Minutes of the FSA Board Meeting on 20 March 2024

FSA 24/06/01

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Crowne Plaza, Wellington Street, Leeds, LS1 4DL

Present:

Susan Jebb, Chair (via Zoom); Timothy Riley, Deputy Chair; Lord Blencathra (via Zoom); Hayley Campbell-Gibbons; Fiona Gately; Margaret Gilmore; Anthony Harbinson; Rhian Hayward; Mark Rolfe; Justin Varney (via Zoom).

Officials attending meeting

Name	Position
Emily Miles	Chief Executive
James Cooper	Deputy Director of Food Policy (for FSA 24/03/05 and FSA 24/03/06)
Sam Faulkner	Deputy Director of Strategy (for FSA 24/03/03)
Claire Forbes	Director of Communications
Junior Johnson	Director of Operations
Anjali Juneja	Director of UK & International Affairs
Robin May	Chief Scientific Adviser (via Zoom)
Rick Mumford	Head of Science Evidence and Research
Ruth Nolan	Director of People and Resources
Katie Pettifer	Director of Strategy and Regulatory Compliance (via Zoom)

Name	Position
Julie Pierce	Director of Information and Science
Peter Quigley	Deputy Director of Regulatory Services (for FSA 24/03/04)
Chris Rundle	Head of Regulated Products Risk Assessment (for FSA 24/03/04)
Rebecca Sudworth	Director of Policy
Anthony Wilson	Risk Assessment Team (for FSA 24/03/06)

1 Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the Board meeting and noted that she was unable to attend the meeting in person and would be chairing the meeting via Zoom. For the same reason, it would be necessary for her to leave the meeting after FSA 24/03/06 and she would pass the chairing of the meeting to FSA Deputy Chair Timothy Riley. Justin Varney and Lord Blencathra were also attending the meeting via Zoom.

1.2 The Chair congratulated Timothy Riley for his appointment as Deputy Chair and thanked Mark Rolfe for acting as interim Deputy Chair prior to this appointment.

1.3 The Chair also congratulated Fiona Gately and Lord Blencathra on their reappointment to the Board for a second term.

1.4 No new interests or conflicts of interest with items on the agenda were raised and no other items of business were raised for discussion at the end of the meeting.

2 Minutes of the FSA Board Meeting on 13 December 2023 (FSA 24/03/01)

2.1 No comments were made on the minutes of the 13 December 2023 Board meeting, and they were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

3 Actions Arising (FSA 24/03/02)

3.1 The Chair noted Action1 and Action 4 from the 13 December meeting were ongoing but were on course to be completed by their scheduled completion dates. No comments were raised by Board Members on the Actions.

4 Chair’s Report (Oral Report)

4.1 The Chair noted that a list of her engagements had been published on the FSA’s website noting discussions and engagement around the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) implementation as well as Regulated Products Regulatory Reform. It was noted that the dates for

Board meetings in 2025 had been agreed and had been published on the FSA website.

5 FSA Executive Governance Review: Next Steps (FSA 24/03/03)

5.1 The Chair welcomed Sam Faulkner to the meeting and explained the paper's inclusion on the agenda was a part of the FSA's commitment to openness and transparency and included a Scheme of Delegations, showing where the Board usually delegated responsibility for decisions to the Executive.

5.2 Sam gave an overview of the paper covering the operating framework; the Scheme of Delegations; and the Board's right to take final decisions. The Chair invited comments from the Board.

5.3 The Board asked about the non-binding nature of the Scheme of Delegations; the Membership and Terms of Reference of the Board's Committees; the principles around consulting and informing the Chair of the Board about Executive decisions; plans for communicating the Scheme of Delegations to staff; third-party certification of the framework; the benefits of maintaining ambiguity on certain aspects of the framework; and the chairing of the Food Advisory Committees.

5.4 Sam explained that the Scheme of Delegations was a guidance document that would be necessarily non-binding by nature. The Board said that it would be important for this to be made clear.

