
Minutes of the open meeting of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee held on 10 January 2019 At FSA Wales's Offices, Southgate House, Cardiff

Present:

Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) Members Attending:

Dr R Hussey, Chair
Mr R Alexander
Mr D Peace
Dr N Barry
Mr J Wilson
Mrs R Lyne-Pirkis
Dr P Hollington

Food Standards Agency (FSA) Officials Attending:

Richard Bowen, Director (Interim) FSA Wales
Julie Pierce, Director of Openness and Digital, and Director FSA Wales
Kerys James Palmer
Ross Yarham
Helen George - Secretariat
Elora Elphick – Secretariat

Stakeholders Attending:

Representatives from Coeliac UK
Representative from Zero2Five, Cardiff, Metropolitan University
Representative from the Chartered Institute Environmental Health (Wales)
Representatives from local authorities in Wales (including Caerphilly, Swansea, Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire)

1. Introductions

1.1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and informed that the meeting was the first to be held following the review undertaken in 2018 on the operations of the Food Advisory Committees (FACs) in Wales and Northern Ireland. The Chair stated that, following the review, the WFAC would be moving towards a new way of working and, in line with recommendations made in the review, would focus its attention on developing its own intelligence/insight which might usefully contribute to forthcoming issues to be considered by the Board. The Chair said that the WFAC intelligence would be supplementary to information already provided for the FSA from a wide range of other sources, including advice from expert advisory groups, scientific advice, data from social science and consumer insight programmes and incident management. The Chair made it clear that the new way of working would be monitored and

reviewed and commented that she would welcome feedback from stakeholders on the day's proceedings.

1.2. Apologies for absence were noted from Mr A Gardner.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1. Committee members advised the following declarations of interest:

- Norma Barry advised that she works on consultancy assignments for food businesses which involve drafting HR policies and business plans. Norma also advised that she is a member of the Wales Food and Drink Industry Board.
- Ruth Hussey advised that she is the Governor of The Health Foundation, Commissioner, LSE/Lancet Commission on the 'Future of the NHS' and an Advisory Board Member for the School of Public Health Research.
- Ronnie Alexander advised that he is a member of the National Assembly for Wales Remuneration Board.
- David Peace advised that he is non-executive Chairman and a shareholder of Vorenta Ltd, which is the holding company of Hall Mark Veterinary Compliance Services, and recently-acquired Meat and Livestock Commercial Services Limited (MLCSL). In addition, David is Chairman of Probita Solutions Ltd and a Director of Umentas Ltd. David also has a daughter who suffers with a challenged immune system.
- James Wilson advised that he is a member of the Wales Food and Drink Industry Board and owns a shellfish business.
- Philip Hollington advised that he currently teaches food security at Bangor University. He is also a member of the Agri-Food Training Partnership Management Board, the British Grassland Society and the Tropical Agricultural Association.

2.2 All declarations were noted.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

2.1 Subject to a few amendments and a final proof read the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November were agreed as a true record. **Action: Secretariat. Minutes to be amended, translated and posted to the website.**

4. Report from Chairman (Paper FSAW 19/01/02)

- 4.1. The Chair presented her written report which summarised discussions at the last Board meeting and covered discussions she had held with the Board Chair, and Chair of the FAC in NI, in relation to the review of FACs. There were no matters arising from the report.

5. Director's Update (Paper FSAW 19/01/03)

- 5.1. The WFAC received the regular report from the interim Director in Wales, which stated that meetings had been held with a range of stakeholders and that additional resources were being made available to support Welsh local authorities in their preparations for EU exit and work in relation to food sampling projects. There were no matters arising from the report

6. Allergens – Open Discussion

- 6.1. The Chair opened the discussions reiterating that the purpose of the open discussions was to assist the WFAC in developing its own insight and intelligence that might usefully contribute to issues which are likely to be the feature of forthcoming Board discussions. The Chair commented that she was particularly interested in opportunities for the WFAC to explore any country specific aspects of an issue. The Chair added that she would welcome inclusive dialogue and invited stakeholders present to participate throughout the discussions.

- 6.2. To set the scene, and to help facilitate discussions, officials delivered two presentations. The first provided an overview of FSA's work on allergens including details on the allergen strategy proposed for 2019; the current legislative framework; proposals to review the legislation to consider whether it is effective in the light of recent tragedies; and details of FSA allergy communications campaigns. The second presentation focused on the range of research studies being undertaken to underpin the FSA's food allergy and intolerance work programme. It covered the four key themes of the research programme, including the development of management thresholds for allergenic foods; the route and timing of exposure to food allergens in early life; the prevalence and characteristics of food allergy and intolerance; and, food allergen; labelling and consumer choice.

