



**Minutes of the 172<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Safefood Advisory Board  
Held on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at 10:00 am  
Assembly Buildings Conference Centre, Central Belfast**

**Present: in person**

Dr Eddie Rooney (ER) (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)

Mr Alan Lewis (AL)

**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)

Dr Charmaine McGowan (CMcG)

Mrs Tyrelle Kenneally (TK) Secretariat

**Apologies:**

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)

## **1. Introduction and Apologies**

**Noted:** The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the 172<sup>nd</sup> meeting and thanked all for travelling. There was one apology - Mr Damien McCallion who is away on leave.

## **2. Conflicts of Interest**

**Noted:** No conflicts of interest were recorded. EC advised of her new membership with the Food Safety Consultative Council, a unit of the FSAI. PF noted this update for the register of interests.

## **3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> September 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:** KMcK

**Seconded:** EK

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

**Noted:** No matters arising.

## **5. Financial Report**

**Noted:** PF advised that to the end of September, Safefood was on target, spending around €5.5 million of the budget.

**Noted:** KMcK enquired about the impact of costs associated with the Cyber Security Breach. PF advised that costs are significant but should be recoverable under Safefood's cyber insurance policy which has a €2,500 excess. There will be a cash flow issue where third-party costs have to be paid in advance of receiving settlement from our insurer, however, as the insurance will be offset against costs it will not affect the budget.

**Noted:** GK expressed thanks to PF and the team for the work done and ongoing in dealing with the cyber security incident.

**Noted:** ER noted Safefood's good work on always keeping on track with the budget which is very important for its reputation.

## **6. Chief Executive Officers Report**

**Noted:** The Chief Executive Officer's report detailed Safefood's activity since the last Board meeting on 12 September. 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 NSMC sectoral meeting which had been scheduled for 14 November was cancelled due to the general election being called in Ireland and there is no new date set as yet.
- The CEO's request to regrade four posts to Higher Executive Officer level had received final approval. Two of the posts are currently filled under temporary contracts, but Safefood will now move to initially open recruitment competitions to fill the HR Executive and ICT & Facilities Executive posts. The CEO also wished to thank both sponsor departments for their assistance in achieving this regrading.
- The CEO's request to re-grade two other posts, the Director of Corporate Operations and ICT & Facilities Manager were not approved. The CEO has discussed with the sponsor departments his intention to seek a fresh job evaluation of these positions in line with protocols laid out in the 2022 Financial Memorandum.
- The 'Building a Healthy Food Environment' public-facing campaign is doing well with positive feedback. It is interesting to note from recent research that the trend is continuing that the public still believe that personal responsibility is still valid and should not rest on environmental factors only. The campaign has had a 31% recall which is good for a such a new campaign and stronger amongst female and older audiences. 35% of the population believed that the food environment had an impact on food choices while 17% did not. The

- research also showed that the public believed that food retailers were the best agents at making a change to the food environment followed by the government and then the individual.
- The Meat Thermometer and Turkey Campaign launch will start earlier this year in mid-November.
  - The All-Island Food Poverty Network event took place on 17 September. It was well attended with fantastic speakers.
  - The All-Island Obesity Forum online seminar will take place on 19 November, titled "How everyday spaces impact obesity." Speakers will include Charlene Brooks of Belfast Healthy Cities, Sharon Daly from Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) and Dr Gesche Kindermann from the University of Galway.
  - Tenders for the Community Food Initiative Programme closed on 16 October and contract talks are taking place with two organisations, one in Northern Ireland and one in Ireland as preferred candidates to run the CFI Programme. It is a four-year programme and will be formally evaluated after two years in operation.
  - 'Safefood for Business' has been very successful with 9,492 registered users to date. GK thanked EC for her early contribution to the programme.
  - Safefood hosted a webinar on Pest Control for small food business with just under 200 attendees. It included speakers from the FSAI and Belfast City Council and generated a lot of questions and discussion. TT thanked EC for the excellent idea of Pest Control and its suggested format.
  - Safefood ran 11 community food safety workshops in conjunction with the district councils of Northern Ireland this year. Two of these took place in Omagh and Enniskillen, different from the regular food-business focused workshops, but with local citizens for an evening to discuss food allergies and safety.
  - Safefood also collaborated with the Creggan Healthy Living Centre in Derry to run two very successful coeliac events – useful practical tips on how to manage the condition.
  - Safefood will host the second all-island Environmental Health Services Forum on 15 November in Ballymascanlon, bringing together EHOs in Northern

