

## **Minutes of the FSA board meeting on 18 September 2019**

Lagan Suite, Hilton Hotel, Lanyon Place, Belfast, BT1 3LP

### **Present:**

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

### **Officials attending:**

Rod Ainsworth	-	Acting Chief Executive
Vanna Aldin	-	Head of Analytics (for FSA 19/09/05)
Chris Hitchen	-	Director of Finance and Performance
Maria Jennings	-	Director of Regulatory Compliance, People and Northern Ireland (NI)
Narriman Looch	-	Foodborne Disease Control (for FSA 19/09/08)
Rick Mumford	-	Director of Science
Julie Pierce	-	Director of Openness, Data & Digital and Wales
Guy Poppy	-	Chief Scientific Adviser
Alison Shields	-	Head of Media
Rebecca Sudworth	-	Director of Policy
Colin Sullivan	-	Chief Operating Officer
Michael Wight	-	Head of Food Safety Policy (for FSA 19/09/08)

### **Apologies**

Catherine Bowles	-	Director - EU Exit, Regulatory & International Strategy
Steve Wearne	-	Director of Science

## **1. Welcome and Announcements**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. She welcomed Rod Ainsworth, the Acting Chief Executive (CE) to his first Board meeting as Acting CE. She commented that, by the Board's next meeting in December, Emily Miles - the new permanent CE - would be in post and was pleased that Emily was observing the meeting in the audience today. She also welcomed Rick Mumford in his position of Director of Science and noted that the new Director for Wales, Nathan Barnhouse, was also present in the audience.
- 1.2 The Chair asked Alison Shields, Head of Media to read out questions submitted by members of the public. There would be an opportunity for members of the audience to ask questions at the end of the meeting.
- 1.3 Alison said three questions had been received and read them out. The questions along with their answers would be posted on the FSA website when the minutes for the September meeting were published.

## **2. Minutes of FSA Board Meetings on 19 June 2019 (FSA 19/09/01)**

- 2.1 The minutes of the 19 June 2019 meeting were agreed as a true record.

### **3. Actions Arising (FSA 19/06/03)**

3.1 The Chair noted that all actions were complete and that no actions were outstanding.

### **4. Chair's Report**

4.1 The Chair said that her list of engagements since the previous Board meeting had been published on the FSA website. She highlighted some key activities:

- She spoke at a reception the FSA held at the Senedd in Cardiff, which welcomed a third of all Welsh Assembly Members including the Minister Vaughn Gething, who also spoke at the event. Ruth Hussey had jointly hosted the event with the Chair;
- an introductory meeting with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, Jo Churchill;
- a meeting with Henry Dimbleby to discuss the national food strategy; and
- a meeting with Julie Hill and Hannah Lambie-Mumford to talk about the work of the FSA's Social Sciences Advisory Committee.

4.2 The Chair recorded the Board's visits the previous day to the Institute of Global Food Security at Queen's University Belfast and the Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI). The Chair said these were fascinating visits with a significant relevance to the work of the FSA. She noted that the Board had been joined for these visits by members of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee, some of whom were in attendance in the audience of the Board meeting.

4.3 The Chair confirmed that two Board Members, Ruth Hussey and Colm McKenna had been reappointed a further year. She said that further Board appointments were pending decisions by Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care.

### **5. Chief Executive's Report to the Board (FSA 19/09/03)**

5.1 The CE said that consideration had been given to the possibility of including an oral EU Exit update for this meeting but that it was decided that there was nothing to add to what was in the written report, adding that he would be happy to pick up questions on the issue.

5.2 The CE said that work around cannabidiol, known as CBD, was progressing as fast as possible and noted that it was not within the gift of the FSA to provide a specific timeline due to the cross-departmental nature of the issue. The CE invited questions from the Board.

5.3 Stuart Reid asked about the shortage of vets in the UK, noting that the profession was included on the official shortage list. He asked if there were any assurances that had been received about capacity. The CE asked the Chief Operating Officer, Colin Sullivan, to respond to the point. Colin explained that this monitoring Official Veterinarian capacity had been part of the EU Exit programme and had now moved to a business as usual, standing item for monitoring in terms of EU Exit readiness. He said that the FSA would remain live to the issue as contracts were retendered.

