



Safefood business plan – abridged version

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Introduction

Safefood was established in December 1999 as the Food Safety Promotion Board. It is one of six North South Implementation Bodies established under the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and given legislative effect on the Island by the North/South Cooperation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, and the British Irish Agreement Act, 1999. Safefood is funded jointly by the Oireachtas in Ireland (Department of Health, Ireland 70%) and by the Northern Ireland Assembly (Department of Health, Northern Ireland 30%).

Safefood's role is to promote food safety and healthy eating across the island of Ireland. It aims to build shared responsibility for food safety among everyone involved in the food chain, including producers, processors, distributors, caterers, and the public.

It delivers this work by sharing clear public health messages, promoting food safety, commissioning and funding research, supporting the Departments of Health in developing policy, enabling scientific cooperation, delivering education and awareness campaigns, championing and funding community programmes, providing food safety and nutrition advice and guidance, and publishing independent reports for consumers and stakeholders.

Safefood has 30 permanent full-time staff, working across four directorates: Corporate Operations, Food Safety, Nutrition, and Communications. The organisation is led by a Chief Executive Officer, who operates under the policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council. The CEO is supported by a 12-member Advisory Board and a 12-member Safefood Advisory Committee. Members are appointed by the North South Ministerial Council and include people with a wide range of professional expertise and backgrounds. The Advisory Board meets at least six times a year, and the Advisory Committee meets twice a year.

2026 Business plan objectives and activities

For 2026, Safefood has identified the following business objectives and activities planned to deliver those objectives.

2.1 Science and public health objectives

- Encourage good food hygiene practices in home kitchens.
- Support people and businesses that prepare food for the public, especially in food service, catering, hospitality, and retail, including advice on food hypersensitivity.
- Strengthen cross-border and multi-disciplinary working between food safety professionals.
- Work in partnership to deliver programmes, conferences, training, and strategic support that raise awareness of current and emerging food safety issues.
- Use strong scientific evidence to inform communications that support safer behaviour across the whole food chain.
- Prioritise overweight, obesity, and food poverty as major public health nutrition issues building cross-border and multi-disciplinary collaboration to address these.
- Support families on low incomes to eat more healthily in their communities.
- Promote clear, evidence-based healthy eating messages for the public.
- Contribute to the development and delivery of nutrition-related policies across the island.
- Share learning on best practice and strengthen the evidence base for sustainable public health and nutrition work.

2.2 Approach to delivering our strategic goals

2.2.1 Research / evidence – Activities and performance evaluation

Safefood will carry out research and gather knowledge to fill gaps in food safety, hygiene, and public health nutrition. All public messages will be based on solid science and will be clear, relevant, independent, and trustworthy. Evidence will guide priorities and help identify behaviours that can improve public health.

Over the next three years, Safefood's research will focus on:

- Public-facing campaigns: Building a strong evidence base to support media campaigns that encourage positive behaviour change.
- Policy and knowledge development: Contributing to policies, codes, and guidance that help consumers make safer and healthier choices.
- Current food safety and nutrition issues: Improving understanding of food safety risks and how to reduce them, and addressing nutrition challenges such as overweight, obesity, health inequalities, and food poverty in a coordinated way across both jurisdictions.
- Emerging issues: Taking a forward-looking approach by identifying new and developing food safety and nutrition risks in a fast-changing food system and society.

2.2.2 Value for money and accountability – Activities and performance evaluation

- Value for money and accountability are central to all Safefood's work. The organisation has strong planning, procurement, and evaluation processes in place, supported by clear controls and procedures that are reviewed every year through internal and external audits.
- All activities include built-in evaluation, enabling Safefood to measure outputs and outcomes against agreed objectives. A key 2026 activity will be to enhance our systems to assess impact of our activities.

2.2.3 Communications

Our goal is to influence food behaviours in the overall interest of improved public health and food safety. During 2026, we will:

Champion all-island collaboration and partnership

- Explore new partnerships with public and charitable organisations to co-create inclusive communications for people with disabilities and learning difficulties.
- Strengthen engagement with key stakeholders to reach community audiences, including sporting bodies such as the IFA, GAA, and Special Olympics Ireland.
- Build community capacity to tackle food poverty and promote healthy eating by providing clear materials and guidance for local food initiatives.
- Implement and review partnership guidelines that set out clear standards for co-branding, messaging, and shared communications.

