

Minutes of the 144th meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board
Held on Thursday, 22 October, 2020 at 11:15am
Zoom

PRESENT:

Ms Helen O'Donnell (HOD) (Chair)
Dr Eddie Rooney (ER)
Mr Brendan Kehoe (BK)
Ms Wendy McIntosh (WMI)
Mr Alan McGrath (AMG)
Mr Stephen Moutray (SM)
Mr Mervyn Oswald (MO)
Dr Mary Upton (MU)
Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)
Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)

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)
Dr Catherine Conlon, Director, Human Health and Nutrition (CC)

APOLOGIES:

1. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: The Board apart from two new members (SMcC and MH) met in private without the Executive present

2. Matters arising from the private session

Noted: Board members asked is there a role for **safefood** during the Covid Pandemic. Can **safefood** assist the Government?

Noted: CEO informed the Rufus campaign addresses handwashing, which is one of the key preventative actions recommended to avoid contracting or spreading Covid. AMG sits on a National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) sub-group advising on behaviour change and will be joining the four-Nation Behaviour Science for Public Health, Health and Wellbeing group on invitation from the Public Health Agency in NI. **safefood** also supports the Departments of Health ROI Covid Communications by monitoring and retweeting/sharing Covid messages. **safefood** is constantly adapting its communications to address Covid to ensure our work is relevant to the public.

Noted: CC sits on Obesity Policy implementation groups in both RoI and NI. There is a direct relationship between Obesity and level of illness and mortality due to Covid. Public Health England published a paper, which looked at this evidence and insights and implications and the UK Government has taken this up in terms of reframing the obesity strategy and legislation in this area. **safefood** has asked the obesity policy implementation groups if there will be a similar level of uptake of these messages in both jurisdictions.

Noted: MH informed that **safefood** also addresses the wider impacts of Covid in terms of its transform your trolley campaign and messages around food storage, recipes and food waste. This information will help people get value for money in a time of economic uncertainty.

Noted: CC informed that the CFI programme has been expanded during the pandemic.

Noted: GK informed **safefood** re-orientated how it delivers its programmes and events and uses digital frameworks to reach people while travel is restricted. **safefood** has also done a lot of work with food SME's who are really struggling during in Covid.

3. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed all members of the Advisory Board to the meeting hosted by zoom. Dr Sinead McCarthy and Prof Maeve Henchion joined their first meeting having been appointed to the Board on 2nd October by the NSMC. Introductions took place by way of Tour de table.

Noted: No apologies were noted

Noted: The CEO expressed sympathy on behalf of the board and staff to the Chair on the recent death of her husband.

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, 20 August 2020

Agreed: The minutes were adopted with no amendments

Proposed: WMcI

Seconded: SM

6. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: There were no matters arising.

7. Presentation

Noted: Dr Ed O'Neil food and packaging technologist and artisan food specialist with Teagasc presented on the role of food packaging. In summary;

- Packaging has a bad reputation; seen as the by-product of food, something that needs to be disposed of but often people do not understand the role packaging plays in food.
- The role of packaging is protection, preservation and providing information.

- Two thirds of packaging is to protect food.
- With packaging comes branding.
- 320,000 goods packed per second, worldwide
- Why is packaging needed?
 - Protect goods from hazard during transport and sale
 - Enhance sale appeal, visually appealing
 - Ensure quality and reduce food spoilage
 - Preserve contents
 - Provide information on ingredients
 - Extend shelf-life
 - Permit widespread distribution both nationally and internationally
- How long will a packaging product take to break down/compost? Packaging companies need to be more honest on the length of time it will take.
- Bring your own packaging/zero packaging – Covid has shown the consequences of cross contamination.
- Discussion around various types of packaging.

Noted: The Chair thanked Dr O’Neil for his presentation and asked if the Board might visit Moore Park. Dr O’Neil offered a visit to the new food hub in Moore Park.

8. Chief Executive’s report

Corporate

Noted: The Health and Food Safety meeting of the NSMC took place on 2 October and attended virtually by the CEO and Chair on behalf of **safefood**. All business successfully concluded with the exception of the approval of **safefood**’s corporate and business plans for the last four years.

Noted: safefood is currently operating within Level five of the Governments Covid plan.

Noted: safefood expects to submit its 2021 Business plan to the Sponsor Departments by the end of October.

Noted: The NSMC approved all 12 nominees to the Scientific Advisory Committee.

Noted: The most recent communication from the lead auditor is that the C&AG’s will sign the 2019 financial statements in the near future with no issues arising.

