

**Scottish Food Advisory Committee**  
**29 April 2009**  
**FSA Scotland's office, St Magnus House, Aberdeen**  
**Open Session**

Present

Committee Members:

Prof. Graeme Millar - Chair  
David Cameron  
Charlotte Maltin  
Moyra Burns  
Carrie Ruxton  
Amanda O'Donoghue  
Christopher Trotter  
Lesley Stanley  
Bernard Forteach  
Jim Wildgoose

FSA Officials:

George Paterson, Director FSAS  
Lydia Wilkie, Assistant Director, FSAS  
Jim Thomson, Assistant Director, FSAS  
Melanie Martin, Committee Secretary, FSAS  
Neil Douglas, Committee Administrator, FSAS  
Sandy McDougall, Head of Contaminants, Hygiene, Additives and Shellfish Branch, FSAS  
Alisdair Wotherspoon, FSA Chief Scientists team, FSA Headquarters

**1 CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME**

1. The Chair welcomed members, guests and observers to the open meeting of the Scottish Food Advisory Committee (SFAC). The Committee was pleased to be in Aberdeen.
2. The role of SFAC is to provide advice to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) on all food safety and standards matters, in particular those with specific Scottish perspective. The Agency in turn has to fully consider the Committees views when determining its actions and the policy advice it gives to Ministers. Food issues are devolved to Scottish Ministers and legislation is implemented by the Scottish Parliament. This Committee is an essential element to the Agency to ensure that devolution is fully taken into account. The Committee holds regular meetings throughout Scotland.
3. Members of the Committee were invited to declare any conflicts of interest on specific areas before they are discussed to allow a decision to be taken on whether participation would be correct.
4. **Charlotte Maltin declared an interest in Agenda item 4 through her employment in the meat industry. Charlotte also declared an interest as Chair of the Audit Advisory Committee in Scotland.**
5. **Lesley Stanley declared an interest in Agenda items 3 and 5 as she acts as a programme advisor for a toxicology research programme to the Food Standards Agency. She also used to be on the Committee on Toxicity for 6 years.**
6. The Chair asked for items of AOB. No matters were raised.

7. There were apologies from John Cowden, Committee member.
8. The Chair welcomed Charles Milne who was sitting in the audience. The Chair informed everyone Charles Milne would assume the role as FSA Scotland Director on 1 June 2009.

## **2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

9. The Chair directed the Committee to the minutes from the previous meeting on 17 March 2009.
10. The Chair discharged the following actions:-

### **Under Para 28 Page 6**

The Committee Secretary amended the Committee's sub group response to the FSA Scotland consultation on the 'proposed changes to charging arrangements and charging levels for official meat controls carried out in Scotland', by incorporating the points made during the discussion at the 17 March open meeting. The amended response was then circulated to the Committee for comments and final agreement.

The Committee Secretary submitted the final Committee response to the Agency on the 25 March.

### **Under Para 50 Page 13**

The Committee Secretary drafted the Committee response to the consultation on the 'Review of Agency's advice on fish consumption', by incorporating the points made during the discussion at the 17 March open meeting. The draft response was then circulated to the Committee for comments and final agreement.

The Committee Secretary submitted the final Committee response to the Agency on the 31 March.

11. Members agreed the minute was a true and accurate reflection of the meeting held on 17 March 2009.

## **ITEM 3**

### **CONSULTATION ON THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY STRATEGY FOR 2010 TO 2015**

12. The Chair welcomed George Paterson, Director of FSA Scotland. The purpose of the Agenda item was for the Committee to agree how they wished to handle their response to the consultation.
13. George Paterson gave a presentation on the FSA Strategic Plan which covered the following areas:-
  - Strategic Planning Timeline
  - Strategic Plan architecture
    - Purpose
    - Objectives
    - Outcomes
    - Priority activities (measures to be developed)
  - Consultation questions

