

Welsh Food Advisory Committee Directors' Report – February 2025

Report by Anjali Juneja, Director for UK & International Affairs and Sian Bowsley, Director for 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 11 December 2024
- a summary of senior engagement across the UK and International Affairs (UKIA) Directorate; and
- an overview of developments and matters of interest to WFAC relating to Wales.

1.2 Members of the committee are invited to:

- note the update
- invite the Directors 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 It's been a busy few months since my last update to the October committee meeting, and since then we have had confirmation that the FSA Chair, Professor Susan Jebb, has been [reappointed](#) until 31 December 2027. Following a competitive recruitment process, Katie Pettifer has been appointed as the permanent Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

3.2 In the run up to Christmas the port of Holyhead was forced to close due to the damage sustained by Storm Daragh. This caused major disruption to passenger and freight movements; and as trade redirected at short notice, led to an increased level of movements directly into Belfast, putting pressure on DAERA and my team in Northern Ireland. We kept close to Welsh Government, Isle of Anglesey County Council and DAERA colleagues to ensure we were able to fully understand the impact and support progress as needed. It was good to hear in mid-January that the port has partially reopened, easing pressure on Northern Ireland colleagues and allowing trade to go back to near normal.

3.3 Elsewhere my focus has been on the UK Government Spending Review, as it continues to form a major part of the wider organisation's work at this time with the focus of HMT moving to the

2026/27 and 2027/28 financial years. Within UKIA and the wider organisation, we have been working through the business planning process and associated budget allocations. In Wales, the Welsh Government published its draft budget on 10 December, confirming our draft allocation as £5.4m for the next financial year. Work is ongoing with the Wales team to define more detailed business plans.

3.4 In November, I was able to join the RCVS Council where along with colleagues from the Veterinary Services and meat hygiene operational teams, we provided an update on our use of temporary registration which allows overseas vets with a recognised qualification to work as a vet in the UK while they improve their English proficiency to the high professional levels required.

3.5 I recently met Sioned Rees, Welsh Government's Interim Director for Public Health Protection in one of our regular discussions. One of the main topics this time around was the upcoming review of the FSA in Wales, which is further detailed in the updates below.

3.6 In early December there was widespread discussion on social media, reported in mainstream media, about the safety of Bovaer, an animal feed additive which had previously been through the FSA Market Authorisation process. This discussion followed an announcement by the food manufacturer Arla that it would be carrying out trials to assess the efficacy of the additive in reducing methane emissions on some farms and was unfortunately fuelled by some misinformation. The FSA issued a statement, Robin May gave media interviews, and we [published a blog](#) setting out the facts. We explained that the additive was authorised as safe for use in the UK, and in other countries including the EU, Australia, Canada and the US. In our safety assessment, the FSA had concluded that at the intended dose it posed no safety concerns to consumers, animals or the environment and had advised ministers to authorise the feed additive. We have worked closely with Welsh Government on this issue.

3.7 Looking ahead, this year will also mark 25 years since the Food Standards Agency was set up and we are busy preparing internal and external events to mark this significant milestone.

3.8 We will also be focusing on supporting the cross-Government work to reset the relationship with the EU, including work on a potential SPS agreement with the EU which is a UK Government manifesto commitment.

4. Update from the Director for FSA in Wales

4.1 This is my first report as Director of Wales, noting that the previous one was prepared by my predecessor Nathan Barnhouse. Since joining the FSA in October I've focused on three key overall priorities – getting to know the team in Wales, and wider FSA; getting to know colleagues in the Welsh Government; and meeting Welsh stakeholders including environmental health and trading standards colleagues within local authorities.

4.2 I'll cover each of these in detail later in my update but the key development since October is the Ministerial Review of the FSA in Wales^[1] with the Welsh Government announcing in December that they had contracted the review to the research team at Cardiff Metropolitan University's School of Sport and Health Sciences. The review team is expected to commence their work this month. The review will consider whether the policy remit, governance arrangements and the delegation of responsibilities between the FSA and Welsh Government are clear and remain appropriate. [1] The review was originally announced in June 2021 by the then Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Lynne Neagle.

4.3 Rather than focusing on the core role of the FSA, the review will look at how this is implemented in Wales, including the extent changes to where nutrition and labelling policy sit in England, Wales and Scotland, and the UK's exit from the EU have impacted on the role of the FSA in Wales, whilst also considering potential developments between the UK Government and

the EU commission that may impact on the work of the FSA in Wales. The review will also focus on governance and accountability in terms of how and to what extent roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines are clearly defined, appropriate and efficient.

4.4 The final report is due for publication in the Spring and will provide recommendations on the changes that could be considered to ensure the FSA in Wales can best support Welsh Ministers. The research team will be supported by an oversight group, which will include me, as Director of FSA in Wales, as well as Welsh Government and Local Authority representatives. We have also set up a small internal working group to support the FSA feeding into the review and ensure we maximise on any opportunities afforded by the review.

