

Chief Executives Report

1. Introduction

1.1 There has been a considerable amount of activity since the last meeting.

2. Engagements and meetings

2.1 In terms of engagements, in late October the CEO accompanied Mairi Gougeon the Cabinet Secretary and Scottish Government (SG) officials meeting his opposite number from Belgium to talk about food safety, food security and food sustainability. He also met with colleagues in the Brussels office and met with the EU equivalent of Which! The CEO also presented to around 50 attendees from different legal firms specialising in food law.

2.2 Geoff was invited to attend a panel discussion at the Moredun Institute on Friday 29 November to talk about food security and food safety.

2.3 Geoff, Ian McWatt and the SFCIU team hosted the Europol funded Operation Oposon/Emfact meeting on Food Crime which was opened by the Cabinet Secretary Ms Gougeon. It was a two day event that also included a meeting of the Global Alliance to tackle food crime. The Oposon meeting was attended by industry stakeholders including the UK Food Industry Intelligence Network. Enforcement authorities were represented by Europol, the European Commission and EU member states with attendance from Canada, USA, Australia, UK and New Zealand.

2.4 The CEO attended the quarterly FSS Audit and Risk Committee meeting which took place at Saughton House on 27 November 2024.

2.5 On 02 December the Chair and CEO had a regular catch up with the FSA Chair and interim CEO to discuss a range of current issues.

3. Minister at FSS's Board meeting

3.1 FSS's Board meeting on 18 September 2024 was attended by Jenni Minto MSP, the Minister of Public Health and Women's Health. The Minister was provided with updates on FSS's recent work.

4. Engagement with opposition parties

4.1 The Chief Executive has written to the leaders of all the opposition parties represented in the Scottish Parliament requesting meetings to update them about the role, remit and work of FSS.

5. Joint FSS/FSA Annual Report on Food Standards

5.1 FSS and FSA have published the Annual Report on Food Standards across the UK. The key findings of the *Our Food 2023: An annual review of food standards across the UK* report were shared at a webinar held on 09 October 2024. The webinar featured inputs from Emma Harper MSP, Jenni Minto MSP, the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health and FSS's Chair, Heather Kelman.

6. Criminal Justice Committee Evidence Session

6.1 On Wednesday 25 September 2024 Ian McWatt, FSS's Deputy Chief Executive, and Ron McNaughton, Head of the Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit, gave evidence on tackling food crime to the Scottish Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee.

7. FSS inputs at Scottish Parliament Cross-party Groups

7.1 Stuart McAdam, FSS's Head of Incidents and Resilience gave a presentation at the Cross-party Group on Animal Welfare on 11 September 2024. The presentation focused on the risks of on-farm poisoning to animals, and the actions that can be taken to prevent this problem which can have such a devastating impact upon cattle and sheep. Ross Clark, Senior Intelligence Analyst in the SFCIU, also gave a presentation on food crime at the meeting on 17 September 2024 of the Scottish Parliament's Cross-party Group on Independent Convenient Stores.

8. MSP Engagement

8.1 FSS has continued to progress its engagement with MSPs on a cross-party basis. Ron McNaughton, Head of Food Crime and Incidents in FSS's Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit (SFCIU), and Robert McGeachy, Head of Public Affairs and Engagement, had meetings on food crime with Rhoda Grant MSP, the Scottish Labour Party's Spokesperson on Islands, Land Reform and Rural Affairs, with Audrey Nicoll MSP, the Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee and with Sharon Dowey MSP, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party's Deputy Chief Whip and Deputy Spokesperson on Community Safety and on Victims. The meetings focused on the impact of food crime on consumers, on businesses and on the economy as a whole.

8.2 Ian McWatt, FSS's Deputy Chief Executive, and Robert McGeachy, Head of Public Affairs and Engagement, met Monica Lennon MSP on 27 September 2024. The meeting focused on FSS's partnership working with local authorities and with other stakeholders in relation to enforcement on issues around food safety and standards, and about the collective challenges we face in this area, including recruitment and retention issues within the environmental health and food safety workforces.

