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## FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY (FSA) TRIENNIAL REVIEW OF SIX SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEES: PUBLICATION OF THE FINAL REPORT

Report by Guy Poppy, FSA Chief Scientist

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### 1 SUMMARY

The Board is asked to:

- **Note:** the publication of the final report for the FSA Triennial Review of its six Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs);
- and **discuss:** the final report.

### 2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The FSA has reviewed its six SACs, listed below, as part of its governance and funding of these bodies. The review was timely given the new FSA Science Governance arrangements introduced in 2014, the publication of the FSA's new Strategic Plan: Food We Can Trust 2015-2020<sup>1</sup> and its underpinning Science, Evidence and Information Strategy 2015-2020.<sup>2</sup> The six SACs reviewed were:

- The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT);
- The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF);
- The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP);
- The Advisory Committee on Animal Feeding stuffs (ACAF);
- The Social Science Research Committee (SSRC);
- The General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS).

2.2 The FSA SACs are all non-statutory and Advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies (ANDPBs), which are subject to triennial review under the Cabinet Office (CO)<sup>3</sup> Public Bodies review programme. The SACs provide independent expert advice to the FSA and other Government Departments (OGDs) as appropriate, in key areas of risk assessment, current and emerging scientific issues and our use of science.

### 3 STRATEGIC AIMS

3.1 The function of the review process, which started in September 2015 and concluded in March 2016, is to provide assurance to the FSA, wider Government and consumers that the future SAC functions are appropriate in addressing the future needs of the FSA and wider Government, and that the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/about-the-fsa>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fsa151104.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-bodies-reform-reports>

bodies are operating effectively whilst taking account of the requirement for public sector efficiency.

3.1 The Triennial Review has followed two stages:

- **Stage one** looked at the ongoing need for the functions provided by the body and the benefits to users and stakeholders; it then considered the best delivery model for the functions that are still needed;
- **Stage two** considered how the body operates, including relationships with stakeholders, opportunities for efficiencies and improved performance, and governance.

3.3 The Review considered the six SACs together, to enable a more efficient process, consider common issues and strands of evidence (e.g. on shared governance) and for a better evaluation of how the SACs work with each other and with other relevant bodies.

#### 4 EVIDENCE, CONSULTATION AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

4.1 The Review gathered evidence and consulted in a number of ways, including:

- Written material: publications, reports, stakeholder views, relevant press, previous reviews and the actions taken in response to their recommendations;
- Interviews: with key stakeholders; these included: SAC Chairs, a selection of members and their secretariats; the FSA Board Chair and Deputy Chair, Directors and senior staff within FSA and other bodies (including Department of Health (DH), Public Health England (PHE), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Department for Environment and Climate Change (DECC) and Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Food Standards Scotland (FSS), Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Northern Ireland (DARD); that commission, collaborate or use SAC advice. A total of 51 interviews were carried out during the evidence gathering phase of the Review and interviewees are summarised in Annex F of the final report;
- An open call for evidence: published on the FSA website ran from 21 September until 5 November 2015, generated 1296 (992 unique) website hits and received 14 completed responses. This included a questionnaire asking key questions and/or the opportunity to submit written evidence. A summary of the open call is provided in Annex E of the final report;
- Three workshops: one with SAC members and FSA staff; one with GACS; and one with any external interested parties were held during the evidence gathering phase of the Review.

4.2 A project Board chaired by the FSA Director of Science and comprising of a cross section of internal FSA, OGD and devolved representatives and an Advisory Group chaired by the Chief Scientist and comprising of representatives from OGDs, FSS and the FSA Board met four and three times respectively during the course of the Review to assure the process, evidence

gathered and to provide challenge and constructive critique to the Review and the draft report and recommendations.

## **5 DISCUSSION AND IMPACT**

- 5.1 The Review has provided an opportunity for the FSA to consider how we get the best independent science and evidence to support the new FSA strategic Plan and Science, Evidence and Information Strategy, as part of delivering our future priorities.
- 5.2 The Review makes four recommendations under stage 1 on the future function and delivery models; to provide the FSA with five SACs, two ANDPBs and three Expert Committees to provide the necessary future science and evidence advice required. The four recommendations made under stage 2 provide the FSA with advice on how to improve the efficiency and impact, internally and externally, of the SACs work and to ensure they continue to meet the highest standards of governance.

## **6 RESOURCE AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Review evidence, gathered in discussions with OGDs and key stakeholders has reflected the importance of transparency, independence, flexibility and swiftness of any Government approach to gather scientific advice whilst balanced with the need to be as efficient and effective as possible against the backdrop of diminishing resource across Government. The report recommendations 6 to 8 provide some suggestions to improve resource efficiency and sustainability in the future operation of our SACs.

## **7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 FSA should ensure that during the implementation of the Review recommendations, that all its future SACs are supported under the Food Standards Act, schedule 2 section 3 on other advisory committees.

## **8 DEVOLUTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Review recommendations have been developed for the FSA with input from all three countries. Food Standards Scotland (FSS) have been part of both the Project Board and Advisory Group and are content with the Review recommendations.

## **9 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 The role of the SACs has been at the heart of the FSA science-based model, one which is highly regarded across Government and indeed internationally. The Review's eight recommendations provide the opportunity for us to create a future structure which provides the independent scientific evidence, advice and challenge required and to maximise our impact internally and externally to deliver our new Strategic Plan: Food We Can Trust 2015-2020 and its underpinning Science, Evidence and Information Strategy 2015-2020.

9.2 The Board is asked to:

- **Note:** the publication of the final report for the FSA Triennial Review of its six Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs);
- and **discuss:** the final report.