



Minutes of the 168th meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board

Held on Thursday, 8 February 2024 at 10:30am

safefood, Dublin office.

Present: in person

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)

Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)

Mr Alex Attwood (AA)

Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)

Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)

Ms Irene Collins (IC)

Present: Virtually:

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (from 11:20am)

Mr Alan Lewis (AL) (from 12:10pm)

In attendance: in person

Dr Gary A. Kearney, Interim Chief Executive (GK)

Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director Corporate Operations (PF)

Ms Trish Twohig, Director Food Safety (TTw)

Dr Aileen McGloin, Director Nutrition (AMcG)

Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretary

Mr Dermot Moriarty (DM) Communication Manager

Ms Angela Cahill (AC) Corporate Operations Manager (item 7)

Ms Marian Brady (MB) Temporary Compliance Support Officer (item 7)

Apologies: None

1. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting and thanked all for travelling.

2. 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.

3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 14 December 2023.

Approved: The Chair asked members if they were happy to approve the minutes of the previous meeting which were circulated in advance. No issues were raised, and the minutes were approved.

Proposed: EK

Seconded: TC

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: Relating to item 12 of the previous minutes on Board evaluation, the Chair informed that catch-up phone calls had been held with most Board members with a few outstanding.

5. Financial Report

Noted: Board Members received the Financial Report for 2023 at the meeting. PF advised that the total spend for the year was just short of 8 million, just 18k underbudget. It was recognised that a lot of work went into achieving successful delivery of our 2023 work programmes.

The Chair opened to the floor for any questions on the Financial Report. KMck queried the variance in other support costs whereby the 2024 budget was a third of the actual 2023 costs. PF agreed to revert to the Advisory Board once she had raised this query with the Corporate Operations Manager. PF speculated that the decrease might arise due to changes in the allocation of the 2024 budget from other support costs to another budget line and savings in support costs expected in 2024.

Action: PF to check the difference in the allocation of support cost figures between 2023 and 2024 and report back at the next meeting.

The budget is capped at 2016 levels despite subsequent salary cut reversals and increasing inflationary pressures and the need to secure long term budget increases were discussed. The CEO advised that the CEO's of all the North South Bodies (NSBs) are due to meet on 20 February to discuss a paper summarising collective issues faced by NSBs, e.g. the paper seeks clarity regarding the 25-year-old funding model utilised, staffing structures and the key need for organisational reviews to take place. AA advised caution in terms of a formal review as the outcomes are not always positive. Board Members commended **safefood** on delivering an ambitious programme of work within budget controls.

6. Chief Executive Officers report

Noted: The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed **safefood's** activity since the last Board meeting on 14 December. The report was circulated to members prior to the meeting and taken as read. The CEO invited colleagues to brief on the following items.

- Senior management and some Board Members attended the launch of an exhibition in the Ulster Museum on 23 January which highlighted the work of each North South Body and marked the anniversary of the Belfast Agreement and indeed the 25th Anniversary of the NSBs.
- **safefood** completed a key project to upgrade its finance system from on-site to cloud based. The new system, which offers extra cyber security, was rolled out successfully on 1 January. The CEO thanked all involved.
- Following provisional approval from the Department of Health and DPENDR in Ireland to regrade 4 positions to Higher Executive Officer level, **safefood** is waiting on final approval from the northern sponsor department and Department of Finance NI. Once this process is complete **safefood** will seek progress in relation to the remaining 2 positions which need to be regraded.
- On resumption of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) the following await approval/ratification by the NSMC
 - Approval of the Corporate Plans
 - Approval of the Business Plans
 - Appointment of vacancies on the Advisory Board

- Appointment of a new Advisory Committee
- Ratification of the CEO appointment
- Members of the senior management team met with the Minister for Public Health, Ms Hildegard Naughton on 24 January to provide an overview of **safefood**'s programmes and activities.
- Customer engagement figures were included in the report and the CEO advised that the Digital Marketing Manager will present at the next meeting.
- A review of **safefood**'s partnership with Special Olympics Ireland Health@Play programme was given for 2023 and the Board were informed the programme will continue in 2024. Special Olympics Ireland is an all-island organisation, therefore a good fit for partnership with **safefood**. The CEO advised that **safefood** is running a similar programme with the Irish Football Association titled 'On the ball' with the relationship getting stronger all the time. Sponsorship involves an after-school programme and exhibition in the education centre. The IFA suggested they were open to introducing Nutrition Standards in their stadium which would make an interesting case study.
- Information was provided on new research projects. Discussion took place regarding the project 'The out of home (OOH) food environment, including physical advertisement, on the island of Ireland – mapping and understanding its impact on food choices and health'.

Noted: The Chair thanked all contributors to the report and opened to the floor for discussion.

Noted: An infographic published on LinkedIn illustrating **safefood**'s achievements in 2023 was commended and suggested to issue wider via other platforms to showcase the organisations work.

