



# **Information Guide**

**Prepared in accordance with the provisions of the  
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000, the  
Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs),  
and the Information Commissioners Office  
Model Publication Scheme**

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# **Section 1: Introduction**

## **The ACMSF: Who we are and what we do**

1. The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) and the Steering Group on the Microbiological Safety of Food (SGMSF) were 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), as the twin arms of a new microbiological food surveillance and assessment system.
2. With the setting up of the Food Standards Agency (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.

3. The Committee's terms of reference are:

*“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.”*

4. In practice this means that ACMSF advises the FSA on the microbiological safety of food.
5. The Members of the Committee are appointed in accordance with the Nolan Principles, which aim to ensure fairness and transparency in appointments to public bodies.
6. Membership covers the areas of medical and clinical microbiology, virology, food processing and microbiological risk assessment, public health medicine, veterinary medicine, human epidemiology, commercial catering, food processing and retailing, environmental health and consumer affairs. Further details are available at:

<https://acmsf.food.gov.uk/acmsfmembers>

7. All Members are required to declare any personal or business interest that may or may be perceived (by a reasonable member of the public) to, influence their judgment. This register is available at the foot of the ACMSF Members page of the website:

[https://acmsf.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/register\\_2019.pdf](https://acmsf.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/register_2019.pdf)

8. ACMSF reports, papers, agendas and minutes of meetings are available at:

<https://acmsf.food.gov.uk/acmsfmeets/acmsfmeets>

ACMSF is supported by a Secretariat provided by the Food Standards Agency. For further information on ACMSF please contact:

ACMSF Secretariat  
Clive House  
70 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9EX  
Tel; 020 7276 8946  
Mobile : 07967 826937  
Email : [acmsf@food.gov.uk](mailto:acmsf@food.gov.uk)

## **What are our priorities and how are we doing?**

9. 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 and Public Health England of the developing trends in relation to foodborne disease. It performs an annual self-assessment of its performance, including an assessment against the Good Practice Guidelines developed by the Agency.
10. The ACMSF Annual Report covers the Committee's activities, progress and future plans. Further details can be found at:

<https://acmsf.food.gov.uk/acmsfreps/acmsfannualreports>

## **How we work**

11. The ACMSF Code of Practice describes how the Committee operates. ACMSF meetings are open to the public and papers, minutes and reports are published on this website. Agendas are published in advance of meetings.
12. ACMSF operates in accordance with the guidelines and procedures established by the Agency and to relevant guidance and rules established across Government for the operation of Advisory Committees and public bodies. These include the Agency's Good Practice Guidelines:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/sci-gov/commswork/goodpracticeguidelinessacs>

and the cross-Government Code of practice for Scientific Advisory Committee (CoPSAC):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advisory-committees-code-of-practice>

13. Appointments to the ACMSF are made in accordance with the principles set out in the Nolan Report on Standards in Public Life<sup>1</sup>, the guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments<sup>2</sup> and CoPSAC. In making such appointments, ACMSF and the Agency is committed to affording equal opportunities to all those with the requisite qualifications and expertise irrespective of race, age, disability, gender, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, transgender and working patterns.
14. The overriding principle is that appointments are made on merit. Members are appointed for their individual qualifications and the expertise they can bring to the Committee, and not to represent any particular sectoral interest. The balance of the Committee is intended to ensure that it has a wide range of expertise on which to draw, in order to enable it to advise the Food Standards Agency effectively.
15. Vacancies and further information on procedures for appointments are published on the Committee's website when vacancies arise.
16. ACMSF operates under Agency policies and procedures on complaints, records management and personal data, and charging for information.

