

# SAFER programme Update

## 1 Purpose of the paper

1.1 To provide the Board with an update on the SAFER Programme and an opportunity to discuss progress and next steps and to ask the Board to agree to support Programme initiation and development of governance and reporting requirements.

1.2 The Board is asked to:

- **Note** the update regarding Programme funding for 2025 – 26 and beyond;
- **Note** progress with regard to recruitment, programme planning and development of governance and reporting arrangements;
- **Note** the challenges with regard to our ability to spend in 2025 - 26;
- **Consider and discuss** the progress made to date, communication requirements and next steps.
- **Agree** to initiation of the SAFER Programme and approach to development of governance and reporting arrangements.

## 2. Strategic aims

2.1 This paper supports all of Food Standards Scotland (FSS) strategic outcomes.

## 3. Background

3.1 Following our application in January 2025 to the Scottish Government (SG) Public Service Reform (PSR) Invest to Save initiative (ITS), FSS successfully secured SAFER Programme funding and £3,247M was confirmed on 21 May.

3.2 All communications with Ministers and SG have clearly stated that SAFER is a 4-to-5-year programme of reform and that a multi-year funding approach will be required. SAFER proposes development of a more sustainable funding and delivery model for food official controls and seeks to develop proposals for a food business registration and charging system that will clearly require wide stakeholder engagement.

3.3 Ministers and SG officials have offered full support for SAFER as part of wider PSR and the successful ITS bid evidences this. However, the funding source beyond 2025 - 26 currently remains unclear and concern in this respect has been raised and the Board will be kept informed of progress.

3.4 It is clear however that the funding allocation must be used within the current financial year and, as we are almost at the end of Quarter 1, there is a significant challenge around our ability to fully spend this in line with our programme plan. The risks here are around the timescales and constraints presented by procurement and recruitment processes however, recruiting through fixed-term appointments and use of agency personnel will help to expedite this.

## 4. Discussion

4.1 SAFER is the FSS strategic response to risks around the food law delivery platform in Scotland and clearly supports Ministerial commitments to wider PSR. A continued decline in resources and staff numbers within Local Authority (LA) Environmental Health functions present a significant risk to the current and future successful delivery of food official controls and action is urgently required.

4.2 SAFER proposes a programme of reform to develop and embrace new and more efficient ways of delivering official controls and securing improved public health outcomes through better use of data and digital technologies, delivery model redesign and ensuring financial sustainability. The challenges ahead are significant and considerable work has already been undertaken by FSS Local Authority Delivery Division (LADD) to identify the key risks and areas that require reform and to develop governance and workstream approaches to progress.

4.3 In moving forward, business as usual (BAU) activities, support functions and LA performance monitoring / reporting currently undertaken by LADD and Audit & Assurance Divisions (AAD) will be reviewed. We will continue to do all that we can to support LAs in their food law delivery work and will also look to discuss and agree future Programme and LA performance reporting requirements with FSS Board.

4.4 Activities currently within LADD that are Programme related will be transferred to a new SAFER Division within FSS exclusively focused on delivery of the programme. Discussion is underway with LADD and AAD to further refine and agree ongoing LA support requirements, business plan priorities and the Divisional intersects with the Programme.

4.5 Concept to Programme launch has taken around 3 years, and we are clearly not at a standing start, however a gear change is essential to take preparatory work forward to implementation. Immediate priorities for the coming year will therefore be:

- Recruit the Programme team including Programme Management Office (PMO), Data and Digital resource and communications and engagement roles.
- Establish the Programme Board and implement governance arrangements already drafted including refining and agreeing the future strategic vision and direction.
- Develop and refine Programme terms of reference, definitions, initiation documentation, plan and milestones for delivery, communications and stakeholder engagement plan, high level and detailed timelines and critical path.
- Develop a financial forecast to describe the plan for expenditure and approach and agree source for subsequent years funding.
- Develop options for the future model for food official controls delivery in Scotland.
- Develop detailed proposals and recommendations for a Food Business Registration and Charging scheme.