14. The Chair thanked George for the presentation, and informed the Committee that at this stage they were invited to have a discussion around some of the aspects of the consultation and provide their views. The Chair confirmed the deadline for responses to the Agency consultation was the 5 June, and suggested the Committee agree their response at the open meeting on the 3 June. This would allow the Committee more opportunity for further discussions. The Chair opened the discussion to the Committee, and asked them to also consider the Scottish context of the consultation.
15. Members of the Committee raised the following initial comments on the consultation:-
  - They felt disappointed the consultation document did not have a section at the beginning on the likely food scenarios that we may have for the period 2010 to 2015. It would have been helpful to have a background and position in the document in terms of food safety and food issues, and the kind of challenges that are likely to be faced.
  - They felt the need for fast action in crisis was not addressed very clearly in this document. The need to move quickly, and be adaptable and flexible in a crisis needed to be highlighted more.
  - On the objective of improving food safety of 'food produced or sold in the UK is safe to eat', with regards to foodborne disease from a Scottish point of view, it was felt that addressing fish and shellfish may be desirable in terms of importance to Scotland.
  - With regards to Figure 1: the Strategic Plan architecture triangle, they felt this diagram should have also included the elements of evaluation and monitoring as they are important to the overall strategy. It was important that we know the Agency were achieving their aims and objectives so ongoing evaluation and monitoring would be helpful for this purpose.
  - On the objective to improve food safety, foodborne disease was discussed at the 4 February 2009 open meeting where it had been highlighted that norovirus was emerging and causing more problems than they were really aware of. It was suggested this should be considered as part of the strategy going forward.
  - With regards to Annex B: table 1 on the estimates of the main public health risks, members found the table difficult to understand and interpret as trends, as it crossed data from 2006 and 2007. Also, it was meant to be a UK report but the table only covered data from England and Wales when there was data available for Scotland from Health Protection Scotland (HPS).
  - On paragraphs 41 to 46 under Science, Evidence and Analysis Needs, members felt this did not adequately represent the way in which the science was being handled in the Agency, in terms of the GO- Science Review. Members found it difficult to answer the key questions set out in this section.
  - On Annex B: outcome HE3, members wondered whether the Agency may be bringing in the Social Science Unit to find out a bit more on the behavioural side of consumers. Members were keen to see the Social Science Unit having a greater role in helping to understand behaviours and then perhaps target the FSA's promotional campaigns more effectively.

- Members mentioned that obesity was a nutritional related disease that now affected many adults across the UK, and it seemed that nobody was taking a lead on tackling this issue in Scotland. Members would like to see the Agency saying more about obesity in terms of what they can do to help to reduce the risk.
  - On Annex B: dietary health, it stated that the number of people 65 years-old and over would increase modestly by 2015 but substantially by 2035, which would increase diet related disease burden. This may provide an opportunity to get ahead of the game and members suggested the Agency considered the needs and implications of the ageing population before we get to 2035. Perhaps the FSA Strategy for 2010 to 2015 could give us a chance to start a body of work to understand what an ageing population means and what the requirements for those individuals are.
  - Members felt food business operators should be encouraged to provide healthier choices on their menus as eating out is a factor which contributes to obesity. Members recognised some business already had the Healthyliving Award.
  - Members felt the onus should be on early education so people understand automatically what is good for them and what is not good for them from an early age.
  - Members felt proportionality was as important as people understanding what a balanced diet is. Also, they felt providing more information was not necessarily better, and perhaps we needed to look at the current information again before bombarding consumers with more new information.
  - Members queried if the Healthyliving award would continue for the period covered by the FSA Strategy document.
16. The Chair informed the Committee he was a member of the David Hume Institute and they had just completed a major survey of the demographics for the ageing population. The Chair would issue a copy to Secretariat for distribution to the Committee as he felt the Committee would find the report useful.
  17. David Cameron, SFAC member confirmed the Healthyliving Award would continue for the period covered by the FSA Strategy document, and from 2010 there would be a higher award.
  18. Lydia Wilkie, Assistant Director of FSA Scotland thanked the Committee for their helpful comments. The Agency needed to get views on the Scottish angle for the FSA Strategy for 2010 to 2015 document. Lydia Wilkie also informed the Committee that tackling obesity was not purely for the Agency as food was only one of many factors that contributed to the cause of obesity.
  19. The Chair opened the debate to observers for questions and comments - .

