

Minutes of the 161st meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board
Held on Thursday, 1st December 2022 at 10:30am
safefood office, Dublin

PRESENT:

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)
Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)
Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)
Mr Alex Attwood (AA) (joined remotely)
Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)
Ms Irene Collins (IC)

In attendance:

Dr Gary A. Kearney, Interim Chief Executive (GK)
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director, Corporate Operations (PF)
Ms Fiona Gilligan, Director, Marketing and Communications (FG)
Ms Joana Caldeira Fernandez da Silva, A/Chief Specialist Nutrition (JCFDS)
Dr Linda Gordon, Chief Specialist Food Science (LG)
Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretariat

Apologies:

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)
Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)
Mr Alan Lewis (AL)
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)

1. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting.

2. Conflicts of interest

Noted: The Chair asked members if there were any conflicts of interest relating to the agenda. No conflicts of interest were raised.

3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 20 October.

Proposed: KMck

Seconded: SMcC

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: No matters were arising.

5. Presentation on National Dietary Nutrition Surveillance

Noted: JCFDS gave a presentation on National Dietary Nutrition Surveillance (NDNS), a summary of which is captured below

- NDNS is a cross-sectional survey designed to assess the diet, nutrient intake and nutritional status of the general population aged 1.5 years and over living in private households in the UK.
- It is the only source of nationally representative UK data on the types and quantities of foods consumed by individuals, from which estimates of nutrient intake for the population are derived.
- The core programme is designed to be representative of the UK. To obtain a representative sample for Northern Ireland (NI) an additional booster sample of 200 individuals has been collected since 2008/09 and data analysed in 4-year periods. This allows direct comparison with UK data.
- One of the emerging trends is that 11- to 16-year-old girls consume below the lower reference nutrient intake (LRNI) for many vitamins and minerals.
- **safefood** is a co-funder of the booster sample with DoHNI and FSA-NI.
- The output data informs
 - A Fitter Future for All
 - Nutritional Standards for Health and Social Care settings
 - Supports public health nutrition campaigns such as **safefood**'s START campaign
 - Ongoing research

Noted: The Chair thanked JCFDS for her informative presentation and opened to the floor for questions. The presentation generated a healthy discussion covering topics such as

- Iron levels in under five-year-olds
- The production of food and its carbon footprint
- Eco-labels and the possible contradiction of nutrition advice
- Consumer in undated with information on packaging
- Reformulation of food products - while **safefood** is not represented on the reformulation taskforce in Ireland, it was suggested the Board invite a member of the taskforce to present at another meeting.

6. Chief Executive Officers report

Noted: The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed **safefood**'s activity since the last Advisory Board meeting on 20 October. The report was circulated to members prior to the meeting and taken as read. The CEO handed over to the following staff members to update on specific areas of work.

Noted: PF updated on the following Corporate Operations matters

- Temporary staff resources have been secured in the Corporate Operations Directorate to whilst four are currently vacant and one position is on sick leave.
- **safefood** has provided all Corporate and Business Plans to the sponsor departments as requested. The following Plans have yet to be issued by the sponsor departments to the NSMC for ratification:
 - Business Plan 2023
 - Corporate Plan 2023-2025
 - Business Plan 2022
 - Business Plan 2019
 - Business Plan 2020
 - Corporate Plan 2020-2022

In the absence of ratification by the NSMC, **safefood**'s programmes budget remains at the 2016 level. **safefood** has highlighted the now intense pressure on our programmes and activities in our Plans due to increased payroll costs from reversal of FEMPI salary reductions and inflationary pressures.

Action- PF to prepare a graph to visually show the impact on programmes for the next meeting.

Noted: FG provided the following updates in Communications

- The last phase of the START healthy weight campaign, which ran in October/November for four weeks, is now complete and concludes the five-year campaign. Some activity is planned for quarter one, possibly running into quarter two to keep the important public health message live whilst the five-year campaign is evaluated.
- **safefood**'s Christmas campaign commences on 9 December, running until Christmas Eve with advertising on TV, YouTube, TikTok, Radio, RTE Guide and digital display channels. The campaign will be supported by public relations activities involving local chefs in Ireland and Northern Ireland, engagement with food writers and active media relations in the run-up to Christmas. A free Christmas leaflet for the public with turkey cooking advice will be distributed through approximately 250 butcher shops on the island of Ireland and more than 50 Spar/Eurospar shops in Ireland through a partnership with BWG Foods. Learnings from last year's Christmas 2021 campaign were considered and edits were made to messaging and branding across this year's campaign.