- Commission research in addition to the Social Science and Food Business research already agreed.
- Review and agree Programme and LA performance reporting arrangements (including reports to FSS Board).

## 5. SAFER current position and activity underway

5.1 A number of key appointments have already been made. Ian McWatt has been appointed as the Programme Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). The SRO will hold the necessary delegated authority and Executive accountability for the success of the Programme and to ensure it meets its objectives and realises the expected benefits. Bryan Campbell, former FSS Head of Operational Delivery has been appointed to the role of Programme Manager and will hold responsibility for the day to day management of the Programme as well as leading the planning and design work and defining and landing the governance framework. We also have previously appointed 3 x C1s within LADD who will all now be funded from the SAFER budget and work will shortly commence to recruit other posts and to the Programme Board. We are also progressing consumer and Food Business Operator research to provide underpinning evidence to support future SAFER decisions and outcomes.

5.2 The [Scottish Public Finance Manual](#) provides detailed guidance on the proper handling and reporting of public funds and includes definitions on major investment criterion and associated controls. Discussions are scheduled with SG Finance to consider this, and compliance requirements will be included within the developing SAFER governance framework.

5.3 A key area of spend will focus on more effective use and analysis of data and digital technologies. LADD have been working closely with SG Digital and CivTech partners to develop the business processes and systems to underpin proposals for a food business registration and charging system and this will move to a prototype stage later in the summer. The intent will then be to consider a move to phase 2 and operationalise work already delivered in phase 1 in readiness for a potential charging system launch in 2027 - 28.

5.4 Other early areas of spend include the recruitment of a Programme Management Office (PMO), finance and legal support and an enhanced Data and Digital and Business Change Management skillset within the Programme. This will be a critical success factor for Programme delivery and work will progress throughout the summer in this area.

## 6. Identification of risks and issues

6.1 Currently, Programme risks surround our ability to spend, recruit personnel and complete procurement within this financial year although some progress has been made in these areas already. As the Programme develops, so too will the risk profile especially around change management and stakeholder engagement and consideration will be given to this as part of team requirements development.

## 7. Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty

7.1 There are no specific issues relevant to this paper as it is an overview of the approach to the initiation of the SAFER Programme. The outputs from the Programme will clearly have considerations in this area and will form the part of specific workstream and project planning activity.

## 8. Consumer Duty

8.1 The SAFER programme proposes reform to the way in which food official controls are delivered in Scotland which clearly intersects with our consumer duty. Future Programme outputs and Board discussions will therefore need to take this into account.

## 9. Conclusion

9.1 SAFER is a complex strategic priority that presents a significant commitment for the wider FSS and is reflective of the scale of the risks and issues we are aiming to mitigate. The LADD have already delivered much of the Programme foundations, and we are now in the process of operationalising this and separating out Programme work from BAU and ongoing support activity for LAs.

9.2 In view of this organisational level commitment for FSS, the Board will have a view on the work underway and agreement is sought for the Executive to formally initiate the SAFER Programme as an immediate priority.

9.3 As part of the set-up phase, governance and reporting arrangements will need to be refined and agreed and further Board discussion in this regard is envisaged. Given the scale of this reform there is a commitment to ensure effective future engagement and communication with the Board, SG, Ministers and stakeholders and Board views around this would be welcomed.

9.4 The Board is asked to:

- **Note** the update regarding Programme funding for 2025 – 26 and beyond.
- **Note** activity underway with regard to recruitment, programme planning and development of governance and reporting arrangements.
- **Note** the challenges with regard to our ability to spend in 2025 – 26.
- **Consider and discuss** the challenges, progress made to date, communication requirements and next steps.
- **Agree** to initiation of the SAFER Programme and approach to development of governance and reporting arrangements.

Please direct queries to:

**Ian McWatt**  
**Deputy Chief Executive**  
**8 June 2025**