



Minutes of the 153rd meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board
Held on Thursday, 2 December 2021 at 10:30 am
Teams

PRESENT:

Ms Helen O'Donnell (HOD) (Chair)
Dr Eddie Rooney (ER)
Mr Brendan Kehoe (BK)
Ms Wendy McIntosh (WMI)
Dr Mary Upton (MU)
Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)
Mr Alex Attwood (AA)
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)
Mr Alan McGrath (AMG)

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

APOLOGIES:

Mr Stephen Moutray (SM)
Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)
Mr Alan Lewis (AL)

1. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: The Board met without the Executive present.

2. Matters arising from meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: There were no matters arising.

3. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting held via Teams and informed of an important day for those members whose last meeting it is (HOD, BK, MU, AMG and possibly SM and WMcI).

Noted: The Chair congratulated GK on his recent success in the CEO recruitment competition. It is expected that formal appointment by the NSMC will take place early in 2022.

Noted: The apologies of SM, MH and AL 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, 11 November.

Proposed: BK

Seconded: WMcI

6. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: In relation to the action noted under point 9 of the November 2021 meeting minutes relating to the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) concerns in relation to the risk arising from **safefood** not having a suitable and experienced Data Protection Officer, the CEO informed that, as a temporary measure, he has approved a tender process to procure a DPO resource and the Corporate Operations Manager is arranging this. **safefood** will raise this with both sponsor departments at the forthcoming meeting, expected to take place in the first half of December 2021.

7. Presentation on the 'Current and potential impacts of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic on the island of Ireland.

Noted: Dr Vincent Hargaden, Associate Professor of Engineering Management and Head of the Systems Engineering Subject Area in the School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering, University College Dublin presented the finding of the **safefood** funded research report titled 'Current and potential impacts of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic on the island of Ireland – a horizon scanning study'. The following top-line information was summarised from the presentation

- the report represents a tale of two supply chains during the pandemic, Food service and food retail. There was an immediate and detrimental effect on food service and a significant increase in sales and revenue for food retail.
- Food supply chain demand is usually supplier driven, during Covid this changed to demand driven. Academically known as the Bullwhip effect.
- Findings from the report show
 - Consumer behaviour in retail showed a significant demand for child pleasing snacks and commodities such as flour, pasta and tinned tomatoes.
 - Employment status had a two-pronged effect. Those furloughed or in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) focused on value for money products. Those still in employment saw an increase in their disposable income so were able to consume premium items, sometimes for the first time. There was also an increase in buying local, a phenomenon not seen since the financial crash of 2008.
 - There was a change in the market share of top food retailers. During the period March to October 2020 Supervalu out placed Dunnes due to Supervalu's online presence and local footprint.
 - Retailers learnt from the experience of panic buying seen in Storm Emma in 2018 and focussed advertising on product availability rather than empty shelves.
 - No major impact was seen in the dairy sector. Milk supply was coming into peak supply and the sector works without much manpower so as not to rely on people in a processing plant. This could not be said for the meat sector, which was the biggest processor hit by Covid due to its reliance on manpower in the processing plant. The sector saw Covid outbreaks which resulted in staff shortages resulting in supply issues.
 - The seafood industry was also hit, mostly in the shellfish sector. When China shutdown early in the pandemic this affected the Irish seafood sector as a large proportion of Irish shellfish is exported to China.
 - Government incentives were introduced to help SME's such as the 'Eat out to help out' scheme in NI and VAT reductions in Ireland.

- Logistics and transport affected food supply due to reduced passenger flights which reduced belly hold capacity in air freight. Containers were also stranded in Chinese ports.
- Brexit enabled a greater understanding and transparency of supply chain activities which helped food retailers in the pandemic.

Noted: The Chair thanked Dr Hargaden for his informative presentation and opened to the floor for discussion which included

- how ready is the supply chain if there is another lockdown?
- How can a sector identify risk factors learnt from Covid?

