

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

OPEN MEETINGS

Introduction

1. In accordance with its commitment to increasing public access to its work, the ACMSF held its first public meeting on 5 December 2000. The occasion was one of the Committee's routine quarterly meetings. The intention is that the corresponding meeting in 2001 (again on 5 December) should also be held in public. Members' views are invited about the experience of the first open meeting and any lessons to be learned for the future.
2. To inform consideration of this issue, brief notes are provided below on the essential features of the first open meeting.

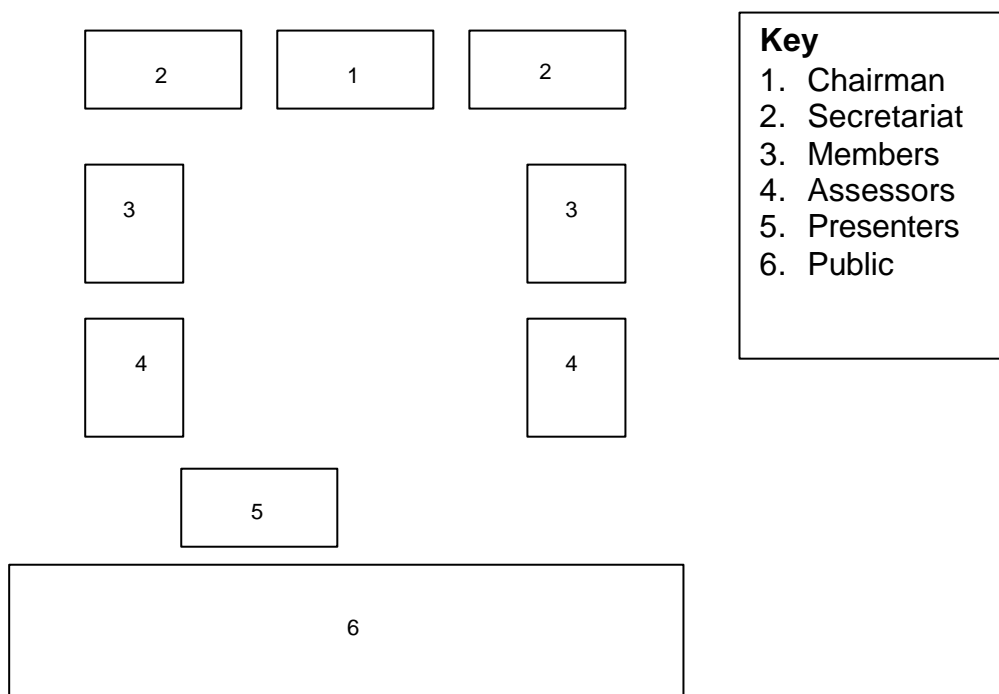
Venue

3. The meeting was held in the Insurance Hall in the City of London. Accommodation consisted of a main meeting room, a committee room (for the Chairman's pre-meeting), and a coffee/lunch room. The Food Standards Agency (FSA)'s Communications Division helped with staging the meeting (including the provision, through COI, of signage and a sound system). Microphones were used throughout the meeting and proceedings were taped.
4. It had not been possible to identify appropriate FSA or Department of Health facilities in which to hold the meeting; thus the use of a non-Government venue. However, appropriate accommodation may be available in the FSA's new Headquarters building in Holborn by December 2001. If it proved necessary to use external facilities again, however, the signage used for the first open meeting would be re-usable (thus providing some cost saving), but there would still be an additional cost for eg. the sound system and, of course, for the hire of the accommodation. The "set" was based on a horse shoe design (see Figure 1).

Advertising the meeting

5. The meeting was advertised on the ACMSF website and in FSA News. The Secretariat also wrote informing interested parties. In the event, around 30 members of the public attended. It may be that numbers would have been higher had it not been for the severe post-Hatfield rail disruption and difficulties caused by the severe weather. Papers were sent to those attending in advance of the meeting.

Figure 1 : Set for open meeting



Conduct of business

6. The pattern of the day was that the Committee's routine business was conducted first, after which, an opportunity was provided for the public to make statements and ask questions. The meeting began at 10.15 am and was scheduled to run through until 1 pm when there was a 30 minute lunch break. Work re-commenced at 1.30 pm and continued until 2.55 pm. There was then a public Q&A session until 3.25 pm. Because the premises had been booked for an evening meeting, the ACMSF was not able to continue beyond 3.30 pm.

7. There was a very full agenda comprising 15 items, of which 7 involved presentations. The time allocated to members of the public to make their statements and ask questions appeared to be sufficient.

8. All business was conducted through the Chair, the Chairman involving Committee members as required. Matters proceeded in a very orderly fashion. Starts in the morning and after lunch were prompt. Members were also very disciplined in their interventions.

Reporting the meeting

9. A press release was issued reporting the meeting. The draft minutes, including an annex of contributions by members of the public, were placed on the ACMSF website, along with copies of the papers.

Lessons for 2001

10. Members views are invited on the 2000 open meeting and on any lessons which could usefully be applied for the 2001 open meeting.

**Secretariat
March 2001.**