



Minutes of the 156<sup>th</sup> meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board  
Held on Thursday, 24 March 2022 at 12:00  
**safefood** Cork office

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**PRESENT:**

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)  
Mr Alex Attwood (AA)  
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC) (joined 12:30)  
Prof Elizabeth Keane (EC)  
Irene Collins (IC)  
Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMCK)  
Alan Lewis (AL)

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr Ray Dolan, Chief Executive (RD)  
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director, Corporate Operations (PF)  
Dr Aileen McGloin, Director, Marketing and Communications  
(AMcG)  
Dr James McIntosh, Chief Specialist in Toxicology (JMCI)  
Ms Joana Calderia Fernandez da Silva, Chief Specialist in  
Nutrition (JCFDS)  
Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretary.

**APOLOGIES:**

Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice Chair)  
Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)  
Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)

## **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:** It was decided by Board members to move the standing agenda item 'Meeting of Board member with Executive present' to the end for future meetings. This provides Members with the opportunity to discuss items that were raised during the meeting and provides less time constraints.

## **3. Introduction and apologies**

**Noted:** The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting held in the **safefood** Cork office. Round table introductions took place due to this being the first in person meeting for some members.

## **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, 2 December.**

**Proposed:** KMck

**Seconded:** AL

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

**Noted:** The CEO informed at the January meeting of two outstanding vacancies to the Advisory Board. The Chair asked for an update on this matter. The CEO informed the meeting that the situation remains unchanged.

## **7. Feedback from the Audit and Risk Committee.**

**Noted:** The Chair informed that AA and EK are the Advisory Board representatives on the Audit and Risk Committee and thanked them for volunteering their services.

**Noted:** The Audit and Risk Committee meeting took place on Monday, 21 March. AA and EK provided the following updates from the meeting:

- Members of the Committee were shown **safefood**'s risk register, which was viewed by AA and EK to be very comprehensive and precautionary. Angela Cahill is aware the Risk Register is a spreadsheet which is paper based and hopes to make the document more dynamic in the future.
- Alan Myles is the Chair of the committee, who is very knowledgeable and brings experience specific to the context in which North-South bodies operate.
- The Risk Register is currently being updated and remains a live register. Updates include risks from
  - Relaxation in Covid rules
  - No clarification yet received from the sponsor departments on the ratification of the new CEO in the absence of the NSMC – **safefood** to write to the sponsor departments to outline concerns at the delay
  - Long standing staff vacancies.
- The focus for the 2022 Internal Audit work programme will be an assessment of promotion activity including Value For Money considerations.
- The new CEO, Gary Kearney, will be invited to attend the next meeting
- **safefood**'s approach to Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) was discussed.
- No issues arose from the 2021 draft financial statements.
- The Protected Disclosures and Anti-fraud policies were considered and NO issues arose for 2021.
- **Noted:** The Chair thanked the members for their briefing and commented that it is important that risk assessment and management is embedded into the culture of **safefood**.

## **8. Presentation 'Trust the meat thermometer – Christmas campaign'**

**Noted:** AMcG presented on **safefood**'s Christmas campaign titled 'Trust the meat thermometer.

The objectives of the campaign were to

- Raise awareness among home cooks why meat thermometers are the best way to check whether meat is cooked properly
- Educate how to use meat thermometers correctly
- Increase thermometer ownership and correct usage
- Reiterate 'three checks' of piping hot/no pink meat/clear juices.

The campaign ultimately sought to create a behaviour change in the target audience. **safefood** uses the COM-B model for all Behaviour change campaigns because it captures the dynamic, inter-connected nature of behaviour change, and shows how different

interventions can address deficits in people's Capability, Opportunity and Motivation to change their Behaviour.

The COM-B model when applied to the Meat thermometer campaign involves

- Opportunity – strategically chosen advertising and partnership to increase opportunity to buy
- Capability – increase knowledge of correct temperature and how to use
- Motivation – appeal to values re expertise as a chef 'getting the turkey just right'.