#### **MARY LAWTON – CONSUMER FOCUS SCOTLAND**

**Mary Lawton was pleased that FSA Scotland would continue to support the Scottish Scores on the Doors scheme, and hoped FSA Scotland would continue to support the Healthyliving Award.**

**Mary referred to the statement under ‘priorities across food safety and to improve the balance of the diet’ on page 11 of the consultation document – Increase**

**understanding of how to change behaviour. She suggested they also needed to sustain the behaviour as well as change it.**

**Mary also welcomed the initiative to get more involved in EU discussions and influence them, particularly with respect to the draft Scottish Food and Drink Policy, and also the discussions that were going on for the food information to the consumer regulation for country of origin labelling.**

The Chair thanked Mary Lawton for her comments. The Agency was conscious of its lack of presence in the EU environment and therefore they were trying to find a very senior individual who could represent for the Agency in Europe.

#### **HUGH GALBRAITH – UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

**In relation to chemical hazards, Hugh Galbraith queried whether all chemical hazards were as well controlled as was being suggested as he recognised there would always be cocktail effects.**

**There had been a lot of debate about pesticides in the EU, and Hugh asked what the view of the Agency was on advising consumers on pesticides.**

**Hugh was also intrigued by the reference to obesity and the psychology of obesity. As well as looking at social aspect on a population basis, it may also be worth looking at motivation for individuals, for finding out how you would encourage individuals to make better choices for food consumption.**

Lesley Stanley reassured Hugh Galbraith that although the FSA Strategy consultation document did not place a great deal of emphasis on the cocktail effects, pesticides and endocrine disruptors, the FSA as a whole was putting a very strong emphasis on this as part of their toxicology research programmes. Lesley was personally involved with programmes looking at effects of mixtures of endocrine disruptors and mixtures of pesticides and what the implications of those were in terms of consumer safety. This was ongoing work.

Jim Thomson, Assistant Director FSA Scotland clarified that the actual chemical contamination figure of 660, on table 1 under Annex B of the consultation document was sourced from the Agency's incident database. All incidents were recorded so this was a factual figure, although there was a wider picture beyond these figures.

#### **DAVID ATKINSON – SCOTTISH CHURCHES RURAL GROUP**

**David Atkinson referred to the Committee's earlier discussion about the importance of unpredictable risks which did not appear anywhere in the consultation document but could perhaps have as great an impact as other issues, and made reference to the current swine flu issue. Somewhere in the document there should be consideration on how to deal with these sudden risks.**

The Chair thanked David Atkinson for his comments and informed him he had made a good point. The Chair also recognised David Atkinson as Chair of workstream 5 for the Scottish Food and Drink Policy.

## **IAN ANDERSON – SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION OF MEAT WHOLESALERS**

Ian Anderson felt the consultation document was reasonably good. However, he felt there was a gap as it talked a lot about risk based and proportionate decision making but little reference about the economic realities of running businesses. There was only a very brief reference in paragraph 39.

Ian felt the FSA UK needed to be more risk based than they currently were before they translated into the debate in Europe.

Ian felt the BSE reference on page 20 did not look risk based as he felt there was far greater risk for consumers from other food issues than from BSE, due to the decline of the disease. The document talked about moving BSE from very low to negligible risk, would the next step be 0% risk.

On page 21, in terms of modelling the impact of reducing controls, a lot of this work had already been done and it portrayed a slight lack of urgency as if they were going to start with a blank sheet of paper on this area. Ian would like to see some of the risk based work speeded up to help the economics of the industry which needed the help in the current climate.

