MINUTES OF THE FSA BUSINESS COMMITTEE MEETING ON 19
JUNE 2019

Maple House, 150 Corporation Street, Birmingham B4 6TB

Present:
Heather Hancock, Chair; David Brooks; Stuart Reid; Ruth Hussey; Colm McKenna; Mary Quicke.

Officials attending:
Jason Feeney - Chief Executive
Catherine Bowles - Deputy Director - EU Exit, Regulatory & International Strategy
Simon Dawson - Head of Regulatory Delivery and Operational Transformation (for FSA 19/06/17)
Justin Everard - Head of External Communications (for FSA 19/06/14)
Sarah Gibbons - Head of Internal Communications and Engagement (for FSA 19/06/14)
Chris Hitchen - Director of Finance and Performance
Maria Jennings - Director of Regulatory Compliance, People and Northern Ireland (NI)
Julie Pierce - Director of Openness, Data & Digital and Wales
Steven Pollock - Director of Communications (for FSA 19/06/14)
Guy Poppy - Chief Scientific Adviser
Rebecca Sudworth - Director of Policy
Colin Sullivan - Chief Operating Officer
Steve Wearne - Director of Science

Apologies
Rod Ainsworth - Director of Strategy Legal & Governance

1. Welcome and Announcements

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the Business Committee meeting and noted apologies from the Director of Strategy Legal & Governance, Rod Ainsworth.

2. Minutes of 13 March 2019 (FSA 19/06/11)

2.1 The Business Committee approved the minutes without comment.

3. Actions Arising (FSA 19/06/12)

3.1 The Chair noted that there was one outstanding action noted in the papers, which related to diversity information. She explained that this information had been provided to Members through information included in one of their weekly
circulations and could now be considered completed. All other actions were complete.

Action 1 - Board Secretariat to close off the action on diversity information on the Business Committee Actions Arising list.

4. Chief Executive’s Report to the Business Committee (FSA 19/06/13)

4.1 The Chair invited the CE to introduce his report to the Business Committee. He explained that the significance of some of the prosecutions noted in the report had been discussed previously and noted the effect they were having in terms of deterrence.

4.2 The CE explained that the FSA's initial response to the Spending Review laying out areas of focus and highlighting areas where additional investment may be required. He explained that the spending review would conclude in the autumn with final agreement towards the end of the year.

4.3 The CE then mentioned the NAO report, explaining that it was encouraging to see such a positive report and the recommendations were all for areas where the FSA had already begun working and progressing.

4.4 The CE drew attention to the pay strategy, explaining that the FSA had received strong feedback on this in the annual people survey, which was not unusual for a government department with less than 30% saying that they were content. He explained that the FSA had been building a business case over the last year to seek permission to allow greater flexibility in using funds in this area.

4.5 David Brooks mentioned that on prosecutions, there seemed to be a high proportion of businesses represented in the figures from the Asian community. He asked if the FSA was doing enough to ensure that training materials were available in the most suitable range of languages to ensure that the best opportunities to become compliant were available to all Food Business Operators (FBOs).

4.6 Colin Sullivan, the Chief Operating Officer, explained that the overall number of prosecutions had not changed significantly. In terms of the ratio between halal and other, it was not known to what extent language was a factor, and this was something that could be looked into.

Action 2 - Colin Sullivan to look into whether training materials are available in the most suitable range of languages to ensure the best opportunities to become complaint are available to all FBOs.
5. Annual Communications Update (FSA 19/06/14)

5.1 The Chair welcomed Steven Pollock, Director of Communications, Justin Everard, Senior Head of External Communications and Sarah Gibbons, Senior Head of Corporate Engagement, to deliver the annual communications update. Steven explained that the presentation aimed to give a reflection of activities that had taken place over the past year, consider the context in which the FSA operated and noted some of the anticipated challenges ahead. Sarah noted that research demonstrated that confidence in government institutions was low, adding that this appeared to be the case globally. She noted that the other side of this was that there had been a rise in trust in scientists, she suggested that this demonstrated the need for the FSA to ensure that science and technical expertise were at the fore in the FSA’s external communications.

