

Business Committee Performance Report for Q3 2024/25

FSA BC 25/03/04 - Report by Ruth Nolan

1. Summary

1.1 The Quarter 3 2024/25 Business Committee performance report is based on the latest executive performance dashboard, discussed with EMT in February 2025 covering data mostly up to 31 December 2024.

1.2 The Business Committee is asked to discuss the FSA performance set out in section 3, with a particular focus on:

- **Operational delivery – to note** performance remains strong across Operations, particularly the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU), delivery of Food Business Operator (FBO) meat audits and a recent increase in enforcement activity. However, the volume of incidents is higher than our tolerance, and the number of new incidents has increased over the last two quarters. This high volume of work is making it harder to implement our improvements, which includes the delay in surge training.
- **Local Authority – to note** the update on the latest position on local authority delivery, with next steps and issues being discussed as part of the separate 'Local Authority Performance' paper.
- **Market Authorisations – to note** that the entire Tranche 3 batch of 26 Feed Additive applications were delivered in line with the committed timescales. However, the total number of applications being completed remains lower than new applications entering the service.
- **Reputation and Communications – to note** our Christmas news story was one of the most successful ever, highlighting the most common food errors made when handling, cooking, storing and reheating festive food. We also generated increased amounts of interest in reissued consumer messaging about smoked and cured fish by targeting it at vulnerable groups and those most at risk from a food safety perspective.

2. Introduction

2.1 The aim of the performance dashboard is to enable the committee to fulfil its duties, delegated from the FSA Board, to scrutinise quarterly performance information, and identify and monitor operational and delivery risks, informing the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee if necessary.

3. Key themes and insights

3.1 Operational delivery (slides 3-6).

- **Official Controls:** Delivery of official controls in approved meat premises continues to meet targets for FBO audits. There was a slight drop for Q3 conditional approvals visits, which was a result of FBO availability and will be prioritised in Q4. Compliance scores for FBO remain high with the majority of premises falling into 'good' and 'generally satisfactory' categories. Dairy and wine inspections have been delivered to target.
- **Veterinary resourcing:** We continue to monitor data from our service delivery partner in relation to the recruitment and retention of Official Veterinarians as well as the declining percentage (down 1% from last quarter) of those who are temporarily registered. Work on the transition to the new dual service provider model is well underway. The Veterinary Resourcing programme has now been closed due to the successful completion of its workstreams, notably the implementation of a sustainable resourcing plan and the significant reduction of associated risk within our corporate risk 4 (FSA Fails to deliver Official Controls in England and Wales for Meat).
- **Incidents and our response:** After an initial drop in Q1, the number of new incidents and incidents occupying time has steadily increased over the last two quarters, this is both in terms of overall numbers and numbers in the higher priority categories. This high volume of work is making it harder to implement our improvements, which has impacted our planned Q3 surge training (due to limited advisors to provide training). This is despite an improved triaging system implemented by the unit to ensure a focus on incidents falling within the agreed thresholds. In addition, there have been challenges with training on the Signals and Incident Management IT system. Surge training has now recommenced in February 2025.
- **National Food Crime Unit (NFCU):** Q3 performance overall is strong and on track for all key performance indicators. Our Strategic Intelligence Requirements have identified gaps in intelligence where threat and vulnerability exist, and we work to understand these through focused intelligence gathering over the year. Our progress this quarter is on target at 10%, reflecting an enhanced intelligence picture in pork rearing methods.

There was a strong Q3 performance delivering 65 outcomes, two thirds (44) of which were driven by Operation Charlton focussed on supporting Defra's lead on the UK's African Swine Fever Plan (ASF). As a result of Charlton, the local authority reported a significant spike in seizures from illegally imported pork. Further operational investigations reported significant smokies' seizures.

- Disruptions remain consistent when viewed against Q3 for 2023/24. Further analysis shows that six of the 16 disruptions this quarter are attributed to (time-lagged) 2,4-Dinitrophenol (DNP) website takedowns, a source of disruptions that will fall significantly after Q4.

