



Minutes of the 165th meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board

Held on Thursday, 7 September 2023 at 10:30am

safefood, Dublin

Present: in person

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)

Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)

Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)

Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)

Ms Irene Collins (IC)

Present: Virtually

Mr Alex Attwood (AA)

Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)

Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)

Mr Alan Lewis (AL)

In attendance: in person

Dr Gary A. Kearney, Interim Chief Executive (GK)

Ms Fiona Gilligan, Director Communications (FG)

Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director Corporate Operations (PF)

Ms Trish Twohig, Director Food Safety (TTw)

Dr Aileen McGloin, Director Nutrition (AMcG)

Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretariat

Apologies:

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)

1. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting. The apologies of DMcC were recorded.

Noted: The Chair, on behalf of the Advisory Board, offered condolences to Alex Attwood on the passing of his father.

Noted: The Chair welcomed the recently appointed Director of Food Safety to her first meeting of the Advisory Board.

2. Conflicts of interest

Noted: The Chair asked members if there were any conflicts of interest relating to the agenda. KMcK informed he may become involved in a piece of work, via his employer, with the Food Safety Authority Ireland (FSAI) and European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) (an initial meeting has taken place).

3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 29 June 2023.

Approved: The Chair asked members if they were happy to approve the minutes of the previous meeting which were circulated in advance. All concurred.

Proposed: KMcK

Seconded: SMcC

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Action: Carried forward from February Minutes - It was agreed to keep the suggestion made in point 5 of the previous minutes (December 2022) that the Board invite a member of the FSAI 'reformulation of food products taskforce' to present at a meeting at a suitable date in the future.

Noted: GK advised that Michael Barry, facilitator of the discussion on the 2024 Business Plan, had met with SMcC, KMcK and MH to discuss sustainability and how **safefood** might work in this area. The outcome of this meeting will be documented in Michael's summary report of the overall Business Plan discussion.

Action: CEO to arrange for circulation of '**safefood** Advisory Board deliberations on the 2024 Business Plan' document.

5. Financial Report

Noted: PF presented the financial report for the first seven months of 2023 (January to July). **safefood**'s expenditure to date is slightly behind budget at present. GK informed there is always a slight under/overspend across budget lines throughout the year, which is closely monitored, with a close focus on staying within **safefood**'s approved budget. PF explained the 70 / 30 percent funding model. Seventy per cent of **safefood**'s funding is drawn down from the Irish Government for the first nine months of the year. **safefood** needs to be clear that the full annual budget will be required before making the final draw-down of funds from the Irish sponsor department, otherwise the 70 / 30 ratio will not be achieved.

6. Update from the Board's Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

Noted: EK provided an update from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 22 August 2023.

- Thanks to Marian Brady for assisting the ARC and providing notes for feedback to the Board.
- ARC members approved the draft 2022 financial statements.
- **safefood** have now transitioned from Excel to a new risk software package (GOAT) for Risk Management. PF spoke to the workings of the dynamic software, how the trend of risks is managed, and allocation of ownership of risks. Angela Cahill, Chief Risk Officer, is continuing to expand the Risk Appetite statement and review the Risk Policy. **safefood** plans for full transition to the new risk system by the end of this year. There are quite a few significant risks which **safefood** cannot mitigate without assistance from outside agencies for example where approval is necessary from the NSMC or sponsor and finance departments. The ARC requested that the top risks report is shared with Sponsor Departments to ensure they are formally advised on the implications and impact of these for **safefood**. PF agreed to add this to the agenda for the next Sponsor Departments meeting as requested by the members of the ARC.

- A letter from the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) to **safefood** was discussed. The letter noted recommendations to include more numerical KPIs (Key performance indicators) metrics/targets to assess our programmes. The C&AG outlined that the new Fixed Assets policy is more robust. The Fixed Asset Policy now includes logging assets for disposal, completing disposal certificates for each item disposed of and increasing the frequency of records reconciliation of fixed assets.
- Tony Campbell (TC) from the internal auditor, presented two reports.
 - High Level Review of System of Internal Control 2022 – which showed 1 medium risk finding and 3 low risk findings. He explained that the recommendations were taken on board by management and could be easily rectified and addressed.
 - Pricing, Value for Money, and Relationship Building in the Communications Area - TC discussed the findings of this report, specifically that there was only 1 low risk finding. TC assured the ARC members that processes and procedures related to this risk are already in place in the organisation, but just need to be documented.
- ARC members met with TC without the Executive (**safefood**) present as is best practise.
- The next meeting of the ARC will be held in December.

