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**Meeting of the Northern
Ireland Food Advisory
Committee on Wednesday
21 October 2020 via
Microsoft Teams.**

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AGENDA

1. 10.00am - Welcome and Housekeeping
2. 10.05am - Minutes of the Meeting of 15 January 2020
3. 10.10am - Chair's Update and Director's Report
4. 10.25am - Michele Shirlow (Food NI)
5. 10.55am - Joy Alexander (Future Food Policy)
6. 11.25am - Break
7. 11.35am - Discussion
8. 12.20pm - AOB
9. 12.25pm - Close

**PAPER FOR DISCUSSION
MINUTES OF OPEN MEETING ON 15 JANUARY 2020**

Executive Summary

Attached are the minutes of the 15 January 2020 NIFAC meeting.

Members are invited to:

- Agree minutes as a true record of proceedings.

FSA in Northern Ireland

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**REF NIFAC MINUTES 1/20
OPEN MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY
COMMITTEE (NIFAC) ON 15 JANUARY 2020, 9.30 AM AT THE FSA
OFFICES, BELFAST.**

Those present:

NIFAC Members

- Colm McKenna – Chairman
- Lorraine Crawford
- Fiona Hanna
- Aodhan O'Donnell
- Greg Irwin
- Phelim O'Neill
- Elizabeth Mitchell
- Sara McCracken

FSA Executive

- Maria Jennings – Director for Regulatory Compliance, People and NI
- Kathryn Baker – Head of Food Safety, Policy and Delivery
- Sharon Gilmore – Head of Standards and Dietary Health
- Roberta Ferson – Head of Finance, Business Support and Communications
- Helen Smyth – Senior Communications Manager
- Michelle Byrne – Communications Manager
- Ruth Watson – Senior Incidents Investigator
- Nicole Fusco – Environmental Health Intern
- Jayne McGlaughlin – NIFAC Secretariat

Guest Speakers

- Wesley Aston – Ulster Farmers' Union
- Ivor Ferguson – Ulster Farmers' Union
- Eamon Hardy – FSA in NI
- Mark O'Neill – FSA in NI

1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all NIFAC members, observers and presenters to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 24 October 2019

- 2.1 The Chair asked if there were any comments on the minutes of NIFAC's meeting on 24 October 2019. No issues were raised, and the Secretariat agreed to publish the minutes.

Action Point 1 - Secretariat to arrange for the publication of the minutes of the 24 October NIFAC Open meeting.

3. Chair's Report and Director's Update

- 3.1 The Chair informed the Committee that since the last NIFAC meeting, three new Board members had been appointed although there was not yet a Deputy Chair in place.
- 3.2 He reminded Members that the Board meeting in December had been postponed due to purdah for the General Election and would be taking place on 21 January. He also noted that the Board papers would be discussed by NIFAC in a closed session following the meeting.
- 3.3 The Chair discussed the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive and noted that this was an important development moving forward.
- 3.4 The Director explained that her report had been included with the papers and highlighted the following items:
- Shellfish
 - All-Island Food Poverty Network
 - 'Did You Know?' Consumer nutrition campaign
 - Illegal Meat conviction
- 3.5 On Shellfish, she explained that the FSA launched an open tender on 14 November 2019 for services for the delivery of sanitary surveys and sanitary reviews for new and existing shellfish harvesting areas in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (NI) and if successful, a contract will be awarded commencing April 2020.
- 3.6 Regarding the All-Island Food Poverty Network, she noted that an All-Island Food Poverty Network meeting took place in December in partnership with Safefood and representatives attended from NI and the Republic of Ireland, Government Departments, voluntary, community and consumer organisations with a remit in food poverty.
- 3.7 She explained to the Committee that two people were successfully convicted on food safety and food hygiene offences, relating to a multi-agency investigation into the illegal sale of meat.
- 3.8 Maria noted that as part of the FSA's Eating Well Choosing Better programme, an integrated communications plan is in development to help the FSA educate and motivate consumers in NI to make healthier food choices. She explained that the 'Did You Know?' phase is designed to draw attention to decisions on the shopping environment, using specific 'treat' foods, and focuses on driving behavioural change through a clear call to action to check the label.

