

## Chief Executives Report

### 1. Visits and Meetings

1.1 Garry McEwan gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee on 30 May 2023 in a roundtable discussion focusing on the public sector reform programme.

1.2 FSS has joined a number of Cross Party Groups in the Scottish Parliament relevant to our work. The membership of these groups consists of MSPs, organisations across different sectors and individuals with an interest in specific policy areas and issues. FSS has secured an opportunity to deliver a presentation on the risks of food borne illness to older people at the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Older People, Age and Ageing in September 2023.

1.3 Meetings have been arranged with Rhoda Grant MSP, the Labour Party's Spokesperson on the Islands, Land Reform and Rural Affairs, and with Emma Harper MSP, and with the Scottish Parliament's information centre (SPICE)

1.4 The CEO, as a follow up to the evidence session with the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on 24 January 2023, has written to the Convener of the committee, Clare Haughey MSP, offering to arrange for FSS to provide an evidence session in private focusing on food crime. FSS has also contacted Audrey Nicoll MSP, the Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee, and the opposition parties' spokespersons on justice offering separate meetings to update them on FSS's work on food crime.

1.5 On the 13 June Emily Miles, Chief Executive FSA and Susan Jebb, Chair FSA came to Aberdeen to meet with Heather Kelman and Geoff Ogle as part of the MoU commitment to meet twice yearly. . As part of their visit they attended Peterhead Fish Market and Susan and Heather also attended the Rowett Institute.

1.6 Geoff Ogle attended the International Heads of Food Agency Forum in Dublin for the first time in May. It was a one day conference focusing primarily on incidents. A further presentation will be given to the Board in August in relation to our recent international engagement generally, and there are clear opportunities for more collaboration. My main reflection is that most of us attending the conference are grappling with the same challenges and issues and horizon scanning and identification of emerging risks is a core issue that is important to us all.

1.7 FSS also attended the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) conference in Atlanta. Some key thoughts from that conference are:

- There was a very strong message throughout the conference on the "globalisation of trade" and alongside that was the emphasis on emerging market and support for less

developed countries and how they can develop and meet food safety obligations. Following our prioritisation exercise we concluded that “trade” per se is not our core role, and while that is still the case, I think we do need to think about the narrative we portray with regards to the links between trade and the enabling capability of a good food safety regime.

- How we integrate 1st, 2nd and 3rd party audits/assurance into our regulatory regime is essential going forward. The frequency of private sector over-sight is far more substantial than that done by LAs and we need to focus more time, energy and effort on how we get 3PA working effectively. In terms of criticality, getting this off the ground will do more for assurance sooner than other options
- We need to think hard about the data and insight we want from the private sector. No Govt organisation would be able to handle all the data they have so we need to be clear on what we need. As Steve Wearne Chair of CODEX said “we want their wisdom, not their data”
- E-commerce is not going away and if anything is going to be more and more of a challenge. Germany gave a very good presentation on e-commerce, not only is the issue the size and scale of it a worry but the issue is the speed with which businesses can move to a new domain etc. If physically located businesses are less of the future and e-businesses are more, then what does that mean for regulation of the food system? There is also a level of segmentation of e-commerce that we need to think about: (i) retailer with home delivery; (ii) food services (e-commerce=quick commerce) take-away; (iii) micro businesses essentially selling via the internet. (i) and (ii) are probably manageable where the business is reputable; (iii) a size and scale and level of risk issue that we need to understand

## 2. Update on FSS veterinary resource

2.1 A success story of sorts!. As the Board will be aware, the significant negative effects of Brexit and Covid-19 pandemic were severely felt by the executive team in relation to availability of veterinary resource. The key risk was in relation to FSS’ ability to deliver statutory Official Controls (OCs) as fully required, due to significant veterinary staff shortages and a series of failed recruitment campaigns. Since then, we have been working through a series of actions which we believe have addressed the risk. In particular, we had:

