



Minutes of the 164<sup>th</sup> meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board

Held on Thursday, 29 June 2023 at 9:30am

**safefood**, Cork

**PRESENT:**

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)

Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)

Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)

Mr Alex Attwood (AA)

Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)

Ms Irene Collins (IC)

Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)

Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)

**In attendance:**

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

Ms Fiona Gilligan, Director Communications (FG)

Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director Corporate Operations (PF)

Dr Aileen McGloin, Director Nutrition (AMcG)

Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretariat

Mr Dermot Moriarty, Communications Manager (item 8)

Dr James McIntosh, Chief Specialist Toxicology (item 8)

Dr Linda Gordon, Chief Specialist Microbiology (item 8)

Mr Michael Barry (Items 8)

**Apologies:**

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)

Mr Alan Lewis (AL)

## **1. Introduction and apologies**

**Noted:** The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting. The apologies of DMcC and AL were recorded.

## **2. 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.

### 3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 27 April 2023.

**Approved:** The Chair asked members if they were happy to approve the minutes of the previous meeting which were circulated in advance. All concurred.

**Proposed:** SMcC

**Seconded:** TC

### 4. Matters arising from the minutes

**Noted:** Carried forward from February Minutes - It was agreed to keep the suggestion made in point 5 of the previous minutes (December 2022) that the Board invite a member of the FSAI 'reformulation of food products taskforce' to present at a meeting at a suitable date in the future.

**Noted:** No other matters arising

### 5. Update from the Board's Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

**Noted:** AA provided an update from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 16 May 2023.

- The review of risks posed to **safefood** remain unchanged since the last ARC report to the Board. Topline risks include delays in progressing the staffing regrading's and upgrading the finance system.
- The ARC agreed that internal audit should focus in 2024 on performance of the new finance system following upgrade. Focus in 2023 will be on **safefood**'s Risk Register and Policy.
- The Data Protection Officer presented her report for 2022. Data breaches were minor which did not warrant reporting to the data commissioner. It is encouraging staff are engaging with the Data Protection Officer.
- The term of office for some members of the ARC was due to conclude and measures have been put in place to stagger terms to ensure continuity of skill and knowledge of the committee.
- The Director of Nutrition, AMcG, attended the last meeting and presented an overview of nutrition activities.

- The Comptroller and Auditor General commenced their on-site review of the 2022 accounts in late May.
- EK concurred with the report and thanked all ARC members and PF and M. Brady for their assistance.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked AA and EK for their ongoing work and keeping the Board informed and up-to-date.

## 6. Financial report

**Noted:** PF presented the financial report for the first five months of 2023 (January to May) and highlighted that **safefood** had received an additional amount of funding on a once-off basis from the Department of Health Ireland of €266,000 to support the thermometer campaign. **safefood**'s expenditure to date is slightly behind budget which is due to timing issues and dependant upon payment schedules for programmes and research. The Executive Board met in May to review budget headings and forecast. PF advised that the southern sponsor, Dept Health in Ireland, provides its 70% funding to **safefood** during the first nine months of the year and that the remaining 30% funding is drawn down from the Northern Ireland Dept Health for the final three months.

**Noted:** ER informed that budget cuts in NI are worrying and might impact on **safefood**'s funding. PF advised that our funding has remained unchanged since 2016 and **safefood** had not received any indications to-date that a cut is imminent but any reduction in funding would seriously impact **safefood**'s work. This is in the context of previous and significant budget reductions and reminded members that **safefood**'s budget in 2008 was €10.2m.

**Noted:** KMck advised the Permanent Secretary for Education in NI has cut back on the summer school food programme which could have an implication for food poverty.

**Noted:** SMcC asked does NI see value for money? GK confirmed that **safefood** food safety and nutrition promotion activities in Northern Ireland are very significant and impactful. For example, commissioned research spend in NI exceeds 40% of the total research budget. In addition, initiatives like the 'Transform your Trolley' is an NI only programme, four NI Community Food Initiatives are funded, and

**safefood** has worked on a policy level on many projects in NI as well as linking colleagues in NI and Ireland. PF confirmed that this type of information is routinely reported to the Sponsor Departments.

## 7. Chief Executive Officers report

**Noted:** The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed **safefood's** activity since the last Board meeting on 27 April. The report was circulated to members prior to the meeting and taken as read. The CEO invited questions.

- MH asked what was the response to the recruitment campaign for the position of Nutritionist? PF informed 40 applications were received which were shortlisted to seven invited for interview on Friday 30 June. In regard to the vacancy of Communications Assistant - PF advised that this is still in progress. IC suggested contacting the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).
- MH asked if numbers reported in the CEO report could be provided in context? For example, 'over 100 preschools signed up to the pre-school newsletter' - how many preschools are there?
- In reply to a question as to how retailers were selected for our meat thermometer campaign - FG advised that all retailers were approached and **safefood** will work with all interested retail parties as it is a key communications channel.
- AA informed the event hosted by the North South Ministerial Council in Armagh for Board members and CEOs was an enjoyable and interesting event.
- GK advised that CEOs of the North South Bodies meet on a regular basis. The CEO's recently drafted a joint paper to capture all the common issues facing the bodies, which was issued to An Tánaiste, Micheál Martin and the Head of the NI Civil Service, Jayne Brady. Such issues included resourcing (budgets and staffing), north-south administrative anomalies, and general systemic aspects which are limiting in terms of future-proofing the organisations. The overall focus and ambition is on optimising the potential of

North-South Bodies and maximising the benefits and value accrued to citizens in both jurisdictions.

## **8. Discussion – Business Plan 2024**

**Noted:** The chair welcomed Michael Barry to facilitate the discussion on the Business Plan 2024. The following **safefood** staff members GK, PF, FG, AMcG, JMcl, LG, DM presented on their area of work, which prompted discussion and input from Board members on various aspects of food safety, nutrition and communications.

**Noted:** MB will prepare a separate document which will capture the discussion and outputs of the session.

## **9. AOB and tour de table**

**Noted:** The Chair thanked all Board members for their valuable input and opened to the floor for AOB.

**Noted:** Members of the Board thanked Tyrelle Kenneally for her warm welcome to **safefood**'s Cork office.

**Noted:** The Chair informed the next meeting will take place on 7 September.

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

**Noted:** Board members agreed this was not required due to an already packed agenda and no issues to raise or discuss.