

Minutes of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee meeting held on 8 February 2023

Hybrid themed meeting - FSA Meat Hygiene Operations

Present

Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) members attending:

- Peter Price, Chair
- Alan Gardner
- Dr Philip Hollington
- Christopher Brereton OBE
- Helen Taylor
- Georgia Taylor
- Dr John Williams
- Jessica Williams

Food Standards Agency (FSA) officials attending:

- Anjali Juneja – Director of UK and International Affairs
- Nathan Barnhouse – Director for Wales
- Sioned Fidler – Head of Communications, Welsh Language and Business Support
- Lucy Edwards – Business Manager
- Owen Lewis - Head of Policy and Local Authority Partnerships
- Delyth Murray-Lines - Head of Hygiene Policy

Observers:

- Representatives from Torfaen County Borough Council

Presenters:

- Geraint Jones - Area Manager, FSA Operations
- Delyth Murray-Lines - Head of Hygiene Policy

1. Introductions, apologies and minutes of the last meeting

1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. No apologies noted. The minutes of the October 2022 meeting were agreed.

2. Declaration of interests

2.1 No new interests were declared.

3. FSA Operations

3.1 Geraint Jones, Area Manager, FSA Operations Wales and West

The presentation gave an overview of the number of abattoirs within Wales - 17 red meat approved premises and gave an indication of throughput through the varying sizes of abattoirs. 5 Poultry abattoirs with a throughput of approximately 1400 turkeys per week (when in operation) and 900,000 chickens per week. There are 71 approved meat establishments in Wales – these are primarily meat cutting premises, some premises are co-located.

The presentation informed that Welsh Livestock numbers are currently steady, with approximately 9.5 million sheep, 1.1 million cattle and calves, 27k pigs according to [figures from Hybu Cig Cymru](#). It also informed of the throughput for abattoirs in Wales during 2022: 129,449 cattle and calves, 2,458,686 sheep, 25,273 pigs and 116,895,507 poultry.

Geraint then gave an overview of the role of the Meat Hygiene Inspectors and other operations staff including Dairy Hygiene Inspectors and Official Veterinarians. Geraint explained that the regulatory environment in which they work is covered by a mix of retained EU and domestic legislation. The impact of animal diseases was also discussed in relation to Bovine Tuberculosis and Avian Influenza. Geraint informed that Third Country export is also a large area of work for the Operations team with Welsh produce reaching many global markets.

4. FSA Meat Hygiene Policy

4.1 Delyth Murray-Lines, Head of Meat Hygiene Policy, FSA in Wales

The presentation gave an overview of the policy areas the food hygiene policy team are responsible for which include: meat hygiene, shellfish and aquaculture, dairy hygiene, food hygiene, food borne disease, feed hygiene, primary production and OFFC/OCR legislation. Delyth informed that the team develops policy for food and feed hygiene in Wales and engage with relevant stakeholders to ensure their needs are considered and their knowledge and feedback is used to inform the development of new policies.

Delyth explained the risk analysis process and four-country working practices that are adopted when developing policy or making changes to policy. This leads to consultation with stakeholders which will then inform Ministerial decisions or change of advice or policy decisions. Delyth informed of the three interim Common Frameworks: Food and Feed Safety Hygiene Framework, Food Composition, Standards and Labelling and Nutrition Labelling, Composition and Standards. These Common Frameworks have Ministerial agreement across four-nations, they set out arrangements and governance for collaboration and policy responsibility on devolved matters across the four nations, their scope does not include enforcement. Delyth informed that the principles set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act are also considered in policymaking decisions.

5. Forward look for WFAC

5.1 The WFAC discussed potential future topics for themed meetings, the following suggestions were made:

- Local Authorities (LA) and their role and responsibilities – how things have changed, are changing
- LA enforcement – what are the barriers to effective enforcement in Wales?
- Stats on FHRS – rating trends and how these have impacted incidence of food poisoning during the duration of the Scheme
- Allergen labelling – update from LAs on compliance with allergen labelling and impact

- Student Environmental Health/Trading Standards LA officer training – whilst concentrating on food looking to consider student numbers and sponsorship. What are the challenges with recruitment of newly qualified officers
- Small scale producers selling through social media – number of ‘dark kitchens’ seem to be increasing. How do LAs respond to these?
- Aberystwyth University – future food centre visit to learn about research being undertaken. Working with small scale artisan producers – developing healthy foods and future foods
- Environment and sustainability – Wellbeing of Future Generations Act – take environment into account. Any actions LA’s take with FBO’s to comply with that?
- Risky foods – raw drinking milk, last discussed in 2018, has risk level changed? Looking at latest statistics there are around 6 premises in Wales
- Shellfish
- Plant based foods – risks associated with developing and consuming alternative proteins, insects etc
- Vertical farming and risk associated – grown in a controlled environment with water circulation
- Border Controls

6. Chair's report (Paper 23/02/02)

6.1 The Chair gave an oral update on his report which detailed the Board meeting held in London in December 2022 and a meeting with the Minister for Economy and the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing to discuss the future Border Target Operating Model. The Chair informed that a number of questions had been posed to the committee ahead of the meeting, the questions and answers are detailed at [Annex A](#).

