

Summary Report of 12 June 2023 Business Committee Meeting

INFO 23-06-02

The Committee considered the following:

Chief Executive's Report to the Business Committee (FSA BC 23-06-03)

The Chief Executive (CE) updated Members on senior resourcing; and the launch of the People plan, including refreshed ASPIRE (Accountable, Supportive, Professional, Inclusive, Ready, Evolving) values.

The three work areas emerging from the roundtable meetings with industry, following stakeholder and media interest in Operation Hawk, were planned for completion around September.

On the recent announcement of the cost-of-living payment to all civil servants noted in the Report, the committee was updated on next steps. The pay awareness information sessions had been well received by staff.

In response to questions from a member about possible increases in rates of Avian Influenza (AI) cases after the summer, it was explained that animal health issues were a Defra lead and noted that AI was a global issue affecting the poultry industry everywhere.

Members raised questions around resource capacity following changes to the Retained EU Law (REUL) Bill as well as measures of productivity.

On REUL it was explained that a very small amount of resource had been freed following changes to the REUL Bill but this was now allocated to the priority areas on the Windsor Framework and the border Target Operating Model (TOM). Much of the work, which would have been needed had there not been changes to the Bill, had also already been completed when the changes were announced.

On staff productivity, while there was no current metric to determine productivity levels for home workers within the FSA, and this was difficult to construct for a largely policy and science function. It was known from staff engagement that staff felt able to dedicate more time to their work when not having to travel and appreciated the ability to fit their work around caring responsibilities. Also working days lost due to sickness had improved.

Performance and Resources Q4 2022-23 (FSA BC 23/06/04)

Tara Smith, Director of People and Resources, presented this Report mentioning that despite the challenges throughout the year, there had been a continued focus on delivery against the corporate plan, and highlighted areas including; the surpassing of the target for meat food business audits; latest local authority performance; additional information on regulatory compliance and science; and the financial position for 22/23.

There was discussion around the risk basis for food standards performance within the local authority escalation process. It was explained that data from multiple sources, as well as on-the-ground intelligence would be required to take a local authority into the escalation process on this basis and the surveys had been designed with questions that would flag concerns around standards. The Executive also committed to provide further information on the funding model for the Directed Food Standards sampling programme.

A Member asked whether new technologies would enable sampling to be done in the UK that had previously had to be outsourced to Europe and it was noted that some methods were not available in the UK but there was an ambition to bring in the necessary skills to allow more testing to be done domestically.

The recovery plan for local authorities had now been closed. It had set a less stretching set of expectations on local authorities in the light of their constrained resource during the pandemic. Local authorities were now back to being measured against a higher standard than they were under the flexibilities that were put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the foodborne disease slide it was noted that tackling foodborne disease was the core work of the FSA. The main point was that the incidence of foodborne illnesses were returning to pre-pandemic levels. However, there did appear to be some possible increases over that. It is unclear exactly what factors were influencing the data and whether this was a trend or the usual volatility in incidence. However, it was noted that particular weather conditions emerging from the impacts of climate change on Shiga toxin-producing E.coli (STEC) caused an outbreak. The committee wanted to understand what actions should be considered to improve the current pattern of disease. Officials reported that a range of work was underway and would be reported to the Board later this year.

The Committee noted the 22/23 financial position and sought clarification on CDEL funding and the HMT limits of £2m headroom requirement outlined in the finance section of the Report.

It was noted that there was a paper on the agenda for the upcoming Board meeting covering regulated products, and that the high number of CBD cases skewed the overall total of regulated products cases. Committee Members felt that it would be helpful to present the number of regulated products cases being considered that were not related to CBD separately.

Food Hypersensitivity Programme Update (FSA BC 23/06/05)

Natasha Smith, Deputy Director of Food Policy, gave the Committee an overview of key issues that were contained in the Update including progress made since the Board's consideration of papers on Food Hypersensitivity (FHS) in 2022 and proposals for the next tranche of work.

The Committee noted that in a Parliamentary Health Select Committee debate on FHS, Chairperson Steve Brine MP had asked to ensure that the FSA was aware of the strength of feeling around the issue. The FSA Chair had now written to both Steve Brine and Neil O'Brien, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Primary Care and Public Health, and offered to meet to discuss work on FHS.

The Committee asked how training for staff would be carried out and whether there would be a programme that would be accredited by the FSA. It was explained that issues around accreditation and charging would be explored among the options for the training programme.

The priority given to Precautionary Allergen Labelling (PAL) over written information on labels and menus was noted. The Committee asked what else was being done on written information. It was explained that the size of the FHS team had been reduced. There were risks as well as opportunities in changing the law around written information due to the capacity of the system to

implement changes. It was suggested that some communications work to set parameters for the standardisation of written information, even if it were done on a voluntary basis by food businesses, could be a useful step.

The recent stakeholder event with allergy and food hypersensitivity stakeholders had given an insight into the concern among stakeholders about the pace of change. It was asked that the team provided an update to the Board on the timeline for a proposal to Ministers within a year, including Board consideration to approve the approach.

The Committee noted the work that was being done on FHS; and the timelines proposed in the paper for the provision of information and the development and delivery of training. It was emphasised that many of the issues around the FHS programme were being worked through with consideration of the best approach for food hypersensitive consumers.

ANNEX A

Business Committee Papers – 12 June 2023

- [Minutes of the FSA Business Committee Meeting on 13 March 2023](#)
- [Actions Arising](#)
- [Chief Executive's Report to the Business Committee](#)
- [Performance and Resources report Q4 2022 to 2023](#)
- [Food Hypersensitivity](#)