Noted: JCFDS informed of the following updates in Nutrition

- The All-island Obesity Action Forum hosted a hybrid event on the 15 November titled 'Stopping obesity stigma – a priority for all'. Attendees heard from patients and researchers in the area. The event promotes a move from the way we spoke and portrayed obesity in the past.
- The success of the community piece 'Transform your Trolley' points to the broader potential for these food shopping tips currently in a larger campaign.

Noted: GK and LG advised of the following updates in Food Science and the Research area

- Provided several diary notices for food safety training
- The Knowledge Network hosted a meeting for Public Health Laboratory management staff from across the island of Ireland in November. The purpose of the meeting was to bring laboratory staff from Northern Ireland and Ireland together to discuss topics of

- shared interest and to exchange knowledge and ideas. Scientific cooperation forms a major part of **safefood**'s legislation. This event was really successful.
- An update on two research projects which were put up for tender was provided
 - 'Food messaging to children and adolescents – what works?'
 - The draft contract for this project has been sent to the Preferred Candidate for review and sign-off.
 - 'Communicating food poverty – understanding the current discourse on the island of Ireland'
 - The contract for this project has been signed by the University of Galway. The duration of the project is 15 months and due to commence in January 2023.

Noted: There was a general discussion regarding research - KMCK asked how the research office would describe the quantity and quality of applicants. GK commented that both aspects had improved this year compared to last year. SMCC commented that in her experience the duration of **safefood**'s research projects can make it difficult to apply for as attracting a Post doctorate researcher for a relatively short period of time may be inappropriate.

7. Feedback from the Audit and Risk Committee

Noted: EK and AA provided feedback from the most recent Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) meeting.

- The ARC wished to thank PF and Marian Brady for their support with the minutes.

Action: Circulate the approved minutes of the ARC meetings to Advisory Board members.

- The ARC reviewed the Statement of Internal Control in detail at their November meeting and reported that there were 4 findings from the review, all ranked as low-level risk.
- It is hoped the C&AG will attend the February meeting of the ARC.
- The following aspects were captured or updated on the Risk Register
 - Staffing issues
 - The finance system
 - Inflation has moved up to red
 - Political has downgraded to amber.

8. Presentation on the Knowledge Network

Noted: LG presented on the Knowledge Network (KN). The presentation is summarised below.

- The Knowledge Network was established to connect those working in food safety: producers, caterers, regulators, researchers, educators.
- It provides a vehicle for **safefood** to connect with food businesses, laboratory staff, Environmental Health Officers and public health professionals.
- The Network runs in three-year phases, and services include workshops, webinars, training courses, videos and publications.
- The objectives for the next three years are
 - To promote food safety especially for food SMEs across the island of Ireland.
 - To monitor developments and other challenges along the food chain including technological advances, monitoring, surveillance, regulatory developments, and on-going research both on the island and internationally

- Utilise the KN programme as an accessible source of expertise for **safefood** and to raise awareness of **safefood** activities and enhance its profile in the overall public health promotion field
- To further develop multi-disciplinary and cross-jurisdictional cooperation between food safety professionals in food safety laboratories and across food production, regulation, academia, and other public bodies.

Noted: The Chair thanked LG for her informative presentation and opened to the floor for questions or suggestions from members for growth of the KN.

- Guest lectures at catering colleges
- Run a one-to-one clinic for SME's
- Target staff as well as business owners – sell the benefits for upskilling to low-paid staff. Make credentials work for staff and not just for owners.
- Promote and use on LinkedIn – ‘leadership not regulation’ - what can be learnt from distillers and brewers, they have moved beyond compliance into leadership
- Help food companies upskill to meet challenges of reformulation – reduction in salt etc will affect shelf life of products.
- Is there a food safety issue regarding sustainability labelling?
- horizon scanning.

9. Financial report

Noted: PF presented the financial report for ten months, January to October 2022. **safefood** is currently under budget and this is due to an underspend in salaries due to vacancies and partnerships moving work to next year.

10. AOB

Noted: No other business was noted. The Chair concluded the meeting and wished members and **safefood** staff a happy Christmas.

11. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present (CEO was present)

Noted: The Board met with the CEO without the Executive present. The Chair directed a wide-ranging discussion on how best to optimise the expertise and experience of Board members for the benefit of the executive and future work of **safefood**. It was suggested that an outline plan for discussion of relevant topics and operational programmes be agreed for 2023 – including how best to enhance safefood’s role of fostering all-island working relationships including north-south linkages and cooperation.