MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FOOD STANDARDS SCOTLAND BOARD HELD 17 JUNE 2026 10:45 – 15:00 VICTORIA QUAY, EDINBURGH

Present

FSS Board
Heather Kelman, Chair
Alban Denton
Aileen Brown
Carol Evans
Phillip Couser
Kate Richards
Paula Charlesworth
Christina Bichan

FSS Executive
Geoff Ogle, Chief Executive
Kate Smith, Head of Marketing & Communications
Christine Hill, Head of Private Office
Joanne Smith, Board Secretary

Apologies
Ian McWatt, Deputy Chief Executive
Garry McEwan, Head of Corporate Services

1. Introduction, apologies, matters arising

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the Food Standards Scotland Board meeting in Victoria Quay, and also those attending via Teams.

1.2 Apologies were received from Ian McWatt, Deputy Chief Executive and Garry McEwan, Head of Corporate Services.

2. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

2.1 No conflicts of interest were declared by Board members.

3. Alignment of Public Service Reform and FSS Strategy

3.1 The Chair invited Geoff Ogle, Chief Executive to present a paper providing an integrated assessment of the alignment between Scotland’s Public Service Reform (PSR) Strategy, reflecting the policy direction outlined in the SNP Manifesto of 2026 and assessing alignment with the Food Standards Scotland (FSS) Strategy for 2026-31. The paper also considered the strategic implications of reform for FSS and how FSS’ role as an independent, evidence-based public health and regulatory body contributes to prevention, public trust and effective public service delivery in Scotland.

3.2 The Board agreed greater visibility is required across strategy and decision-making so that the organisation's role and value is framed in terms of public service reform and for example focusing on prevention around obesity, foodborne illness, surveillance and the wider reputational consequences for Scotland's food sector when preventative action is absent or undervalued.

3.3 The Board agreed that PSR should be recognised as a cross-cutting strategic priority, complementing FSS' existing strategic priorities and delivered in part through programmes such as SPS and SAFER, while recognising that SPS is a distinct policy driver which will need to take PSR into account in its implementation.

3.4 The Board agreed that the Board paper template be amended so that future Board papers include a section on PSR implications and alignment around the themes of prevention and efficiency, rather than focusing mainly on internal efficiency or organisational process.

ACTION POINT – 2026/03 – Private Office

4. Dietary Monitoring and Surveillance Strategy 2026-2032

4.1 The Chair invited Alana McDonald, Head of Nutrition Science and Surveillance, and Gillian Purdon, Head Nutritionist to present the full draft strategy for consideration ahead of its publication. This sets out a six-year framework to provide a consistent and flexible approach to dietary surveillance in Scotland.

4.2 The Board noted the more structured reporting cycle, the stronger use of existing data and the emphasis on producing evidence that is relevant to policy and decision-making.

4.3 The Board heard that partnership data remains a major opportunity with FSS looking to work with Public Health Scotland and making use of established existing health and academic datasets, dashboards and biobank-style sources to strengthen analysis without duplicating effort.

4.4 Following discussion, the Board agreed to the proposed strategic approach to dietary monitoring and surveillance subject to revisions that strengthen links to PSR, improve external framing, clarify how findings will reach decision makers, and explicitly captures why dietary evidence matters for policy, prevention and wider public outcomes prior to its publication.

ACTION POINT – 2026/04 – Alana McDonald

4.5 The Board heard that the Diet and Nutrition branch will work with Comms colleagues to ensure a strong launch of the strategy.

4.6 The Chair thanked Alana and Gillian for their paper.

2026/27 Finance Plan including end of May budget actuals and forecasted spend

4.7 The Chair invited Iain Blackwood, Interim Head of Finance and Procurement to present an updated position on information presented at the previous Board meeting.

4.8 The Board noted the budget allocation of £24.8 million, with £23.7 million designated as the resource budget for 2026-27. The remaining £1.1 million comprises non-cash depreciation and annual managed expenditure. The resource budget is effectively the allocation for FSS to deliver on its new five-year strategy, underpinned by three priorities: public health and consumer protection, evolving and reforming the regulatory landscape, and providing an effective public service for the people of Scotland.

