

Welsh Food Advisory Committee Director's Report - February 2024

Report by Nathan Barnhouse, Director of FSA in Wales

1. Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of subjects introduced by the Chief Executive at the [last Board meeting](#), held on 13 December 2023, a summary of senior engagement across the UK and International Affairs (UKIA) Directorate and an overview of matters of interest to WFAC relating to Wales.

1.2 Members of the committee are invited to:

- **note** the update
- **invite** the Director to expand on any issues for further discussion

2. Chief Executive's Report to the Board

2.1 This is the latest [Chief Executive's Report](#) presented to the December Board meeting.

3. Overview from the Director of UK and International Affairs (UKIA)

3.1 Since the last WFAC themed meeting on 25 October my areas of focus have been on business planning for 2024/2025 which has been an exercise happening across the organisation; plans for implementation of the Border Target Operating Model given the first phase of EU controls will be coming in from the end of January; and supporting the work to reform our regulated products process.

3.2 In November, I was delighted to meet in person with Dr Rhian Hayward at the Senedd for the Welsh launch of the FSA's Annual Report on Food Standards which was combined with a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme in Wales. It was an opportunity to meet a number of stakeholders and Members of the Senedd.

3.3 In December, along with Nathan, I met with my counterpart in Welsh Government to discuss the broader finance situation in Wales and the impact this has on public sector budgets. The situation is similar to the UK Government situation, which I have reflected in my discussions at the Executive Management Team. The FSA, like other departments, is going to feel increased pressure in 2024/25, which we will need to reflect in our business planning and prioritisation. The next step is for discussions with Welsh Government to focus on the Welsh Ministers' relative priorities within our remit.

3.4 In January, the UK&IA Directorate came together for an away day in London and I was pleased to see so many colleagues from Wales there. Amongst other areas of discussion we also picked up UK&IA's people survey results with the senior leadership team.

4. UKIA Senior External Engagement in Wales

4.1 Since the last WFAC themed meeting on 25 October, senior management have been involved in the following external engagement opportunities that may be of interest to WFAC:

- **13 November** – Presentation by the Wales Regulators' Forum to the Welsh Government Cabinet Sub-Committee on the Cost of Living. We provided information to the committee drawing from relevant cost of living headlines from the FSA's publication 'Our Food 2022', which is further detailed below.
- **22 November** – [UK Association of Food Protection Conference](#). We attended this conference organised by Zero2Five and themed on 'Building food safety resilience into the food manufacturing sector' with delegates from local authorities, industry and associated experts. Carmel Lynskey, Head of the FSA's Achieving Business Compliance Programme, presented on Resilience in Regulation and the work being undertaken as part of the ABC programme. The event provided a good opportunity for engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and to showcase the recent publication of 'Our Food 2022' and the FSA's strategy.
- **22 November** – Trading Standards Wales Business Planning event. Nathan presented an overview of the FSA's area of work that could help to inform trading standards business planning over the next financial year. Topics covered included LA resourcing, ABC, incidents and sampling data and information provided by the NFCU. A good opportunity to network with Local Authorities and the WLGA.
- **29 November** – Senedd event to launch Annual Standards Report 'Our Food 2022' and celebrate 10 years of mandatory FHRS in Wales. Further details below.
- **5 December** – Safe Sustainable Authentic Food Wales meeting where the group were presented with an overview of the FSA's latest Annual Food Standards Report.
- **22 December** – Meeting with Welsh Government officials to discuss cell cultivated products and the authorisation process.

4.2 External engagement forward look:

- **19 January** – FSA and Welsh Government Quarterly meeting to discuss finance and priorities for 2024-25.

5. Matters of interest to WFAC relating to Wales

5.1 **Regulated Products** – as of 30 September 2023, the caseload of applications in the Regulated Products System was 450. We have completed 29 applications since April 2023 with legislation now being in force to support new and reauthorisations. We are presently taking another 33 applications through the legislative authorisation process, including consultation and Ministerial determinations, across the regimes of feed additives, novel foods and food improvement agents.

