



Minutes of the 178th meeting of the
Safefood Advisory Board
held on Wednesday 5 November 2025 at 10:30 am

The Arc Healthy Living Centre (Site of a Safefood CFI Centre),
116-122 Sallys Wood, Irvinestown, Co. Fermanagh

Members Present in person:

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)
Mr Alex Attwood (AA)
Ms Irene Collins (IC)
Dr Elaine Mooney (EM)
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)
Ms Elaine Clohosey (EC)
Mr Alan Lewis (AL)
Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)

Members Present virtually

Mr Damien McCallion (DMc)
Ms Julie Andrews (JA)
Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)
Mr Tim Morrow (TM)

In attendance:

Dr Gary A. Kearney, Chief Executive Officer (GK)
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director of Corporate Operations (PF)
Ms Trish Twohig, Director of Food Safety (TTW)
Dr Aileen McGloin, Director of Nutrition (AMG)
Mr Dermot Moriarty, Manager of Communications (DM)
Ms Colette O'Shea, (CO'S) Secretariat
Mr Richard Murphy, ICT & Facilities Manager (RM)
Ms Anne Parle, Nutritionist (AP)

1. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the 178th Meeting.

2. Conflicts of interest

Noted: No conflicts of interest were recorded.

3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 18 September 2025

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: KMckK

Seconded: AL

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: No matters arising.

5. Financial Report

Noted: PF advised that Safefood's expenditure to date is at €5.39 million, roughly €500k behind budget year to date due to timing differences. Our forecast for the full year is to finish within our current budget of €8.6 million. All budget lines are tracking well and not exceeding allocations.

Noted: KMckK queried if Safefood's insurance costs had increased following the ransomware attack in August 2024. PF clarified that, while some ICT costs had increased due to Safefood's migration to 'Software as a System' model and implementation of enhanced cyber security software and controls, Safefood was successful in securing enhanced insurance coverage due to our response to the incident at reasonable cost.

Noted: KMckK highlighted the decreased spend in promotion since 2010 due to budget constraints. The CEO advised that the current funding based on 1998 population data (70:30 Ireland: Northern Ireland population in 1998) and that sponsor Departments are considering reviewing same. Updated population figures suggest a 73:27 split.

6. Report of the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC)

Noted: AA advised that a meeting of the ARC took place on 23 September. The 2025 self-effectiveness review was completed with satisfactory outcomes. Two Safefood policies were reviewed with no recommendations, and the Q2 Risk Register was reviewed. Two substantive outstanding actions related to the review of the cybersecurity following the 2024 attack, have subsequently been completed.

In addition, while 4 posts were successfully regraded in earlier years, unfortunately two in situ posts have not been progressed as yet.

7. Chief Executive Report

Noted: The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed Safefood's activity since the last Board meeting on 18 September 2025. The report was circulated to Members prior to the meeting and taken as read.

Noted: The Safefood 2036 strategic planning initiative is progressing well, with internal workshops and analysis underway, in addition to the external analysis and interviews which have already taken place, and which will contribute to shaping future priorities to 2036. A final report is expected in Q2 2026 and will guide planning from 2027 onwards.

Noted: The new Safefood Advisory Committee (SAC) has had its first meeting. The SAC comprises 11 external members with expertise and experience complementary to in-house capabilities. It provides guidance on food safety, nutrition, marketing, and other relevant areas. Two meetings are planned for the coming year, typically in late spring and autumn.

Noted: The Chief Executive extended thanks to Prof Elizabeth Keane for her exemplary and wise leadership as Chairperson of the previous committee.

Noted: The next Health Sector meeting of the North South Ministerial Council is scheduled for 26 November in Armagh. The Chair will attend with the Chief Executive, who will present a progress report to the Ministers. In addition, Safefood's Dr James McIntosh will make a presentation on Safefood's work around food hypersensitivity.

Noted: Safefood has successfully progressed negotiations in relation to the Cork Office future arrangements. Heads of Agreement for a new lease have been signed, and drafting of the full legal lease is in progress.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the significant work undertaken by Patricia and her team in developing the business case and progressing negotiations.

Noted: Safefood's Food Safety Campaign: The "UV Light" has concluded, and initial feedback suggests strong public engagement due to its distinctive approach. A formal performance report is expected in the coming weeks.

Noted: Safefood's Christmas Campaign: Planning is underway for the December launch. The campaign will focus on three key tools to support public food safety practice:

- Turkey Cooking Calculator – guidance on safe cooking times
- Meal Planner – helps reduce food waste and manage costs.
- Big Shop Advice – tips for efficient and safe grocery shopping.