- 3.9 On the 'Did You Know' campaign, members asked about what channels were being used to engage. Sharon Gilmore explained that focus groups had taken place and social media will be a big driver for the campaign. She added that certain 'treat type' foods had been chosen and the campaign would seek to raise awareness of these.
- 3.10 Helen Smyth, Senior Communications Manager, explained that consumer testing had been completed and had informed the campaign. She added that key stakeholders had been consulted.
- 3.11 On Scone Reformulation Guidance, Members asked if Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) would have the capacity to deliver the guidance. Sharon explained that a four-page guidance document for EHOs had been developed for them to hand out at the end of an inspection. She added that she had met with food managers and the guidance can be built into EHOs routine inspections.
- 3.12 The Chair thanked Maria for this update and Members for their questions.

4. The Structure and Characteristics of the Food Retail, Wholesale and Production Sectors in Northern Ireland

- 4.1 The Chair introduced the topic and explained that it was being continued from the October meeting. The Chair noted that there is a lot to investigate within the food landscape and in Northern Ireland and this would be fed back to the Board.
- 4.2 The Chair explained that the presentations would be heard firstly from Ivor Ferguson and Wesley Aston from the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU), followed by presentations from Eamon Hardy from the FSA in NI and Mark O'Neill from the FSA in NI. The Chair noted that Alastair Higgins from Invest NI had supplied a presentation on the Bakery Sector in NI but due to a bereavement he unfortunately could not attend to present.
- 4.3 He invited Ivor Ferguson and Wesley Aston to deliver their presentation which covered:
- Issues facing farming and agri-food in NI
 - EU Exit
 - Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol ('the Protocol')
 - Future UK Trade Deals
 - Future Agriculture Direct Support
 - Devolved NI issues
 - Restoration of the NI Assembly
 - Bovine TB
 - Climate Change
 - AMR

- 4.4 The Chair thanked Ivor and Wesley for their presentation and invited Members to ask questions and further discussion.
- 4.5 The UFU explained to NIFAC that following the General Election in December 2019, the Government committed to Agriculture Direct Support Funding for the full term of the Parliament (up to 2024). The amount of funding for 2020 has remained at the same level as 2019 but there are no guarantees about the level of funding for the following years.
- 4.6 NIFAC heard that as Trade is a reserved matter, but Agriculture is a devolved matter, it is important to find a way to bridge the intersect when trying to develop future trade deals. Members heard from UFU that it is key that farmers find out what future trade deals will be in place and when they will happen.
- 4.7 Members asked UFU that with EU Exit was there a risk of members leaving the market. Ivor explained that although it is often reported that farming is becoming more difficult in NI, UFU have a lot of new members this year and Colleges are filled with new and enthusiastic young people. NIFAC noted that although there is some concern in the industry, there is a willingness to work through and deliver.
- 4.8 Discussing the Protocol, UFU and NIFAC noted that in some cases there is a lack of understanding of what the Protocol means and the implications that it could have.
- 4.9 NIFAC members agreed that the working relationship between UFU and the FSA in NI will be very important moving forward and information should be shared across channels at any available opportunity.
- 4.10 The Chair thanked Ivor and Wesley for their presentation and associated discussion. He then invited Eamon Hardy from the FSA in NI to deliver his presentation on the Bakery Reformulation project. The presentation covered:
- Rates of overweight and obesity in NI
 - Consumption of sugar, fat and salt
 - Bakery percentage contribution of average daily free sugars in NI by age
 - Aim of the reformulation project
 - Project objectives
 - Key criteria and customer acceptance
 - Barriers to reformulation
 - Project update
- 4.11 The Chair thanked Eamon for his presentation and asked members if they had any questions or comments.
- 4.12 Regarding the Bakery Reformulation Project, NIFAC agreed that it complements the 'Did You Know?' consumer campaign that is being undertaken by the FSA in NI. Members emphasised that the relationships between Government, industry and consumers are part of the key to success

for the project.

4.13 During the discussion with Eamon, NIFAC noted with interest the bakery percentage contribution of average daily free sugars of fat in NI by age, emphasising the rise from the 19-64 age group (4% fat and 9% sugar) to the 65+ age group (8% fat and 18% sugar).

