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**Minutes of the first meeting of the All-island Obesity Action Forum, held on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008 at 11am at *safefood*, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin**

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**Present**

Dr Kevin Balanda	Institute of Public Health (KB)
Ms Catherine Bent	Nutrition and Health Foundation (CB)
Ms Margot Brennan	Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (MB)
Ms Norma Cronin	Irish Cancer Society (NC)
Dr Muireann Cullen	Nutrition and Health Foundation (MC)
Dr Cliodhna Foley-Nolan	<b>safefood</b> , Chairperson (CFN)
Ms Janas Harrington	University College Cork (JH)
Ms Maria Jennings	Food Standards Agency (MJ)
Ms Maria Lordan Dunphy	Health Service Executive (MLD)
Ms Janis Morrissey	Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (JM)
Mr Brian Mullen	Department of Health and Children (BM)
Ms Maureen Mulvihill	Irish Heart Foundation (MM)
Ms Ursula O' Dwyer	Department of Health and Children (UD)
Mr Rob Phipps	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (RP)
Dr Brian Redahan	Food Safety Authority of Ireland (BR)
Mr John Tracey	Irish Sports Council (JT)

**In Attendance**

Ms Erin Brennan	<b>safefood</b> (EB)
Dr Marian Faughnan	<b>safefood</b> (MF)
Ms Marita Hennessy	<b>safefood</b> , Minute Secretary (MH)
Mr Dermot Moriarty	<b>safefood</b> (DM)

**Apologies**

Mr Martin Higgins	Chief Executive, <b>safefood</b>
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**1. Welcome and apologies**

The Chairperson welcomed all Members to the inaugural meeting of the All-island Obesity Forum. Apologies from Martin Higgins were noted and recorded.

**2. Introductions**

Members were invited by the Chair to introduce themselves.

**3. Policy perspective**

The Chair introduced Mr Rob Phipps and Mr Brian Mullen from the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Health and Children (DOHC) respectively and asked them to provide a brief overview of the policy context in both jurisdictions.

Mr Phipps gave an overview of the policy context in Northern Ireland (NI). He firstly provided an outline of the structure of the DHSSPS. He stated that in NI 60% adults have a weight problem and 20% are obese. There may be some encouraging signs in children with recent data indicating a potential levelling off of overweight and obesity

rates in 4-5 year olds. The collection of regular data is an ongoing and pressing issue. The Fit Futures group is chaired by the Minister for Health and is represented by three ministries – Health, Education and Culture, Arts and Leisure. There were 70 recommendations in the Fit Futures Report which was issued in 2005. An Obesity Prevention Steering Group (OPSG) was established in 2008 to progress the Fit Futures recommendations and also broaden them to the life course. It is supported by four advisory groups – Food and Nutrition, Physical Activity, Data and Research and the Prevention, Education & Public Information group. The key function of the group is to look forward. The next stage in NI is to develop a 'life course' obesity strategic framework. A consultation is underway (October 08 – March 09) and the framework is due for launch in February 2010. The framework will include short-, medium- and long-term targets.

Mr Mullen gave a synopsis of the policy context in the Republic of Ireland (ROI). The Report of the National Taskforce on Obesity (NTFO) made 93 recommendations in 2005 which could be made into 20 key recommendations. The main comment on the implementation to date is that the recommendation of the establishment of an over-arching steering group chaired by the Taoiseach's Department has not progressed. €3M was given to the HSE to implement the recommendations. The Minister for Health Promotion, Mary Wallace, held bilateral meetings with other government departments, however, has decided that a more inclusive forum with a wider stakeholder basis is needed to tackle obesity and is convening an over-arching steering group before the end of the year. This Forum will be chaired by the Minister and will meet in January, February and March to discuss progress to date on the strategy and also establish the way forward. A lot of work has been undertaken including a cycle policy, physical activity guidelines, National Nutrition Policy, playgrounds and advertising codes.

The following discussion points were noted:

- There are a lot of similarities between the two jurisdictions.
- Strategies focus on prevention rather than treatment. In ROI, the HSE is looking at best practice guidelines for staff for treating obesity in primary care and is conducting a staff training needs assessment, UCD is conducting research into the management of morbid obesity and the NTFO published Obesity Management Guidelines. In NI NICE guidelines on treating obesity run alongside the prevention strategy in NI.
- HSE is currently reviewing their second year obesity implementation plans in light of scarce resources. They are on target for the current year. The National Nutrition Surveillance Centre (NNSC) has prepared a progress report. This and other reports will be made available once they have been signed off by the HSE. CFN suggested that the group be advised of these, while it was further suggested that these be presented at the next meeting.
- A discussion took place on the public perception of a lack of activity in relation to the implementation of the Obesity Strategy in ROI when in fact this was not entirely the case. Many organisations have been working both visibly and in the background on various activities. It was noted that in NI much has been done in a short time and that there is a need to learn from each other. It was suggested that the 93 recommendations in ROI were still valid but that a lot of new data has emerged since then and the recommendations need to be reviewed and prioritised in light of this. The NTFO received a great response from stakeholders and a lot of momentum was created at the time. Minister Wallace was congratulated for taking the lead in taking the strategy forward.
- The urgency to engage with the food industry was highlighted. In ROI the Nutrition and Health Foundation was established in January 2005 as a public-private partnership, a specific recommendation of the NTFO Report, and has

