

Minutes of 11 December 2024 Board Meeting

FSA 25/03/01 - 11 December 2024, Church House, London

Present:

Susan Jebb, (Chair); Fiona Gately; Margaret Gilmore; Anthony Harbinson; Rhian Hayward; Timothy Riley; Mark Rolfe.

Officials Attending:

Katie Pettifer - Chief Executive
Emma Barton - Head of Regulatory Reform, Innovation and Engagement for (FSA 24/12/06)
James Cooper - Deputy Director of Food Policy for (FSA 24/12/05)
Claire Forbes - Director of Communications
Junior Johnson - Director of Operations
Anjali Juneja - Director of UK & International Affairs
Carmel Lynskey - Deputy Director for Business Compliance & Market Authorisations Service Delivery
Robin May - Chief Scientific Adviser
Rick Mumford - Head of Science Evidence and Research
Ruth Nolan - Director of People and Resources
Julie Pierce - Director of Information and Science
Andrew Quinn - Head of National Food Crime Unit (for FSA 24/12/08)
James Robinson - General Counsel
Rebecca Sudworth - Director of Policy
Thomas Vincent - Deputy Director of Sandbox and Innovation for (FSA 24/12/06 and FSA 24/12/07)

1 Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted there were no apologies. Fiona Gately was not able to join the meeting for the start but would join the meeting after the break .

1.2 The Chair explained that having taken a position as a Shadow Minister, Lord Blencathra, had stepped down from the Board since this could have presented a conflict of interest with his work with the FSA. She paid tribute to Lord Blencathra's contribution to the FSA, especially his support for the work of the National Food Crime Unit.

1.3 Three questions had been received from stakeholders ahead of the meeting in relation to the papers on the agenda. All questions would receive a full answer in writing and points from the questions could also be picked up during the relevant discussions.

1.4 The Board had no new interests to declare since the previous Board meeting and no interests were declared that could create a conflict with any items on the agenda.

2 Minutes of 18 September 2024 Board Meeting (FSA 24/12/01)

3.1 No comments were made on the minutes of the Board meeting of 18 September 2024, and they were agreed as an accurate record of that meeting.

3 Actions Arising (FSA 24/12/02)

3.1 The Board did not raise any comments on the actions outstanding from previous Board meetings. The Chair noted that Action 2 from September had been completed since the papers had been issued and that a note on Public Health Authorities (PHAs) was being prepared in completion of Action 2 from the September Board meeting.

4 Chair's Report (Oral Report)

4.1 The Chair updated the Board on the extension of her appointment as Chair of the FSA until the end of 2027 and the process for the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive (CE), where a recommendation was now with Ministers.

4.2 The FSA's joint Annual Report on Food Standards with Food Standards Scotland (FSS) had been published since the previous Board Meeting and stakeholders were encouraged to read it. The core message in the Report was that standards were being maintained but that concerns about local authority resourcing and the recruitment of Official Veterinarians (OVs) continued, urging the Government to ensure a secure system of OV recruitment. The Report noted the number of incidents involving the mislabelling of allergens and the FSA was appealing to industry to treat the issue with increased vigilance.

4.3 The Chair mentioned that since the previous Board meeting she had held meetings with Chairs or Board Members of organisations who worked closely with the FSA, such as UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), National Trading Standards (NTS), Veterinary Public Health Association (VPHA) and the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and other safety regulators, as well as the Chairs of the Health and Social Care (HSC) and Environment Food & Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committees.

4.4 The priorities of the devolved and UK Governments had been emerging. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland had published the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework which the FSA had helped to develop. There had been discussions with Welsh Ministers following the publication of their Food Matters report. The Chair had attended the Blas Cymru event and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) Cymru conference and was planning a visit to Northern Ireland in the Spring.

