

Report from the Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee

FSA 23-03-09 - Report by Dr Rhian Hayward MBE.

1. Summary

1.1 This report from the Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) reports on the activity of the Committee from the period March 2023 to February 2024.

1.2 The Board is asked to **note** the activities of WFAC and **comment** on the forward look plans.

2. Introduction

2.1 The role of the WFAC is defined in the Food Standards Act 1999 and acts as an advisory body to the Food Standards Agency (FSA). It is chaired by the Board member for Wales and its role is to advise the FSA on food safety and standards issues, with particular emphasis on Wales.

2.2 WFAC members provide a wide range of expertise, experience and practical knowledge to the FSA. All members are recruited through open public appointment competition and are appointed by the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing in Wales.

2.3 The Committee works closely with the FSA both in Wales and beyond and supports the FSA's strategic outcomes.

2.4 The previous Board member for Wales and Chair of WFAC, Peter Price, finished his term of appointment on 31 August 2023. The Committee wishes to note its thanks on record for the work that Peter did during his tenure and the insight and experience that he brought.

2.5 Given the change of Chair in the reporting period, this paper reflects on WFAC activity under both Chairs.

2.6 This paper highlights the themes that have been considered and discussed by WFAC over the last year as well as looking forward to the work of the Committee in the next 12 months.

3. Committee Membership

3.1 The Committee has a complement of eight members, one of whom is also the FSA Board member for Wales and WFAC Chair.

3.2 There is a wide range of expertise among the WFAC membership, including members with backgrounds in farming and agriculture; academia; industry; law, research, policy; science and innovation and environmental health. This wide-ranging experience, as well as members' associated networks and insights, has been extremely useful for WFAC discussions.

3.3 In September 2023, Dave Holland was appointed to the Committee following a vacancy arising from Alan Gardner's second term of appointment ending on 31 August 2023. The Committee wishes to note its thanks on record for the work that Alan did during both terms of his WFAC appointment and the insight and experience that he brought.

3.4 Four Committee members; Helen Taylor, Chris Brereton, John Williams and Georgia Taylor will finish their first terms of appointment on 31 March 2024.

3.5 One Committee member, Dr Phil Hollington, is due to come to the end of his second term of appointment on 7 October 2024. The WFAC Secretariat are working to develop the public appointment exercise for a new Committee member.

3.6 One Committee member, Jessica Williams, will come to the end of her first term of appointment on 30 November 2024.

4. Committee meetings

4.1 Since March 2023, four in-person WFAC themed meetings have taken place. Each theme, guided by the Chair, has provided the Committee with the opportunity to consider issues from a country specific perspective, enabling discussion and consideration of a number of relevant themes and matters.

4.2 Over the last year, the Committee has considered the following themes:

- **Border Target Operating Model (BTOM)** – in May 2023, the Committee received presentations from the Welsh Government and FSA officials on the BTOM. The presentations gave an overview of the BTOM and how it affects Wales and the three ferry ports at Holyhead, Fishguard and Pembroke and outlined the FSA's contribution to the development of the BTOM. Discussions centred around the Welsh perspective being very distinctive in that all Welsh ports face Ireland, and this creates significant challenges. The Committee recognised the success of the four-country working approach and was confident in the risk-based approach for BTOM, underpinned by science and evidence.
- **Local Authority operations** – for the July 2023 meeting, WFAC received presentations from the Chair of Environmental Health Wales, the Chair of Trading Standards Wales and FSA officials. The presentations provided a valuable insight into the Local Authority (LAs) landscape and delivery in Wales, and current and future challenges facing LAs. It was also an opportunity to learn more about how the FSA works with LAs in Wales. From discussions with LA colleagues, it was clear that there is difficulty attracting people into Environmental Health and Trading Standards profession and this is resulting in resource issues.
- **Science and Innovation** – the October 2023 meeting was held at AberInnovation in Aberystwyth. The committee received a series of presentations including the work undertaken at AberInnovation, Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) plant breeding programme, Aberystwyth University's Beef Eating Quality Project, and the Aberystwyth School of Veterinary Science. The Committee also received a tour of AberInnovation. The Committee commended the excellent work being undertaken in Wales, the presentations clearly demonstrated the progress being made in Science and Innovation. It was noted that the history of the oat breeding is a jewel in the crown of Wales, promoting over 100 years of research and development and noting the commercial relationships built. Aberystwyth is

one of the only locations in UK where this work has continued in such depth.

- **Regulated Products Reform** – in February 2024, the Committee met for the first time at the new FSA in Wales office at Cathays Park. WFAC received a presentation from FSA officials on the Regulated Products Reform programme providing insight into this work and the aims of the reform programme of work. Overall, the Committee were supportive of the reform programme, its aim of delivering a more streamlined and efficient system, to bring products to market faster, and content that the FSA were canvassing Wales-based stakeholders in their engagement programme. Key points of discussion were around how this was a critical piece of reform for the food system which needed to be mindful of not creating a barrier to innovation within the system. The Committee were mindful of the UK Internal Market Act and the influence that this legislation has on the products available for sale in Wales.

5. Review of the Food Advisory Committees (FACs)

5.1 As noted in the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Report to the December Board meeting, the Board members for Wales and Northern Ireland are undertaking a joint, informal review of the FACs to ensure that they are operating in the most efficient and effective way, and that they are best placed to country specific advice now that the UK is outside the EU.

5.2 The recommendations set out in the Review of the FACs paper, presented to the FSA Board in June 2023, continue to be implemented by the WFAC and NIFAC secretariats. This includes aligning the themes discussed by WFAC and NIFAC in their respective themed meetings to ensure a consistent approach and to minimise the duplication of Committee materials and encouraging WFAC members to input on future themes to guide their understanding of developing areas of priority and policy.

6. Forward look

6.1 In April 2024 at the next themed meeting, we plan to discuss the food business landscape in Wales, challenges to business compliance and the factors that are affecting innovation and growth.

6.2 In June 2024, I look forward to welcoming my fellow Board Members to Wales for the Board meeting which will take place in Llandudno. The FSA in Wales team are liaising with the Board secretariat to help them identify and develop a series of visits and stakeholder engagement opportunities.

6.3 The Committee will continue its commitment to stakeholder engagement and raising the visibility of WFAC, holding meetings and visits across Wales. I look forward to the summer engagement opportunities offered as Chair of WFAC including the National Eisteddfod which will be held in Pontypridd and the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show.

7. Conclusions

7.1 WFAC has considered a wide variety of themes over the last 12 months and has appreciated the input from colleagues both within the FSA and those externally.

7.2 The Committee will take 2024 as an opportunity to continue to engage with stakeholders in Wales and deliver the recommendations set out in the Review of the FACs.

7.3 The Board is asked to **note** the activities of WFAC and **comment** on the current forward look plans.