

Minutes

Minutes of 106th meeting

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD (ACMSF) - HYBRID MEETING HELD ON 19th JUNE (ONE-HUNDRED AND SIXTH MEETING)

Present:

Chair: Prof Bill Keevil (BK)

Members: Dr Jane Gibbens (JG)

Prof Francis Butler (FB)

Dr Nicol Janecko (NJ)

Dr Rohini Manuel (RM)

Prof Linda Scobie (LS)

Mr Martin Briggs (MB)

Dr Wayne Anderson (WA)

Prof Cath Rees (CR)

Dr Dragan Antic (DA)

Prof. Andrew Page (AP)

Dr Inaki Deza-Cruz (IDC)

Ms Adri Bester (AB)

Defra/APHA representative:

Steve Wyllie (SW)

UKHSA Representative:

Lesley Larkin (LL)

FSS observers:

Marianne James (MJ)

Jacob Hargreaves (JH)

Secretariat: Dr Anthony Wilson (AW)

Dr Lauren Adams (LA)

Ms Azuka Aghadiuno (AA)

Ms Oluwatoyin Atoyebi (OA)

Archana Gadaria (AG)

Presenters: Beth Armstrong (BA)

Giles Chapman (GC)

Stephen Wyllie (SW)

Dr Erica Kintz (EK)

Dr Johanna Jackson (JJ)

Members of the Public are not invited to this session due to the pre-election period.

1 **Chair's introduction**

1.1 The Chair welcomed members of the Committee and secretariat to the 106th meeting of the ACMSF. The Chair welcomed Beth Armstrong (FSA) who presented item 6, an update on wave 7 of the Food and You 2 survey, Giles Chapman (NFCU, FSA) who presented item 7A on food fraud, Erica Kintz (FSA), who presented agenda item 13, an update on the IID3 project and Johanna Jackson (FSA), who presented item 14, an overview of the recent *Campylobacter* Expert Elicitation carried out with the support of some committee members. He also welcomed Lauren Adams, who will temporarily replace Elaine Pegg, who is on maternity leave.

1.2 The Chair mentioned that a full set of papers has not been made available to the public on the webpage because of the Purdah season.

2 **Apologies for absence**

2.1 Apologies were received from Dr Roberto Vivancos.

3 Declaration of interests

3.1 The Chair asked members if they wished to declare any potential conflicts of interest associated with the agenda items to be discussed.

3.1.1 There was no conflict of interest declared by any Committee member.

4 Minutes of the 105th meeting

4.1 The Chair mentioned that the version he received has minor grammatical and typographical errors, which he has now corrected. He will return his copy to the secretariat.

4.2 The Chair went through all the pages and asked if anyone had any issues to raise.

4.3 It was pointed out that 'couldn't' on page 7, paragraph 7.3 should read "could".

4.4 The committee agreed that once these changes were made the minutes would be accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

5 Matters arising (ACM/1425)

5.1 ACM/1425 provided a summary of actions on matters arising from previous meetings. Dr Anthony Wilson reported that:

5.2 Subject to the amendments and Committee approval of the minutes of the 104th meeting as an accurate record of the meeting, it would be posted on the ACMSF website once the pre-election period is completed.

5.3 Timelines will be added to reports of action to indicate when things will be completed.

5.4 The Committee had requested that the discussions of analysis during the EFIG meetings be included in the report to the committee. This was discussed during the EFIG update (item 9)

5.5 The Committee noted that notification rates and number of cases for all the pathogens are reported, and the trends are reported on charts; however, the specific numbers and the changes between years are not shown.

ACTION: The secretariat to provide tables of raw data in report.

5.6 AW mentioned that the above were discussed during the last EFIG meeting. **ACTION:** that another meeting involving APHA, DEFRA and UKHSA will be held between now and December to discuss how the structure, presentation and communication of the reports can be improved. EFIG members have also been encouraged to provide more discussion of the context, interesting result patterns, potential root causes and any recommendations for further action.

5.7 The Committee had requested that the FSA Scientific Adviser, Robin May, be approached to determine the reasons behind the delays to the IID3 project to try to prevent them from happening in the future. **ACTION:** Secretariat to follow this up. AW mentioned that IT systems are up and running to start retrieving the results to make up time of the delays. There is a change in the leadership that is going through from now until the end of July. AW highlighted that once these has been completed, then the matter would be brought up and that a lesson learned exercise is being done about the approval process. Erica to give more details during IID3 presentation.

6 Wave 7 of the Food and You 2 survey (ACM/1426) (Beth Armstrong, FSA)

6.1 Beth Armstrong presented paper on ACM/1426 which gave an update on the latest findings from the Food and You 2 survey.