4.5 The Chair also updated the Board on the plans announced by Defra to develop a Food Strategy, the DHSC Health Mission, the Government response to the House of Lords Report on Diet and Obesity, work with UK and devolved authorities on border controls, and the ongoing focus on streamlining processes and procedures within the FSA.

4.6 The Board raised the issue of staffing for Trading Standards in local authorities, noting the popularity of the new qualification that the FSA had helped to develop. The CE said that she had recently presented the Megan Lee Hero Award to Trading Standards Officers for their work on allergen controls. The award paid tribute to the work of Trading Standards Officers and she congratulated the award winners.

4.7 The Board asked whether there had been discussion with the new Government on Owen's Law and Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) mandation in England. The Chair said that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention, Andrew Gwynne, understood the potential value of FHRS mandation in England and of the FSA's approach. Discussions with Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs, Daniel Zeichner, around Owen's Law had also found him to be supportive of work the FSA was doing to develop systems and encourage good practice around allergen information.

5 Chief Executive's Report to the Board (FSA 24/12/03)

5.1 The CE gave an update on issues highlighted in her Report including the extension to the FSA Chair's appointment; the FSA's financial context; Bovaer; the House of Lords Inquiry on Food, Diet and Obesity; the retirement of Codex Chair Steve Wearne and Junior Johnson's OBE.

5.2 The Chair paid tribute to the work of Steve Wearne both within the FSA and as Chair of Codex and noted that the Board had met with him the previous day to hear his reflections on the FSA.

5.3 The Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) noted the level of misinformation being disseminated through social media platforms around Bovaer. The animal feed additive, 3-NOP, which was sold commercially as Bovaer, had been through the FSA's approvals process, and had also been independently assessed through the approvals processes of the national regulators in other countries and agreed to be safe. All had found no trace of the additive in the milk. What was not yet known was the effectiveness of the additive in achieving its purpose of cutting methane emissions from cattle.

5.4 The Board said that this was a clear example of the importance of the market authorisation process to provide independent scrutiny of the safety of new food and feed. They urged consideration of how the process could be made more transparent to dispel misinformation. Rebecca Sudworth accepted the importance of transparency in the process and said that all applications were published on the FSA's website. The FSA's risk assessments were also published and input from stakeholders and consumers was considered as part of the process.

5.5 The Board noted the recommendations for the FSA in the House of Lords Report on Food, Diet and Obesity. It was also noted that some of the recommendations of the Report could require changes to staffing levels and structure. The CE acknowledged that machinery of government changes would be required for some of the legislation to be realised. Other recommendations in the Report would also require legislation.

5.6 On folic acid, the CSA agreed that legislation for folic acid formulation was welcome and noted that DHSC would keep evidence under review to consider whether dose was appropriate.

5.7 Rebecca Sudworth said that the FSA was consulting businesses on methods of communicating allergen information to consumers; symbols were one of the potential options

5.8 On trade, the Chair noted there had not been any new Section 42 responses but asked Anjali Juneja to give an overview of issues that could be emerging. Anjali explained that a key issue currently being discussed was anti-microbial resistance (AMR) protections in markets approved for imports. The UK had maintained its protections around AMR in the Free Trade Agreement deals with Australia, New Zealand and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

6 National Level Regulation (FSA 24/12/04)

6.1 The Chair gave a recap of the response to the paper discussed at the previous Board meeting on this subject and said that, since then, it was good to see that the FSA had engaged extensively with organisations working in this area.

6.2 Junior Johnson and Carmel Lynskey introduced the paper covering activity since September; new forums for engagement with stakeholders; ongoing engagement with retailers and primary authorities; and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) Advisory Panel. On this, they noted that the Panel did yet not have a date confirmed for a meeting. Stakeholders had also made clear that their membership of these forums did not necessarily signify agreement.

6.3 The Board noted other work done under the previous Achieving Business Compliance programme including the charter with aggregators. The Board emphasised that this should not be forgotten, as the work with aggregators around FHRs and allergens was important.

