Minutes of the 151st meeting of the safefood Advisory Board
Held on Thursday, 21 October 2021 at 10:30am
Teams and Dublin VC

PRESENT:

Ms Helen O’Donnell (HOD) (Chair) (Dublin)
Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Dublin)
Mr Brendan Kehoe (BK) (Teams)
Ms Wendy McIntosh (WMI) (Teams)
Dr Mary Upton (MU) (Dublin)
Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC) (Teams)
Mr Alex Attwood (AA) (Teams)
Prof Maeve Henchion (MH) (Teams)
Mr Alan Lewis (AL) (Teams)
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC) (Teams)
Mr Alan McGrath (AMG) (Teams)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Ray Dolan, Chief Executive (RD) (Dublin)
Dr Gary Kearney, Director, Food Science (GK) (Teams)
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director, Corporate Operations (PF) (Dublin)
Dr Aileen McGloin, Director, Marketing and Communications (AMcG) (Dublin)
Ms Joana Calderia Fernandez da Silva (JCFDS) (Teams)
Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretary (Dublin).

APOLOGIES:

Mr Stephen Moutray (SM)
1. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: The Board met without the Executive present. The Chair congratulated ER on his appointment as the new AB Chair commencing 2022.

2. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting hosted virtually on the Teams platform and in the Dublin office.

Noted: The apologies of SM were noted.

4. Conflicts of interest

Noted: The Chair asked members if there were any conflicts of interest relating to the agenda. No conflicts of interest were raised.

5. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 9 September.

Proposed: TC
Seconded: ER

6. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: No matters arising.

7. Presentation on Portion control tools

Noted: The Chair welcomed Dr Caomhan Logue of Ulster University who is one of the authors of the safefood funded research report titled ‘Portion control tools – do they work in practice?’

Noted: Dr Logue informed the research project was carried out to assess the public acceptability of portion control tools. Prevalence of overweight and obesity on the island of Ireland has doubled in the last 20 years. The Foresight report published by the UK Government in 2007 listed portion control as one of the seven clusters that may contribute to reducing overweight and obesity levels. Consumers struggle with what a recommended portion size should look like and therefor the acceptability of portion control tools was researched, for this research the acceptability of using a 200ml marked measuring cup in the family setting was researched.
The research report provided useful insights into portion control tools which can be used by policy developers or bodies such as safefood in their health promotion messages.

- 9 out of 10 households reported using the portion cup for estimating portion sizes at week 3 (90% of households) and week 6 (94% of households).
- Around 9 out of 10 respondents reported that the portion cup was ‘very acceptable’.
- The portion cup was acceptable for use in the home setting, but most people stated that it would not be used outside the home.
- Whilst most respondents reported that the portion cup was usable some practical issues were raised by a small proportion of respondents including:
  - Recommended portion sizes were perceived to be too small
  - Markings being erased following repeated washing
  - Markings on the portion cup being too small (identifying accessibility issues).

The amount of space available to present information on the cup was limited. Enhancement of available technology such as QR codes could be used.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked Dr Logue for an interesting and comprehensive report on the research project which generated discussion amongst the board on how the report could be acted upon.

**8. Chief Executive’s report**

**Corporate**

**Noted:** The CEO thanked the Chair and PF for representing safefood at the North South Ministerial Council (Health and Food Safety Sectoral meeting) on 14 October in Armagh and invited both to provide an update from the meeting. PF informed there was a comprehensive report on safefood’s work and Rufus, the food pyramid and allergens were mentioned. The Chair informed the board that Ministers were complimentary of safefood’s work and wished all Advisory Board retirees well. ER was welcomed as the new Chair to the Board commencing in 2022 and all are looking forward to working with him.

**Noted:** The recruitment process for a new CEO is ongoing.

**Noted:** An update on Covid-19 working arrangements was given, with staff now returned to work in safefood offices, transitioning from 1 day per week from 20 September up to 3 days per week from 14 November.

**Noted:** safefood issued a request for tender for Managed IT Services Solutions to enhance ICT capacity and support business needs with a closing date of 26 October.
Noted: The findings and recommendations from Grant Thornton’s on how to implement the recommendations of the Internal Auditors following their Review of safefood’s Business Continuity Plan were considered by the Executive Board and will go forward to the Audit & Risk Committee at their next meeting.