The Chair thanked Ian Anderson for his comments. The Chair assured Ian the Agency would not be starting with a blank sheet of paper and that the Strategic Plan would hit the ground running on work which had already taken place up to 2010 and going forward. The Chair recognised that a debate needed to take place in the UK and in Europe around BSE controls.

## **HARRY MCARDLE – ROWETT INSTITUTE**

When the emphasis has been placed on a healthy diet, Harry McArdle felt we did not specify what a healthy diet was and when it is a healthy diet, as it is very different depending on the life stages of individuals. He felt it was important that in the FSA Strategy life-stage nutrition was explicitly mentioned should be an area that the FSA considered of significant importance.

The Chair thanked Harry McArdle for his comment and he felt it was very valid.

20. The Committee agreed how they would progress and handle their response to the consultation -
  - By forming a sub group of up to 5 members of the Committee.
  - The sub group members would meet in early May to discuss and formulate a response to the consultation.
  - The agreed sub group response would then be circulated to the other Committee members for comments in advance of the SFAC meeting on 3 June 2009.
  - The draft Committee response would then be taken to the SFAC meeting on 3 June 2009 for final agreement from the Committee.

**ACTION - The Chair will issue a copy of a David Hume Institute survey regarding the demographics for the ageing population to Secretariat, for distribution to the Committee.**

**ACTION – To form a sub group of up to 5 members of the Committee. The sub group members to meet early May to discuss and formulate a response to the FSA Strategy for 2010 to 2015 consultation.**

**ACTION - The agreed sub group response to the FSA Strategy for 2010 to 2015 to be circulated to the other Committee members for comments in advance of the SFAC meeting on 3 June 2009. The draft Committee response to be taken to the SFAC meeting on 3 June 2009 for final agreement from the Committee.**

**ITEM 4  
THE PUBLIC ENQUIRY INTO THE SEPTEMBER 2005 OUTBREAK OF E.COLI 0157 IN  
SOUTH WALES**

21. The Chair welcomed Sandy McDougall, Head of Contaminants, Hygiene, Additives and Shellfish branch, FSAS to the table. The Chair informed everyone that Professor Hugh Pennington headed up on this public enquiry.
22. Sandy McDougall introduced the paper on the initial FSA response to the E.Coli Public Enquiry Report and Recommendations, which had been discussed at the 21 April 2009 open FSA Board meeting. The paper set out the major areas where action had already been taken and explained that the FSA would establish a programme to develop a full action plan. The Board paper was not a detailed action plan as this would be developed primarily by a Programme Board and they were due to meet on 21 May for the first time. It had been agreed that a detailed action plan would be presented at the open July Board meeting. It was the FSA's intention to feed the comments from this open meeting into the first meeting of the Programme Board. Sandy asked the Committee for comments on the content of the Inquiry Report and on any aspect of the work to help shape future direction, in particular on section 13 regarding the programme managed delivery of outcomes which could be found on page 5.
23. The Chair thanked Sandy for introducing the paper, and asked the Committee to provide their observations and questions on the content of the Inquiry Report –
  - Members recognised from the report that the incident occurred due to ongoing deficiencies and failures in the system, and that it was not just a sudden disaster. Members were concerned that many Agencies seemed to get the enforcement wrong at the same time.

Members made an observation with regards to school meals as they were aware that on occasion large contracts would be let but not audited.

They felt the Agencies needed to make sure the audits were happening regardless of the size of contract as a single incident could occur from very small consequence or very small activity. In striving to improve the connectivity and delivery mechanisms between companies in Scotland and the public sector, the Government needed to recognise that all the checks and balances need to be in place so the public were protected.

- Members felt due to the nature of all the people involved and all the links in the chain that lead up to an incident occurring, it would require constant vigilance to prevent further incidents and this would be a challenge.

