

Summary of discussions at the FSA Board and Business Committee meeting – 07 December 2022

National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) External Review

At the FSA's Business Committee meeting, members welcomed Keith Bristow QPM who led a recent comprehensive external review into the FSA's National Food Crime Unit. Mr Bristow, a former Chief Constable of Warwickshire, oversaw the creation of the National Crime Agency and was its first Director-General from 2011 to 2016.

The NFCU, which was set up in the light of the horsemeat scandal almost a decade ago, is now a team of 80, with investigative capability since 2020, and is one of a handful of food crime units globally that works to help prevent fraudulent or unlawful activity in the food chain.

While noting that the NFCU is "well led, with a well-qualified motivated workforce who are focused on delivering results", Mr Bristow warned that food fraud is a serious crime that is currently not receiving enough public interest.

Mr Bristow told the Board:

I don't think the threat [of food crime] is well enough understood and I don't think it's visible enough.

When I understood more, I was quite taken aback by the nature of the threat. It is acute, it's also chronic, and it seems to me that the more visibility that one can give that – without causing unnecessary or disproportionate alarm – is really important. That, for me, was a very important finding of the report, and it is a thread that goes through everything that we say.

FSA Chair Professor Susan Jebb thanked Mr Bristow for his comments, adding:

This is a really important review for us. The NFCU has grown enormously and represents a huge amount of investment from the FSA.

For you to come in, look at it, and say that the unit is doing a good job and is well led, is hugely reassuring. It is fantastic to hear the endorsement of what the team is doing.

It's been really helpful to hear your perspective about the level and status of the risk of food crime, and that is something that we understand.

The review also highlighted that further investigatory powers are necessary for the NFCU to be able to lead criminal investigations into complex food crimes. Work continues to secure the legislation needed for these additional powers for the NFCU.

The Board discussed several other items, including the Retained EU Law Bill and the FSA's Operational Transformation Programme, and all these Board papers can be viewed [on the FSA website](#). You can also watch the full video recording of the Board and Business Committee meetings by [visiting the FSA's YouTube channel](#).

The next [FSA Board meeting](#) will take place on Wednesday 22nd March 2023.