## **How we make decisions**

17. ACMSF's role is to provide 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 quarterly 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.
18. ACMSF Chair is responsible for ensuring that the Committee meets at appropriate intervals, and that the minutes of meetings and any reports to the FSA accurately record the decisions taken and, where appropriate, the views of individual members.
19. Where more in depth assessments of specific topics are required the Committee may co-opt external expertise onto its Working and Ad Hoc subgroups 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on Standards in Public Life (Nolan: First report). May 1995

<sup>2</sup> The Commissioner for Public Appointments. Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies August 2009

## **Financial information**

20. ACMSF has no independent budget or expenditure. The Agency covers the costs for the operation of the committee (including Secretariat support, Members' fees and expenses, and administrative costs for meetings, publications and events), and these are recorded formally in the accounts of the Agency.
21. ACMSF Members are not employed by the Agency and they do not receive a salary for their work on ACMSF. They are however entitled to claim expenses and fees for attending meetings and, in some circumstances, for work between meetings.

## **Other information**

22. ACMSF does not hold any assets itself. Information in respect of the Committee is managed by the ACMSF Secretariat and where relevant is recorded in the Asset and/or Information Asset Registers of the Food Standards Agency<sup>3</sup>.

## **Section 2: The ACMSF Publication Scheme**

### **About the Freedom of Information Act 2000**

23. The Freedom of Information Act (the Act) 2000 received Royal Assent on 30 November 2000. The Act has been fully in force since January 2005. It gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities, provides exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on public authorities. ACMSF is one such authority. Under the Act, any person who makes a written request to a public authority for information must be informed whether the public authority holds that information and, subject to exemptions, be supplied with that information within 20 working days.
24. The Act requires the Committee to have in place its publication scheme, which is a guide to the Committee's publications and policy. It is intended to provide a framework for you to obtain direct access to these published documents.
25. ACMSF, along with every other public authority operating under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), has a legal duty under Section 19 of the Act to:
- adopt and maintain a scheme which relates to the publication of information by the authority and to have that scheme approved by the Information Commissioner;
  - publish information in accordance with that scheme; and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/5ca4dd1d-51bf-452f-a4ef-3271c03b1248/fsa-information-asset-register>

- review the scheme from time to time.

26. The publication scheme specifies:

- the classes of information which the public authority publishes (or intends to publish);
- the manner in which information in each class is (or is intended to be) published and;
- whether the material is (or is intended to be) available free of charge or on payment of a fee.

## **Model Publication Scheme**

27. The “model publication scheme” has been developed and drafted by the Information Commissioner’s Office and is applicable to most public authorities. The scheme contains seven classes of information. These are:

- Who we are and what we do
- What we spend and how we spend it
- What our priorities are and how we are doing
- How we make decisions
- Our policies and procedures
- Lists and registers
- The services we offer

All of the above is covered within this Information Guide.

28. The scheme commits the ACMSF to:

- proactively publish information (including Environmental Information) which is held by it and contained within each class
- proactively publish information in line with the access and charging statements
- a means by which the authority can ensure the public are aware of the sorts of information the public authority has committed to make readily available, how they can access this and whether they will have to pay for it. Generally this will be an authority’s existing website.
- review and update the information (e.g. the website) on a regular basis.

29. The aim of the ACMSF Publication Scheme is to bring together in one place the many differing types of information that are issued by the Committee in the discharge of its public functions in a clear and structured manner. The scheme will categorise the information type and provide details on how to obtain it. The overall benefit to our

stakeholders and others is to save time and effort in searching and securing relevant Committee information.

## Our copyright policy (Open Government Licence)

30. See advice on Open Government licence for public sector information at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

## The ACMSF Publication Scheme

31. Please note that documents within this publication scheme may, on occasion, be edited where, in the view of the ACMSF Secretariat, specific information should not be disclosed on the grounds of exemptions specified in the FOIA. If a document has been edited, it will be made clear to the user that this is the case.