- 6.3. In commenting on the increase prevalence of allergens, the WFAC noted that there were a number of reasons for the increased prevalence including increased awareness, better diagnosis and a range of other factors, which could include the Western diet.

- 6.4. A local authority representative commented that it would be useful in any forthcoming Board discussions on allergens and intolerances, for data to be provided on the number and nature of incidents pre- and post-2014 and for this

to be made available on a country specific basis. It was also commented that it would be useful if the cost of the burden of the disease was provided at country specific level.

- 6.5. A representative of the CIEH commented that it would be helpful in developing any new strategy to understand the full pattern of the disease. It was suggested that it might be useful to consider hospital admission data to identify the scale of the problem and to explore any country specific dimension. It was also suggested that it would be useful to examine product recall and withdrawal data to understand if produce was having to be withdrawn as a consequence of ignorance on behalf of the food business operator, a disregard for the legal requirements or as a result of cross contamination concerns.
- 6.6. In commenting on the enforcement of the legislation, a local authority representative suggested that the highest prevalence of allergen incidents are linked to loose foods and contamination from unintentional ingredients. It was felt that food business operators had difficulty in managing these particular risks and that this often led to an over precautionary approach, with some business operators applying a blanket cautionary disclaimer. It was thought that this was having the effect of reducing consumer choice, but considered a UK wide issue rather than one specific to Wales. A representative from Coeliac UK commented that the blanket use of cautionary disclaimers was having a detrimental impact particularly in relation to gluten free products and that it was adversely affecting the range of products available to consumers suffering from Coeliac disease.
- 6.7. It was noted that the FSA's website was to be a main source of information for enquiries in relation to allergens and intolerances particularly in relation to the 14 foods specified in the Food Information Regulations (Wales) 2014. However, it was acknowledged that there were also some foods containing specific enzymes that may give rise to issues similar to those related to allergens and intolerances.
- 6.8. A concern was raised in relation to application of GDPR in schools which may adversely impact on the management of dietary requirements of children with a known allergy or intolerance and pose a degree of risk. A Committee member made the point that the requirements of GDPR should not be a barrier in such circumstances.
- 6.9. A requirement for better information and training at the catering and business operator level was highlighted and the need for information to be available in a range of different languages.
- 6.10. The Committee was interested to learn of global research looking at tolerance levels for allergens and studies looking at the possibility of increasing tolerance thresholds. It was noted that this was very new research which was proving some promising results.

An issue was raised in relation to the National Procurement Service in Wales. A number of local authority representatives commented that they had concerns in relation to how the procurement framework operates from a food hygiene perspective in respect of the public sector, particularly in relation to allergen and intolerant issues. It was considered that inadequate food standard and safety mechanisms are in place for the procurement of goods and services supplying a large part of the public sector including food to schools and hospitals. It was noted that the National Procurement Service was changing and might not continue in its current format. It was agreed that this was an issue which needed to be explored in order to ensure that public sector procurement services in Wales had robust and effective food safety and standards control measures in place. **Action: Secretariat. To initiate discussions with National Procurement Service.**

6.11. In summarising the overall general position, the following points were made:

- that attendees were not aware that allergens have a different manifestation in Wales compared to the rest of the UK;
- that in developing and improving data sets, it would be useful to explore regional and country differences to identify any demographic or epidemiological trends;
- that there was a need to maximise analysis of data from product recalls and incident management information on a regional basis to establish if there are differences in the way food manufacturers work in the different countries;
- that in relation to the catering industry there is a specific need for adequate training and information provision to ensure maximum consumer food choice; and
- that there is a need to ensure that all consumer and business information is kept up to date.

6.13 In relation to Wales specific issues, it was recommended that further information should be sought on food safety and standards controls and mechanisms built into procurement contracts negotiated to supply food and drink to the public sector. **Action: Secretariat. To initiate discussions with National Procurement Service.**

6.14 The Chair thanked WFAC and those present for their comments and said that the outcomes from the discussions would be relayed to the relevant FSA policy officials and inform future Board consideration of allergens and intolerances work.

7. Question and Answer Session

7.1. There were no issues raised.

8. Any other Business

8.1. The Committee noted that the next meeting would be a business meeting on 7 March 2019.