authority performance the previous week and had highlighted some of the challenges, which were mentioned to in the paper. Board Members were asked to keep comments on those issues for the agenda item on the Report from the Business Committee (INFO 25/03/02). This discussion should focus on the findings of the investigation into charging for local authority services. She reminded Board Members that some local authorities had asked the FSA to explore the issue of cost recovery in the context of the increasing financial pressures that they faced and noted that the paper set out the work the team had done to begin this.

8.3 The Chair welcomed Nathan Barnhouse to the meeting. Nathan introduced the paper covering engagement with FSS; financial pressures on local authorities; the need for sustainable funding and the case for cost recovery; the need to gather the view from businesses; and potential safeguards.

8.4 The Chair asked about analogous activity by FSS. Nathan said there had been conversations with FSS about how the FSA's programme and FSS's programme could work together and the overlap in how they were approaching re-investment in regulatory services. FSS work was consistent with the FSA's approach.

8.5 Rhian Hayward said that Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) Members were supportive of the concept of recovery of costs, though noted WFAC's caution about next steps noting the differences in the licensing regimes. WFAC had also highlighted pertinent political factors in Wales such as the commitment to co-produce and co-design new initiatives with Welsh Government.

8.6 Nathan explained that there had been engagement with local authorities in Wales over the winter, which would continue. Local authorities in Wales were interested in registration and there was a piece of work under way in Wales looking specifically at this. There had also been conversations around the challenging socio-economic landscape in Wales, and whether cost recovery would drive some businesses underground, although it had been acknowledged that this happened already with businesses trying to avoid the rules and a cost recovery mechanism designed in the right way could give local authorities more tools to address that behaviour. Other mechanisms such as fixed penalty notices had also been also discussed.

8.7 Anthony Harbinson said that Northern Ireland only had 11 District Councils and a different operating context, given the statutory nature of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) in Northern Ireland. There was a prevailing attitude that the same issues did not apply and the appetite for change was less significant. Divergence had been happening with GB and there was a concern that this would increase if there was the development of a cost recovery scheme. Nathan explained that conversations in Northern Ireland recognised that divergence was not necessarily negative and reflected how the law was implemented across the nations. Managing that and being aware of it was what would matter the most.

8.8 The Chair invited comments from Board Members, asking them to focus on how the FSA could help support a charging model which delivered the best outcomes.

8.9 The Board raised concerns about developing a charging mechanism focussed on business which would then pass that on through increasing costs to consumers and impact, most significantly, on the poorest consumers. Board Members also commented on further exploration of the legal position; potential challenges from the restructuring of local authorities; the potential for FHRS mandation in England to improve business performance; the potential benefits of registration fees over a licence model; potential charges for non-compliance; the importance of getting the views of businesses; and graduating charges according to the proportionality of the risk.

8.10 The Chair noted the general enthusiasm for the approach and the interest in the details of how it might work. She asked that Board Members commented on the principles outlined in the paper, noting that decisions should be driven primarily by consumer safety and that this should also contribute significantly to driving improved outcomes; the broader consumer interest, beyond safety, should also be included among those drivers.

8.11 Mark Rolfe noted a comment in the paper about the predictability and sustainability of funding and said that this would be a key point for local authorities, and a licencing or registration model would represent a more straightforward way to achieve that. The current registration process meant that some potential businesses registered but then did not go on to trade, contributing to the number of businesses apparently uninspected. This could be partly due to it being cost-free to register. Mark asked how the models included in the paper might work in a two-tier local authority structure and also highlighted the wider government mission around growth and how this approach would fit with reducing the regulatory burden on businesses. The Chair noted the need to start conversations with Ministers, in each of the countries about this and recognised the challenge to simultaneously avoid additional burdens on businesses, avoid additional costs on consumers, and the limitations of public finances.

8.12 The CE said it would not be the FSA's decision whether this would be done, and Ministers would need to be content with any approach. On challenges that local authorities were facing, the CE said that an enhanced role for the FSA in using intelligence to drive activity was one of the building blocks of the future regulatory system, along with improved guidance for businesses, the enforcement toolkit, and an enhanced registration system across the local authority delivery service. She added that the FSA was committed to advocating for the mandatory display of FHRS scores in England. These elements should not be considered in isolation as they provided a context for each other.

8.13 The Chair noted that the Board agreed that it should be made clear that this work fitted within a broader context and that should be reflected in the principles. The Board had also expressed a view that it must not increase the regulatory burden on local authorities nor undermine the levels of safety and delivery for consumers. The topic would need to come back to the Board when the wider discussions had taken place. The CE said this would not be in time for the June Board meeting but there could be an update in September or December.

Action 4 -Regulatory Compliance team to bring update on Local Authority Cost Recovery to September or December Board.

