

# **Minutes of the themed meeting of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee held on 24 April 2024.**

## **Present:**

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

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

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

- Anjali Juneja – Director for UK & International Affairs
- Nathan Barnhouse - 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
- Lowri Williams – Senior Communications Manager

## **Presenters:**

- Jon Wood – Shared Regulatory Services
- Kathryn Thurlow – Welsh Government
- Emma Burgess – Lewis Pies
- Helen Taylor – ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre

## **Observers:**

Representatives from:

- Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
- Carmarthenshire CBC
- Welsh Local Government Association

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

1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Jessica Williams. The minutes of the February 2024 meeting were agreed.

## **2.Declaration of interests**

2.1 No interests were declared.

## **3. The food business landscape in Wales and challenges for growth and innovation**

3.1 **Jon Wood, Industry Team Manager, Shared Regulatory Services (SRS)** -The presentation detailed how SRS engage with businesses and help food businesses to achieve compliance. Jon outlined the role of the Specialist Services Industry team which comprises of highly skilled officers from across the Environmental Health and Trading Standards functions and highlighted the positive ways that SRS is working with businesses to support them in achieving compliance and how the team have utilised various platforms including social media, newsletters, food safety events and an 'Ask the Regulator' podcast to extend their reach and provide expertise to food business operators. Jon also provided an overview of how SRS have gradually built Primary Authority relationships with multiple businesses and detailed the other paid for support services available including HACCP advice, food labelling reviews and allergy advice amongst others.

3.2 There were questions from the committee on opportunities for collaboration in relation to training across Local Authorities and interest around the Primary Authority relationships and assured advice.

3.3 **Kathryn Thurlow, Senior Innovation & Food Technology Manager, Welsh Government** – The presentation gave an overview of the work of Welsh Governments

Food Technology, Innovation and Clusters with the overarching vision of 'creating a strong and vibrant Welsh Food Sector with a global reputation for excellence, having one of the most environmentally and socially responsible supply chains in the world. Kathryn explained that some of the challenges that are faced in Wales are not having the landscape to produce all the raw ingredients required and being reliant on UK and global trade, thus easily effected by global issues. Novel foods can also cause challenges, small businesses in Wales want to be innovative and use novel ingredients but don't fully understand the process and time required for approval. Kathryn informed that to help address these challenges Wales has a comprehensive range of business support for food and drink business in programmes such as Food Innovation Wales and the Trade Development Programme. They also collect market intelligence through the Clusters and associated networks, which cover Fine Foods, Drink, Seafood, Nutri-Wales, Horticulture, Sustainability and Exports. Kathryn also mentioned how the Welsh Government is committed to actively encouraging and supporting UKGI/EUPFN applications from all sub sectors in Wales and to work with UK Government/partners, to promote this key programme of support to the Welsh food and drinks industry. Wales currently has 20 registered food and drink products with Geographic Indicator status, which is more products pro rata per population than any other UK nation.

3.4 There was a discussion around how we could link in FSA Science colleagues with the Welsh Government's University and Research Cluster and the benefits that this could provide. The committee were also interested to hear about the sustainability cluster and the support available to businesses to reduce their carbon footprint.

**3.5 Emma Burgess, Technical Manager, Lewis Pies** – the presentation gave an overview of the business which is now in the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of the Lewis family, they are a SME employing 91 members of staff. Emma explained that they are a leading manufacturer of savoury and sweet pastry-based products such as pies, pasties and rolls, who also specialise in Vegan and Halal ranges. Their customer base includes wholesale to food service providers, travel & leisure industries, brand partnerships and food outlets throughout South & West Wales. The company are currently building their premium brand 'Wilfreds' and are focussing on growing and investing in the future whilst fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.

Emma informed of some of the technical challenges that the business is facing including recruitment of staff and skills shortages, lack of technical understanding in the wider business, BRCGS is no longer the one standard for all and maintaining momentum with a food safety and quality culture. Emma also touched upon wider business challenges including increasing energy and materials costs, sustainability and efficiency and productivity. Emma also highlighted the support that the business has received from ZERO2FIVE with BRCGS, training, workshops and the technical leader's forum.

3.6 WFAC were interested to hear how the business has been impacted by changing regulations and is now adapting to these.

**3.7 Helen Taylor, Technical Director, ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre (FIC)** – the presentation provided an overview of the work of ZERO2FIVE and Food Innovation Wales. Helen detailed the four key priorities of the centre: Industry Support, Welsh Government, Education and Research. Helen outlined the industry support available through Project HELIX and also gave examples of how the FIC has provided technical support to industry partners on food safety (HACCP), factory hygiene, factory and equipment design, looking at how businesses can improve the nutrient profile of products, to name a few. The FIC also assists with process management support including product and process validation, value and waste stream mapping, and product costings. Helen informed that the FIC is working on a crisis incident management workshop designed specifically for small business which is due to launch in the autumn. Helen explained how the FIC as part of Food Innovation Wales works with Welsh Government to hold events such as Blas Cymru/Taste Wales, host visits and contribute towards the Healthy Weight Healthy Wales Strategy. Helen then covered the FIC's role in education explaining that the Environmental Health BSC offered at Cardiff Met is unique in that it's the only one that is endorsed by 3 bodies. At the time of the meeting there were 45 students on site undertaking various projects including work on school dinners and low sugar products. Undergraduates also get briefs from industry partners to work on and apply their food safety knowledge. Helen also gave an overview of the Food Safety , Listeria and the Nutrition and Science Research Groups.

3.8 There was discussion around the funding arrangements for businesses to access the services of the FIC and WFAC were interested to hear about the graduate programme where graduates are placed into businesses for further experience and mentoring.

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

4.1 The Chair gave an oral update on the March Board meeting held in Leeds and the insightful visit to MicroSearch who conduct analytical and screening tests for food manufacturers.

#### **5. Directors report (Paper 24/04/02)**

5.1 The UKIA Director gave an oral update on the report which included updates on Veterinary resourcing and the Border Target Operating Model. The Director for Wales then gave an update on Regulated Products and Ministerial engagement.

#### **7. Any other business**

7.1 Members noted that the next themed meeting would be on 16 July.

The Chair closed the meeting.