

Report from the Director for Northern Ireland

FSA 26/06/09 - Report by Andy Cole, Director for Northern Ireland

1. Summary

1.1 This paper provides a high-level overview of the work of the FSA in Northern Ireland over the last year.

1.2 It also provides an update on Northern Ireland specific priorities as well as a forward look at priorities for the coming months.

1.3 The Board is asked to:

- **assess** the effectiveness of the work in Northern Ireland to deliver FSA priorities;
- **consider** the alignment of this work with the FSA's strategic direction; and
- **provide** feedback on the identified priorities.

2. Introduction

2.1 The FSA team in Northern Ireland has policy responsibility for all aspects of FSA policy, as well as an additional remit in relation to dietary health, nutrition surveillance and research, and food compositional standards and labelling, including nutrition food labelling.

2.2 In Northern Ireland, the Windsor Framework can change the dynamic of our work at times as we continue to work under EU food and feed law. This operating environment means that it is key for us to work on a four-nation basis, as well as working with the Republic of Ireland given the unique operating context of the island of Ireland.

2.3 The team also works closely with stakeholders across other government departments and district councils. These links are key to delivery and are evidenced throughout the paper.

2.4 The draft Northern Ireland Budget was subject to a public consultation between January and March 2026 and while it has not yet been agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive, we have been issued with a contingency planning envelope to support planning in the absence of a 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 at £12.4m. If agreed, this draft Budget represents the first multi-year budget settlement in Northern Ireland in

over a decade. While the figures are indicative, they provide a solid position to review modelling, particularly for 2027/28.

3. Windsor Framework and EU Reporting Obligations

3.1 With the Windsor Framework, our primary focus is to ensure that Northern Ireland receives the same level of robust public health protection as the rest of the UK, whilst facilitating the smooth movement of goods to consumers in Northern Ireland. As a result, the team in Northern Ireland has engagement with the Northern Ireland Assembly Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC) and additional EU reporting obligations. This section outlines some of those areas.

3.2 **DSC.** The purpose of the DSC is to assist with the observation and implementation of Article 13(3a) and (4) of the Windsor Framework. These are the parts of the Framework which set out the processes for how new and amending or replacement EU law may apply in Northern Ireland. Over the last 12 months we have continued to provide written briefing to the DSC, including on EU developments on the EU proposal for a Regulation on plants obtained by new genomic techniques and their food and feed. We took part in an in-person session at the end of April 2026 on the EU's proposed Food and Feed Safety Simplification package, working in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Department for the Economy. The proposals are technical clarifications which would not impact consumer protection and would not create new requirements for businesses.

3.3 **Product Inspection Facilities.** A major milestone in the implementation of the Windsor Framework has been delivered with the construction and onboarding of four new sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) inspection facilities at Belfast, Foyle, Larne and Warrenpoint ports. The FSA has a statutory responsibility to designate the facilities as EU compliant from a public health perspective, and for FSA policy areas. The facilities were inspected by DG Santé in October 2025 and formally designated by the Commission thereafter. The construction, designation and operation of these facilities have been critical in demonstrating the UK Government's commitment to full, timely and faithful implementation of the Windsor Framework, removing a key element inhibiting progression upon UK-EU SPS negotiations. The FSA was vital to this cross departmental programme of work from inception to completion, ensuring that public health requirements were met within the design, construction and operationalisation.

3.4 **UK (Northern Ireland) Contaminant Control Plan 2026-27.** EU Regulations require the development and submission of a contaminant control plan and the upload of sample results by Northern Ireland on the monitoring of certain contaminants in food. The team in Northern Ireland continues to meet these official control obligations. In June 2025, the results from the previous year were successfully reported to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The 2026/2027 Northern Ireland contaminant control plan was submitted to the EU on 30 March. The next stage is to report the results of last year's plan to EFSA by 30 June. Work is ongoing with DAERA to amend the existing FSA/DAERA Service Level Agreement (SLA) regarding sampling for the plan and to formalise roles and responsibilities.

3.5 Other additional requirements include the monitoring and reporting to the European Union of Anti-Microbial Resistance from fresh meats at retail sale in Northern Ireland as well as the procurement of National Reference Laboratories (NRLs). Under Windsor Framework arrangements, Northern Ireland NRLs must be based in an EU member state and cannot be based within Northern Ireland or Great Britain.