- Members were concerned when they read recommendation 6: “The FSA should remove the confusion that exists among food business operators about what solution(s) should be used to prevent cross contamination from surfaces to equipment.” It was felt that everyone involved in the food sector should know their responsibilities and that it should be properly controlled.
  - Members also had concerns about recommendation 7: “Regulatory and enforcement bodies should keep the choice of “light touch” enforcement for individual food businesses under constant review.” Members felt there was a need to get away from the idea that enforcement was light touch. Enforcement needed to be fit for purpose, and they felt fit for purpose was not light touch.
  - Members acknowledged that over 70 Environmental Health Officers (EHO’s) had been through a weeks additional HACCP training in Scotland last year. They commented that in Scotland there seemed to be an ongoing training programme that the Agency was running, and this was helpful.
  - Members referred to the recommendations given by Hugh Pennington in Chapter 18 of The Public Enquiry into the September 2005 Outbreak of E.coli 0157 in South Wales report. Under 18.4, the recommendation stated all food business operators should take note of this report. It was felt this was an important message and could the Agency help to make this recommendation possible. Although the report was large it was felt it was in a very readable accessible language and that there was a lot to be learned by those who read the report.
  - It was also noted that E.coli 0157 was not included in the FSA Strategy consultation document, which was unfortunate given this report. In the report, the recommendations given by Hugh Pennington under 18.6 stated that E.coli 0157 should be at the top of an operator’s agenda as far as risks are concerned. If procedures can prevent it from causing infection, then they can be expected to prevent most other forms of food poisoning as well. Members felt this was a very important message and that this should be included in the FSA Strategy document.
  - With regards to section 13 of the Board paper on improving our understanding of the science, members were aware many of the Agency staff were scientists and may not have first hand experience of some of the challenges and pressures of the food industry. Members wondered if there was opportunity to second staff to different sectors of the food industry for trial periods, for reality education purposes.
  - Members felt the Programme Board should be looking at the whole report as well as the recommendations however they were sure that this was the case.
24. As Chair of FSA Scotland Audit Advisory Committee Charlotte Maltin, SFAC member commented one of the key things that seemed to have come out of this was about communication, education and joined up approach. She felt one of the great benefits of the Audit Advisory Committee in Scotland was that it allowed the Local Authorities and the Environmental Officer’s to get together and to discuss issues together. This meant the partnership working between the Agency, the Local Authorities, Trading Standards and the EHO’s was quite good. The overarching discussion forum in this situation would be helpful to look at implementing reality checks, which she believed Scotland, were already doing. The issues that Hugh Pennington raised suggested that we need better communication at that level.

25. The Chair asked Jim Thomson, Assistant Director, FSA Scotland to inform the Committee and the audience in attendance of the Audit Advisory Committee's role and what its membership looked like.
26. Jim Thomson, Assistant Director, FSA Scotland informed the Committee that early on when the audit was starting, it was recognised in Scotland that it would be useful to have a communication forum for FSA Scotland, for the Enforcement Community, Enforcement Professionals and for the consumer to get a feel for how the audit was going. Once the audits were up and running its role was to look at trends, training and any issues that arose and this had been useful over the years. At the end of the audit programme they used this information as a learning tool to go onto the next audit round. One area that had been identified was reality checks on the ground. The work was ongoing and Charlotte Maltin had chaired the Committee to help to pull it all together.
27. The Chair informed Charlotte Maltin as Chair of the Audit Advisory Committee in Scotland, it may be useful for the Committee to have a look at some of the recommendations that relate to the role that they play to remind the players around the table we all have to work together on this; we lay out the contracts for Local Authorities and we don't devolve the responsibility. It would give them something to look at as a group and to acknowledge whether there are any areas in these recommendations that were appropriate to the environment in Europe.
28. Charlotte Maltin mentioned that they were planning to have a meeting after the current round of reality checks so they could look at the lessons learned there as well.
29. Jim Thomson added that the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee (SFELC), which was the wider Committee that looks at enforcement, would also be considering this at their meetings over the coming months. Jim mentioned that David Cameron, SFAC member, was a member of SFELC.
30. The Chair opened the debate to observers for questions and comments - .

