

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

DISCUSSION PAPER

ACMSF FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

Issue

1. The quinquennial review of the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) was carried out in 2011. One of the recommendations from this review was that the process for determining the Committee's work programme should be improved and a forward work plan published with proposed timescales for the work.
2. This paper seeks the Committee's views on the attached work plan, the process for agreeing the work plan and members input on this programme of work for the coming months.

Background

3. ACMSF's role is to provide the Food Standards Agency (FSA) with independent expert advice on all aspects of microbiological safety of food. The Committee's work programme has been primarily determined by issues referred to it by the FSA. Other Departments (such as the Health Protection Agency) and members of the Committee also propose issues for the Committee to consider.
4. A summary of ACMSF's forward work programme is usually outlined in the ACMSF annual reports where the Committee states its commitment to continue to respond promptly with advice on food safety implications of any issues referred to it by the FSA. Details of the work under consideration by the active ACMSF subgroups are also highlighted in the reports.
5. Recommendation three from the quinquennial review report stated that the process for determining the Committee's work programme should be improved and a forward plan published with proposed timescales for the work (see extract from report at Annex A) .
6. ACMSF discussed its responses to the quinquennial review in June 2011. The Committee welcomed the above recommendation and endorsed the Secretariat's proposal concerning developing a more formal work planning process for the Committee. It was agreed that the work plan should be viewed as a living document and the importance of maintaining flexibility to defer discussions if necessary was emphasised. It was agreed that the work plan will be published on ACMSF's website. The Committee also agreed that development of a work plan would assist in addressing recommendations 1

and 2 on ensuring the work of the Committee continues to be focussed on where it can have the most impact, value and relevance and to undertake horizon scanning more regularly (see ACMSF response at Annex B).

7. The FSA in its response to the quinquennial review report agreed that effective forward planning is good practice and that it helps to ensure prioritisation of resources and transparency on future scientific advisory committee (SAC) work for stakeholders. Secretariats were encouraged to ensure that SACs have a work plan. Although it was highlighted that the level of detail in the work plans and the extent to which these are made public may vary. The FSA proposed that all SACs should have a rolling, summary work plan, covering 12-18 months, which is published on their website and updated periodically and in their annual reports by April 2012, to make this transparent to stakeholders.
8. Proposed process for agreeing ACMSFs programme of work :
 - Secretariat to draft work plan covering 12-18 months
 - Members informal input sought on the draft work plan
 - Draft work plan to be presented to Committee for discussion and agreement once a year at January ACMSF meeting
 - Agreed work plan to be published on ACMSF website and included in ACMSF annual report
 - Work programme will be reviewed and updated twice a year prior to the May and September ACMSF meetings where it will be provided as an information paper.
9. Attached at Annex C and D is a draft work programme for 2012/13 presented in two formats for Members consideration. Members are also requested to suggest new areas of work for the Committee to consider.

Action

10. The Committee is invited to:
 - comment on and agree the draft work programme indicating a preferred format
 - identify other topics that may have food safety implications to be included
 - comment on and approve the process for agreeing an annual programme of work for the ACMSF.

Secretariat

January 2012