

# Minutes of 9 September 2024 Business Committee Meeting

FSA BC 24/12/01 - Via Teams

## Present

Timothy Riley, Chair; Lord Blencathra; Hayley Campbell-Gibbons; Susan Jebb; Rhian Hayward;

## Officials Attending

- Katie Pettifer ? Interim Chief Executive
- Aimee Adkin ? Deputy Director of Risk Assessment (For Julie Pierce)
- James Cooper ? Deputy Director for Food Policy (for FSA BC 24/09/06)
- Claire Forbes ? Director of Communications
- Junior Johnson ? Director of Operations
- Anjali Juneja ? Director of UK & International Affairs
- Robin May ? Chief Scientific Adviser
- Ruth Nolan ? Director of People and Resources
- James Robinson ? General Counsel
- Rebecca Sudworth ? Director of Policy
- Michael Todd ? Head of Planning and Performance (for FSA BC 24/09/04)

## Apologies

- Julie Pierce - Director of Information and Science

# **1. Welcome and Introductions**

1.1 The Committee Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that since the previous meeting, Fiona Gately had now left the Business Committee to join the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC). It was also noted that Hayley Campbell-Gibbons had been appointed as the new Chief Executive of the Royal Society of British Dairy Farmers. She was due to begin in the role from October, before which she would resign from the FSA Board, but declared it as an interest in the interim. No other new interests were raised by Committee Members and no interests were raised in respect of the agenda. No other items of business were raised.

1.2 The Committee Chair said that the paper for the item Policy Development: Precision Breeding (FSA BC 24/09/06) would not be published with the other Business Committee papers due to pending Ministerial decisions and would be discussed as a closed business item.

## **2. Minutes of 10 June 2024 Business Committee Meeting (FSA BC 24/09/01)**

2.1 The minutes of the Business Committee meeting of 10 June were agreed as an accurate record of the discussions.

## **3. Actions Arising (FSA BC 24/09/02)**

3.1 There were no comments from the Committee on the Action Arising, which it was noted were all complete.

## **4. Chief Executive's Report to the Business Committee (FSA BC 24/09/03)**

4.1 Katie Pettifer noted that this was her first report to the Business Committee since her appointment as interim CE and gave an update on issues covered in her report including incidents, such as the outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC), Linked to Mrs Kirkham's Cheese; the FSA return to the Spending Review and the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement; and the significant impact on some staff of the public disorder that happened over the summer.

4.2 The Committee asked about the contract retender for the FSA Delivery of Official Controls (FSADOC); labelling for unpasteurised cheeses; assurances over certain types of slaughter; FSA finances; estates and the future of office space; and the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) and Crown Court delays.

4.3 On the FSADOC contract retender; The CE explained that the process was now complete and there was a result, which due to commercial sensitivity, could not yet be shared. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) would receive an update on the non-sensitive elements of the process, noting that the outcome was in line with the business case but would be more expensive than the previous contract.

4.4 On labelling for unpasteurised cheeses, it was explained that this had been raised with Ministers and the Executive shared the Committee's concerns about the awareness of the risks.

4.5 On the assurances requested over certain types of slaughter, Junior Johnson explained that Meat Hygiene Inspector (MHI) and Official Veterinarian (OV) presence during the festival

season tended to increase in line with the demand for religious slaughter giving assurance that welfare was maintained.

4.6 Ruth Nolan explained that in early summer, there was a forecast overspend in FSA finances. This was exacerbated by announcements around Civil Servants' pay. The overspend would be partly offset by work around treatment classification and double counts. Treasury had also agreed to switch some funding from capital to resource, which would be helpful but would not be used for estates. Discussions were ongoing with the Office of Government Property about the location of the office.

4.7 On the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) and Crown Court delays, Junior explained that the delays were impacting in a number of ways, including pressure to submit cases earlier to mitigate the risk of deprioritisation due to a case backlog.

4.8 The Committee Chair welcomed the update on court delays and noted there would be further discussion on animal welfare issues, including different types of slaughter at the Board meeting.

## **5. Business Committee Performance Report for Q1 2024/25 (FSA BC 24/09/04)**

5.1 The Committee Chair invited Ruth Nolan to introduce the Performance Report. Ruth gave an overview of its content, noting coverage of some of the topics in papers for the upcoming Board meeting.

5.2 The Committee discussed the following key topics from the report:

### **Science**

5.3 Amie Adkin gave an update on the development of metrics to measure the impact of FSA science and the development of a new platform for the publication of FSA research as well as an update on sampling and compliance.

5.4 The Committee asked about how the metrics could capture the impact of FSA Science that was not used directly through the FSA's publications, for example peer reviewed manuscripts, and whether the use of citation index information could better represent the true impact including that created through co-funded projects. There was also a question about sampling and compliance data.