5.2 Justin explained that a new communications agreement had been in place with the communications teams in Belfast and Cardiff for seven months and had noted the value of this agreement in supporting joint working in communications. Justin highlighted the handling of communications around the recent listeria outbreak in maintaining consistency of messaging sometimes in the face of aggressive questioning from journalists. He noted the Easy To Ask campaign as a key achievement of the past year highlighting the two awards won for the campaign. He gave an overview of the campaigns key target demographic and the use of social media and online influencers to improve the reach of the messages. He also noted that there had also been a reset in the relationship with the media pointing out that relations were much improved. He added that FSA was also much quicker to correct erroneous information.

5.3 Sarah gave some reflections on the FSA’s internal engagement noting that the work in this area had to be considered as a partnership with staff with a focus on how scores around staff engagement could be improved and how colleagues and staff could be encouraged to advocate for the work of the organisation. She noted an increase in confidence among staff to be able to explain the FSA’s approach to various issues.

5.4 Steven explained that the team had worked hard with partner organisations on two of the FSA’s major priorities: EU Exit and Regulating Our Future (ROF) and communications had played a significant supporting role in these areas. On external engagement, he emphasised the use of Instagram as a way to reach younger consumers and highlighted the FSA’s expanded social media presence highlighting YouTube as a useful place where content could be boosted through likes, highlighting the number of views for the FSA Explains campaign, adding that having this content on YouTube allowed the FSA to trigger relevant videos at key moments. He expressed his appreciation for the work of all members of communications staff, especially in relation to their work in supporting the FSA’s incident handling over the past year.

5.5 The Chair noted and endorsed that appreciation and invited questions from Committee Members. Colm McKenna welcomed the connections between the communications teams across the three countries and asked what work was being done to ensure a consistency of message across government. Steven
explained that FSA Communications staff had worked very closely with other government departments and had been working to secure those relationships to give confidence that they would be sustained in dealing with an incident. He mentioned the strength of the relationship with the communications teams in Belfast and Cardiff, highlighting a recent presentation to the NI Communications Forum. Julie Pierce, Director of Openness, Data & Digital and Wales, clarified that FSA Communications was a single team but that there was a recognition of the need to respond according to the different requirements and remits of the three nations.

5.6 The Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) noted that Steven had delivered a very welcome and well received presentation at the induction of members to the new expert advisory committees. The Chair asked whether Steven considered it to be the case that there had been a significant shift in understanding across the FSA in the value that can be added by communications. Steven confirmed that he did consider this to be the case and that there now seemed to be a wider understanding, across the teams, of communications as a strategic partner. He outlined the OASIS model that government communications teams work to explaining that this had been explained to the department and had been accompanied by an offer and an ask. The offer being the value that could be added by communications professionals and the ask being early engagement. He noted that this had been well received.

5.7 Ruth Hussey asked the Chair whether the Science Council had been commissioned to consider the approach to risk communication. The Chair explained that they had been commissioned to look at areas around the communication of risk and uncertainty and consideration of presentational issues around uncertainty. Steve Wearne, Director of Science, confirmed this and explained that the follow up work on communicating risk and uncertainty was being undertaken by the Advisory Committee on Social Science (ACSS). Ruth clarified that she was seeking to understand the timings of the outputs of that work and how it might be used.

5.8 The Chair commented that in general, members of Boards were quick to raise any concerns about communication. She was pleased to say that FSA Communications had not been raised with her as a concern over the past year and this demonstrated the FSA Board’s confidence. She confirmed that the Board would continue to emphasise the value that early engagement with Communications could add to teams across the FSA.