5.4 The Chair thanked the CE for this update and noted that once again, we were about to call on FSA staff to put in many additional hours to ensure operational readiness for the new exit date set by the government of 31 October 2019.

**6. Update on FSA's Work on Food Hypersensitivity and the Implementation of the Allergen Labelling Review Outcomes (FSA 19/09/04)**

6.1 The Chair invited Rebecca Sudworth, the Director of Policy, to introduce this item, noting the relevance of the issue following from the recent Inquest into the tragic death of Owen Carey after a meal at a branch of the Byron restaurant chain. Rebecca gave a summary of the contents of the paper and invited questions from the Board.

6.2 The Chair confirmed a meeting was planned between the FSA and representatives of the Byron restaurant chain and the relevant Local Authority (LA) in order to discuss the lessons learned. The Chair invited questions from Board Members.

6.3 Mary Quicke noted the new future requirement for ingredient labelling on foods prepacked for direct sale (from October 2021). She emphasised the scale of the challenge for small businesses, such as a farm shop that she was involved with. She asked about technological solutions such as apps for mobile devices that could help small retailers and caterers to comply. Rebecca explained that the FSA was aware of the scale of the challenge for smaller businesses. She said that the use of appropriate technology to ease compliance for such businesses was a good idea and that there would be role for the FSA in facilitating best practice. She invited the Director of Openness, Data & Digital and Wales, Julie Pierce, to comment further on the use of technology for this purpose.

6.4 Julie explained that tools, such as the apps that Mary had mentioned, did exist and were available for small businesses to use.

6.5 David Brooks commented that he was pleased that the legislation was able to be passed through Parliament prior to its prorogation. He asked about next steps and measures that could be taken for businesses selling un-packed foods. Rebecca explained that this would be picked up during the discussion of the Strategic Framework at the December Board Meeting. The CE added that the approach of the Executive drew on the experience, learned through EU Exit

preparation, of how to incorporate the expertise from the various different directorates across the FSA.

- 6.6 Ruth Hussey said she was encouraged by the profile the issue was being given by the FSA and the steps taken so far. She suggested that cooperation with Local Government would be required to continue the necessary promotional work over the longer term. She said that close working with LAs would be necessary to ensure that they are aware of the resourcing implications for them.
- 6.7 Ruth asked a question about near-miss reporting. Rebecca explained that initial scoping work had been done and the next step would be to run a pilot. The timing was not yet confirmed. The Chair requested an update to be included in a Board circulation.

**Action 1 - Secretariat to include an update of near-miss reporting for food hypersensitivity incidents in a Board Circulation.**

- 6.8 She also said that she would be meeting with Barnsley and Blackburn Councils to understand more about their activities in this area.
- 6.9 The Chair asked officials to say more about the Addenbrookes Hospital research, which had been published the previous day and funded by the FSA. Rick Mumford, Director of Science, explained that this was part of ongoing research for the TRACES project and focussed on peanut allergies and the thresholds for anaphylaxis and the influence of other factors on that threshold.
- 6.10 The Chair added that the FSA's annual Parliamentary reception in late October would focus on allergens.
- 6.11 Colm McKenna mentioned that there was some overlap with the content of the Business Committee paper on Local Authority Performance, emphasising the importance of enforcement in ensuring that the success of the approach and the resource implication that would follow from that. The Chair agreed and added that it would need to be considered in light of the response to the National Audit Office (NAO) recommendation to ensure a sustainable funding model.

**7. Cost of Illness Model, Willingness to Pay and Quality-Adjusted Life Years as Impact Measures for Foodborne Diseases and Food Hypersensitivity (FSA 19/09/05)**

- 7.1 The Chair welcomed Vanna Aldin, Head of Analytics, and invited her to introduce this item. She reminded the Board that this would be an opportunity to contribute to how the model could work.
- 7.2 Vanna delivered a short presentation covering the methodology utilised to develop a Cost of Illness (COI) model that monetise the burden of illness and disease and the outputs from the model that, in conjunction with additional

measure such as Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs), can be utilised to inform appraisal, evaluation and prioritisation of policy interventions. She also highlighted the limitations of the model.

