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Chair  
Food Standards Agency  
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14 September 2018

Dear Heather

**REPORT FROM THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE CHAIR OF THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY ON ISSUES DISCUSSED BY THE COMMITTEE: SEPTEMBER 2018**

The key role of the Food Advisory Committees is to advise the Board of the Food Standards Agency. To that end, the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) met in open session on 11 September to discuss the following papers, due to be considered at the upcoming meeting of the FSA Board.

- Annual Animal Welfare update
- Annual Incidents and Resilience Report
- Regulating Our Future – Assurance Framework for Primary Authority National Inspection Strategies and Impact for FSA Structure
- Update on the FSA's Activities on AMR including the report of the ACMSF Task and Finish Group
- Risk Analysis: Process, Governance, Communication

Discussions on these items were led by presentations from Julia Williams, Philip Randles, Michael Jackson, Paul Cook and Michael Wight respectively and I am grateful to them for assisting the Committee's discussions.

NIFAC also heard an update on the work of the Standards and Dietary Health Team in Northern Ireland from Sharon Gilmore, the FSA in NI's Head of Standards and Dietary Health and I would like to extend my thanks to her.

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### Animal Welfare

Julia Williams, the FSA's Animal Welfare & Delivery Assurance Lead, presented by video link to introduce this item on a paper due to be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the FSA Board, which gives an update on FSA activities to drive improvements under the "Deter, Prevent, Detect, Enforce" animal welfare programme in slaughterhouses in England and Wales.

NIFAC were reassured to hear the measures that the FSA has been taking to ensure that all premises are aware of their obligations following the 5 November deadline and also aware of the implications of failure to comply after that date.

It was also encouraging to hear that DAERA were kept apprised of the legislation in England and Wales through the Veterinary Technical Portfolio Group and had been proactive in discussing and considering the aptitude of the requirements of that legislation for NI slaughterhouses.

### Incidents & Resilience Annual Report 2017/18

Philip Randles, the FSA's Acting Head of Incidents & Resilience Unit, presented by video link to introduce this item on a paper due to be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the FSA Board providing the annual report ending March 2018 of the FSA's incidents and resilience function.

While NIFAC were supportive of the UK position to negotiate full access to the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) network, there was confidence given by the increase in engagement with the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN), to provide a channel for communicating food safety issues should access to RASFF be lost following the UK's exit from the EU.

NIFAC also asked about the relationship with Food Standards Scotland (FSS) and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and were pleased to hear that cooperation with these bodies is regular and constructive. NIFAC also endorsed the principle that the best route for engagement with FSAI is through the FSA's team in NI.

The detail given in the paper and the discussion of the relationships the FSA has established heard through this presentation gave a clear indication of the way in which the FSA has matured in dealing with incidents and how lessons from previous incidents been incorporated into practice.

NIFAC also asked about the relationship with the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU). It was noted that the remit of the NFCU was different from that of the Incidents and Resilience Unit, which focusses on food safety issues but there would inevitably be a

significant area of overlap and food crime can quickly lead to food safety issues through unscrupulous operators.

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

Michael Jackson, the FSA's Head of Standards & Assurance, presented by video link to introduce this item on a paper due to be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the FSA Board giving an update on progress made to explore Primary Authority national inspection strategies (NIS).

NIFAC acknowledged that although modernisation of the delivery model, particularly with regard to assurance, should not be constrained by the current operation of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS), the introduction of NIS will result in some premises being inspected less frequently affording fewer opportunities to refresh ratings through LA inspections. There will be a challenge in marrying the two processes and ensuring that FHRS is protected. This will be especially challenging in NI as the Food Hygiene Rating Act only allows for a rating to be derived through an inspection carried out by a District Council.

NIFAC acknowledged that the position for NIS in Northern Ireland is distinctly different from England and Wales as the legislation under which Primary Authority operates does not relate to the food safety regulatory function. It was good to hear that the Environmental Health NI group may consider revisiting their Statement of Intent in relation to the operation of Primary Authority in Northern Ireland. NIFAC also endorsed the FSA's approach to considering the barriers and challenges to implementing a form of NIS for the NI Councils to allow them to consider businesses operating multiple establishments in NI as single entities rather than as a number of outlets.

### Standards and Dietary Health Update

Sharon Gilmore, the FSA in NI's Head of Standards and Dietary Health introduced this item as part of a series of presentations from the FSA in NI's Standards and Dietary Health team, focussing on the FSA in NI's joint working with our District Councils.

NIFAC welcomed this presentation and endorsed the FSA in NI's approach to engaging with the District Councils. To further progress engagement and the inclusion of the FSA dietary health policy into the Community Plans, it was recommended that a lead Council should be sought, to hold up as an exemplar to the others.

One NIFAC member asked about the Peas Please initiative, which NIFAC had heard about at a previous meeting noting that the project was still seeking a partner

organisation. It was recommended that Food NI and Mash Direct were potential partners for this project if approached.

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

Paul Cook, the FSA's Head of Microbiological Risk Assessment, presented by video link to introduce this item on a paper due to be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the FSA Board giving an update on the FSA's science activities concerning antimicrobial resistance and the food chain.

NIFAC were reassured that the FSA are promoting the seriousness of the issue and the FSA Director Science and Policy Steve Wearne's position on Codex had been beneficial in ensuring that this issue remained on the agenda internationally. It was also welcome to hear about the role of the Chief Medical Officer in maintaining momentum on this issue.

NIFAC noted the challenges of securing the funding for the necessary work and were interested to hear that retailers, who are also concerned about antimicrobial resistance, have undertaken some research projects often in partnership with academia.

NIFAC also noted the balance between moving fast enough and undermining public confidence, acknowledging the importance of simple hand-hygiene and cross-contamination protection methods in food preparation to reduce microbial counts and the implications of antimicrobial resistance for the importance of food hygiene.

### Risk Analysis: Process, Governance, Communication

Michael Wight, the FSA's Interim Director of Policy, presented by video link to introduce this item on a paper due to be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the FSA Board setting out how elements of an effective regulatory regime are being further developed in preparation for EU Exit.

Access to the information coming out from EFSA and other European institutions will be key to avoid unnecessary expense and duplication of gathering this evidence independently. NIFAC endorsed the approach outlined of seeking to maintain a watching brief on EFSA evidence.

NIFAC commented that capacity comes out in the paper as a key risk and were pleased to hear about the high number of applicants the FSA had received in being able to meet this challenge bearing in mind that the quality of the applicants is always the key to successfully fulfilling capacity requirements. There will be an ongoing

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question about where the FSA will continue to get evidence on Standards and Dietary Health to fulfil its remit in Northern Ireland.

I am copying this letter to the Chief Executive.

  
pp. Colm McKenna (approved by Colm McKenna and signed in his absence)  
Chair, Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee

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