6. Review of Staff Engagement 2018/19 (FSA 19/06/15)

6.1 The Chair invited Maria Jennings to introduce the item of the review of staff engagement. Maria explained that this was an annual report. She noted that the FSA was at a 10 year high in terms of staff engagement as noted through the people survey with an engagement index of 64% putting the FSA very close to the highest performing civil service departments. This gave some good indicators for areas of focus for the coming year including, as the CE had indicated in his report, pay and benefits. Maria explained the progress in
delivery of the three-year people strategy noting the three key strands of the strategy. She explained progress in embedding the Aspire values across the organisation and campaigns undertaken throughout 2018 to facilitate this, highlighting the emphasis on the values associated with resilience, as well as events to incorporate mental health and wellbeing advice for staff.

6.2 Maria highlighted the changes to the management conversations that had taken place through the introduction of a new performance management system, shifting the focus to strength-based conversations between managers and staff with an expectation of these conversations taking place every six weeks. She explained that the period had also included the launch of a diversity and inclusion strategy though which staff networks would be supported to strengthen a culture of inclusivity within the FSA. She mentioned the diversity council, drawn from members across the employee networks and others who had expressed an interest in joining noting the inclusion champions within the FSA’s Executive Management Team and Senior Leadership Team to set expectations around inclusivity from the top of the organisation. She explained that the internal staff networks provided insight from employees, enabling staff to give voice to concerns in confidence that it was safe for them to do so.

6.3 Maria explained the changes to staff recognition and rewards that had taken place in 2018 including the introduction of team and individual cash rewards for excellent work and Aspire vouchers, which were smaller tokens of recognition where staff were seen to be embodying the Aspire Values.

6.4 Maria noted one concern that had been raised by staff was the way in which the FSA managed change and in this period, this had been an area of focus, with an ambition to become one of the Civil Service’s high performing departments in this area also. She outlined the ‘fit for change’ three step process that had been introduced. Good feedback had been received on this model and it would be embedded into the organisation in 2019.

6.5 In the financial year 2019-2020, Maria noted that the FSA was committed to submit a pay bid to Cabinet Office. She explained that this would address some of the anomalies within the current FSA pay structures, as well as continuing to embed reward and recognition programmes, the fit for change model and diversity and inclusion network. The Chair invited questions for Maria from the Committee.

6.6 Colm McKenna asked what training had been provided to managers to enable them to hold successful and productive conversations with staff. Maria explained that a very comprehensive training package had been provided for managers. She acknowledged that this did represent a new kind of conversation with full training provided around how that should be done as well as documentation and guidance around its use. Colm suggested that the evidence showed that the FSA clearly was one of the higher performing government departments but that the numbers were still to become apparent and that they should be expected to continue to improve. The Chair agreed and welcomed the change to holding check-in conversations with staff, noting
that these were something that was become increasingly seen as an effective management tool across leading businesses.

6.7 Ruth Hussey welcomed the commitment to diversity and inclusion apparent through the report and the personal leadership of the CE and Directors. The CSA asked whether there was the granularity in the data about what a high performing department should look like in terms of trends on various vectors and whether this suggested that addressing pay and benefits would have the expected impact. Maria explained that pay and benefits was one of the lower scoring areas for staff satisfaction across all departments and that this information was available. She added that the issue was one over what staff believed leadership to be doing to address their concerns over pay and benefits and it would be necessary to be able to demonstrate to staff that the leadership was earnest in seeking to improve pay and benefits for staff. The CE explained that there were few departments with conditions as flexible as the FSA's and there was greater satisfaction from staff on the benefits side than on pay. He added that the pay issue would need to be addressed eventually also.