4.14 Members asked if reformulation could be done with other products and Eamon explained that the learning is transferrable to other products.

4.15 The Chair then invited Mark O'Neill from the FSA in NI to deliver his presentation on imports and exports. The presentation covered:

- Imported food and EU Exit
- What is an import?
- Categories of Imported Food
- Import Controls
- Key stakeholders
- High risk foods
- Types of checks
- Failure to meet import controls
- Exports
- Export Health Certification
- EU Exit – no deal planning/NI Protocol
- Timeline of key concepts

4.16 The Chair thanked Mark for his presentation.

5. Discussion

5.1 There then followed a short discussion regarding the theme 'The Structure and Characteristics of the Food Retail, Wholesale and Production Sectors in Northern Ireland,' and the presentations that the Committee had received.

- Commenting on the food landscape, Members agreed that is complex in NI with several competing factors. NIFAC noted that some of the issues, including the border with the Republic of Ireland could be felt more acutely following EU Exit.
- Members noted that they were concerned to hear that the Port of Belfast is the only Border Control Point in NI for human consumption. Currently, the infrastructure and staff resource at the port would not be able to cope with the number of consignments arriving into the port that may need to be checked post-EU Exit.
- NIFAC agreed that there was an overall concern regarding ports and port capacity following EU Exit, especially regarding the possible divergence between NI and GB.

- Members questioned if there is a full understanding of the Protocol and the impacts that it might have on the food landscape in Northern Ireland. Members emphasised that there are a lot of very specific issues for the FSA in NI to think about and consider.
- It was agreed that there are several areas where the rest of the UK could learn from NI and how things are done.
- Members emphasised that with the reestablishment of the NI Assembly and Executive there are opportunities to tackle issues and start new tasks. NIFAC also agreed that time is of the essence with the Programme for Government as the current mandate will only last for two years.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 No further business was raised, and the meeting was closed.

ACTION POINTS

Action Point 1 – Secretariat to arrange for the publication of the minutes of the 24 October NIFAC Open meeting.

PAPER FOR INFORMATION

UPDATE FROM DIRECTOR FOR REGULATORY COMPLIANCE, PEOPLE AND NI TO NIFAC 21 OCTOBER 2020

Executive Summary

Attached is the FSA in NI Director's update to the Committee for October 2020.

- No action by members is necessary.

FSA in Northern Ireland

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Food Is Safe

Shellfish Sanitary Surveys and Reviews

Following the last update, the FSA has awarded a 3-year contract to conduct sanitary surveys and survey reviews on NI shellfish production areas. The FSA is required to conduct sanitary surveys on new production areas and review existing surveys when certain triggers are met. This is to ensure the risk-based monitoring programmes within these waters are still representative and protective of public health. So far, in this financial year a sanitary survey review has been completed on Killough Harbour and work is underway to review the survey on Strangford Lough. These reports will be made available on the FSA website.

Implementation of a risk-based toxin monitoring programme in NI shellfish production areas

From January 2020, a risk-based toxin monitoring programme has been implemented across six out of the seven NI shellfish production areas. The intention for implementing the regime in the remaining production area was to carry out a targeted consultation with stakeholders, following a risk assessment of monitoring locations. Due to Covid-19, this consultation was delayed for a number of months, however work is now underway to progress this before the end of October. Whilst the implementation of the new, higher frequency, monitoring regime is challenging, all partners have been working together to ensure its delivery.

Fish imports into NI post Transition Period

The FSA has been working closely with Defra, DAERA and District Council colleagues, on the future of fish landings into NI and consignment movements from GB-EU/NI. Work has been conducted by District Councils to examine landings into NI ports to ensure there are no knowledge gaps on how fishery products enter NI. The FSA has also contributed to draft Defra guidance for certifying officials to inspect fishery products/Products of Animal Origin moving from GB to EU/NI from 1 January 2021, ensuring that the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol ('the Protocol') is considered with the various scenarios of fish movements that currently happen within the UK.