6.2 A committee member commented about the methodology that is used in recruitment of participants. She asked whether online surveys affect the age demographic or if that is covered by sending out paper copies, noting that elderly people might not be comfortable or familiar with using the internet. BA responded that it is true that some elderly adults preferred postal or hard copy response method rather than the online method. BA confirmed that the postal method was included because running the survey solely online would exclude or skew the data. Inclusivity data are being collected for all the age groups and for those with mixed digital literacy. The data is also being weighted, making it more in line with the ONS census data. For example, if there are more women than men taking part in the survey, the weighting ensures that data is reflective of the general population. The committee member further asked if socio-economic groups are also being considered, as access to computer and digital literacy may be different. BA replied that the wave 7 study only calculated weights based on age, gender, country, and ethnic group. **ACTION:** BA to confirm if the previous studies calculated weights based on socio-economic status of participants.

6.3 A committee member was concerned that there may not be full representation of respondents from across the UK due to oversampling in Wales and Northern Ireland. This could be of concern as population demographics in England might not be accurately reflected. BA explained that they oversampled in Wales and Northern Ireland because if proportional sampling was used in those regions, then it would not be possible to look at the subgroups in question. By oversampling, in these countries they can look more into the demographics. However, results from Wales and Northern Ireland were weighted, so it balances out in the end.

6.4 A committee member raised concern about the food safety behaviour around consuming food at any point after use by date. She said depending on food type, it may not be risky. For example, eating bread one or two days after the best before date is not as risky as eating chicken 4-5 days after the use by date. BA responded that they do ask about key food of interest as a follow up or part of the module that investigates the use-by-day adherence. From the chart on Eating food after the use-by date, it shows that people's behaviour does vary.

6.5 SW queried that from about 6000 respondents, 1500 were from Northern Ireland which is 25%, but Northern Ireland is about 3-4% of the population of England. BA explained that they oversampled to investigate the demographic groups within Northern Ireland and that the entire sample data will be weighted, which balances the issue out.

6.6 SW also observed that people observe the use-by date of raw meat more than cooked meat. Raw meat will be cooked, whereas the cooked meat which may be contaminated with *Listeria*, especially if the fridge is not working at a correct temperature, may be a more contaminated product. BA responded that this is an interesting issue, but they could not ascertain the reason for that from the survey, but that she suspects perceived risk and knowledge. A committee member agreed that most consumers will not know about listeriosis or the risks.

6.7 BA mentioned that she has questioned advice about 'open pack' as some people leave packaged items open longer than advised. She pointed out that this may be another area worth exploring.

6.8 The Chair asked if they ask people why they behave in a certain way. For example, do people leave cheese for longer as it is already matured and leave bagged salad because it still looks fresh or is it to reduce food waste and save money. BA responded that the evidence in this survey does not answer the questions on such behaviours. However, she would be interested in doing another

piece of research to investigate the reasons behind certain behaviours.

6.9 A committee member asked if this project is linked to Kitchen Life 2 and if so, how are data being compared and are the results similar as projects have similar population but different methodology. BA responded that the Kitchen Life 2 project is run by people in the social sciences team as well, and that comparisons between the self-reported and the observed behaviours are being performed. The team is currently supporting a PhD student from Leeds who is looking at direct comparison of certain behaviours as part of their thesis. She added that Kitchen Life 2 has a widespread input of data comprising of data on domestic kitchen and food business kitchens, therefore, not all of these are comparable.

6.10 The Chair asked if the web-based server is beneficial in that people feel more anonymised so more willing to speak the truth? BA replied that starting the web-based server has encouraged more participation as response rate was declining for the original Food and You project which uses a traditional face-to-face survey model. She also mentioned that the web-based server is less stressful on respondents, and they hope that people can feel that they can be more open and honest about their behaviours: however, there is always a certain bias in people's responses either how they perceive themselves or how they want to come across in the survey, regardless of whether it is anonymous or not.

6.11 A committee member asked if anyone analysed the comparative results of face-to face and the anonymised surveys, where similar questions have been asked, to see if people report more risky behaviours when it is done by self-reporting? Beth answered that this has not been done by the Food and You data, but that based on her experience in psychology and evidence from academic literature, people do tend to declare slightly riskier behaviours when it is anonymous compared to a face-to-face survey.

6.12 The Chair asked if BA thinks people's behaviour change? For example, over the busy holiday period such as Christmas or the barbecue season in the summer. Beth responded that they have seen some seasonal variations, for example, in the types of food that people eat, as people are more likely to eat salad in the summer than the winter. Seasonal changes in eating habits also creates variation in adherence to use by dates: people are more likely to eat salad past the use by date compared to Christmas leftovers. BA thinks that people's behaviour changed depending on seasonality and certain occasions. For instance, one of Waste and Resources Action programme's projects reported a massive reduction in the amount of self-reported food waste during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown as people were more indoors. The Chair further asked if BA could make future

recommendations in the case of a pandemic or any major event. BA responded that she will be able to provide solid evidence to those who develop the policies.