6.8 The Chair asked if there was any other support that Maria wanted from the Committee. Maria suggested that any suggestions from the FSA Board Members around how performance could be improved for diversity and inclusion would be welcomed. Julie noted Ruth Hussey's involvement in the FSA's Women's Network as a demonstration that Board Members were becoming involved and that this was welcome. The Chair noted that she had previous experience of change management scores in high performing organisations that specialised in this area, and it was very difficult to get excellent results on this in staff engagement surveys – so the FSA should not be unduly disappointed if the movement in performance was not as profound as the high ambition that had been set. The CE acknowledged the time effort and energy dedicated to all these activities, especially given the huge amount of work FSA staff had been undertaking. He noted that it was apparent that it was well understood that for the FSA to be able to do the work expected of it, it would be essential to not lose sight of the interests of the people delivering that work.

7. Performance and Resources Report Q4 2018/19 (FSA 19/06/16)

7.1 The Chair invited Chris Hitchen, Director of Finance and Performance, to introduce the Performance and Resources Report. Chris explained that many aspects of the report had been included in the Board meeting papers already, so he would bring out a few key items. On EU Exit, he noted that all projects within that programme of work were categorised as green. On the ROF programme he highlighted that the paper updated on key areas of progress toward the main workstreams and deliverables. In terms of doing the day job, he explained that for protection against food borne disease, even though there had been an increase over the last 12 months, each of the metrics were within the expected threshold and assured Committee members that this was being monitored closely. He noted that on FHRS, Wales and Northern Ireland had seen the greatest improvement in the number of five-ratings after the FSA had
introduced mandatory display of ratings. He noted that while the annual accounts were not finalised, the FSA were again expecting to be within all relevant HM Treasury limits for resources. The Chair mentioned that there would be a report on campylobacter at the September Board meeting.

7.2 Mary Quicke asked whether there was any significance in the small rise in foodborne illness and whether this was due to resources being directed towards work to prepare for EU Exit. Chris noted that there was inherent volatility in the numbers and that the small increases were not likely to be statistically significant.

7.3 Steve Wearne explained that all foodborne pathogens were within the normal variation but the fact that all four had gone up simultaneously meant that further investigation would be warranted. He explained these questions were being addressed in collaboration with public health organisations across the UK.

7.4 Ruth Hussey welcomed the fact that this was being looked into and suggested that with the current outbreak of listeriosis, there were actions that could be taken now that enabled the connection of the cases to a common source, and that this could not have been done previously. She asked if there was confidence that the best technology was being used to determine whether the simultaneous rises in different foodborne illnesses might have had commonalities in the things that were causing them to rise. Steve explained that he was confident that the methodology had recently been reviewed. He explained it would be necessary to consider behavioural, methodological and food aspects to the causes to determine whether or not there was any connection.

7.5 The CSA highlighted the complexity of determining public health impacts of activity due to the ‘noisiness’ of the data. He suggested that an example of a success in this area would be salmonella in eggs which represented a successful outcome from vaccination of chickens and other measures that enabled a reversal of a recommendation around undercooked eggs. He explained that the FSA should be setting aspects of a percentage change that triggers attention being given to a particular area to determine if the signal was indicative of some larger cause. He noted the difficulty with this was the time lag involved meant that the signal would not be discovered at the time when it should have first been detectable. The Chair noted that other factors such as population growth and changes in consumption levels might be a part of the explanation meaning there was no change in incidence, despite the change in volume.

7.6 Mary Quicke asked whether it would be helpful to present a comparison of the data on animal welfare non-compliances with that from previous years. Colin Sullivan explained that he would take that as an action but could confirm that non-compliances were down overall from last year’s figures.

**Action 3** - Colin Sullivan to circulate a comparison of animal welfare non-compliances from current and previous years’ data.
8. **Cutting Plant and Cold Store Review Recommendations – Progress Update (FSA 19/06/17)**

8.1 The Chair welcomed Simon Dawson, Head of Regulatory Delivery and Operational Transformation, to the meeting and invited Colin Sullivan to introduce the progress update on the cutting plant and cold store review recommendations.