8. Chief Executive's report

Corporate

Noted: The CEO recruitment process concluded in November and Dr Gary Kearney was the successful applicant. We have been advised by our Sponsor Departments that GK will be formally appointed as CEO at the next NSMC meeting which is expected to take place in February 2022. The current CEO will remain on until the end of February 2022.

Noted: *safefood* continues to adhere to Public Health restrictions and align with Government guidance. On 17 November ***safefood*** advised all staff that it would pause its transition back to the workplace until 10 January. ***safefood*** offices remain open, and staff can attend the offices for necessary business purposes.

Noted: In relation to the ongoing matter of the Dublin office lease, which is due to expire in December 2021, the landlord discussed with ***safefood*** the possibility of renovating the offices and offering alternative offices to ***safefood***. ***safefood*** set out our requirements and we await further details from the landlord. We have been assured that we can remain in our current offices as we discuss the options with the landlord.

Noted: The following HR updates were given –

- ***safefood***'s Communications Executive commenced a three-year career break in October. Following an open recruitment competition, ***safefood*** has successfully recruited a replacement to cover this position on a temporary basis.
- Recruitment will commence shortly to fill the vacancy created in October by the resignation of the HR Executive. This has also created a vacancy in the position of Data Protection Officer and a tender will be issued in December to fulfil this role and Data Protection responsibilities as noted in point 6 above.
- ***safefood***'s IT Executive resigned in November after six months in the role. The remaining in house IT staff member is the ICT & Facilities Manager who is returning

to work on a phased basis following long term sick leave. **safefood** has previously raised concerns regarding the inability to attract suitably qualified and experienced staff to fill our IT Executive and IT Assistant positions and this issue will be raised again with the Sponsor Departments at the earliest opportunity to seek approval for regrading one or both positions. In the interim, four organisations have been shortlisted in **safefood**'s recent tender to procure a Manager IT Service Provider. These were interviewed by the Director of Corporate Operations and the ICT & Facilities Manager on 23 November. It is hoped that a contract will be put in place before the end of 2021 with the new MSP commencing in February 2022.

Campaigns/Communications

Noted: AMcG updated on the following:

- **safefood**, along with its START partners hosted a webinar entitled 'START Talking Treats: The Moderation Conversation' on 25 November. Over 730 registered for the event and 200 joined live. The recording was also available on **safefood**'s website and social media channels and emailed to all registrants
- Media coverage was secured in trade publications to publicise the new elearning resource '**safefood** for Business'.
- There were 82,305 page views in the first three weeks of November on the **safefood** website where the START healthy snacks for children was the most popular page. The START home page was the second most popular, followed by the home page, dinner recipes and the **safefood** for life resource. Most of the visitors were female. There was a 10% increase in people 18-44 years compared to the same period in 2020.
- A newsletter to support the START webinar sent on 16 November garnered a very positive response with a 48% open rate and a 4% click rate. There were 1,076 unique opens of which 74% (796) clicked on the Register button.
- The 101 square meals publication has been shared by The National Council for Blind Ireland and the Royal Institute of Blind people in NI via the Book share platform (Book share makes reading easier for people with dyslexia, blindness, cerebral palsy, and other reading barriers).
- The webinar entitled 'Whole systems approach to addressing obesity on the island of Ireland' was held on 16 November. A total of 189 participants registered for the event and at peak 126 participants joined live.
- **safefood** sponsored the following education events
 - o Irish Primary Principals' Network online event 11 November
 - o Social Personal Healthy Education (SPHE) online event 12 November
 - o Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE) event 13 November

Health promotion and nutrition

Noted: JCFDS informed on the following work taking place in health promotion and nutrition.

- SECAD have been appointed as programme managers for the 2022-24 CFI programme.
- The Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG) Healthy Eating sub-group is currently finalising the 'Healthy Eating Guidelines for Older Adults'.
- **safefood** are currently supporting the Department of Health on the following Nutrition guidelines, which are expected to be published in early 2022, 'Nutrition Guidelines for food parcels' and 'Nutrition Standards for Early Learning and Care Centres'.

