
MINUTES OF THE FSA BOARD MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER AVIATION HOUSE, LONDON – 09:00 – 15:15

Present:

Heather Hancock (Chair), Laura Sandys (Deputy Chair), Dave Brooks, Ram Gidoomal, Rosie Glazebrook, Ruth Hussey, Stewart Houston, Colm McKenna, Mary Quicke, Stuart Reid, Paul Williams

Officials Attending:

Jason Feeney (Chief Executive)
Rod Ainsworth (Director of Regulatory and Legal Strategy)
Chris Hitchen (Director of Finance and Performance)
Maria Jennings (Director of Northern Ireland and Organisational Design)
Richard McLean (Director of Strategy)
Julie Pierce (Director of Digital, Data and Openness)
Nina Purcell (Director of Wales and Regulatory Delivery Division)
Guy Poppy (Chief Scientific Adviser)
Colin Sullivan (Chief Operating Officer)
Michael Wight (Interim Director of Policy and Science, deputising for Steve Wearne)
Andy Morling (Head of the National Food Crime Unit)
Michael Jackson (Head of Standards and Assurance)
Dr Paul Cook (Head of Microbiological Risk Assessment)
Steven Knight (Surveillance Programme Manager)
Michelle Patel (Head of Social Science Transformation)
Vanna Aldin (Head of Analytics and Chief Economist)
Richard Hoskin (Head of Incidents and Resilience Unit)
Philip Randles (Head of Incidents)
Patrick Miller (Head of Science Strategy and Governance)

Other Attendees

Sandy Thomas (Chair of the FSA Science Council)

Apologies

Steve Wearne (Director of Science Policy)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone in the room and online back to the meeting and noted that the Board would now consider operational matters at the Business Committee meeting.

1.2 Before accepting the September 2017 Minutes as an accurate record of the meeting, Stuart Reid pointed out that his apologies had not been stated on the record and asked for them to be edited to reflect his absence. No further amendments were requested, and no other business was declared.

ACTION 6: Board Secretariat to edit the minutes of the September meeting to include apologies from Stuart Reid.

1.3 The only comment on Actions Arising came from Dave Brooks, who reminded the Executive that the Board had requested an update on the Recalls paper - Item 31 on the Actions Arising table, regarding to feedback from a Food Standards Scotland meeting.

ACTION 7: Richard Hoskin to follow up with the Incidents Team and ensure the Board are updated in 2018.

2. CE REPORT TO BUSINESS COMMITTEE

2.1 The Chair invited the CE to present his second report to the Board, which will focus on operational updates. The CE highlighted the ongoing investigation into the incident at the 2 Sisters plant, and stated that the FSA will be providing an official response to the EFRA Committee by the end of February 2018. The CE reported the results of the FSA People Survey, which he noted had shown a marked improvement from last year's survey, and even those areas that remained 'less good' in terms of scoring (for example, pay and benefits), they were still 'good' when considered comparatively across government.

2.2 In response to a question from a Board Member about the impact of the 2 Sisters incident on ROF, the CE clarified that the EFRA Committee remained supportive of the direction of travel, with no need for changes to be made to the programme. However he and the Chair both agreed that the FSA now needed to ensure that the ROF Programme has a diverse and balanced environment and that businesses that are compliant with the programme will benefit from a lighter touch from the FSA.

2.3 The Chair gave a brief update on the FSA's York office move, and highlighted that the refurbishment had been completed ahead of schedule and on budget. She added that the FSA's London office would be going ahead at the end of January, and that final aspects of the project were now focusing on ensuring the purpose of the organisation across the three countries is clear in the building's branding. She commended the Director of Finance and Performance for his work leading the Foss House project.

3. Q2 PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES REPORT

3.1 The Chair invited Chris Hitchen to lead and introduce the Q2 Performance and Resources Report, with input and assistance from other Directors.

3.2 Chris summarised that good progress had been made on the FSA's three priorities: planning for the EU Exit Programme, Regulatory reform (RoF) and doing the day job well. There'd been good progress made on reducing the number of poor performing Food Business Operators (FBOs). He noted that with EU Exit and RoF planning, more money had been invested in both programmes. He also highlighted the high number of vacancies and low number of appointments in the policy and science teams as a key concern that the team will be working to tackle throughout the next quarter. He concluded that the FSA is on track to meet all HM Treasury targets.

3.3 Paul Williams noted that whilst it is helpful for the Board to see information (slide 12) that the FSA is a 'great place to work', they would also benefit from data reporting that show it is a safe place to work and accidents and health and safety should be reported within the people data section. The CE agreed and noted that this features in the Operations Performance Pack that is tracked monthly and so will be included in future.

ACTION 8: Colin and Chris to share health and safety information with the Business Committee.

3.4 In response to Mary Quicke's question about whether the science and policy vacancies within the FSA are a long-term concern, Michael Wight stated that recently the FSA have been through a number of recruitment rounds for these positions with limited success. He cited market conditions and the attractiveness of larger Ministerial departments (especially DExEU) as reasons why candidates might not make the FSA their first choice. Nevertheless, he noted that work is currently being done to make important roles more attractive to external candidates.

3.5 Colm McKenna asked why other Government departments might seem more attractive than the FSA and whether the FSA would consider recruiting from outside the public sector. Michael Wight commented that as per Civil Service recruitment guidelines and requirements, the FSA must advertise posts internally through the Civil Service first and, if no appropriate candidates can be recruited via this route, only then can opportunities be advertised to external candidates. However, once external recruitment was in place he agreed it was important to seek candidates from as wide a field as possible.