3.6 While the Windsor Framework has not changed our core role of working to keep all consumers safe, these examples represent additional workstreams which are carried out by the FSA team in Northern Ireland.

4. Progress against our priorities over the last 12 months.

4.1 This section provides an update on the priorities that were identified and presented to the Board in June 2025.

4.2 **Legislative programme.** We have worked to deliver on the legislative forward look programme which was agreed by the Board last year. The actions were prioritised in line with those pieces of legislation which would have the highest impact, as well as recognising our obligations to implement EU law in Annex 2 of the Windsor Framework.

4.3 The Breakfast Foods (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 were 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. This was the first time the FSA transposed an EU Directive into domestic legislation since the UK left the EU and marked a major milestone. It required extensive engagement and co-ordination with the Northern Ireland Executive, Northern Ireland departments and FSA officials providing written and oral evidence to both the DSC and the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Health.

4.4 In addition to this, progress has been made in relation to the draft Feed and Food (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026. The consultation has taken place, and we have initiated engagement with the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Health.

4.5 **Dietary health workstreams.** The [Healthy Futures Framework](#) – the new Obesity Prevention Strategy for Northern Ireland – was published in November 2025 following approval from the Northern Ireland Executive. While the Framework is led by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland, it is cross-departmental and seeks to take a whole system approach to addressing obesity. The FSA is referenced as a lead delivery partner for several industry focused outcomes alongside the Department of Health under the theme of healthy policies and as a partner under healthy places.

4.6 We continue to work with our partners in the Public Health Agency and *safood* to implement [Nutritional Standards](#) across Health and Social Care, local councils and the wider public sector in Northern Ireland. Recent [trials](#) of vending nutritional standards in three public sector settings demonstrated a 26% reduction in calories and 35% reduction in sugar per unit sold in the leisure centre setting, with no reduction in sales and revenue or customer satisfaction when the standards were implemented. Learning from the trials has been influential in securing agreement from three local councils and two public sector venues to implement the vending standards. We are supporting these venues with delivery and monitoring whilst continuing to engage with other public sector venues interested in adopting the nutritional standards.

4.7 To inform policy direction in Northern Ireland on restricting the promotion of food and drink high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS), we [published](#) research to map the food retail landscape in Northern Ireland, looking at the location of grocery and non-grocery food retailers and area deprivation. The research demonstrated that policy to restrict the promotion of HFSS food has strong potential to influence consumer purchasing and support public health objectives, particularly in urban and more deprived areas, where a higher number of businesses would be in scope of HFSS promotions restrictions. Engagement is ongoing with the Department of Health on policy options, and we continue to work with them on a draft consultation which we aim to publish in July 2026.

4.8 Building on our previous work on healthier children's menus, we published a [literature review](#) exploring strategies that could help improve children's menu offerings, as well as promoting our [Healthier Catering Guide for Children's Menus](#) at IFEX, Northern Ireland's flagship hospitality and food service event, where we led a panel discussion and cookery demonstration with development chefs from local suppliers. We continue to work with these suppliers to promote healthier children's menus among local restaurants and we are working with Food NI to produce tailored resources for chefs.

4.9 In supporting efforts to create a healthier food environment, the FSA sponsored the Healthier Food Innovation Award at the 2026 Northern Ireland Food and Drink Awards in February. The award supports the aims of the FSA's Making Food Better programme and encourages local food manufacturers to submit case studies of good practice in creating healthier food. Entries came from a wide range of businesses and product types, and the winner was a drink product called 'Fibre-Up' which contains 50% of the recommended fibre intake in one serving and is low in calories and sugar.

4.10 We commissioned [research](#) mapping the availability of fast-food outlets and grocery retailers in Northern Ireland and their distance to secondary schools. The first study in 2025 found that there are on average 2.4 times more fast-food outlets than grocery retailers in Northern Ireland. Additionally, in some areas of Northern Ireland, there are a high number of fast-food outlets within 400 metres of secondary schools, and less availability of grocery retailers in comparison which may offer healthier alternatives. The second study, [published](#) in May 2026, explored trends in deprivation through free school meal entitlement (FSME). The findings show that schools with more socio economically deprived student cohorts were more likely to have both fast-food outlets and grocery retailers within 400 metres compared with schools with less deprived student cohorts. Among schools that had at least one fast food outlet within 400 metres, higher densities of fast-food outlets (7–21 outlets) were more commonly observed around schools with less deprived student cohorts.