FSA marks a year to go until allergen labelling changes are introduced

On 1st October, a campaign launched to support businesses adapt to new labelling laws for prepacked for direct sale food before October 2021. The FSA is raising awareness of changes to allergen labelling laws and throughout the coming year will be providing new information and resources to help businesses prepare before they come into effect on 1st October 2021 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Gathering and Using Science, Evidence and Information

Nutritional content of cheesecake report

During 2019, the FSA and the 11 District Councils in NI carried out a survey of cheesecake served in restaurants and hotels in NI, to determine the nutritional composition and typical portion sizes in comparison to PHE recommendations. In September 2020, the results were published in a [report](#) which showed that portion sizes in this setting are often very large, with bigger cheesecakes containing more energy, sugar, fat, saturated fat and salt, often in excess of recommended daily amounts. The findings of this report will inform targeted interventions with food businesses and manufacturers of puddings to increase the availability of healthier products. The FSA is committed to working with knowledge providers and industry to develop technical guidance to help businesses to reformulate recipes and to reduce portion sizes and levels of energy, sugar, saturated fat and salt.

Front of Pack Nutritional Labelling Research

The FSA in NI commissioned qualitative research with food and drink manufacturers in NI to gain a better understanding of how and why decisions are made about Front of Pack Nutritional Labelling (FOPNL). Forty telephone interviews were conducted with a range of different food and drink manufacturers, characterised by those who have and have not implemented FOPNL, business size and the type of food and drink products they manufacture. The findings have provided the FSA with the information required to further support and engage with NI manufacturers in the implementation of FOPNL, inform future policy direction on this issue in NI and across the UK and complement the joint four nation FOPNL consultation. The [research report](#) is available on food.gov.uk.

Kantar Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) - promotions data

Following the consultation launched by the Department of Health and Social Care on [restricting promotions of products high in fat, sugar and salt by location and by price](#), the FSA purchased additional data from Kantar FMCG specific to promotions. Kantar FMCG provides information on consumers take home food and drink purchases. This information excludes food purchased out of the home e.g. in restaurants or takeaways and does not account for food waste. The data has been shared with various key stakeholders and will be used to inform policy as it progresses across the UK.

All Island Food Poverty Network Webinar

This year's All Island Food Poverty Network Conference will take place in the form of a webinar, jointly hosted by the FSA and Safefood on 20 October 2020. The webinar 'Learnings from responses to Covid-19' will share the challenges and learnings from the responses to tackle food poverty/insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic with speaker presentations from the UK, NI and ROI. In NI the Department for Communities will present on their work with FareShare, the Covid-19 Community Support Fund, and the Social Supermarket programme.

Empowering Consumers

Calorie Wise

The South Eastern Regional College successfully achieved the Calorie Wise Gold award at the Bangor and Newtownards sites in February 2020 and were presented the award at a celebration event on 4 March 2020.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCCT) also successfully completed Calorie Wise audits at five hospital sites at the beginning of March 2020. A further number of WHSCCT sites were due to be audited but were temporarily suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Being the Best Organisation We Can Be

Food Law Code of Practice Review

To facilitate the recruitment of additional resources within those District Councils who will be required to carry out increased imported food controls, there has been an urgent review of the Food Law Codes of Practice (the Code) and Practice Guidance (PG) and fast tracking of the development of a new Competency Framework (CF) for those undertaking official food controls, including imported food.

An eight-week hybrid consultation on the revised Code and PG and new CF commenced on 6 October 2020 and consists of a number of stakeholder events to discuss key messages, followed by a four-week written consultation exercise.

Joint Four Nation Front of Pack Nutritional Labelling Consultation

The FSA has worked in partnership with Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Food Standards Scotland and the Welsh Government to develop and launch the joint four nation Front of Pack Nutritional Labelling [consultation](#). The aim of the consultation is to gather views and evidence to help inform future improvements to the current recommended front of pack nutrition label and to ensure the UK's label remains effective. The 12-week consultation will close on the 21 October 2020. It is anticipated responses to the consultation will be disseminated by DHSC late 2020/early 2021.

MenuCal

The FSA's online tool 'MenuCal' helps businesses to calculate the calories on their menus and manage allergens. Over the last year there has been an 18% increase in the number of NI users and a 33% increase in the total number of users. It is positive to note that the number of new users has continued to rise each month throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of returning sessions also shows regular use of MenuCal throughout the year as users return to their accounts to add new recipes or make amendments to existing recipes. Over the last year 1,921 new recipes have been inputted to the tool.

