

Chief Executives Report

1. Introduction

1.1 The Chief Executive took up post on 6th July and has spent a considerable amount of time meeting with internal and external parties to undertake introductions, understand the business and to promote the work of Food Standards Scotland.

2. Communications, engagements and meeting update

2.1 The Scottish Parliament was in recess between 27 June and 30 August 2026. The public affairs activities below were undertaken prior to the Scottish Parliament resuming on Tuesday 01 September 2026.

2.2 On 30 June 2026 the former CEO sent the SFCIU's Annual Report on Food Crime to the Scottish Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee. This was in response to the Committee's request, at an evidence session on 25 September 2024 with Ron McNaughton, Head of the SFCIU, and Ian McWatt, Deputy Chief Executive of Food Standards Scotland, that it would welcome an annual report from the SFCIU on food crime, and on its work in tackling food crime.

2.3 The CEO, the former CEO and Chair met Stephen Flynn MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, on 07 July 2026 to discuss a range of issues, including the change of policy portfolio at Scottish Government level, and future meetings with the Cabinet Secretary.

2.4 On 31 July 2026 a meeting was held with Martyn Day MSP, a member of the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee and of the Climate Action Committee, and formerly the SNP's Spokesperson on Health at Westminster. The meeting was attended by Ron McNaughton, Elena McWatt, Head of Operational Delivery, Gillian Purdon, Head of Nutrition and Robert McGeachy, Head of Engagement & Public Affairs. The meeting was to update Martyn Day MSP on aspects of Food Standards Scotland's work relevant to the remits of the Committees of which he was a member.

2.5 An introductory video introducing the CEO will shortly be finalised and sent to all MSPs, and to all MPs representing constituencies in Scotland. A copy will be made available to the Board.

2.6 On 25 August 2026 the CEO attended a meeting of Food Standards Scotland's Engagement Committee, which identifies opportunities across divisions for external engagement particularly with MSPs, as well as risks in the external environment.

2.7 A letter has been sent to Jack Middleton MSP, FSS's constituency MSP, with requests that he visits Pilgrim House to meet the staff team, and also to have a

discussion about him hosting Food Standards Scotland's proposed parliamentary event.

2.8 The CEO has contacted Helen McDade MSP, Convener, of the Scottish Parliament's Health, Care and Sport Committee requesting a meeting for the CEO and Chair to discuss various issues including Food Standards Scotland's future reporting arrangements to the Committee.

2.9 The CEO has written to the Conveners of the other key committees that Food Standards Scotland will be engaging with over the course of this parliament, including the Economy, Tourism and Energy Committee, the Public Service Reform Committee, and the Rural Affairs Committee.

2.10 The CEO has written to the leaders of all of the opposition parties requesting introductory meetings, with the exception of the Scottish Labour Party, which will not be announcing the result of its current leadership election until 17 September 2026.

2.11 The CEO has written to the local MSPs for the abattoirs and FBOs that Food Standards Scotland works with, requesting meetings for Elena McWatt and colleagues from the division.

3. Out of Home Food Evidence

3.1 On 9 June, FSS published two complementary reports examining Scotland's out-of-home food environment: [*What's behind our choices? Understanding food purchases and behaviours in the out of home environment in Scotland*](#) and [*Out of home food intake and behaviours among adults living in Scotland*](#). The second study was undertaken by the University of Edinburgh.

3.2 The evidence shows that eating out is now a routine part of everyday life. Participants in the University of Edinburgh study visited out-of-home settings on average seven times each week, with food from these settings accounting for around 21% of total energy intake. Taste and convenience were identified as important drivers of behaviour. The findings strengthen the evidence base for action to improve the availability, affordability and attractiveness of healthier choices, particularly in convenience-led settings.

3.3 FSS hosted a stakeholder webinar on 30 June to share the findings and discuss their implications, including a presentation from the University of Edinburgh. The webinar was endorsed by the Association for Nutrition as continuing professional development and helped extend the reach of the research beyond its initial publication. The recording is available [here](#).

4. Publication of tracking survey of Small and Micro Food Business Operators (FBOs) in Scotland

4.1 On 20 August, FSS published the findings of its tracking survey of Small and Micro Food Business Operators (FBOs) in Scotland. The survey was commissioned as part of [*a tracker survey run by the Food Standards Agency \(FSA\)*](#) covering

England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The FSA survey takes place every 2 years and is currently on Wave 5, and this is the first time a Scottish module has been included. Although the coverage in Scotland was relatively small (150 businesses), the survey provides us with new insights relating to the experiences, perceptions, and behaviours relating to small and micro FBOs (those with less than 50 employees) which will be useful for policy development, communications, and the scoping of future research needs in this area. Topics covered include: current challenges faced by these businesses, their experiences and perceptions of FSS, their access to information on food safety regulations, their experiences of food law inspections and how they manage allergen risks.

4.2 The report can be found here: [Small and Micro FBO Survey 2025 - Scotland | Food Standards Scotland](#)

5. Price controls on essential food items

5.1 To support the development of the Scottish Government's Price controls on essential food items, we provided advice on the principles, criteria and approaches that could be used to identify foods for inclusion in an essential food basket and undertook additional analysis to identify commonly consumed foods within the Eatwell Guide food groups.