3.2 Local Authority (LA) delivery (slides 7-9)

- The latest data was collected in October 2024 (for April to October 2024). Analysis is based on 99.7% Food Hygiene (FH) and 98.9% Food Standards (FS) returns and there may be future minor changes due to accuracy checks being carried out.
- The overall % FH interventions carried out at establishments rated A to E remains around 51%, with a slight increase in Wales, and a larger increase in Northern Ireland (NI) since the April 2024 data return. The overall % FS interventions A to C carried out increased by 3.5%, to around 19% with an increase in England and a decrease in Wales and NI. There are varying trends at each risk category for FH and FS but the overall % interventions carried out are lower than in the April return across the higher risk categories FH (A to C) and FS (A). The bi-annual returns have confirmed that the pattern of delivery changes throughout the reporting year with an increase in activity at the end of the year (April data reported in Q1 and Q2). As previously noted in the [Q1 report](#) we were not expecting performance on the lower risk categories to be back at pre-pandemic levels, since LAs are still working through a large backlog. Whilst there is some evidence of additional resources being recruited into the LA teams, it will take time for this to positively impact upon service delivery. However, we remain concerned in the progress that is being made in reducing

backlogs and realigning with the Food Law Code of Practice.

- There has been an overall increase in numbers of new business registrations since the last period. This has increased the number of establishments, which was already high compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- For FH, there were around 42,000 establishments awaiting a first inspection which is the same as that reported for the same period in 2023. FS numbers decreased by around 4,000, but they remain high at over 84,000. The pre-pandemic levels were around 28,000 and 63,000 for FH and FS (five-year average for 2015/16 to 2019/20).
- Our expectation of LAs in England and Northern Ireland is that they will be working to the new Food Standards Delivery Model (FSDM) by the end of March. In Wales amendments to the Code to introduce the FSDM will be consulted on in May/June 2025 when next steps will be determined. There are more details in the LA Performance Paper.

3.3 Market Authorisations for Regulated Products (slide 10)

- This section provides performance data for the Regulated Products Service (RPS) up to 31 December 2024.
- The caseload in the RPS has slightly decreased and is now at 481 (in line with expectations). We have received 25 contacts in Q3 2024/25, of which 88% had sufficient information to progress. There have been 26 completed applications this quarter (aligned with our revised timelines for Tranche 3), raising the total completed applications to 97 since the service went live in January 2021. This quarter, Science Evidence and Research Directorate have completed 22 safety assessments.
- We launched a consultation for ten applications on 18 December 2024, containing a mix of regimes. This consultation includes the first batch of applications in Tranche 4, and we plan to launch a consultation for the second batch in Spring 2025, including around 15 applications. Our work on short and longer-term reforms remains essential to ensuring a sustainable service in the future. We need to complete around 100 applications per year for the volume of applications exiting the service to equate the volume entering.
- We continue to actively manage the caseload by pausing 133 out of 481 applications in the service (28% of the total applications) so that resources are focused on achieving the best outcomes in the interest of consumers. There are 242 applications currently in Pre-Validation, 85 of which are paused, 163 applications in Risk Assessment, of which 36 are paused, and 76 applications in the Risk Management stage, 12 of which are paused. The 133 paused applications consist of: 53 Feed Additive renewal applications, 29 Genetically Modified Organism renewal applications, 45 applications where we are awaiting additional information from the applicant and six Dormant applications. Renewal applications can remain on the market and are linked to ongoing immediate reform work to remove the requirement for applicants to submit pure renewal applications.
- We are preparing the service for the implementation of planned immediate reforms, which include the removal of the requirement to lay statutory instruments and renewal applications. We are updating our processes to manage the operational impact of these improvements.