- 7.3 The Chair noted that the Board would be holding a workshop during their retreat in October to understand more about how the model works and its potential. She asked Guy Poppy, the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA), to comment on the paper. The CSA said that the development of the framework was important as it was based on well established, tried and tested methods, which enabled transparency in how issues were prioritised. He said that the ease of measuring microbiological causes of food-borne disease had often led to its being prioritised over toxins, which were equally concerning to consumers but more difficult to measure impacts. The Chair invited questions from the Board.
- 7.4 Ruth Hussey noted that this was a very complex area but said that it would help, in conjunction with horizon scanning work, to judge where focus is required. She asked whether there were any country specific issues that could impact on the model such as free prescriptions in Wales and Northern Ireland or demographic nuances between the three countries. She also asked about how the benefits of preventative activity could be measured. The Chair remarked that this was a good example of the CSA's point and that it would be for the Board to decide how the model should be used.
- 7.5 Colm McKenna asked whether there were examples from other countries where cost of illness modelling had been used effectively to develop policy. He asked about how we would work with other government departments, including those in the devolved administrations, to ensure that their work was built into the assumptions of the model.
- 7.6 Rebecca Sudworth explained that work had been going on with other government departments as well as internationally to find lessons from where cost of illness models had been used in policy making. She said that she would be reaching out to the departments in the devolved administrations similarly to access learning from there too.
- 7.7 Chris Hitchen said that from a value for money point of view the framework would be helpful in being able to demonstrate evidence based decision making in prioritising issues. He added that this was something that was noted in the NAO report's recommendations.
- 7.8 The Chair said that the model would deliver important new inputs to decision making and prioritisation by the FSA. It would be discussed further at the retreat in October and that she looked forward to seeing some of the outcomes.

**8. UK Official Food and Feed Laboratories: Vision for the Future (FSA 19/09/06)**

- 8.1 The Chair invited Rick Mumford to introduce this item. Rick delivered a brief summary of the paper explaining that this was the first systematic look at the issue, which highlighted the need for change to ensure coordination across government and that capability was maintained. The Chair invited questions from the Board.
- 8.2 Ruth Hussey said that she agreed with the recommendations of the paper and that it represented a welcome starting point for a discussion with partner organisations around how capacity can be maintained. She mentioned the Board's visits the previous day to the AFBI and the Institute for Global Food Security at Queen's University, Belfast and that there was an apparent shift to testing outside of laboratories. She pointed out the relevance for the FSA's Sampling Strategy and said that until such technology becomes widespread, there would still be a need for specialist laboratories. She said that there appeared to be a significant cost involved in transformation and that the leadership position should be assumed by the FSA, asking if this was accepted by partner organisations.
- 8.3 Rick answered that the FSA would need to take the leadership role as there was a legal obligation to provide laboratory capacity. He added that there had been good conversations with partnership organisations and departments around this. He said that despite the different areas of regulation, these departments were facing the same issues as the FSA in addressing effective access to public analysts.
- 8.4 The Chair said that there had been attempts at gaining broader government buy-in in the past and that while there was a leadership role for the FSA, the FSA was not the only part of Government with a need for the capabilities identified and should not be left owning the whole problem or financially liable.
- 8.5 The CE agreed, emphasising that the FSA should not be the sole body to be financially responsible for provision of this service. He noted Ruth's point about emerging technology, highlighting the risk of designing a system that could be overtaken by the rate of technological change.
- 8.6 The CSA said that across government, departments had the same aim of using analytical methods to improve data and outcomes. He mentioned that Professor Chris Elliott of the Institute for Global Food Security had highlighted that newer technologies meant that improved data could be gained at a lower cost, so the issue did not necessarily always mean that more financial resource would be needed.
- 8.7 Julie Pierce said that she had undertaken a surveillance workstream to look at needs and opportunities presented by emerging technologies for sampling and testing and the implications for long-term horizon scanning. She added that this would be included in the update on surveillance scheduled to be discussed by the Board at its meeting in December.

