

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

ACMSF TERMS OF REFERENCE

Issue

It will be thirty years this year since the setting up of ACMSF as a non-statutory body to provide Government with independent advice on microbiological safety of food. The Committee was setup in 1990 on the recommendation of the Richmond Committee (Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food, chaired by Sir Mark Richmond). In the light of the UK's exit from the European Union, this paper seeks members views on ACMSF's original terms of reference which has been presented in a format which will be considered for harmonisation of the terms of reference across the FSA's Scientific Advisory Committees.

Terms of reference

Purpose

The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food is an independent Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body of the Food Standards Agency comprising of a Chair and nineteen members.

ACMSF was established in 1990, on the recommendation of the Richmond Committee (Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food, chaired by Sir Mark Richmond) set up by the Government in 1989 to provide advice on the microbiological safety of food.

With the setting up of the FSA in 2000, food safety and other interests of consumers in relation to food became the responsibility of the FSA. An effect of this was that from 1 April 2000 the ACMSF was required to advise the FSA, rather than UK Health and Agriculture Ministers as previously.

ACMSF provides the FSA with independent expert advice on all aspects of the microbiological safety of food across the whole food chain. To develop this advice the Committee's expert independent members meet three times a year in open session to assess the risk to human health from microorganisms in relation to food. This risk assessment takes place in accordance with the FSA's scientific governance and openness procedures.

Specifically, its role is to:

“To assess the risk to humans of microorganisms which are used or occur in or on food and to advise the Food Standards Agency on any matters relating to the microbiological safety of food.”

ACMSF provides advice in response to requests from the FSA and also on matters that Committee members themselves identify as important. The Committee keeps itself informed through its close links with the FSA, Food Standards Scotland and Public Health England of the developing trends in relation to foodborne disease.

A wide spectrum of skills and expertise is available to the ACMSF through its Members. They are currently drawn from: food microbiology, microbiological risk and food processing, food microbiology research, food retailing, commercial and public sector catering, environmental health, human epidemiology, medical microbiology, clinical microbiology, public health medicine, veterinary medicine, veterinary public health and epidemiology, microbiological risk assessment and virology. The Committee also has one consumer Member.

The ACMSF from time to time establishes subgroups to consider particular topics in depth. Such Groups contain a proportion of ACMSF members (supplemented, as necessary, by external expertise in the particular subject being considered) and may meet as often as 6 times a year. *Ad Hoc* Groups may also be established, to make assessments of particular issues and advise the main Committee on the possible need for further action.

Ways of working

Independence and transparency

The Committee is an independent Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) which operates to the highest standards of openness and transparency. It will work in accordance with guidelines by the FSA and relevant guidance and rules established across Government for the operation of Scientific Advisory Committees. These include:

- The cross-Government Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC), which includes the Principles of Scientific Advice to Government
- The FSA's Good Practice Guidelines for SACs

Key elements of practice which underpin and assure this includes:

- a) Committee meeting agendas, papers, minutes and reports are published on a dedicated website and plenary meetings are open to the public. Summaries of the minutes of subgroups meetings are also posted on the ACMSF website as these groups meetings are not open to the public.
- b) Publication of an annual report
- c) The Committee Chair has the right of direct access to the FSA CSA, the CEO, and to Board members (via the FSA Chairman), at all times. Members also have the right of access to the CSA, the CE and Board on any matter which he or she believes raises important issues relating to his or her duties as a member

- d) In addition to regular contact between meetings, the Committee Chair and FSA CSA will meet for a feedback discussion each year to review the work of the Committee against its remit, and the relationship with and support from the FSA

Meetings of the ACMSF and its Groups are attended by Departmental Representatives. The Representatives are nominated by, and are drawn from, those with relevant policy interests and responsibilities in the Food Standards Agency, Food Standards Scotland and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Committee is supported by a Secretariat provided by the FSA.

Work programme

The Committee work programme will focus on issues identified by the FSA. Other Departments (such as Food Standards Scotland and Public Health England) and Committee members may also propose issues for the Committee to consider. The Committee has a 12 to 18 months workplan which is flexible to consider urgent issues that may arise unpredicted.

In the activities of subgroups where more in depth assessments of specific topics are required the Committee may co-opt external expertise to support development of ACMSF advice. These subgroups inform advice through recommendations in the form of technical reports, which following a period of public consultation, are adopted by the full Committee prior to being submitted to the FSA for publication. Some technical reports such as those produced by short-life groups are not subjected to public consultation.

The FSA and the Committee Chair and members will maintain regular communication between meetings through face to face meetings and correspondence with support from the Secretariat as needed.

We expect to work with the Committee to develop and use online tools to support its work and communication both at and between meetings.

The Committee will establish and engage with wider networks of experts, including with other SACs, calling on wider expertise and seeking new synergies depending on the issue at hand, and assist FSA in maintaining and updating the FSA SAC Register of Specialists to assist this agile way of working.

The Committee will also have a key role in its own continuous development to assure successful ongoing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary working.

Action

ACMSF Members are invited to comment on the Committee's original terms of reference.

Secretariat
January 2020