



Minutes of the 171st meeting of the Safefood Advisory Board

Held on Thursday 12th September 2024 at 9:30 am

Safefood Cork Office

Present: in person

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)

Mr Alex Attwood (AA)

Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)

Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)

Ms Elaine Clohosey (EC)

Present virtually:

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)

Ms Irene Collins (IC)

Dr Elaine Mooney (EM)

Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)

In attendance: in person

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

Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director Corporate Operations (PF)

Ms Fiona Gilligan, Director Communications (FG)

Dr James McIntosh (JMc)

Dr Aileen McGloin, Director Nutrition (AMcG)

Mrs Tyrelle Kenneally (TK) Secretary

Dr Linda Gordon (LG) – item 8

Apologies:

Mr Alan Lewis (AL)

1. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the 171st meeting and thanked especially those who travelled.

2. Declarations of interest

Noted: No conflicts of interest were recorded.

3. Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday, 26th June 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: EM

Seconded: EK

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: Chair inquired if Actions from the previous meeting were completed. GK confirmed that all Actions were completed.

5. Financial Report

Noted: PF advised that Safefood was very marginally under budget to the end of July. Looking at the forecast to the end of the year, Safefood remains under significant pressure and the senior management team will continue to keep the budgetary situation under close review.

Noted: KMcK enquired about costs incurred and pending due to the recent cyber-attack. PF advised that costs incurred to date with third parties were currently within the limit of cyber insurance cover (excluding the policy excess).

Noted: DMcC enquired about the potential liability of the cyber attack and if the public was impacted or did it only pertain to staff. PF advised that Safefood held very limited personal data on the public and most personal data retained related to employees, pensioners, Board and SAC Members. DMcC stated that Safefood's

ability to pay salaries was a critical success factor in managing the impact of the attack.

Noted: AA enquired on the progress on receiving additional funding from NI sponsors in the current economic circumstances. GK advised that a Ratio Based Funding Model is used for all North-South Bodies and that funding from both sponsor Departments will continue on that basis. However, the Departments of Finance in both jurisdictions are in the process of finalising a paper, covering all north-south bodies, to allow supplementary funding from either jurisdiction alone depending on circumstances.

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

Noted: EK and AA provided an update from the last Audit and Risk Committee meeting held in Dublin on 20 August 2024.

- It was noted that the papers of the Risk Register and Action Log were comprehensive and very extensive.
- PF provided an update on Safefood's response to the recent cyber-attack. The response of Safefood to the cyber-attack was immediate and a crisis management team, headed by PF was established. The ARC expressed satisfaction in Safefood's response and recognised the increased strains on the staff and organisation due to the attack. At the meeting, Angela Cahill identified 8 risks on the Register which are impacted by the cyber breach.
- ARC is concerned about the ongoing staffing risks.
- ARC reviewed their Terms of Reference.
- Thanks to PF, Angela Cahill and team in the work they do supporting the ARC.

7. Chief Executive Officers report

Noted: The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed Safefood's activity since the last Board meeting on 26 June. The report was circulated to members prior to the

meeting and taken as read. The CEO invited colleagues to brief on the following items.

- The CEO and Director of Corporate Operations attended a working group meeting at the NSMC Offices in Armagh on 29th August to prepare for the Autumn Sectoral meeting at which the 2025 business plan will be approved.
- Regarding this Business Plan, senior staff are in the process of getting feedback and information from the four Directorates with a view to finalising the 2025 draft.
- The CEO advised that the NI Department of Finance had not yet ratified 4 of the 6 posts already approved by the sponsor departments and DPENDR. The review of the 2 in-situ posts has not commenced pending conclusion of the 4 re-gradings.
- There were resignations by two Safefood staff in August and September.
- The 'Building a Healthy Food Environment' Campaign is being publicised during the month of September and contains strong pieces from the Trusted Voices Series. KPIs will be measured next year. FG advised that there is some push back from the public who still believe that 'it is my responsibility and not the retail environment'. Safefood is taking this into consideration and researching ways to resolve and accommodate such sentiments. The Donal O'Shea PR piece was strong with 1.7 million hits and continues to grow.
- Feedback was welcomed on the interim 'Transform your Trolley' programme evaluation report.
- The Food Poverty Research Report is scheduled to be launched at the All-island Food Poverty Network (AIFPN) on 17 September. Minister for Health in Northern Ireland, Mr Mike Nesbitt, has agreed to open the event due to his strong interest in the topic and health inequalities. The AIFPN is co-hosted with the Food Standards Agency in NI.
- The next All-island Obesity Action Forum event will take place virtually in November 2024 with the focus on 'Everyday spaces and their impact on obesity'.
- 70,000 copies of the Rufus Handwashing Story Book have been rolled out via public libraries and promoted in conjunction with Libraries Ireland's 'My Little Book Bag' initiative.