5.5 The paper stated that the FSA Deputy Chair's membership of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) was noted in the Business Committee's Terms of Reference (ToRs). It was clarified that this should be added into the ARAC ToRs.

5.6 The Board supported the principles for consulting and informing the Chair of the FSA about Executive decisions and stressed the need for flexibility for instances when issues took on a high media profile, meaning there would be a need to consult with the Chair at short notice.

5.7 There was a plan to communicate changes with staff through the Business Delivery Group (BDG) and down through the management chains. An evaluation of how well understood it had become amongst staff would be run towards the end of the year.

5.8 There were currently no plans to have the framework certified by a third-party, but this could be something that ARAC sought assurance on or that could be considered for a future internal audit. The Board suggested that having a third-party assessment of the framework would be good practice and that it could form a part of the National Audit Office's audit process. There would also be an opportunity for the framework to be considered during the next, three-yearly, independent Board Effectiveness Review.

5.9 It was noted that the Annex should be explicit for the Wales Food Advisory Committee (WFAC), as it was for the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC), that WFAC was chaired by the Board Member for Wales.

5.10 The Chair noted that there was support from the Board for the operating framework and that it should be adopted as a guide for the FSA's governance structures. It should be circulated to Board Members to enable fine tuning of the wording in places that Board Members had indicated prior to sign off by the Chair.

Action 1 - Sam Faulkner to circulate the operating framework to Board Members to allow refinement of the wording.

5.11 The framework should be looked at again in December to coincide with the Annual Governance Review. The options for the audit of the framework should be considered as a part of that Review.

6 Regulated Products (FSA 24/03/04)

6.1 The Chair welcomed Peter Quigley and Chris Rundle to the meeting and noted that the current system of approvals for regulated products was a remnant of the previous EU system and was now in need of reform. The paper set out two key reforms as well as the discussions of the Board sub-group on Regulated Products, chaired by Mark Rolfe. The approach outlined in the paper had been discussed with the Chair of Food Standards Scotland (FSS) as well as with Ministers in Wales and Westminster and officials in Northern Ireland. The paper outlined proposed reforms to deal with other short-term issues around the regulated products system. It was suggested conducting the discussion in two parts: starting with the proposals in relation to renewals and Statutory Instruments (SIs), and then discussion of the Board sub-group's recommendations. She invited Peter to introduce the paper.

6.2 Peter noted the legislative priorities agreed in December; removing the requirement for renewals for feed additives, smoke flavourings and GM food and feed; and the removal of SIs and the establishment of an e-register. The Chair invited comments from the Board. In discussion the Board noted the change for the FSA as one of the UK's market authorisation authorities since leaving the EU; the impact of changing food production and novel foods; the importance of the proportionality of risk assessments; and the history of the requirement for SIs for approvals.

6.3 The Board noted that the FSA's position had changed since leaving the EU, becoming one of the UK's market authorisation authorities. This entailed not only dealing with current issues but also addressing future challenges. As the system of approvals did not anticipate some changes in the manufacture of novel foods an issue had arisen around some categories of product. This also, however, presented an opportunity, to improve the system for the future.

6.4 Lord Blencathra agreed ensuring proportionality was important noting that he had previously chaired the delegated powers committee, which observed three principles for consultation. These were where a department was changing its internal rules there would be no consultation; where a department was changing rules to diminish the burden on the consumer or stakeholder, a short consultation was preferable; and where a department changed rules which could increase the burden on stakeholders or add to their costs, a full consultation should take place.

6.5 The Chair asked Peter to outline the proposed approach to consultation outlined in the paper. Peter noted that subject to Ministerial approval, it was proposed that the consultation on the changes would be held later in the Spring, with the legislative debates held in the Summer. There was optimism that this could be achieved ahead of an election. The Chair noted the ambition of the timelines involved and said that interested stakeholders should watch for the consultation coming out towards the end of March or early April.

