



Minutes of the 149<sup>th</sup> meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board  
Held on Thursday, 17 June 2021 at 10:30am  
Teams and Cork VC

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**PRESENT:**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr Ray Dolan, Chief Executive (RD) (Cork)  
Dr Gary Kearney, Director, Food Science (GK) (Cork)  
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director, Corporate Operations (PF)  
(Cork)  
Ms Joana Caldeira Fernandez da Silva, Chief Specialist in  
Nutrition, Human and Health and Nutrition (representing Dr  
Catherine Conlon) (Teams)  
Mr Dermot Moriarty, Manager, Marketing and Communications  
(DM) (representing Dr Aileen McGloin) (Teams)  
Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretary (Teams).

**APOLOGIES:**

Mr Stephen Moutray (SM)  
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)  
Dr Aileen McGloin, Director, Marketing and Communications  
(AMcG)  
Dr Catherine Conlon, Director, Human Health and Nutrition (CC)  
(Cork)

## **1. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present**

**Noted:** The Board agreed to forgo the meeting without the Executive present due to hybrid nature of the meeting.

## **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 Cork office.

**Noted:** The apologies of SM and TC 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, 13 May.**

**Action:** SMcC requested a change to the wording of the minutes under campaign/communications to cover all **safefood** campaign materials rather than limited to the IFA project; the edit is as follows 'SMcC suggested **safefood's** campaign materials could be extended to community groups such as scouting Ireland and its equivalents as these organisations are always looking for new ideas'. Subject to these amendments, the minutes were approved.

**Proposed:** MH

**Seconded:** BK

## **6. Matters arising from the minutes**

**Noted:** The Chair informed that the following actions from the minutes of the 148<sup>th</sup> meeting held on Thursday, 13 May would be dealt with at a future Board meeting due to the Director of Marketing and Communications being on leave.

An in-depth discussion took place regarding the personal data (biogs.) available on **safefood's** website on Advisory Board and Advisory Committee members and the Executive Board, the increase of activism and the use of social media and how this impacts the reaction to **safefood** activities.

**Action:** It was agreed that this should be included on **safefood's** risk register and considered by **safefood** before issuing press releases.

**Action:** Due to time constraints the Chair advised to table this for discussion at the next Board meeting.

**Action:** Considering time restraints at this meeting, the action from the June Board meeting in relation to ethics involved with the practice of tracking people's eye reaction to **safefood** advertisements will be carried forward and tabled for discussion at a future Board meeting.

## **7. Presentation on the START campaign 2017 -2020**

**Noted:** Dermot Moriarty, Communications Manager presented an overview of the first three years (2017-2020) of the five-year START campaign. START is a public health campaign from **safefood**, the Departments of Health in Northern Ireland and Ireland, Healthy Ireland, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Public Health Agency. The START campaign aims to support families to take small steps to eating healthier food and becoming more active to curb the growing trend of overweight and obesity in children.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked Dermot for an interesting presentation and opened to the floor for questions.

**Noted:** SMcC noted the difficulty for parents in knowing if their child is doing enough exercise and stressed the balance and importance of getting the balance between encouraging healthy behaviour and avoiding stigmatising parents right.

**Noted:** MH informed of the importance of understanding exactly where the most substantial health problems arise and focussing our resources on targeting these and queried how the START campaign achieved this.

**Noted:** DM informed **safefood**'s media buying agency has been tasked with aiming the ads at those from a C2DE background as research has shown they are most at risk of overweight and obesity. **safefood** also works with participants of the Community Food Initiative who provide feedback on the development of the campaign and advertising. START stakeholders such as the HSE hold events in disadvantaged areas to seek input. **safefood** also aims to work with relatable and relevant spokespersons for the campaign.

## **8. Feedback from the Audit and Risk committee (ARC)**

**Noted:** ER and AMG provided feedback from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting which took place prior to the Board meeting.

