

Welsh Food Advisory Committee: Themed Discussion

Date of Meeting: 5 February 2026

Theme: Supplements

Presenters

FSA officials: Steve Adie, Head of Standards Policy and Owen Lewis, Head of Policy – FSA in Wales

External: Sue Davies, Which?, Jasmine Drew, Head of Healthier Food Environments, Welsh Government, Lynda Scammell and Ed Scully – MHRA

General Comments/Observations

Sue Davies, Which? – Sue informed that Which? evidence highlights significant consumer and regulatory risks in the food supplements market, particularly online. Supplement use is widespread, often without professional advice, with many consumers confused by information and labelling. Investigations found numerous products sold at doses well above safe levels, alongside illegal injectable products and widespread misleading weight-loss claims, frequently positioning supplements as “natural alternatives” to medicines. Online marketplaces present the greatest concerns, with weak pre-listing controls and repeated non-compliance. Sue advocated for clearer guidance, more effective enforcement and greater accountability for online platforms.

Steve Adie, FSA - Steve outlined the regulatory landscape for food supplements and the central role of the Food Standards Agency. Responsibility for food safety, labelling, nutrition policy and enforcement is split across multiple bodies and differs by UK nation, creating inherent complexity and potential for regulatory gaps. Within this framework, the FSA is responsible for food safety and hygiene, working with local authorities on enforcement, and for labelling and nutrition policy in Wales and Northern Ireland. Steve emphasised the FSA’s role in protecting consumers through surveillance, incident management, sampling, risk assessment, consumer insight, guidance for businesses and local authorities, and coordinated working across regulators, underpinned by the core principles that food must be safe, accurately described and support healthier outcomes.

Jasmine Drew, Welsh Government - Jasmine described the Welsh Government’s role in food supplements regulation within the Nutrition Labelling, Composition and Standards (NLCS) Framework. This includes responsibility for policy development, ministerial advice, regulation-making and post-implementation review for food supplements, alongside related areas such as nutrition labelling and the addition of vitamins and minerals. Safety assessments and enforcement sit outside Welsh Government’s remit, relying instead on the FSA and local authorities. The presentation also set out the NLCS authorisation process for new food supplement substances, from application and risk assessment through to consultation and ministerial decision-making, with an emphasis on four-nation alignment where possible and early identification of divergence risks.

Lynda Scammell and Ed Scully, MHRA – Lynda and Ed explained the complexity of determining whether food supplements fall under food or medicines legislation, focusing on MHRA’s approach to “borderline” products. Classification is

made on a case-by-case basis, based on product claims, presentation, ingredients, dosage, intended use and overall consumer perception, with particular sensitivity to medicinal claims, testimonials and comparisons to licensed medicines. The presentation highlighted that borderline decisions are rarely straightforward, especially for herbal products and emerging categories such as GLP-1-related products. Enforcement is primarily based on voluntary compliance, escalating where necessary through statutory determination processes. Overall, the material underlines the regulatory burden created by unclear boundaries, inconsistent claims and consumer-generated content, reinforcing the need for clearer guidance, stronger oversight and coordinated action across regulators.

Steve Adie, FSA – Steve then set out the practical challenges of enforcing food supplements regulation and the FSA's future priorities. Local authorities face significant complexity due to unfamiliar substances, products sold above guideline levels, labelling and claims issues, overlap with medicines and advertising law, and the growth of online and cross-border sales. These challenges are compounded by misinformation, influencer marketing and novel ingredients. In response, the FSA will continue to support local authority enforcement, update toolkits and guidance, strengthen training for businesses and regulators, and work with partners to improve alignment on upper limits and regulatory standards, including through EU/SPS engagement, to ensure supplements placed on the market are safe, compliant and accurately described.

WFAC discussion highlighted rapid growth in the supplements market, particularly among small and micro-businesses, often emerging from fitness and wellbeing sectors rather than scientific backgrounds. Members queried whether simpler, clearer regulatory guidance could support safer innovation and economic growth while reducing non-compliance. It was noted that many smaller operators struggle with labelling accuracy, supply-chain assurance, and ingredient verification.

Across the discussion, members suggested:

- Clearer, consumer-facing guidance on **safe supplement use and cumulative intake**
- Faster, cross-agency action on **emerging trends** (e.g. GLP-1-branded supplements)
- Improved engagement with **online marketplaces**
- Enhanced **training and toolkits** for local authorities and small businesses
- More evidence on **long-term exposure and combined supplement use**.

The comprehensive discussion reflected the complexity of regulating food supplements, emphasising the need for multi-agency collaboration, robust scientific assessment, and clear communication to both businesses and consumers to ensure safety and compliance in a rapidly evolving market.