8.2 Colin explained that this was the first update since the joint report with Food Standards Scotland (FSS) in October 2018. He noted that there had been 19 recommendations divided up by completion periods and actors and that there was a parallel but separate implementation process being progressed by the FSA and FSS respectively. He explained that the paper noted progress against each of the recommendations. He highlighted recommendation five, which concerned an information sharing initiative being progressed by most of the large producers in poultry and red meat, and recommendation seven, covering participation in a trial to evaluate a unified approach in a geographic area delivering official controls. Wrexham and Cornwall LAs were participating in the trial.

8.3 He noted implementing the recommendations from the review represented a subset of a wider workstream covering overall operations transformation of official controls delivery. The recommendations were being absorbed into that wider work area and future updates on implementation of the recommendations would be within that wider context. The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

8.4 Mary Quicke observed that for recommendation eight, relating to discovery work with the British Retail Consortium (BRC) that the BRC was not the only available potential third party auditor.

8.5 The Chair asked if there was anything to add about the impact of the official controls review. Colin explained that the official controls review had been ongoing for several months adding that the focus of the FSA’s activity had been around the service delivery partner contract, due to expire at the end of March 2020. He outlined the longer-term work including trials and feasibility studies to test ideas for the future direction of official controls. He noted that this work was ongoing, and he was working to create an implementation plan. Simon added that it was possible to ensure any new contract allowed sufficient flexibility to allow changes that might be required as a result of the review of official controls. The Chair noted that the Committee would look forward to receiving further reports.

9. **EU Exit (FSA 19/06/18)**

9.1 The Chair invited Catherine Bowles, Deputy Director for EU Exit, Regulatory & International Strategy, to deliver an update on EU Exit preparations. Catherine explained the aim of the paper was to bring formal closure to the programme of work that had been set up in relation to EU Exit to do some very specific things.
and deliver some very specific products. She explained that the paper outlined the extent of success in achieving this, noting that the FSA had achieved what it had said it was going to, at the time it said it would do. She acknowledged that this was not the end of the EU Exit process and the work would need to be picked up again.

9.2 She drew attention to the fact that the products introduced would be beneficial to the FSA (whatever the outcome of EU Exit – which had provided the catalyst for carrying out the work). She explained that the paper set out the products in terms of three broad headings depending on whether they were intended to become a part of business as usual, things that would be put on hold but kept under continuous review and areas where it would be necessary to be prepared to restart activity. She paid tribute to the calibre of the people who had worked on EU Exit across the FSA also noting that the ability to focus on a clear FSA purpose in relation to protecting public health and the other interests of consumers had been key to achieving this success.

9.3 She noted that the default option (because it was laid down in law) would be that the UK leaves the EU on the 31 October, explaining that it would require some significant events to occur for that to change. She added that exiting on that date without a deal would be more challenging to the UK food industry than it would have been to have left earlier, as the period following October was traditionally a challenging time for businesses in the lead up to Christmas.

9.4 The CE added that it would be important to note the risk to other deliverables from EU Exit due to the lack of legislative time highlighting risks to the NFCU, FHRS mandation, sanctions and official controls as areas that could be impacted.

9.5 Mary Quicke noted that the impression from industry was that this had become less of a priority area due to a fatigue from maintaining the level of organisational preparedness required by food businesses. She asked what additional burden this might place on the FSA and whether there was anything the Board could do to help with the FSA's readiness. Catherine agreed that there had been some concern expressed by industry representatives when reflecting on how well they were prepared for prior leave dates. She explained that it would be key for industry to increase levels of engagement and that it was expected that this would occur in the coming months.

9.6 Colin explained that in terms of incident and emergency response planning for leaving the EU without a deal, the team would begin engaging in requirements around this again at the beginning of October. He also acknowledged that the additional time had allowed for areas such as the NFCU and the receipt and management system to become effectively embedded during the intervening period.
10. Any Other Business

10.1 No further business was raised, and the Chair closed the public part of the meeting, with a single item of closed business to be discussed following this session. The next meeting of the FSA Business Committee would take place on the 18 September in Belfast.