

Minutes of the 177th meeting of the
SafeFood Advisory Board
held on Thursday 18th September 2025 at 10:30 am
SafeFood Office, Dublin

Members Present in person:

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)
Mr Alex Attwood (AA)
Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)
Mr Tim Morrow (TM)
Ms Julie Andrews (JA)
Ms Irene Collins (IC)
Dr Elaine Mooney (EM)
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)
Ms Elaine Clohosey (EC)
Mr Alan Lewis (AL)
Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)

In attendance:

Dr Gary A. Kearney, Chief Executive Officer (GK)
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director of Corporate Operations (PF)
Ms Fiona Gilligan, Director of Communications (FG)
Ms Colette O'Shea, (CO'S) Secretariat

Apologies:

Damien McCallion

1. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the 177th Meeting. Apologies were noted from Damien McCallion

2. Conflicts of interest

Noted: No conflicts of interest were recorded.

3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 19 June 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: TM

Seconded: EK

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: No matters arising.

5. Financial Report

Noted: PF advised that Safefood's expenditure to date is at €5.034 million. Our forecast for the full year is to finish within our current budget of €8.6 million.

Noted: A comprehensive financial review has already been conducted by the Senior Management Team involving a detailed, line-by-line analysis of the management accounts to align with our business plan objectives for 2025.

Noted: The CEO advised that discussions are ongoing with both sponsor departments regarding a process to secure a potential adjustment to the funding ratio, currently set at 70:30 (Ireland: Northern Ireland) which was based on 1998 population data. A revised ratio of 73:27 which reflects the current 2025 population split will be under consideration by the sponsor departments.

6. Chief Executive Report

Noted: The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed Safefood's activity since the last Board meeting on 19 June 2025. The report was circulated to Members prior to the meeting and taken as read. The CEO highlighted the following items.

Noted: Safefood has commenced development of a longer-term 10-year plan which will offer a pathway for our strategies, corporate and business plans and activities. This new project is led by the CEO and is called **Safefood 2036** and shall assist and enhance our normal planning cycles. Work has progressed to secure outputs from the external environmental analysis work which will inform projections in regard to demographics, social, communications and food and health in 10 years' time. Internal workshops have been planned for November.

Noted: The next meeting of the NSMC Health and Food Safety Sector shall be held on Wednesday November 26th in Armagh.

Noted: Following the series of engagements facilitated by M-CO, the Senior Management Team discussed their final report of engagements to develop the 2026-2028 Corporate Plan and identified minor changes to Safefood's Vision, Mission and Values and formulated 3 new strategic goals:

- a) Leading all-island and cross-border working and partnership in the promotion of safer and healthier production, provision and consumption of food.
- b) Being the trusted voice on food safety and healthy eating for people across the island of Ireland.
- c) Driving continuous improvement through using best practice, innovation, technology, staff development and growing the evidence base.

The draft Corporate Plan has been issued to the sponsor Departments, and we await initial comments. Once a final draft has been agreed with the Departments, Safefood will prepare an abridged version which it will issue to staff and Board members and publish on its website after being ratified by the NSMC in November.

Noted: The third governance meeting with both sponsor Departments took place in Belfast on 14th August at which a broad range of issues were discussed spanning the Cork office lease, budgets, 2025 progress reports, the 2026 Business Plan and 2026-2028 Corporate Plan and staffing.

Noted: Following the annual internal budgeting and business planning meeting, the first draft of Safefood's 2026 Business Plan was issued to the sponsor Departments. This includes a request for increased funding in 2026 to support ongoing campaigns, programmes and operations.

Noted: On 24 June, Safefood submitted a business case to its sponsor Departments seeking approval for future office arrangements in Cork, following the forthcoming expiry of its current 25-year lease in June 2026. This submission included an executive summary, details of the preferred option, clarification of the approval process, criteria for office requirements from 2026 to 2036, and an assessment of

five alternative options. The recommended option is a halving of Safefood's present footprint at its headquarters in Cork.

