
Minutes of the FSA Business Committee meeting held on 20 June 2018

The Dales, Doubletree By Hilton Hotel, York

Present:

Heather Hancock, Chair; Laura Sandys, Deputy Chair; David Brooks; Rosie Glazebrook; Stewart Houston; Ruth Hussey; Colm McKenna; Mary Quicke; Stuart Reid, Paul Williams.

Officials attending:

Rod Ainsworth - Director of Regulatory and Legal Strategy
Jason Feeney - Chief Executive
Chris Hitchen - Director of Finance and Performance
Maria Jennings - Director of Northern Ireland and Organisational Development
Julie Pierce - Director of Openness, Data and Digital
Guy Poppy - Chief Scientific Adviser
Nina Purcell - Director of Wales and Regulatory Delivery Division
Colin Sullivan - Chief Operating Officer
Michael Wight - Acting Director of Policy and Science

Apologies:

Steve Wearne – Director of Policy and Science Group

Minutes

The Board accepted the Minutes of the March Business Committee as an accurate record of their discussion.

Actions arising

There were no comments on the Actions Arising from the March Business Committee.

Chief Executive's Report To The Business Committee

The Chief Executive (CE) updated the Board on HR developments in the FSA, and began by noting his pleasure that Rick Mumford and Jane Clark would soon be joining the FSA, as the new Head of Science, Evidence and Research and Veterinary Director respectively. He added that the FSA's Executive Management Team (EMT) were continuing to work on organisational design across the business, considering the expansion of the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) and assigning resources to expanding risk assessment and management workstreams. The CE also reported that the FSA had recently launched a new HR Management System, which had received good feedback from managers when being implemented. The CE reported that the FSA continues to work closely with industry stakeholders and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to install CCTV in slaughterhouses.

FSA's definition of 'excellent' performance. He drew members attention to the recommendations as detailed in the Annexes, explaining that these will be refined and continually updated and that this was a start point. One of the most complex measures and targets EMT had discussed was on FBD. The paper recommended a 2-step approach where, should an increase in food borne disease be detected, the reasons for this will be investigated. This will precede any decisions about what, if any action will be taken.

Ruth Hussey welcomed the approach to food borne illness but drew attention to the figure quoted for Food Hygiene Rating System (FHRS) highlighting the different legislative bases between the UK's nations. The figure, as an average across the UK, could belie the fact that the target for Northern Ireland and Wales should be 100%. Chris agreed that the aggregated figure could be split out to give targets for the three nations separately

ACTION 1 – Chris Hitchen to ensure the FHRS target figures are presented separately for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Chair asked the Business Committee if they were content to adopt the recommendations of the paper. The Committee confirmed that they were content.

Performance and resource report

Chris Hitchen introduced the paper, highlighting the two priorities – EU exit and ROF which Board members had already received updates on. He noted that the body of the paper contains a new Health and Safety report, and explained that the environment for operational staff means that the focus and lead for this is with Colin Sullivan.

David Brooks noted that the statistics for Campylobacter were rising while retailer information appears to show it going down. He asked whether there was an explanation as this could be important to the help the next tier of chicken producers. Michael Wight agreed, explaining that it is difficult to know what amount is pre-existing and how much is coming from cross contamination as it is not currently possible to distinguish between food borne and environmental bacteria. He explained that the FSA is currently working with the top nine largest of the small-scale abattoirs, to look at what more could be done to address this.

The CSA explained that this was a part of the classic epidemiological pattern for all food borne diseases and highlighted the work the FSA did on salmonella as an exceptional success where the number of incidents were reduced and kept down. He explained that this demonstrated the need for a long-term approach in tackling food borne diseases.

Paul Williams noted that the paper showed that, where a business has an FHRS rating of 3, there seems to be good chance that they can be helped to improve to eventually achieve a rating of 5. For ratings of 1 and 2, however, this did not appear to occur as readily. He asked if there was a reason that this might be the case.

Nina Purcell explained that this trend had been noted but had not yet been investigated. Some engagement and discussion with Local Authorities would be necessary to see if there was a reason underpinning this apparent trend.

ACTION 2 – Chris Hitchen to confirm the movement of ratings within the FHRS scheme.

Stuart Reid suggested that some information around the sample size for the information presented on slide 7 would be useful.

ACTION 3 – Chris Hitchen to check sample size used for the statistics presented on slide 7.

Rosie Glazebrook commented on the workforce slide asking if it was possible to explain the length of time to fill vacancies and whether this was related to the percentage of staff that have completed training.

The Chair explained that having gone to so much effort to make the performance report meaningful, focussed and accessible, the Committee should resist the temptation to start adding a great deal of new information. The CE added that vacancy filling had been subject to some discussion recently and that the issues were known and solutions being sought. Maria Jennings added that the length of time it takes to run a recruitment campaign may be an issue that impacts here and a subject that could be of interest to the Board explaining that there were multiple issues to be considered on whether a position represents an existing role subject to a Job Evaluation and Grading Support (JEGS) process or whether this is a new role which requires external recruitment.

Laura Sandys asked about FBO licences being withdrawn due to issues with FSA staff. Colin Sullivan explained that Bullying and Harassment of operational staff was a serious issue and the FSA had adopted a zero-tolerance approach. Where it has occurred, the FSA staff have been withdrawn from the site, leaving the business unable to operate pending discussions between the FSA and the FBO and the satisfactory resolution of issues.

The CE explained that, due to the nature of the issues involved where the environment may be unsafe for the FSA staff to operate immediately, the decision to withdraw the staff must be made quickly and the issue escalated rapidly.

The Chair suggested that Animal Welfare statistics might be looked at in the September meeting.

AOB

No further business was raised and the Chair closed the meeting. The next meeting of the FSA Business Committee will take place on 19 September.