Campaigns/Communications
Noted: AMcG updated on the following:

- Phase 10 of the Start campaign is currently on air for five weeks with a focus on reducing treats. The campaign which is co-created with the target audience (parents) addresses their wish for a moderation message.
- All Rufus campaign materials have now been distributed to early childcare providers and primary schools. An evaluation will commence in November.
- Evaluation of the meat thermometer summer campaign revealed food performance of the first phase. A very encouraging stat was 27% of those surveyed reported owning a meat thermometer and of those 27%, 6% of owners said they had purchased it in the last six weeks, whilst the campaign was on air.
- PR in September/October focused on the launch of ‘What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Ireland in 2020?’ and the launch of the ‘Transform your Trolley’ initiative in Northern Ireland.
- The digital team have continued to support campaigns throughout the year and produce podcast on topical safefood issues. Traffic to the safefood website is beginning to increase following a cookie issue and open rates for newsletters are positive.
- Development of the Irish language version of safefood for life is in the final phase and planned to be launched before the end of 2021.
- safefood took at stand in the Government arena at the Balmoral Show to promote the START campaign. The footfall to the event was reduced on previous years due to Covid, however this allowed for higher quality interaction with the audience.

Health promotion and nutrition
Noted: JDS informed of the following activity taking place through safefood’s work in health promotion and nutrition during September/October.

- A webinar to share strategies to ensure the continuity of community food programmes was hosted by safefood on 20 October.
- safefood in partnership with the FSA NI hosted the annual All-island food poverty webinar on the topic of food poverty and health inequalities on 29 September. The research report titled ‘What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Ireland in 2020?’
was also launched at the webinar. Live attendance was very positive with 186 delegates joining.

- Board members were sent an invitation to join the 2nd bi-annual All-island obesity Action Forum webinar in November which will focus on whose systems approach to addressing obesity.
- The successful ‘Transform your Trolley’ was relaunched in partnership with 18 Healthy Living Centres in Northern Ireland to deliver community support programmes and online events.
- **safefood** has invited tenders for a programme manager for the CFI 2022-24 term with a closing date of 20 October.
- Extremely positive feedback was received following a feedback session with IFA coaches to review the ‘On the ball’ programme. Coaches reported the interactive materials to be very engaging and pitched at the right level for the age group with no suggestions for improvements to the materials. Noted by coaches was the strong influence of parents in relation to promoting long term healthy behaviours. Workshops for parents are planned for the next phase of the programme which expects to see approximately 700 children participate.

**Knowledge Network**

**Noted:** GK informed of the following activity taking place in Knowledge Network

- **safefood** produced an A5 double side flyer for SMEs on food fraud. The flyer included a QR code which then provides a breadth of information on the subject. Food fraud involves the substation of ingredients generally to make a profit. **safefood** were produced by DEFRA in the UK who thought the resource was very useful and sought permission to use it across England and Wales. The provides a nice East/west link and opportunity to work with another government and raise **safefood**’s profile.
- As of 1 October, Requirements for prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) food labelling has changed throughout the UK and NI. As a result, **safefood** is doing a lot of work in this area to help businesses interpret the legislative changes. **safefood** is working with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and the FSA NI to produce a video, content for the video will be informed by focus groups held with local SME’s.
- The new elearning resource ‘**safefood** for business’ is expected to be launched in November.

**Research**

**Noted:** GK informed the deadline for submissions for a research tender call for two HHN research projects has now closed. The final report on the recently completed project titled
‘Use of antimicrobials in animal health on the island of Ireland: knowledge, attitudes and behaviours’ has been submitted for review by safefood.

**Noted:** ER welcomed the continued work on issues outside of Covid-19.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked the CEO for a comprehensive report.


**Noted:** The Financial report for nine months, January to September of 2021, was tabled and presented by PF. PF informed that underspend can be attributed to how the funds for research are paid, 20% on signing the contract with the remainder paid on completion. As a few projects are now nearing completion this will push up spend.

## 11. Feedback from the Audit and Risk Committee.

**Noted:** The Audit and Risk Committee met recently and Board members ER and AMG who represent the Advisory Board on the committee provided the following feedback from the meeting.

The risk register was discussed at the meeting with the following issues arising/noted

- Most items listed in the register are internal risks.
- A few items discussed/listed related to the Advisory Board e.g., reputation risk and not keeping up to date with developments in safefood.
- AMG advised Board members to look at issues in terms of risk and ask that it is put on the risk register if required.
- The challenge of getting the risk register to be a living document for the whole organisation.
- The inability of the organisation to secure the right resources at the right time which results in safefood carrying the risk along with issues with are outside safefood’s control
  - Covid-19
  - CEO uncertainty
  - Political instability Northern Ireland arising from Brexit and the NI Protocol
  - staffing issues – fixed grades are prohibitive in allowing safefood to appoint a certain skill set.

The external audit is complete. The internal audit will commence in November which will involve blended working.

**Noted:** The Chair informed two vacancies for Board members to sit on the ARC next year.

### 11. AOB

No other business was raised.

**Date of next meeting:** Thursday, 11 November 2021