7. Overview of **safefood's Risk Management Policy and Framework**

Noted: AC and MB joined the meeting to present an overview of **safefood**'s Risk Management Policy and Framework which is summarised below.

- **safefood** defines risk as any material threat to the achievement of the organisation's goals and functions.
- Risk is unavoidable therefore an effective Risk Management Framework is essential.
- The Risk Management Policy outlines **safefood**'s risk appetite statement, roles and responsibilities, the Framework and the risk management process in place.
- In 2023, **safefood** implemented a new software package (GOAT) to replace the previously used Excel-based register. The new package is bespoke risk management software and a better tool to assist **safefood** in managing risks.
- Following a subsequent review of our Risk Management Policy in 2023, **safefood** implemented the following changes:
 - Reviewed & updated the Risk Management Policy.
 - Expanded the Risk Appetite Statement to incorporate definitions and business area risk appetite levels, which was a recommendation from an Internal Audit report.
 - Incorporated Risk Management reviews quarterly in all Directorate team meetings and Executive Board meetings in addition to the Audit & Risk Committee quarterly review.

Noted: The Chair thanked AC and MB for their presentation and opened to the floor.

Noted: It was queried if there is a mechanism to identify the top 5 or 10 strategic risks for Board Members. It was pointed out that, prior to ARC meetings, a separate Risk Register report is prepared which highlights top risk and that members of the Board who sit on the ARC give feedback to the Board and the subsequent meeting. AA and EK represent the Board on the ARC and provided their view that the enhancements implemented, and level of risk reporting is very comprehensive and gives a high level of confidence.

Noted: The 4 directorates have been asked to review the Risk register every quarter which creates and embeds a risk identification, control, and management mindset across the organisation.

8. Commissioned Research Strategy

Noted: TTW presented **safefood**'s Research Strategy 2023 – 2028 which is focuses on identifying and targeting critical issues, building the evidence base and supporting multi-disciplinary and collaborative projects to promote food safety and healthy eating at all points across the food chain on the island of Ireland.

- Research forms part of **safefood**'s mandate and governing legislation.
- **safefood** identifies research to develop its own policies & support its primary function - promotion of food safety and nutrition.
- Outputs are utilised directly as a basis for much of the organisation's work.
- Research contributes to the scientific evidence underpinning our consumer facing communication campaigns with a view to enhancing our understanding of the potential hazards in the production of food, measures to minimise or eliminate these hazards, and creating positive behaviour change in regard to public health nutrition practice.
- **safefood** publishes and communicates research findings and recommends action arising from these findings. **safefood** publishes its funded research to ensure there is wide awareness of a growing evidence base relating to food safety and health eating focused on the enhancement of public health across the island.

Noted: The Chair thanked TTW for her presentation and opened the discussion to the Members.

Noted: **safefood** should use its unique positioning as a North South Body on research projects. A reference was made to the British Irish Council as a possible avenue to gather intelligence. **safefood** was commended on its research and a question was posed if enough is done with it? It was suggested more could be done with the Executive Summary and projects should be pushed out at every opportunity.

Noted: Rapid data gathering from a panel of expertise was suggested as a faster method of gathering some data and would eliminate the requirement to tender.

Noted: **safefood**'s yearly market research survey works ongoing since 2000 called safetrak was referenced. New research methods are also being explored such as an ongoing consumer panel to give quick opinions.

Noted: The question was posed if there are sufficient staff in the research office to deal with the workload?

Noted: **safefood** has commissioned over 140 projects and worked with more than 640 researchers across the island of Ireland since it was formed. These figures were commended and suggested could be used a selling point.

Noted: Board Members offered suggestions and insights to identify research topics.

- The National Obesity Policy is due to end in 2025, there may be an opportunity to link into the next policy.
- The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service was referred to as a possible source of information.
- Queens University's Professor O'Reilly's research was referenced as a possible source of information for **safefood**.
- Caution was recommended on the approach to identifying topics – i.e. keeping in mind why research is being conducted and what will come out of it and its relationship to policy.

9. Financial Memorandum

Noted: PF advised that a requirement of the new 2022 Financial Memorandum is that it be tabled yearly at the Advisory Board for information. The Financial Memorandum was circulated to members previously and a link provided to members prior to the meeting. PF advised that there were no updates.

Noted: Members noted the paper and update and agreed that no further action is required.

10. AOB

Noted: The Chair informed that the April meeting will take place on 18 April rather than 25 April as previously circulated, a new schedule of dates has been circulated and the calendar occurrence altered.

11. Close

Noted: The meeting closed at 1 pm

12. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: Looking forward, members discussed the need to ensure **safefood's** work is aligned with the policy direction of North South working as this developed. They considered the importance of linking with community needs and of developing the organisation to ensure an appropriate fit with future priorities

Summary

No	Action	Responsible
1	Clarify the difference in support cost figures between 2023 actual and 2024 budget and report back at the next meeting.	PF