

Report from the Chair of the Business Committee

INFO 24/06/01

Report of 10 June 2024 Business Committee Meeting

The Committee considered the following:

Chief Executive's (CE's) Report to the Business Committee (FSA BC 24-06-03)

Discussion of the CE's report included recent incidents including Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) and *Listeria* incidents.

The CE also noted other matters mentioned in her written report including:

- import arrangements and recommendations for changes to the risk model coming into effect in October;
- prosecutions;
- the evidential file submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) relating to Operation Hawk; and
- the monk fruit judicial review, where the judgment had been a loss for the FSA, and subsequent steps to implement lessons learned from this decision.

There had been an underspend in the directed sampling budget, which was a concern given low sampling rates overall. It was noted that although FSA was paying for the sampling, it still required local authorities to adequately cover staffing. Understanding capacity and ensuring the budget was utilised appropriately would be key to the FSA running the process. This was being monitored closely this year.

There was concern about the time taken to initiate bulk sampling for Avian Influenza in milk following an outbreak in cattle in the USA, and communication with Defra on the issue was supported to ensure we could more readily mobilise sampling in future incidents.

Business Committee Performance Report for Q4 2023/24 (FSA BC 24-06-04)

Ruth Nolan introduced the Performance Report, giving an overview of its content and the potential impacts of the general election.

The Committee discussed the following key topics from the report:

Science

The Committee heard an update that covered the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs); the impact of FSA research, including in policy, and the use of the Scholastica tool to help measure impact;

people and skills; sampling; and financial management.

There was a recommendation from the Committee that measuring the number of citations as opposed to publications would give a better metric for assessing the reach of FSA research. It was also noted that policy impact was probably more important than traditional academic metrics, but harder to measure.

Reputation, Communications, and Trust in the FSA

The Committee heard an update about the trust metrics from the most recent wave of the Food and You 2 Survey showing a drop in consumer trust, noting that this came largely from an increase in neutral responses rather than rise in distrust. It was also noted that this drop in trust was also seen in government and business more generally. Factors that could be influencing responses and communications measures being considered were outlined. It was emphasised that trust in the work of the FSA merited continued attention as did increasing the public's familiarity with the work of the FSA. Specifically, initiatives such as the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, as well as the work of the NFCU and incident handling, helped keep the FSA's work visible amongst consumers.

Regulated Products

The Committee noted that operational management of regulated products continued to present a challenge for the FSA with the caseload increasing. This would likely be exacerbated by the General Election's consequences for the timetable for the proposed removal of the requirements for renewals and Statutory Instruments (SIs) relating to authorisations. Officials continued to explore ways of ensuring the process was as efficient as possible within that framework.

There were questions about the changes to regulations relating to smoke flavourings in the EU and how that would impact on the UK's decision in light of the new evidence base. The FSA and FSS were conducting a review of the evidence, which will include consideration of the EU risk assessment.

Local Authorities

The Committee noted that the information contained in the report was the same as that from the previous report with the next set due to be available in September. It was expected that the new data set would alleviate concerns around delivery on the on the highest risk food hygiene premises.

The feedback from the Chief Executive's letter to the Chief Executives of local authorities had led to local authority food teams being able to argue for additional resource with their seniors.

The rollout of the new food standards model would be taking place imminently with the first local authority due to go live with it within the following week.

Precision Breeding – Delivery Plan (FSA 24-06-05)

The update on Precision Breeding outlined proposals for the delivery of a service; the likely impact of the upcoming election; and the constraints of the available resources.

The Committee said more clarity was needed about the timelines for authorisation, especially for Tier 2, and that it would be important to be able to communicate expected timings clearly to applicants. It was noted that guidance should be clear about the 90-day period for Defra to consider the application before it came to the FSA to give clarity to businesses about the overall

process between Defra and the FSA, not just for the FSA.

Annual Report on Human Resources (FSA 24-06-06)

The Committee noted this was the first annual report on Human Resources. The Business Committee were pleased to see the paper and noted its contents.

Operational Modernisation Programme – Business Committee Update (FSA 24-06-07)

This update covered the milestones delivered as set out in the plan; the accuracy and efficiency of inspection data collection including the establishment of an automated data transfer mechanism currently undergoing testing; a tender exercise for desktop remote assessment software; improvements to data quality and security in dairy; the development of an FBO Account solution and the challenges presented by multiple priorities across both Operations and enabling functions.

The Committee commented on the rate of progress. It was noted that the implementation of the plan had been incremental by design, acknowledging that this could make it difficult to identify specific impacts. The design of digital solutions required a complete understanding of what the data to be collected meant in order for it to operate effectively and a data audit was taking place to ensure this.

Annex A

Business Committee Papers – 10 June 2024:

- [FSA BC 24-06-01 - Minutes March Business Committee Meeting](#)
- [FSA BC 24-06-02 - Actions Arising Business Committee](#)
- [FSA BC 24-06-03 - CE Report to Business Committee.docx](#)
- [FSA BC 24/06/04 - Performance and Resources Q4 2023-24](#)
- [FSA BC 24/06/05 - Precision Breeding - Delivery Plan](#)
- [FSA BC 24/06/06 - Annual Report on Human Resources](#)
- [FSA BC 24/06/07 - Operational Modernisation Programme Update](#)