found that industry has implemented recommendations. The Food and Drink Industry Ireland (FDII) has also prepared a document which outlines the activities undertaken by industry in this regard. It was highlighted that industry changes have been driven by EU legislation. The NI experience was also discussed as industry involvement in NI is still being discussed with reference to the OPSG as the food industry in NI is quite disparate. The FSA (NI and UK) is working on an ongoing basis with industry – producers, retailers and caterers. There are competition issues so much work goes on behind the scenes. The Food and Nutrition Group under OPSG will engage an industry representative and were in a similar place to ROI before the OPSG convened. Industry in ROI has not been engaged and that the Irish Heart Foundation is currently conducting research on seeking support from industry. The difficulty in engaging with retailers was also acknowledged. The differing perceptions between industry and non-industry were noted as on one hand industry perceives that they are being excluded from the process while others perceive a lack of commitment from industry. It was highlighted that it was imperative that industry be involved as they determine the food we eat. It was noted that industry in NI has the capacity to interact, is keen to improve the quality of food and the FSA are making good progress in working with it. Some difficulties have been encountered by DOHC such as getting industry to present at a recent salt reduction workshop.

- RP clarified the training aspect of the OPSG. He stated that training was for all staff within DHSSPS and the workforce.
- RP stated that NI plan to carry out an audit to capture all the local work being conducted.
- DOHC outlined the EU context and the work of the EU Platform on Diet and Physical Activity, including labelling (profiling and claims) and salt reformulation (will extend to sugar and fat). Developments will be reviewed in 2010.
- Barriers to physical activity were discussed and the need for them to be researched and addressed highlighted. There is a pilot being conducted with the HSE on facilities for after school physical activity. The Irish Sports Council has undertaken research and found the following: the difference between boys and girls is defined between the ages of six and ten and continues throughout life; disadvantaged communities need to be targeted (education more important than income, these communities need direct intervention thus ISC is working with local sports partnerships); and if involved in individual sport, one is more likely remain in it or other sports throughout life. It was suggested that the positive messages are not sufficiently marketed. It was further highlighted that that in relation to obesity that food is usually the focus and that the balance between diet and physical activity should be redressed.
- The benefits to North-South working were highlighted. Recent developments in data and research noted with the establishment of two new research centres – Centre for Diet and Health Research (UCC/UCD) and QUB. It was suggested that the Forum group could contribute to informing their work and that more interaction between groups in both jurisdictions would be informative and beneficial.

***Action Point 1: The FDII document and the HSE progress report will be circulated to the Members, via Catherine Bent and the HSE respectively.***

#### **4. Tour de Table – Expectations**

The chair asked the group to outline their expectations for the group and their vision, if any, for it. Most of the expectations were reiterated by more than one person and are summarised here:

- Get more coherence between both jurisdictions and opportunities to work with NI/ROI equivalents
- Guidance on all-island priorities e.g. policy recommendations, research, all-island Obesity Observatory, advertising/marketing of food to children. Identify work we could all do together, e.g. physical activity or marketing and labelling
- Halt obesity
- Shared experiences and learning and identification of best practice among organisations and also from both jurisdictions. Important that ROI learn from NI in terms of their joined-up approach. One place to get information. The NHA provide such a service and this model may be appropriate to the Forum. Because of limit on frequency of meetings, it would be beneficial if **safefood** could provide secretariat and share information via email. The format used by the National Heart Alliance would be worth considering
- Forum needs to be action-focused and goals must be realistic and achievable
- There is a tendency to look at individual factors in isolation; there should be a lifestyle approach. Focus on environment as well as individual – proportionate responsibilities
- Welcome what food industry will bring. Need to break down the barriers of miscommunication and misunderstanding in terms of industry. Some member organisations may have initial reservations about working with industry. This was acknowledged and the management of same was highlighted as important
- The Forum formalises North-South working. The all-island Obesity Conference held by the HSE and HPA was noted as being an important step in the right direction and was attended by a wide range of stakeholders
- Joined-up voice with clear and consistent messages. There are so many different programmes/information campaigns available with similar aims and objectives. Allied to this is the need to bring cost efficiencies to what people are doing
- Need to consider tackling perceptions/social norms of overweight and obesity. The public and health professionals need to be informed while at the same time making information and services available
- Need to consider changing economic and social environment
- The Forum needs to add value to existing structures. Concern was expressed that it potentially could duplicate the OPSG and the proposed multi-stakeholder group to be established in ROI. A lengthy discussion took place on this. It was suggested that perhaps the group is best placed as an exchange between the NI and ROI groups. It was noted that NI and ROI are at different points in the process and that this Forum may need to wait until both groups are established
- Research is a topical common area. It was suggested that perhaps this group could identify common areas of interest and **safefood** could act as broker. Standardisation of methodology between jurisdictions was highlighted and indeed the standardisation in dietary surveys was acknowledged. In addition the Forum could provide mechanisms for using research information appropriately and timely, e.g. SLAN data in ROI. It was noted that a report from SLAN will be launched in 2009 which looks at North South comparisons
- Food poverty and salt are key areas for consideration
- Division between macro and micro level information should be considered
- Identify how best to engage with parents

***Action Point 2: NI Obesity Prevention Steering Group and ROI Group to be requested to discuss the potential for this forum***

***Action Point 3: safefood to provide Secretariat and establish e-newsletter for Forum***

## **5. Plan for Forum**

In light of the discussions that took place it was decided that a meeting would take place after the first three meetings of the ROI group had taken place. Those present at today's meeting would be invited to this meeting at which future membership, terms of reference and structure would be discussed.

## **6. Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the group will be held in April – date and venue to be confirmed.

## **7. AOB**

None

As there was no further business, the meeting concluded at 1pm