Campaigns/communications

Noted: AMcG informed on the following campaigns:

- Start - Research showed parents found return to school very valuable to them. They indicated they were not ready to tackle the issue of treat foods and were only able to concentrate on Covid at this time. Parents did however indicate an increase appreciation of family time, the next phase of the Start campaign is therefore going to go in this direction and encourage and emphasis a 'healthy' family time.
- Rufus handwashing campaign - extended from childcare settings/pre-school into primary schools. Nine thousand packs were distributed to schools in September and proved hugely popular. Extra copies were printed and the resource was translated into Irish.
- Transform your Trolley - will run in Northern Ireland in partnership with the Healthy Living Centre Alliance at a local level in November and early December offering healthy shopping tips. The campaign consists of social media activity focused on food planning and shopping at a regional level, and at a local level, the Healthy Living Centre Alliance will support low-income families within their communities to make small and practical changes to their large weekly supermarket shop to achieve a better balance of foods in line with the Eat well Guide
- Christmas campaign - anticipate changes to Christmas cooking habits due to Covid to include smaller family meals, more leftovers, transporting cooked meals to relatives. Food safety advice for these scenarios and others is being prepared. Chefbot, which previously hosted on Facebook, has been extended this year to WhatsApp and Alexa in order to increase reach.

Events

Noted: CC informed on the All-island food poverty network conference, which was held on 20 October by webinar. The topic covered the challenges and learnings from the responses to tackle food poverty/insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic in different jurisdictions, with over 140 delegates joining.

Noted: CC informed the All-island Obesity Action Forums second webinar of 2020 will take place on 10 November. Titled 'The hidden influencer – tackling marketing of unhealthy food to children in today's digital world'. The programme will focus on the latest evidence on the impact, and areas of action, for the marketing of foods and drinks to children. Board member were invited to attend.

Noted: CC informed activities continue to be delivered via the Community Food Initiative through the pandemic. Community groups have adapted to delivering content remotely. The initiative has been expanded so community groups can apply for funding under 'CFI at home' to support families in their own home.

Education

Noted: Media Wise was due to be formally launched last week. Unfortunately, planned publicity could not go ahead due to Covid. The resource is available to use and is being publicised through social media.

Noted: safefood for life, the basic food hygiene education resource aimed at Transition Year is currently being updated. To date over 36,500 students have completed the course.

Publications

Noted: The Department of Health launched 'the Healthy eating for one to four-year-olds: The Children's Food Pyramid Guidelines' on 1 October. **safefood** were a key organisation involved in the development of the guidelines, providing technical expertise, coordinating the food photography and communicating to key consumer and professional audiences the key messages from the guidelines.

Noted: The reviewed edition of the Minimum Nutritional Standards for Health and Social Care await publication. The funding partners are planning a launch event for later on this year. **safefood's** website will host the digital elements and resources that will support the implementation work.

Knowledge Network

Noted: CEO informed Knowledge Network began 10 to 12 years ago and is continuously growing.

Noted: GK summarised the background of the Knowledge Network for the purpose of the two new members of the board and gave an overview of some of the activity covered in the Chief Executive Report including [✚](#)

The Expert Groups draft plan of future activities in the area of food hypersensitivity and webinars.

Research

Noted: Four new projects were approved by the Exec. Board to be commissioned, three are at the contract stage and one titled 'Fiscal and pricing policies related to food and non-alcoholic drinks: a review of the evidence' has gone back out to tender.

9. Financial Report

Noted: PF referred to the summary Financial Results for nine months Jan – September 2020. **safefood** is currently progressing in line with their plan and have re-allocated funds in line with needs arising from Covid.

10. Tour de table

Noted: ER and AMcG informed of the following updates from the Audit and Risk committee meeting which took place on 21st October:

- The internal auditor was present for part of the meeting
- The committee conducted their self-effectiveness review; this covers every aspect of the committee's functions.
- The C&AG recently issued a paper on the insights on the impacts of Covid on control environments. The Committee has asked the internal auditor to assess **safefood's** performance vis-à-vis this document.
- The committee is undertaking a programme to review **safefood's** Policies. The Learning and Development Policy was recently reviewed which provides a great support mechanism from **safefood's** employees to progress training and development. The organisations Employee Wellbeing Programme was also reviewed and the committee agreed has been tested through the pandemic. **safefood** employs Spectrum Life to offer comprehensive, expert and independent Employee Assistance support to **safefood** staff. Both policies stood up to review.
- The Social Media Policy will be reviewed at the December meeting along with business continuity in light of Covid and Brexit.
- No GDPR issues to report.

11. AOB

Noted: The Chair asked all Board members to review the draft dates for 2021 meetings and report in December with any issues.

Date of next meeting: Thursday, 3 December 2020