4.11 **Food Strategy Framework.** The Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework has firmly moved into the delivery stages. Over the last year, we have continued to work with colleagues across government and stakeholders in Northern Ireland to support the implementation of the Framework. The FSA is a named delivery partner under Mission One: To use food to improve lifelong health and wellbeing. Our actions for the first year were completed with the publication of the literature review exploring strategies that could help improve children's menu offerings and the evaluation of nutritional standards for vending in public sector and local council settings.

5. Delivering corporate priorities

5.1 **Work with district councils.** Our work and engagement with district councils remains a vital part of our ability to deliver on several of our corporate priorities and associated workstreams in Northern Ireland. All district councils are working to the new Food Standards Delivery Model (FSDM). The first food standards official returns from district councils following their transitioning to the FSDM were due in April 2026. A pragmatic and phased reporting approach was implemented to reflect varying levels of system capability across district council Management Information Systems, allowing for full returns, partial returns, or aggregated survey submissions. The team is currently working through and analysing the data which has been returned.

5.2 The Local Authority Performance [Paper](#), which was presented to the Business Committee in March 2026, provides an overview at a three-nation level of Local Authority performance. In relation to food hygiene performance in Northern Ireland specifically, the October 2025 return shows 68.3% of food hygiene interventions (Ratings A–E) completed, a marginal reduction from 68.7% in April 2025 which is consistent with expected seasonal variation. Under the FSA

Performance Assessment Matrix for food hygiene, six of the 11 district councils are assessed as low concern, with the remaining five assessed as medium concern. October 2025 recorded the highest level of D rated interventions since pre-COVID, with A rated interventions sustained at 100%. Other performance indicators remain positive. Overall, this represents the strongest October performance since bi-annual reporting commenced, indicating a continuing upward trend. All district councils received feedback on their October 2025 performance and assurances have been received that any required improvements will be addressed.

5.3 Official controls delivery. In Northern Ireland, the FSA has an SLA in place with DAERA for the delivery of official controls and associated activities by the Department relating to meat, milk, egg and primary production hygiene in establishments registered by, or holding certain approvals from the FSA. This represents a large part of our budget (approximately £10 million) and work to deliver on our core remit of keeping food and feed safe. Official control delivery is carried out by DAERA in accordance with EU Regulations and FSA policy and guidance. The quality of the service delivery is verified and measured throughout the year against a range of key performance indicators. Technical, financial and delivery aspects are subject to scrutiny and challenge at bi-annual governance meetings between DAERA and the FSA.

5.4 Lough Neagh. 'Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment' is one of the commitments in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2024 – 2027. From May 2024 – February 2025, we undertook further exploratory testing of fish from the Lough to understand the levels of cyanotoxins within the fish during all phases of the seasonal bloom of blue green algae. Both fish flesh and fish viscera (liver and gastrointestinal tract) were tested for cyanotoxins. The species of fish tested included perch, eel, pollan, bream, trout, and roach. Cyanotoxins were detected in the viscera of the fish and, for the first time, in the flesh of some fish. These results, compared to the Tolerable Daily Intake levels established by the World Health Organisation, are not considered a health concern. FSA toxicologists confirmed that fish from Lough Neagh remain safe to eat, and a news [story](#) in relation to the findings was published. The 2026 updated Rapid Risk Assessment was [published](#) in April 2026 and reaffirmed the FSA's risk management advice that there are no food safety concerns associated with consuming the various fish species from Lough Neagh. Consumer advice therefore remains unchanged: commercially caught fish from Lough Neagh are safe to eat, as are recreationally caught fish which should be prepared and handled hygienically. Recreational anglers should continue to eviscerate fish thoroughly and wash fillets before consumption.

