

Minutes of the 174th meeting of the SafeFood Advisory Board  
held on Thursday 13 February 2025 at 10:30 am  
SafeFood Office, Dublin

**Members Present in person:**

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)

Ms Elaine Clohosey (EC)

Mr Alan Lewis (AL)

**Members Present virtually:**

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)

Mr Alex Attwood (AA)

Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)

Dr Elaine Mooney (EM)

Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)

**In attendance:**

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

Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director Corporate Operations (PF)

Ms Fiona Gilligan, Director Communications (FG)

Ms. Trish Twohig, Director Food Safety (TTw)

Dr Aileen McGloin, Director Nutrition (AMcG)

Ms Colette O'Shea, (CO'S) Secretariat

Mr Dermot Moriarty, Manager - Communications Directorate (DM)

Ms Aoife O'Reilly, Communications Manager – Digital and Health (AOR)

Mr Richard Murphy, ICT & Facilities Manager (RM)

Ms Angela Cahill, Corporate Operations Manager (AC) (virtually)

**Apologies:**

Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)

## **1. Introduction and apologies**

**Noted:** The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the 174th meeting. Apologies were noted from Irene Collins and Dr Kenneth McKenzie.

## **2. Conflicts of interest**

**Noted:** No conflicts of interest were recorded.

## **3. Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday, 11 December 2024.**

**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:** TC

**Seconded:** EK

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

**Noted:** EK asked for an update under item 8 on the Department of Health Ireland's Folic Acid Steering Group. AMcG advised that the group is scheduled to meet at the end of February 2025.

## **5. Financial Report**

**Noted:** PF advised that Safefood's spending for 2024 was €7.9 million which is very marginally under the budget of €7.97 million. The budget is comprised of Safefood's core approved budget of €7.48 million plus pension costs of €215,400 plus additional funding of €274,000 from the Department of Health Ireland.

**Noted:** TC asked if the figures included the costs related to cyber-attack. PF responded that costs associated with the cyber-attack were significant and were covered by Safefood's insurance policy and that practically all third-party costs had been recovered.

## **6. 2022 Financial Memo**

**Noted:** As required by the 2022 Financial Memorandum, PF advised that the FM is available on Safefood's website and has been issued to all Board Members. PF noted that there have been no amendments to the 2022 Financial Memo.

## **7. Chief Executive Officers report**

**Noted:** The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed Safefood's activity since the last Board meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December. The report was circulated to Members prior to the meeting and taken as read. The CEO highlighted the following items.

**Noted:** Safefood's 2023 Annual Report is published.

**Noted:** Safefood met with the Department of Health Ireland and discussed budget requirements for 2025. Safefood's core approved budget is €7.48 million, with 70% coming from Ireland and 30% coming from Northern Ireland. This budget is down from a level of €10.6 million in 2010 and has remained unchanged since 2016, despite the subsequent unwinding of the Emergency Measures deductions and implementation of salary increases for staff.

Safefood put forward a business case to the Sponsor Departments seeking an additional €800,000 to cover these specific costs. Safefood does not expect additional funding from the Northern Sponsor Department in 2025 due the budgetary pressures in Northern Ireland. The Department of Health Ireland have advised Safefood that they have secured €644,000 extra funding from the Southern exchequer for 2025 and have opened discussions with the Northern Ireland sponsor and Finance Departments to seek support for this.

**Noted:** Both sponsor departments will meet with the two Finance departments to discuss options for a change of the budgetary ratio to reflect the changes underlying the actual basis of this ratio, i.e. population size in both jurisdictions. This process may take some time.

**Noted:** EM asked about Safefood's presence in Northern Ireland and the possibility of having an office space. GK responded that Safefood does indeed need a permanent staffed presence in NI, but the priority at present is securing enhanced budget increases so the organisation can fully deliver on its legislative remit.

The CEO invited colleagues to brief on the following items.

- PF: Recruitment Packs were prepared for two of the four upgraded staff positions and were signed off by the HR Section in DPENDR. The post of ICT & Facilities Executive is currently open, and the HR post will be advertised once the ICT competition is completed.
- CEO: Advised that he was waiting for clarification regarding Safefood's budget for 2025 before formally requesting a fresh job evaluation review of the two in situ posts which Safefood wishes to regrade.
- FG: 'Building a Healthier Food Environment' campaign is expected to launch on 5<sup>th</sup> March in the CHQ, Dublin.
- FG: Traffic to our website for the Christmas 2024 Meat Thermometer/ Turkey campaign was very high again on this occasion.
- AMcG: Community Food Initiative Programme: The new CFI tender has been completed and contracts signed. The recruitment process has now begun. The team are now finalising the work on evaluation from the previous iterations and this data be published at the launch in May.
- AMcG: Online Health Task Force: The online Health Task Force is a group that was convened by the previous Minister for Health to look at all types of harm to children online. Safefood met with colleagues from DOHI and the Institute of Public Health and will share the two recent Safefood

commissioned research reports regarding online food advertising to children on the island.

- TTW: Dr James McIntosh met with the Northern Ireland District Council Food Managers Group to discuss collaborations for 2025. It was agreed that a series of further food safety workshops will run again in association with the District and Borough Councils.
- TTW: Safefood is working with the FSAI on the topic of 'Establishing a Strong Food Safety Culture' – the agency will introduce new guidelines to support the regulatory framework.
- Newly Commissioned Research –
  - Understanding consumer behaviours and food safety practices in air fryer usage on the island of Ireland. A draft contract is with Cardiff University for review.
  - Consumer attitudes to novel foods on the island of Ireland. A draft contract is with QUB for review.
- Technical reports from three research projects have been submitted to the Safefood Research Office and are currently being evaluated. These projects are 'Food messaging to children and adolescents - What works?', 'Reducing the exposure of children and adolescents to digital marketing of unhealthy foods' and 'Food safety advice for vulnerable patients/residents in healthcare settings on the island of Ireland.'

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

**Noted:** AA complimented the work of Safefood at the All-Ireland Obesity Action Forum.

**Noted:** GK advised that Safefood is committed to undertaking an audit of its ICT infrastructure in 2025 to test Safefood's cyber architecture processes and safeguarding systems.

**Noted:** DMC suggested that Safefood contact the National Cybersecurity Centre as the legislative framework is changing.

**Noted:** EK complimented TTW's recent food safety interview during the recent Storm Éowyn.

## **8. Overview of Safefood 2025 Work Programmes**

**Noted:** Each directorate gave a presentation to the Board on their work plan and resources for 2025. Included was a focus on the strategic outcomes desired.

**Action:** AMcG to forward the slide on influences to Board Members.

**Noted:** On behalf of the Audit and Risk Committee, EK thanked the Corporate Operations Team for their phenomenal and diverse work.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked each Directorate for their informative presentations.

## **9. Tour de Table**

**Noted:** The CEO advised that the next Board meeting will take place on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April. Following normal business, it is planned that two facilitated consultation sessions will take place with the Board on development of the new Safefood 2026-2028 Corporate Plan.

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

The Chair asked if everyone was happy to have the Tour de Table and Meeting of Advisory Board members without Executive present at their one-to-one discussions. Members all agreed.

Members noted their appreciation of the breadth and quality of work reflected in the presentations on the 2025 Work Programme. They also welcomed the

forthcoming discussions on longer-term planning which would provide an opportunity to reflect on how best to maximise the impact of Safefood activities moving forward.

## **11. Meeting close**

**Noted:** The meeting closed at 13:00 pm

Signed

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Eddie Rooney

Chair Safefood Advisory Board.