In line with the 2022 Financial Memorandum and the 2025 Business Planning Guidance for North-South Bodies, Safefood formally requested approval to enter a new 10-year lease beginning in 2026. Safefood received approval to proceed with finalising negotiations and drafting the lease contract.

Noted: The competition to fill the HR HEO position attracted many applications and, following a rigorous screening and interview process, the top placed interviewee has accepted Safefood's offer and started with Safefood on 16 September.

Noted: Following an invitation from the sponsor Departments in August, the CEO submitted a business case to alter the approved grade for Safefood's Director of Nutrition post from a medical grade to a senior management grade.

Noted: Safefood's current Food Safety Campaign targets domestic kitchens - focusing on avoiding cross-contamination of food-poisoning bacteria when handling or preparing chicken. A previously used UV light ad will again be presented to visually demonstrate hygiene risks due to *Campylobacter* contamination in chicken. This latter aspect causes the bulk of reported food poisoning across both jurisdictions each year. The campaign is supported by press and media outreach from the Food Safety and Communications teams. This campaign emphasises repetition of core public health messages for new and inexperienced home cooks.

Noted: A series of citizen engagement events is currently underway with the public on the island of Ireland to get feedback on what a healthy food environment would look like for them, and it is hoped that these community-based activities will also include workshops with both health committees in the Assembly and Dail culminating in a public event to publicise the outputs from the workshops during Q4.

Noted: In response to the release of draft data from the latest National Diet and Nutrition Survey, the current Nutritional Standards for Health and Social Care (HSC) settings in Northern Ireland are being revised ahead of formal publication.

The updated Standards will be officially launched at an event taking place at the Stormont Hotel, Belfast, on Thursday, 25 September.

Noted: Safefood officially launched its new 'Fuel your Game' resource in partnership with GAA Healthy Clubs on 10 September — an initiative to highlight the vital role of healthy food in supporting young athletes on and off the pitch. The photocall at Croke Park featured GAA, LGFA and Camogie Ambassadors Jason Forde – Tipperary Hurling, Joe O'Connor – Kerry Football, Leah Caffrey – Dublin Football

and Mairead Kennedy – Kilkenny Camogie. The *Fuel Your Game* resource will be distributed to over 2,000 GAA clubs nationwide, significantly enhancing its reach and impact. This wide dissemination is a fantastic opportunity to promote healthy eating habits among young athletes across the island.

Noted: A recent update was provided on Safefood's collaboration with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) in response to a series of food product withdrawals linked to *Listeria monocytogenes*. While Safefood is not a regulatory body and does not engage in risk management, it is supporting the FSAI in understanding consumer behaviour related to these incidents.

The affected products were primarily pre-prepared meals (e.g. meat, vegetables, and gravy) widely sold across the island. One fatality was associated with these products, and investigations revealed confusion around food handling and storage practices, particularly among older consumers.

Safefood is conducting a targeted consumer survey focusing on:

- Food safety practices among older adults
- Labelling comprehension
- Storage and consumption behaviours

The aim is to inform both public health messaging and regulatory interventions. The research is expected to conclude by Christmas.

Additionally, advancements in whole genome sequencing were highlighted as a key factor in the increased detection of *Listeria*. This technology enables faster and more accurate tracing of contaminated food products, helping to remove them from the market promptly and prevent further spread through the food chain.

7. Tour de Table

The CEO advised that the next Board meeting, originally scheduled for Thursday, 6 November, has been rescheduled to Wednesday, 5 November, and will take place in County Fermanagh.

8. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: Advisory Board members discussed emerging challenges for the current year.

9. Safefood 2036 Workshop facilitated by M-CO.

Safefood arranged for M-CO to facilitate an internal Advisory Board workshop as part of the Safefood 2036 project. The purpose of the session was to explore projected changes in society over the next decade – especially around food and

health, but also demographic, communication, and consumer trends. There was also a focus on internal capacity and capabilities. When completed, this project is intended to assist and enhance Safefood's normal planning cycles.

Signed

Dr. Eddie Rooney
Chairperson
Safefood Advisory Board.