5.2 The two briefing papers have now been published on our website [here](#).

6. SAFER Update

6.1 The SAFER Programme continues to make strong progress and remains RAG rated Amber/Green (A/G) (successful delivery likely) overall, Key programme milestones have been achieved across funding, recruitment, evidence gathering and stakeholder engagement.

Funding and Programme Capacity

Food Standards Scotland received confirmation in August 2026 that the SAFER Programme had secured Invest to Save Funding for 2026/27, providing greater certainty for delivery during the current financial year.

Recruitment has progressed successfully, with a number of key programme posts now filled across delivery, communications and programme management functions. Recruitment for the Head of Data and Digital Enablement remains ongoing.

Policy and Delivery Development

Work is underway to assess international food regulatory delivery models, drawing on evidence from EU Member States, EEA countries and other international jurisdictions. This will support the development and appraisal of future food law delivery options in Scotland.

Development of sustainable funding options continues, including detailed work on the application of the Official Control Regulation (EU) 2017/625 and exploration of domestic and international cost recovery models. Engagement has taken place with a range of regulators to inform future policy options.

Research and Evidence

A significant programme of research has progressed during the period. The Food Business Operator survey has concluded, with findings informing the evidence base for future reform.

Further research with authorised officers, managers and consumers is underway to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current food law delivery system and future opportunities for reform.

Discovery work on Voluntary Third-Party Assurance (vTPA) has commenced, supporting the wider Dynamic Regulation and Assurance workstream.

Data and Digital Enablement

Engagement continues with Scottish Government digital teams to explore opportunities for future digital registration solutions.

International collaboration has commenced with Safe Food Queensland to understand lessons learned from recent digital regulatory reform and implementation.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Food Business Interests Technical Advisory Group (TAG) has been established and is now operating effectively, alongside continued engagement with the Food Law Professionals TAG.

Collaboration with the Food Standards Agency continues, including joint strategic discussions to ensure alignment between SAFER and the FSA's Future of Food Regulation Programme.

Risks

The principal strategic risk remains the potential for future funding uncertainty beyond the current financial year. While 2026/27 funding has now been secured, longer-term funding arrangements remain the programme's highest-rated risk.

Overall, The programme remains on track, with funding secured for 2026/27, significant progress in building programme capacity, a growing evidence base to support future reform options, and strong engagement across local government, industry and regulatory partners

7. Data and Digital

7.1 During the year, we established a new Data & Digital Division, bringing together technology, data, digital delivery, analytics, cyber resilience and governance into a single function. This reflects the increasingly important role that data, technology and digital capability play in delivering effective public services and supporting informed decision-making.

7.2 The division will support delivery of both the FSS Strategy and the wider Public Service Reform agenda by helping the organisation make better use of data,

modernise technology and strengthen digital capability. While responsibility for delivery sits across the organisation, the division will contribute to progress across our strategic pillars and foundations through improved governance, enhanced insight and more efficient ways of working.

7.3 Over the coming year, the focus will be on strengthening our understanding of organisational data and technology assets, supporting key strategic programmes, enhancing data, digital and cyber governance and building the capability needed to become a more data-driven organisation.

8. Meat charge rates

8.1 The meat charge rates for 2026/27 have been finalised, published and presented to the meat industry on 13 March 2026, and applied from 30 March 2026. This year's hourly rates increased by 10.41% for Meat Hygiene Inspectors and 8.61% for Official Veterinarians, compared to 2025/26.

8.2 On 19 March, the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers (SAMW) have written to Ms Minto, Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, and stated that the scale, structure and timing of the charge rates increases remained fundamental issues for them, also raising the additional Public Holiday, as an example of Government decisions that have a direct and immediate impact on the FSS meat charge rates. However, due to the election period, engagement on the matter was delayed. Further attempts to meet with Mr Flynn materialised in a meeting being set for the 8 September, however that got cancelled due to Ministerial business and is to be rescheduled.

8.3 In order to improve industry's understanding on how the costs contributing to the charge rates are generated, Elena McWatt, Head of Operational Delivery Division, has stood up a joint FSS-industry working group, which met once on 1 June. Two subsequent meetings were cancelled due to lack of contributions from the industry; however a lengthy list of queries and challenges was sent by SAMW on 5 August.

8.4 Nine businesses have written to FSS to advise that they are committed to paying their Official Controls invoices, however they would do so at last year's rates. Of them, eight have maintained the stated approach. FSS has applied the debt recovery policy for the outstanding balances from the May invoices (for work completed in April) and referred them to our legal partners Anderson Strathern on 28 July, actioned by them on 6 August. The industry, specifically SAMW, have taken this referral to mean that we are trying to intimidate them and not allowing engagement with Ministers to take place, despite our repeated reminders that FSS charges and Ministerial discounts are two separate matters.

8.5 In recent media articles, SAMW are now asking for "Scotland (to) establish independent scrutiny of FSS cost allocations, agree charges over several years (...) and publish clear measures of efficiency" and "More fundamentally, ministers should define the baseline inspection needed for public protection and fund a fair share of it

(...)”. This seems to be less about understanding the model and actually demanding a change in the model itself.

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