Knowledge Network

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

- The Knowledge Network membership currently stands at 3,582 members.
- Eleven editions of the online 'Network News' e-zine have been published so far this year with the final edition for 2021 due to be published at the end of December.
- This year's third edition of The Food Chain magazine will be published early December and includes various food safety articles.
- An evaluation session for all qualifying tender applications for the provision of the **safefood** Knowledge Network Magazine 'The Food Chain' for the next three years is currently being arranged.
- The following events took place in November
 - Thermal Processing for Food Businesses - 12 November
 - Listeria, The Law and What Good Control Looks Like - 23 November
 - Microbiology Method Validation & Verification - 24 November.

9. Advisory Board self-evaluation 2021

Noted: PF informed that the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) in August 2016 imposes requirements in relation to evaluating a Board's performance.

Noted: 2021 was the fifth self-evaluation of the Board's performance. All Board Members were requested to complete the **safefood** evaluation questionnaire. Completed

forms were received from ten Board Members. The responses (anonymised) were collated into one document which was issued to the Chairperson and CEO for consideration on 8 November 2021. The cover paper and summary was circulated to all Board members and taken as read at the meeting.

Noted: The Chair opened to the floor for discussion and the following items were raised/discussed.

- Diversity of the Board - It was acknowledged by the Board that the Board's capacity to ensure diversity on the Board is limited as appointments are made by the NSMC. It was suggested that focus on diversity within the Board could be partly addressed through **safefood** inviting diverse guest speakers.
- It was also noted that **safefood's** outreach programmes, including CFIs, and scale of engagement from a small organisation is remarkable and needs to be acknowledged.

10. Audit and Risk committee (ARC) evaluation 2021

Noted: ER advised that the checklist for the effectiveness of Audit and Risk committees appended to the Audit and Risk Committee Guidance included with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies was used to conduct the evaluation. This comprehensive questionnaire is designed for large organisations.

Noted: the following points were summarised from the evaluation

- Overall, the Audit and Risk Committee commented that the checklist is very detailed for an organization of **safefood's** scale however **safefood** and the ARC comply with 94% of the items on the checklist. Three items on the checklist were not answered as these are deemed as non-applicable to **safefood**.
- The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) has repeatedly provided assurance that **safefood** is a well-run organisation with nothing major for the ARC or Board to be concerned with.

Noted: The Chair opened to the floor for discussion and the following were raised

- Board members thanked ER and AMG for their efforts and interest during their term on the Board which was a reassurance to their fellow Board members.
- The difficulty in retaining staff in IT, Human Resources and Data Protection is a risk to the organisation and will remain until it is addressed through the sponsor departments.
- The CEO informed of his intention to request an urgent meeting with the sponsor departments, accompanied by the new Chair of the Board, to discuss issues that are becoming alarming.

11. Audit and Risk committee update

Noted: AMcG reported that Grant Thornton had presented the findings of the Business Continuity Plan audit during 2021. **safefood** had received a pass on a practical level. However, ER the IT Infrastructure documentation was not maintained up to date and a central repository to manage SLAs/contracts for Critical third parties had not been maintained by **safefood**. An action plan to address these weaknesses has been put in place and is being actioned by **safefood**.

Noted: The ARC acknowledged the work undertaken by the Director of Corporate Operations to oversee the ICT&Facilities resources and work programme including business enhancements, the BCP audit and the Managed IT Services tender during the long-term absence of the ICT&Facilities Manager in 2021.

12. Updated Data Protection Notice

Noted: PF referred to the updated Data Protection notice, which outlines how **safefood** deals with personal data for Advisory Board members and advised that each Member is required to acknowledge and accept this.

Agreed: All Board members present agreed to the new privacy notice.

13. Financial report

Noted: The Financial report for ten months, January to October of 2021, was tabled and presented by PF. PF informed of a marginal underspend.

10. AOB

Noted: Outgoing Board members were thanked for their service, efforts, and interest during their terms. HOD was thanked for Chairing the Board. Departing Members expressed their pleasure working with the **safefood** team and fellow Members and wished **safefood** well in its progressive and proactive work programmes.

Date of next meeting: Thursday, 20 January 2022