

MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS MEETING OF THE WELSH FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE HELD ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2020 VIA TEAMS

Present:

Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) Members Attending:

Dr R Hussey, Caretaker Chair
Mr P Price, incoming Chair
Dr N Barry
Mr A Gardner
Dr P Hollington
Mr D Peace
Mrs B Lyne-Pirkis
Mr R Alexander

Food Standards Agency (FSA) Officials Attending:

Nathan Barnhouse – Director, FSA in Wales
Julie Pierce – Director of Openness, Data & Digital, Science and Wales
Kerys James- Palmer- Acting Head of Regulatory Policy
Darren Davies - Head of National Food Crime Unit
Lucy Boruk- Business Manager

1. Introductions

- 1.1 The Caretaker Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and formally introduced Peter Price as the new Chair of WFAC and Board member for Wales. Peter Price said that he was looking forward to the role and would be participating in a two-day induction programme the following week.
- 1.2 Apologies were noted from Helen George.
- 1.3 During the introduction, the Chair reminded members that the main purpose of the meeting was to gather intelligence and insight which might usefully contribute to issues which are to be discussed at the forthcoming Board discussions. The Chair commented that she was particularly interested in opportunities for the WFAC to explore any country specific aspects contained in the papers.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 Committee members advised of the following new declarations of interest:

- Norma Barry advised that she had recently been appointed to the Council of the Deans of Health, which was a UK wide body.

- Ronnie Alexander declared in the previous meeting that he was working for UKAS as an assessor in the health sector. He also stated that he Chairs the Independent Members' Allowances Review Panel in Bath and North East Somerset. Furthermore, at Bristol City Council, he is a member of the Independent Members' Allowances Review Panel.
- Ruth Hussey declared that she had worked on Covid-19 in April and May for MHCLG in support of Greater Manchester (GM) Councils and again directly with GM in August.

2.2 All declarations were noted.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting (Paper FSA 20/09/01)

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2020 were agreed as a true record subject to minor amendment.

3.2 On matters arising, the Chair stated that the secretariat had arranged for presentations from the Welsh Government in relation to EU exit, the implications for Wales arising from the Agriculture Bill and from the Food and Drink Industry Board for the October meeting.

3.3 Ronnie Alexander enquired about the Ministerial letter he had shared with the Director and Dr Ruth Hussey in relation to concerns highlighted in the Drinking Water Inspectorate's 2019 report about the safety of some water supplies to food businesses from a chemical and bacteriological perspective. DWI considered some such supplies to be a potential danger to human health. In addition, and on a separate but related point, DWI had issued general advice about the safety of water supplies, following business closures as a consequence of Covid-19. The implications for food businesses once operating at full capacity was worrying as there was no clear information on any risk assessment processes that had been undertaken. Nathan Barnhouse confirmed that he had shared the intelligence with the consumer protection team.

3.4 Action: Nathan to advise on the outcome of the above

3.5 Norma Barry informed those present of a planned evaluation of the Food and Drink Industry Board. It was agreed that it would be useful for the FSA to feed in the review.

3.6 Alan Gardner questioned the FSA's involvement in situations where a slaughterhouse might be closed or have limited operation due to COVID-19, yet there is a supply of animals in the processing chain.

3.7 In response it was said that the FSA attends Incident Management Team (IMT) meetings when there are outbreaks and animal welfare is one of the considerations. This is a multi-agency response and animal welfare on farms is covered by APHA, with the policy owned by Defra / WG. So the Agency is involved in these

conversations and keeping the plants open is the easiest way to avoid the issue arising, when that's possible.

3.8 The FSA also liaise with APHA and the LA to ensure processing sites are correctly resourced and prior notice provided where possible. Key regulator responsibility for welfare of birds on farms is that of APHA.

3.9 **Action: Secretariat; Minutes to be translated and posted to the website.**

4. Report from Chairman (Paper FSA 20/09/02)

4.1 The Chair presented her written report which summarised discussions at the last Board meeting. It was noted that the new arrangements for meetings were to be continued, utilising Teams going forward. The Chair congratulated Alan Gardner on his re-appointment to the WFAC.

5. Director's Update (Paper FSA 20/09/03)

5.1 Members welcomed the report from the Director in Wales. In commenting on the recent meeting between the Board Chair and Vaughan Gething MS, the Minister for Health and Social Services, the Director said that the meeting had been viewed as positive from both sides. He added that useful discussions were held on recent outbreaks of Covid-19 in meat plants and that the Minister had indicated that he was content with the FSA's strategies for responding to outbreaks.