5.2 **Precision Breeding (PB)** – in December 2023, the FSA launched their consultation on their proposals for a new framework in England for the regulation of precision bred organisms used for food and animal feed. Whilst the Act applies to England only, the consultation (available in [English](#) and [Welsh](#)) was circulated to Welsh stakeholders for comment. Susan Jebb, Chair of the FSA Board, has met on multiple occasions with Minister Lesley Griffiths and Deputy Minister Lynne Neagle to discuss a range of areas within PB and letters of communication have been exchanged to update and request information, ensuring continued open channels of communication.

5.3 **Food Standards Delivery Model: Wales Pilot** – the Pilot is running until the end of February 2024. Participating Local Authorities (LAs) have continued to submit their intervention

data to inform the quantitative analysis and we continue to liaise closely with colleagues in the FSA's Science, Evidence and Research Directorate (SERD). The formal evaluation will commence in March 2024 and the team will consider the impact of the pilots on the proposed model in Wales. The team has contributed to the development of a suite of training tools to aid the implementation of the model in England and Northern Ireland, which will ensure the training is suitable for delivery in Wales if the decision is taken to implement the model. This is subject to the findings of the Pilot evaluation and agreement from the Minister.

5.4 LA Performance monitoring – following the return of the mid-year survey from LAs, we have reviewed the information and discussed with individual LAs, where required. This is in order to verify the data submitted, performance trends based on the analysis of the survey findings or consider any required escalation in line with the procedure [agreed at the FSA Board](#). Currently, we are liaising with 5 local authorities in Wales following the mid-year data returns to understand the local landscape and timescales for realigning with the Food Law Code of Practice (Wales).

5.5 LA audits – four of the five LAs selected to assess service planning and delivery of interventions following the end of the Recovery Plan, as well as reviewing any relevant open audit actions following previous audits, have been audited and their reports and updated action plans issued. The fifth audit was undertaken 10-11 January 2024 and the draft report and action plan have been sent to the LA for comment. We have received positive feedback from LAs on the audits that have been undertaken.

Programme planning for 2024/25 has commenced and meetings have taken place with all FSA in Wales policy and delivery colleagues.

The Audit Manual has been reviewed with colleagues in England and Northern Ireland to ensure consistency across the three countries. The review is nearing completion and once finalised, LAs will be notified, and the manual will be published on the FSA's public facing website.

A meeting took place with LA representatives to discuss their feedback in relation to the audits which have taken place to date. A further meeting will be held in the New Year to discuss the proposed audit programme for 2024/25.

5.6 Bluetongue virus – Bluetongue virus (BTV) is an infectious, non-contagious, vector-borne viral disease. It affects wild and domestic ruminants such as sheep, goats, cattle, deer and camelids. It does not infect humans and there is no risk to public health or food safety. On 11 November, the UK Chief Veterinary Officer confirmed a single case of Bluetongue virus serotype 3 (BTV-3) at a premises near Canterbury, in Kent, following routine Bluetongue surveillance. Since then, further cases have been identified in both Kent and Norfolk. Temporary Control Zones (TCZ) are in place in Kent and Norfolk to restrict the movement of susceptible animals, except under licence. This brings the total number of cases in England to 35 infected animals on 18 premises. There are no cases in Wales. There is still no evidence that bluetongue virus is currently circulating in midges in Great Britain. Surveillance is ongoing. Establishments slaughtering livestock from TCZ shall be designated by Defra or Welsh Government upon recommendation by the FSA. Current requirements do not allow for abattoirs beyond 100 miles from the TCZ to be designated.

As all TCZ are well over 100 miles from Welsh Abattoirs, no abattoir in Wales can be designated. This might present a challenge to those establishments as sometimes source their livestock from farms within the TCZ. Industry is pressing the Government to facilitate the movement of livestock when this occurs.

5.7 Annual shellfish classification review – the FSA carried out an annual review of all shellfish classifications using previous microbiological data from shellfish samples taken from each respective bed. On 1 December 2023, following the review, there were 27 classified beds in Wales, 3 of which are Class A, 1 is a seasonal Class B/C, 1 is a Class B, 20 are Class B -Long

Term and 2 are Class C.