9. Food Standards Scotland Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) 2023-24

9.1 FSS received an unmodified audit report from Deloitte for the year 2023-24 and the ARA was signed off on 28 November 2024, and these will be laid in parliament.

10. Export Missions

10.1 The Canadian audit took place during September with visits to four food business establishments in Scotland. FBOs are currently working to address non-compliances raised during the audit with Corrective Action reports being produced and verified by FSS or LAs. The draft audit report is due in early January 2025.

11. EU Audits

The Dairy audit took place in England and Scotland in November, with visits in Scotland to three food business establishments in two local authorities and meetings with the LAs concerned. The closing meeting took place on 22 November. The main issues for FSS and LAs were GB wide, and not specific to Scotland:

- the role of local authorities in official controls, and
- handling and identification of cheese waste.

Other issues were raised concerning matters that fall within the remit of other competent authorities.

- Poultry meat and egg products (with a focus on controls against Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza) planned to take place from 14 to 30 January 2025. Visits will only take place in England with FSS contributing to the pre-audit questionnaire and opening and technical meeting presentations.
- The 2025 EU audit work plan was published at the end of November 2024 - [Health and food audits and analysis programme 2025](#)

For GB we expect the following audits:

- Animal health in countries listed (poultry) – January (in planning)
- Safety of products from mammals and birds for human consumption (poultry)
- Food of animal origin – Safety of fishery products
- Production hygiene of live bivalve molluscs – end Feb/early March (we await the audit plan and pre-audit questionnaire)

12. New publication on calorie content of sweet discretionary products sold out of home

12.1 On 03 December 2024 we published our report [“A repeat analysis of the energy content of sweet discretionary products in the out of home sector in Scotland 2023”](#). An analysis of sweet discretionary products was previously carried out between May and September 2022, with findings indicating these items widely ranged in calories. The purpose of the current research was to assess whether there had been any changes in the calorie content of these products between 2022 and 2023.

12.2 Although the results from the 2023 analysis demonstrated slight reductions in the calorie content of sweet discretionary products through reformulation and/or reduced portion sizes, the findings highlight the profound scale of change required to bring out of home sweet discretionary products that are available in Scotland in line with Government calorie recommendations. [The accompanying press release can be viewed here.](#)

13. Civil Service People Survey 2024

13.1 FSS participated in the annual Civil Service People Survey and obtained an overall 72% employee engagement score and an 85% response rate. High staff input gives confidence in the results and will help us understand what is working well and where we need to focus to improve, for example, over the past 3 years the results have been used to drive strategic and tactical improvements. We will now be analysing the results and deciding on which areas to focus our improvement efforts on.

14. New Structure

14.1 The new structure is bedding in well and while we will undertake a review of it, we still need to give it a bit more time to bed in. On governance we have the Executive Management Team focusing on the tactical decision making, resource, performance and risk management with the Strategy Forum attended by Ian McWatt and I and the Heads of Division as the strategic element of our governance.

15. Framework document and corporate plan requirements

15.1 As we continue to work towards the development and launch of our new strategy, there will be a need to undertake a formal review of the Scottish Government Framework document. In the meantime, we shall operate on the basis that FSS has a wide range of statutory and administrative reporting responsibilities and many of these are covered in this Framework Document. Two of the most significant is the publication of the FSS (3 or 5 year) strategy and the publication of an Annual Report (including the Annual Accounts). FSS will, before each strategy cycle plan and prepare a strategy which sets out what it aims to achieve over that period. This will be supported by a mechanism to publicly measure performance and demonstrate how it intends to deliver on the commitments made.

15.2 Once our new strategy is finalised and agreed by the Board, a copy of the FSS Strategy will be provided to the Scottish Ministers and will be published.

For queries contact:
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