

**REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE**

**Executive Summary**

1. The attached report provides an update on issues emanating from the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee.
2. The Board is invited to **note** the report by the Chair of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee. **No action** is required.

**Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland**

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**NIFAC Meetings**

1. NIFAC last met on 21 June at the FSANI offices, Belfast. An overview of the Committee's recommendations follows:

***The UK Survey of Hygiene Standards in Food Premises 2005***

2. Members were grateful to Charissa Poynton and Mark Woolfe, FSA Enforcement Division, who presented the results of the UK Survey of Hygiene Standards in Food Premises 2005 in closed session by videoconference. The Committee provided comment and advice as appropriate regarding ways in which the Agency can utilise the results. Namely:
  - The Committee welcomed this 'outcome' based overview measure of the state of food premises in the UK and were especially pleased that 96% of Local Authorities in NI co-operated with the study.
  - The survey should be repeated regularly taking account of the appropriate statistical rules for representative sampling. Considerable progress has been made and it should be monitored on an ongoing basis.
  - It is reassuring that similar studies done in Ireland provide broadly similar results.
  - The fact that catering premises and small retailers presented a greater risk should continue to inform the work on food safety (HACCP, 4C's etc) and enforcement.
  - The data could be further analysed to determine whether good record keeping does in fact improve outcomes, and whether the LA returns made to the FSA mirror the results of this survey.
  - The FSA should be encouraged to investigate further those LA's who did not co-operate in the survey to determine possible causes and whether there are underlying non-co-operations.
  - The publication of these results should be used to create greater awareness of progress made and of progress still to be made.

- The Committee asks how the FSA ‘openness’ agenda will be applied to the publication of these survey results and seeks consistency of approach regarding names of LA’s and businesses/brands.

***Performance Indicators, Auditing and Reporting of Food Safety Enforcement for District Councils in Northern Ireland***

3. The Committee was grateful to Barny Heywood, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Western Group Environmental Health Service for presenting the system proposed by the Northern Ireland Chief Environmental Health Officers Group (CEHOG). The system aims to ensure that the Performance Indicators for food enforcement that are provided to the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland, Local Government Division (LGD), are accurate, consistent and provide outputs to assist improvement. CEHOG would like to use the same data as input for FSA and FVO reports.

4. The following was agreed:

- The Committee welcomed the efforts of Local Authorities in Northern Ireland to establish robust internal performance indicators, to improve their own performance, and to make available their data in support of the FSA external audits.
- The Committee noted the urgent need for the FSA to develop good outcome measures for enforcement that CEHOG want to ‘plug into’ their matrix as soon as possible.
- Systems used by Local Authorities, FSA, and other external audits should be robust, but should be developed to avoid costly duplication and inflexibility.
- The Agency’s revised audit framework must be flexible enough to allow for practical differences at local levels, while maintaining consist consumer protection throughout the UK.
- The Committee encouraged officials to consider possible weighting of scores in the matrix as data comes to light to support the relationship between some measures and good outcomes.
- It was recognised that while the Agency is committed to publishing audit reports, any information published must be in the interest of consumers as stated in the FSA’s openness policy.
- Members were anxious that this revised performance management system in Northern Ireland is maintained and carried over during the transformation from 26 to 7 Local Councils in the wake of the Review of Public Administration.

- Members encouraged the Executive and CEHOG to ensure that the Enforcement team in FSA HQ is aware of this work and its significance to the review of the Enforcement and Audit Frameworks.

### ***Charging for Official Controls for Meat Inspection***

5. Members were grateful to Mr David Hart, Head of Meat Hygiene Business and Meat Plant Approvals, who led the pre-consultation discussion on possible changes to the current charging arrangements for meat hygiene controls, and the possible introduction of charges for Specified Risk Materials. The Committee agreed the following:
  - The FSA is not a market support organisation and should not subsidise industry organisations in the execution of their clear responsibility for production of safe food.
  - Expenditure should be more appropriately aligned across all of the Agency's strategic priorities, particularly those relating to improving consumers' food skills (safety, cooking and nutrition). Therefore any savings from changes to meat hygiene charging must be capable of being retained by the Agency for allocation to other programmes in the strategic plan.
  - The proposals fit with the Government's broader principles on cost-sharing.
  - The FSA's proposals of:
    - phasing in increased charges for meat hygiene controls
    - introducing charging for SRM controls
    - whilst unequivocally reducing the costs of the controls were approved of in principle, subject to
      - satisfactory sustainability assessment (social, environmental and economic) in each of the UK regions and a
      - Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) which should take account of the wider European situation. This is especially important to NI sharing a land border with another Member State.
  - The committee further expressed concern that the producers should not be in the position of subsidising the Competent Authorities in the exercise of their statutory duties.

- Parallels must be maintained between the MHS and DARD regarding the roles and responsibilities of any changes made to the current arrangements.

### ***HACCP Update for NIFAC Members***

6. The Committee was grateful to Trevor Williamson, Head of FSANI Head of General Food Hygiene and Incidents, and Kathryn Baker, FSANI General Food Hygiene and Incidents for their presentations updating NIFAC on the implementation of HACCP Requirements in the food premises in Northern Ireland. In conclusion:

- The Committee recognised and welcomed the leadership given by FSA NI in developing HACCP guidelines and the considerable progress made.
- The Committee endorsed the Agency's focus on the catering and small business sector for promotion of HACCP. Much has been achieved but it is a major concern that some premises have made no attempt to implement HACCP.
- Budgetary restraints are a clear challenge to the Agency. FSANI must be flexible in its approach to obtaining funding and should explore options around partnership, charging and sponsorship provided that FSA retains ownership of content.
- Members welcomed the different translations of HACCP packs and encouraged the Agency to translate further, widening the use of HACCP packs in the international community.
- The Committee asked for clarification on HACCP guidance for occasional events, although it is clear from the EU guidelines that there is considerable flexibility in implementation.
- Northern Ireland consumers must be provided with the same level of protection as GB consumers. The Committee welcomed the support that FSA HQ has given in relation to the SFBB for retailer packs, but were concerned that although Safe Catering is available on the website, FSA NI and Local Authorities were not in a position to provide further hard copies unless additional funding was obtained.

### **Meetings with Others**

7. The Chairman has met with a number of stakeholders during the period. For details please see the Board Member Engagements paper number SO 06/07/04.

### **Future NIFAC meetings**

8. The programme and provisional agenda for future meetings of the Committee is described below.

DATE	EVENT	POTENTIAL TOPICS
6 September	Open meeting, FSANI offices, Belfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nanotechnology (closed session)</li></ul>
25 October	Open meeting, Enniskillen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To be confirmed</li></ul>
26 October	Committee Retreat, Enniskillen	
29 November	Open meeting, Agri-food and Bio Sciences Institute (AFBI), Belfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To be confirmed</li></ul>