5.8 Food hypersensitivity – at the December Board meeting, FSA Board members agreed that the best means of providing allergen information to consumers in restaurant and café type settings is both in a written and verbal format. That will include businesses having conversations with consumers regarding allergens.

Board members also decided that legislating was the best means of achieving this rather than producing guidance. The FSA Chair has notified Ministers, including the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing in Wales, of the Board decisions.

5.9 Our Food 2022 – on 9 November the FSA launched the annual Our Food report at a reception in the Houses of Parliament. This joint report with Food Standards Scotland (FSS) reviews food standards across the UK and is the second report since the UK left the EU. It forms an independent and evidence-based annual assessment of food standards across all four nations. The report shows that overall, food standards remained stable in 2022 despite pressures including inflation, labour shortages and the war in Ukraine. However, it does identify shortages in key occupations needed to keep food safe, such as vets and food inspectors.

5.10 Senedd engagement event – we held an event in the Senedd in November to launch Our Food 2022. During the event, the FSA Chair addressed the findings of the report including resourcing issues on veterinarians and local authorities. Lynne Neagle MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Wellbeing, also spoke at the event and highlighted the success of the Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme and how it remains vital that the scheme is adequately resourced for the future. Lastly, Chris Llewelyn, Chief Executive of the Welsh Local Government Association, spoke to highlight the resource pressures facing local authorities. It was a good opportunity for our Chair, Chief Executive, Directors and WFAC to engage with members of the Senedd (MSs), representatives from Local Authorities and other industry and consumer representatives in Wales.

5.11 Wales Annual Report and Accounts – the report and accounts were laid before the Senedd in January 2024 and subsequently published on the FSA's website.

5.12 Communications campaigns – over the last few months the communications team in Wales have worked with colleagues across the FSA on the following campaigns, incidents and media bids:

- **FHRS 10** – to mark 10 years since the mandatory display of Food Hygiene Ratings in Wales, the FSA partnered with the Welsh Government and Local Authorities to launch a campaign on 28 November to celebrate the success of the scheme. The campaign used local media opportunities, case studies and social media content to remind consumers of where they can check ratings and remind businesses of the importance of a good rating – a good food hygiene rating is good for business. A full evaluation to measure the success of the campaign is currently underway.
- **Christmas food safety campaign** – we ran our usual Christmas communications campaign to improve awareness of good food safety and hygiene practices during the holiday season. This covers Christmas topics including defrosting and cooking your turkey, checking the FHRS before booking a Christmas meal out and what festive favourites may contain listeria. We used our social media channels to spread the messages and developed a bilingual toolkit for Welsh local authorities and partners to encourage and enable them to share these important food safety messages.
- **Fake branded chocolate bars** – the Communications and Consumer Protection teams in Wales supported the dissemination of messaging warning members of the public not to buy or eat fake 'Wonka Bars' or 'Prime' chocolate bars for safety reasons. This included proactive social media content to coincide with the release of the new 'Wonka' movie.

- Polish Chicken – following a rise in cases of Salmonella linked to poultry products imported from Poland, the communications team in Wales joined forces with the central and Northern Ireland communications teams and the Wales Consumer Protection Team in reminding consumers of safe handling and cooking advice. In addition, they ensured the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales comms teams and other key stakeholders were sighted on the [press release](#) ahead of publication and developed and issued social media content to disseminate key consumer safety messaging.

6. Consultations

6.1 Live Consultations:

- There are no open consultations at present.

7. Forward look

7.1 We have the following communications activity coming up over the next few weeks:

- Vegan Labelling campaign – the campaign will help consumers make safe food choices and increase understanding of what constitutes safe food by helping those with food hypersensitivities (particularly those with an allergy to egg, milk, fish crustaceans or molluscs) understand why they should not assume a ‘vegan’ label means a product is safe for them to eat and free from their allergen. The campaign will go live late February 2024.
- Register a Food Business campaign – the main aims of this campaign are to address barriers to business registration, in particular a fear of the inspections. The campaign will also encourage food businesses to register and increase awareness of the legal requirement to register. The campaign will go live in March 2024.

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