6.4 Anthony Harbinson said that the views of District Councils in Northern Ireland were heard at the Northern Ireland Advisory Committee's (NIFAC's) themed meeting and there was confidence that misunderstandings arising from reporting of the FSA's position had been resolved.

6.5 Rhian Hayward said that the Wales Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) had also held a themed meeting in October on the topic. The meeting was well-attended and gave an opportunity to engage with Welsh local authorities. There had been positive feedback about the discussions with a consensus that co-design would work in Wales.

6.6 The Board expressed frustration about the impact that misleading media reporting about the FSA's position had caused early in the process. For clarity, they reiterated that the pause on long-term thinking on this work was just that, and therefore the work on immediate next steps should be developed at pace to enable the long-term thinking to be re-visited.

6.7 There was support from the Board for the engagement plans, direction of travel, the focus on data analysis, and the emphasis on improving existing regulation. The Chair noted that the March Board meeting may not allow sufficient time for proposals to be fully developed but said that NLR should return to the Board as quickly as possible, with fully developed proposals on the immediate next steps for discussion at the June 2025 Board meeting.

Action 1 - Carmel Lynskey to bring paper on NLR to June 2025 Board Meeting to include fully developed proposals on the immediate next steps for NLR for discussion.

7 Evaluation of the Meat Charging Discount Regime (FSA 24/12/05)

7.1 The Chair introduced the item, welcoming James Cooper to the meeting. She outlined the importance of Official Controls and the need to charge businesses for their delivery as well as the current discount to the charge. She noted the response to the call for evidence from stakeholders and said that this would be important when forming advice to Ministers.

7.2 James provided some background on the discount and noted the question to the Board that had been submitted ahead of the meeting. In response, he explained that when determining the charges for meat premises, the FSA would continue to include both the cost of activities for which the FSA was required to charge in line with articles 79 and 81 of the Official Controls Regulations as mentioned in the question, as well as for other costs incurred in line with article 80 of the regulations. The FSA would continue to provide transparency with respect to the charges in accordance with article 84 of the regulations. This would include conversations with industry during the charge setting process.

7.3 James gave an overview of issues covered in the paper including the call for evidence and the views received in response; possible impacts on trade; the objective of the discount; potential unintended impacts on businesses; the need for detailed analysis; the need for the Board's views on the discount; and how to manage any potential transition.

7.4 On previous transition points, James explained that the first major transition involved a shift from local authority responsibility to that of the former Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), the second major transition arose from the Stowe Review recommendation to move from a headage based system to an hourly charge based one. The discount was intended to buffer the impact of these changes.

7.5 Anthony Harbinson explained that NIFAC had discussed this paper and noted the difference in the arrangements for the delivery of Official Controls in abattoirs in Northern Ireland as well as the difference in industry profile. NIFAC agreed with the recommendations in the paper but urged that the impact on Northern Ireland of the proposed changes be assessed.

7.6 Rhian Hayward said that WFAC had emphasised the need to take time and act with caution, noting the particular vulnerability of small abattoirs in Wales and the need for better definitions of small and large abattoirs that also recognised the location and access to short, local supply chains.

7.7 On efficiency, Junior Johnson confirmed that the FSA Operations team were looking at improvements in IT systems and noted improvements in automation within abattoirs.

7.8 Summarising the discussion, the Chair noted that the Board considered the discount to represent a form of subsidy and there was a case for calling it as such. She noted an opportunity to modernise the framework of support and highlighted the need to ensure that tax-payers' money was being used both appropriately and efficiently. She welcomed the response to the stakeholder questions and noted the dual issues of efficiency and reform of the discount system were both important and related but would need to be addressed separately. She highlighted the need for careful handling of any transition and the need for ongoing engagement with industry.

7.9 The Chair said that the issue should return to the Board at the June 2025 meeting with an outline of how a new discount model could look to allow the Board to form advice to go to Ministers in the summer. She urged consideration of the necessary timelines to ensure resolution in 2025 to inform charge setting for 2026.

