

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING, 8 DECEMBER 2009, AVIATION HOUSE, LONDON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Draft Minutes of the open session held on 8 December 2009 at Aviation House, London, are attached. The full web cast of the meeting is available on the FSA's website.
2. The Board is asked to **confirm** that the Minutes are a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Board Secretariat

Contact: Philip Clarke Tel: 020 7276 8337
Email: philip.clarke@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Aadil Bashir Tel: 020 7276 8001
Email: aadil.bashir@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING, 8 DECEMBER 2009, AVIATION HOUSE, LONDON

OPEN SESSION, 14:30 – 16:55

Present:

Jeff Rooker, Chair
Ian Reynolds
Sue Atkinson
Tim Bennett
David Cameron
Maureen Edmondson
Margaret Gilmore
Clive Grundy
Graeme Millar
Michael Parker
Chris Pomfret
Nancy Robson
John Spence

Officials attending:

Tim Smith, Chief Executive
Andrew Wadge
Terrence Collis
Steve McGrath
Steve Wearne
Philip Clarke
Aadil Bashir
Patrick Miller

Chair's Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed the Board members to the meeting and reminded them of their obligation to declare interests before discussion of relevant items. No apologies of absence had been received.

Item 1 – Minutes and Actions Arising

1.1 – Minutes of Meeting on 10 November 2009, Aviation House

2. The Board members agreed two additions to paragraphs 24 and 32 of the draft minutes:

- *Para 24: “The Chief Executive confirmed that future papers would include and distinguish between the four countries where appropriate.”*
- *Para 32: “The Board was pleased with the reductions in administrative burdens achieved by the FSA despite not reaching the target set. They congratulated the Executive for their good work in achieving these savings without compromising consumer safety. The Board found the examples included in the report helpful in illustrating the points made. The Board also acknowledge the FSA’s work to reduce administrative burdens in its negotiations at the European Commission, for example the Food Information Regulation, and provide evidence accordingly. One Board member requested further information on the primary authority scheme described in the report, specifically the application of the principle to a business that is represented in all four countries of the UK.”*

Action: Andrew Wadge

3. With these amendments, the minutes held on 10 November 2009 were accepted as an accurate record.

1.2 – Actions Arising

4. The Chief Executive informed the Board that Action 440 was not covered in his written report. The results of the research will be ready by the end of March 2010 and an update will be given to the Board in May.

Action: Terrence Collis

5. The Board was content with the actions arising schedule.

Item 2 – Reports

2.1 – Chair’s Report

6. The Chair reminded the Board members that details of his engagements were available on the FSA website. The Chair informed the Board that as of 7 December, the new Strategic Plan was available on both the FSA website and in hard copy and congratulated the staff who had worked hard to realise this achievement.
7. The Chair informed the Board of visits to the Food Advisory Committees in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. He had also attended the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes.

8. The Chair also reported having nearly completed meetings with all eight Health and Rural Affairs ministers in the four countries of the UK.
9. The Chair congratulated Tim Bennett, on behalf of the Board, on being made a Fellow of the Royal Agricultural Societies in respect of his continued significant contributions to agriculture.

2.2 – Chief Executive’s Report

Salmonella in eggs

10. The Chief Executive referred to media reports concerning salmonella in eggs and informed the Board that an update had been published on the Agency’s website on 4 December. The available evidence suggests that the increase in cases of salmonella may be linked to an egg production premises in Spain. The FSA and the Spanish authorities have been working in close co-operation to investigate this case and the salmonella has been identified as being from a particular flock in Spain. Spanish authorities will ensure that no further eggs from the affected flock are distributed until they are satisfied that contamination is no longer present in the flock and barns. The FSA has contacted companies in the UK that are known to have received eggs from the affected establishment to ensure that they do not place these eggs on the market or that they send them to an authorised establishment to be pasteurised. The majority of eggs on sale in shops in the UK are of UK origin, and recent surveys have shown there is a very low incidence of salmonella in UK eggs. Even so, it is not possible to guarantee that any egg will be free from salmonella, whatever the source or brand. It is important that people continue to take care to ensure the safe storage, preparation and cooking of eggs.