- 8.8 The Chair noted that this area was an example of where some of the things the FSA had needed to develop for EU Exit had accelerated progress. Chris Hitchen said that in terms of value for money considerations, the commercial team at the FSA had been supporting the Science Directorate in ensuring the arrangements were suitable and preserved the value for money focus expected from HM Treasury. The Chair added that one of the reasons that this was being discussed was because of a recommendation from Professor Elliott's report into the horsemeat scandal.
- 8.9 Mary Quicke added that the public would need assurance that this resource was available and had sufficient capacity for the needs of all Government departments following EU exit. She noted the role of testing and sampling in trade and exports and the significance that this would take on following EU exit. The Chair agreed that the impacts on trade could have follow on impacts on consumer confidence but pointed out that the FSA did not have an economic remit.
- 8.10 Stuart Reid noted the possibility, as pointed out by the CSA that the FSA would be able to get more for less from emerging technologies in terms of data but cautioned that the quality of the data would need to be higher as well as the quantity. Rick explained that better coordination of the sampling, enabling bulk testing, could afford savings in running the laboratories. Stuart accepted this but pointed out that if the testing was still of the same quality then there could not be said to have been a significant improvement in the service.
- 8.11 The Chair summarised that the Board supported the direction of travel and that it wished to consider detailed proposals on how to ensure the necessary capability and capacity could be sustainably provided as soon as possible.

## **9. The FSA's Approach to Uncertainty and Risk (FSA 19/09/07)**

- 9.1 The Chair asked Rick Mumford to introduce this item. Rick gave a brief summary of the content of the paper and invited questions from the Board. The Chair added that it was important for the Board to be clear on what the precautionary principle means in the context of this paper.
- 9.2 David Brooks asked how the consumers' other interests in relation to food regulation, whether arising from the unpalatability of interventions or a perception of over-regulation, could be balanced with the duty to ensure food safety based on science and evidence. Rick said that part of the new process was to incorporate those factors, noting that many of the issues involved would be complex. He explained that the role of the Science Directorate in risk assessment would be to provide the information to allow risk managers to make informed decisions. The Chair noted that the Board had agreed a list of other relevant factors at their meeting in June.
- 9.3 The CSA said that the process development by the FSA allowed transparency in how the consumer interests would be balanced against the precautionary

principle to allow informed decision making by risk managers within the FSA. Julie Pierce explained that there would be a need to build a communications capability to ensure this transparency. She said that the FSA was getting increasingly sophisticated in understanding attitudes. She explained that there would need to be coordination with the FSA's Communications team to ensure consumers will be receptive to FSA messages.

- 9.4 Ruth Hussey noted that the summary stated that measures will be no more restrictive to trade than necessary. She said that Welsh public bodies had an obligation to present how policies interact with the Future Generations legislation. She suggested that it would be useful to test the proposals of this paper with Welsh colleagues. The Chair cautioned against blurring the distinction between risk assessment and risk management. Rebecca Sudworth highlighted the importance of ensuring partners in the risk management process understand what the FSA means by precautionary principle. She said that she would take an action to make this clear in upcoming meetings with colleagues across government and within the devolved administrations.

**Action 2 - Rebecca Sudworth to ensure clarity around the FSA's use of the precautionary principle when discussing risk assessment with colleagues across government.**

- 9.5 Colm McKenna said that he had had an opportunity to discuss the paper with members of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) and a question had been raised over what was meant by technical and economic feasibility. Rick explained that this referred to other legitimate factors to take into consideration beyond immediate food safety risks.
- 9.6 Stuart Reid noted a degree of circularity in that the risk analysis would be fed into the communications work, which could impact on public opinions that are then fed back into the risk analysis. He asked whether the approach to risk assessment proposed in the paper was a replacement for the FSA's risk appetite, which should also be included in the circle at some point. Rick suggested that this would just be one tool to consider when making risk management decisions. The Chair invited the invited the CSA to comment on this issue.
- 9.7 The CSA said that there would be some areas where levels of confidence were lower. He said that, initially, it had been proposed that this paper should cover all work relating to uncertainty but that this had been refined to focus on the precautionary principle to allow the development of a framework where, in instances where increasing confidence would have a high financial impact but there was little appetite for risk in that area, decisions could be made transparently about whether the financial burden represented good value. Stuart said he was reassured that the framework would underpin how the risk appetite was decided. Colm added that the FSA's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) had considered the risk profile and the risk appetite and it was consistent with the approach outlined in the paper. Rebecca said that it was easier to follow through the implications of the approach when there was a real example to work through.

9.8 The Chair summarised the discussion by saying that the Board agreed the proposals in the paper on how uncertainty and risk assessment – appropriately reflecting the precautionary principle - should support risk management decisions, the Board was clear about the contribution of this work in advising Ministers following EU exit and noted the point about trade where the aim was to maintain or improve levels of health protection. She added about the importance of communications expertise being drawn on in risk assessment.

