

Heather Hancock
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Food Standards Agency
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14 September 2018

Dear Heather

ADVICE FROM THE WELSH FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WFAC) TO THE BOARD OF THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY ON ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE COMMITTEE: SEPTEMBER 2018

The key role of the Food Advisory Committees is to advise the Board of the Food Standards Agency. At yesterday's meeting, the WFAC considered the following issues that will be discussed by the Board:

- Animal Welfare Update
- Incidents and Resilience Annual Report
- Regulating Our Future - Assurance Framework for Primary Authority National Inspection Strategies and Next Steps on Regulated Private Assurance
- Risk Analysis: Process, Governance, Communication
- Update on the FSA's Activities on Antimicrobial Resistance Including the Report of the ACMSF Task and Finish Group

I am grateful to Julia Williams, Steve Wearne, Phillip Randall, and Michael Jackson for joining by video and telephone conference and Collin Wilson and Nina Purcell who attended in person to present and answer questions from members and stakeholders in attendance.

Animal Welfare Update

The WFAC considered the paper which provided an update on FSA activities to drive improvements under the “**Deter, Prevent, Detect, Enforce**” animal welfare programme in slaughterhouses in England and Wales. The WFAC welcomed the update on progress on the Animal Welfare Action Plan and the key achievements made. In relation to the use of CCTVs in slaughter houses, the WFAC made the following comments:-

- that it noted that there is no non-stun slaughter in Wales;
- that it noted that there is reasonable coverage and use of CCTV in slaughter houses (around 99% in Wales and Northern Ireland) but that further work is required to understand whether what is in place is effective, up to date, used effectively and compliant with legislative requirements; and
- that it welcomed the scheme to encourage small slaughter houses on installation of and upgrade to CCTV equipment, but reserved the position that legislation may be required to be fully compliant regarding the use of CCTVs in Wales.

In relation to funding for animal welfare controls, the WFAC noted the current position in England and Wales and raised some concerns. The WFAC would encourage further rapid discussions with the relevant parties in relation to ensuring adequate funding for animal welfare controls. The WFAC welcomed the data stories detailed in the paper and supported the work which has been done around reducing the number of major and critical welfare incidents. In this respect, the WFAC emphasised the use of data sharing and the use of the Chronos referral process to further understand the issues surrounding welfare issues which have occurred on farm or in transit.

The WFAC commented on the possibility of the use of behavioural science to support change, particularly with smaller slaughter houses. In welcoming the collaborative steps which have been taken with stakeholders to address animal welfare issues found to have occurred either on farm, or in transit, the WFAC commented that collaborative links would need to be strengthened to ensure that animal welfare issues are addressed and have impact across the food chain system as a whole.

In conclusion, the WFAC welcomed the positive progress report noting that there were still some areas that needed to be addressed by partner agencies including the FSA.

Incidents and Resilience Annual Report

Members considered the paper which provided the annual report ending March 2018 of the FSA's incidents and resilience function. The paper focused on continuous improvement and efforts made to build on, and strengthen, the FSA's risk management resilience, capability and capacity in preparation for EU Exit.

In its discussions the WFAC made the following points:-

- that it noted actions taken to strengthen the Unit's capacity and capability to deal with food incidents and, in this respect, the WFAC welcomed the 4 nation approach taken;
- that it welcomed the close collaborative working arrangements between the FSA's Incidence and Resilience Unit and the Food Crime Unit;
- that it noted the work being undertaken in preparation for EU exit and this work focussed not only on a no deal scenario but also on work to strengthen the FSA's relationship with a range of countries. WFAC was of the view that it was important that the FSA fosters relationships with competent food safety authorities in Europe, and worldwide, to develop a mutually supportive approach to sharing of information;
- that it noted the incidents landscape and the number of incidents and alerts recorded can be affected by many factors including new consumer trends, technological developments, legislative changes and sampling and testing practices;
- that it noted that it is not possible, at this stage, to quantify the capacity and capability costs associated with preparations EU Exit; and
- that it recognised that pressure on local authorities may impact upon their ability to react to, and contribute effectively to, incident management and product recalls.

In welcoming the report and its conclusion that it is essential that the UK's incident response capability remains effective and robust, the WFAC commented on the importance of having sound monitoring and evaluation measures in place to enable the FSA to evidence its effectiveness.

Regulating Our Future - Assurance Framework for Primary Authority National Inspection Strategies and Next Steps on Regulated Private Assurance

The WFAC considered the paper which provided an update on progress made to explore Primary Authority (PA) National Inspection Strategies (NIS) and to develop NIS Standards as part of the Regulating Our Future (ROF) programme. The paper also provided an update on next steps in respect of regulated private assurance.

A separate paper was tabled at the meeting. This was a letter received from the Head of Policy at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH). The letter detailed a number of concerns that the CIEH has in relation to NIS strategies. Subsequent to the meeting, concerns were also forwarded by Directors of Public Protection in Wales (DPPWs). These concerns supported those made by the CIEH, raised a number of additional points, and provided a more detailed Welsh perspective. It was noted that formal responses to both the CIEH and the DPPWs were in preparation, and would be circulated to the WFAC.

In its discussions on the paper itself, the WFAC enquired about the take up of PA in Wales and was informed that a number of Welsh local authorities have PA relationships, some of which cover food, and that this number was anticipated that numbers might increase following a recent promotional campaign undertaken by BEIS.

