
Enhancing the contribution of the FACs to FSA insight and decision making

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1 SUMMARY

1.1 This paper highlights the important contribution of the Food Advisory Committees (FACs) for Wales and Northern Ireland and sets out a proposal to derive further value from the Committees as a source of insight and advice to the Food Standards Agency Board

1.2 The Board is invited to:

- **Confirm** the Food Advisory Committees' important role as advisory bodies to the FSA Board
- **Invite** the FAC Chairs to:
 - refresh their Committee's consumer engagement activities to provide wider consumer insight for the FSA as a whole; and
 - proactively to explore with their FAC the specific country issues that exist in relation to the FSA's strategic priorities
- **Agree** that the FACs's contribution should be widened to, from time to time, explore specific areas of interest at the request of the FSA Board, with an emphasis on the public's perspective on their interests in food.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) and the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) were established as advisory bodies in the Food Standards Act of 1999, which specifies their role as:

To give advice or information to the Agency about matters connected with its statutory functions in particular matters or otherwise relating to [Wales/Northern Ireland].

2.2 Each Committee is chaired by its respective country FSA Board member. FAC committee members are appointed to provide a wide range of expertise, experience and practical knowledge of benefit to the FSA and, of course, a country specific perspective. The Committees work closely with the Food Standards Agency both in country and beyond.

Enhancing the contribution of the FACs

- 2.3 Further to a review of FACs carried out in May 2010, the FAC agendas have focused on discussing the forthcoming formal business of the FSA Board. They have provided a point of view on the policy and strategy decisions before the Board, and offered any country-specific evidence or dimensions that the Board would wish to take into account in reaching its decisions.
- 2.4 Whilst this contribution is an essential part of the Committees' role, there is more that they could offer within their current remit and resourcing. Our core business of food safety and standards, our regulatory reform agenda, our contribution to public trust in food, and our awareness of the consumers' wider interests in relation to food, all create a need for more granular understanding of the public's perspectives and responses to food issues.
- 2.5 We therefore propose that FACs should also be asked, from time to time, to specifically address a wider issue in relation to the FSA's agenda, where the Agency would welcome more granularities in the FAC's analysis, or from their public engagement, to inform the development of policy and future Board decisions. These issues will ideally be identified every six months when the Board forward agenda is determined.
- 2.6 In parallel, the FACs would be asked to refresh their consumer engagement activities to ensure they are providing the depth and breadth of insight that is expected. We expect this consumer insight to be broadly applicable to and representative of the whole consumer base for the FSA in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, although of course specific issues may differ.
- 2.7 We would also invite the FACs, through their Chairs, to take a more proactive stance in relation to country-specific emerging matters that impact on the FSA's remit and priorities. For example, the forward FSA Board agenda includes papers on the The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 and on the new 'Health and Wellbeing' vision through to 2026 recently launched by the Health Minister in Northern Ireland.
- 2.8 This proposed approach is in line with the Board's decision in May 2016 that the Agency should be more deliberate and direct in identifying the specific questions we want our expert advisors, in that case in our science advisory committees, to address.

England

- 2.9 There is no equivalent to an FAC in England. The Board discussed consumer engagement generally in September 2016. It noted that a wider range of opportunities for the FSA to hear from and engage with consumers was being pursued across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including through Regulating our Future and other work streams. We believe that more enriched consumer engagement in Wales and Northern Ireland will have relevance and read-across to England, and will therefore enhance our overall decision making.

Resources

2.10 The FACs are funded by the FSA in Wales and the FSA in Northern Ireland, with the costs of the Committees in 2016/17 budgeted at £46.7k and £45k respectively. The reduction in the number of FSA Board meetings for 2017 will reduce the time commitment from FAC members, since FAC meetings are scheduled in line with FSA Board meetings. This means that the Committee members, who are remunerated on the basis of 48 days per year, and the wider resourcing of the Committees, can accommodate this broader remit. The expectation is that one or two special interest or enquiry areas would be suggested to the FACs in a year, alongside any country specific theme the Board agrees the respective FAC should focus on.