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Minutes of the 173rdmeeting of the Safefood Advisory Board

Held on Wednesday 11 December 2024 at 10:00 am

Dublin City University Business School

**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)

**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 (JMcI), Food Safety Directorate

Dr Aileen McGloin, Director Nutrition (AMcG)

Mrs Tyrelle Kenneally (TK) Secretariat

**Apologies:**

Mr Damien McCallion (DMcC) (Vice-Chair)

Mr Alan Lewis (AL)

Ms. Trish Twohig, Director Food Safety

# 1. Introduction and apologies

**Noted:** The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the 173rd meeting and thanked all for traveling.

# 2. Conflicts of interest

**Noted:** No conflicts of interest were recorded.

# 3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 07 November 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:** IC

# 4. Matters arising from the minutes

**Noted:** No matters arising.

# 5. Financial Report

**Noted:** PF advised that Safefood’s spending to date is €6.787 million which is 85% of the budget for the year of €7.969 million. Based on forecasts and estimates, Safefood is expected to finish the year approximately €110k above budget.

**Noted**: ER asked if Safefood has capacity to manage this additional burden. PF responded that Safefood will have to rely on reserves from previous years to cover the extra costs.

**Noted**: KMcK asked if the sponsor departments fund the range of variance of the spending. PF advised that sponsor departments can only provide funding up to the limit of our approved budget for the year and that Safefood could not draw down any extra funds from the sponsor departments.

**Noted:** TC asked if Safefood receives an advance funding from the government departments. PF advised that Safefood must always draw down funding in advance to be in a position to meet its commitments.

# 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 the Safefood Cork Office on 26 November 2024. The following are the main points covered:

* AA advised that the ARC discussed in detail the cyberattack including the overall cost of the response and the possible exposure of Safefood. It was noted that the insurance policy has been beneficial in supporting Safefood’s response but that this is likely to impact Safefood’s ability to procure such a policy in future. The ARC felt assured on how well the cyber incident was responded to by Safefood. The ongoing work now is to deal with the recommendations of the security experts, to engage a cyber expert in 2025 to look at the post breach environment and to conclude the implementation of Safefood’s records management policy in the HR and Finance areas.The Corporate Operations Manager presented the draft Business Plan for 2025 which contained the 2016 level of budget, but which outlined the significant budgetary pressures experienced by Safefood. The CEO expected the DoHI to approve an additional once-off supplementary again in 2025.
* The ARC welcomed the presentation by the Director of Food Safety, Trish Twohig, on the team and its work and the opportunities and challenges faced.
* GK’s presentation at the ARC meeting was described as ‘full and frank’ and highly informative noting that sometimes there is the need for an alternative approach to solving issues.
* The Q3 Risk Register updates were discussed, with significant risk increases arising from the ransomware attack. Many of these increases will reverse in Q4 to reflect the successful response by Safefood and the mitigating actions implemented.
* The ARC is very pleased with the support from the Corporate Operations team at Safefood. The Chair of the ARC thanked the Director of Corporate Operations for sharing the learning from the cyber incident with Tourism Ireland and suggested that this could be shared with other North South Bodies.

# 7. Governance: 2024 Advisory Board Self-Evaluation

* PF thanked members for completing the 2024 self-evaluation checklist. All ten board members responded as well as four members of the Senior Management Team. The responses were collated and discussed by the CEO, Chair and Director of Corporate Operations on 21 November 2024.
* Overall responses were very positive mainly in the ‘Satisfied’ and ‘Very Satisfied’ category. Some members also gave very useful comments which were listed in the report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.
* Comments received in regard to three questions from the self-evaluation questionnaire were highlighted and discussed by the board.
* The Chair thanked Board members for their feedback and expressed appreciation for the time taken to complete the self-evaluation and advised that he would contact each of them individually in the coming weeks to catch up.

# 8. Chief Executive Officers report

**Noted:** The Chief Executive Officer’s report detailed Safefood’s activity since the last Board meeting on 07 November. 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 Director of Corporate Operations and the team have started to update processes and policies in place to incorporate the learning from the cyber incident.
* Recruitment Packs have been prepared for two of the four upgraded positions and will be sent to the DoHI in December for sign-off prior to publishing these in Q1.
* Due to additional financial support from Healthy Ireland, Safefood has been able to air the ‘Building a Healthier Food Environment’ campaign again before Christmas.
* The Christmas 2024 Meat Thermometer/ Turkey campaign has been launched.
* Community Food Initiative Programme: The External Management Organisation Tenders Competition has ended. The tender evaluation has been completed and four-year programme will be launched next year in Q1.
* A number of Safefood staff - Dr Aileen McGloin, Fiona Gilligan and Joana da Silva will sit on the Department of Health Ireland Folic Acid Steering Group.
* Arising from Safefood’s partnership with the Irish Football Association, UEFA has selected Safefood’s ‘On the Ball’ nutritional-based programme to be featured in a new health resource to be shared with national soccer associations across Europe.
* Safefood hosted the second all-island Environmental Health Services Forum on 15th November. Forty-two senior Environmental Health Officers attended. Feedback is showing that they were very pleased with the development of north-south working relationships and are working together on solving work issues.
* Two research tenders on ‘air fryer usage’ and ‘novel foods’ have been completed, and contracts have been sent to the preferred applicants.
* Technical reports from three research projects have been submitted to the Safefood Research Office and are currently being evaluated. These projects are ‘Food messaging to children and adolescents - What works?’, ‘Reducing the exposure of children and adolescents to digital marketing of unhealthy foods’ and ‘Food safety advice for vulnerable patients/residents in healthcare settings on the island of Ireland.’

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

**Noted**: AA complimented the work of Safefood on the Cross Border event in Cullyhanna and the All-Ireland Obesity Action Forum.

# 9. IPA Governance Training

**Noted:** Dr Tom Wardjoined the meeting to present Governance Training to Advisory Board members. The agenda included governance in the public sector; roles, responsibilities and expectations of Board members; strategy and performance; audit & risk; assurance; stakeholders and reporting.

**Noted**: The Chair thanked Tom Ward for an excellent presentation.

# 10. Tour de Table and Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

The Chair asked if everyone was happy to have the Tour de Table and Meeting of Advisory Board members without Executive present at their one-to-one discussions. Members all agreed.

**Noted**: The Chair thanked everyone and wished all a happy Christmas.

# 11. Meeting close

**Noted:** The meeting closed at 12:30 pm

# 12. DCU Presentation in Virtual Reality Room

Professor Theo Lynn and his team engaged Board members in a Virtual Reality (VR) session. Members were shown the basics of how to use the equipment and were also personally immersed in one of the programmes to gain a better understanding of how VR is used, and ideas on how it can be used by Safefood in its future planning.

Signed

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Eddie Rooney

Chair Safefood Advisory Board.