- Secured and extended a pay supplement for our Official Veterinarians (OVs), subject to annual review
- Continued to offer specialised quality CPD to OVs, despite staff shortages challenges at times
- Reviewed and adapted the organisational structure of the Operational Delivery Division, ensuring adequate support for frontline staff and continued a positive organisational culture
- Promoted veterinary resource internally, demonstrating to our OVs the career progression opportunities within FSS
- Taken part in a range of veterinary-focussed events, where we highlighted the work our vets do and the employment conditions with FSS (London Vet Show, vet career fairs, individual enquiries etc.)
- Developed a bespoke OV training programme and secured independent assurance on it from the Scottish Qualifications Authority, by developing a customised award, one of its kind across the UK

- Engaged SG recruitment, Home Office and other stakeholders across the UK and streamlined the recruitment process from abroad, as we continue to rely on non-UK nationals to deliver our meat OCs (only 1 of our qualified OV's, including the management team, is a UK graduate)
- Published our very first veterinary extra-mural studies (EMS) placement, one of the very few across the UK veterinary public health sector [EMS placement with Food Standards Scotland — apply now! | Food Standards Scotland](#)
- Progressed the long term planned actions and lobbied for changes to policies by the RCVS and DEFRA (review of the English level requirements by RCVS, review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 etc.).

2.2 Less than 2 years ago we were in a dire situation. With a continued focus the risk on we have turned that around completely we currently have no OV vacancies, retention levels are between 90-100% (better than they have ever been), we have a number of vets that wish to take up roles with us and we are probably one of the few (if not only) UK veterinary employers that have no issues around veterinary recruitment and retention.

2.3 The difficult task is now to maintain what we have achieved and we will continue to closely monitor the OV requirements and maintain UK-wide engagement in this arena. In the meantime, it is good to be able to acknowledge and celebrate the successes we have achieved and recognise the contribution our OV's (and indeed all field staff) make to protecting public health.

### **3. Launch of the advanced online allergen training tool**

3.1 The Enforcement Delivery branch, in collaboration with Marketing and Comms, have launched a new online allergen training tool to support food businesses and give their staff a better understanding of food hypersensitivities. This training was initially developed by the Greater Gwent Food Group, the Food Standards Agency and Trading Standards Wales, and was later adapted by FSS for the purpose of this training.

3.2 To access the tool, please visit [Advanced Online Allergen Training | Food Standards Scotland](#).

### **4. On Farm prevention campaign 2023**

4.1 The FSS on-farm prevention campaign was run as a collaboration between SFCIU and Communication & Marketing, with the objective of raising awareness of how to prevent on-farm incidents focusing on lead and copper poisoning.

4.2 For this year's campaign we worked closely with a farmer who had been affected by an on-farm incident involving cattle and who was happy to take part in a new video. This was used as part of the comms activity, alongside a news release, social media content and advertorials.

4.3 The statistics for the campaign suggest it was very well received, with views for the newly commissioned video over 55k, and impressions of over 150k for posts across all channels throughout the duration of the campaign.

4.4 There was also significant media pickup, with coverage appearing in a range of regional, national and trade titles, including an interview with Stuart McAdam on BBC Scotland.

4.5 The approach demonstrates the shift in approach in line with the C&M strategic plan, showing how FSS can maintain impact and influence without big budget media campaigns through creating innovative and relevant content and making better use of our organic channels.

## **5. 2024 Meeting dates**

5.1 The dates for Board, ARC and Finance and Business Committee Meetings have all been set and calendar appointments sent out. Board Seminar calendar appointments will be forthcoming shortly.

## **6. FSS/FSA Annual Report on Food Standards**

6.1 FSS continue to work with FSA to progress the annual report, which will be published later in the year.

## **7. SVS and REUL Update**

7.1 There is a Board update on both issues at the meeting. But to confirm a paper was sent to the SVS programme including the Board's thoughts and views on the proposals on setting up an SVS.

## **8. Organisational Structure**

8.1 The Board will recall that following the prioritisation exercise the Executive made changes to the management structure. That was a temporary measure while we awaited the outcomes of SVS and REUL in particular. We are expecting that those two issues will reach key decision points soon and we have therefore set up a small team to consider the longer term organisational structure. We will share our proposals with FBC initially once we have got to the stage of being clearer on what we think the structure should be.

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