EU Transition

FSA Workstreams

To prepare for the end of the Transition Period (TP) and to fulfil the requirements of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP), the FSA has constituted a NIP Project. The NIP Project is part of the FSA's wider preparations for EU Transition. The NIP Project encompasses a series of workstreams to understand and implement the NIP. The workstreams focus on Legislative, Border, Regulatory and Negotiations areas, with a series of sub-workstreams under each. Whilst there may be divergence between the EU and GB, it remains FSA's priority to ensure a 'one FSA approach' where possible and this project is building structures to ensure the obligations of each regulatory system are met, with FSA continuing to deliver its core brief.

These workstreams are continuing to progress and prepare the FSA for the end of TP. This has been particularly challenging due to the implications of Covid-19 and the reliance of progress in negotiations in some areas.

A new Risk Analysis process has been developed to operate across the UK which will maintain the high standard of food safety and consumer protection after the TP. This process incorporates the NIP and will seek to reduce the burden on NI businesses where possible.

The FSA has been actively contributing to Defra-led EU negotiations on Networks, Systems and Databases (NSD) and these will have particular relevance in how Incidents and Food Fraud are handled and the operations of Official Control Laboratories (OCLs) and National Reference Laboratories (NRLs) post-TP in NI. Work has commenced in relation to the allocation and appointment of OCLs post-TP and a working group including FSA, DAERA and District Councils is progressing this issue.

The FSA is also implementing a legislative programme to ensure that the law on food and feed hygiene and safety, both in GB and NI, is operable after the TP. It is the FSA's priority to maintain the UK's high standards of food and feed safety and a functioning statute book is critical to achieving this. As such, amendments to legislation are required to keep pace with new or updated EU legislation which has come into force since the FSA's 17 UK-wide Statutory Instruments were made in 2019, and to provide legal underpinning for the operation of the NIP by the end of the TP. It is necessary to disapply the retained EU Law on food and animal feed hygiene and safety in respect of Northern Ireland, amending the extent of its application from the UK to GB in accordance with the NIP. Previous "no deal" corrections to Northern Ireland domestic legislation will be revoked to reflect that EU law will continue to apply in Northern Ireland in respect to food and feed hygiene and safety.

Common Frameworks

The FSA in NI is involved in the development of three UK Common Frameworks: Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene; Food Compositional Standards and Labelling; and Nutrition and Compositional Standards and Labelling. These frameworks are currently being developed following UKG-DA Frameworks Project Board guidance.

The UKG- DA Frameworks Project Board has classified these three Frameworks as priority, meaning that they are intended to be agreed by Ministers by the end of the transition period.

The Frameworks are being created to protect the functioning of the UK Internal Market, while acknowledging policy divergence, and the Frameworks will set out a common UK approach, providing clarity on the role of Minister and the governance of any shared structures in line with the devolution settlements. The legislation covered in these frameworks is included in Annex 2 of the NIP, which means that NI will continue to follow EU law. Cross Cutting issues such as the NIP and the functioning of the Internal Market are being considered during the development of the Frameworks. Northern Ireland will remain a full participant of the Common Frameworks programme, and the Frameworks will respect the devolution settlements and the democratic accountability of the devolved legislatures

The Common Framework on Nutrition Labelling and Compositional Standards is now in Phase 4 of development and has received provisional agreement by JMC(EN) in September 2020. The Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene Framework is in Phase 3 of development – as part of Phase 3, the Framework has been considered by the FSA Board, completed Stakeholder Engagement, and is undergoing an in-depth review in mid-October. The Food Compositional Standards and Labelling Framework is in development, with stakeholder engagement and reviews being planned for later this year.

In line with the Common Frameworks process, summaries of the Nutrition Labelling, Composition and Standards and Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene Frameworks were shared with the Health Committee in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Committee noted the summaries at their meeting on 8 October. Full Parliamentary scrutiny of the Frameworks will take place following JMC(EN) approval of the Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene Framework is received. As the Nutrition Labelling, Composition and Standards Framework has received JMC(EN) approval, scrutiny will begin soon.