Ireland and Ireland. TT noted that both bodies continued to collaborate during the year after the initial forum.

## **7. Presentation of Safefood's research project: 'Communicating food poverty- understanding the current discourse on the island of Ireland'.**

**Noted:** Safefood's Dr Charmaine McGowan presented the findings from a multi-method interdisciplinary research project which had been run by Dr Elena Vaughan of the University of Galway. It included such concepts as the power of framing positive changes, the project's methodologies, an overview of findings, analytical observations and recommendations. This report will be shared with all relevant stakeholders on the island.

**Noted:** The Chair thanked CMcG for the presentation.

## **8. Discussion Topic: The Knowledge Network- Future Strategy 2025-2028**

Director of Food Safety, Ms. Trish Twohig submitted to the Board a document titled Safefood Knowledge Network (KN) Plan 2025-2028 in advance of the meeting.

**Noted:** The CEO gave a brief introductory description of the Knowledge Network programme noting that it currently runs on a 3-year cycle to promote food safety and is coming to an end in June 2025. This programme is the vehicle for all food safety promotion carried out by Safefood along the food supply chain. It is an opportunity for Members to consider current arrangements and progress and provide feedback for its future development.

**Noted:** TT gave an overview of the paper and highlighted the work the food safety team has undertaken in the area including operational monitoring and management, assistance from expert groups, overview of the provision of a wide array of events and training, its work to enhance scientific linkages, its various publications, how the food safety mobility sub-programme is working, Network membership and finally, its new virtual food safety educational platform called 'Safefood for Business'. The

paper also examined a proposed direction of travel for the new KN over the next cycle of the programme.

**Noted:** EM commended the team on the amount of work being delivered for such a small team. For this to be sustainable long term, EM suggested that work areas could be consolidated and become specialised in key areas or to work more with other organisations to spread the workload.

**Noted:** EK noted the impact of KN was effective and that was important in keeping the Safefood brand relevant for the future.

**Noted:** EC suggested finding a way to get more stakeholders involved and inviting more members from the food industry to become members of the KN.

**Noted:** IC suggested offering branded merchandising to students of food safety on campuses with the use of leaflets, aprons etc.

**Noted:** EM noted that the lectures given by Safefood's Dr James McIntosh on Hypersensitivity have been excellent in promoting the brand.

**Noted:** KMck suggested getting help from stakeholders and cutting back on the breadth of work, for example, publications and events to allow for better use of resources and greater impact. He suggested that as the team delivering all this work is relatively small, it might make sense to conduct some type of impact analysis that would inform the team on resource and time allocation, and emphasis, during the next cycle of the Network. KMck also suggested the potential use of AI technology to get ideas for future strategic opportunities to promote food safety.

**Noted:** ER suggested that the KN focuses on the strategic goal and to also get the people that we work with to carry our message and brand forward.

## **9. Tour de Table**

**Noted:** The CEO thanked FG for arranging the next meeting's discussion topic which will focus on how communication has evolved and how it will look in the future.

**Noted:** The Chair advised that the next Advisory Board meeting will take place on Wednesday 11 December at Dublin City University.

**Noted:** The meeting closed at 12.25 pm

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

**Noted:** Members considered current and future pressures and discussed challenges and opportunities as Safefood develops its next Corporate Strategy.

Signed

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

Dr. Eddie Rooney  
Chairperson, Safefood Advisory Board.

## **11. Short tour of the Assembly Buildings**