

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT TO THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

1. This is my final report to the Business Committee for this year.
2. **Funding.** In the Chancellor's Spending Review announcement on 25 November, he re-stated that the Government's top priority is protecting the health and prosperity of the British people in the face of the pandemic crisis. To maintain that focus, the Prime Minister and Chancellor decided to change from a three-year to a one-year Review, which set departmental resource and capital budgets for 2021-22 and Devolved Administrations' block grants for the same period. Given the need to prioritise the response to COVID-19, "one-year settlements do not include discretionary increases in funding, which must be focused on essential operational needs".
3. In spite of the challenging fiscal environment, FSA (Westminster) has managed to agree an increase to its (£103m) baseline resource budget of £3m, which, when combined with planned savings (e.g. COVID-19 costs) and further efficiencies, will allow FSA to focus on EU Transition activity and make some progress on other corporate priorities. The EU Exit funding ring-fence (£17.6m) is likely to remain, along with a requirement for monthly EU Transition reporting. The Admin/Programme expenditure classification split will be removed as FSA's RDEL budget becomes 100% Admin funded consistent with some other regulators. This added flexibility will improve value for money and make in-year reprioritisation much more possible.
4. Final confirmed settlements for FSA in Wales and Northern Ireland will follow as the block grants are allocated to departments.
5. As 2020 draws to a close, managing the response to **COVID-19** and protecting our staff remains a key priority. We have continued to adapt our approach in managing the health and safety risks associated with COVID-19. This reflects changes in Government guidance, but also our own learning as the pandemic continues. This has included:
 - a review of our approach to health and safety risk assessment;
 - adjustments to how we manage our most clinically vulnerable members of staff;
 - responding to COVID outbreaks in approved establishments;
 - continuing to carefully manage a very limited occupancy of FSA offices based on distinct business and individual needs;
 - implementing an FSA-funded seasonal influenza immunisation programme, allowing significant numbers of staff access to the vaccination where they choose to take this up;
 - and, a review of our wellbeing provision in light of the pandemic extending into the winter months.

6. In addition to staff who are unwell (either with confirmed COVID-19 or symptomatic), our data includes those who are unable to work from home and are self-isolating, and those who fall into the extremely vulnerable or clinically vulnerable groups, as defined by the Government. We also collect data on those who have had to take emergency special leave due to school closures or to care of ill relatives due to COVID-19.
7. In the 9 months since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Field Operations has maintained service delivery in all of the 249 abattoirs where we provide inspection and OV services. Risk assessments have been undertaken in all of the abattoirs where our staff work, and a number of mitigating actions have been implemented in order to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our teams. These actions have helped to keep infection rates extremely low. However, absence levels continue to fluctuate, impacted by colleagues who are isolating or have been advised to shield throughout this period. Our response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been a huge team effort and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to ensuring food is safe and keeping the food supply chain moving during this unprecedented time. Feedback from the industry has been positive in respect of our response and our efforts have been recognised in weekly industry calls and the Food Business Operator Account Management process.
8. As of 5 November, 2.08% of our staff were absent due to COVID-19. Of those, 0.62% were absent due to illness, 0.85% were self-isolating (including as a result of Test and Trace), and 0.62% fell into the vulnerable groups, most of whom were operational staff unable to work from home. We have also recorded 28 positive tests for COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. As a result of the Government's decision to reintroduce the lockdown in England, approximately 20 operational staff have returned to shielding.
9. We have also been celebrating **diversity and inclusion**, with our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Staff Network organising events for this year's Black History Month in October. There were events and articles appearing on our internal channels, and the programme culminated in a closing event with Tamara Finkelstein, Permanent Secretary at DEFRA. Prior to Black History Month, the Network held an 'Understanding Me' event with members sharing stories of their culture, heritage and identity. Our staff networks also go from strength-to-strength with the formal launch of two new networks covering 'Age' and 'Faith and Belief'.
10. For a second consecutive year the FSA has been recognised by work-life balance charity Working Families as one of the top family-friendly employers in the UK. We were named as one of the 30 outstanding organisations that made their Top Employers for Working Families list.
11. We also held a number of events and awareness sessions during National Inclusion Week [28 September – 4 October], which was designed to raise

awareness and to celebrate and support inclusion in all its forms. On National Coming Out Day, our LGBT+ network held an event called 'Under the Rainbow', giving staff the opportunity to hear from its members and a presentation from Stonewall. Finally, we turned the spotlight on dyslexia during National Dyslexia Week and shared stories from staff talking about their own experiences of dyslexia.

