

Minutes of Business Committee Meeting on 1 December 2025

FSA BC 26/03/01 - Via Teams

Present

Timothy Riley, Chair; Susan Jebb; Steve Ruddy; Louise Hoste; Alison Austin

Apologies

Rhian Hayward

Officials Attending

Katie Pettifer ? Chief Executive

Beth Chaudhary ? Director of Strategy and Regulatory Compliance

Claire Forbes ? Director of Communications

Ian Gibson ? Director of Corporate Services

Junior Johnson ? Director of Operations

Anjali Juneja ? Director of UK & International Affairs

Rick Mumford ? Head of Science Evidence and Research

Nathan Philippo ? Head of Delivery Assurance (for FSA BC 25/12/05)

Julie Pierce ? Director of Information and Science

James Robinson ? General Counsel

Rebecca Sudworth ? Director of Policy

Michael Todd ? Head of Planning and Performance (for FSA BC 25/12/04)

Observer:

Dan Deacon - GIAA

1 Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees, noting that Alison Austin, was attending her first Business Committee meeting. He reminded Members that the meeting was being recorded to support accurate minute production, noting that recordings were not shared publicly and were deleted once minutes were ratified.

1.2 Apologies for the meeting had been received from Committee Member Rhian Hayward.

1.3 The Chair also welcomed Ian Gibson, the new Director of Corporate Services, who had joined the FSA on 13 October. Dan Deacon from GIAA was also welcomed as an observer, attending as part of the external Board effectiveness review, which formed part of the FSA's three-year governance cycle.

1.4 The Chair invited declarations of interest. No new interests were declared, and members confirmed they were content to proceed.

2 Minutes of 10 September 2025 Business Committee Meeting (FSA BC 25/12/01)

2.1 The Chair confirmed that members had reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 September 2025. No amendments were requested, and the minutes were accepted as an accurate record.

3 Actions Arising (FSA BC 25/12/02)

3.1 The Chair reviewed outstanding actions. Two actions remained in progress relating to the review of the proposed approach to market authorisations delivery, informed by the planned prioritisation strategy paper for the Board. No additional matters were raised, and members confirmed they were content with progress.

4 Chief Executive's Report to the Business Committee (FSA BC 25/12/03)

4.1 The CE presented her report, noting the ongoing nature of several previously reported issues. She highlighted key developments across operations, finance, and workforce matters.

4.2 The CE reported positively that the FSA was not managing any serious incidents at present, which was unusual given previous updates. She noted that the absence of major incidents provided an opportunity to consolidate improvements in operational resilience. The CE highlighted successful implementation of the PRISM system, now fully operational and delivering benefits for incident management. The system was expected to improve traceability and speed of response, reducing the time taken to resolve complex incidents.

4.3 The CE drew attention to the issue of parasites in sheep lungs, noting increased human consumption of offal, particularly lungs, which had heightened operational challenges. The challenges of identifying lesions indicative of parasites immediately post-slaughter were highlighted. This had prompted concerns from industry stakeholders. Junior Johnson's team had worked extensively with industry and proposed an additional verification step for lungs entering the human food chain. This option was well received by industry, despite strong correspondence from AIMS expressing concern about FSA performance.

4.4 The Chair noted that lungworm posed no zoonotic risk to human health, though it affected meat palatability. He stressed the importance of clear communication to assure consumers.

4.5 The CE confirmed that the financial position remained challenging but manageable. Recent government announcements included funding for work on a national-level approach to regulating large businesses, providing £1 million in-year and a total of £8.6 million (non-ringfenced) over the full three and a bit year period. A Treasury "letter of comfort" on SPS funding was expected, and there would be a discussion with HMT around a formal business case for future SPS funding early next year.

4.6 The CE confirmed implementation of the pay award without agreement from one union.

4.7 The CE announced that recruitment for Anjali Juneja's replacement had commenced and acknowledged that this was Anjali's final Business Committee meeting. She thanked Anjali for her contribution to trade and international policy work.

5 Performance Report Q2 2025-26 (FSA BC 25/12/04)

5.1 Ian Gibson introduced the Q2 performance report, highlighting priority areas including: operational delivery, local authority performance, market authorisations, and communications. He noted that local authority delivery would be discussed further under a separate agenda item.

Operational Delivery

5.2 Junior Johnson introduced this section of the report. New incidents had increased in Q2, consistent with seasonal trends. Outbreak complexity remained high. Early indications are that PRISM system implementation had improved incident management speed this quarter.

5.3 It was explained that current thresholds were outdated, and a review was underway, with revised tolerances to be presented in Q1 2026–27.

5.4 Surge capacity had been activated three times over the period, with staff trained under the crisis management programme taking on lead incident management roles.

5.5 Dairy audits were red for two quarters. This was considered to be due to methodology changes increasing plant coverage. Absences delayed recovery, but Q3 performance was back on track.

5.6 On Raw Cow's Milk Sampling, six failures had been identified and addressed through enforcement and resampling. The Committee asked whether the affected farms were repeat cases. The Chair informed the Business Committee that she had asked Junior for a note on the FSA's approach to raw drinking milk and whether more needed to be done. The issue of repeat cases should be included within that note.

Action 1 - Junior Johnson to confirm whether raw drinking milk failures were repeat cases within a note on the FSA's approach to raw drinking milk to be provided to the Board.