## **10. Campylobacter Reduction Programme: Update (FSA 19/09/08)**

10.1 The Chair welcomed the Head of Food Safety Policy Michael Wight and Narriman Looch of the Foodborne Disease Control Unit to the meeting to introduce this paper. Michael gave a summary of the paper and invited questions from the Board. David Brooks asked five questions. The first related to figure two in the paper, which showed Public Health England's (PHE's) data on cases and reflected a seasonality to the numbers of cases, David asked if the reasons for the seasonality were known.

10.2 The second question related to paragraphs 24 and 25 of the paper relating to the use of industry data to monitor progress. David asked whether the recommendations from that would include continuing with current activity, which seemed to be effective and whether a more challenging target should be set for tier-one suppliers.

10.3 The third question related to tier two suppliers and whether there was a case for the authorities to support investment to allow them to reduce their rates of campylobacter contamination.

10.4 Fourthly, David noted at the previous day's visit to AFBI, Board members heard that while campylobacter rates were being reduced, it was the more virulent strains which are surviving and becoming more prevalent. He asked what could be done to tackle these strains of the bacteria.

10.5 David's final question was whether any future work would include a review of what additional end treatments could be added to increase safety.

10.6 Michael explained that on seasonality, warm, humid weather conferred conditions that accelerate the growth of Campylobacter meaning that the rates tend to peak in the summer. On David's second question, around reporting processes, Michael explained that there was currently no intention to change the targets for tier-one suppliers. He said that there had been a sustained effort by all in the supply chain to reduce rates, but the FSA would continue to encourage improvements where they could be made. Noting the reference in the paper to discussions with retailers about their sampling, the Chair stressed that the Board expected retailers to continue to be transparent in the consumer interest and continue with data collection and sharing.

- 10.7 In relation to tier-two businesses, Michael explained that they had been considering the effectiveness of the process hygiene criteria which all slaughterhouses should be carrying out. Those currently not sampling tend to be not doing so possibly due to the financial implications. He said that the FSA was looking at how these smaller businesses might be helped to meet this requirement.
- 10.8 On the prevalence of more virulent strains, Michael explained that during the campaign, this was considered, and the evidence suggested that more competitive strains would not become more prevalent as a result of the reduction of overall rates. The CSA explained that it was difficult to know how reducing the overall rates impacts on these strains and to some extent this would depend on whether bacteria or illness was measured. The Chair said that in terms of being outcome based, the Board would still need to know overall incidence numbers as there would not be any other body collecting that data.
- 10.9 On the future work programme and whether innovative treatments would be considered, Michael said that various novel physical treatments were introduced during the campaign but that these were expensive for all slaughterhouses to introduce. Nevertheless, during the earlier campaign the FSA had advised slaughterhouses on low cost improvements that could be made, and the FSA might consider running this again. As to carcass e treatment washes, these had to be approved and any new processes would be assessed for safety and efficacy. Rick Mumford said that the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Foods (ACMSF) report on *Campylobacter* had been published and did touch on novel treatments for use in slaughterhouses.
- 10.10 The CSA noted that as well as seasonality, there was an annual variation, which gave a reason for caution in looking for outcomes based solutions as there will be a degree to which rates will not be within the control of producers whatever processes are adopted. David noted that the proposal was for the target to remain at 7%. He urged caution that when seeking to maintain figures rather than improve them, they often deteriorate. On novel treatments, he also urged attention to technological change due to the rate of technological progress.
- 10.11 Ruth Hussey asked whether more attention should be given to the hospitality industry and their handling practices. Michael said that the campaign covered all sectors including catering and that communications would continue to focus across all sectors and their suppliers. Maria Jennings noted the role of catering establishments Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans, which were checked by Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) as part of their routine inspections.
- 10.12 Mary asked whether there was a particular risk from barbecues and whether this added to the seasonality figures around incidents. Julie Pierce explained that the communications strategy had previously focussed on barbecues and would now be focussing primarily on caterers rather than consumers. Chris

Hitchen added that it was difficult to get data about the particular sources of food-borne disease, but that emerging science could start to give better indications. Michael said that the campaign had focussed mainly on whole chickens in slaughter houses. The messages for consumers would continue to revolve around the washing of raw chicken.