The Context of the campaign was described as

- Highly competitive marketplace during December for food & brand advertising
- Noise of big budget advertising using emotion and nostalgia to engage audiences
- 2 years of changed audience viewing habits
- Modest advertising budget (<150k) compared to competitors at Christmas, none the less **safefood** advertised across lots of channels.

The Advertising channels were

- Television & Video on Demand
- Radio
- Print
- Digital display
- Social Media, Tic Tok and Spotify were used to reach younger novice cooks.
- Publicity – used ambassadors. Achieved 74 pieces of PR.
- Retail - point-of-sale via butchers.

The results were summarised as

- Almost 1 in 5 (17%) had seen or heard advertisements about meat thermometers "*in the past 8 weeks*"
- More than one in three understood the ad message was "*to ensure that your meat is properly cooked*"; higher for C2DEF audiences than ABC1 (40% versus 28% respectively).
- 1 in 10 respondents attributed the campaign advertising to **safefood**, higher in NI than ROI
- While not directly comparable, meat thermometer ownership at 27% was 10% higher than our pre-campaign baseline ownership level.
- 53% of those with a meat thermometer would always use it when cooking whole turkeys, rising to 66% for those who saw the ad.

- 80% would place the thermometer in the thickest part between the leg and breast, this is higher in NI at 89% vs ROI at 72%.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked AMcG for a most interesting and comprehensive presentation and opened to the floor for questions, which included

- What is the monetary value of 74 pieces of PR? It was agreed that this would be provided in a more detailed analysis from the PR agency.
- What was the highest performing advertising channel and it is great to see on Tic Tok being used? TV always reaches the most people but also costs the most. Social media is less expensive as the work is done in-house and still reaches a broad audience. Advertising channels are chosen per campaign, so Tic Tok and Spotify were chosen to reach younger novice cooks.
- What would you do differently? The overall campaign performed well, however the audience struggled to recall who the campaign came from. **safefood** will investigate the balance between the message and the brand for future bursts. Statistics from web traffic have shown 42% of males went directly to the meat thermometer section of the website compared to others who also visited other sections showing BBQ's and cooking the Christmas turkey seem to be largely male orientated so **safefood** will look at channels to reach this cohort.

**Noted:** AMcG informed the Meat thermometer campaign will be theme of **safefood's** stand at the Balmoral show in May.

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

### Corporate

**Noted:** The CEO informed that from the start of April Dr. Gary Kearney will take up the position of CEO and Accounting Officer. However, due to the absence of an NSMC to formally ratify GK in his position as new CEO, GK will retain the responsibilities of Director of Food Science and has agreed to carry on in both posts until the Summer, when arrangements will be reviewed.

**Noted:** A comprehensive consultation with staff has taken place for the implementation of a blended working policy. Based on the consultation and the published DPER guidance **safefood** will draft a blended working policy which will allow staff to apply to work from home for a portion of the week.

**Noted:** **safefood** continues to explore options for alternative office space in Dublin due to expiry of the lease and the landlord's intention to renovate the current office.

**Noted:** The Chair and CEO conveyed congratulations to AMcG on her appointment as temporary Director of Nutrition following a recruitment competition. CEO informed that the position of Director of Human Health and Nutrition is approved by the NSMC as a Specialist in Public Health Medicine. It has been difficult to recruit a public health doctor and became impossible during the COVID 19 pandemic. There is an operational need to fill the role as it has been vacant since July 2021 and therefore it was agreed with the Sponsor Departments that **safefood** would recruit a temporary Director of Nutrition at principal officer level.

**Noted:** The position of HR Executive, Data Protection Officer and two IT positions remain unfilled. These positions have proved difficult to fill due to the salary offered on the historically approved grades. There was discussion around implications for **safefood** on persistent staffing recruitment difficulties which is linked to the fact **safefood's** approved staff contingent is based on a model which is over 20 years old. AA informed that this issue was discussed at the Audit and Risk Committee and is noted on **safefood's** Risk Register as posing governance, operational and reputational risk for **safefood**. The Chair has discussed this with the Sponsor Departments and asked for their assistance in addressing these issues as a matter of urgency. In the meantime, **safefood** continues to engage and train temporary outside resources to fulfil these roles.

