

Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Director's Report February 2026

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of activities relevant to the FSA's remit in Northern Ireland since the last written report to the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) in October 2025.

1.2 Members are invited to:

- Note the update and
- Invite the Directors to expand on any issues for further discussion.

2. Chief Executive's Report to the Board

2.1 The latest Chief Executive Report that was presented to the December Board meeting can be found [here](#).

3. Update from the Director for Northern Ireland

3.1 **Update on new Directorate** – Since my last report to NIFAC, the Northern Ireland and Wales teams have moved into the Policy Directorate which is led by Rebecca Sudworth. Both the Director of Wales and I have been working closely and collaboratively with Rebecca to help ensure a seamless transition. This move will help to strengthen and solidify three nation working.

3.2 **Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA)** – Professor Ian Young has been [appointed](#) as the new CSA for the FSA. He will become the fourth FSA CSA, taking over from Professor Robin May, who left the FSA in September 2025 following his appointment as Interim Chief Scientific Officer at the UK Health Security Agency. Professor Young joins the FSA in a part-time capacity, whilst maintaining his current role of Consultant Chemical Pathologist at Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and Professor of Medicine at Queen's University in Belfast, where he previously directed the Centre for Public Health. He has also served as CSA to the Department of Health in Northern Ireland and Director of Research for Health and Social Care, Northern Ireland.

3.3 **Annual Report and Accounts** – The Annual Report and Accounts for Northern Ireland have been [presented](#) to the Northern Ireland Assembly. This is a statutory requirement for all government departments and provides a comprehensive summary of our performance, governance, and financial management over the past year. The report is reviewed by the National Audit Office to ensure accuracy and fairness and demonstrates that the FSA continues to deliver on its mission.

3.4 Draft Budget – The Minister of Finance, John O'Dowd MLA, issued a proposed Draft Budget via a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 6 January. The Draft Budget has been [published](#) for public consideration and is subject to an eight-week public consultation period. In parallel, the Northern Ireland Executive will continue discussions to reach agreement on the final Budget. The Draft Budget aligns with the Chancellor's most recent Spending Review. This provides a three-year funding envelope for Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL), covering day-to-day expenditure from 2026-27 to 2028-29, and a four-year funding envelope for Capital DEL, supporting longer-term investment from 2026-27 to 2029-30. Under the Draft Budget, the FSA's Resource DEL allocation for 2026-27 remains flat in cash terms which in real terms represents a reduction when increased Employers' National Insurance Contributions and inflation are taken into consideration. However, this Draft Budget represents the first multi-year budget settlement in Northern Ireland in over a decade, which is significant and while the figures are indicative, they give us a solid position to now review our modelling, particularly for 2027-28.

3.5 Product Inspection Facilities – A major milestone in the implementation of the Windsor Framework has been delivered with the construction and onboarding of four new SPS inspection facilities at Belfast, Foyle, Larne and Warrenpoint ports. These facilities received official designation inspections by EU DG Santé in October 2025, and subsequently the UK Chief Veterinary Officer has received official confirmation that each site will receive formal EU designation. This achievement is critical to demonstrating the UK Government's commitment to full, timely, and faithful implementation of the Windsor Framework, providing essential assurance to the EU removing a key element inhibiting progression upon UK-EU SPS negotiations. The FSA has been vital to this cross departmental programme of work from inception to completion, ensuring that public health requirements were fundamental within the facilities design, construction and operationalisation.

3.6 Breakfast Directives – The Breakfast Foods (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 have been made and [published](#). The Regulations implement Directive (EU) 2024/1418 by amending four existing Statutory Rules setting requirements for composition, labelling and processing of: honey; jams and marmalades; fruit juices; and dehydrated preserved milk. The amendments made by the EU Directive are intended to enhance transparency and enable consumers to make informed, healthier food choices, while providing food businesses with greater flexibility and opportunities for innovation. The Regulations extend the existing application of Improvement Notices to all of the new requirements as an effective and proportionate approach to enforcement. The team has engaged extensively with stakeholders, and with both the Democratic Scrutiny Committee and the Committee for Health in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

3.7 The Food Law Code of Practice – The revised Food Law Code of Practice for Northern Ireland has been approved by the Minister of Health and subsequently [published](#). The amendments (set out below) will enable a more risk-based, proportionate and consistent approach to official controls by focusing on higher risk establishments, removing unnecessary delivery barriers, broadening the cohort of professionals to undertake certain activities, and allowing greater use of existing flexibilities, while safeguarding public health.

The amendments introduced in the revised Code include:

- An updated risk-based approach to the prioritisation and timescales for undertaking initial food hygiene official controls of new food establishments
- Enabling an establishment's food hygiene intervention rating to be amended following a wider range of official control methods and techniques, including those undertaken remotely, in certain circumstances
- Providing clarification in the approach to interventions at establishments that fall into the lowest risk category for food hygiene
- Other amendments to reflect legislative change, provide clarity, improve consistency and keep

pace with current practices.

3.8 Future of Food Regulation – The UK Government has [asked](#) the FSA to develop a new national approach to regulation for large food businesses in England. This approach will be part of a wider programme of reform to ensure food regulation remains effective and fit for the future. Two years ago, the FSA carried out a year-long trial of 'National Level Regulation' with major retailers, looking at whether the biggest businesses could be regulated at a national level, scrutinising their data and systems, combined with some checks on the ground. The request from the UK Government builds on this work that the FSA has already undertaken. While the FSA has been asked to develop a new national approach for England only, there may be opportunities to align options for reform across Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, recognising the operating footprint of most of the larger businesses and this will be explored as options are developed.