- An update was provided on the Knowledge Network SME food safety training workshops, Community Group Workshops in NI and Food Testing Laboratory Staff Training.
- Final contracts are nearly agreed with preferred institution to carry out a research project on Air Fryers and associated food safety aspects.
- There was a general discussion on Safefood's research tender process which included suggested ways of putting out tenders so that researchers use their ingenuity to deliver our goals, re-evaluating the scoring guide, adding an unmarked section on the form so applicants could add ideas that enhance their project within the project budget. EM noted it was difficult to meet the Safefood criteria while bringing your own pool of ideas and creativity because of the scoring guide. KMckK agreed and suggested perhaps a relook at how marks are allocated. AMcG advised that Safefood must comply with public procurement rules in relation to our tendering processes.
- PF presented an update on the recent cyber-attack which included the Response Timeline of the Crisis Management Team, and details of the Attack Timeline which was logged back to 11 December 2023 and a summary of the team's response under the headings: Technical, Legal/regulatory, Communications & Threat actor (hacker) engagement. The next steps were also listed.

Noted: The Chair thanked PF for the impressive response by the team.

8. Presentation of the Safefood Research project

'Establishing a strong food safety culture in small food businesses: attitudes, barriers and facilitators.'

Noted: Safefood's Dr Linda Gordon joined the meeting to present an overview on a Safefood-funded research project titled 'Establishing a strong safety culture in small food businesses: attitudes, barriers and facilitators.' It was conducted on behalf of Safefood by Ulster University and completed at the end of 2023 and will be published on the website.

Noted: The Chair thanked Linda for the fascinating presentation.

9. Safefood Corporate Plan

Noted: The CEO submitted a document titled Safefood Corporate Plan 2023-2025 to the Board in advance of the meeting. The CEO gave an overview of this document which included Safefood's four strategic goals for the years 2023-2025.

Directors provided highlights regarding progress with these four strategic goals, giving an update on what they were doing in food safety, nutrition and communications.

Noted: The CEO also mentioned the establishment of the Positive Health and Well Being Team for staff as well as Human Resources looking at providing extra development courses for staff to enhance their skills both in terms of what we do as a North South body and in their relevant areas.

Noted: The Chair thanked the CEO and Directors for their input and opened the floor to members for discussion.

Noted: Board members discussed and gave their feedback on the input presented by Directors with regards to the future Corporate Plan for 2026-2028.

Noted: The CEO posed two questions for consideration by Board members:

- Feedback in regard to the process which will commence over the coming months for the next plan that will cover 2026-2028?
- have Members come across any new evaluation models to be used as best practice?
- are there any particular stakeholder groups Safefood should engage with that it has not done so in the past?

IC suggested the use of Best Practice Improvement Resource (BPIR) and KMCK suggested working with the Road Safety Authority of Ireland to find out what they are doing to improve their organisation.

Noted: The CEO thanked everyone for their contributions and the Chair thanked the CEO for allowing the Board the opportunity to give their early input towards the forthcoming Corporate Plan for 2026.

10. Tour de Table

Noted: The CEO advised that Safefood had attended the Oireachtas Health Committee on 5th July and presented on the subject of Obesity and was proud of the Safefood staff attending for doing a splendid job.

Noted: The Chair also noted a job well done by Safefood at the last NSMC Health and Food Safety Sectoral meeting at the end of June.

Noted: The Chair advised that the next Board meeting will take place on 7 November in Belfast.

Noted: The meeting closed at 1.25 pm

11. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: Board members noted their appreciation of the staff response to the Cyber-attack.

They also noted the importance of securing outstanding approvals and being able to replace staff rapidly for long-term stability.

The discussion on the Corporate Strategy highlighted the need for the streamlining of priorities to meet future challenges.

Signed



Dr. Eddie Rooney

Chair Safefood Advisory Board.