12. In order to recruit more diverse candidates and reduce bias in our recruitment practises, we have committed to diverse selection panels and have recently trained an additional 40 members of staff who have protected characteristics on recruitment and selection. Last month, we launched a diversity focused reverse mentoring scheme where SCS staff are mentored by staff from diverse backgrounds. We have also invited representatives from the staff networks to sit on staff engagement panels as part of the Senior Civil Servant recruitment process. We are in the process of developing a 12-week targeted development programme, FSA Accelerate, for under-represented groups at SEO grade. The programme will include a Civil Service Coach, an FSA Mentor, focussed learning and development, and shadowing opportunities.
13. Following the Government's response to this year's Senior Salaries Review Body recommendations, the **pay award for Senior Civil Servants (SCS)** was made in October. The minimum salaries of each pay band were uplifted and all eligible SCS members not benefitting from the increase to minima received a 1% award. A small number of colleagues received a basic increase of above 1% to address pay anomalies. As with the delegated grades, higher awards have gone to Senior Civil Servants at the lower end of their pay range. The majority of Senior Civil Servants in the FSA received percentage increases to basic pay less than the lowest award made to colleagues at AO to G6.
14. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced as part of the Spending Review that there will be a pause on public sector pay increases next year. This will apply to all departments that have not agreed pay deals in 2021-22. All Civil Service grades (including the Senior Civil Service) will have a one-year pause on pay rises apart from those earning below a base pay of the public sector median average salary (£24k), who will receive an uplift of £250.
15. Our **reward and recognition scheme** enables us to reward excellent and exceptional one-off achievements relating to work done over a limited time. Between April and 31 October, a total of 931 cash awards totalling £213,950 have been made to staff up to and including Grade 6.
16. For **SCS Recruitment** we have recently been carrying out key recruitment processes to fill senior leadership roles including:

Head of Achieving Business Compliance. We received 43 applications for this role and shortlisted six candidates. Carmel Lynskey was appointed.

Chief Information Officer. We received 65 applications for this post and shortlisted four candidates. Diane Barlow was appointed.

Head of Operational Transformation. From the 71 applications received, we long-listed 10 candidates. The shortlist was reduced to five and all were interviewed on 19 and 20 November. Richard Wynne-Davies was appointed.

17. Paul Morrison, our Director of Strategy, Legal, Governance and Communications, will be leaving us on 20 January to go to lead MHCLG's work on planning reform. I am very grateful for the work he has done for the FSA over the last year. I will run a formal recruitment in due course.
18. We have had a good response to this year's **Civil Service People Survey 2020**. The provisional participation rate in the staff survey for 2020 is 86%, compared to the 2019 figure of 87% at the final count.
19. We are finalising the **FSA-Food Standards Scotland Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**, which has been undergoing a formal review and amendment process and will soon be ready for CEO sign-off and implementation. The MoU has been updated to capture changes in existing work approaches, or new work areas, which have arisen since the MoU was first written in 2015. These include food crime and post-Transition Period working arrangements, such as the implementation of the Common Framework for Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene and the updated risk analysis process. The aim is to have the revised MoU in place before the end of the Transition Period on 31 December.
20. Delays in the court system due to COVID-19 restrictions mean that most **prosecution cases** being taken by the FSA or the CPS are still slowly working their way towards final hearings. However, we have recently seen some movement in the backlog of cases and outcomes have been reached in two matters.
21. On 2 November 2020, a conviction was secured in the prosecution of Elite Poultry Limited, who operate a meat cutting plant in Bristol. The prosecution concerned a series of food hygiene breaches relating to over-temperature storage of meat products at the premises and non-compliance with requirements concerning the manner in which product was dispatched. The company pleaded guilty to six offences at Bristol Magistrates Court and was fined £53,000 and ordered to pay £9,425 in prosecution costs.

22. At Leeds Magistrates Court on 28 October 2020, a 12-month conditional discharge was given to a slaughterman at an approved premise in West Yorkshire who pleaded guilty to two offences under animal welfare legislation. The prosecution, brought by the CPS following an FSA referral, concerned the failure of the individual to ensure that the bleeding process for bovine animals had been completed before he undertook further dressing procedures on them. In addition to the conviction, the slaughterman had his Certificate of Competence revoked by the FSA and is no longer employed by the business operator.
23. The CPS also secured a favourable judgment from the Supreme Court in an important case relating to the application of the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 (WATOK). A judgment in favour of the appellants would have fettered our ability to take enforcement action against business operators for animal welfare breaches that occurred within their plants. The unanimous judgment of the Justices handed down on 16 October 2020 was to dismiss the appeal, and to hold that the offences are ones of strict liability and that negligence by the business operator does not have to be proved.
24. In my CEO report to the November Board meeting, I reported on the detection of *Salmonella Enteritidis* at a British Lion egg packing station which was subsequently linked to an outbreak in which the consumers involved had eaten eggs purchased from retailers supplied by the same packing station. At the time, the FSA issued an initial news briefing and then two further updates keeping consumers informed of the eggs affected and providing advice on how they should be cooked. I can now follow up by highlighting that all flocks where Salmonella was detected were depopulated and deep cleans undertaken. In addition, a review of biosecurity and vermin control has been completed and, since these actions, there have been no further detections of Salmonella. The local authority for the business continues to monitor the situation to provide assurance that the hygiene controls have been effective.