4.5 Since joining in October, I have focused on getting to know and to that extent I attended the NFU Cymru Conference in Llandrindod (where our Chair was one of the main speakers); the Allied Industries Confederation Conference in Peterborough and the Hybu Cig Cymru breakfast at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair. I was invited to, and presented at, the Trading Standards Wales Business Planning event in November and more recently the Directors of Public Protection Wales (DPPW) Heads of Service meeting in January. I have separately met with the Chairs of Trading Standards Wales, Environmental Health Wales and the lead for food and feed at DPPW.

4.6 From a team perspective, I've been overawed by the level of work carried out across the team – both in managing business as usual work, in dealing with urgent issues and in supporting colleagues across the wider FSA team.

4.7 Over the last few months, the policy teams have:

4.7.1 Progressed work on BAU market authorisations and reform of the authorisation process – on 20 December 2024 the Feed Additives (Authorisations) and Uses of Feed Intended for Particular Nutritional Purposes (Amendment of Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/354) (Wales) Regulations 2024 came into force. This statutory instrument relates to the approval of twenty-four feed additives applications and one feed for particular nutritional uses (PARNUT) application. Since then, we have launched a public consultation on ten further regulated products – one food additive, one feed additive, one food flavouring, one food contact material, three genetically modified organisms and two novel foods. The consultation also considers the removal of 8 permitted flavouring substances (one application covering eight food flavourings). A further batch of applications have progressed from risk assessment, and we are preparing a consultation. Additionally, we are progressing work to reform the Market Authorisation Service, specifically two proposals – the removal of renewals and allowing new authorisations to come into effect following ministerial decision without a Statutory Instrument (SI). Welsh Ministers have consented to a GB SI to take these proposals forward, which should be laid on 29 January. It will then be debated in both Houses of the UK Parliament before it becomes law.

4.7.2 Taken forward work on the Bread and Flour regulations. Legislation implementing a number of changes to bread and flour requirements, including the addition of folic acid to flour has now been made in Wales (January), following legislation being laid in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland at the end of last year. The changes come with a 24-month transition period and work is now focused on finalising business guidance ahead of the changes coming into force.

4.7.3 Held two rounds of engagement with industry on potential changes to legislation on jam, honey, fruit juices and preserved milk following EU agreement introducing changes to the Breakfast Directives. We will launch a formal consultation Wales, England and Scotland this year to ascertain industry views on adopting the changes which will come into force in Northern Ireland after an 18-month transposition period.

4.7.4 The food supplements team has published guidance for consumers and business on the safe consumption of food supplements containing caffeine. The team are also working on a submission requesting the Committee on Toxicity to undertake a risk assessment (RA) on the use

of ashwagandha in food products and food supplements, noting its popularity as a “health” food. The RA will ascertain whether a safe level can be set for its consumption.

4.7.5 On food hypersensitivity, we received over 200 responses to the FSA’s recent consultation on revised guidance for the provision of allergy information in the out of home food sector. A formal summary of the responses will be published in February alongside revised guidance.

4.7.6 The hygiene policy team provided a Wales contribution to the closed Board session on shellfish on 10 December. This included an update on the situation in the Menai Strait alongside clarity on the FSA’s key responsibilities.

4.8 The teams working with local authorities have:

4.8.1 Published a summary report of the audit of Local Authority Out of Hours Emergency Response in Wales on the [FSA’s website](#). We are undertaking the final audit of the Service Delivery Planning Processes, Arrangements and Open Audit Actions programme in early February. A draft summary of this audit will be shared with local authorities before it’s published later this year.

4.8.2 Commenced the audit programme planning for 2025/26 audits, planning meetings with local authority representatives to discuss the proposed programme later this Spring.

4.8.3 Continue to review the Performance Monitoring data submitted by local authorities and liaise with them when needed to inform the paper that will be presented at Board.

4.8.4 Received the final evaluation report of the Wales pilot of a proposed new food standards delivery model. We have informed the Welsh Government of our intention to publish, after which we will seek agreement from Welsh Ministers to consult on amending the Food Law Code of Practice (Wales) to incorporate the model.

4.8.5 Delivered presentations on the proposed new food standards delivery model as well as wider FSA’s workstreams at the Chartered Trading Standards Institute Welsh Branch Autumn Training event. This is a great event for engagement with the wider trading standards community

4.9 The incidents and National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) have also been busy over recent months:

4.9.1 Colleagues in the NFCU continue to work towards securing additional enforcement powers and we are updating Welsh Government colleagues as this progresses. Further engagement is planned across industry, local authorities and other government departments as we move to lay a Statutory Instrument to apply provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to investigations of offences by FSA authorised food crime officers. This will also bring the activities of food crime officers under these powers using the complaint handling processes of the Independent Office of Police Conduct. Whilst the legislation is reserved, we will continue to keep Welsh stakeholders updated.

