

REF NIFAC MINUTES 1/16

**OPEN MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY
COMMITTEE (NIFAC) ON 20 JANUARY 2016, 10.30AM, AT THE FSA
OFFICE, CLARENDON ROAD BELFAST.**

Those present:	FSA
<p><u>NIFAC members</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Henrietta Campbell – Chairman.• Brian Smyth.• Aodhan O’Donnell.• Christine Kennedy.• Phelim O’Neill.• David Lindsay.• Elizabeth Mitchell. <p><u>Apologies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Colin Reid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maria Jennings – Director for Northern Ireland and Organisational Development.• Michael Jackson –NI Head of Local Authority Policy and Delivery.• Seth Chanas – NIFAC Secretariat. <p><u>By Teleconference</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Julie Pierce – Director of Openness, Data & Digital.• Sian Thomas – Head of Information Management.• Nina Purcell – Director for Wales.• Rod Ainsworth – Director Of Regulatory And Legal Strategy.

1. Welcome and introductions

1.1. The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies had been receive from NIFAC member, Colin Reid. Colin Reid’s Comments on the papers were circulated to the Committee and tabled as an insert to the papers.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 11 November 2015.

2.1. The Chair asked if there were any comments on the minutes of NIFAC’s open meeting on 11 November. The Secretariat explained that two changes to the version of the minutes included in the papers had been suggested prior to the meeting. These had now been incorporated in to the version that would go

for publication. No further changes were requested and the Secretariat agreed to arrange for the publication of the minute.

Action Point – Secretariat to make arrangements for publication of the minutes of the NIFAC meeting on 11 November 2015.

3. Chair’s Report and Director’s Update

- 3.1. The Chair updated the Committee on a recent meeting she had attended with the FSA Chair, Tim Bennet; deputy Chair, Heather Hancock; Maria Jennings; and Simon Hamilton, the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. It was explained that it had been a warm and open, introductory discussion, allowing the Minister to meet Heather Hancock, the current FSA deputy Chair who will assume the Chairmanship of the FSA in April.
- 3.2. Maria Jennings then updated the Committee on items from her report contained in the meeting papers, including:
 - the Workshop on Microbiological Analysis of Food;
 - the Food Hygiene Rating Bill; and
 - Nutritional Standards for Health and Social Care (HSC) Catering.
- 3.3. It was explained that the workshop on microbiological testing took place at CAFRE and was arranged by the FSA in NI and **safefood**. It was a helpful meeting with good questions coming from industry representatives that FSA in NI staff were able to answer.
- 3.4. The section about the Food Hygiene Rating Bill had also been included in the Chief Executive’s report ahead of the Board meeting as it demonstrates an area where devolution has allowed for Northern Ireland and Wales to move at a pace, appropriate to those jurisdictions and to lead the UK in implementing a mandatory scheme.
- 3.5. On Nutritional Standards for HSC Catering, it was explained that discussions had taken place with the Chief Executives of the Public Health Agency and **safefood** and draft minimum nutritional standards for use by caterers in Health and Social Care organisations had been agreed. These standards would be extended to hospital vending machines and covers food served to HSC staff as well as that available to the public in HSC premises.

4. A Data Driven FSA

- 4.1. The Chair welcomed Julie Pierce, the FSA’s Director of Openness, Data and Digital and Sian Thomas, FSA Head of Information Management, to deliver a presentation by video conference from the FSA’s office at Aviation House in London, giving a proposed approach to systematically make the best use of data. The presentation covered:

- the volume and complexity of the data within the food system;
- data currently held by the FSA;
- Norovirus predictive modelling;
- extending the use of social media data including coverage and the ethics of data collection;
- prosecution data from Local Authorities;
- Food Hygiene Rating Scheme data;
- the internet of things and data from sensors in appliances;
- partnership working;
- openness and transparency; and
- opportunities for the use of data.

