

Performance Report Q2 2024-25

FSA BC 24/12/04 - Report by Ruth Nolan

1. Summary

1.1 The quarter 2 2024/25 Business Committee performance report is based on the latest executive performance dashboard, discussed with the FSA's Executive Management Team (EMT) in November 2024 covering data mostly up to 30 September 2024.

1.2 The Business Committee is asked to discuss the FSA performance set out in section 3 (key themes and insights), with a particular focus on the following areas:

- a) **Operational delivery – To note** the continuing high number of incidents and allergy alerts, the work being undertaken to understand the incident management chain and resource impact across FSA teams, and the wider work planned to improve our incident responses.
- b) **Operational delivery – To discuss** the annual progress and outcomes of the National Food Crime Unit's (NFCU) work.
- c) **Market Authorisations - To note** that whilst no applications have been delivered this quarter, we are on target to deliver the entire tranche 3 batch of 26 Feed additive applications next quarter.

2. Introduction

2.1 The aim of the performance dashboard is to enable the committee to fulfil its duties, delegated from the FSA Board, to scrutinise quarterly performance information, and identify and monitor operational and delivery risks, informing the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee if necessary.

2.2 We have summarised our approach (slide 15) to setting Red/Amber/Green (RAG) tolerances for overarching service areas and individual measures following a request at the previous Business Committee for further detail on how performance is assessed. Further detail can be provided if that would be helpful.

3. Key themes and insights

3.1 Operational delivery (slides 3-6)

- a) **Official Controls:** Delivery of official controls in approved meat premises continues to meet targets for inspection and audit. Compliance scores for Food Business Operators remain high with the majority of premises falling into 'good' and 'generally satisfactory' categories. Dairy inspections have been delivered to target.
- b) **Veterinary resourcing:** We continue to monitor data from our service delivery partner on critical success indicators in relation to the Official Veterinarian pipeline. We have now begun preparing for the closure of the programme to include lessons learned sessions and ensure effective handover to business as usual.

c) **Incidents and our response:** The Q2 period across the summer months delivered a brief respite from new non-routine incidents with a tolerable level of routine activity. Management of the raw cheese incident continued through to September, with significant cross-Agency working. The process of triaging incidents was implemented with success, meaning we respond to the right incidents, and as such we have seen a decrease in the overall number of incidents handled. However, the ones we do respond to are increasing in complexity and mostly classified to high and medium risk level. We are starting another phase of work to improve the way incidents are dealt with FSA wide; we are working to have surge capacity in place following successful trials, planning for exercising, and now plan to focus on finalising the surge capability, incident data and operational guidance systems.

d) Incident management in the FSA is a cross-team process requiring immediate and real-time input from Policy, Science Evidence and Research Directorate, Legal, Communications and more recently UK and International Affairs Directorate, with the Incidents Unit being the coordination point. The high incident numbers impact across many FSA teams and this pressure exists on a 24-hour basis due, for example the out of hours allergy alerts produced. The Executive has asked to see more data on the impact of dealing with incidents across the whole department, to help manage capacity and plan.

e) **National Food Crime Unit (NFCU):** Q2 performance overall is strong and on track. The Strategic Intelligence Requirements progress has improved in Q2. The number of operations closed with a result remains stable and in line with the previous year Q2 performance. NFCU note a sustained strong delivery of disruptions from prevention activities (recorded under prepare) linked with the food fraud resilience tool and full fraud assessments.

f) Intelligence reports (344) this quarter show a slight uptick from Q1 in overall numbers. The focus has been on lamb livestock theft reporting and alcohol reporting linked to counterfeit vodka. There was an unusual spike in DNP (2,4-dinitrophenol) online reporting and associated website take-down disruptions (8) this period, which were completed before Home Office handover. The FSA have now ceased the proactive scanning for DNP, given its classification as a poison, but we understand from the Home Office that no other law enforcement agency has yet taken on this proactive role. We believe it is in the best interests of consumers that another organisation takes on the scanning, who has the full remit and enforcement powers.

g) Stakeholder engagements in Q2 have reflected a significant push on industry engagement (45) with slightly fewer engagements with local authorities over the summer period taking our engagement total to 102. Engagements overall are comparable to previous quarter (112) and have included NFCU attendance at the Food Integrity Global event in Amsterdam, generating new opportunities for full fraud assessments with food businesses, NFCU have also continued regular engagements with the Food Industry Intelligence Network and Industry partners. Engagements in Q3 are expected to pick up pace with highlights including prevention desktop exercises and small and medium sized enterprises engagement group work.