4.9 The Board heard that financial pressure has increased early in-year, with the organisation now forecasting a larger budget pressure than previously reported. The main drivers are staffing pressures, reduced operational income and data and digital capital needs, although some movement is still expected as the year develops and assumptions are tested further.

4.10 They also heard that the SAFER programme continues to progress, but funding assumptions and the outcome of invest-to-save decisions remain material to the organisation's wider financial position. The programme therefore remains important not only from a delivery angle but also from a financial sustainability perspective.

4.11 The Board held a thorough discussion on the financial information and forecasted position reported as of 31 May 2026 and agreed that FBC would continue to monitor financial performance with the FBC chair reporting back to the Board as appropriate.

4.12 The Chair thanked Iain for his paper.

5. Finance and Business Committee (FBC) – Annual Report to the Board and oral update

5.1 The Chair invited Alban Denton, former Chair of FBC, to present the Annual Report to the Board from FBC for the period April 2025 to March 2026.

5.2 Some highlights from the report included:

- Throughout the year the FBC received updates on Performance against the Corporate Plan to ensure the organisation remains on track in terms of strategy delivery, as well as effective resource allocation and management. The transparency of corporate performance reports will be improved by way of a traffic light system to show progress against deliverables
- FBC noted the positive results of the 2025 Civil Service People Survey with FSS ranking 9th place overall in UK Civil Service
- FBC received consumer tracking results and noted that one thousand people from various demographics are selected to take the survey, and they were reassured by the data presented, with findings showing an increased trust in FSS among young people and families

5.3 The Chair invited Christina Bichan, Chair of FBC, to provide an oral update from the FBC meeting held on the 27 May 2026.

5.4 Staff costs were slightly under budget, while programme and capital spending were higher than expected due to project work, and the purchasing of vehicles and equipment. Income was also slightly lower than expected.

5.5 SAFER was allocated £1.16m in the Spring Budget Review in 2025/26. The FBC will monitor SAFER spend as well as the overall budget position.

5.6 The committee also discussed the year-end review of performance against the 2024-26 corporate plan, marking the end of both the financial year and the strategy period. A new 2026-27 delivery plan is being developed to support the organisations three new priorities. Of the 23 key deliverables and 55 commitments, 13 deliverables were fully completed, 6 were partly delayed and 4 were not completed. It was suggested that future reports should show the impact of the work delivered, not just the activities completed.

5.7 FBC had also been presented with proposals on the new strategic delivery framework for the 2026-31 strategy, which included a presentation on the proposed strategic indicators covering finance, delivery plan performance, enforcement actions, public health measures, communications reach, SAFER, food safety monitoring, sampling results, staff engagement and audit performance.

5.8 They were presented with a summary of FOI and data protection for 2025-26. Forty five FOI requests were responded to, the highest number since FSS’s creation. Of these, one was answered late due to a member of staff not recognising it as a FOI request, staff training on recognising FOI requests is being planned.

5.9 They received the annual update on meat charging, which, due to increased pay and rises in employment costs have increased by 10% for meat hygiene inspectors and 8% for official veterinarians. Future discussions will focus on long-term resilience, service continuity and reducing reliance on agency staff. The committee will revisit the issue after further engagement has taken place.

5.10 The FBC received a presentation on the year-end engagement and communications results. They noted a 70% reduction in website usage compared to the previous year. This is due to changes in cookie tracking, the transition to the new website, and the impact of AI generated search results reducing click-throughs. However, despite this, engagement increased by 62% which indicates that users who access the site find the content valuable.

5.11 Overall social media audience growth was 6.6%, despite a 66% reduction in spend. Media coverage was also high, with 81.6 million opportunities to see FSS content in the final quarter.

5.12 The Chair thanked FBC for the important work of the committee.

6. Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) – Annual Report to the Board and oral update

6.1 The Chair invited Aileen Brown, Chair of ARC to present the Annual Report to the Board from ARC for the period April 2025 to March 2026.