6.6 The Chair then asked the Board for comments on the recommendations of the Board subgroup, which were included in the paper. The subgroup had been formed by the FSA Board and consisted of Board Members appointed to it as agreed at the Board's meeting in December 2023 following a recommendation from the Business Committee. The sub-group had reported back with proposals covering a wider range of potential measures for addressing the caseload and efficiently processing regulated products applications. These had now been considered by the Business Committee and commended to the Board for approval. The Business Committee had not discussed whether the proposals from the sub-group ought to be accepted but considered the proposals and were content for them to be put to the Board. The Chair invited Mark to outline the proposals. It was also noted that the performance of the regulated products

system was considered quarterly by the Business Committee as a part of the Performance and Resources report.

6.7 Mark thanked the subgroup members as well as officials for the time they had contributed. He noted the sub-group's focus on short-term measures to address the active caseload. Measures considered included pausing renewals where products were already lawfully on the market. He also noted recommendations three and four of the subgroup, which were that at all stages of the process, firm deadlines must be set and adhered to when seeking information and input from stakeholders and applicants; and that the periods of time allowed for further information to be provided must be as short as reasonable to meet the requirements which could be interpreted as basic good practice.

6.8 Decisions at each stage of the process should be taken by a lead responsible official, limiting review and sign-off to what was required to meet quality standards and to achieve three- and four-country working.

6.9 Rebecca Sudworth noted that the proposals were about creating better outcomes, noting the FSA's first principle of protecting public health. A detailed implementation plan was being developed with FSS that would cover the implementation in England, Wales and Scotland and would also look at the impacts for Northern Ireland.

6.10 The Chair said that the two issues to consider were caseload management and efficiency. The sub-group had provided outline recommendations, and now a detailed implementation plan was required to set out the likely impact of the changes. She invited comments on the recommendations from Board Members. Rhian Hayward said that WFAC had been supportive of the recommendations. Anthony Harbinson explained that the Board paper had not been available for discussion at the time when NIFAC had met but as a member of the sub-group he had been able to communicate the position to NIFAC Members who were supportive of them. Concerns had been raised by NIFAC around the potential for divergence.

6.11 The Board noted the need to maintain a focus on the consumer interest in the reforms; the proposals around the need to consult on approvals; the need for the FSA to undertake peer review other regulators' opinions; the need to ensure that paused applications were not forgotten; the need to ensure the system was properly resourced; and the importance of ensuring transparency around the process.

6.12 The Chair said that the Board were agreed on the removal of renewals and the removal of SIs. There was support for the sub-group recommendations, and the Board had expressed the need for tangible detail around implementation. There would be a need for stakeholder engagement to explain to the various sectors what the changes would mean for them. The Board indicated that they were content for the Chair to take responsibility on their behalf over the immediate period to sign off on the implementation plan and allow it to be put into place. Regular updates from the team to the Chair were needed to maintain the momentum that had been generated by the sub-group. The June Board paper would present an outline of potential wider, longer-term reforms, including more information on the use of other regulators' opinions, where the Board would like to see more detail about how this could work.

Action 2 - Rebecca Sudworth and Peter Quigley to provide the Chair with details of an implementation plan to expedite sign-off.

6.13 The Chair noted that the timelines involved meant that work on these threads would need to be carried out in parallel.

7 Precision Breeding – Response to Public Consultation and Next Steps (FSA 24/03/05)

7.1 The Chair noted that this paper represented an update on the recent public consultation on the regulatory framework for Precision Breeding (PB). The high number of questions received ahead of the meeting on this subject and the clear strength of feeling on the issue amongst stakeholders was noted.

7.2 Parliament had debated Precision Bred Organisms (PBOs) and the PB Act reflected the outcomes of that discussion. The Chair acknowledged that this was a new technology, but no evidence had been seen that it was riskier than traditional breeding and it had not been the intention of the consultation to revisit the fundamental principles of the Act. The system that was being designed was intended to be flexible to any emerging evidence of risk arising from some of the unknowns around the technology.