5.2 The Director provided a supplementary update in relation to the work of the Safe Sustainable Authentic Food Wales (SSAFW) group stating that it, together with the Covid -19 sub group, were carrying out an important intelligence gathering role. In response to a query on the frequency of the Covid-19 working group meetings, the Director stated that the working group were looking to reduce the frequency of meetings but would keep the matter under review depending on any further developments with the outbreak. Norma Barry mentioned that the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board had issued a Covid-19 resilience plan for the sector, which had been developed in partnership with officials.

6. National Food Crime Unit (NFCU): Food Crime Strategic Assessment (Paper FSA 20/09/07)

6.1 Darren Davies introduced the paper which provided an update on the recent Food Crime Strategic Assessment, which is being developed by the NFCU, in partnership with colleagues in Food Standards Scotland's Food Crime and the FSA's Incidents Unit. He added that the paper also set out the proposed direction of travel for the work of Unit.

6.2 A Member raised the potential of animal by-products and stolen animals entering the food chain. It was confirmed that the work of the NFCU is focused on prevention and protection and when such occurrences happens, the Unit works closely with police.

6.3 Discussions were held on additional responsibilities which may fall to ports in Wales as a result of EU exit and the potential for increased food crime. Specific concern was expressed in relation to Holyhead. The Director responded by saying that the FSA in Wales's bid for additional resources under SR20 would reflect the need for continued support for local authorities to assist with additional pressures arising from the end of the transition period.

6.4 Members welcomed the report and highlighted the need for additional resources at a local authority level as a consequence of additional pressures arising from EU Exit.

7. Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene Common Framework Update: (Paper FSA 20/09/04)

7.1 The Chair introduced the paper which updated members on the common frameworks programme which is as a joint initiative between the UK Government (UKG) and Devolved Administrations. The framework aims to develop enduring post-transition period agreements between the four UK countries on areas of EU legislation to achieve consistent approaches. It was made clear that the Framework is being developed jointly by officials from the four UK countries and sets out how the key elements of the FFSH framework proposals align with the strategic objectives for EU transition set by the Board.

7.2 In consideration, the WFAC made the following comments: -

- that it would be useful to know the timing for the inter-governmental review;
- that it would welcome further clarity on the cross-cutting areas outlined including proposals for managing the UK internal market (UKIM), the review of intergovernmental relations (IGR) and the outcomes of UK-EU FTA negotiations;
- in noting that the Northern Ireland Protocol will create different circumstances in Northern Ireland from the other three countries, that specific examples of what this might mean in practice would be useful;
- that it was concerned to note that the application of mutual recognition could result in Ministers having to accept food and feed products on the market that the FSA had advised as being unsafe if Ministers in other parts of the UK had taken different decisions. Whilst it was acknowledged that in most cases, the FFSH framework's processes will work effectively to manage regulatory approaches on a four-country basis, it was agreed that this was an area that would need to be closely monitored; and
- the need for openness and transparency on any divergences in the decision-making process.

7.3 Subject to the above observations, the Committee endorsed the framework proposals.

8. Risk Analysis Process Update (Paper FSA 20/09/05)

8.1 The Chair introduced the paper which provided an update on the FSA's approach to developing and implementing risk analysis and on work undertaken to further refine the detailed operational procedures underpinning the process. The paper also set out the proposed approaches to prioritisation and triage of issues in the process, and publication and consultation.

8.2 The WFAC endorsed the agile approach to risk analysis described in the paper and highlighted the importance of continued engagement with appropriate stakeholders as the approach is further developed.

9. Science Council Working Group 5 on Hypersensitivity (Paper FSA20/09/06)

9.1 This paper described the progress of the Working Group to date reviewing previous and existing FSA research activities on food hypersensitivity and sought agreement to the Science Council's recommendations.

9.2 In considering the paper the WFAC made the following comments:

- that it noted that many of the recommendations were operational rather than strategic.
- that it understood why progress on some work programmes, particularly where stakeholder input was required, had been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- that the WFAC would welcome the reinstatement of regular stakeholder input to this area of work.
- that it noted the need for appropriately skilled and trained staff but commented that it would be advantageous to select and train individuals who are both experts and effective project managers rather than employ separate disciplines.
- the need to recognise the value of research around environmental factors influencing food hypersensitivity; and
- the need for regular external reviews of the work programme.

9.3 Subject to the comments above the WFAC welcomed the progress of the working group, noted the recommendations from the interim report and commented that it looked forward to considering the final report from the Working Group.

10. AOB

10.1 The Chair advised that the next meeting will take place on 22nd October.