

Welsh Food Advisory Committee Chair's Report - July 2023

Report by Peter Price, Board Member for Wales and Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee

1. Summary

1.1 This report provides a brief summary of matters considered at the last Board meeting, and other activities relevant to the FSA remit in Wales.

1.2 Members of the committee are invited to:

- **note** the Board discussions
- **invite** the Chair to expand on any issues for further discussion

2. Board Meeting

2.1 The last full Board meeting was held in Belfast on 21 June 2023. The Board considered the following matters:

- [Import Controls and the Target Operating Model \(TOM\) \(FSA 23-06-04\)](#): This paper provided an update on the process that has been followed for determination of the Target Operating Model, risk categories, and the next steps. I raised that Wales is in a unique position with all ports facing the Republic of Ireland, which creates challenges. I commented that the committee is reassured by the approach being risk focussed and based on four-country working.
- [Annual Chief Scientific Adviser's \(CSA\) Report \(FSA 23-06-05\)](#): This paper was the third annual report from Professor Robin May to the Board as the Food Standard Agency's Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA), reflecting on the past 12 months in the role. I raised that the Farm Assurance Scheme in Wales is now recording antibiotic usage of every farm and flagged the potential for the FSA to link in with this project and use this data for on farm surveillance, in particular, relating to antibiotic resistance in milk. I also mentioned the opportunities to broaden the scope of SALIENT to Wales to potentially link with the Welsh Government's Healthy Weight Healthy Wales strategy.
- [Foresight Function and Horizon Scanning – Annual Update to the Board \(FSA 23-06-06\)](#): This paper delivered an update on the FSA's foresight function, covering the findings so far and our response to them, and the plan to continue to develop our foresight capability over the coming year. I raised the need for sufficient resource in the event of regulatory divergence.
- [Risk Analysis Process and Regulated Products Service – Quarterly Report \(FSA 23-06-07\)](#): This paper provided an update on the performance of the FSA's risk analysis process including applications progressing through the regulated products service, and issues that the FSA has proactively chosen to consider. I had previously highlighted the many innovative businesses and centres within Wales that could input into discussions.

- [Update on Veterinary Supply, Modernisation and Support for the Small Abattoir Sector for 2023/24 \(23-06-08\)](#): This paper provided an update to the Board on the things the FSA are doing to ensure that we provide reliable and efficient Official Controls. I raised the importance of the small abattoir sector in Wales and the ongoing concern around the potential loss of these operations going forward due to multiple pressures, including rising costs.
- [Review of the Food Advisory Committees \(FACs\) \(FSA 23-06-09\)](#): This paper provided an overview of the informal review of the Food Advisory Committees (FACs), discussions that have taken place to date, and recommendations for the FACs. I commented that WFAC would welcome more direct interaction with the Board along with a steer from the Board on topics for each of the FACs to consider. I also reported that WFAC favoured raising the profile and further engagement with stakeholders.
- [Director of FSA in Northern Ireland Report \(FSA 23-06-10\)](#): This report provided a high-level overview of the work of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in Northern Ireland over the last year.

2.2 A [recording of the 21 June Board meeting](#) is available on the FSA website, along with the minutes of the meeting when published.

2.3 The [next Board meeting](#) will be held on 20 September 2023 in Southampton.

3. Other Board activities and meetings

3.1 The day before the 21 June meeting, board members split into three groups for visits to key food players. I was in the group visiting the HQ of Lakeland Dairies, where we learned about the integration of their business at sites across the north-south border and the issues arising from Brexit, both across that border and to GB mainland. It is a large-scale innovative company and a tour of the adjoining factory also brought out their excellent staff engagement practices.

3.2 That afternoon, we exchanged findings with the other two visiting groups and then board members spent two hours on an Incidents Training Exercise. It revealed issues about balancing speed of response with board involvement. We ended the session with a discussion of 'hot topics' and then a presentation by me on 'FSA and the EU', in which I took a strategic look at the issues to be faced by FSA in the next few years.

3.3 In the evening, we had dinner with NIFAC members and guests who lead discussions on relevant issues.

3.4 On 12 May, the board held an online KIT session to discuss key developing issues. It was followed by another of our online 'coffee' sessions with groups of staff. This time, it was with the Disability Network.

3.5 On 12 June, I attended an online meeting of the board's Business Committee.

4. WFAC membership

4.1 I am pleased to report that the sift and interviews for my successor as Chair and Board Member have proceeded as planned and the panel's recommendations are before the Minister. A decision is now awaited and should enable an orderly handover process.

4.2 I would like to thank Alan Gardner for his time served on the committee. Alan has been a very valuable member of WFAC since 2017. He brought a wealth of primary production knowledge to committee discussions and helped new members as they joined. He and his wisdom will be missed by all colleagues.

4.3 This will also be my last meeting. I have enjoyed my 3 years as Chair of WFAC and Board Member for Wales. However, after decades of public roles, I decided not to apply for a second term but to focus on family priorities and my remaining role as European Strategy Counsel, advising on EU-related strategic issues. My term ends on 31 August. Before then, I will be attending various board meetings and Welsh events.

4.4 I have had strong staff support, first from Helen George and Lucy Boruk, and for the past two years from Sioned Fidler and Lucy Edwards, joined latterly by Christie O'Keefe. I have regularly liaised with Nathan Barnhouse, who leads the FSA's work in Wales, and also received help from several senior members of his team. A giant diolch yn fawr to each and every one of them.

4.5 You – the members of WFAC – have worked as a great team. It has been a pleasure to get to know you and your various strengths. You have become my friends, whom I will never forget. Carry on the good work!