7.3 The focus of the consultation was on the regulatory framework which would allow the FSA to monitor and assess the safety of PB products. It was noted that Parliament had passed the Bill and PBOs would be coming to market. The question for the FSA would be regulation. She invited James Cooper to introduce the paper.

7.4 James gave an overview of the paper covering the number of responses received to the consultation; key legislative points; the support for a robust enforcement regime; working with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and next steps; and the development of enforcement guidance. Julie Pierce then gave an update on traceability noting that traceability covered a wide variety of measures from chemical sampling to audit; recent innovations; and existing documentary and analytical traceability methods.

7.5 The Board commented on the responsibility for traceability and labelling, and requirements across the internal markets; concerns raised in responses to the FSA consultation; the naming of FSA advisers in questions to the Board; parliamentary procedure for SIs; the production of technical guidance; and the likely convergence of the system with that for market authorisation of regulated products.

7.6 On traceability and labelling, the Board noted their commitment to supply chain integrity and concerns around the capacity of businesses to know the origin of their ingredients. It was noted that the FSA would not be able to take the responsibility for traceability of PBOs and the Board asked about steps to ensure that the approach taken would support traceability through supply chains and trade across internal markets, and whether the authorisation number allocated for the register could be signposted in guidance for this purpose.

7.7 Rebecca Sudworth explained that many of the issues around organic standards were general policy responsibilities for Defra and work with them was ongoing to enable manufacturers and producers to confidently select the appropriate ingredients for their products. The FSA took supply chain integrity seriously and it was considered that there were sufficient protections in place, which would apply to PBOs. Work on improving testing was ongoing, noting there was currently no analytical test that could definitively identify PBOs.

7.8 James added that it was important not to conflate the issue of traceability with that of detection. The ability to trace was currently based upon the requirement in food law for businesses to know the origin of their supplies at each step of the food chain. If a business wanted to trace whether a product contained PBOs, it could ask the question commercially with their suppliers and if a supplier would not provide an answer, not do business with them. Whether labelling would or would not facilitate this would be outside of the FSA's remit.

7.9 The Chair acknowledged anxieties from some organisations and consumers around the inherent safety of PBOs and noted that regulation would be proportionate to the risk. The consultation had asked whether the proposed system was appropriate, and no new information had been received to suggest it was not. The two-tier system provided flexibility to allow deeper assessment where there was reason to do so with the opportunity to adjust the proportion of PBOs in each Tier if it became clear that there were risks in the technology that needed to be factored in, which were currently not known. The Business Committee would continue to monitor the performance of the system as applications were received.

7.10 On the naming of individual Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) Members in the questions to the Board, the Chair said the FSA relies heavily on the advice of experts and suggested Robin May, the FSA's Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) bring a paper to a future Board meeting, later in the year, setting out current practice for managing Conflicts of Interest and any proposals for further assurance.

Action 3 - Robin May to provide a Board paper to the June or September 2024 Board meeting on managing conflicts of interests among the FSA's expert advisers.

7.11 On parliamentary procedure, James explained that all of the FSA's legislation was done by affirmative resolution. It was hoped that it could be passed ahead of a general election but there would be a need for debates to take place to allow this to happen.

7.12 The Board noted the approach to secondary legislation and the expected timeline. Continued consideration of what more could be done around traceability and labelling was urged. The Board agreed the proposed approach to the regulatory framework and next steps for implementation but asked for more detail on plans for implementation.

8 Foodborne Disease Policy Overview (FSA 24/03/06)

8.1 The Chair welcomed James Cooper and Anthony Wilson to the table for this item and noted that changes in the prevalence of foodborne disease were discussed at each Business Committee meeting as well as work relating to incidents. This paper had been brought as a reminder to the Board of the work going on across the FSA to mitigate the risks of foodborne disease.

8.2 James gave an overview of foodborne disease work within the FSA, the roles of various organisations and ensuring that Food Business Operators (FBOs) were doing the right thing.

8.3 The Board commented on the apparent rise in foodborne disease; possible labelling of pre-packed sandwiches for listeria risks; unpasteurised cheese; the cost of testing; data within the devolved nations; and risks from chemical contamination.