- The ARC discussed the recent cyber-attack on the HSE and were reassured of **safefood**'s ICT awareness of and measures to protect **safefood** in as much as they can be and the risk of a similar attack on the organisation is deemed low.
- The term of the ARC's Chair in office is being reviewed against the ARC's Terms of Reference.
- The Corporate Operations Manager is exploring the use of new risk assessment software called 'decision time' which would make identifying risk dynamic.
- The ARC updated the risk register to reflect the reputational risks arising from the recent media coverage of the appointment of a Scientific Advisory Committee member and increased incidence of.
- The CEO attended the meeting and was thanked for doing so.
- The issue of recruitment for the succession of the CEO role was discussed and the following noted:
  - The ARC feel it is very unlikely the post will be filled by the end of September which is the date for the existing CEO's retirement.
  - The vacant post presents a significant risk for **safefood** which is viewed as unnecessary and avoidable had the recruitment process been conducted in a timely fashion.
  - The ARC has requested the Board convey their concerns on this regard.

**Action:** PF informed under legislation **safefood** cannot be without a CEO. At the very least an interim arrangement needs to be put in place prior to September. A meeting of the Departments is taking place on 25 June, PF will request this item is tabled on the agenda.

**Action:** The Chair requested PF to draft a letter from the Advisory Board to the sponsor Departments and to seek an urgent meeting to discuss this issue.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked ER and AMG for their comprehensive report on the ARC meeting.

**Noted:** AA enquired if the process of appointing a CEO was a) a consequence of politics in Northern Ireland b) or more an issue in Ireland c) another issue. The CEO confirmed none of the above and that the process has just been very slow. The Chair confirmed that **safefood** had made early contact with the sponsor Departments on this matter.

**Noted:** BK enquired if the Board would have any input to the appointment of the new CEO. PF informed the Board does not have a formal role and an individual member(s) may be invited by the Departments to sit on the interview panel. The CEO informed he had indicated to the Departments his expectation that the Advisory Board would be represented on the panel.

## **9. Chief Executive's report**

### **Corporate**

**Noted:** A virtual meeting is scheduled to take place with both sponsor departments on 25 June.

**Noted:** The status of the Corporate Plan 2017-2019 and the Business Plan 2017 and 2018 reported in January and March remains unaltered and the sponsor departments have submitted these Business Plans to the NSMC for noting.

**Noted: safefood's** Corporate Plan 2020-2022 and Business Plans for 2019 and 2020 have been submitted by the sponsor departments to the NSMC for approval at a future meeting.

**Noted: safefood** continues to adhere to Public Health restrictions arising from Covid-19 and align with Government guidance. **safefood** advised staff of the expectation to return to fulltime office working in September if the reopening of society progresses in line with the Government's plan.

**Noted:** Following an open recruitment competition to replace our Finance Manager the successful candidate is due to commence on 19 July.

**Noted:** The Communications Executive has resigned, and an open recruitment process will commence shortly.

### **Campaigns/Communications**

**Noted:** DM updated on the following:

- Evaluation on the Rufus handwashing campaign was conducted with pre-schools and primary schools who received campaign materials. A total of 800 pre-schools and 237 primary schools took part in the survey and provided extremely positive feedback. **safefood** will support World Food Safety Day with a week of social media and digital content to promote key food safety behaviours including use-by dates, safe cooking on BBQs and common food safety myths. The new podcast "Curious Consumer" will also be launched as part of this activity.
- To coincide with the bank holiday weekends in NI (31 May) and ROI (7 June), the 2020 food safety campaign "*Well done – now that's how you cook a burger*" will be

repeated on Digital outdoor screens in proximity to supermarkets and smaller retail outlets where meat is sold.