#### **DOUGLAS SCOTT – SCOTTISH FEDERATION OF MEAT TRADERS ASSOCIATION**

**Douglas Scott commented after the 1996 Lanarkshire outbreak, Scottish butchers don't need any reminder on the need to protect the public and that butchers welcomed the butchers licensing scheme and were actually opposed to the removal of the butchers licensing. It seemed every E.coli outbreak was being used to remind consumers about the shortcomings of butchers and they did not want continuing derogatory remarks about butchers. The South Wales incident was far from the size of even a high street butcher therefore it was disappointing that butchers were again being dragged through the media because of it. They would encourage enforcers to work on ensuring that no further bad publicity days were on the horizon for butchers.**

**With regards to HACCP plans, when butchers licensing was introduced there was a great onus on making sure that every business HACCP plan was particular to it. EHO's did not like ones that looked as if they had been drawn up generically. This in itself made it difficult for EHO's to come in to businesses to look at HACCP plans. He felt it must be even more difficult to come in now and look at hundreds of different HACCP plans so there may be a need to have them drafted in a way that enforcers could quickly get to grips with what a HACCP plan looked like.**

The Chair thanked Douglas Scott for his comments. He recalled that butchers licensing scheme was welcomed by butchers and was seen as a form of protection. With regards to the bad publicity for butchers, the Chair was sure the FSA would also have to look at this in the way it responds to make sure the types and natures of business are mentioned and that they don't use the generic term 'butchers'.

#### **DAVID ATKINSON – SCOTTISH CHURCHES RURAL GROUP**

**David Atkinson referred to earlier comments made about people working together and learning from each other. There seemed to be a degree of commonality in terms of problem here, between the meat handling industry and the NHS. The NHS had recently put major emphasis upon the importance of people washing their hands well and frequently as although this was obvious hygiene it is something which too often got forgotten. There may be something to be learned here and it may be useful to join up with others to learn from each other and work together on getting messages across regarding basic hygiene. With regards to school education, if you start the basic hygiene messages in schools, then it could move on to have significant input and would just become part of how you do things.**

The Chair thanked David Atkinson for his comments. He informed David that one of the recommendations did relate to schools, and the provision of fresh water and hand washing facilities in all schools, so this must have been an area that had been identified. With regards to the NHS, it would be useful to see how successful their messages regarding hand washing were becoming as some hospitals were better than others at doing this.

The Chair commented that we could not afford to give a response to the enquiry and hope that another incident does not occur. A resource needs to be put in place to continue to remind and to continue to build on the relationships between the Agencies so that we come and work together better.

#### **DR COLETTE JONES – UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

**Colette Jones was currently working on a multi-disciplinary project, specifically focussing on E.coli 0157 risk in rural areas rather than in food. She had interviewed a large number of people for her project. One of the issues that had come out was that there was an acceptability of a certain level of morbidity and mortality associated with E.coli 0157 which was known throughout the profession but was not spoken openly. Therefore, one of the recommendations may be how affordable was food safety, with regards to E.coli 0157 and whether an open debate is required on this for the sake of the consumers and the industry.**

The Chair thanked Colette Jones for her observation and informed her he would take her observation away and pursue it, as he was not aware of this level of acceptability.

31. Members queried whether there were any opportunities in Scottish policy to emphasise guidance on hand washing for children
32. Lydia Willkie, Assistant Director, FSA Scotland informed the Committee that the input the Agency has had into the new Curriculum for Excellence included the healthy eating and the food hygiene element as well.