4. ANNUAL INCIDENTS REPORT

4.1 Following invitation from the Chair, Colin Sullivan introduced the paper - noting that it covered the changing landscape and nature of recent incidents – and he welcomed Philip Randles and Richard Hoskin to the table, both from the Incidents and Resilience Unit.

4.2 Philip summarised the paper. He noted that over the last year, the main objective for the Incidents Team has been to remove unsafe products from shelves. With the help of new technology, that had not been available 18 months ago, the FSA is now better placed to identify potential problems, which has led to an increase in the number of incidents over the last year. He also highlighted some of the main workstreams in this area – changes in consumer trends and new risks; and working with stakeholders to review recall systems - and he cited the non-routine incident on fipronil in eggs in Summer 2017 as an example of decisive action from the FSA. Finally, he expanded on the team's new priorities for the next 12 months; doing the day job well; continuing the build capacity and develop incident prevention techniques; and supporting the ROF programme.

4.3 The Chair invited questions, and in response to Rosie Glazebrook's question about why mycotoxin related incidents had doubled in 2017, Philip explained that FSA analysis shows that better reporting has resulted in a greater number of incidents being recorded. However, he clarified that the FSA is currently investigating this further to better understand the area.

4.4 Dave Brooks asked two questions - how the fipronil incident would have played out if we were not in the EU, and if the Board could see what the 'insufficient controls' were that the FSA had identified (as highlighted in the paper). With regard to EU Exit impact on incidents, Rod Ainsworth and Richard Hoskin both commented that the FSA has another well-established workstream on this to ensure that the regulatory regime (in future) will be able to offer a proper response in the event of the occurrence of a similar incident. Richard also noted that as per the timeline the Board saw at the September 2017 Board meeting, the FSA envisions having guidance outlining respective roles and responsibilities initiated and in place before the end of 2018. The CE also commented that much of the FSA's role in this area is dependent on the nature of the exit agreement, and so current preparatory work includes working with the EU Commission to ensure arrangements and priorities are in place.

4.5 In response to a question from Ruth Hussey about whether the lessons learnt from different incidents drives change and improvements, Philip responded that the FSA can normally only gather circumstantial information on the cause of incidents. In future he noted that the team will be conducting root cause analysis, to identify the depth in the causal chain

where intervention could reasonably be implemented to change industry performance and prevent further incidents of the same type.

4.6 The Chair thanked everyone for their questions and commended the team for the continued hard work and success.

5. SCIENCE ASSURANCE UPDATE

5.1 The CSA and Patrick Miller introduced the paper and highlighted that it had two objectives: to provide analysis on the FSA's science spend, which had shown a decrease in recent years. It also aimed to give the Board a picture on how science reporting would continue in the future - with science being discussed once in the spring (a more strategic look, including the work of the Science Council) and again in the winter (focusing more on performance and reporting on how the budget has been spent). The CSA reminded the Board that reporting on science spend had recently been developed to allocate spend into three broad categories – core, investment and strategic; whilst the largest share of spend had been core, including statutory work, the expectation is to shift increasing proportion of spend to investment and strategic which is directed by FSA to addressing its current and future priorities..

5.2 In response to Rosie Glazebrook's question about how the FSA can extend the visibility of its advisory committees and attract high level advice, the CSA explained that the market supply of suitably qualified experts in some key areas for FSA at present is low. He and Patrick confirmed, however, that recruitment for the Science Council had been successful, but across other Committees the FSA has sometimes struggled to recruit members. In addition, the Deputy Chair raised a concern that if the FSA doesn't get key internal and external science posts filled, it will struggle to deliver its high-end priorities - especially its contributions to EU Exit. Chris Hitchen confirmed that the FSA has recognised this trend and is working to address the issues. The Deputy Chair also asked about the public's perception of the *Food and You Survey* and the Chair confirmed new proposals to update it would return to the Board the following year.

5.3 Mary Quicke queried the decline in the FSA's science spend as a proportion of total spend from 18% - 12% spending, as illustrated in the paper, and noted that in her own dairy production work she had noticed a shortage of capable and engaged individuals. Patrick and the Chair confirmed that the FSA's spend on science had been focused in recent years which will have eliminated some spend with a weaker link to FSA priorities. The CSA expanded on this and noted that the return on strategic science can be high – for example many industry groups have modern day tools based on new technologies or their applications that have not yet been brought into the food sector - and the FSA would continue to encourage expansion.

5.4 Paul Williams asked for more information on the CSA's response to using the Science Council to provide expert advice across the FSA and requested clarity on how this would be utilised going forward. The Chair and CSA responded that the Science Council provide reports that the FSA considers and overlays with questions (in a similar way to how the independent advice on the NFCU had been handled) and therefore adding a degree of confidence in the FSA's work. Chris added that more information on this would be returning to the Board in the Budget approval paper in 2018.

5.5 Dave Brooks commented that it would be helpful for the Board to have the background information on the gaps from the negative impact this might have had on the FSA, which Chris confirmed they could make available.

5.6 Stewart Houston also voiced his concern over the decreased percentage of the budget FSA science had received. The CSA clarified that the budget alterations would move the FSA

towards having a Science portfolio delivers good value for money, with the advice from the Science Council adding assurance that the FSA's approach and use of science was sound. The CE reminded the Board that the FSA previously declared an underspend in science and spending 20% less in this area did not indicate that the science spend provides 20% less value. He noted that the FSA now has a solid platform to deliver EU Exit and is appropriately prioritising its resources.

5.7 The Chair summarised the discussion and emphasised that the Board was happy with the direction of travel. She noted that the science updates to the Board made up a series of papers that the Board would continue to look forward to receiving so they can understand how science is visible and important.