8.4 On the apparent rise in foodborne disease cases, it was explained that there are likely to be multiple factors at play, one of which will be improvements in diagnosis, particularly as a result of wider rollout of PCR-based testing. There was also a hypothesis that, of those experiencing symptoms, a higher proportion might be presenting directly at hospital, rather than via primary care, due to factors such as delays in accessing GP appointments, but more evidence would be needed to determine whether this was occurring. There was currently no data that would indicate any underlying change in the population diversity or epidemiology of the major foodborne pathogens that might lead to higher rates of hospitalisation, although we remained alert to any change in evidence regarding the underlying pathogenicity of these organisms. The challenge with labelling the listeria risk on pre-packed sandwiches was the large variation in risks meaning that it was better to ensure that the ingredients were clearly listed to allow customers to better assess for themselves based on their own level of vulnerability.

8.5 The FSA was working closely with the NHS and healthcare providers who were in touch with vulnerable individuals to ensure that tailored advice could be provided. It was also acknowledged that pre-packed sandwiches were generally considered a very safe product with the risk factors often introduced by the consumer themselves through improper storage and advice to consumers around this was also an area of focus for the FSA.

8.6 The risks from unpasteurised cheese were also highly variable with softer varieties generally presenting a larger risk than was the case with harder varieties such as parmesan. It was also noted that contamination would often occur after pasteurisation meaning that this was not the most significant factor in reducing foodborne disease from cheeses.

8.7 Rhian Hayward had asked whether data covering Wales could be isolated within the figures and suggested that WFAC would appreciate a deep dive on the issue. The CSA said that one interesting factor in the data for Wales was that there appeared to be a lower hospitalisation rate compared to England, though there did also appear to be a time lag in the figures so it was possible that they would converge. Data from Northern Ireland and Scotland would be released in the coming months.

8.8 On testing costs, it was explained that the changing testing landscape was a benefit for public health, as more testing took place using lateral flow devices and PCR. One challenge was that the data landscape was changing and some testing was very local with businesses doing their own testing. The FSA would not see that data straight away, and agility about data access would be required.

8.9 The CSA noted the third intestinal infectious disease study was underway and would report a large data set on foodborne disease. It was hoped that it could provide answers around currently unattributed foodborne disease.

8.10 Mark Rolfe raised a concern that infectious disease might not represent the full picture around illness contracted from food and urged consideration of the impacts of toxic chemical contamination on public health.

8.11 Margaret Gilmore said that the FSA needed to ensure that retailers and manufacturers were not putting food that was not safe on to the market and thresholds could be used to guide this which would need to be led by science and evidence. The FSA could not be seen to be moving thresholds based on the numbers of cases and they would need to be set for good reasons.

8.12 The Board noted the complexity of foodborne disease and recognised the need to stay focussed on what the FSA could do within the food system and where responsibilities fell to businesses. The request for information from the devolved nations was noted. The issue of lab capacity and whether the FSA was able to access data efficiently was also one where the Board wanted further consideration to be given. It was suggested that these issues should be included in a paper for the for the Board in relation to thresholds.

Action 4 - CSA and Rebecca Sudworth to provide a paper on foodborne disease threshold levels to also include data relating to the devolved nations and provide the Board with information on FSA access to data from businesses and food contamination from chemical toxins.

8.13 Other issues raised should be addressed through Board briefings in the first instance unless it became clear that a full Board discussion was warranted.

9 Chief Executive's Report to the Board (FSA 24/03/07)

9.1 Susan Jebb left the meeting and Timothy Riley assumed the chair for the remaining agenda. Timothy asked the Chief Executive (CE) to introduce her report. The CE gave an overview of the paper covering the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive and the implications for Executive oversight of regulatory changes; evidence to the House of Lords Industry and Regulators enquiry and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee debate on Official Veterinarians, noting the impact of changes to immigration requirements on veterinary resourcing; vegan food, 'free-from' labelling and the possibilities of contamination; and the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) and the implementation of export health certificates.