**ITEM 5**  
**BREIFING ON OUTCOMES OF THE GO-SCIENCE REVIEW**

33. The Chair welcomed Alisdair Wotherspoon of the FSA's Chief Scientists Team, FSA headquarters, to the table.
34. Alisdair Wotherspoon gave a presentation on the outcome of the Science Review of the Agency by Government Office for Science which covered the following –
- The UK FSA's science
  - Independent review of FSA's science
  - The Science Review
  - The 10 review criteria for the Science Review
  - Science Review: the key messages
  - Science Review: the findings
  - GO-Sc headline recommendations
  - Science Review: next steps
  - Implications for future S&E strategy
35. Alisdair Wotherspoon invited the Committee to consider and comment on the report so their views could be built into the draft FSA response to be considered by the Board at its open meeting on 14 July 2009.
36. The Chair thanked Alisdair for his presentation and information paper, and asked the Committee to provide their observations –

**A - Recommendation 8 of the Review:** The Committee felt this was a good idea and queried whether there would be mechanisms in place to publish these widely. If the FSA was going to take a lot of time and effort to produce Systematic Reviews and meta-analysis, it would be good if the information was disseminated widely, as the information would be useful for other scientists.

**B – Recommendation 7 of the Review:** The Committee felt this was an important recommendation which the Agency covered well however they felt there was more that could be done.

The Committee queried whether the FSA was already looking at the success of projects as it was recognised that funding research was a risky process. Things could go wrong through project management, selection of the topic, or the project may just not work as the plan intended. The Committee queried if the FSA was trying to learn from this.

**C – Recommendation 5 of the Review:** The Committee endorsed the issue of incorporating the social science strategy, as an integral part of the FSA's longer term direction and purpose, as they felt this was very important.

**D – Recommendation 6 of the Review:** The Committee felt it was important in terms of context to have horizon scanning for feedback.

**E – Recommendation 14 of the Review:** The Committee felt it would be difficult to make the functional separation between risk assessment and risk management more transparent. The Review only had a small paragraph on this however they

were given the impression there was a lot of work to be done in this area, and they were doubtful it would be easy to separate those two concepts out. The Committee queried whether there were some thoughts within the Agency regarding this as it was important to be clear about where responsibilities lie.

**F – Recommendation 16 of the Review:** The Committee supported that the FSA should provide more opportunities for formal secondments and two way exchanges. They felt it was essential working in this kind of environment, particularly for the science field, to get some short term experience of what was happening elsewhere.

**G - Recommendation 15 of the Review:** The Committee supported this recommendation. It was felt that this linked into the whole overarching number of recommendations regarding communication with stakeholders, transparency about decision making, and transparency about how research was targeted and commissioned. They thought this would be difficult to do and were interested to find out how the Agency actually formulated the policy to engage with stakeholders at that level.

37. The Chair invited Alisdair Wotherspoon to respond to the following –

**A –** Alisdair confirmed the Agency would want to disseminate the information widely to open it up to further challenge and invite further comment, as well as to show people what the FSA had looked at and what they think.

**B –** Alisdair responded the Agency regularly looked at the success of projects and regular programme reviews. The Agency also encouraged contractors doing work for the FSA to have a regular dialogue with them, so that if things were not working according to plan, they didn't find out at the end when it was too late to take action. For example, it may be useful to redirect the work if the path they were going down was not working. Alisdair emphasised they try to keep or enhance the value of research by taking alternative paths when necessary. It was felt that sometimes they don't get enough dialogue from the contractors, which may be because the contractors were used to being left to get on with the work and that the contractors may also see the dialogue process as a bit of a threat. The FSA see the dialogue process as more of an opportunity. Alisdair recognised there would always be a level of criticism that the Agency do not engage widely enough with external parties. The FSA would continue to try very hard to ensure that they are sourcing a wide range of views and freshen up the ideas that were coming through.

Lesley Stanley added that as part of the assessment process at the end, projects went to at least three people to be assessed with a form to complete. The form will have specific questions on the project, example questions were was it value for money, and what were the implications for the Agency strategy. Also, in terms of project management, both the FSA Secretariat and programme advisors carry out regular site visits to check if projects are on track and they also look at taking alternative paths when it is not working out according to plan.

38. The Chair opened the debate to observers for questions and comments - .

## **HUGH GALBRAITH - UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

In relation to the context of the importance of science and evidence for the outcomes of the Agency, particularly on the reference that 50% of Agency staff have a strong background in the natural and other analytical sciences, Hugh Galbraith queried how the Agency intended to maintain ongoing training for these individuals and perhaps provide some training for the other 50% who were not grounded in science.

