

Chief Executive's Report to the Business Committee

FSA BC 25/03/03 - Report from Katie Pettifer

I'm very pleased to present my first report to the Business Committee having been confirmed in the permanent role of CEO at the FSA.

1. Incident management and prevention

1.1 As reported in national media, FSA worked with food businesses and local authorities at the end of January to coordinate [a precautionary recall of certain product lines](#) produced by Coca-Cola's subsidiary in Belgium and distributed to the UK and other countries, after elevated levels of chlorate were detected. Over 100,000 product cases have been identified as having been distributed in the UK. This posed a low food safety risk, especially when product was only consumed occasionally, but presented specific concerns around potentially greater health impacts for consumers sensitive to chlorate, in particular young children and consumers with pre-existing medical conditions. Affected products had been distributed to Northern Ireland and some Caribbean nations, the relevant contact points in each country were notified via the INFOSAN network. We are continuing to liaise with the manufacturer and their primary authority in the UK regarding ongoing investigations.

1.2 In my report last December, I mentioned work underway to learn from the response to a national outbreak of *E. coli* STEC O145, where domestically produced lettuce included in ready-to-eat pre-packaged products was identified as the likely source of contamination. This work has continued, including through an industry-facing lessons identified exercise in mid-January on the causes of the outbreak and to understand what measures need to be rapidly put in place to prevent a further outbreak occurring in 2025. Action is already being taken by industry, and FSA is meeting with salad leaf growers to assess whether further support and advice can be provided by local authorities. In the longer term, there is a need for modelling which helps growers predict increased risks.

1.3 The Prevention team wrote to the food industry at the end of January on the importance of following the voluntary standards on glycerol (E 422) in slush ice drinks, or 'slushies', with a further reminder of [the advice on our consumer page on food additives](#), and the advice on NHS Choices. [Voluntary industry guidance was issued in 2023](#), outlining that such products are unsuitable for children under the age of 4 and refills should not be for under 10's. The FSA are also looking at what further support that could be offered to industry stakeholders in delivering this message to consumers. The Food Additives team along with counterparts in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland have been investigating what other risk management options could be brought to bear on this issue, including consideration of possible legislative changes. However, any risk management needs to be on a four nation basis and proportionate to the risk, whilst maintaining wider consumer choices, particularly as glycerol is used as a replacement for sugar in these types of product.

2. FSA delivery of Official Controls

2.1 Preparedness for implementation of the new FSA Delivery of Official Controls (FSADOC) contract remains on track for the start date of 31 March 2025. Since my last update our teams have been focussing on the critical transition phase for the transfer of two lots, and the associated staff, from Eville & Jones Ltd to a consortium led by Hallmark Meat Hygiene Ltd. Internally there has also been significant work to make the necessary modifications to systems and processes to account for two suppliers and the introduction of a new and improved contract management performance framework.

2.2 We have now successfully closed our Veterinary Resourcing programme. This programme has completed its objectives, notably the retender of the Official Controls delivery contracts and the implementation of a sustainable resourcing plan for Official Veterinarians that removes our reliance on the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' temporary registration scheme. The delivery of these objectives has significantly reduced the operational delivery risks we were facing when the programme was set up almost two years ago.

3. Animal disease outbreak management and prevention

3.1 Work continues to manage the current outbreak of Avian Influenza as well as preparing for potential outbreaks of other notifiable diseases. Engagement sessions have been held with industry and other government departments (DEFRA, APHA and AHDB) on the potential for an African Swine Flu outbreak. Additionally, there has been work underway internally on preparedness to respond should an outbreak occur. We have also worked closely with DEFRA on the positive case of Foot and Mouth Disease in Germany and our preparedness should any positive cases reach our shores.

4. National Food Crime Unit

4.1 Operation Charlton - an FSA-led operation supporting Defra in their response to African Swine Fever, delivered by the NFCU - generated 44 of the 65 outcomes recorded in Q3. These outcomes relate to illegally imported meat seizures being detained by inland Local Authorities responding to our intelligence. Operation Bantam – The trial of four defendants started on 13 January 2025. The charges they face - of conspiring to supply unfit meat and other regulatory offences - relate to animal by-products being put back into the human food chain. Three defendants have entered guilty pleas to their part in this criminal enterprise. The fourth defendant is now standing trial alone and at the time of drafting most of the prosecution evidence has been heard. The trial is expected to end in early March 2025.

4.2 NFCU has commenced the delivery to industry partners of food crime desktop training exercises. The Unit has also worked with international partners in Germany and Italy to understand shared threats and best practice in prevention.

