



Minutes of the 163rd meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board
Held on Thursday, 27 April 2023 at 9:30am
Stormont Hotel, Belfast

PRESENT: Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)
Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)
Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)
Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMcK)
Mr Alex Attwood (AA)
Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK) (joined remotely)
Ms Irene Collins (IC)
Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)
Mr Alan Lewis (AL)
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)

In attendance: Dr Gary A. Kearney, Interim Chief Executive (GK)
Ms Fiona Gilligan, Director Communications (FG)
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director Corporate Operations (PF)
Dr Aileen McGloin, Director Nutrition (AMcG)
Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretariat

Apologies: None

1. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting. No apologies were recorded

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, 9 February 2023.

Approved: The Chair asked members if they were happy to approve the minutes of the previous meeting which were circulated in advance.

Proposed: SMcC

Seconded: TC

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: Carried forward from February Minutes - It was agreed to keep the suggestion made in point 5 of the previous minutes (December 2022) that the Board invite a member of the FSAI 'reformulation of food products taskforce' to present at a meeting at a suitable date in the future.

Noted: No other matters arising

5. Update from the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

Noted: The Audit and Risk Committee's Annual Report 2022 was circulated to members prior to the meeting and taken as read. The Chair commented on a strong Annual Report which is a testimony to the work undertaken by all involved.

Noted: The Chair thanked members of the Audit and Risk Committee for producing the Annual Report 2022. Thanks, were also extended by AA to PF and Marian Brady for their support of the Committee during the year and welcomed the return of Angela Cahill.

Noted: AA provided an update from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 21 February 2023.

- A clear Audit Certificate was received by **safefood** in December from the Comptrollers and Auditors General, and the sponsor departments arranged for the Financial Statements to be laid before the Oireachtas and the NI Assembly.
- A draft management letter was received by **safefood** who had responded to the C&AG.
- The ARC's self-effectiveness review is complete. One suggestion resulting from the review is the Chairs from other North South Bodies' ARCs could possibly meet to share learnings and knowledge.
- The NI budget will be announced today, it is hoped there will be no negative consequences for North South bodies.
- The ARC reviewed the Risk Register and noted Angela Cahill's update in relation to progressing implementation of a new cloud based financial system in **safefood** which she is in the process of implementing.
- Other routine items noted were support and training being provided by Angela for the finance team, the annual report on anti-fraud processes and protected disclosures.

Noted: The Chair thanked AA for keeping the Board informed.

6. Chief Executive Officers report

Noted: The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed *safefood's* activity since the last Board meeting on 9 February. 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: The CEO invited PF to update on the following Corporate Operations matters

- The Annual Report 2021 and Financial Statements have been laid in the NI Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas and is now published on *safefood's* website. Printed copies were given to members.
- The 2022 Financial Accounts have been submitted to the sponsor departments, the NSMC secretariat and the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG). No date has been given for when the C&AG will come to *safefood* to complete the audit.
- Updates on recruitment are;
 - The receptionist position has been filled on a permanent basis since March.
 - The position of Director of Food Safety has now been accepted by the second candidate of the successful interviewees panel. The candidate will start on 3 July on a temporary basis for a minimum of three years and contracts are expected to be concluded shortly.
 - Following two unsuccessful recruitment competitions for the position of Finance Executive and no update from the Sponsor Departments regarding *safefood's* request to regrade this position, an Accounting Technician is due to start on 2 May on a temporary basis for a minimum of three years.
 - The recruitment competition for the position of Administrative Assistant in the Communications Directorate was unsuccessful. A one-year internship with colleges is being investigated to fill this position.
 - Following an open recruitment competition, the permanent vacancy for the position of Chief Specialist in Nutrition was filled by an internal candidate. This will create another vacancy in the position vacated and recruitment will commence shortly to fill this role. The Board passed on their congratulations.
 - The CEO continues to follow up with the Sponsor Departments for a decision to his 2022 request to regrade several critical positions.

Noted: MH raised concern regarding the move from accountant to account-technician and Administrative Assistant to Intern and advised of the extra requirements this could put on staff to train and provide job shadowing.

Noted: FG informed of the following updates in Communications

- The final phase of 'Start' aired in March and concluded the five-year childhood obesity public health campaign. An evaluation of the full five-year campaign is now underway with consumers, stakeholders and partners.
- Evaluation of the Christmas meat thermometer campaign revealed a significant increase of 9% in meat thermometer ownership. Building on this success planning is in progress for the summer phase. 38% of respondents said they intend to purchase a meat thermometer, based on this excellent opportunity for retailers, **safefood** have secured chains such as BWG, Tesco and Londis to come on board. Board members asked what is the cost to **safefood** for the thermometers? FG informed the retailers will be providing them for sale so there is no cost to **safefood**.
- The launch of **safefood**'s partnership with Special Olympics Ireland took place on 7 March in Belfast. The Health@Play programme will bring for the first time on the island of Ireland health education through sport to children with intellectual disabilities.