Action 2 - James Cooper to bring paper on Meat Charging to June 2025 Board meeting outlining potential options for any discount system.

8 Market Authorisation Service Progress Update (FSA 24/12/06)

8.1 The Chair welcomed Emma Barton and Thomas Vincent to the meeting to introduce this item. She noted the scrutiny around the performance of the market authorisations process that was undertaken by the Business Committee and said that this paper covered a review of the reform plans as well as the Sandbox for Cell Cultivated Products (CCP).

8.2 Emma and Thomas gave an overview covering approval times; the Sandbox fund; and progress on streamlining since the previous update.

8.3 Rhian Hayward said that WFAC had discussed the paper and agreed with the approach set out. On pre-application support, WFAC felt it was important to help businesses understand how to get started. WFAC also noted the reduction in timescales through the use of other regulators risk assessments. Anthony Harbinson said that in discussion with NIFAC, the question

of acceptable levels of THC in CBD products had been raised.

8.4 On pre-application support, Emma explained that the paper mentioned improvements to the online guidance. Lessons and improvements from using the Sandbox would also be applied to the wider market authorisation process in terms of supporting applicants. The Chair noted that CCPs represented a significant innovation and an opportunity to develop the market authorisation process. It would be important to use that to improve the overall service in order to ensure value for money.

8.5 On other regulators risk assessments, Emma explained that the paper outlined plans to expand their use, and next steps were being considered. The CSA added that it was scientific best practice to use the best available science around the world and reassured the Board that each application would be carefully considered. Where there was insufficient evidence from other regulators it would become the subject of a full risk assessment.

8.6 On the potential for cost recovery of pre-application support provided to applicants, Rebecca Sudworth said this was not a current priority, with the focus being on service efficiency. This would need to be ensured before consideration of any steps towards charging.

8.7 On REUL Act powers, Emma explained that there was an expiry date in June 2026 and changes would need to be delivered earlier than that, due to elections in Wales and in Scotland. Work was progressing on the understanding that those powers might not be extended. There were alternative powers which could be used and engagement with other Departments on plans for REUL powers continued. The Chair said it would be important to ensure all priorities were ready in time and the Board would want to hear further detail about the plans and timeline necessary.

Action 3 - Regulatory Services team to provide an update to the Board about the necessary plans and timelines to ensure priorities were ready in time for the expiry of REUL Act powers.

8.8 In response to a question about the FSA's Sandbox approach and how it compared internationally, Thomas explained that there were three key elements to the Sandbox including: identifying food safety implications that would need to be considered; working through emerging complex regulatory and legal questions; and the piloting of pre-application support. The FSA would work closely with industry to work out how best to mitigate hazards, as well as with legal colleagues, to identify whether current regulations were fit for purpose and what guidance could be required. There was an opportunity to learn, through testing with industry applicants, what pre-application support was most helpful. The FSA would be setting up an International Regulators Forum to access the expertise of regulators from other countries.

8.9 On the expected levels of applications, Thomas explained that there were currently four CCP applications in the system, which would receive additional resources from the Sandbox. It was anticipated that up to 15 applications were likely to be received during the time of the Sandbox, dependent on industry and their readiness with technology to submit a novel food application.

8.10 The CSA explained that CCPs covered a broad range of products, but the majority were complex, science-innovated foods and expressed a wish to record his thanks to the industry, which had been engaged and transparent. He noted that a sub-committee of one of the FSA's existing Scientific Advisory Committees would be looking domestically and internationally for advice that could be drawn upon.

8.11 The CE and Rick Mumford gave a summary of how the Sandbox fund would work and the amount of investment involved. The Chair noted the interest from the Board and suggested that she liaise with the CE about the best way to keep the Board informed of progress.

Action 4 - CE to discuss best approach to keeping the Board informed on progress around the Sandbox.