4.3 I am pleased to note that significant progress continues to be made towards securing Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) powers for Food Crime Officers. We have written to Minister Ashley Dalton, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention in the Department of Health and Social Care to request approval of two statutory instruments (SI's) to be laid before Parliament on 10 March 2025. These SI's will grant access to powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and bring the FSA under the complaint handling remit of the Independent Office for Police Conduct.

5. Finance

5.1 As of 31 January, we were forecasting to spend £144m, a £0.7m underspend overall (£0.3m Westminster, £0.3m Northern Ireland and £0.1m Wales).

5.2 The £0.3m Westminster resource expenditure (RDEL) underspend includes £0.2m underspend on non-ringfenced RDEL. This broadly balanced budget reflects decisions made in year to release contingency to offset most unforeseen pressures (increases in key contract costs and the civil service pay uplifts), and the additional £0.9m budget moved from capital expenditure limits (CDEL) to RDEL at Supplementary Estimates.

5.3 Although the £0.2m RDEL forecast underspend appears tight, our forecast spend already includes £0.5m for any year end budget adjustments (including any which may be made later following audit of our accounts) and a further £0.6m contingency for any further unexpected fluctuations in forecasts. We are managing several risks against that contingency. Our actual underspend at the end of the year may therefore be greater.

5.4 With regards to devolved budgets, Wales remains close to budget at Q3, and Northern Ireland is forecasting an underspend of £0.3m. This is £0.5m lower than the underspend reported at the end of October, due largely to the return of unspent ringfenced Windsor Framework funding to NI Department of Finance.

5.5 In February, EMT concluded the 2025/26 business planning process, having presented the proposed budget and deliverables to the Board at its away day in January. This can be seen in further detail in the 2025/26 Annual Plan and Budget paper, presented for your formal ratification.

5.6 Work is ongoing to respond to the second phase of Spending Review 2025, launched by the Chancellor in November. This is split into two parts. The first, on which we submitted our return on time, on 27 February, asks departments to identify 5% of savings and efficiencies options and to present their lowest 20% value for money spend. The second, due on April 10, asks departments to plan against two different budget scenarios – flat cash budget across the three-year SR period, and 2% budget reductions. In our returns we are, of course, setting out the value of our work in terms of protecting public health and supporting public trust (and that of our trading partners) in the UK food industry. We are also extremely conscious of the broader pressure on public finances and the need to deliver these benefits in the most effective and efficient way for the taxpayer. We will continue to keep the Board up to date as we progress through this process.

5.7 The 2023/24 external audit concluded in January, and all three Annual Reports and Accounts were published on 27 January 2025.

6. People

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

6.1 All three of our new suppliers for occupational health and employee assistance are now fully operational. We are in the process of scheduling health surveillance tests for existing staff identified as needing appointments in 2025. Pre-recruitment and in-role support continues as normal.

Estates

6.2 We received notification from our landlords in September regarding the implementation of a lease break at Clive House, with an exit deadline set for June 2025. We have submitted our office space requirements to the Government Property Agency (GPA), along with a request to retain a central London office. Negotiations are underway with GPA and Treasury to facilitate our move and ensure budgetary cover is in place.

6.3 While planning permission for the hub in York has been agreed, Treasury is still reviewing funding, and no decision has yet been announced. We have engaged with GPA to discuss the situation and explore whether contingency plans are in place should Treasury decide not to fund the York hub.

Senior Recruitment

6.4 Following my appointment as CEO, I am pleased to announce that I have appointed a job-share partnership to fill the post of Director of Strategy and Regulatory Compliance. Rachel Cooper and Beth Chaudhary have joined us on loan from the Department of Education for a 12-month period starting on 3 March 2025.

Recruitment

6.5 Between November 2024 and January 2025, 49 recruitment campaigns were launched to fill 55 vacancies. The majority of the campaigns for the Trainee Official Auxiliaries (TOAs) and Qualified Official Auxiliaries (OAs) have been successfully concluded, filling 27 of the 30 vacancies. This has resulted in an 83% fill rate for 2024 campaigns and an increase from 67% in 2023.

People Plan 2023-26

6.6 As part of the 'An Enabling Organisation' strand of our People Plan, we have continued to deliver improvements to our HR/Payroll system, Workday. Recent improvements have seen us move additional offline processes onto the system which will help to streamline our processes for line managers and made improvements to sickness absence reporting.

6.7 We continue to explore greater improvements to Workday to ensure we are utilising the full extent of the system's capabilities. These improvements include developing dashboards within Workday which allow senior leaders greater access to people data and exploring additional modules to support with the delivery of relevant interventions.