- Explore creating a Safefood Partners' Forum to engage sporting bodies, NGOs, education providers, charities, and public bodies, supporting shared learning and cross-border collaboration.

Be the trusted voice of food safety and healthy eating

- Continue our core food safety campaign on preventing the spread of harmful bacteria in the kitchens of busy households.
- Develop and deliver a new phase of our food environment campaign shaped by citizen input advocating for the changes the public want to see in their food environment.
- Develop a targeted communications campaign for at-risk populations specifically looking at new messaging on Listeriosis and older populations.
- Create an annual “Health Calendar” to coordinate behaviour change messaging: - aligned with cultural and seasonal moments, for example: Exam time, Ramadan, Christmas.
- Produce a series of short accessible digital videos tackling common food myths and mistakes, for example: fridge temperature, washing chicken, portion sizes.
- Build on recipe analysis completed in 2024 and 2025 to build capacity and confidence of first-time home cooks.
- Continue to support our education portfolio, namely Rufus, lunchbox leaflets, and Safefood for Life.

Use evidence, insight, and innovation to shape communications

- Develop communications to support vulnerable groups, based on completed research findings.
- Explore a real-time campaign dashboard to track reach, engagement, and behaviour change and allow timely improvements.
- Update the website for an AI-driven, “click-zero” search environment, with clear navigation and accessible content.
- Apply the 2025 brand and style guidelines consistently across all internal and external communications.

2.3 Transparency and monitoring

Safefood closely monitors how the Business Plan is delivered. The plan sets out activities for each quarter, and each directorate clearly links its work to the 2026–2028 Corporate Plan.

Progress is reviewed monthly by the Senior Management Team through written reports discussed at management meetings. These reports track delivery and performance against the Business Plan, including progress on the Equality Scheme Action Plan and the Disability Action Plan, in line with Northern Ireland legislation. They also provide updates on spending and any differences from monthly budgets.

The Chief Executive provides a progress report at every Advisory Board meeting. The Advisory Board meets at least six times a year, while the Audit and Risk Committee meet at least four times a year.

The Chief Executive also presents progress updates and key highlights at each North South Ministerial Council Health Sectoral Meeting during the year.

In addition, Safefood holds at least two governance and liaison meetings each year with its sponsor departments to review progress. These departments also receive the Chief Executive's report issued for every Advisory Board meeting.

2026 Budget

3.1 Overall Position

The total budget for 2026 is €9,290,750. This includes €7,480,000 for planned programme activity, €1,330,800 in additional funding from the Department of Health in Ireland to cover higher pay costs, agreed new projects, and one-off relocation costs linked to the expiry of the Cork office lease, and €479,950 for pension costs funded separately.

The table below sets out the planned 2026 budget in Euro, compared with the approved 2025 budget. It also shows approved full-time equivalent staffing levels and how funding is split between pay and non-pay costs.

	<i>Budget 2026</i> €'000	<i>Budget 2025</i> €'000
Programme expenditure	3,356	3,451
Pay costs	2,657	2,611
Non-Pay Administration	1,467	1,418
Total expenditure excluding pension costs	7,480	7,480
NI share representing 30%	2,244	2,244
IRL share representing 70%	5,236	5,236
Additional Projects IRL Share 100% including exceptional relocation cost	1,331	803
Direct Pension Costs	480	378
Pension costs - NI - 23% (2025-22%)	112	82
Pension costs - IRL - 77% (2025 – 78%)	368	296
Overall total expenditure for approval	9,291	8,661
<i>Total NI share, including pension costs</i>	2,356	2,326
<i>Total IRL share, including pension costs</i>	6,935	6,335
Approved Full-time Equivalent (Staffing)	30	30

The table below is a summary of the 2026 budget over the major expenditure heads compared with the 2025 proposed budget.

	Proposed Budget 2026		Proposed Budget 2025	
	€'000		€'000	
Promotional Programmes	2,510	27.01%	2,602	30.05%
Additional Projects & Exceptional Relocation Costs	1,331	14.32%	803	9.27%
Research	434	4.67%	230	2.66%
Corporate Operations	2,317	24.94%	2,324	26.83%
Food Safety	820	8.83%	856	9.88%
Nutrition	690	7.43%	777	8.97%
Communications	709	7.63%	691	7.98%
Direct pension costs	480	5.17%	378	4.36%
Total	9,291	100%	8,661	100%