Noted: AMcG informed of the following updates in Nutrition.

- **safefood** hosted a Community Food Initiative (CFI) regional event titled 'Engaging the reluctant participant' in Tullamore. The event provided the opportunity for leaders of the CFI's to come together to share learnings. This was the first time the HSE Sláintecare Healthy communities attended a CFI event which is a positive networking opportunity for the CFI's.
- The next All-island Obesity Action Forum webinar titled 'Healthy start – supporting healthy living in young children' will take place 4 June. The webinar will focus on the prevention of obesity in young children and interventions aimed at creating supportive environments for healthy eating and active living. **safefood**'s healthy lunchbox leaflet is currently being reviewed so this webinar will help inform content for the new leaflet. SMcC suggested the new leaflet could also apply to parents i.e., 'if your making lunch for your kids, why not make something healthy for yourself'.
- **safefood** presented at the Indian Embassy as part of the 'India-Ireland friendship lecture series' which provided an opportunity for shared learnings.

Noted: GK advised of the following updates from the Knowledge Network and Research Office

- Recruitment of members for the food hypersensitivity expert group has completed and the first meeting took place in March.
- Knowledge Network events which recently took place are
 - Mycotoxin control in feed and food workshop
 - Food packaging webinar which was well attended by 160 delegates.
 - An update on Salmonella webinar which was also well attended with 167 delegates.
- The Knowledge Network hosted a forum for Public Analyst's Laboratory staff in Limerick on 25 April - this was noted as the first time that senior staff from the three laboratories have got together.
- A public research tender advertising calls for three new research projects is closing today (27 April). **safefood** will co-fund one of the projects with the FSAI and FSA NI to provide an all-island view on the project titled 'Ensuring food allergen understanding and labelling compliance for non-prepacked foods in the catering and hospitality sector'. SMcC enquired how the research tenders were advertised? GK informed all research institutions are notified as well as the tenders advertised in national papers, **safefood's** website, Knowledge Network and etenders.

Noted: KMCK referenced the CEO report and questioned 'six research projects yielded three published articles' and should each research project publish at least one article? GK advised that generally external research teams secure peer-reviewed publications for all **safefood**-funded projects on a staggered time basis. **safefood** collects such publications to demonstrate further outcomes from the research projects, besides reports and dissemination events etc.

7. Financial report

Noted: PF presented the financial report for the first three months of 2023 and highlighted that **safefood** had received an additional amount of funding on a once-off basis from the Department of Health Ireland of €266,000 to support the thermometer campaign. **safefood's** expenditure to date is on par with last year for the same period.

8. Presentation – Evolution of Northern Ireland food and policy

Noted: The chair welcomed Mr. Michael Bell, Executive Director of the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association to the meeting.

Noted: Michael gave a presentation entitled 'Evolution of Northern Ireland food and policy' which was a general overview of the food industry in Northern Ireland, the key challenges both

past & future faced by the industry whilst also touching on food safety and nutrition. Michael also described how the food industry in Northern Ireland is affected by UK and Irish food policy and the effects of Brexit.

Noted: The Chair thanked Michael for a very interesting presentation and opened to the floor for questions and discussion.

9. Discussion – Childhood obesity campaign, where next?

Noted: The chair welcomed Niall McCaffrey from IPSOS who facilitated an extensive discussion with Board Members to ascertain their views on the past five years of the Start campaign – what worked, what didn't? and their thoughts on future communications from **safefood** regarding childhood obesity. Feedback from the Board, which was excellent, will feed into the overall evaluation of Start and will also help to inform future campaigns in this area.

Noted: Niall will submit a report to FG noting the feedback received.

Noted: The Chair thanked Niall for attending the meeting and facilitation of an in-depth discussion.

10. AOB and tour de table

Noted: The Chair asked members if there was interest in holding the next meeting scheduled for Northern Ireland (2 November) outside of Belfast. Members agreed and Armagh and Enniskillen were proposed.

Noted: The Chair informed the next meeting will take place in Cork on 29 June.

11. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Advisory Board members reflected on the evolving format of meetings. The Chair agreed to share the following issues with the Chief Executive for future consideration:

- Stabilising remote access to ensure that members joining remotely can participate fully at all venues,
- Limiting the number of substantive topics to enable sufficient time for full discussion.
- Continuing refinement of the first part of meetings, taking pre-circulated papers as read and focusing on discussion of key issues of particular significance.