5.7 On enforcement trends, Junior explained that, for the first time in six quarters, enforcement quality had dipped, driven by issues in one region and two plants. Both plants were now closed and had subsequently reopened with improved compliance.

Local Authority Delivery

5.8 Beth Chaudhary updated the Committee on the section of the report covering Local Authority Delivery. She noted improvement in food hygiene interventions across risk categories, particularly lower-risk premises, reflecting the backlog clearance. Wales had de-escalated its only case; England had 10 local authorities in escalation.

5.9 Volumes of unrated businesses were at the lowest since 2020, though resource pressures persisted. Full Time Equivalent (FTE) increases may indicate new recruitment of inexperienced staff. The Committee requested percentage of unrated businesses as a proportion of all businesses; Beth agreed to provide this in future reports.

Action 2 - Future Performance Reports to provide percentage context for unrated businesses in the local authority data.

5.10 On enforcement trends, actions had increased since October 2024, possibly indicating deteriorating standards or improved local authority activity. Food Hygiene Rating Scheme scores remained strong. The Committee observed that increased enforcement might reflect proactive local authority work rather than declining standards.

Market Authorisations of Regulated Products

5.11 Rebecca Sudworth and Lexi Rees delivered an update on this section of the report. It was noted that the completion of the April 2025 reforms removed 83 renewals and secured ministerial decisions on eight applications without statutory instruments. Though the caseload remained high, it had reduced from 494 to 423, which, was below the forecast but represented a smaller reduction than the number removed by reforms.

5.12 On precision fermentation and precision breeding, a number of consultations on precision breeding products are planned for the next quarter. Precision breeding regulations had opened a new application stream for market authorisations, and two applications were currently with Defra for approval of PB status – a pre-requisite required before applying for market authorisation with the FSA.

5.13 Discussion highlighted concerns about progress beyond legislative reforms. The Committee requested clarity on delivery plans, particularly for precision breeding applications given government interest. Lexi confirmed tier-one applications would follow an accelerated two-month target, and that separate resources are set aside for these products. It was agreed that reporting should be reviewed, taking into account revised delivery plans and the impact of the future SPS agreement.

Action 3 - Market Authorisations and central reporting team to develop and present a revised reporting model focused on priority applications and provide clarity on precision breeding applications and timelines at next meeting.

Communications and Reputation

5.14 Claire Forbes reported that public trust in the FSA remained high, ranking fifth among 80 public sector organisations, behind the NHS and armed forces. Research was underway to identify drivers of trust and inform communication strategies. The CE emphasised the importance of maintaining trust amid declining confidence in other public institutions.

6 Performance Management Framework for Food Standards Delivery Model (FSA BC 25/12/05)

6.1 Nathan Philipppo introduced the paper outlining a proposed performance management framework for the Food Standards Delivery Model, setting out the context for why this framework was necessary and explaining that the FSA had observed persistent underperformance in local authority delivery of food standards work. This was not a short-term issue but the result of structural challenges that had developed over more than a decade. He gave an update covering the Introduction of the new delivery model; the proposed performance management framework; current challenges and constraints; and the legal position including the FSA's powers to direct local authorities.

6.2 The Committee challenged whether the proposed pace of improvement was sufficient, and discussed the underlying causes and the reality of the situation. The scale of the problem was acknowledged, and while the committee would strongly prefer far more rapid correction, it had to accept that an accelerated recovery plan would not be consider credible given resource constraints.

6.3 There were questions over local authorities' budgets to fund the necessary improvements. Nathan confirmed that while budgets were tight, the FSA's engagement often resulted in additional funding being allocated. The real constraint was workforce availability. The Committee noted practical staffing constraints relating to the use of powers.

6.4 The CE highlighted the FSA's legal duty to monitor and report on local authority performance. While the FSA had actively supported improvement, it could not guarantee full compliance. She cautioned against creating unrealistic expectations that the FSA could fix structural problems in local government.

6.5 On reputational risk, the Committee stressed the importance of clear, proactive communication to stakeholders, including local authorities, professional bodies, and government departments. The need to be transparent about the scale of the challenge and what was being done to address it was noted.

6.6 The CE confirmed that proactive engagement was already underway. The team had drafted a letter to local authorities explaining the new framework and expectations. The CE agreed that the messaging should emphasise urgency and encourage authorities to go faster than the dates set out in the phased approach wherever possible.

6.7 The Committee acknowledged that the proposed framework represented a pragmatic response to a complex problem. While it could not deliver immediate compliance, it provided a structured path to improvement and a mechanism for holding authorities to account. Members agreed that the FSA should continue to monitor progress closely and report regularly to the committee. They also recognised the need to manage expectations, both internally and externally, about what could realistically be achieved.

6.8 The Chair noted that the Committee had questioned the proposed pace of implementation and the resource constraints for local authorities. Improvement from the current position was sought with clear communication to local authorities. The Business Committee requested regular progress updates.

Action 4 - Regulatory Compliance team to focus on accelerated progress with clear communications to local authorities outlining performance expectations and trajectory and regular updates to the Business Committee on progress.

7 AOB

7.1 The Chair noted that no other business had been raised, and the meeting was closed. The next meeting would take place on 16 March 2026.