Trader Readiness

As part of plans to prepare business for the NIP, the FSA has been working closely with Defra and DAERA to prepare business guidance and the FSA will be participating in business webinars on the implications of leaving the EU. The FSA is also continuing to work with Defra to deliver guidance on labelling and Health and ID Marks and their application post-TP. The initial webinars will focus on labelling and the movements of goods from GB to the EU (these are scheduled for October and November) and these will be followed by similar events concentrating on movements of goods into NI.

DAERA Operational Readiness

The FSA is working closely with DAERA on plans to implement the Protocol and has representatives on the various working groups and workstreams within the DAERA programme of work to deliver Northern Ireland's Operational Readiness for 1 January 2021. Both DAERA and FSA hold areas of policy when it comes to imported

food and feed controls (SPS checks). FSA holds policy responsibility for high risk food not of animal origin (HRFNAO) and for Fish and Fishery products.

Whilst FSA is the Central Competent Authority in these areas, the performance of SPS checks at Points of Entry (POE) is delivered by District Councils. Currently NI has one POE eligible to perform SPS checks on goods entering NI from outside the EU. It is envisaged that, with the UK leaving the EU, further POEs will be required. DAERA and Defra, with ongoing FSA input, have made proposals for additional POEs at Warrenpoint, Larne and Foyle and an expanded facility in Belfast. The FSA is working closely with those District Councils who will be asked to perform additional SPS checks because of the NIP. As this will result in new functions for several District Councils, the FSA has been offering policy advice, delivering funding bids and facilitating resource planning and training to assist all Councils.

At the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 24 September, the DAERA Permanent Secretary acknowledged that Northern Ireland would not be able to fully implement the SPS controls under the Official Controls Regulations (OCR) on 1 January 2021. As a result, contingency arrangements are being developed to be in place for 1 January, and the FSA is an active participant in this planning. The contingency arrangements will progress alongside DAERA's existing workstreams, which will aim to deliver the SPS checks required under the NIP under a revised timetable.

Continued discussions at SLA technical meetings in relation to resources and how to protect essential front-line delivery for the VPHP programme.

Legislation

Amendment of the Food Hygiene Rating Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

At the last written update in January we explained that the technical amendment to the Food hygiene Rating Act (NI) 2016 (FHRA) would be progressed via an Order in Council. Progress was however delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Upon returning to progress this issue we received updated legal advice, from the Office of Legislative Counsel, to advise that the amendment to the FHRA could be made using Section 2(2) of the European Communities Act. This legislative option only became available in February 2020 as a result of an amendment of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 by the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020, however this legislative option expires at the end of the TP. The Food Hygiene Rating Act (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 have now been drafted and we will be consulting on these in the coming weeks in order to ensure the coming into operation of these regulations before the end of the TP.

Three-year review of the statutory food hygiene rating scheme in Northern Ireland

In accordance with Regulation 14(2) of the Food hygiene Rating Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, (the Act), the FSA has completed a review of the operation of the Act in Northern Ireland. A report of the review has been drafted and will be sent to the

Department of Health (DoH) in the coming weeks. The DoH has agreed to FSA publishing the final report on the FSA's website on behalf of the DoH.

Covid-19

From the commencement of the Covid-19 pandemic the FSA in NI has contributed to working groups established to coordinate the FSA response to the pandemic, including:

- LA Delivery Forward plan/Recovery Group - established to determine the FSA's expectations and priorities for local authorities (LAs), short-term and long-term
- Local Authority Hub – established to coordinate and respond to LA queries and intelligence
- working groups established to develop new guidance for LAs, food business and consumers, including the “Here to Help” campaign

The team also maintained regular engagement with District Councils to facilitate the effective and efficient exchange of information and intelligence regarding the impact of the pandemic on the ongoing delivery of official food controls.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the FSA has provided oversight, assistance and guidance to our Border Control Posts (BCPs) in order to mitigate potential effects of the virus and ensure adequate staffing numbers are in place to deliver essential import controls, protecting the consumer and flow of food products into the country. BCPs have taken steps to split teams up to reduce risk of infection and provide resilience if staff are required to self-isolate. The FSA has worked with BCPs and utilised Covid-19 specific EU legislation, which introduced some flexibilities to official controls, to put in place a graduated approach to the delivery of imported food controls. This approach ensured consumer protection whilst allowing BCPs to operate under reduced resources.

