

Minutes of the meeting of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee held on 21 October 2021

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Present:

Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) Members Attending:

Peter Price, Chair
Alan Gardner (via Teams)
Dr Philip Hollington (via Teams)
Christopher Brereton OBE
Georgia Taylor
Dr John Williams

Food Standards Agency (FSA) Officials Attending:

Nathan Barnhouse – Director, FSA in Wales
Julie Pierce – Director Wales, Information and Science
Sioned Fidler – Head of Communications, Welsh Language and Business Support
Lucy Edwards – Business Manager
Kerys James-Palmer- Head of Regulatory Policy (via Teams)
Jonathan Davies – Head of Policy (Standards) and Consumer Protection

Guest Speakers:

Sarah Pattison, parent of a child with multiple allergies and social media campaigner
Meleri Williams, allergy sufferer and participant in FSA's 'Easy to Ask' campaign
Gary Davies, Chair of the Local Authority Food Information and Labelling Group

Observers:

Caroline Kitson - Senior Communications Manager, FSA

1. Introductions and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Helen Taylor.

2. Declaration of interests

2.1 Chris Brereton advised that he has been appointed as a Vice President of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

3. Chair's Update (Paper FSA 21/07/01)

3.1 The Chair provided an oral update on the October Board retreat and also the last policy meeting that was held on 16 June and the seven papers considered.

4. Director's Update (Paper FSA 21/10/03)

4.1 The Director presented his written report which summarised the key activities of the FSA in Wales since the last meeting on 21 July 2021.

4.2 In an oral update, the Director reported that the Shellfish Water Quality Group had recently been re-established with Welsh Government and that work had been ongoing to engage with Local Authorities in relation to their Covid response.

5. Food Hypersensitivity – Personal accounts

5.1 A series of presentations were delivered on Food hypersensitivity including two personal accounts, an overview of the FSA's Food Hypersensitivity Programme and the New Allergen Labelling Law and also an update from Local Authorities on the implementation of the Law and help for businesses.

5.2 Sarah Pattison explained how she uses her social media handle Welsh Allergy Mummy to raise awareness of allergens and share credible information and messaging. Sarah informed that her 7 year old son has multiple food allergies including cow's milk, wheat (not gluten) egg, soya, buckwheat, lentil, peas and tree nuts.

5.3 Sarah described the difficulties in living with these allergies and detailed the struggle to get information from producers in relation to the 'may contain' precautionary allergen labelling due to many of her sons allergies being outside of the 'top 14' allergens. Sarah explained that eating out was also a significant issue because of this.

5.4 Sarah informed that she shops in multiple supermarkets every week to ensure that she can purchase suitable products for her son. In her experience of checking packaging and labels she has difficulty getting clarity on 'may contain' labels and if she needs to check a new product a response from a manufacturer can take weeks or months and she has to discard many products because the allergens outside of the 'top 14' cannot be confirmed. This limits the variety of foods she is able to offer to her son and restricts his diet.

5.5 Meleri Williams explained that she has an allergy to tree nuts and peanuts, experiencing an anaphylactic shock from eating Brazil nuts when she was 8 years old. Meleri informed that she took part in the FSA's 'Easy to ask' campaign to help raise awareness of allergens amongst students and young people.

5.6 Meleri advised that her biggest challenge is eating out as some establishments are not always as receptive to allergen requests but did comment that she has noted an increase in restaurants asking for specific allergens or dietary requirements and feels that this is improving. Meleri informed that she avoids purchasing foods from bakeries and cafes as they quite often cannot confirm that the products do not contain nuts.

6. Food hypersensitivity - FSA overview

6.1 Kerys James-Palmer gave an overview of the FSA's Food hypersensitivity Programme informing that this is a priority for the FSA because it is a significant food-related health issue in the UK with a severe and enduring impact for people with a food hypersensitivity and their families and carers.

6.2 Kerys informed of the work being carried out in relation to Precautionary Allergen Labelling (PAL) which includes PAL guidance to support SMEs, a PAL consultation, a PAL workshop and also consumer and FBO research.

6.3 Kerys informed the committee of the development of the Food Allergic Reaction Reporting Model (FARRM). The tool is intended to provide information to the FSA on the extent and nature of allergic reactions, particularly when buying food outside the home. This information would give a better understanding of the nature of reactions and inform policy development in the area of food allergy and intolerance.

6.4 The committee were advised that the FSA is also looking at the introduction of a 'food allergy safety scheme' (FASS) to provide consumers with an increased confidence that food businesses have demonstrated the requisite level of allergen risk management and communication.

6.5 Kerys gave an overview of the new allergen labelling law for prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) food which came into force on 1 October 2021. Planning for implementation of this included: an updated PPDS webpage, a 'food labelling decision tool' for businesses, an allergen information and labelling technical guide, updated allergy and intolerance e-learning and separate Local Authority and business training webinars. The FSA in Wales has funded and developed a 'quick guide' to Natasha's Law, contributed to the development of a suite of multilingual allergen resources, attended Wales specific events to talk about the new legislation and are developing bespoke training for LAs in Wales on PPDS.

7. Local Authority update

7.1 Gary Lewis gave an overview of the work undertaken by Local Authorities and the Greater Gwent Food Group to produce a suite of multilingual allergen resources, these resources are available in 9 different languages and will aid a vast number of businesses. Gary advised that LAs have been working with the FSA in preparation for the new allergen labelling by promoting the business training webinars, social media updates and using online forums and blogs in addition to responding to business queries and providing information at the time of inspection.

7.2 Gary informed the committee that there are some concerns around the compliance with the new legislation and commented that a statutory definition of PPDS would have been preferable. There are concerns that this law has a big impact for micro businesses in relation to defining the main ingredient of products, the use of substitute ingredients where labels are not then regularly updated and also sourcing information from suppliers.

8. Panel discussion

8.1 The committee and presenters participated in a panel discussion and the following topics were discussed:

- The possibility of linking FHRS and compliance with allergen law although the general consensus was that a new indicative system should be developed for allergens
- That online shopping can sometimes prove difficult as some products do not show full ingredients list or many use 'may contain'
- Discussion of the FSA allergen alerts system and the valuable data that is gathered to allow for root cause analysis

8.2 The committee commented that it was extremely beneficial to hear the personal accounts of living with allergies, the discussion had provided a different perspective and provided very useful information that will help to inform FSA work on Food hypersensitivity going forward.

9. AOB

9.1 Members noted that the next themed meeting was to be held on 3 February 2022.