



Minutes of the 170<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Safefood Advisory Board

Held on Wednesday 26 June 2024 at 10:30 am

Safefood Dublin Office

**Present: in person**

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (Chair)

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)

Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)

Mr Alex Attwood (AA)

Ms Irene Collins (IC)

Dr Kenneth McKenzie (KMck)

Prof Elizabeth Keane (EK)

Ms Elaine Clohosey (EC)

Dr Elaine Mooney (EM)

**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)

Ms Trish Twohig, Director Food Safety (TTw)

Dr Aileen McGloin, Director Nutrition (AMcG)

Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretary

Dr Mairead McCann, Technical Executive Food Safety (MMcC) – item 9

Ms Anne Parle, Nutritionist (AP) – item 10

Ms. Joana Caldeira Fernandes da Silva, Chief Specialist Nutrition (JCFdS) – item 10

**Apologies:**

Mr Alan Lewis (AL)

## **1. Introduction and apologies**

**Noted:** The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the 170<sup>th</sup> meeting and thanked all for accommodating the date change from the previously scheduled 27 June due to the NSMC Health Sectoral meeting taking place on that day. Apologies were noted from AL. Round the table introductions took place for the benefit of two new members (EC and EM) who were warmly welcomed.

## **2. Conflicts of interest**

**Noted:** EM declared an interest in item 9 as a member of the research team.

## **3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 18 April 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:** IC

**Seconded:** TC

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

**Noted:** No matters arising.

## **5. Financial Report**

**Noted:** For the benefit of new members PF advised on the nature and context of the tabled Financial Report at each meeting. Figures for the years 2019 – 2022 are provided for comparative purposes, the 2023 figures are currently draft and in the process of being audited, while the 2024 figures show the spend for the year to date. PF highlighted how Safefood was performing against its budget and in comparison, with the same period in 2023 and advised that forecasts indicate that ending the year on budget will prove challenging again.

KMcK queried whether the entire research programme expenditure budget of approximately 1.07 million will be spent. PF advised that this budget is committed

and is expected to be spent providing contracts for new research projects are signed.

## **6. 2023 Annual Report of the Data Protection Officer (DPO)**

The 2023 Annual Report of the Data Protection Officer was circulated before the meeting and taken as read. PF provided a brief overview of the report

**Noted:** Safefood currently has a contract with Xpert DPO to help fulfil its obligations and act as Data Protection Officer for the organisation. The DPO produces a yearly report which is reviewed by the senior management team, the Audit and Risk Committee and the Advisory Board. The report details the steps Safefood is taking to satisfy their obligations under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, while outlining the data protection initiatives that have been completed in 2023 and sets out our programme of work for the rest of 2024.

The DPO reports that there is a good relationship and engagement between Safefood staff and the DPO, and a lot of work has been carried out in the last few years to implement Safefood's Data Protection and Records Retention Policies. Once the 2024 Records Retention programme of work is completed, the annual task should prove less onerous. There were 3 reported breaches in 2023 which is a decrease from 5 in 2022.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked PF for the update and congratulated all involved on a comprehensive and reassuring report.

**Noted:** DMCC suggested cross border bodies could share learnings on cyber security.

**Noted:** AA advised that the DPO attended the last Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) meeting and reported a sense of reassurance in regard to the relationship between staff and the DPO. The ARC found the report technical and would like further training to gain a better understanding.

**Noted:** KMCK advised that Safefood should require appropriate due diligence in regard to data protection from researchers to ensure they are compliant and that the workload in ensuring their compliance does not fall to Safefood. A set of 'if/then' rules may be useful.