A lot of work has taken place in relation to contingency planning to ensure that all the meat establishments remained resourced and to control transmission, and forward planning. This included:

- Feeding into the GB sub-group looking for alignment and idea sharing.
- Planning and communication of easements in relation to Official Controls at approved establishment specific for NI. This included 8 Northern Ireland specific Emergency Instructions (developed in parallel with FSA Ops and available during April and May) based on implementation of changes to Official Controls from the recently implemented OCR Regulations. The impact of implementing these in NI would have been small in terms of releasing Competent Authority resources, and there was minimal uptake: 48 authorisations were issued under emergency EU legislation to maintain service delivery by front line staff
- Emergency labelling and ID mark easement was made available for 1 plant but was not used

- Ongoing collaboration with DAERA, FBOs, PHA and the Health and Safety Executive NI, with a minimum of 2 meetings per week with the different sectors
- Two premises did have Covid-19 clusters declared, resulting in 1 plant being closed for two weeks to facilitate a deep clean
- In relation to primary production, there was a prioritisation of visits and forward plans were also created
- Ongoing stakeholder engagement which includes daily/bi-weekly meetings chaired by DAERA with input from the FSA and the Health and Safety Executive NI to discuss emerging issues. These have proved to be very successful and have provided a perfect conduit for communication that has evolved into a suitable place for discussion of EU Transition related topics.

'Here to Help' campaign to help food sector adapt to the 'new normal'

The Here to Help campaign provides a practical guide for food businesses on how to register, re-open and adapt to the way they trade safely during the Covid-19 pandemic. In recent months, many established food businesses have diversified into food delivery, takeaway or online sales in order to continue operating. Anecdotal evidence also shows an increase in people cooking from home and selling food locally or online. The campaign was well supported by FSA stakeholders in NI and attracted positive coverage by local food industry media.

The FSA developed the Here to Help guide for small food businesses such as restaurants, takeaways and coffee shops, to make the hygiene processes and requirements they must follow clear as they develop new ways of working.

Provision of food to vulnerable groups

The FSA provided support to the Department for Communities (DfC) in NI on the distribution of food parcels to vulnerable groups during the Covid-19 lockdown. The FSA engaged with project organisers and collaborated with local council Environmental Health Officers to provide information and advice to food suppliers during the consideration of phase 2 food supply.

The FSA also engaged with DfC and a Dietitian from the PHA to provide some suggestions on how emergency food parcel contents could be improved nutritionally for the shielding cohort going forward. Draft weekly menu plans were produced based on the products available in one food parcel to illustrate how the food could be used in meal planning.

Food Vulnerability during Covid-19 Research Project

A representative from FSA in NI is a stakeholder in a UK wide research project examining food vulnerability during Covid-19. The [first report](#) from this research outlines the findings of mapping national level responses to risk of rising food

insecurity during the Covid-19 outbreak between March and July 2020. The report includes a section specifically on food provision responses in NI. The next stage of the research will look at how these interventions worked in practice and will be published as part of the monitoring phase of the project in Autumn 2020.

Maria Jennings
Director for Regulatory Compliance, People and NI

NIFAC DISCUSSION

The Future Food System in Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

Following on from the NIFAC open meetings in October 2019 and January 2020 when the Committee considered the food system and landscape in Northern Ireland, the theme of this meeting is 'The Future Food System in Northern Ireland,' with a view to exploring and understanding more about the impact of Covid-19 and EU Transition on the food system.

To understand more about the future food system in Northern Ireland, the Committee will be hearing from two presenters. A presentation will be given by Michele Shirlow from Food NI, looking at the impact of Covid-19 on the hospitality industry. This will be followed by a presentation Joy Alexander from DAERA who will provide NIFAC with an update in relation to the Future Food Policy work. There will then be a panel discussion to allow NIFAC members to ask questions of the presenters to help inform the Committee's advice and information to the FSA on this topic.

Members are invited to:

- Consider the content of the presentations and;
- Comment on and consider the impacts that Covid-19 and EU Transition will have on the future food landscape in Northern Ireland.

FSA in Northern Ireland

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