8.12 There were no decisions for the Board to make on the market authorisation plans at the current time, but the Board endorsed the outlined approach in the paper and the streamlining of the system. It would also be important to have clarity around the timeline. The issue should return to the Board in March or June 2025.

Action 5 - Regulatory Services team to bring a paper on Market Authorisation to the March or June 2025 Board meeting.

9 CBD Novel Food Applications (FSA 24/12/07)

9.1 The Chair noted that Thomas would remain at the table to introduce this item. Thomas gave an overview of the paper covering the unique position of CBD within the market authorisations system; issues around the presence of THC and the role of the Home Office; treating THC in food as a contaminant; recommendations for labelling and restrictions on marketing including age restrictions; implications for the Windsor Framework and the Retail Movement Scheme (for products authorised in Great Britain) for the status of CBD products in Northern Ireland.

9.2 The Board noted the potential for THC consumption to have impacts beyond food safety, such as effects on an individual's safety when driving or operating machinery.

9.3 Anthony Harbinson said NIFAC had raised questions around vulnerable groups and under 18s including whether there was an acceptable level of THC or a maximum residual level for products. NIFAC had also asked whether the way a product was consumed would be considered to account for people exceeding serving sizes.

Rhian Hayward said WFAC agreed with the principles set out in the paper. Consumer safety and trust featured in the Committee's discussion; it would be important that the public understood what CBD products were to ensure vulnerable groups were adequately protected. It was within the FSA's responsibilities to communicate why CBD products were not appropriate for under 18s and those on certain medications. WFAC had also raised a point about CBD being available as an ingredient.

9.4 On limits for THC content, Thomas explained that while THC was being treated as a contaminant, only 'trace' amounts would be tolerated. Rebecca Sudworth explained that the Home Office guidance about levels of THC acceptable within drugs law was clear but that the levels where it constituted a contaminant in food would be separate and set by the FSA based on independent scientific advice.

9.5 On THC and intake from different sizes of individual products, Thomas explained that Novel Food applications would be based on the product type and the form of consumption the applicant had applied for, which would be factored into consideration of the application.

9.6 On vulnerable groups, Thomas said that the paper covered issues around labelling and consumer advice was available to communicate messages clearly and accessibly, including to vulnerable groups.

9.7 The Board agreed with the direction of travel outlined in the paper, that CBD be regulated as a food, and that consumer safety, as well as public safety more broadly, should be the priority. The Chair asked officials to consider the points raised in the discussion and share a note with the Board by correspondence. She noted that the Board had given a clear indication of the expectation that the amount of THC in CBD products should be undetectable.

9.8 The Chair said the proposals would need to go to public consultation in early 2025. The Board should receive regular correspondence through that period to maintain oversight.

Action 6 - Food Policy team to draft a note to share with Board by correspondence covering issues raised in discussion with regular correspondence with the Board throughout the consultation period in early 2025.

10 National Food Crime Unit – Annual Update (FSA 24/12/08)

10.1 The Chair noted that this was a regular, annual update and welcomed Andrew Quinn to the meeting to introduce the item. Andrew gave an overview of issues covered in the paper including the application for PACE powers for the Unit; bespoke training; continuous professional development; Senior Investigating Officers (SIOs); and the future role of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) if powers are received by the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU).

10.2 In discussion, the Board noted the separate legal system in Northern Ireland; recovery of the proceeds of crime; court delays; and other options for holding criminals accountable.

10.3 Andrew said that the NFCU had only requested those powers that would be most useful in carrying out its role and were appropriate for the FSA to obtain at this time.

10.4 The Chair asked if the Board could receive a separate, comprehensive update on the application for PACE powers, including those powers applied for already.

Action 7 - Andrew Quinn to provide update on PACE powers application including powers applied for already.