## **7. 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 virtually on 21 May 2024.

- Thanks to PF and Angela Cahill for their support to the ARC.
- Dermot Moriarty, Safefood's communications manager presented the Crisis Management Procedure and Checklist which documents how Safefood should respond in a crisis to prevent reputational damage. DM also advised on tools Safefood use to look and listen for risks for example the social listening tool Emplify, our two PR agencies and media monitoring service. External members of the ARC emphasised the importance for the organisation in having this procedure in place which is also empathetic to staff involved in the crisis.
- Tony Cooney from the internal auditors, Crowleys DFK, joined the meeting to present the Internal Audit Report on Risk Management. Whilst risk management was noted as strongly embedded in the organisation there were 3 minor recommendations which were accepted by the ARC with EK advising that the current policy assigns responsibility for risk management to the CEO as Accounting Officer but in practice the ARC takes responsibility and a recommendation to update the policy was made.
- Tony advised that Safefood would rank in the top 10% for risk management policies and practices among similar organisations that Crowleys DFK report on.
- The first draft of the 2023 Financial Statements had been reviewed by the Committee.
- The final management letter from the C&AG was reviewed with no significant issues noted.
- The C&AG were recently onsite to audit the 2023 accounts.

- Safefood will tender for the internal auditor role in Q4 2024 / Q1 2025.
- The committee highlighted the ongoing risks for Safefood associated with the delays in progressing the six regrading's of positions within Safefood.
- The committee also noted that there is a technical difficulty moving payroll to a cloud-based system, so an on-premises solution is being implemented.

**Noted:** KMCK queried potential audit cost increases to which PF responded that the C&AG have increased their fee.

**Noted:** Members of the Board congratulated Safefood on ranking in the top 10% of similar organisations.

## 8. Chief Executive Officers report

**Noted:** The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed Safefood's activity since the last Board meeting on 18 April. The report was circulated to members prior to the meeting and taken as read. The CEO invited colleagues to brief on the following items.

- Bilateral meetings have taken place with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland which provide the senior management teams the opportunity to discuss collaboration and partnership opportunities.
- Safefood has formed a cross directorate working group to identify the risks and opportunities of using Artificial Intelligence and identify training for staff as well as to develop an appropriate Policy and Guidelines.
- The North South Ministerial Council Health Sectoral meeting will take place tomorrow (Thursday 27 June) and will be attended by the Chair, CEO and AMcG.
- The CEO provided an update on the regrading issue including his most recent discussions with sponsor departments as background for the new members. The Department of Finance NI has raised queries in relation the four vacant posts which have been already provisionally sanctioned by DPER in Ireland. Safefood is awaiting final sign off by both jurisdictions for these 4 roles and wish to commence a process examining the regrading of the two in-situ two posts.

- A corporate brand refresh is close to completion. This shall give our logo and other associated elements a more contemporary sense.
- Safefood's new healthy eating campaign titled 'Building a healthier food environment' launched on 17 and 19 June in Dublin and Belfast and has already achieved significant media coverage. FG and AMcG briefed on the launch event, discussion panel and media coverage.
- Safefood has been in conversation with the catering director of Windsor Park and Kingspan Stadiums in Northern Ireland regarding potentially changing the food offering in the stadiums which would line up nicely with the new campaign.
- An update was provided on the recent All-island Obesity Action Forum event which took place on 18 June and focused on the impact of obesity on fertility, pregnancy and beyond with 330 participants registering to attend. The second all island event will take place on 19 November.
- An event to review the 2023 Transform your Trolley programme, which is run in partnership with the Healthy Living Alliance in Northern Ireland, took place on 22 April. Encouraging results based on the previous year saw five more programmes delivered, an increase of 49% more individuals taking part and 25% more males participated.
- Safefood's TikTok channel was launched one year ago and is performing well. The new food environment campaign advertisement which links back to the website generated 2.5 million hits alone.
- An update was given on the recent 'Healthier food environment forum' meeting which took place on 20 May. Members discussed a Roadmap for a Healthier Food Environment on the island of Ireland which would compile a series of actions that Government Departments and State agencies across the island are committed to progressing to promote a healthier food environment and ensuring that access to a healthy diet is within reach of everyone.
- An advertisement inviting expressions of interest to join the Safefood Advisory Committee was published in relevant media and circulated to appropriate professional networks with a closing date of 27 June. This committee

provides competencies and areas of expertise to Safefood which are not available in-house.