9.2 The Board commented on the necessary infrastructure for the implementation of border checks; whether there had been a reaction to evidence provided by the FSA to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) committee about vets; and work around Precautionary Allergen Labelling (PAL) arising from the survey of online purchasing and the need for labels to provide a reason for the possibility of contamination.

9.3 On border checks, it was considered that the necessary infrastructure for the checks to be introduced next month had been put in place in the run-up to the previous milestone on BTOM. Final preparations around training and decisions around the quality of checks were increasing as implementation approached. There was an outstanding issue around west coast checks which was being discussed across government involving the devolved nations.

9.4 It was explained that there was no exemption for Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs) or vets on the salary requirements for immigration to the UK, which presented a challenge for veterinary resourcing.

9.5 On PAL, it was explained that the work around the survey of online purchasing had been carried out with people with food hypersensitivities.

10 Strategic Risk Management (FSA 24/03/08)

10.1 Timothy Riley noted the annual risk workshop at the Board's Retreat in January and said that the paper summarised the outputs from that discussion. Timothy invited Ruth Nolan to introduce the paper. Ruth gave an overview covering the respective responsibilities of the Board, ARAC and the Executive; the operating context; levels of uncertainty around resources and the end of the Spending Review settlement; and actions against areas of risk.

10.2 The Board commented on whether risk number five adequately captured the issues of concern. It was noted that the mitigations around the risk seemed correct and appropriate and did address the real risk but that the wording for the risk itself did not fully capture the risk being faced. Ruth accepted that this could be the case, adding that the information in the paper represented a summary of the register rather than the full register itself but that the wording would be considered further to ensure that it properly captured the risk.

Action 5 - Ruth Nolan to refine the wording around risk number five to ensure that it accurately captures the risk being faced.

10.3 The Board welcomed the paper and noted the principal risks and mitigations.

11 Report from the Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) (FSA 24/03/09)

11.1 Timothy Riley invited Rhian Hayward to introduce this report. Rhian thanked her predecessor as Board Member for Wales and Chair of WFAC, Peter Price, for his work over the period of the report and gave an overview of the paper covering the membership of WFAC;

locations and timing of meetings and themes including BTOM, operations, science and innovation, and regulated products regulatory reform; upcoming themes focussing on the Wales food landscape; the upcoming Board meeting in Llandudno; and the importance of WFAC's stakeholder engagement.

11.2 The Board commented on whether there was scope within the WFAC themed meeting on the Wales food landscape to consider the way the FSA operates across the UK and the impacts of that for Wales; and also, about how some of the things being done in Wales around science and innovation could be replicated regionally elsewhere across the UK.

11.3 Timothy thanked Rhian for the report. The Board had noted the activities of WFAC and commented on the forward work plans.

12 Report from the Chair of the Business Committee (INFO 24/03/01)

12.1 For this item, Timothy Riley passed the chair of the meeting to Anthony Harbinson and Anthony invited Timothy to introduce the report. Timothy gave an overview of the report covering financial control targets; staffing costs; incidents including and supplementing information received from the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF); local authority delivery and regulated products regulatory reform.

12.2 The Board asked about the RAG ratings for local authority performance shown in the Performance and Resources report considered by the Business Committee. It was noted that guests at the Board's dinner the previous evening had set out some of the challenges faced by local authorities and had outlined what they would like the FSA to do, which was to make the case for adequate resources, to provide a definition of a model service, and for improved audit of local authorities against that definition.

12.3 Katie Pettifer explained that the data on local authority performance provided to the Business Committee was the same as that seen by the Board in December. A model service definition was being developed. There were challenges around this due to the varying circumstances across local authorities. Part of how the FSA worked with local authorities involved helping them to make the case for more resources and the Business Committee had heard about cases where the FSA's interventions had enabled local authorities to access to greater resources. There were also areas where the FSA was seeking to help local authority capacity and capability including looking at the competency framework to assure that it was not stricter than necessary.