Food Policy in a devolved UK

11. The Chief Executive attended a meeting on 16 – 17 November, organised by the College of St George in Windsor, on food policy in a devolved UK. The meeting brought together for the first time four groups of advisors from outside government who have been appointed by Ministers in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast and London to assist in their formulation of food policy. It was a very productive discussion, which was conducted under Chatham House rules. He noted that food issues are high on the agenda in all four countries of the UK and that it was helpful to share intelligence and experience.

Consumer Stakeholder Forum

12. The Chief Executive chaired a meeting of the Consumer Stakeholder Forum on 23 November. The Chair was also in attendance for the start of the meeting and met with a wide range of stakeholders attending the Forum. Stakeholders were given updates on the GM dialogue, Scores on the Doors, the consultation on saturated fat reduction and providing calorie information for consumers at point of choice.

National Institute of Clinical Excellence

13. The Chief Executive and Gill Fine (Director of Consumer Choice and Dietary Health), attended a meeting on 27 November with the Chief Executive of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE), and his Public Health Excellence Centre Director, Mike Kelly. This was an initial meeting and a very productive discussion took place around issues of mutual interest, in particular the work both organisations are doing to help tackle cardiovascular disease where their draft advice and ours are not aligned. Regular meetings will now take place.

Which?

14. The Chief Executive had met Helen McCallum, Head of Policy, Campaigns and Communications and Sue Davies, Principal Policy Advisor, from Which? on 1 December. The meeting was very useful and centred on the many and varied food issues that Which? has an interest in. Most helpfully, discussion took place on how Which? could engage its membership to participate in meetings and respond to consultations.

SACN Draft Report on Energy Requirements

15. A concern was raised as to whether the SACN advice would have implications for the numerical data used on Front of Pack labelling and the Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs). The Chief Executive said that this would need to be considered later once SACN had considered the results of the consultation and finalised its advice. However, in the interim, the rising incidence of overweight and obesity in the population was evidence enough of calorie imbalance.

Local Authority engagement and Food Safety Culture

16. The Board asked if co-funding for both these work strands could be encouraged from local authorities and partners. The Chief Executive replied that joint funding was something he welcomed and informed the Board that a body will be created to oversee the work on the engagement between the local and national regulators who also have an interest in food issues and the FSA. Once membership has been established, jointly funded exercises would be likely to take place.

Review of FSA Response to Incidents involving Dioxins in Meat

17. The Board asked if the Chief Executive had considered the Board's role in terms of incidents and communicating them. The Chief Executive replied that a simulated incident will be "road tested", involving both a devolved country and a third member state. This will help test communication channels at all levels.

Consultation on Calorie Evaluation

18. The Board sought reassurance that there would be a commonality of direction of approach in helping consumers make healthier choices. The Chief Executive replied that the intent is to start and finish with a single approach.

Consultation on Saturated Fat: Phase Two

19. The Board asked for information on the FSA's views on the interaction between "claims" legislation and work being done to reduce saturated fats in products, as industry report that this prevents them reporting their work to consumers. The Chief Executive said that the Executive would get back to the Board. He stated, however, that the FSA certainly wants industry to highlight work they are doing to reduce saturated fats and was happy to praise such businesses on the FSA website.

Action: Gill Fine

Scores on the Doors: Update

20. In response to a query from the Board, a clear description of which types of butchers that sell ready-to-eat cooked food that will be included in the National Scores on the Doors scheme will be circulated to the Board.