- An update was provided on the Knowledge Network expert groups, food hypersensitivity, SMEs, and microbiological food safety.
- Safefood is working with all 11 district councils in Northern Ireland to provide food safety training to SME's.
- An update was given on the status of a tender call for four new research projects with a closing date for applications of 10 May. Evaluations of tenders submitted for the following research projects will take place on
  - Understanding Consumer Behaviours and Food Safety Practices in Air Fryer Usage on the island of Ireland – 15 July
  - Consumer attitudes to novel foods on the island of Ireland – 8 July
  - Overweight and obesity – understanding stigma and current discourses on the island of Ireland - TBC
  - Validating a scoring system for evaluating the healthiness of children's menus in Ireland – No responses were received for this project; the tender will be reviewed and possibly re-advertised.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked all contributors to the report and opened to the floor for discussion which focused on

- the reaction of retailers and manufacturers to the campaign.
- background to the Food Safety Skills Fund.
- successful launch of the building a healthier food environment campaign.

## **9. Presentation of *safefood*'s research project 'Consumers use of smart devices while preparing food in the domestic kitchen on the island of Ireland'.**

**Noted:** Safefood's Dr Mairead McCann joined the meeting to present an overview of the recently published research project 'Consumers use of smart devices while preparing food in the domestic kitchen on the island of Ireland,' which is available on Safefood.net and was circulated in advance of the meeting.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked Mairead for the interesting presentation and opened to the floor for questions.

## **10. Cross border working discussion and consideration of a draft business proposal for the new Community Food Initiative (CFI) programme.**

**Noted:** The Chair advised that the topic of cross-border working was first tabled at a Board meeting held on 2 November in Armagh - in a session facilitated by the late Tommie Gorman. The Chair acknowledged the recent passing of Tommie who will be remembered by Safefood and others for providing valuable insight into positive cross-border relations.

**Action:** The Board requested that a letter of condolence be sent to Tommie's family on behalf of the Board.

**Noted:** A discussion paper was circulated in advance and taken as read.

**Noted:** The CEO provided an overview of the paper and advised that the purpose of the discussion is to pause and strategically reflect on whether Safefood is optimally fulfilling its mandate as a North South Body in terms of cross border working.

**Noted:** The following strategic questions were posed and discussed:

- Consideration of safefood's all-island work vs. cross-border work.
- Is Safefood getting it right after 25 years? If not, what needs to change?
- What does cross-border success look like for a North-South Body?
- What value is Safefood bringing to the cross-border environment?
- What communities need the most help?
- Are there other potential partner organisations/community champions?

**Noted:** There was consensus amongst board members that Safefood should not re-invent the wheel to better focus on cross-border working and that existing well-run programme(s) could be refined and adapted to achieve healthy and positive cross-border relationships and value. This segued nicely into a discussion on a draft business case proposal for the new Community Food Initiative (CFI) programme which had been circulated in advance.



**Noted:** Anne Parle presented a proposal for the new 4-year Community Food Initiative programme 2025 – 2028.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked Anne for her presentation and opened to the floor for comments. The CEO advised that the views of Board Members were being sought in regard to this paper and welcomed suggestions and observations to strengthen this proposal.

**Noted:** Board Members congratulated AP on the detailed business proposal and agreed the CFI could be an excellent option for an existing programme being enhanced to optimise cross-border working in communities. Board Members also suggested a programme involving schools could provide another option. KMCK noted the proposal calls for the CFI programme to realistically have double the projected impact amongst communities compared to what it is now, and it would be sensible to consider the internal workload which may be required. It would be advisable to explore what the organisation can do less of.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked JCFdS, AP and AMcG for all their work on the proposal and presentation.

**Action:** Board Members were invited to provide feedback on the proposal to AD within 10 working days.

**Action:** The Chair suggested that the paper would benefit from a short one pager executive summary which would be useful for a policy audience.

## **11. Meeting close**

**Noted:** The meeting closed at 1.25 pm

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

**Noted:** Board members discussed future opportunities and noted the importance of engaging with a broad range of stakeholders as well as tuning into the potential of both North-South and East-West experiences. The impact of budget constraints and the potential for leveraging additional funds were also discussed.

Signed

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. P. Rooney', written over a horizontal line.

Eddie Rooney

Chair Safefood Advisory Board.