

Minutes of the 145<sup>th</sup> meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board  
Held on Thursday, 3 December, 2020 at 10:30am  
Zoom

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**PRESENT:**

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

**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:**

Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)  
Mr Stephen Moutray (SM)

## **1. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present**

**Noted:** The Board met in private without the Executive present

## **2. Matters arising from the private session**

**Noted:** No matters were arising.

## **3. Introduction and apologies**

**Noted:** The Chair welcomed all members of the Advisory Board to the meeting hosted by zoom.

**Noted:** The apologies of MH and SM were noted.

**Noted:** The Chair advised that MO's term as a member of the Advisory Board is complete. The Chair thanked MO for his involvement in the Board over the last four years and wished him well.

## **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, 22 October**

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted with no amendments

**Proposed:** MO

**Seconded:** WMcI

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

**Noted:** There were no matters arising.

## **7. Presentation**

**Noted:** Dr Aileen McGloin, Director of **safefood's** Marketing and Communication Directorate presented on '**safefood's** communication response to Covid-19'.

To give context, the busiest period on the **safefood** website year-on-year is December. In December 2019, there were 456,000 page views, during the first wave of Covid-19 the amount of page views surpassed the December figure and were as follows:

- March 12 - April 11 - 459,191 page views
- April 12 - May 11 - 553,321 page views
- May 12 - June 11 - 441,487 page views

The presentation informed how **safefood**'s planned communication activity for 2020 needed to change in order to respond to a global pandemic, however **safefood**'s remit spanned various topics relating to Covid-19 and therefore its communications played a vital role in spreading behaviour change messages.

- Handwashing remained a key behaviour for protecting against virus transmission for all government agencies addressing the crisis. **safefood** contributed to the NPHET behaviour change group. Current evidence was captured in a report by the NPHET behaviour change group and had existing handwashing resources, which were distributed accordingly.
- Cooking and eating at home - The closure of food establishments led to a reduction in dietary intake from outside the home and an increase in food prepared and consumed at home. This means that more people, whether they have the skills to prepare and cook food or not, are preparing food for themselves and others. **safefood** communicated food safety advice and healthy recipes in response to this increased behaviour change.
- Cooking outdoors - The weather during May-June was drier and milder than the same two-month period in 2019. **safefood** drew on its bank of seasonal messages including food safety when eating outdoors and BBQ'ing so was well placed to advise the public.
- Hoarding/increased food shopping - Overbuying of food was reported initially, therefore advice around storing foods, use-by and best-before dates, leftovers and avoiding food waste was needed.
- Low incomes - Covid-19 led to extreme changes in socioeconomic circumstances for many. Those affected, along with groups that were already vulnerable to food poverty, were identified as particularly at risk. **safefood** utilised its bank of budget friendly recipes as well as the recipe book '101 Square Meals', which is also distributed by MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service).
- Treats and snacks - Treating has become a more frequent behaviour during the lockdown. **safefood**'s START campaign has a wealth of advice on reducing treats.
- Adaptation of education resources - From 13 March in ROI and the 23 March in NI schools were ordered to close in line with public health measures. While many of

- safefood**'s educational resources are designed to be delivered in the classroom, **safefood** began work to explore the delivery of these remotely, or to repackage them to help parents use the resources for home schooling.
- Adaptation of communications for professionals – with the significant shift from office-based to home-based working and the ending of non-essential travel, **safefood** had to adapt the delivery of events and resources for our professional audiences to facilitate virtual/remote attendance/access.

**Noted:** The Chair and members of the Board congratulated **safefood** on its agility in adapting its work programme to the changed circumstances of its audiences and the resilience of its staff in achieving this despite personal and organisational challenges arising from the public health measures implemented during this pandemic. AMcG was complimented on her comprehensive and informative presentation.

**Noted:** SMcC enquired if **safefood** are involved in science week? **safefood** response was not to date but will explore this.

#### **8. 2020 Advisory Board Self Evaluation**

**Noted:** PF presented the summary document compiling responses of the 2020 Advisory Board Self Evaluation, which was circulated to all members prior to the meeting. Progress with actions identified in previous self-evaluations were noted.

#### **9. 2020 Audit & Risk Committee self-evaluation**

**Noted:** ER presented the summary document compiling responses from the 2020 Audit & Risk Committee self-evaluation, which was circulated to all members prior to the meeting. The Committee thanked the Executive and especially Angela Cahill for their support during the year.