Action: Andrew Wadge

21. The Board sought clarification on local authorities' concerns about mapping of 'broad compliance' (scores of 10/10/10 from the *Code of Practice*) to the equivalent of the three star position in the national Scores on the Doors scheme. The Chief Executive explained that it is clear that a range of standards are currently being scored against the 10 points in each category by some local authorities, and it is the establishments at the lower end of this range that local authorities do not want to get three stars. The Agency will be working with local authorities to develop the guidance and training in order to achieve consistency in applying these scores. The Chief Executive also highlighted the need to be clear about the effect scores equivalent to three stars will have on consumer behaviour and explained that the Agency will be conducting further research to identify the best way of communicating the scores and the food hygiene standards they represent at each level.

Food Hygiene Delivery Programme

22. A Board member was concerned about what responsibility for training professional bodies should take. The Chief Executive replied that it was in the interests of the FSA in terms of enforcement of food safety to seek ownership by the local regulators and that a key objective was for them to work with the FSA in investing in such services. The responsibility of the professional body for environmental health skills and training should not be overlooked in this.
23. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Board to receive substantive updates from the Food Hygiene Delivery Board before May. There will also be an annual update.

Action: Andrew Wadge/Catherine Bowles

Item 3 – Discussion Items

3.1 – The Food Standards Agency New Science and Evidence Strategy 2010 – 2015

24. The Chair explained to the Board that the Agency has developed a new Science and Evidence Strategy in conjunction with the new Strategic Plan. The aims of the new Science and Evidence Strategy are to set out how the Agency will use science and evidence to meet the challenges of delivering *safe food and healthy eating for all* to support delivery of the Strategic Plan 2010 – 2015 and inform future strategy beyond 2015. He then introduced Andrew Wadge (Chief Scientist), and Patrick Miller (Head of Science Strategy and Governance), to explain the paper and its context.
25. The Chief Scientist described how resources available for research will align with the new Strategic Plan. He noted that in the past he had reported a total spend of about £21 million and that it was now at £26 million. He explained that this was because a broad view had been taken to capture all the evidence that the FSA funds and that the figure now includes statutory monitoring work, such as on shellfish and other foodstuffs, which costs approximately £5 million. The Chief Executive noted that £5 million made this sum now look inconsistent in relation to the decision on Meat Controls (made by the Board last month) and the Board would be asked to reflect on this in the future.
26. The Chief Scientist elaborated further on the scope for partnerships and cross-funding of research with other bodies. He explained that currently 20 - 24% of food related research is co-funded by external bodies but given the economic climate he agreed that, without hard work and careful resource management, maintaining the proportion of spend would be difficult. He gave examples of co-funding and said one of his key priorities was to secure joint funding with research bodies. The Board was also told that as part of the Chief Scientist's Annual Report, all co-funded projects and details of the partners the FSA is working with are listed. Details can be found on the FSA website at (<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/researchpolicy/chiefsci/csreps/>).
27. It was agreed that information on the range of co-funded science projects would be sent to the Board.

Action: Andrew Wadge

28. The Chief Scientist gave a number of examples of co-funded initiatives currently underway in the UK. The Board asked if the Chief Scientist saw any difficulty in commissioning these longer term cross-cutting challenges in terms of getting reliable evidence in a timely manner. He said an additional step would be added

to the commissioning process so that proposals would be shared with the scientific community to ensure that the FSA is undertaking the right work; to reduce duplication; and to promote opportunities for joined-up working. He also agreed that the FSA should link better into the long term projects and funding around food security and its links to food safety and dietary health.

29. The Board raised the issues of climate change and obesity and asked about synergies between these different agendas. The Chief Scientist agreed it was challenging but that the key was to focus on behavioural research.

30. The Board welcomed the Science and Evidence Strategy and agreed to its publication, subject to bringing out more clearly the approach to the following issues :

- risk and monitoring of evidence should be highlighted;
- mention of development of new technology;
- reference to finance and partnership;
- reflection of evaluation and post-event evaluation;
- clearer links to recommendations made in the Pennington Report; and
- make clear in presenting information about future spend and priorities that the budget for food safety is not in decline.