**Action:** It was agreed that Members may have an opportunity to raise this issue at the induction session for new members arranged by the NSMC Secretariat. The Chair and CEO will follow up with the sponsor departments also.

#### Campaigns/Communications

**Noted:** AMcG updated on the following activity in communications:

Benchmark research findings of the most recent phase of the START campaign which aired in November 2021 showed recall of the advertising was good. Prompted recall of the campaign television ad was strong at 68% with a peak of 72% among ABC1 parents. Almost four in ten (38%) of parents recalled the campaign tagline '*Let's go easy on the treats*'. More parents in Northern Ireland than Ireland felt that they clearly understood the main point of the ad (99%), that it gave them confidence (93%) and that it was aimed at parents like them (83%).

The research did find behaviours linked to the campaign were negatively affected over the two years of the pandemic. The average amount of time spent on screens by children

reached its highest level since tracking began and increased frequency of consumption of foods high in fat, sugar and salt was also recorded. Meetings with relevant stakeholders are planned to see what can be done to reverse this behaviour now restrictions are being lifted.

**Noted:** Evaluation of the 'Rufus handwashing campaign showed it continues to perform well. When asked if the Rufus handwashing programme has helped the children in their care to remember to wash their hands regularly and correctly (using an agreement scale of 0-10), 68% of pre-school and 62% of primary school teachers responded with a score of 8 and above.

Discussions took place around whether the reported behaviour change could be attributed to the campaign due to the saturation of advertising on the message due to Covid-19 and whether **safefood** saw a future in this campaign. AMcG informed that **safefood's** campaign resources were aimed at a certain age group which a lot of messaging during Covid-19 did not. Research into recent handwashing behaviour has shown a drop since restrictions were lifted and the HSE has reported a drop in handwashing behaviour in clinical settings. Promotion of good hand hygiene practice will always be needed in younger age groups.

**Noted: safefood** have been approached by Lidl to consider how we can work with them on their Inflation Busters campaign which is a current campaign aiming to feed a family of four, a healthy diet at the affordable price of €76. We have had a good initial discussion with them, and we see this is a good opportunity to explore how we can get our messages into consumer hands/influence the decisions made at the point of purchase. **safefood** will not endorse their offering however we will direct them towards the correct nutritional advice and options to ensure the meals they're suggesting are suitably balanced. **safefood** are open to all supermarkets/retailer approaching to discuss similar opportunities.

Discussion took place around the opportunity this creates for **safefood** and the part they can play in helping struggling families. It was recognised that many families will not see a choice for healthy versus unhealthy but rather eat or go hungry. Avenues on how **safefood** can reach the public were discussed

- The meals and recipes on the **safefood** website are not expensive, only use a certain amount of ingredients that can usually be found in the pantry and are all nutritionally approved.

- The research titled 'What is the cost of a healthy food basket' which is carried out every two years is due to be updated in 2022. This will provide comparable costs to previous years.
- The Research report titled 'Exploring the world of food: The perspective of families with children' will provide an insight into how society and outside measures influence the gatekeeper (meal provider) in the home. One notable outcome from the report is the impact the provision of school meals would have. A workshop on this report will take place on 5 April.
- The Community Food initiative programme was identified as an important avenue in addressing food poverty and food skills. The evaluation of the previous term (2019-2021) will provide useful insights. Some have already been identified such as digital events were seen to remove the stigma associated with attending a community centre.

**Noted:** Approximately 350,000 page views were recorded in the first two months of 2022. This is a testament to the search engine optimisation work carried out by **safefood's** digital team.