7 Food Fraud presentation (Giles Chapman - National Food Crime Unit, FSA)

7.1 GC gave a presentation on the activities of the Food Crime Unit.

7.2 The Chair asked if the team could utilise the dark web as a source of information of the organised crimes. GC thinks that it may be quite bad for business to explore a selling place which is not as visible as the dark web as traditional foodstuff may not be there except certain products such as supplements. He mentioned that they have the technical capability to explore the dark web for various operational reasons, but that they only do so based on intelligence and not regularly. The Chair further asked if there is a food equivalent of Interpol or anything similar. Giles responded that there is not a food equivalent of Interpol but both Interpol and Europol have worked on food fraud. He also said that they have a strong relationship with Europol and that they still have access to secure transmission of information to and from the European partners despite the UK exit from the EU.

7.3 A committee member asked if there is evidence for an increase in problems associated with border change after the reduction of resources at local authority. They asked if there is anything that should be known as planning for the government ahead? Giles responded that they cannot point to any specific issues that are arising in the border setting or any work due to resources reduction.

7.4 A committee member was concerned about the waste diversion, that is animal by-products that get diverted and sold as food for human consumption. He asked what type of products are the most affected and how prevalent is the issue? GC responded that it may not be a common occurrence, but the risk associated with that activity makes it a high priority for the team. He said that it is more common with red meat and poultry meat.

7.5 Another committee member asked if surveillance is carried out on usual suspects or if it is mostly investigative after receiving alerts. They also asked if there is a trend over time per product? Giles responded that most of their investigations are reactive, and that they receive alerts from regulatory partners or whistleblowers. He said that general surveillance does occur within the FSA, but it is carried out by another team in SERD (Science, Evidence and Research Division), for example, the retail Surveillance Sampling Programme. There are

some commodities that get surveyed every year such as olive oil and orange juice, which are areas with current supply chain issues. However, surveillance is also used to test hypotheses around the authenticity challenges that may be arising because of market movement.

7.6 A committee member asked would there be an emergence of new forms of fraud due to further divergence of regulatory standards within the UK and EU. They asked if the unit is considering this as a foresight exercise, where these opportunities or threats may arise? GC responded that there is another team within the FSA that is looking into monitoring divergence, but that there is no case of food fraud that has been associated to divergence for now.

7.7 A committee member asked how significant the whistleblowers are and what are the protections in place for them? GC responded that their input is quite significant and that they contribute to the provision of quality and critical information that are received. He added that they provide assurance to the whistleblowers to ensure that their welfare is protected. For example, if the information brought in by a whistleblower is known by a small number of people, the trained practitioner will present it in a way that the source will be undetectable to significantly reduce the risk to people. He said that welfare considerations and safeguarding practices are very well established within the policing circles and that the people involved are aware of the unit's obligation under the Regulation of Investigatory Power Act. He said that the origin of the information is detached from the information and even senior practitioners in the unit do not know where the information is from.

7.8 A committee member asked if there is a current increase or decrease in the production of smokies. GC responded that it is hard to provide evidence of the absolute prevalence of any form of food fraud which is why academic research projects are commissioned to give a better sense of the scale, risk, and impact in terms of smokie production. GC is unable to say if the level of production has gone up or down, but it is still something that they encounter.

7.9 A committee member asked if the Food Crime Unit investigates veterinary risks such as substitution of meat from a disease-free area to meat from an area of outbreaks of exotic livestock diseases being imported into the UK under false certification? Giles answered that there are factors that link to animal disease that come into their assessment. For example, African Swine Fever is most prominent in their views now. He stated that replacement of livestock from a controlled area with livestock from an uncontrolled area is ultimately deception, which is information they would be interested in capturing on their system. The

unit rarely refuses to investigate information that involves documentary misrepresentation. The Chair asked if there is a greater risk of imported food coming via the EU or directly from outside the EU? Giles answered that there is no conclusive answer to that and that it depends on the product and the risks that would manifest from it, origin or otherwise, so the unit keeps an open mind to threats from both jurisdictions. The Chair added that he wonders whether fraudsters might consider it is an easier route to go through EU than to export directly into the UK. Giles mentioned that they will expect fraudsters to be thinking about things like this and that they are vigilant to how criminals would respond to changing circumstances for example, around different importation arrangements, demand and supply, and that economics is a critical driver of criminality in food sector.

- 8 Committee Updates-reserved business**
- 9. EFIG update-reserved business**
- 10 Sheep Survey overview- *reserved business***
- 10 IID3 update- *reserved business.***
- 11 *Campylobacter* expert elicitation feedback- reserved business**