32. All information on the FSA website regarding the Committee, can be found by going through the Committee's homepage at: [acmsf.food.gov.uk](http://acmsf.food.gov.uk)

CLASS OF INFORMATION	WHERE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE	COST
<b><i>ACMSF Agendas</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On FSA Website</li> <li>On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free*
<b><i>ACMSF Meeting Papers</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On FSA Website</li> <li>On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free
<b><i>ACMSF Minutes</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On FSA Website</li> <li>On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free
<b><i>ACMSF Annual Reports and Microbiology Reports</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On FSA Website</li> <li>On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free
<b><i>Code of Practice for Members of ACMSF</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On FSA Website</li> <li>On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free
<b><i>Table of Members' Interests</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On FSA Website</li> <li>In annual reports</li> <li>On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free
<b><i>News Releases</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On FSA Website</li> <li>On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free
<b><i>ACMSF recruitment exercises</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On FSA Website</li> <li>On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free



<b>Consultation Documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On FSA Website</li> <li>• On request to ACMSF Secretariat</li> </ul>	Free
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**Committee Secretariat:**

*You should in the first instance contact the Secretariat at:*

ACMSF Secretariat  
Clive House  
70 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9EX  
Tel; 020 7276 8946  
Mobile : 07967 826937  
Email: acmsf@food.gov.uk

**Section 3: Access to information under the scheme**

- 33.ACMSF's general policy stemming from its Code of Practice on Openness is to be as open and transparent as possible in dealing with all requests for information.
  
- 34. We will treat all requests for information on a fair and equal basis, and without prejudice. All written requests will be acknowledged within ten working days and a full reply within twenty working days thereafter. Where we are unable to provide the information you request, we will explain why. Where we decide not to release the information you request, we will explain why and give you details of how you can complain against our decision.

**Section 4: Complaints procedure**

- 35. Even the best organisations will sometimes get things wrong. If you are dissatisfied with something we have done or the way we have done it, please let us know. We will try to resolve any problem quickly, and explain what we have done and why. Hearing from you will help us improve by learning from our mistakes.
  
- 36. If you wish to complain, in the first instance, please give details of what you are unhappy with and why, to the person you have been dealing with. If you do not have a named contact, you can get in touch with the

**Food Standards Agency's Complaints Co-ordinator via the Openness Team:**

Food Standards Agency  
Clive House  
70 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9EX  
Tel : 0207 276 8612/8632  
Email: FCT@food.gov.uk

37. If we cannot deal with your complaint immediately, we will acknowledge it within ten working days (please always give us your email or postal address). We will write to you with a full reply within 20 working days thereafter. If this is not possible, we will explain why and say when you will get a full reply.
38. If you are not satisfied with our response and would like to take your complaint further, please contact the FSA Complaints Co-ordinator at the address above. The Complaints Co-ordinator will look at it again and give you a full reply within 20 working days.
39. If you are still unhappy, you can then ask the Complaints Co-ordinator to refer your complaint to the Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency, Emily Miles.
40. If you remain dissatisfied with the way the Agency has acted, you may then ask for your complaint and its handling to be investigated by the UK Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (<https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/contact-us/>).
41. This complaints procedure applies across the Food Standards Agency in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and to ACMSF.
42. If you feel that we have not complied with our obligations under the FOIA, you should write or email within two calendar months of the date of our response to your request for information to the FSA Complaints Coordinator and ask for an internal review.
43. If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the Agency. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Details on how to make a complaint can be found at: <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

## **Section 5: Your feedback**

44. This scheme fulfils our legal duty under Section 19 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We would positively welcome any views and comments on the structure and/or content of the scheme itself. This scheme will be treated as a 'living' document, which we will amend and develop in the light of our experience, as appropriate.

45. When commenting, we would particularly ask you to actively consider the following:

- did you find the structure and layout of this scheme easy to understand and navigate?
- were you looking for some specific information?
- did this scheme facilitate that search successfully?
- if you were browsing, did the scheme help guide your search and make the process easier?
- are there any types of information or areas that are not currently covered by the FSA Scheme that you would like to see in the future?
- do you have any suggestions or other comments that might make this scheme more user-friendly or helpful?

46. Please send your views and comments on this scheme to [acmsf@food.gov.uk](mailto:acmsf@food.gov.uk) stating your name, organisation (if relevant) and contact details.