**Noted: safefood** will continue their partnership with the Irish Football Association (IFA) in 2022, which will deliver nutrition workshops, school programmes and festivals to an expected audience of over 3,000 children. The partnership also includes aspects such as digital, social and match day advertising. **safefood** have expanded their sponsorship with the IFA this year by becoming a patron of their Education and Heritage Centre (EHC) at Windsor Stadium. The Centre has a footfall target of over 8,000 visitors (across all age groups) for 2022. Patronage of the Education Heritage Centre will deliver an opportunity to provide START information booklets to visitors, branding incorporated into tickets and interactive handsets, as well as the delivery of nutrition workshops for up to 20 visiting schools (>400 children).

#### Health promotion and nutrition

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

**Noted:** Recruitment of CFI leaders for the 2022-2024 programme has been completed. Thirteen CFIs will receive funding, including 9 in Ireland and 4 in Northern Ireland. Seven of the thirteen CFIs are new to the programme, six were part of the previous 2019-2021 programme. The launch of the new programme took place on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at the Richmond Hospital in Dublin.



**Noted:** The next All-island Obesity Action Forum workshop will take place on Tuesday, 21 June 2022 in Belfast. The workshop will focus on the role of policy in addressing overweight and obesity and the effectiveness of these policies.

**Noted:** The Chair and CEO attended the launch by the Health Minister, Robin Swann of the updated Nutritional Standards in Health and Social Care in Northern. The Standards are the result of a significant collaborative effort involving **safefood** and the Public Health Agency (PHA), Food Standards Agency (FSA), and Health and Social Care (HSC) colleagues who jointly developed and reviewed these Nutritional Standards, so that healthier food choices are available for staff and visitors in Health and Social Care settings. These standards influenced the introduction of the same standards in Ireland. Both the Chair and CEO recognised the huge commitment from all involved.

#### Knowledge Network

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

**Noted:** The Knowledge Network membership currently stands just shy of 3,700 members. Two editions of the 'Network News' e-zine were published so far in 2022, with the next edition due out at the end of March.

**Noted:** The next meeting of the KN Expert Group is due to take place on 25<sup>th</sup> May in Dundalk.

**Noted:** Following a tender competition for the provision of the **safefood** Knowledge Network Magazine 'The Food Chain' for three editions per year a contract is currently being prepared for the winning tenderer. The first issue of 'The Food Chain' for 2022 will be published in early May.

**Noted:** In early February 2022, a survey was sent out to the laboratory managers of all the official food safety/control laboratories on the island of Ireland to assess the training needs of the food testing laboratory staff. A laboratory staff training programme will run from 2022 to 2025, is currently being drawn up based on the findings of the survey.

**Noted:** A tender competition has commenced for an information document for the provision of a database of food testing laboratory services currently available on the island of Ireland with a closing date for application on 1 April 2022. **safefood** published a lab directory of old which due to changes is now obsolete. This was a well thought of resource.

**Noted:** JMcI informed of the following events which have being hosted or to be hosted by the Knowledge Network

- The Knowledge Network provided six two-day online training workshops on “Expert Witness Training” for EHOs in Ireland during January and February 2022. The workshops were so well received **safefood** were asked to provide an additional six in 2022.
- On 23<sup>rd</sup> March the Knowledge Network will host a webinar titled “An overview of foodborne viruses”.
- A logistics plan is currently being developed for the delivery of workshops on food safety training for SME’s to be delivered in early April.

**Noted:** A short promotional campaign to support **safefood**’s eLearning course for small food businesses will launch in March via social media advertising and the distribution of emails and flyers to key contacts in the food industry and agencies who interact with this sector.

**Noted:** The current contract for administration services for the Knowledge Network will expire in early June. The tender for the service will be advertised during March.

**Noted:** **safefood** sponsored the ‘Food Safety Champion Award’ at this year’s Northern Ireland Food and Drink Awards which took place in Belfast on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March.

## **10. Financial report**

**Noted:** PF presented the financial report for the first two months of 2022.

## **11. Any other business**

**Noted:** EK informed of the Ukraine refugees entering Ireland and Northern Ireland who also have health and nutritional needs and asked **safefood** to consider whether there is anything it can do to help.

**Date of next meeting:** Thursday, 12 May 2022