Noted: Safefood is undertaking informal outreach to the Chairs of the Health Committees in both jurisdictions. The aim is to:

- Provide briefings on Safefood's remit and current initiatives.
- Share findings from the food environment citizen engagement.
- Explore opportunities for Committee engagement in future dissemination events.

A technical briefing format may also be considered to facilitate Committee involvement.

Noted: Safefood continues to monitor developments in food environment policy across both jurisdictions. In Northern Ireland, progress has slowed due to a change in personnel within DAERA and in Ireland, the policy is more advanced, with Ministerial sign-off pending. Safefood is aligning its campaign planning with these evolving timelines and policy frameworks.

Noted: Safefood continues to engage with the Sláintecare initiative, with strategic messaging from recent work to be integrated alongside standalone sessions in both jurisdictions. Initial engagement with parliamentary committees may begin with a technical briefing, followed by a full hearing focused on two to three key messages tied to high-interest topics like obesity or food environment policy.

Noted: A webinar hosted for GAA clubs in September attracted 1,200 registrations and 500 live attendees, requiring rapid expansion of online capacity. The partnership is in its early stages but has shown strong engagement and offers a valuable channel for disseminating Safefood's healthy eating resources and messaging.

Noted: Safefood hosted the Food Poverty Network event in September, which focused on food poverty and waste. Building on last year's conference, the event

emphasised communication strategies, and Safefood has now launched a pilot mentoring programme pairing five mentors with mentees.

Noted: Enhanced nutrition standards for staff and visitors in Northern Ireland health settings were published through a cross-border collaboration between Safefood, the Public Health Agency, and the Food Standards Agency, and launched with Ministerial support in Belfast.

Noted: There were updates on Safefood-provided food safety training and coeliac disease workshops, which continue to see strong demand—particularly in Northern Ireland, where evening and community-based events are being explored.

Noted: Safefood continues to promote technical aspects of food safety and hosted a Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) online event which was well-attended. There were also events and ongoing training with HSE and private laboratories, reinforcing its role in supporting emerging technologies and practice across the island.

Noted: Safefood is conducting a research project in response to a recent ready-meal-related food safety incident in Ireland affecting adults aged 65+, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews to understand relevant behaviours and risks; the study also includes Northern Ireland and will inform future advisory work and potential campaigns, alongside the ongoing annual SafeTrak survey measuring public sentiment relating to its functions across the island.

8. ICT cybersecurity and resilience review

Noted: RM advised that Safefood experienced a cybersecurity breach in August 2024. In response, extensive remediation and system upgrades were undertaken, including enhanced multi-factor authentication, cloud migration, privileged account clean-up, and installation of advanced security tools. In addition, a full ICT security review was completed by third party experts in October 2025. This exercise benchmarked Safefood against the NIST framework and identified further improvements in log monitoring and procurement processes etc.

Noted: The Board acknowledged the significant progress made by Patricia and Richard in strengthening cybersecurity following the August 2024 breach, and commended the structured approach taken.

Noted: Discussions took place around the potential for a formal cross-border or inter-agency framework to share cybersecurity expertise and infrastructure and agreed that engagement with the NSMC secretariat and parent departments may be necessary to explore sustainable support models and mitigate future budgetary pressures on North-South Bodies in managing cybersecurity.

9. Brief update of Safefood CFI 2025 – 2028 Programme

Noted: AP joined the meeting and provided an update on Year One of the new Community Food Initiative Programme, which successfully onboarded 28 organisations following strong interest and Ministerial support. The programme has broadened its reach to include diverse groups such as older adults, migrants, and isolated individuals.

Noted: The CFI Innovate strand of the programme has approved 15 one-off projects, with a mix of in-person and online formats. Two cross-border partnerships have been approved, with contracts underway and further recruitment planned. Year One has been extended into 2026 to support onboarding and delivery, with a mid-point evaluation scheduled.

Noted: The Board noted the importance of maintaining quality assurance, particularly around nutrition guidance, and welcomed the broadened demographic reach and creative use of community spaces.

10. Tour de Table

The Chair invited comments from attendees. No issues were raised.

11. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: Advisory Board met without the Executive present and members discussed emerging challenges for 2026.

12. Presentation and Tour of ARC Healthy Living Centre, Irvinestown – Jenny Irvine, CEO.

The ARC Healthy Living Centre aims to address health inequalities and improve the well-being of local people by bringing together a partnership of community health activities and services. Consistently since 2009, ARC has been successful in satisfying key criteria to be awarded the Social Enterprise Mark, which identifies it as a trading centre for social and environmental purposes. ARC provides shared space, basing a range of health and wellbeing services within the Centre. The ARC actively promotes community participation and volunteering – services are run for local people, by local people.

Signed

Dr. Eddie Rooney
Chairperson
SafeFood Advisory Board.