

# **Minutes of the themed meeting of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee held on 22 October 2024.**

## **Present:**

### **Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) Members Attending:**

- Dr Rhian Hayward, MBE, Chair
- Dr Philip Hollington
- Dr John Williams
- Dave Holland
- Georgia Taylor
- Helen Taylor
- Jessica Williams

### **Food Standards Agency (FSA) Officials Attending:**

- Anjali Juneja – Director for UK & International Affairs
- Sian Bowsley - Director for FSA in Wales
- Sioned Fidler – Head of Communications, Welsh Language and Business Support
- Lucy Edwards – Senior Business Manager
- Owen Lewis – Head of Regulatory Policy and Local Authority Partnerships
- Jonathan Davies – Head of Standards Policy and Consumer Protection

## **Presenters:**

- Ellis Roberts, Business Engagement Manager for Shared Regulatory Services (SRS)
- Karen McCloskey, Head of Delivery Standards Unit
- Sarah Aza, Head of Local Authority Delivery, FSA in Wales
- Lucas Williams, Neath Port Talbot CBC
- Kay Ledward, Wrexham CBC

- Carmel Lynskey, Head of Achieving Business Compliance Programme
- Micah McGuire, Project Delivery Lead

**Observers:**

Representatives from:

- Caerphilly CBC
- Monmouthshire CC
- Merthyr Tydfil CBC
- Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
- Shared Regulatory Services
- Welsh Local Government Association
- St Helens BC
- NCASS Nationwide Caterers Association

## **1.Introductions, apologies and minutes of the last meeting**

1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. The minutes of the July 2024 meeting were agreed.

## **2.Declaration of interests**

2.1 No interests were declared.

## **3. Exploring Regulation**

3.1 **Ellis Roberts Business Engagement Manager for Shared Regulatory Services (SRS)** and also the **Chair of the Wales Primary Authority Group** – Ellis gave an overview of Primary Authority (PA) Partnerships from the Local Authority (LA) perspective and explained how the group has seen a steady increase in businesses seeking PA partnerships with Welsh LAs due to the level of service they can offer on a range of regulatory matters, including food hygiene, consumer protection, trading standards and product safety. Ellis explained that the Wales Primary Authority Group meets every quarter and is an opportunity to share knowledge and best practise between LAs who deliver PA as well as those who don't and are potentially interested in venturing into this area.

3.1.2 **Karen McCloskey, Head of Delivery Standards Unit at the FSA**, gave an overview of the FSA's role as the National Regulator within the PA scheme and explained how the FSA could also be asked to be a Supporting Regulator.

3.1.3 There were questions from the committee around LA resourcing and if this impacts LAs in Wales being able to offer PA services, however LA representatives in attendance clarified that whilst there are pressures in terms of an ageing workforce there is sufficient resource to carry out all aspects of delivery work and the LA resource picture is better in Wales than in England.

3.1.4 The committee commented that it was refreshing to hear about the measures in place to train and retain more LA officers through apprenticeships and other routes but are aware that there is more work to do in this area in attracting younger people into these roles.

3.1.5 There was also a request from the committee to see data in relation to Welsh businesses and the PA relationships that Welsh LAs hold – what types of businesses and in what sector, i.e. retail, manufacturing, hospitality.

3.2 **Sarah Aza, Head of Local Authority Delivery, FSA in Wales**, provided some background on this work explaining that in 2017, Ipsos Mori published a report presenting their research on the modernization of the Risk intervention programme. Their research included a literature review, interviews with international regulators and UK non-food regulators, stakeholder interviews and visits with local authorities. The research indicated that there was a need to modify the Food Standards scheme. This led to an FSA review of the Food Standards delivery across Wales, England and Northern Ireland in 2018 and the development of a proposed new model in 2019. The model was piloted in England and NI during 2021, evaluated and consulted on in 2022, with the revised Codes of Practice published in England and NI in 2023. Sarah explained that the pilot in Wales had to be delayed due to LA resource being diverted to responding to the pandemic. In Wales, the Food Standards Delivery Model pilot ran for 6 months from September 2023 to February 2024 and involved 2 pilot LAs and 2 control LAs. Sarah highlighted that the results were positive, and the next steps are dependent on the outcome of the evaluation report which could lead to

seeking agreement from Ministers to amend the current Food Law Code of Practice in Wales.

**3.2.1 Lucas Williams, Neath Port Talbot CBC and Kay Leward, Wrexham CBC**

shared their experiences of the pilot, with both confessing they were apprehensive at first but had positive experiences during the pilot. They talked about how, under the pilot, they had more flexibility to use resources more effectively and both said it is a step in the right direction.

**3.3 Carmel Lynskey, Head of Achieving Business Compliance Programme and Micah Mcguire, Project Delivery Lead** presented on the next steps for National Level Regulation. They noted that the objectives for the session were to demonstrate the FSA's commitment to engagement with key stakeholders to help develop the FSA's next steps of work, and to ensure those next steps are clearly explained. They also highlighted that they are keen to listen to stakeholder concerns around the programme to establish common ground around making the food system safe and ultimately protect public health.

**3.3.1** Carmel advised that in 2022, FSA engaged with the Primary Authority working group in Wales about our early conceptual thinking. In conversations with DPPW it was agreed that this was not a priority project for Wales, and that the FSA would report back on findings post-trial. In 2023 we collaborated with the Welsh Minister on an agreement to ensure:

- Proposals are evidence-based and can demonstrate they deliver improvements to food business regulation in Wales and more collaborative, effective and efficient ways of working between the partner agencies.
- Current high standards for food safety or consumer confidence are protected.
- The integrity and consumer confidence in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is maintained.
- Unintended consequences from one regulatory system on another are identified and mitigated.

- Consistency across the UK is sought where practical and where not an approach appropriate for Wales is taken. *Discussions are underway with NI and Scotland*

3.3.2 Micah then gave an overview of the proof-of-concept trial in England explaining the four key elements: assurance framework, data, relationship management and validation, and then detailed the next steps.

3.3.3 There were questions from the committee around the integrity of the data and the impact on risk assessment which led to discussions around data trends. It was also questioned if any considerations had been given to expanding the scope of the programme to also include food standards. The committee commented that this is a challenging area of work and there are great possibilities with data that we can create to get some efficiencies in the system but not lose that sort the local assurance that the Environmental Health officers and inspections provide.

3.3.4 Local Authority representatives advised that they are keen to work together and co-produce as protecting public health is key. They shared concerns around the maintenance or improvement of the current levels of public health protection and that the science and evidence should be a key aspect of this work going forward. They also expressed the desire to explore a permit to trade or licencing regime for food businesses.

3.3.5 Carmel and Anjali stated that the long-term vision for this programme is now on hold while more engagement is underway, and science and evidence is built upon.

## **4. Chair's update**

4.1 The Chair gave an oral update on the September Board meeting in Peterborough and her visit to the Morrisons fruit packing facility as part of the Board programme. The Chair informed of two vacancies that are arising on the FSA Board.

## **5. Directors report (Paper 24/10/02)**

5.1 The UKIA Director gave an oral update on the report which included updates on the new Government in Westminster and positive engagement with Minister Bryant in Wales. Sian Bowsley was also introduced as the new Director for FSA in Wales.

## **6. Any other business**

6.1 Members noted that the next themed meeting would be on 4 February 2025.

The Chair closed the meeting.