3.2 Local Authority (LA) delivery (slides 7-9)

a) Most of the LA delivery section is not new data except for the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and performance management data. Benchmarks have also been added for the number of new business registrations. The most recent LA monitoring data was discussed in the Q1 report, and work is progressing on the October data return.

b) LAs continue to report problems with staff recruitment and retention. Some are using new students or newly graduated staff and training in-house. The LA Resourcing project continues to address the issues identified in the LA Capacity and Capability research published November 2023. We recently endorsed the new Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) professional competency in feed qualification and are working closely with CTSI on the equivalent for food.

Next steps: LA engagement to co-develop revised competency framework and methods of

assessing suitable qualification. Work is ongoing to begin developing the LA Resource Modelling tool, however, early engagement has indicated that there are complexities around how LAs gather and use information that need to be considered.

- c) One LA has onboarded to the Food Standards Delivery Model (FSDM). **Next steps:** We continue to work closely with Management Information System (MIS) providers. We are seeking LA volunteers to act as 'early adopters' as the different MIS providers complete development of their products to reflect the FSDM.
- d) We engage with LAs, and where appropriate seek an action plan to address problems. The number of cases with active open engagement are constantly changing – the total number of cases in escalation across the three nations is seven (six in England and one in Wales).
- e) LA engagement continues, with specific plans in place to firstly ensure that LAs understand what happened in the enterprise level regulation trial, which can help to shape the next steps; and secondly, explore wider system challenges to ensure FSA activity can make an impact.

3.3 Market Authorisations for Regulated Products (slide 10)

- a) This section provides performance data for the Regulated Products Service up to 30 September 2024.
- b) The total caseload in the service has increased to 507. We have received 32 new contacts in the last quarter. Six did not progress to full application due to insufficient evidence at the point of submission. The number of progressed applications this quarter is aligned with our projections of 30 per quarter (120 applications progressing per year).
- c) We continue to actively manage our total caseload, which is split between active and paused under Active Caseload Management. 358 applications are currently active and progressing through the service, and 149 applications are paused. There are 264 applications currently in Pre-Validation, 173 are active and progressing. There are 154 applications in Risk Assessment stage, 108 are active and progressing. There are 89 applications in Risk Management stage, 77 are active and progressing. The 149 applications paused applications consist of: 52 Feed Additives renewal applications, 29 Genetically Modified Organism renewal applications, 62 applications where we are awaiting additional information from the applicant and six Dormant applications. Renewal applications can remain on the market and are linked to ongoing immediate reform to remove the requirement for applicants to submit renewal applications.
- d) We have completed 71 applications in total since the service went live in January 2021. These include 66 which were approved and five which were rejected. This quarter, we have completed 19 risk assessments and remain on track to complete around 100 risk assessments in 2024/25. 11 applications were withdrawn this quarter.
- e) We are on track to deliver against our revised timeline for the completion of the remaining 26 Tranche 3 applications, which are expected to come into force this calendar year. Work on Tranche 4 (which includes a mix of regimes is progressing through Risk Management as planned and we aim to publish a consultation this year.
- f) **Process and Service Improvements:** Work continues to support the implementation of planned immediate reforms, which include the removal of the requirement to lay statutory instruments and renewal applications. We are considering operational impacts of changes to the Service Delivery of Market Authorisation process. This includes mapping the 'to be' process against our 'as is' to ascertain changes required across the end-to-end service. We are working collaboratively with interdependent teams to ensure all impacts of change are considered from a delivery perspective.

g) We have embedded our improved, streamlined documents, policies and processes; continue to roll out training; and remain reasonable and consistent with deadlines for applicants submitting additional information, resulting in more incomplete applications being withdrawn from the service. We will keep the effectiveness of these service improvements under review.

h) We consider specified criteria when determining which applications go into each tranche to ensure the most efficient and fair way of progressing them. As the number of safety assessments increase in volume and frequency, we are reviewing these criteria to ensure they still meet our needs and enable us to manage demand as we progress applications through risk management.

3.4 Science (slide 11)

a) The overall position is positive, with work on track and no major concerns. We are developing new impact metrics, and we are expecting this to accelerate now that we have new resources in place. This includes launching our new publication platform and purchasing an analytics system for monitoring the use of our publications. This will start giving us new impact data in Q3. However, the new system has provided some impact metrics such as in the first two months of its use we know that:

- There has been 12.7k total page views
- We have had 5.5k unique visitors
- There have been 343 article downloads

b) In terms of having the resources to be a science-driven organisation, the position remains stable. The staff from previous recruitment campaigns have now been in post for a sufficient period to be fully operational. Business delivery is progressing as planned, including our work under the risk analysis process. Now procurement has been completed, sampling has ramped up as expected in Q2 and this trend is expected to continue in Q3. The Research and Evidence Programmes continued to be actively managed and are on-track to deliver our prioritised portfolio of work and against budget.