10.5 On whether the deterrent was sufficient, Andrew acknowledged that some custodial sentences would be welcomed and would likely aid with this. The Board noted that it was good to see prosecutions being brought but delays within the criminal justice system were disappointing and could work to undermine deterrence.

10.6 The Board noted that media reporting around the authenticity of honey had been based on testing techniques, which were not universally accepted and, until this was resolved, the NFCU would continue to utilise a weight of evidence approach to concerns about honey authenticity. Andrew stated that the FSA, Defra and industry partners were working together to improve scientific and regulatory capabilities linked to honey authenticity.

10.7 The Chair noted that, overall, it had clearly been a good year for the Unit and said that ensuring the effective implementation of new powers, the mitigation of court delays, and building resilience would be key areas of future focus.

11 Annual Communications Update (FSA 24/12/09)

11.1 The Chair noted challenges and changes in the external environment for the FSA. Changes included a new Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly, changes in the Welsh Government and the new Government in Westminster. She invited Claire Forbes to introduce the report. Claire outlined some of the areas covered in the Report including Food and You Survey research and the public trust in the FSA; the importance of clarity in external communications; and the FSA's 25-year anniversary.

11.2 On vulnerable consumers and allergen information, the Board noted that during a recent incident involving mustard, there had been a 75% awareness rate amongst those with a moderate or severe allergy, which still meant 25% not being fully engaged.

Claire said this particular incident had been highly complex with the FSA's focus on helping affected consumers manage the risks. There had been lessons learned from this incident that would help inform communications in future incident responses. News media had been the primary outlet for ensuring consumers received appropriate information but word of mouth among consumers had also been key. Work with charities focussed on food hypersensitivity had also been a very important part of the strategy.

11.3 The Chair noted the importance of partnership working in incident management. Claire said partnership working was essential and building relationships between the FSA and different expert groups, including those with constituencies of vulnerable people, would be maintained and expanded. This would help the FSA reach more vulnerable consumers and provide valuable advice for the FSA on messaging. The CE added that the FSA also gave consideration to how it could use its own diversity to help reach key groups of consumers.

11.4 Claire explained that the need to counter misinformation was an area of key focus and was highlighted by recent discourse around Bovaer. There was a need to ensure that authoritative voices were able to cut through to consumers seeking clear information.

11.5 The CE said that the FSA had been working with CIEH and the Local Government Association (LGA) on the pipeline for the Trading Standards Environmental Health Professionals and wider discussions with careers in the food industry generally. She highlighted a recent event with representatives from trade bodies and food businesses discussing workforce challenges and how people could be encouraged to seek a career in food.

11.6 The Chair noted the conversations around incidents, partnership working and targeting vulnerable consumers and expressed the Board's trust in the team to ensure that work was carried out effectively. She mentioned the communications work in support of the FSA's regulatory reform work noting the importance of highlighting the FSA's role as a forward-looking regulator. This would be a priority for communications over the next year.

12 Annual Governance Report (FSA 24/12/10)

12.1 The Chair explained that the last external effectiveness review of the Board had been carried out in 2022, and an external Board effectiveness review this year had been postponed, due to the change in Government. Instead, the FSA Deputy Chair had conducted an internal Board effectiveness review by interviewing each Board Member, the CE and the Director of People and Resources. No major concerns had been raised. The report of the internal Board effectiveness review was annexed to the Annual Governance Report. The internal Board effectiveness review had given rise to 12 recommendations, some of which were already being attended to, for the Board to consider.

12.2 The Chair noted that the recommendations divided into those which required straightforward, practical responses and those which were more strategic in nature. She suggested that the CSA address the recommendation regarding the Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) this in his next annual report to the Board.

Action 8 - CSA to address the internal Board Effectiveness Review recommendation on the SACs in his next annual report to the Board.

12.3 In discussion the Board endorsed the internal Board Effectiveness review and its recommendations, noting the need to address potential overlap in responsibilities of the Board's

sub-committees and agreeing with the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee's (ARAC's) role in escalating risks to the Board.