5.5 Incident management. During the 2025/26 financial year, the Consumer Protection team in Northern Ireland led the investigation into 242 in country food and feed incidents. This was in addition to contributing to a broad range of UK-wide incidents which were led by the central Incidents team. The team in Northern Ireland worked collaboratively with counterparts in England, Wales and Scotland, district councils, other government departments and interested stakeholders in Northern Ireland to ensure that unsafe product that had reached Northern Ireland was removed from the market. The team also worked closely with partners in the Republic of Ireland, EU Member States and third countries to investigate international food and feed safety issues.

5.6 Meat charging. Work has been ongoing in Northern Ireland in relation to the proposals for a revised system of financial support for abattoirs and game handling establishments. Whilst general charging policy arrangements are the same across Northern Ireland, England and Wales, the delivery model for meat hygiene official controls and the structure of the Northern Ireland agriculture and meat processing sector is different. The consultation therefore includes Northern Ireland-specific questions seeking evidence and views on whether the proposed model requires adaptation to reflect Northern Ireland business structures. Furthermore, in Northern Ireland, this issue is also considered cross-cutting as it cuts across the departmental responsibilities of the Department of Health, the Department of Finance and DAERA. Therefore, the proposals and recommendations will be subject to final agreement from the Northern Ireland Executive.

5.7 Alongside the areas highlighted, we are closely linked into priority workstreams across the FSA to ensure that Northern Ireland considerations are considered, including the Future of Food Regulation and the Cell Cultivated Products sandbox.

6. Forward look

6.1 The Northern Ireland Assembly is now in the final months of the current mandate, with the pre-election period expected to commence in March 2027. During the remainder of the mandate, we will continue to respond to Ministerial requests as required and will be ready to support incoming Ministers following the election.

6.2 We will continue to deliver the FSA business plan priorities in Northern Ireland, working closely with colleagues in England and Wales to support the delivery of these programmes. We will also flex our resources to address Northern Ireland-specific priorities, including adapting to specific implications that may arise for Northern Ireland as a consequence of the SPS Agreement between the UK and EU. The following areas will be of particular focus for the team over the next six to 12 months.

6.3 **Legislative programme.** Given the limited time remaining in the current Assembly mandate, both Committee and plenary capacity are under increasing pressure. However, ahead of the pre-election period, we intend to make the Feed and Food (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026. Furthermore, we intend to continue to progress work in relation to Food Contact Materials legislation to update references to EU legislation in existing domestic legislation, ensuring effective enforcement of EU requirements on recycled plastic food contact materials. We will keep these legislative priorities under close review and will engage with the Department of Health on these, as we rely on it to present legislation before the Assembly on our behalf.

6.4 **Dietary health.** The forward look priorities in relation to dietary health will be complimentary and focused on the areas where the FSA is a named delivery partner in both Healthy Futures and the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework. This will include exploring policy to restrict the promotion of high fat, sugar, salt food, consideration of the best approach to nutritional labelling, expanding Nutritional Standards to public sector catering and vending and supporting the Northern Ireland food industry to create healthier food environment. Alongside this, we will also continue to work with officials in the Department of Health in Northern Ireland and across the nations in relation to the proposal to introduce mandatory reporting on the healthiness of sales for large food businesses in the UK, as well as targets. We will also be engaging and working closely with the FSA's Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Ian Young, in relation to our dietary health and nutrition surveillance and research remit.

6.5 **Lough Neagh.** We have completed the 2025/26 sampling programme testing fish from Lough Neagh for cyanotoxins. Analysis of all samples is now complete and the results from this sampling programme will be subject to an internal risk assessment and used to update the current risk management advice, if required. We are continuing to sample fish from Lough Neagh during 2026/27 for cyanotoxins. We will also continue to support the delivery of Action 37 of the [Lough Neagh Action Plan](#) – implementation of the Inter-Agency Blue-Green Algae monitoring protocol – a key commitment within the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government.

7. Conclusions

7.1 This paper provides a high-level overview of work that has been undertaken since the last update to the Board in June 2025 as well as current and future priorities for the FSA team in Northern Ireland.

7.2 Overall, the Board is asked to:

- **assess** the effectiveness of the work in Northern Ireland to deliver FSA priorities
- **consider** the alignment of this work with the FSA's strategic direction; and
- **provide** feedback on the identified priorities.