Noted: The Chair thanked AA and EK for their ongoing work and keeping the Board informed and up to date.

7. Chief Executive Officers report

Noted: The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed **safefood's** activity since the last Board meeting on 29 June. The report was circulated to members prior to the meeting and taken as read. The CEO invited Directors to inform on the following items.

- FG referenced the completion of the START Campaign evaluation and provided an overview of topline outcomes.

Action: Circulate a one-page summary of the evaluation to Board members once completed.

- FG informed of plans for the next Childhood obesity campaign which will move away from direct messages to parents. The new campaign will encourage people to look and understand the food environment and have an awareness of how this impacts their choices. Once this understanding is raised the campaign will encourage people to ask for change to allow the environment to help them make healthier choices.

This generated a lengthy discussion between Board Members, therefore the CEO suggested facilitating a discussion at the next meeting in November.

- AMcG informed **safefood** is hosting an event in Newry to promote practical collaboration between colleagues delivering community food projects across the island of Ireland whilst also providing the opportunity to share knowledge and best practice.
- Following a successful pilot, the NI Transform your Trolley programme will launch on 21 September and run for three years. Twenty-nine Healthy Living Alliance Centres in Northern Ireland signed up deliver the programme.
- TTW provided feedback from the 'Novel Foods: The food safety concerns' webinar which included an impressive line-up of speakers who provided a horizon scanning view.
- An update was provided on new research projects following a tender call in March.
 - An evaluation session is due to take place on 18 September on the research project titled 'Are knowledge and behaviours related to food purchase, storage and cooking in the domestic context affected by the current cost of living crisis?'
 - Two tender calls were issued for the project titled 'Modelling cost-effectiveness of overweight and obesity prevention policies on the island of Ireland' without producing a successful candidate. KMCK observed that it is a rare skill set who provide cost modelling.
 - The research project titled 'Ensuring food allergen understanding and labelling compliance for non-prepacked foods in the catering and hospitality sector' was unsuccessful on the first evaluation and will be re-advertised. That evaluation is scheduled for October.
- FG informed **safefood's** Meat Thermometer food safety campaign has been nominated in this year's Effie Awards in the *Public Service & Government*

category. These awards recognise the most effective advertising & communication campaigns and are notoriously difficult to win.

8. Presentation – Climate action at **safefood**

Noted: AMcG presented on Climate Action at **safefood**. Under The Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP21) public sector bodies are committed to complete Climate Action Roadmaps by the end of 2022. **safefood**'s Climate Action Roadmap outlines how **safefood** aims to meet the requirements and reach our 2030 carbon and energy efficiency targets.

Noted: Advisory Board Members were asked in advance of the meeting to consider the following

- Do you know of examples of organisations who are leading the way in relation to sustainability and what can we learn from them?
- In terms of **safefood**'s programmes that you are familiar with, where do you see the opportunities to make our work more sustainable?

Noted: The CEO welcomed any insights or advice around sustainability. A discussion took place with advice and suggestions given from Board members.

9. AOB and tour de table

Noted: The Chair thanked all Board members for their valuable input and opened to the floor for AOB.

Noted: KMcK informed it was great to see the START evaluation and asked how **safefood** can lead the C & AG's thinking on KPI's. He suggested looking at Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES).

Noted: SMcC enquired as to her membership of the Advisory Board as her term is due to end in October. GK advised that he has written to the Sponsor Department in Ireland, and it will be raised at the meeting with them on 18 September.

Noted: The Chair informed the next meeting will take place on 2 November in Armagh.

10. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: Members discussed the importance of ensuring that due consideration is given to the workload of staff as new exercises are initiated.