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

**Noted:** ER and AMG presented feedback from the Audit and Risk Committee and are summarised below:

- The committee has conducted a review of **safefood**'s social media policy – which was considered by the committee to be a very comprehensive document, which will keep the organisation on point.
- The CEO attended at the meeting by invitation by the committee and informed of the challenges of working across two jurisdictions.
- **safefood**'s ICT & Facilities Manager answered the Committee's queries in relation to ICT & Facilities matters.

- The audit report from the C&AG is delayed, however they have assured of no problems in the organisation.
- The internal audit is expected to be complete with 2-3 week.
- The Corporate Operations Manager advised the Committee in relation to two technically illegal payments which the Department of Health NI had made to **safefood** amounting to less than €5k.

## 11. Chief Executive's report

### Corporate

**Noted:** **safefood** received the Guidance for preparing the 2021 Business Plan in September and submitted this plan to the sponsor departments in November.

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

**Noted:** **safefood's** Chief Specialist in Nutrition will be taking a two-year career break commencing January 2021. **safefood** undertook an open recruitment competition to fill this temporary vacancy.

**Noted:** Induction meetings of the newly appointed **safefood** Advisory Committee (SAC) are underway.

### Campaigns/communications

**Noted:** In November, **safefood's** campaigns featured the 8<sup>th</sup> phase of the START campaign, and the Transform your Trolley campaign. **safefood** then focused on Christmas food safety messaging for the month of December and the success will be evaluated in early 2021.

### Events

**Noted:** The CEO report informed on two topical webinars hosted by **safefood** in October and November. Firstly, the All-island Food Poverty webinar titled 'Learnings from responses to Covid-19' shared the challenges and learnings from the responses to tackle food poverty/insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic in different jurisdictions. Following on from this successful webinar the All-island Obesity Action Forum webinar titled 'The hidden influencer – tackling marketing of unhealthy food to children in today's digital world' which took place on 10 November which saw a record 210 registered for the webinar with 148 delegates tuning in on the day.

## Education

**Noted:** The following activity took place in **safefood's** education department:

- Re-development of the **safefood** for life food safety resource is progressing and is hoped to be launched in Q1 2021.
- MediaWise NI is now available to schools on the **safefood** website.
- Fulfilment of the healthy lunchbox leaflet orders to 426 schools has been completed

## Customer engagement

**Noted: safefood** is now using a tool called 'Moz Enterprise' to gain a better understanding of our web traffic metrics. The insights from the tool are also informing our Search Engine Optimisation and content strategy. Visits from Google organic search have shown a marked improvement since the week ending November 12. This indicates that our efforts in SEO, increased google rankings and amendments to the cookie control tool are paying dividends.

**Noted:** In October, **safefood's** healthy eating guidelines was the second most popular page this is in part due to collaborative work with the HSE and Healthy Ireland on the new Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1-4 year olds. The healthy eating guidelines page was updated to include the new guidelines with related leaflets, fact sheets, serving sizes etc. With over 3,000 page views, the average time spent on the page was over 3 minutes

## Knowledge Network

**Noted:** GK informed of activity taking place in the Knowledge Network programme:

- The sixth meeting of the **safefood** Knowledge Network (KN) Expert Group was held on 3 December.
- Eleven editions of online 'Network News' were published in 2020 and three editions of 'The Food Chain' magazine.
- Development of KN Food safety eLearning tools project has commenced.
- The following events were hosted by **safefood's** KN in Q3

The Importance of Internal Audit in Maintaining Food Safety webinar

- An introduction to product shelf life for small food businesses virtual training event
- An update on milk hypersensitivity webinar
- Virtual training event titled 'Laboratory Information Management System Administration training' for public food safety laboratories staff on the island of Ireland'

- two-part webinar series titled "Effective Food Safety
- 'Allergens: whose responsibility is it anyway?' webinar
- 'Emerging Risks in seafood' webinar
- 'Practical allergen management for food businesses' webinar.

#### Research

**Noted:** GK informed one research project was out for tender and one Project completed in Nov/Dec.

#### **12. Financial Report**

**Noted:** PF presented the summary Financial Results for ten months Jan – October 2020. **safefood** is expecting delays in delivering a number of research projects, the KN elearning resource and the NDNS survey could not be completed this year due to Covid-19.

#### **13. Tour de table**

**Noted:** BK enquired as to the possibility of Board payslips delivered electronically?

**Action:** PF to investigate the above.

#### **14. AOB**

**Noted:** The Chair passed on thanks and gratitude to **safefood**'s employees in what has been a challenging year and wished the Board a happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

**Date of next meeting: Thursday, 21 January 2021**