3.2 – Communications Annual Report

31. Terrence Collis (Director of Communications), announced that the Agency had, that same day, won a 'Plain English' award for its leaflet on Listeria entitled, 'If you're over 60...'

32. The Director began his report to the Board with a short DVD that highlighted the main activities over the last year.

33. The Board welcomed the achievements set out in the paper. The Chair commented that 47 staff being interviewed on the TV and radio in the past year was impressive.

34. The Board asked about the email food alert system and wondered if the right people were being targeted. The Director replied that members of the public, journalists, stakeholders etc and anyone interacting with the Agency had the opportunity to sign up to these alerts. The objective was to maximise the number of people signing up for this service. He also clarified that there was a separate system for local authorities and another for allergen sufferers.

35. A Board member asked if science and evidence messages could be conveyed in a better way on the FSA website to inform the public. The Director replied that the FSA endeavoured to explain “the science behind the story” on the website as informatively as possible. He cited the success of the Chief Scientist’s blog, which was followed by many science commentators. The Chief Scientist confirmed that the purpose of the blog is to explore the science behind the stories.
36. A Board member said that it was important to note that not all stakeholders had the same positive view of the FSA’s handling of the Dioxin incident. The FSA’s review of its handling of the incident highlighted where improvements could be made and these were being addressed.
37. A Board member asked about sponsorship of ‘Family Supercooks’ and requested an evaluation of the impact of the programme. The Director said that evidence showed advertiser-funded programming, already used by other government departments such as the Department of Health, was a good avenue for getting messages across and that there would be an evaluation and a report back to the Board on the programme.

Action: Terrence Collis

38. The Board praised the FSA website but felt it might have become too large and unwieldy. The Director agreed that the website was complex because of its size. He said he was very keen to make the website as simple to use as possible and stated that some user-feasibility work had begun.
39. The Director said that work to update the FSA brand would be a “refresh” rather than a rework. This was important to make sure it fitted better with progress made in the last ten years in electronic communication and to take into account the merger with the MHS.
40. A Board member praised the increased awareness of the FSA over the last 10 years (currently at 79%), and asked if the Executive was using this research sufficiently. The Chief Executive responded by saying that there was work to be done as 21% of the population were not aware of the FSA. The Board agreed that for 79% to be aware of the FSA was remarkable and that it should be recognised as a positive achievement.
41. With regard to people’s confidence in food safety measures, the Chief Executive felt that 64% was categorically not good enough and that his ambition was for the FSA to be above 80%. However, he cited that from a 40% base when the graph started, the current figure of 64% was a dramatic shift. The Chair also stated the increase in confidence in the way food safety measures were being presented was a success on the part of Communications.

42. The Director explained that the Social Science Team monitor and analyse this data. He informed the Board that a new survey is in development which will replace the Consumer Attitudes survey and this will look in much more detail at the data on consumers' opinions and will underpin the Communications Strategy he is developing.
43. The Board asked whether the GM Dialogue Steering Group could update the Board on their work. The Director stated that the Steering Group will update the board in the near future.

Action: Andrew Wadge/Alison Gleadle

44. Overall the Board welcomed the DVD and were impressed with the work and activities of the Communications Group, considering the funds that they had and the number of activities involved. Particular mention was made of the FSA staff that had been involved in TV and radio interviews, citing that they all came across extremely well. The consensus from the Board was that they would wish in the future to see a forward looking report that linked with the 2010 – 2015 Strategy and one that outlined lessons learnt. The Chief Executive said that this report was a review and that in 2010 there would be a Communications Strategy Paper coming to the Board.

Action: Terrence Collis

Item 4 – Any Other Business

45. The Chair and Board thanked Vivienne Collette (Director of Legal Services), for her work and service and congratulated her on her forthcoming retirement from the Agency and Civil Service.

Date of next meeting

46. The next open meeting would be held in London on 26 January 2010.