12.4 The Board indicated they were content to ratify the updated Terms of Reference for ARAC.

12.5 The Chair thanked Timothy for carrying out the internal Board effectiveness review and confirmed that the Board were content for the recommendations to be implemented.

13 Report from the Chair of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (FSA 24/12/11)

13.1 The Chair invited Anthony Harbinson to introduce this report. Anthony gave an overview of issues covered in the paper including NIFAC Members who had completed their terms of appointment since the previous report; the high quality of applicants to join the Committee; the ambition to increase the use of Member networks to fully embed the Committee into the devolved environment; the Obesity Strategy; and the synchronous approach to harmonise working with WFAC.

13.2 The Chair acknowledged the work that had been undertaken to revitalise NIFAC and noted the intention to focus on dietary health in Northern Ireland in 2025.

13.3 The Board noted the Chair's contribution to projects in Northern Ireland including the work around vending machines and children's menus. Anthony said that her input had been significant in moving the focus away from being solely on reformulation and allowing fresh consideration of what it hoped to achieve to change the food environment.

13.4 The Chair noted that the proximity to stakeholders in Northern Ireland presented an opportunity to achieve goals collaboratively in Northern Ireland. She noted that, while there was no equivalent committee for England, the work in Northern Ireland served to demonstrate the value of direct engagement.

14 Report from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (INFO 24/12/01)

14.1 Anthony Harbinson gave an update covering the finalisation of the Annual Report and Accounts (ARAs) and the limitations of the National Audit Office (NAO) timetable; confidence in meeting the 31 January 2025 statutory deadline for laying the ARAs; and the Audit of Official Controls.

14.2 On the Audit of Official Controls, Anthony explained that this represented a separate audit service and updates would continue to be provided to ARAC on that work from the Head of Operational Assurance.

14.3 The Chair noted the confidence of ARAC Members in Anthony's leadership of the Committee and acknowledged the detailed documentation scrutinised by that Committee and the assurance it provided to the FSA.

15 Report from the Chair of the Business Committee (INFO 24/12/02)

15.1 Timothy Riley gave an update on matters discussed at the previous meeting of the Business Committee including the complementary nature of the CE reports to the Board and

Business Committee; the complexity of the breadth of different incidents; the consistent approach to measuring performance; Market Authorisations; concerns around data provided from Survey Monkey on local authority delivery; and the level of challenge from Members.

15.2 In discussion, the Board noted the incidents outlined in the CE's Report to the Business Committee and asked whether these was now under control. The CE explained the STEC outbreak, tragically, two people had died, but numbers of cases had now stabilised. On the work with the Indian authorities on mustard there were ongoing discussions, and the Board would be kept informed. Anjali Juneja added that the incident had concluded and there were good relationships with the Indian authorities.

15.3 The Chair noted that the Business Committee papers had been improving in clarity and accessibility, allowing better scrutiny of performance.

16 Reports from the Chairs of the Food Advisory Committees (Oral Reports)

16.1 Rhian Hayward gave an overview of WFAC activity since the previous Board meeting including ongoing recruitment campaigns; the appointment of the new FSA Director for Wales Sian Bowsley; potential topics for themed meetings in 2025 including possible discussions on animal feed and on nutrition; and work with Welsh Government.

16.2 Anthony Harbinson noted site visits that NIFAC had undertaken to animal feed mills and noted recent activity for NIFAC including the attendance of Sian Bowsley at the Committee's most recent meeting and joint working with WFAC; the capacity of NIFAC to bring influence within Northern Ireland and how networks could similarly be used effectively across England.

16.3 In discussion, the Board said they would particularly welcome hearing the outputs on any discussions around animal feed.

17 Any Other Business

17.1 The Chair said that no other business had been raised and asked whether there were any questions from the observers present. No questions were raised, and the meeting was closed. The next meeting would take place on 26 March 2025 in Hull.