- A two-year behaviour change campaign to promote safe cooking of meat and awareness and increase usage of meat thermometers is currently in development with a planned launch date of early July. The campaign will air during Summer and at Christmas.
- In March and April, the newly updated education resource **safefood** for life was the second most visited area of the website with 12,300 page views.
- Sponsorship of both *Incredible Edibles* and *Veg Power* Initiatives are ongoing. 1508 schools and 44,000 students are participating in *Incredible Edibles*. 41 schools are currently signed up to participate in *Veg Power* in NI.
- The recipe book '101 Square meals – Easy recipes for everyday life' has been reprinted due to popular demand. Copies were sent to Community Food Initiatives and stock levels replenished in Healthpromotion.ie and **safefood**.
- Research titled 'What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Northern Ireland in 2020' was published and launched through PR on 3 June 2021. The report presents the cost of the minimum essential food basket for the four household types, adjusted to reflect food costs in 2020, building on the data published thus far for 2014, 2016 and 2018. This demonstrates the average weekly cost of healthy food, and the level of household income that may need to be spent on attaining this minimum standard.

### **Events**

**Noted:** JCFDS informed **safefood** hosted a webinar from the All-island Obesity Action Forum on 15 June with sixty-four delegates attending. The topic was physical activity and obesity, which explored the barriers to physical activity and the policies and interventions designed to increase physical activity with a focus on individuals living with obesity.

### **Healthy eating and partnership working**

**Noted:** **safefood** is currently supporting Healthy Ireland, with the development of Healthy Eating Guidelines for over 65s, a social media campaign targeting adults and promoting healthy eating in a post-pandemic context, a child food poverty group and finally, by chairing a new working group that will work on the development of new resources that will support consumers in moving towards a more plant-based diet.

**Noted:** The Food in Schools Forum Ireland met for the first time at the end of May to discuss the objectives and scope of the group. The aim of the Forum is to bring together all partners working in the schools setting to help maximise the wide range of initiatives underway and identify the gaps. Terms of reference were proposed and approved. Membership of the group includes HI, **safefood**, HSE, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth,

Department of Social Protection and Department of Education and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth.

**Noted:** The Regional Obesity Prevention Implementation Group (NI) group met for the first time this year at the beginning of May. The START campaign was discussed under member updates. The focus of the meeting was also to discuss the future working strategy including using a whole systems approach to address obesity.

### **Knowledge Network**

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

The 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the **safefood** Knowledge Network Expert Group will take place online on Thursday, 24 June. The group are looking at several different resources including a checklist of food fraud and an accompanying podcast has been recorded.

**Noted:** MH informed she is working on a project which is looking into food fraud and offered to share learnings and information.

- Five editions of the online 'Network News' e-zine have been published so far this year. The next edition due out in the last week of June.
- The development of this new Food Safety eLearning tool for small food businesses is continuing with six of the eight modules now fully developed. User testing will commence shortly and a marketing plan outlining how the resource will be promoted is also being developed.
- The following KN events recently took place:
  - Managing allergens through cleaning and disinfection webinar – 13 May
  - Practical allergen management training – 17 & 18 May.
  - What to consider in relation to allergens when formulating new products – 27 May
  - Our changing food: new protein sources and implications for the allergic consumer webinar – 27 May
  - ISO/IEC 17025:2017 Internal Auditing Training online – 2 & 3 June
- The following KN events are planned.
  - LIMS Crystal Reports Course - 8 & 9 June.
  - Practical allergen management for small food businesses webinar – 22 June

### **Research**

**Noted:** GK informed of update on research tenders. Contract negotiations and discussions are ongoing with all three preferred candidates on the following research projects.

- Mycotoxin control in cereals: safeguarding human food.
- Establishing a strong food safety culture in small food businesses: attitudes, barriers and facilitators.
- Consumers' use of smart devices while preparing food in the domestic kitchen on the island of Ireland.

**Noted:** GK informed the following research projects have recently completed and will be published once evaluated by **safefood**.

- supplements – exploring our reasons for taking them.

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

## **10. Financial Report**

**Noted:** The Financial report for the first five months of 2021 was tabled and presented by PF.

## **11. AOB**

**Action:** MU asked if standards in poultry relating to bacteria *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* have improved/declined and suggested a presentation to the Board on this area.

**Date of next meeting: Thursday, 19 August 2021**