4.9.2 We have been involved in a national, non-routine incident relating to the contamination of mustard products with peanuts. Whilst the source was a business in England, the incident and distribution impacted all nations. We took immediate action to control the risks including precautionary advice to consumers with a peanut allergy and numerous product withdrawals and recalls. We have since lifted the precautionary advice and the incident has been de-escalated due to the assurance provided through FSA and local authority investigations.

4.10 Our bilingual communications team in Wales have continued to ensure key FSA messages have been communicated across Wales, which has included:

4.10.1 Taking part in the 21st Annual UK Association for Food Protection Conference (UKAFP), themed 'Food Crime and Recalls' at Cardiff Met in November. Colleagues within the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) presented at the event and the FSA Wales Communications and Incidents teams supported with a stand sharing key information on our work, including our involvement in the aforementioned peanut contamination incident.

4.10.2 Supporting proactive communications around the Bovear feed additive, including sharing a factcheck blog and other bilingual communications to combat misinformation.

4.10.3 Ahead of Christmas, running our annual Christmas food safety campaign with the primary focus on behaviour change, aiming to improve food safety practices at home during the Christmas period. As well as social media, members of the team were interviewed on the Bore Cothi radio show and Prynawn Da on S4C, valuable opportunities to share our key messaging in Welsh.

5. Consultations

5.1 The following consultations are live at present:

- [Consultation on Market Authorisation of 10 Regulated Food and Feed Products December 2024](#) – seeking stakeholders' views in relation to the authorisation of one food additive, one feed additive, one food flavouring and the removal of 8 permitted flavouring substances, one food contact material, 3 genetically modified organisms (for food and feed uses) and 2 novel foods.

Date launched: 18 December 2024

Closing date: 19 February 2025

- [Correcting references in the Food Safety Act 1990 and Food Standards Act 1999](#) – seeking stakeholder views on a proposal to correct references to EU law in the Food Safety Act 1990 and Food Standards Act 1999.

Date launched: 6 January 2025

Closing date: 31 March 2025

6. Forward look

6.1 Much of the work we have updated on in this report will continue over the coming months, including supporting the Welsh Government review of the FSA in Wales and implementing any recommendations. In addition, we will also be working to progress the following projects and workstreams.

6.2 Following receipt of £1.6 million from the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology Engineering Biology Sandbox fund, the FSA are working with Food Standards Scotland to launch the Regulatory Sandbox on Cell Cultivated Proteins this month.

6.3 The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act (REUL Act) powers we are using to deliver our priority reforms expire in June 2026. We will continue to consider any opportunities for legislative reform using REUL Act powers over the next 12 months.

6.4 Meanwhile, in the local authority space:

6.4.1 We are planning an engagement session with local authorities for early February. This session will cover ongoing proposals including the outcomes of the food standards pilot in Wales, feedback from local authority meetings regarding cost recovery and continuing the engagement on National Level Regulation and the outcomes of the trial in England.

6.5 In terms of our communication and stakeholder activity for the next few months:

6.5.1 The latest Annual Report on Food Standards will be published in June and we are currently planning a stakeholder event in early July to highlight the main findings. The event will also be an opportunity to note the 25th anniversary of the FSA, highlighting the progress made on food safety in this time, and looking at what challenges lie ahead.

6.5.2 I am also planning on attending the Wales Food and Drink awards in May which is a valuable opportunity to celebrate excellence and innovation within the food industry in Wales, and hopefully an opportunity to catch-up with some of our main stakeholders.

6.5.3 We will be working on a communications campaign to support food businesses next month, which will be targeted at small and micro food business operators with 50 or fewer staff. The purpose is to remind businesses that the FSA is here to support in ensuring consumer safety, boost confidence in understanding and complying with regulations, improve planning for recalls or withdrawals, and increase signups for the alerts and recalls platform. Additionally, the campaign will promote the FSA as a source of training and best practice guidance. We will target businesses with lower food hygiene ratings (1-3), those less engaged with authorities, and those where English may be a second language.

6.5.4 The team will also be executing a consumer focused food hygiene campaign in the Spring. The aim of this campaign is to educate consumers about poor kitchen hygiene practices that can cause foodborne illnesses where we will highlight risky behaviours, explain their dangers, and offer hygiene advice. The campaign has a broad consumer audience, but we will also work to target specific groups such as carers and young people via paid ads on FSA channels. We will also be building partnerships to help target the vulnerable and hard to reach audiences such as pregnant women, older adults and those with immunosuppressive conditions.