10.13 The Chair summarised the discussion noting an endorsement from the Board to sustain current achievements and keep expectations on larger retailers and also to endorse the efforts to tackle the issues at the smaller slaughterhouse and retail businesses. The Board wanted the FSA to keep abreast of new technologies which could give rise to opportunities for new intervention points, which industry could increasingly focus on. The Board wished to be informed in future timely updates of evidence of any increase in virulence, and whether there was evidence about whether this might result from success in reducing overall contamination rates.

## **11. Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Progress (FSA 19/09/09)**

11.1 Rick Mumford gave an overview of the paper, highlighting the global nature of the challenge. The Chair invited questions from the Board. Mary Quicke noted an update from the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) and was reassured to hear that they were confident about reducing antibiotic use to 30mg per kilo in farm animals. The Chair said that the FSA had a meeting with RUMA every six months to look at progress and that she would be speaking at their annual conference in November.

11.2 The Chair said that AMR was a novel issue for the FSA, because it was a global public health issue which national action could not fully address for the UK population. She observed that antimicrobials were being used in citrus farming in the USA, and that the full scale of use in vegetable crop production was not fully known.

11.3 The CSA highlighted indirect benefits relating to animal welfare that had been found by RUMA in assessing the reduction in the widespread use of antimicrobials. He also pointed out that action may take a long time to give effect to a measurable reduction in levels of AMR. He said that the FSA had the ability, through work in this area and through the role of Steve Wearne, the Director of Global Affairs, with Codex, to set global standards.

11.4 Julie Pierce outlined the work of a working group that had been set up with representatives from across Government, academia and industry, explaining that there was an opportunity to understand how data analytics may help understand the use of antimicrobials throughout the fresh-produce supply chain. Rick added that work was being taken forward jointly with Defra, using the Strategic Evidence Fund to look into the use of antimicrobials for crop protection.

11.5 Ruth Hussey endorsed the focus being given to the issue. She highlighted the Welsh Government's five-year AMR plan and the proposals in it for the

collection of data that could be useful to the FSA. She asked about the resistance mentioned in paragraph nine of the paper and whether there was data that could be provided to demonstrate this. She also questioned the apparent low coverage of data in dairy and beef. Rick said he would need to check the report to see the source of the data for the point about dairy and beef.

**Action 3 - Rick Mumford to check the EU harmonised survey to provide detail to the Board on the data relating dairy and beef.**

11.6 Stuart Reid endorsed previous comments about the nature of the problem, drawing parallels with the challenge of tackling climate change. He noted improvements in communication of the issues and mentioned that the global nature of the problem related not only to imported foods but to people who travelled and consumed foods, possibly containing pathogens with resistance to antimicrobials. He asked whether there was a communication task to inform travellers about these risks. The Chair noted that the responsibility for that would lie primarily with PHE but that the FSA could contribute.

**Action 4 - Rick Mumford to consider how the FSA could contribute to a communications campaign to raise awareness of AMR bacteria in food for travellers.**

11.7 Colm McKenna expressed concern about the levels being used in animal feed and asked about what global measures the FSA was taking. Rick highlighted the work of Codex and looking at how the UK approach could be applied elsewhere. David Brooks said that progress with issues such as this was often seen when consumers were motivated about them. He suggested that AMR had not yet gained that level of public resonance. The Chair highlighted the emphasis the departing Chef Medical Officer had placed on the issue. The CSA also highlighted messaging about the use of antibiotics, which could be seen in GPs' surgeries and pharmacies. Ruth added that she had noted a growing awareness of untreatable infections and suggested that there was an opportunity to align messaging with that from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and PHE. Stuart said that it would also be important to ensure that the FSA's messaging is reaching those who could be negotiating the UK's trade arrangements following EU Exit.

11.8 The Chair agreed asking how the FSA's concern about the issue would be reflected in trade negotiations. She added a further endorsement of the work being done through Codex.

**12. Report from the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) (FSA 19/09/10)**

12.1 The Chair invited Colm McKenna to introduce his report as Chair of NIFAC. Colm gave an overview of the report covering the changes in the operating procedures for the committee and activities over the previous two years.