3.4 Science (slide 11)

- The overall position is positive, with work on track and no major concerns. Development of impact metrics has been delayed due to procurement challenges, but these have now been resolved. While this will start giving us new impact data in Q4, the new publication system has already provided some metrics, which demonstrate our articles and reports are being accessed across more than 120 countries. The most viewed article this quarter was "Impact of Climate Change on the UK Food System" with 2047 views.
- The total number of evidence packages under the risk analysis process completed year to date is five. This is consistent with the profile from the previous year, where the delivery of evidence packages was mainly backloaded into the end of the year.

- Despite an increase in sampling spend, sampling overall is likely to be lower this year than in previous years, primarily due to higher sampling costs. 1,624 science and research samples are forecast to be analysed this year, which is a reduction from last year (Baseline for 2023/24 was 2,715 samples taken).
- The FSA funds regulatory monitoring to fulfil its food and feed safety monitoring responsibilities e.g. Official Controls monitoring of shellfish (and associated waters) and radiological sampling. The Q3 figures demonstrate a decline in sample numbers. Sampling is forecasted to be around 700 fewer samples in comparison to the previous year (Baseline for 2023/24 was 6,563 samples taken, whereas the current year to date figures stands at 3,452 samples.)
- The level of targeted surveillance and enforcement sampling is forecast to be similar to last years (Baseline for 2023/24 was 1,947 and 2,440 respectively).
- We continue to make progress on the series of recommendations made in the Chief Scientific Advisor's September [Annual FSA Science Update, Annex 1](#).

3.5 Trade and International (slide 12)

- During this period FSA issued a World Trade Organisation regulated products notification covering the authorisation of four novel foods, a new production method for two food additives, an extension of use of an authorised food additive, a new limit for ethylene oxide in all food additives and the removal of twenty-two flavouring substances.
- The third review of High-Risk Food Not of Animal Origin controls / statutory instrument came into force 18 December 2024. The fourth review has cleared the Future Publications Panel and we are preparing a public consultation to commence February / March 2025.

3.6 Reputation and Communications (slide 13)

- The results for Q3 represent a significant amount of reactive communications activity, as well as our planned proactive campaign work. From a campaign perspective, we issued consumer safety messaging on the consumption of smoked and cured fish by vulnerable groups (145 articles; 26.6m reach and above average visits to the news story on food.gov). This represents a 48% increase on media coverage compared to a similar exercise around Smoked Fish in 2023. We also successfully promoted the announcement of the Cell Cultivated Sandbox (192 articles and a reach of 10.1m). In addition, our Christmas news story was one of the most successful ever, highlighting the most common food errors made when handling, cooking, storing and reheating festive food (achieving 198 articles, 33m reach including Mail Online, The Mirror and The Independent).
- There was significant interest in our response to the public backlash to the trial of Feed Additive Bovaer on Arla farms. This included the publication of a blog to counter online mis and dis-information. The FSA was quoted across multiple channels including Sky News, BBC news and BBC Radio 4, with the blog recording 35,899 page views to 31 December 2024.

3.7 Resources (slide 14)

- Overall FSA FTE levels remain broadly stable at the end of the last quarter, with a slight reduction in Westminster levels (6 FTE) offset by increases in Northern Ireland and Wales (both increased by 4). These represent small day to day movements in our staffing levels.
- The diversity and representation of our workforce remains above wider Civil Service benchmarks in all categories apart from Ethnicity. EMT received a deep dive into the potential drivers for this during January and have agreed a number of local directorate and cross-FSA actions.
- As at 31 December, the FSA Westminster was forecasting to utilise all of its budget. However, there remains several uncertainties within this forecast which we continue to monitor closely to ensure we strike the balance of fully utilising our budget, but

not breaching the control totals we are allocated from HM Treasury. We can provide a verbal update on the latest position at the Business Committee meeting.

- The dashboard also includes for the first time the FSA performance on prompt invoice payment and collection, and payroll accuracy. These are core metrics which measure the accuracy and efficiency of our operational finance processes, and illustrate we spend minimal time investigating and processing corrections, refunds and under/overpayments.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The Business Committee is asked to discuss the FSA performance set out in section 3, with a particular focus on:

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Report Dashboard

PDF

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