Mindful of concerns expressed previously by the WFAC, about an over reliance on third party assurance, members are keen to understand the outcome of recent work undertaken with six primary authority partnerships on a project to test the concept of NIS, to explore PAs accessing and using business compliance data, to find out what needs to be done to make food related NIS a success. In this context, it was noted that an independent evaluation of the project had been undertaken, and that publication of the report from the evaluation was imminent.

The WFAC enquired about the resource implications associated with the FSA's capability and capacity to assess and recognise NIS proposals. It was noted that was difficult to undertake an impact assessment without a formal standard NIS strategy being in place. It was noted however, that as NIS becomes established, resourcing would be assessed and reviewed in the wider context of sustainable funding.

The WFAC noted that the changes to the regulatory regime, particularly, in relation to the first tier of regulatory assurance delivery, would impact on the structure and resourcing of the FSA. WFAC was informed on work underway to establish the capabilities that will be required and what organisational

changes will be needed to support the FSA's role as a Central Competent Authority and an excellent, accountable, modern regulator.

In looking at what the paper was asking the Board to consider, WFAC commented that while it understood the potential role of PA and NIS, it would value the opportunity to reflect on the comments made by the CIEH and DPPWs, and the FSA's responses to these. Further, WFAC commented that it would value the opportunity to have considered the evaluation report undertaken on the project testing the concept of NIS, before it provided advice to the Board. In this respect, it was agreed that the WFAC would hold further discussions on the issue as soon as possible when it is hoped that the additional information it required would be available.

Risk Analysis: Process, Governance, Communication

Members considered the paper which set out approaches being taken to evolve risk analysis processes, capacity and capability in preparation for EU exit. In noting that the delivery of an effective domestic regulatory regime will require an increase in the volume of risk analysis undertaken by the FSA post EU exit, the WFAC welcomed that the FSA had received additional resources. Discussions were held on the FSA's internal capacity and capability for risk management and was encouraged to learn that a recent recruitment exercise will increase the FSA's risk analysis capability. The WFAC was encouraged to learn that the FSA has been successful in recruiting a number of well established, mid-career, scientists.

Discussions were held on how risk assessment work would capture any different county specific characteristics, nuances and demographics. The WFAC noted that while risk assessment will continue to address the UK population as a whole, supplementary information on county specific issues would be sourced, from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey for example, and reflected.

In welcoming the update paper the WFAC concluded that it:-

- agreed that continuing to align the FSA's approaches to risk analysis with those international standards is a positive approach;
- welcomed the commitment to openness, the Code of Practice and the intention to publish risk analysis recommendations to make them available to risk managers; and

- that it would be keen to consider the frameworks and principles paper being developed which will be used at the different stages of risk analysis.

Update on the FSA's Activities on Antimicrobial Resistance Including the Report of the ACMSF Task and Finish Group

The WFAC considered the paper which provided an update on the FSA's science activities concerning antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and the food chain. In its considerations of the paper the WFAC made the following comments:-

- that it welcomed the report and recommendations on AMR from the ACMSF Task and Finish Group;
- that it noted that AMR in food is a complex area which highlights the need for the FSA to work with partner organisations, including other funders, to deliver the science agenda on AMR;
- that it recognised that due to its complexity, that there are no import controls on AMR in food currently, but that work is underway to address this on an international basis; and
- that it appreciated that AMR can impact across the whole food chain, including marine waters, and that a co-ordinated systematic approach is needed.

In concluding that it agreed that the report provides an evidence base to inform engagement with other partners on research and surveillance on AMR, the WFAC was reassured to learn that both the UK Government and the devolved administrations were looking to provide a co-ordinated approach to AMR in relation to food and the environment.

Other Matters

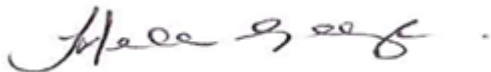
As usual, I provided a written report to the WFAC which gave a summary of discussions at the last Board meeting which included discussions on the development of the National Food Crime Unit, Raw Drinking Milk Controls, the Review of Cutting Plants and Cold Stores, Regulating Our Future – Mid-point Programme Report, International Strategy, and the Review of Food Advisory Committees. In my report, I also highlighted my involvement in the selection process to appoint two new members to the WFAC which I am anticipating will be announced shortly.

The WFAC was pleased to receive the report from the interim Director in Wales, which informed of recent engagements including discussions held with the Chair of Directors of Public Protection Wales, of several meetings with local authorities and of FSA Wales attendance at this year's Royal Welsh Agricultural Show and the National Eisteddfod. The report informed on work underway to align the Welsh Food Fraud Co-ordination Unit to the National Food Crime Unit and of a consultation underway on amendments to Food Law Code of Practice in Wales to introduce operational changes identified through the Regulating Our Future programme. The report also announced that the FSA in Wales has been successful in a bid to obtain additional funding from Welsh Government to support EU Exit work.

In an oral update, the interim Director informed of the organisational changes being made across the FSA in preparation for EU Exit and implementing the first phases of ROF.

I am copying this letter to the Board Secretariat and to the Chief Executive.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Hussey', followed by a period.

pp Dr Ruth Hussey CB, OBE
Chair of WFAC
(Authorised by and signed in her absence)