- 12.2 Mary Quicke noted the integration of food industry with regulation and inspection in Northern Ireland and asked if there were lessons in that for the rest of the UK. Colm indicated the differences in population and economic focus between NI and the rest of the UK. He accepted that there could be applicable lessons but that moving the whole UK to operate on a similar model to that used in NI would likely be neither practical nor desirable.
- 12.3 Colm noted the contribution to the operation of NIFAC made by the Director of Regulatory Compliance, People and Northern Ireland (NI), Maria Jennings, as well as the secretariat team in Belfast.

### **13. FSA in Northern Ireland: Director's Update (FSA 19/09/11)**

- 13.1 Maria Jennings gave an overview of her update as Director for Northern Ireland noting that the paper outlines various areas of work delivered over the previous two years, highlighting the work led by FSA staff in NI around dietary health and food standards and labelling. She also outlined the depth of the partnership working, especially with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and Safefood; and also covered EU Exit planning on a four-country model. The Chair noted that it was good to have welcomed Pamela Byrne, the Chief Executive of FSAI at dinner with the Board the previous evening. She asked about the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with FSAI. Maria explained that the MOU had been in place for a number of years and had been a very useful instrument, especially in relation to incident handling and cross-border veterinary controls. The CE added that it was a good MOU, but any MOU could only be as good as the personal relationships between the organisations involved. He acknowledged that Maria had worked hard to ensure that the FSA's relationship with FSAI continued to be a good one.

### **14. Annual Governance Report (FSA 19/09/12)**

- 14.1 The Chair reminded the Board that a change to the standing orders for the Board and Business Committee had been agreed at the Board meeting in June 2019. She explained that the paper proposed a change to the terms of Reference for ARAC and invited the Board to contribute any suggestions for improvements to the operation of the Food Advisory Committees. The Board indicated that they endorsed the proposed change for ARAC. No suggestions were made on the operation of the FACs.
- 14.2 Mary Quicke noted that ARAC was quorate for its meetings but only so long as all Members are present. She expressed a hope that new appointments would take place quickly. The Chair noted that discussions with Jo Churchill MP gave reason for optimism that this could happen soon.

**15. Annual Report to the FSA Board from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) 2018/19 and Report from September 2019 ARAC meeting (FSA 19/09/13)**

- 15.1 Colm McKenna explained that papers included an annual report from ARAC as well as a report from their recent September meeting. He gave an overview of issues raised in the annual report and those discussed at the September meeting. The Chair asked about external resource, which is something that ARAC had previously expressed concern around. Colm explained that this was less of an issue than it had been previously.
- 15.2 Ruth Hussey welcomed the support from the teams across the FSA that ARAC had received. Mary Quicke echoed this welcome and added that there could be a greater number of issues for ARAC to consider in future such as the work of the National Food Crime Unit, noting there could be resource implications in this.
- 15.3 The CE said that one of the FSA's strengths was its specialised and dedicated internal audit team and that the quality of audit had been impressive over the years. Colm acknowledged this and said that internal audit was increasingly, and appropriately, being used as a tool to help drive improvements.
- 15.4 The Chair thanked all ARAC members for their commitment to this area.

**16. Reports from the Chairs of the Food Advisory Committees (FACs)**

- 16.1 The Chair invited Ruth Hussey and Colm McKenna to update the Board on recent activities from the FACs. Ruth explained that the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) had met in July and held a session on strategic issues. Members had also attended the Royal Welsh Show and Eisteddfod. Colm said that NIFAC had also met to discuss strategy and had heard from representatives from Invest NI and Queen's University to help inform their discussion. Their next meeting is due to be held in Larne and would be attended by representatives of the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA). He added that they had also met by teleconference ahead of the Board meeting to discuss the Board papers.

**17. Any Other Business**

- 17.1 The Chair paid tribute to Acting Chief Executive Rod Ainsworth who would shortly be retiring. She thanked him for the work he done, both since stepping in as CE but also over the past 9 years as the Director for Strategy, Legal & Governance. She paid tribute to his work in preparing the FSA for EU Exit and for having twice delayed his retirement, most recently to step into the CE role.
- 17.2 The CH thanked the Chair and said that the past few months as Acting CE had been an enjoyable end to his career with the FSA, adding that it was an organisation that he had been proud to work for.

**18. Question and Answer Session**

18.1 The Chair invited Questions from the audience. No questions were raised.

18.2 The next Board meeting would take place in London on 4 December.