

Minutes of the FSA Business Committee Meeting on 2 December 2024

FSA BC 25/03/01 - Via Microsoft Teams

Present

Timothy Riley, Chair; Lord Blencathra; Susan Jebb; Mark Rolfe; Rhian Hayward;

Officials Attending

Katie Pettifer, Chief Executive

Nathan Barnhouse, Head of Regulatory Compliance Division (For FSA BC 24/12/04)

Claire Forbes, Director of Communications

Junior Johnson, Director of Operations

Anjali Juneja, Director of UK & International Affairs

Carmel Lynskey, Deputy Director Business Compliance & Market Authorisations Service Delivery (For FSA BC 24/12/04)

Robin May, Chief Scientific Adviser

Ruth Nolan, Director of People and Resources

Julie Pierce, Director of Information and Science

Andrew Quinn, Head of National Food Crime Unit

James Robinson, General Counsel

Rebecca Sudworth, Director of Policy

Michael Todd, Head of Planning and Performance (for FSA BC 24/12/04)

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Committee Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies from Business Committee Members or the Executive.

2. Minutes of 9 September 2024 Business Committee Meeting (FSA BC 24/12/01)

2.1 The Committee agreed that the minutes of the 9 September Business Committee meeting represented an accurate account of the discussions of that meeting.

3. Actions Arising (FSA BC 24/12/02)

3.1 The Chair noted the actions from the previous meeting including ongoing Action 2 on the Board Member input on publications on food standards. The CE said it was important that food standards priorities and FCU Food crime priorities were addressed in a coordinated manner and a proposal for Board Member input into each of these at appropriate points had now been developed.

3.2 No further comments were made on Actions Arising.

4. Chief Executive's Report to the Business Committee (FSA BC 24/12/03)

4.1 The CE gave a brief introduction to her report covering the successful award of the FSA Delivery of Official Controls (FSADOC) contract; the People Survey scores for the FSA, delays in the criminal justice system and the impact on prosecutions, and staff vacancies.

4.2 The Committee heard that the FSA had successfully retained two suppliers, increasing market diversification. The tender process had been recognised by the Cabinet Office for good practice in procurement.

4.3 The People Survey scores had been received the previous week and showed an improvement in results since the previous People Survey. Around 79% of FSA staff had completed the survey with an overall engagement score of 70%, which was 6% points higher than the Civil Service benchmark. Scores around management, purpose for work and inclusive culture had also improved. The one area which had decreased was around pay and benefits, reflecting the Civil Service trend.

4.4 The Committee asked about the impacts of delays in the criminal justice system on prosecutions; and the basis of the Judicial Review mentioned in the report.

4.5 James Robinson gave an overview of issues surrounding the Judicial Review as well as an inquest mentioned in the report. There had also been a withdrawn charge relating to a Food Business Operator and the Chair declared an interest as this was a company he made use of in the course of his business as a livestock farmer.

4.6 On court delays, James noted a developing pattern of defendants opting for Crown Court trials. Junior Johnson gave some detail about the impacts of the delays and noted that there were meetings arranged with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) CE to discuss the issue. There was a heightened need to work quickly to meet shortened deadlines. This was having positive outcomes, but it was acknowledged that it raised resource questions for the Operations team.

4.7 The number of vacancies within the FSA, though appearing high, was considered within the normal range due to regular turnover and market conditions.

4.8 The Committee Chair noted the good procurement practice for the FSADOC contracts.

5. Performance Report Q2 2024-25 (FSA BC 24/12/04)

5.1 Ruth Nolan introduced the report, noting discussions at the Executive Management Team (EMT) meeting and said that EMT Members present would be invited to give an overview of sections of the report relevant to the work of their Directorate.

Incidents and Our Response

5.2 Ruth invited Junior Johnson to introduce the section of the report on incidents, noting the shift from targets to tolerances and how resource is allocated according to incident priority. The Committee noted the high volume and complexity of incidents and efforts to build surge capacity and improve triage processes.

5.3 On the high volume and complexity of incidents, Junior confirmed that although the total number of incidents was going down, the complexity meant that they required greater resource to address. Whole genome sequencing data available from work with UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) also meant that incidents were often open for longer.

5.4 It was confirmed that officials were able to access three-nation data from the Signal and Incident Management System (SIMS). Where there were ongoing challenges on unlocking, work was underway with an external company to help access and join up the information and make it available for performance reporting.

5.5 The Committee asked about FSA pushback on local authorities in incident handling and emphasised the need for consistent communication to ensure local authorities were clear about expected standards.

5.6 The use of retrospective reviews to test the effectiveness of the approach being taken was noted and the Committee Chair asked that the outcomes of these be brought back to the Business Committee.

Action 1 - Outcomes of retrospective reviews of the effectiveness of incident handling to be included in future updates when available.

5.7 The Committee noted the complexity of relationships between various parties, highlighted in the handling of recent incidents. The significance of lessons learned for the national risk register was highlighted.

Market Authorisations for Regulated Products

5.8 Carmel Lynskey gave an update on Tranche 3 feed applications and active caseload management. Tranche 3 Feed Authorisations were progressing in line with our public commitment, with Statutory Instruments laid in England, Scotland, and Wales, pending parliamentary scrutiny. A firm line was being maintained on active caseload management and work was underway to explore improving metrics, with continuous improvement activities and reform efforts to speed up the process.

5.9 The Committee asked about the tolerances for metrics. Carmel explained that it was still work in progress and acknowledged the need for better data on tolerances. A great deal had been learned from Tranche 3 and it was hoped that more could be done to refine this for future authorisations.

5.10 The Committee Chair noted that it gave a clearer insight to the process, system development and potential pinch points.

Local Authority Delivery

5.11 The Committee noted that only one local authority had been onboarded to the Food Standards Delivery Model.

5.12 Nathan Barnhouse said that it was still the intention to have all local authorities working to the new Food Standards Delivery Model by end of March. However, it was acknowledged that this was optimistic. The FSA had been very clear in stressing the importance of meeting this deadline in communications with both local authorities and their contracted Management Information System (MIS) providers and had provided support to facilitate the process as much as possible. The ultimate responsibility for agreeing the timeline for implementing the necessary system changes belonged to the local authority. Officials continued to engage with all parties to confirm timelines and identify any local authorities unlikely to be onboarded by end of March so that implications, and any further action required, could be considered.

5.13 The Committee Chair noted the overall improvement as well as the number of red RAG rated metrics for local authority delivery, particularly around Food Standards. The Committee asked about the confidence level in the data received from local authorities. The CE explained the subjectivity of the SurveyMonkey data capture mechanism around Food Standards. Julie Pierce added that this would be replaced with a new system, which would make it easier for local authorities to provide data much more frequently. Ruth Nolan agreed to arrange a session to discuss with Rhian Hayward about the RAG metrics for local authority delivery.

Action 2 - Ruth Nolan to arrange a discussion about local authority delivery metrics with Rhian Hayward.

Science Council Projects

5.14 The Committee asked if Julie Pierce could provide a note to the Board on the two projects being taken forward once the Terms of Reference had been scoped.

Action 3 - Julie Pierce to provide a note to the Board on upcoming Science Council Projects once Terms of Reference are scoped.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 No other business was raised, and the meeting was closed. The next meeting would take place on 17 March 2025.