7. Director's report (Paper 23/02/03)

7.1 The Director gave an oral update on his report and introduced Anjali Juneja as the new Head of UK and International Affairs, the directorate within FSA in Wales is now situated along with Northern Ireland. Anjali gave an overview of the work of the directorate.

8. Any other business

8.1 Members noted that the next themed meeting would be on the 11 May in Cardiff.

8.2 The Chair closed the meeting.

Annex A - Questions submitted to WFAC

Question 1

I note the agenda item “Topics for Themed meetings in 2023”. I think it is important that if themed meetings continue, they need to be relevant and will add value to inform the development of related FSA policy, strategies and operational delivery. As such, priorities need to be identified with the input of key stakeholders and it is important the committee considers how information obtained will be used. I recall a themed meeting relating to Food Insecurity - expert guest speakers from academia, local authorities and food bank organisations etc. presented a vast amount of information. I would like to know how the information and data has since been used to inform FSA policy, strategy and delivery? The same question applies to other themed meetings.

Answer to question 1

The Food Advisory Committees (FACs) were established under Section 5 of the Food Standards Act 1999 "for the purpose of giving advice or information to the Agency about matters connected with its functions including in particular matters affecting or otherwise relating to Wales (or Northern Ireland)".

That is how the information and data obtained from discussions of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) is used. The outcomes of our focussed themed meetings and considerations of upcoming Board papers are represented in Board discussions by the WFAC Chair and member of the FSA Board appointed by Welsh Ministers.

The Board has overall collective responsibility for the activities of the FSA in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, so too for ensuring that the FSA discharges its statutory duties to protect public health and consumer interests, including those relating to Wales, in relation to food and feed. It sets the strategy for the FSA and ensures that recommendations made by the FSA executive align with this strategy. Further, the Board makes decisions on key policies and issues of principle, thereby informing the advice given to Ministers in Westminster, Wales and Northern Ireland.

One of the key objectives of the WFAC themed meetings is to horizon scan future issues likely to be considered by the Board and the executive. On other occasions, it is to take a 'deep dive' into important current issues. In both cases, the aim is to give the Committee detailed insights to improve their understanding. An example is the precision breeding (PB) meeting held in July 2022. PB is a rapidly developing field of work and WFAC members wanted to expand their knowledge, so as to be able to advise the Board efficiently and effectively.

Evidence gathered in themed meetings is used to inform a whole range of policy and operational decisions taken thereafter. One such example is the themed meeting on the FSA's Strategy, held in March 2022, which enabled the Strategy Team to incorporate WFAC views on Welsh considerations into their planning.

Question 2

It is important to ensure WFAC fulfils its purpose, and accordingly WFAC are expected to consider items relating to FSA policy and future direction. Therefore, topics for future themed meetings, could include the proposed ABC Delivery Model. Guest speakers from LAs (experts in delivering front line food controls) could contribute to a useful engagement session. Hopefully such engagement will inform WFAC of LA views, which may be taken into account when related discussions take place at Board meetings.

Answer to question 2

Ideas from stakeholders for future themed meetings are always welcome. Several LA related topics were tabled as options for future discussions by the Committee during the February meeting, including:

- LAs and their role and responsibilities – how things have changed, are changing
- LA enforcement – what are the barriers to effective enforcement in Wales?
- Stats on FHRS – rating trends and how these have impacted incidence of food poisoning during the duration of the Scheme
- Allergen labelling – update from LAs on compliance with allergen labelling and impact
- Student EH/TS LA officer training – whilst concentrating on food looking to consider student numbers and sponsorship, what are the challenges with recruitment of newly qualified officers
- Small scale producers selling through social media – number of 'dark kitchens' seem to be increasing, how do LAs respond to these?

The Committee will take on board these suggestions and other relevant ideas outlined in the February discussion, all of which are welcomed, when deciding on future themed meetings.

Question 3

Another themed topic could relate to performance. The performance of LAs and the FSA Operations Team – what works well, what can be improved and how improvements may be identified and implemented. A considerable amount of LA performance data has been submitted to the FSA (via Temperature Checks); it would be good to discuss key issues arising from the data.

Answer to question 3

As above, this is another idea which we can consider and which I have shared with the Committee. However, WFAC's role is advisory, and the operational detail seems more a matter for discussion with our exec team. LA Performance, in terms of the Recovery Plan, has been discussed in WFAC and at Board meetings.

Question 4

Also, with regard to the Director's report; it would be beneficial to include information regarding engagement with key stakeholders, in particular LAs.

Answer to question 4

Such information is included. The Director's report reflects engagement by all the Senior Leadership Team in Wales. But the report is a summary and not a detailed diary. The Director will take account of your thoughts for his future reports.

Question 5

During my local EHO visit I was asked if we audit our suppliers and how do we know that we are using reputable suppliers? Currently all meat suppliers under FSA are able to hide behind a lack of transparency over the outcomes of their last visit. Smaller independent butchers like myself fall under local authority where they get publicly scrutinised when scores get published. A clear and transparent audit should be made available for businesses to make an informed decision on whether to use certain meat suppliers or not. I think it's a fair question to ask that its mandatory for Meat Suppliers under the Food Standards Agency have the last audit made public as it would certainly bolster confidence in our supply chain.

Answer to question 5

The FSA [publish the most recent audit scores](#) for all FSA approved meat establishments in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland on a monthly basis. Columns AA and AB detail the date of the latest audit and the audit outcome, respectively.