4.2. There then followed a discussion, during which the following points were made:

- This paper covers a wide scope and, accordingly, engages with the topic at a high level. It was interesting to hear about the large number of information assets the FSA currently has. Information Asset Registers tend not to be particularly descriptive. Until the range of data already possessed by the FSA can be known, it will be difficult to know which assets are the more useful. An audit of this information might prove to be valuable.
- Much of the information relevant to the work of the FSA in NI is held at NI executive and local government level and assurance Northern Ireland will benefit proportionately from the FSA's data analysis expertise would be welcomed.
- Greater emphasis could also be placed on how the FSA might be able to make best use of industry data. We have already seen some of the good work done by large businesses in this area.
- Care should also be taken to consider the necessary human dimension required in data handling, which cannot be replaced by technology. A fuller description of how this aspect of information management will be handled.
- Issues around Cyber Security are an increasing risk for organisations seeking to store and utilise data effectively. How this can be best ensured is something the FSA will need to consider with care.

4.3. The Chair thanked Julie Pierce and Sian Thomas for bringing this paper to NIFAC for consideration.

5. UK Local Authority Food Law Enforcement Annual Report 2014/15.

5.1. The Chair welcomed Nina Purcell, the FSA Director for Wales, to deliver a presentation, by video conference, from Southgate House in Cardiff outlining the above paper. The presentation covered:

- the annual report in line with regulations;
- the overall UK position;
- the difference between the current NI situation and that of the UK as a whole;
- difficulties in inputting data reported by Local Authorities; and
- an attempt to understand resources.

5.2. There then followed a discussion, during which the following points were made:

- This is an interesting and important paper. Local Authority information is key for the FSA to benchmark areas of the strategy.
- Though Northern Ireland appears to be well placed compared to the UK overall, it is concerning to note that the overall position is not good. Nevertheless, there are aspects of the information, which do appear positive. The picture appears to be a complex one and could be interpreted as representing an improvement in enforcement. It would be interesting to see if there was any significant read across to incidents of food borne disease. It should also be noted that the figures for Northern Ireland relate to a 9 month period rather than a full year and will not be directly comparable.
- The Committee however expressed some concerns. The focus on higher risk establishments is legitimate, but this should not take away from the need to be watchful of those establishments deemed to be of lower risk. Also, the decrease in the number of samples is of concern, particularly so if this is as a result of financial pressures. The decrease in the number of FTE Environmental Health Officers particularly in England is significant and suggests stress in the system. These factors point to the need for a more fundamental review of delivery.

5.3. The Chair thanked Nina Purcell for assisting the Committee's consideration of this subject.

6. Delivering the Food Standards Agency's Regulatory Strategy.

6.1. The Chair welcomed Rod Ainsworth, FSA Director Of Regulatory And Legal Strategy to the meeting to introduce a paper, by video conference, from Aviation House in London, outlining the above paper. The presentation covered:

- the consideration given to appropriate key feature of the regulatory

- strategy;
- engagement with partner agencies; and
- resourcing required for delivery.

6.2. There then followed a discussion, during which the following points were made:

- Overall, this is an interesting paper. Some Committee members felt that more detail would have been welcomed, drilling down more into the evidence of inspection.
- A suggested drafting change at the eighth bullet point in paragraph 2.3 to “intervention by governments across the UK” was raised by one member in order to better reflect devolution.
- The Committee noted that much regulation is determined at EU level and queried how much room there was for change. It was suggested that there may be much more room for manoeuvre than had been traditionally considered and that the flexibility inherent within the rules could be better exploited. Work was also being undertaken at EU level to push for innovation and modernisation.
- In discussing the principles which should underlie the work to be taken forward the Committee welcomed the focus on outcomes rather than process. It also welcomed the assurances that there would be consumer engagement, and suggested that these two principles should be included in the list.
- The Committee noted the interconnectedness of the themes and direction in all three papers and the need for integration of the forward work plans.

6.3. The Chair thanked Rod Ainsworth for assisting the Committee’s consideration of this subject.

Any Other Business

6.4. The next meeting will be on 9 March 2016. A venue is currently being considered for the meeting and members will be updated on progress. No further business was raised and the meeting was closed.

TABLE OF ACTION POINTS

No	Action	To be actioned by	To be completed by
1.	To make arrangements for publication of the minutes of the NIFAC meeting on 11 November 2015.	Secretariat	09/03/2016