12.4 The CE added that the FSA had a higher number of auditors in Wales and Northern Ireland due to the grant received from those administrations. England had proportionately fewer auditors and this would be a useful topic for ARAC to look at in more detail.

12.5 Margaret Gilmore said that as the Board Member with responsibility for incidents, being made aware in advance that the Business Committee would be discussing incidents could help avoid duplication of effort by briefing her separately. Anthony noted that the Board had discussed and agreed the Governance paper earlier in the meeting, which would also be a useful guide for ensuring the right Board Members were receiving the right information but further clarity on how to ensure that Board Members special areas of interest were factored into considerations.

12.6 Anthony noted the points raised in discussion and said that it would be important in taking them forward that additional pressure not be put on the Executive.

13 Report from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) (INFO 24/03/02)

13.1 Timothy Riley invited Anthony Harbinson to introduce this report. Anthony gave an overview of the paper that covered discussions around future funding; sustainability; an update from the National Audit Office (NAO) on the Annual Records and Accounts (ARAs) and their backlog from the COVID-19 pandemic; and microbiological sampling.

13.2 On Deep Dives, Anthony explained that ARAC were considering local authority funding, noting that this could be considered an area of overlap with the Business Committee and care would need to be taken to ensure that the appropriate approach was being taken to the deep dive.

13.3 It had also been agreed that one of ARAC's annual meetings would be held in person and that this year, which would take place in June in London.

13.4 Fiona Gately said that she would like to attend the local authority deep dive session. Anthony said that there was a standing invitation to Board Members who wished to observe an ARAC meeting, and that Fiona would be welcome to attend.

Action 6 - ARAC Secretariat to extend invitation to June ARAC meeting to Fiona Gately.

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

14.1 Timothy Riley invited Anthony Harbinson and Rhian Hayward to deliver an update from NIFAC and WFAC. Anthony said that NIFAC had held a themed meeting on regulated products regulatory reform and that the Committee had been pleased to have had an opportunity to feed back a Northern Ireland view into the discussions on the issue. There had also been an event on nutritional standards for vending machines which had been attended by the FSA Chair. Anthony also mentioned that he had attended the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Awards and the Ulster Farmers' Union dinner for the FSA. Anthony gave an update on changes to NIFAC's membership noting that the Committee would be losing three members in 2024 and a process to appoint new members was underway and should be completed by April.

14.2 Rhian noted that in addition to the detail she had delivered in her annual report, WFAC would have two members leaving this year and she would be examining the Committee's skills matrix to see where WFAC could most effectively be strengthened and working with Anthony to align themed topics. The TORs for the FACs were also under consideration and should be available to the Board to see soon.

15 Any Other Business

15.1 No other business had been raised by Board Members and the meeting was closed. The next Board meeting would take place on 19 June in Llandudno.

16 Q&A

16.1 Timothy Riley invited questions from the audience. Steven Jacobs of Organic Farmers & Growers and Leonie Nimmo of GM Freeze raised questions which related to the paper on Precision Breeding, highlighting a rejected legislative amendment in Wales and the vote on PBOs in the European Parliament.

16.2 Steven suggested that the FSA and Organic Farmers & Growers work together to help local authorities enable the Genetic Technology Act to be rolled out safely for commercial operators across all of the regions of the UK.

16.3 Leonie asked about the fact that the potential impact of the vote in the European Parliament to require labelling and traceability of what they term ‘products developing genomic techniques’ had not arisen in the Board’s discussion; detection methods for PBOs being developed within the EU; and the potential impact on UK producers of the establishment of non-tariff barriers resulting from different regimes.

16.4 Rebecca Sudworth said that she was grateful for the way the FSA had been able to engage with the organic sector and was keen that this engagement should continue. The FSA was also keeping in touch with developments within the European Union and it was an important point to raise that it would be essential to understand what was happening there. Margaret Gilmore noted that Board Members would also be interested to see the responses to questions on this subject.