3.9 Evaluation of the Meat Charging Discount Regime – Stakeholder engagement has continued following the presentation of the [paper](#) on the future of the discount scheme at the FSA Board meeting in December. The team recently met with the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters' Association, the Ulster Farmers' Unions and food business representatives during a study tour of WD Meats' red meat slaughter facility in Coleraine. This visit provided an opportunity for industry to highlight nuances specific to the Northern Ireland supply chain. Similar engagement opportunities have been offered to the pork and poultry sectors. Industry representatives welcomed the chance to contribute to the formal consultation on the Future of the Meat Charging Discount Scheme, which is scheduled to begin in Spring 2026.

3.10 Publication of Northern Ireland Obesity Strategy 'Healthy Futures' – The Healthy Futures Obesity Strategic Framework for Northern Ireland has been [published](#). The delivery of the Framework will be taken forward through a thematic approach across four key themes: healthy policies; healthy places and settings; healthy people and collaboration with a whole system approach. The FSA is referenced as lead delivery partner alongside the Department of Health under the theme of Healthy Policies and a partner under Healthy Places and Settings. We will work collaboratively with the Department of Health on the implementation of the Framework with the focus on the listed FSA actions. These actions align with the current Dietary Health priorities on nutrition standards in public sector settings, developing options on restriction of promotions of foods high in fat, sugar and salt in retail and improving the food environment with a focus on children's meals.

3.11 Traybakes: nutritional content and consumer views on portion size – The FSA in partnership with local councils and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) have [published](#) research on the nutritional content of traybakes and consumer views on portion size. This research has found that popular traybakes sold in cafés in Northern Ireland are high in sugar, saturated fat and calories and large portion sizes are common – but consumers are open to change. The key findings include:

- 59 traybakes were sampled by councils in Northern Ireland including rocky roads, fifteens and caramel squares
- On average, one 105g portion of a traybake contained 484kcal, 21g total fat, 13.2g saturated fat and 44.1g of sugar
- The largest sample was a rocky road which contained 1,026kcal, 29.7g saturated fat and 103.2g of sugar. This sample contained over the daily recommended intake of total fat, saturated fat and sugar
- Results from sensory panels conducted at CAFRE showed that 43% of participants consumed traybakes once a week and only 10% of participants preferred the large portion size of the samples presented
- During focus groups, consumers expressed that they would be open to a gradual reduction in traybake portion sizes, if prices were also reduced.

3.12 Cost of a Healthy Food Basket – A report on the cost of a healthy food basket in Northern Ireland in 2024 has been [published](#) by the FSA, Safefood and the Consumer Council. This research assesses the cost of a Minimum Essential Food Basket for 4 household types with low-income scenarios in Northern Ireland in 2024. The research also presents the percentage of take-home income that needs to be spent by these households to achieve a minimum essential, nutritionally adequate and socially acceptable food basket.

3.13 Publication of research exploring the restriction of unhealthy food promotions in Northern Ireland – [Research](#) entitled “Mapping the food retail and out of home sector in Northern Ireland” has been published. It explores the impact of applying promotion restrictions to food high in fat, sugar and salt, to these settings in Northern Ireland. The research contributes to one of the actions in the Healthy Futures Framework and will be used as a basis for further discussion with the Department of Health on future policy options.

3.14 Meeting with Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) – The Senior Management Teams from the FSA in Northern Ireland and FSAI met in December as part of the commitment to meet on a regular basis in line with our Memorandum of Understanding. The meeting covered a range of topics and issues, including the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, Listeria and investigations.

3.15 Dementia NI Training Session – Our 2025/26 charity partner in Northern Ireland visited the Belfast office to deliver an informative session on dementia. Rachel Molloy, Empowerment Facilitator from Dementia NI, explained the condition’s main symptoms, challenged common misconceptions, and outlined the support available for those affected. The team also heard from Julie, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in 2022. She shared her personal journey and highlighted how Dementia NI’s empowerment groups have been a lifeline. The session was moving and gave colleagues valuable insight into dementia and the charity’s vital work.

3.16 IFEX – IFEX is taking place at the Eikon Exhibition Centre from 24 – 26 February 2026. This is a great opportunity to showcase our work and engage with industry stakeholders. The FSA is sponsoring the Live Kitchen and as part of this we will be:

- Hosting a panel discussion and cookery demonstration focused on healthier food offerings for children; and
- Delivering a presentation on nutritional standards, highlighting our commitment to improving dietary health.

3.17 Northern Ireland Food and Drink Awards 2026 – The FSA is sponsoring the Healthier Product Innovation Award at the [2026 Northern Ireland Food and Drink Awards](#). Through this award, the FSA aims to encourage food businesses to make healthier products and showcase successes with healthier food reformulation and innovation as part of our Making Food Better programme. This programme supports Northern Ireland food businesses to make the food environment healthier through reducing calories, saturated fat, sugar, and salt in the food they produce, sell or serve, reducing portion size, providing nutritional information and delivering responsible promotions.

4. Consultations

4.1 Current live FSA consultations can be found [here](#).

5. Forward Look

- 27 January 2026 – Northern Ireland Food Strategy Conference
- 24 – 26 February 2026 – IFEX Exhibition

- 27 February 2026 – NIFDA Awards
- 13 – 16 May 2026 – Balmoral Show