6.2 Some highlights from the report included:

- FSS again received a 'substantial' audit assurance rating from SGDIAA for 2025-26
- There will be three Official Controls Audits taking place in 2026-27
- A refreshed Risk Management Policy was agreed, designed to clarify roles and responsibilities; strengthen governance arrangements; and align with Scottish Government risk management expectations
- FSS maintained its positive safety culture regarding Health and Safety, and a 22% decrease in total carbon emissions was noted

6.3 The Chair invited Aileen to provide an oral update on the in-person meeting which took place on 03 June 2026.

6.4 They received an executive update on a number of items, including changes to FSS's reporting lines into SG and the uncertainty this brings; Scotland's Public Service Reform; SAFER and SPS.

6.5 Scottish Government Directorate of Internal Audit and Assurance (SGDIAA) presented an update on the internal audit progress report and the annual assurance opinion. The food crime and incident management reviews are underway, and the positive outcome of the five-year external quality assessment was noted.

6.6 They were pleased to note the Substantial assurance opinion received for the year 2025-26.

6.7 They also heard that SGDIAA's five-yearly External Quality Assessment undertaken by Grant Thornton had been completed and received a good result, with only two areas of improvement required.

6.8 FSS Internal Audit presented an update on all open files, and ARC noted the insufficient assurance rating given to the Resource Allocation (Meat OC Delivery) audit, and noted findings will be addressed through the action planning process which is in progress.

6.9 They received the Official Control Delivery Audits Annual Report and Statement for 2025-26 and noted the Reasonable Assurance assigned to the Trichinella Verification audit, and the Limited Assurance given to both the Microbiological Criteria and Resource Allocation audits, noting that management action plans have been agreed and are being progressed to address the findings from each audit.

6.10 The ARC reviewed the Risk and Issues Registers and agreed to the reduced score relating to Changes to FSS roles and remit. They agreed the risk relating to Public Service Reform be added to the Strategic Issues Register. They agreed that the risk related to maintaining an effective food surveillance capability be revised to tie in with SPS and SAFER.

6.11 Two new risks, related to change management and the impact of the UK/EU SPS agreement on FSS were agreed, and they noted and agreed the rewording of the Cyber Security risk.

6.12 Deloitte provided an oral update confirming that they are on track to deliver their audit plan for 2025-26 within the agreed timescales.

6.13 ARC reviewed and provided feedback on the latest version of the draft Annual Report and Accounts and look forward to further oversight of the next draft.

6.14 They received the annual report of Cases of Fraud and Significant Losses and noted there was nothing to escalate to the Board.

6.15 ARC was presented with the Health and Safety annual report, and the committee noted the strong performance and noted governance changes with the office and field safety committees now combined, thereby reducing duplication and improving information sharing. ARC noted the clear message of strong health and safety culture, staff training and improvement actions where appropriate.

6.16 The Chair thanked ARC for the important work of the committee.

7. Minutes of meetings held 26 March 2026

7.1 The Minute of the meeting held 26 March 2026 was agreed as an accurate record with no matters arising.

8. Action Log

8.1 There are currently no outstanding actions.

9. Chair Report

9.1 In the period between 18 June 2026 to present day the Chair attended meetings and events as per the published Chairs Report.

9.2 Further to the report the Chair advised that Catherine Topley will join the organisation on the 06 July as the new Chief Executive. Onboarding arrangements are underway to ensure continuity of executive leadership and accountable officer cover through Geoff Ogle’s retirement and the summer leave period.

10. Chief Executive Report

10.1 The FSS Chair invited Geoff Ogle, Chief Executive Officer, to provide an oral update to supplement his written report.

10.2 The Board heard that a recent High Court judgment against the FSA with regards meat charging does not apply directly in Scotland, however it raises questions about how direct and indirect costs are interpreted and may influence future thinking on charging models, debt monitoring and the wider policy approach. The Board will be presented with a further update at a future meeting.

11. Quarterly Finance Report, Strategic Risk and Issues Register Report, Risk Register and Issues Register – for ratification

11.1 The Board ratified the reports previously provided to the FBC and ARC.

12. Questions from Public

12.1 There were no questions from members of the public in attendance.

13. Q&A

13.1 No other business was discussed, and the meeting was closed.