Also, recognising the restricted budget the Agency have, Hugh Galbraith queried to what extent the Agency was targeting collaborative work, and becoming involved with other departments with similar aims to the Agency's.

The Chair thanked Hugh Galbraith for his views. The Chair hoped the Agency was well enough sited of other departments with very similar research being carried out, so they could collaborate or leave it up to the other department to concentrate on the research area themselves. This avoided unnecessary duplication of information. The recommendations in the Review seemed honest and sensible but would not necessarily be delivered in the way they would like, due to resource issues.

## **DAVID ATKINSON – SCOTTISH CHURCHES RURAL GROUP**

David Atkinson queried the Agency's thinking in terms of newer means of communication, for example facebook and YouTube, as the younger part of the population now get a fair amount of their information from these kind of resources, rather than publications where the older population go for information. David felt it was important to think about reaching all audiences including the younger population.

The Chair thanked David Atkinson for his views. The Chair agreed the Agency should look towards using newer means of communication to reach all the different audiences. The Chair asked the Agency to clarify if they used other forms of communication to reach a wider audience.

George Paterson, Director of FSA Scotland responded that they do use other forms of communication. For example, Terrence Collis and his team in FSA headquarters, and the small Communications team in Aberdeen were always looking at new ways of communicating, particularly with younger audiences. At Christmas time, they used SMS to get the food hygiene and food safety messages out. The Agency was considering where it is appropriate to use these other forms of communication.

The Chair suggested it may be useful to find out from the Agency's Communication department how much they used alternative forms of communication to reach a wider audience (for example, SMS).

39. The Chair informed the Committee if they had further thoughts on the Review after the open meeting, they could transfer them to Alisdair through the Committee Secretary.

**ACTION – Find out from the Communications team in FSA headquarters how often they use alternative forms of communication to reach a wider audience, for example SMS.**

**ITEM 6  
PUBLIC SESSION / AOCB**

**40. DAVID ATKINSON – SCOTTISH CHURCHES RURAL GROUP**

Regarding the future FSA Strategy document, David Atkinson commented that looking at the period to 2015 and beyond, one of the issues that would inevitably come up was the impact of genetically modified (GM) foods. David mentioned he was not suggesting that current mainline GM foods were either a safety issue or standards issue. However, inevitably as the technology moved on and more GM crops are around, there would be further cases appearing where experimental varieties get into the food chain leading to significant withdrawals of products as a consequence. As more GM crops and varieties are produced, the risk of crops being engineered for means such as vaccines, proteins and industrial chemicals getting mixed into crops in the food chain would become at least a potential risk. Looking ahead to their future strategy, the Agency needed to consider the GM area carefully.

Lydia Wilkie, Assistant Director of FSA Scotland informed David Atkinson in the Cabinet Office Food Matters document there was a recommendation that the public debate on genetic modification is opened up. There was a recommendation that the debate is led by the Agency because of the recognition of the Agency's independent role within central government. The Agency was unaware of the timeline for opening up this debate.

41. The next meeting will be held on the 3 June 2009 in Dundee.

42. The meeting closed at 12.00.

**ACTION - The Chair will issue a copy of a David Hume Institute survey regarding the demographics for the ageing population to Secretariat, for distribution to the Committee.**

**ACTION – To form a sub group of up to 5 members of the Committee. The sub group members to meet early May to discuss and formulate a response to the FSA Strategy for 2010 to 2015 consultation.**

**ACTION - The agreed sub group response to the FSA Strategy for 2010 to 2015 to be circulated to the other Committee members for comments in advance of the SFAC meeting on 3 June 2009. The draft Committee response to be taken to the SFAC meeting on 3 June 2009 for final agreement from the Committee.**

**ACTION – Find out from the Communications team in FSA headquarters how often they use alternative forms of communication to reach a wider audience, for example SMS.**