c) With work now commissioned, Q2 spend has increased from Q1 and we are on target to utilise our entire third party spend by the end of Q4. We also have a pipeline of work that could make use of any underspend. Further details about FSA science were covered in the annual update to board in September.

d) For Targeted Surveillance Sampling, we ensure the 'right sampling' is performed via a multi-round prioritisation process. This includes; nomination by experts, peer review with policy leads and NFCU, RAG rating against set criteria and allocation to appropriate programs. The Retail Surveillance Survey is on track to complete in January 2025, all samples taken, and results are tracking well. Directed sampling has allocated £147k to 48 LAs which are contributing to 507 samples being taken, and £25K has been allocated for planning within the LAs. The remaining £78k is currently uncommitted. This has allowed flexibility for follow up sampling on; The peanut in mustard incident, grey market work and Official Controls sampling from Retail Surveillance Survey. The LA uptake is increasing year on year. In 22/23 14 LAs were involved, increasing to 23 LAs in 23/24 and 48 LA's this year 24/25. The LA/Port Health Authority Imported Food Sampling program is on track and 12 authorities have completed and reported results.

e) We continue to make progress on the series of recommendations made in the Chief Scientific Advisor's September [Annual FSA Science Update, Annex 1](#).

f) Following the Board retreat, the Chair of the Science Council met with the Chair of the Board, Chief Executive and Chief Scientific Advisor to discuss a pipeline of future Science Council papers. These are currently being finalised and we will produce a final list in Q3.

3.5 Trade and International (slide 12)

a) On the continuous 6-monthly food safety and legislative review of High-Risk Foods Not of Animal Origin, a World Trade Organisation notification for the 3rd review has been made and the Statutory Instrument is planned to be laid in November 2024, this was slightly delayed due to the general election. The 4th review remains on track to be completed in 2025. The rest of the work on imported food continues the green trend of last quarter, with no significant concerns to be raised.

b) The FSA has been asked to contribute to the preparation and facilitation of six inward missions this year from overseas trading partners to secure continued export trade for GB Food Business Operators. This has exceeded the four missions we can reasonably resource over the course of a year, however, funding for the two additional audits is retrospectively being provided from Department for Business and Trade's regulatory partnership growth fund. As of November 24, five of the six missions have now been delivered, with the sixth taking place in January 2025. We are confident of fulfilling our obligations in this space.

3.6 Reputation and Communications (slide 13)

a) The latest Food and You 2 survey highlighted a slight rise in trust following the dip recorded in the previous period. We will continue to monitor this across future surveys, but results from the latest Reprtrak survey, measuring reputation, also revealed a positive trend with significantly more people willing to advocate for the FSA's products and services (+9% from Q4 2023/24) and to say something positive about the FSA (up 7%).

b) In Q2 we managed a widespread incident involving mustard ingredients being contaminated with peanuts. Our handling approach contributed to positive media coverage (reflecting our key messages), resulting in 57 articles with a combined reach of 122.2m. Communications activity related to the mustard/peanut incident resulted in an increase in social media engagement, particularly from industry.

c) We commissioned a survey targeting those with a peanut allergy to measure the impact of consumer communications, to find out if we were reaching the right people at the right time. The survey revealed 45% were aware that certain food products containing mustard ingredients sold in the UK may have been contaminated with peanuts and two-thirds of this group had taken some action as a result. The survey also gave useful information about channels of communication; 44% of respondents had heard about the incident in the news; 25% by word of mouth; and 21% received information from the FSA's allergy alerts service.

3.7 Resources (slide 14)

a) The most significant change in the resources position since Q2 relates to the diversity benchmarks, which have been updated to align with the latest published Civil Services Statistics for 2024. We have also reviewed our methodology for calculating representation for both this and the previous period to ensure consistency with the Civil Service Statistics approach. Our representation for all protected characteristics has increased and are now closer to the benchmarks, with disability exceeding the benchmark. EMT has, however, requested a deep dive into the ethnicity data as the representation remains lower compared to the benchmark.

b) The most up-to-date financial position is included in the Chief Executive's report, which supersedes that discussed at EMT and included in this report. However, the overall message for Westminster is consistent, that additional funding has been secured by HMT in year which, in combination with small amounts of underspends, means we are confident we will live within our

control totals for 2024/25.

c) Wales remains close to budget at Q2 and for Northern Ireland there is a forecast underspend of £0.8m, the majority of which is ringfenced (Windsor Framework) and expected to be returned to NI Department of Finance.

4. Conclusion

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b) **Operational delivery – To discuss** the annual progress and outcomes of the National Food Crime Unit's work.

c) **Market Authorisations - To note** that whilst no applications have been delivered this quarter, we are on target to deliver the entire tranche 3 batch of 26 Feed additive applications next quarter

Annex

PDF

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