5.5 Amie explained that the FSA was continuing to develop metrics to measure the impacts of science and since the previous meeting, the FSA had enhanced its reach, including through the creation of the FSA research and evidence platform, replacing the old Drupal platform, to publish all FSA science reports and track their usage for better assessment of their impact and reach. The Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) added that this data was available and had been included in previous iterations of the report and should be included again in future iterations. The Committee requested that the metrics for FSA use of research findings could be simplified, by using citation index information to make findings more translatable to key functions. This could be fitted onto future iterations of the slide, giving the number of Co-funded projects where the FSA was working with other, significant funders, to support their science as well.

**Action 1 - CSA to ensure that metrics around the impact of FSA Science are included in future iterations of the Performance report.**

5.6 On sampling and compliance, it was explained that data sampling efforts showed varying non compliances across the different programs, with official controls having the highest.

## **Local Authority Performance**

5.7 Rebecca Kirk highlighted that this was an area that the Board would be discussing in greater depth at their upcoming meeting and gave an update covering the numbers of full-time equivalents in trading standards and risks associated with lower priority businesses.

5.8 The Committee raised concern about the figures for establishments that had received written warnings, noting the range of issues that these warnings could be highlighting. There were also questions about the standards against which the Red, Amber, Green (RAG) ratings in the report were determined, and the backlog of unrated businesses.

5.9 Rebecca said that local authorities would interpret regulations around what warranted written warnings differently and may in some cases be more trivial.

5.10 Junior Johnson explained that there was work ongoing around thresholds for RAG ratings. On the backlog of the unrated businesses, Rebecca explained that it was known from local authorities, that there were businesses which had registered but never traded. It was acknowledged that this was a concern but noted that local authorities tended to prioritise higher risk businesses.

## **Operational Delivery**

5.11 Junior Johnson gave an update covering meat, wine and dairy audits; the response from the service delivery partner in relation to the temporary registration of vets; capturing NFCU data including seizure volumes and impact measures.

5.12 There was a discussion that covered prosecutions and the approach to future legislation in relation to PACE powers for the NFCU.

5.13 The CE explained that the Statutory Instrument (SI) for new powers for the NFCU would be ready by the end of the year and discussions with the Home Office were ongoing about ensuring the primary legislation was in place for the SI to be within scope.

5.14 The Committee Chair noted the improvement in the quality of the report each quarter and that the Committee's understanding was improving about how best to use the information presented.

## **People**

5.15 Ruth Nolan gave an update covering the staff numbers with protected characteristics; diversity levels compared with other government departments; the rise in declaration rates; a deep-dive on ethnicity; dynamics around trust and how data is treated; and the Westminster headcount target.

5.16 There were no comments from the Committee on this section of the report.

## **6. Intelligence-Led Working and Rollout of the new Food Standards Delivery Model (FSA BC 24/09/05)**

6.1 Rebecca Kirk gave an update on the rollout of the Food Standards Delivery model; the way in which the FSA uses intelligence; oversight from the FSA's Business Delivery Group

(BDG); and the intention to continue to focus on the rollout in England and Northern Ireland.

6.2 The Committee discussed the publication of the national Food Standards Priorities Paper published on 24 May; food authenticity; the inclusion of food supplements; the outcomes of a six-month trial of the new food standards model in Wales; and the relative familiarity of Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) compared to Trading Standards Officers (TSOs) with using an intelligence led approach, in relation to EHO's delivering the new food standards work and being competent to do so.

6.3 On the publication of the National Food Standards Priorities Paper, it was noted that it had been shared with Board Members but was not brought for discussion at a Board meeting as the decisions around it were operational in nature. It was agreed that consideration would be given to how to better enable Board Member input in future.

**Action 2 - CE to consider how to enable Board Member input into publications on Food Standards.**

6.4 Rebecca explained that for issues around food authenticity, TSOs had a system for flagging potential cases of fraud for imports which could connect those of the local authorities to help set priorities for NFCU and Trading Standards to address.

6.5 On food supplements Rebecca explained the range of ingredients covered, which had emerged through sampling, noting the volume of intelligence that had been collated from that information.

6.6 On the outcomes of the new food standards model trial in Wales, the CE explained that the evaluation had been completed in February and it needed to be considered whether there was anything substantively different being found in Wales from elsewhere, noting the aspiration for the countries to be as aligned as possible.

6.7 On EHOs' familiarity with an intelligence led approach, Rebecca said a training program was in place for how to use the model, which was training EHOs as well as TSOs.

## **7. Precision Breeding (FSA BC 24/09/06)**

7.1 The Board received an update on Precision Breeding. Publication of the paper is subject to any future decision from the Government on Precision Breeding.

## **8. Any Other Business**

8.1 No other business was raised, and the meeting was closed. The next meeting of the Business Committee would take place on 2 December 2024 via Teams.