



Minutes of the 146<sup>th</sup> meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board  
Held on Thursday, 21 January, 2021 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)  
Dr Mary Upton (MU)  
Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)  
Mr Alex Attwood (AA)  
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)  
Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)  
Mr Stephen Moutray (SM)

**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)  
Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretary  
Dr James McIntosh (JMI) for item 7 only

**APOLOGIES:**

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

**Noted:** The Board apart from two new members (AA and TC) 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 virtually on the Zoom platform. Mr Alex Attwood and Ms Teresa Canavan joined their first meeting having been appointed to the Board on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 by the NSMC. Introductions took place by way of Tour de table.

**Noted:** No apologies were noted

## **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, 3 December**

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

**Proposed:** WMI

**Seconded:** BK

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

**Noted:** Under item 13 of the 145<sup>th</sup> meeting, BK enquired as to the possibility of Board payslips being delivered electronically, with an action for PF to investigate. PF confirmed that this was possible and will be implemented immediately for January payslips and going forward.

## 7. Presentation

**Noted:** Dr James McIntosh presented on the topic of Food hypersensitivity. A summary of the presentation is as follows:

- Food hypersensitivity is the general term that covers conditions such as food allergy, food intolerance and coeliac disease.
- Reliable data sets on the subject are not available for the island of Ireland (IoI) data is usually referenced from the United Kingdom.
- Food hypersensitivity is estimated to affect 15 – 45% of the whole population on the IoI.
- There is no treatment for food hypersensitivity, the patient needs to avoid the particular food.
- Cost are monetary and intangible (psychological and socio economic)
- **safefood**'s role in the area is not that of a regulator. **safefood** provides training, understanding and research. Examples of **safefood**'s work in this area are;
  - Training in food allergen control for Environmental Health Officers and catering colleges
  - Food safety training for small medium enterprises (SME's)
  - Food allergen training for early childcare providers
  - **safefood** has published five research projects in the area and provides a wealth of consumer literature accessible in printed format and through its dedicated section on the website to allergy and intolerances.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked Dr James McIntosh for his presentation and opened to the floor for questions, whereby a healthy discussion took place with great interest on the subject from Board members.

## 8. Chief Executive's report

### Corporate

**Noted:** The Minister for Finance NI has not approved **safefood**'s Corporate Plan 2017-2019 and Business Plans 2017 and 2018 due to an approval issue regarding payments made by the Department of Health NI to **safefood**. The Department of Health NI explained that **safefood** is in no way at fault for this situation.

**Noted:** The sponsor departments have advised that **safefood**'s Corporate Plan 2020-2022 and Business Plans for 2019, 2020 and 2021 will be put before the NSMC for approval as soon as possible in 2021.

**Noted:** **safefood** reviewed and updated its Covid-19 Working Safely Plan and Protocols following the Government's update to its Return to Work Safely Protocol on 20 November.

**Noted:** The C&AG's office has signed the financial statements, these will be laid before Government as part of the 2019 Annual report in February.

#### Campaigns/communications

**Noted:** AMcG informed of the following related to **safefood's** Communications

- Evaluation of the Christmas campaign 2020 is currently ongoing. PR results indicate that there were 16 pieces of print or online coverage and 14 broadcast interviews related to the campaign, total audience reach is forecasted in excess of two million. All of the above media coverage referenced the **safefood** website.
- Evaluation of phase eight of the Start campaign, which aired in Nov/Dec 2020, is currently underway by telephone survey with results due by mid-January. A wider evaluation of all activity to date (three years) will follow and will inform the last two-years of the five-year campaign.
- Advertising of the resource is currently on hold as schools are closed until the end of the month due to Covid-19 restrictions. Distribution of the printed resource will recommence when schools reopen.
- The initial findings of **safefood's** yearly market research titled safetrak have been received. This will be presented to the Board at a later meeting.
- **safefood** assisted the Department of Health for the publication of 'Minimum Standards for Hot School Meals' in the Republic of Ireland.

#### Education

**Noted:** The **safefood** for life e-learning build is complete. NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) is currently proofing the resource. Planning for launch and promotion is taking place.

**Noted:** **safefood** is sponsoring two initiatives to promote increased consumption of Vegetables in primary school children.

- Veg Power will run from Dec – Feb in NI schools.
- Incredible edibles will run in ROI schools in 2021.

#### Customer engagement

**Noted:** **safefood** launched its new chatbot on three platforms – Facebook Messenger, Alexa and Google Assist in December 2020. The Chabot acts as an important customer service tool ensuring that people searching for Christmas cooking advice can access it 24/7 particularly on the days around Christmas Day.

### Knowledge Network

**Noted:** GK informed of recent activity with the Knowledge Network (KN) and gave a brief overview of KN for the benefit of new Board members.

- Membership currently stands at 3,500
- Twelve editions of Network News were published in 2020
- Work is continuing on the Food Safety eLearning Project
- Feedback on KN events held in November and December was provided
- **safefood** issued a limited call for expressions of interest for desk research into the potential impacts of the current pandemic on vulnerabilities in the food chain on the island of Ireland titled as *Current and potential impacts of the SARS-Cov-2 Pandemic on Island of Ireland Food Chain Vulnerabilities: A Horizon-Scanning Study*.

### Community Food Initiative

**Noted:** **safefood** are planning a network webinar for March, which will focus on sharing learnings from a variety of projects delivered remotely (CFI, CFI at home and Transform your trolley). Planning of 2021 activities and scoping out the resources required to support the leaders in delivering the projects is taking place.

**Noted:** The new programme titled 'CFI at home', which was implemented to deal with the restraints of social activity due to Covid-19, completed in December. Reports from the various organisations involved are being reviewed.

### Research

**Noted:** The following research projects will commence in quarter one 2021:

- Communicating Allergen Information to Consumers on the island of Ireland
- Fiscal and pricing policies related to food and non-alcoholic drinks: a review of the evidence
- Review of International Practice on Building 'Sustainability' into National Healthy Eating Guidelines and Practical Implications for Policy
- Secondary analysis of dietary survey data of children's diets on the island of Ireland.

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

**Noted:** ER and AMG presented feedback from the Audit and Risk Committee, which met on 20 January 2021, as summarised below:

- A representative from the C&AG's office attended the meeting and advised that a clean audit report has been issued.

- The committee considered a report on the operation of protected disclosures, which gives protections to staff to report on issues of wrongdoing without facing negative impact.
- The Internal Auditors presented a report on **safefood**'s business continuity planning which was broadly positive with some recommendations for enhancements.
- The Business recovery management plan needs to be revised in light of lessons learnt from Covie-19 and third party insurance providers should be listed.
- The committee meets quarterly and the next meeting is scheduled for April.

## **10. Financial Report**

**Noted:** The Financial report for the full year 2020 was not available due to end of year accounting processes.

## **11. Tour de table**

**Noted:** The Chair enquired about **safefood**'s sponsorship of Operation Transformation. The CEO informed that following a comprehensive review of **safefood**'s sponsorship of this programme, a decision had been taken not to sponsor the RTE show in 2021.

## **12. AOB**

**Noted:** No further business was noted.

**Date of next meeting: Thursday, 25 March 2021**