9 Report from the Chair of the Wales Food Advisory Committee (FSA 25/03/07)

9.1 Rhian Hayward introduced her Annual Report from the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC), highlighting the Committee's activities and future plans; engagement with stakeholders; and topics for future WFAC themed meetings.

9.2 The Chair mentioned the Welsh Government's review of the FSA in Wales and suggested expanding the themes for deep dives to include new technology in food.

9.3 The Board highlighted the importance of collaboration across the four nations, particularly around dietary health. Rhian highlighted the availability of data on the food sector in Wales and the importance of supporting Small and Medium sized Enterprises through initiatives like Project Helix. The need for commonality and collaboration in nutrition initiatives and the potential for regional collaboration was raised, noting that positive work taking place in Northern Ireland could be highlighted in conversations with Welsh Government.

9.4 The CSA noted the important work of research partners in Wales for their contributions to the genome sequencing programme as well as those in Northern Ireland, highlighting the benefits of the four-nation approach.

9.5 The Chair thanked Rhian and WFAC for their work and support.

10 Report from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (INFO 25/03/01)

10.1 Anthony Harbinson provided a report from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), highlighting key points from their recent meeting including funding levels; and the Spending Review for the next three years. Anthony also noted the absence of an audit letter from the National Audit Office (NAO) for the third consecutive year, attributing it to various delays including Covid and the General Election. Internal audit resourcing issues had been resolved and were back on target. Additionally, he discussed lessons learned from the Post Office inquiry and shared documentation from the Institute of Directors.

10.2 No questions were raised by Board Members on the update.

11 Report from the Chair of the Business Committee (INFO 25/03/02)

11.1 Timothy Riley gave an update on the recent meeting of the Business Committee, covering local authority performance and challenges in meeting code of practice requirements for lower risk establishments and delays in implementing new food standards delivery models. He stressed the importance of supporting local authorities and ensuring tangible improvements. Timothy also outlined the Committee's discussions around the regulatory sandbox and market authorisations.

11.2 The Chair invited comments on local authority performance and the sandbox. The CE noted the concerns raised about perceived regulatory capture and emphasised that the risk assessment process was separate to the sandbox. Rebecca Sudworth added that the authorisation process would remain the same for any product including CCPs.

11.3 The Board noted issues around potential conflicts of interest in the consultancy service. The Chair clarified that this referred to pre-application guidance and support. Rebecca added that this was a standard part of many regulators' offerings and would be trialled as part of the sandbox. Timothy mentioned the possibility of a fee-for-service offer. The Chair agreed that it should be considered as part of the wider market authorisation reforms.

12 Reports from the Chairs of the Food Advisory Committees (Oral Reports)

12.1 The Chair invited the Chairs of the Food Advisory Committees to share updates from their recent meetings.

12.2 Anthony Harbinson said that NIFAC had met the previous week to discuss the Board papers and points made by the Committee had informed his contribution to the discussions. NIFAC's last themed meeting had been in February and focussed on the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework. The framework was published in November 2024 and was led by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland. Other key Government departments and stakeholders were also involved including the FSA. NIFAC Members were able to hear from the DAERA framework leads and provide insight and feedback about the next stages for the framework. There had been a useful discussion about the FSA's role within that and how it aligned with dietary health priorities going forward. The next themed meeting, as with WFAC, would be focussed on CCPs.

12.3 Anthony noted that the CE had attended the recent Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Association (NIFDA) event as a keynote speaker.

12.4 The Chair shared her experience visiting the Allied flour mill in Belfast with Baroness Hayman, where they had discussed preparations for folic acid fortification and labelling changes.

12.5 Rhian Hayward noted that there was nothing further to add from the recent WFAC meetings that had not been covered in her WFAC Chair's report.

13 Any Other Business

13.1 The Chair noted that in line with the Board's Standing Orders, the dates for 2026 Board Meetings had now been set for 26 March, 17 June, 16 September and 9 December.

13.2 No further business was raised by the Board.

14 Questions

14.1 The Chair invited questions from attending stakeholders. Paul Turner, a local Environmental Health Officer, expressed his appreciation for the Board's focus on local authorities and shared his experiences and suggestions regarding food business registration. He highlighted the challenges faced by local authorities in regulating businesses, particularly in areas like Spring Bank. He also noted the Board's discussion around incidents involving listeria in hospital sandwiches.

14.2 The Chair thanked Paul for his insights and mentioned the Board's ongoing work with the DHSC on hospital sandwiches.

14.3 Marika Graham-Woods, representing the Cannabis Trades Association, thanked Rebecca Sudworth for her transparency and openness. She expressed support for the pre-approval process and suggested considering a fee for it. The Chair acknowledged Marika's comments and emphasised the importance of the feedback in shaping the Board's work.

14.4 No further questions were raised, and the meeting was closed. The Next meeting would be on 18 June in Birmingham.