

Chief Executives Report

1. Introduction

1.1 There has been a considerable amount of activity since the last meeting.

2. Engagements and meetings

2.1 In terms of engagements, in April Geoff gave evidence to the Health and Sport Committee in the Scottish Parliament along with Heather Kelman and Gillian Purdon, Head of Nutrition. The session can be viewed at this link – [Health, Social Care and Sport Committee | Scottish Parliament TV](#)

He held meetings with Scottish Government (SG) Director Generals Caroline Lamb, Louise McDonald, Roy Brennan and Gregor Irwin to talk about FSS more generally and the cross-cutting nature of our work across a number of SG directorates.

On 18 June Geoff and Heather attended an International Food Summit dinner at Edinburgh Castle, followed by a conference the following day.

The Royal Highland Show took place 20 - 23 June and Geoff, Ian McWatt, Heather and Alban Denton held productive meetings with a number of stakeholders such as Quality Meat Scotland (QMS), the Moredun Institute, NatureScot, the Rowett Institute, the Cabinet Secretary and various supermarkets, amongst others.

3. FSS website rebuild

3.1 This is a standalone web development project to review and rebuild [Food Standards Scotland](#). The project is being led by the Communications and Marketing team as part of the wider digital transformation programme and will:

- Follow user centred design principles and use user research insights to inform design decisions
- Adhere to the Digital Scotland Service Standard (DSSS), Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) requirements and sustainable website design techniques
- Streamline navigation menus and web content to improve the user experience
- Improve resilience and security by upgrading the content management system (CMS)
- Drive process and workflow efficiencies within FSS

3.2 Following the completion of the user research, the Discovery phase has been completed. The research consulted to key stakeholders including local authorities, food businesses, consumers and other stakeholders, including educators and partner organisations, to understand their experience of using the FSS website. The

user research insights were presented to SLT and EMT in May and the outcomes will form the basis for the new design and navigation.

3.3 The Define phase has now started. During this phase, the technical specification, look and feel and information architecture will be scoped and approved. A project board is being set up with representatives from across FSS to input into the website requirements and content review. The Communications and Marketing team is also working with the Digital Assurance Office (DAO) to assess the project against the Digital Scotland Service Standard criteria, with the first DSA3 assessment scheduled for July.

4. Accessibility

4.1 The cross-office Accessible and Inclusive Communications (AIC) group has now been established with representatives from across FSS, so that we can embed the principle that we all have a responsibility to make sure what we produce is accessible and inclusive. Accessibility is not the sole responsibility of one branch or Division.

4.2 The broad aims of the group are to:

- meet the accessibility requirements for public bodies in Scotland which are primarily governed by the UK-wide Equality Act (2010)
- improve the practice of inclusive communications across the organisation

4.3 Some of the work completed by the group so far includes:

- Guidance on the creation of accessible documents.
- A blog article from Mike Duxbury, a blind farmer who gave us his perspective on how important accessibility is, and why it should be built into what we do.
- Ian McWatt spoke about the importance of accessibility at a Head Office meeting.

4.4 We are also looking into e-learning that can be used as mandatory accessibility training for staff across FSS.

5. Board update June 2024 – Vitamin D campaign

5.1 The evaluation of the fourth annual campaign was completed in June. The campaign ran from November to the end of March and, unlike in previous runs, there was no budget for paid media advertising.

5.2 A partner toolkit, featuring assets translated into seven languages, was disseminated to stakeholders to amplify the campaign messaging. Social media posts on the FSS channels were boosted to reach a wider audience.

5.3 Campaign messaging highlighted the provision of free vitamin D supplements for pregnant and breastfeeding women, infants and children under 3 years old by the Scottish Government, and the recommendation that those at higher risk of deficiency, for example those with darker skin or who have low/no exposure to the sun, take a supplement year-round.

5.4 The evaluation found that there was significant use of the toolkit by stakeholders. However with no budget for paid advertising the reach of the campaign (especially at risk groups) was significantly reduced. Furthermore, this was the third time the creative assets were used, which is not recommended as audiences become less engaged with adverts they see repeatedly.

6. On farm poisoning

6.1 Our annual On-Farm Poisoning campaign launched on 25 March and ran until 4 May. It encouraged farmers to take [five important steps](#) to prevent farm animals from getting lead and copper poisoning during spring.

6.2 Indicative results are encouraging, however the number of social media impressions and engagements, and web-site visits are lower than last year's campaign. This can be attributed to the reduced spend on boosting social media posts, but also reflects the limitations associated with re-running the same campaign videos generating less new interest and engagement. However, supporting posts and videos from two influencers (one of which is a presenter on BBC Scotland programme Landward) has significantly enhanced social media performance.

6.3 Using very low-cost community radio stations has proven to be cost-effective. Although it's not possible to measure community radio listener figures, it's estimated that paid and earned coverage represents an area of around 320,000 people in some of the main farming areas of Scotland. Press coverage exceeded expectations and included a substantial interview piece on BBC Radio Scotland which has a weekly audience of 801,000 people in Scotland. Full results and learnings will be available in due course.

7. Consumer Tracker

7.1 Following a successful procurement process, Progressive Partnership have been appointed as our market research agency. The intention had been that upon appointment we would begin working with them immediately to completely revamp the consumer tracker. However, due to procurement delays we decided to replicate the survey [run in December](#) so that we could collect important insight around awareness, trust, and issues of concern to consumers this summer. We also included questions on calorie labelling and ones to understand consumer perceptions of the suitability of vegan labelled products for those with food allergies. The results of the tracker will be available in August.

7.2 We will begin working on redesigning the permanent consumer in the early Autumn. This will be led on by the C&M team with input from divisions across the organisation.

8. Publication of monitoring retail purchase and price promotions in Scotland 2019-2022

8.1 At the end of April, we published our report on [Monitoring Retail Purchase and Price Promotions in Scotland 2019-2022](#), using data from Kantar Worldpanel. The data relates to the retail environment and take-home purchases for use within the home. The report includes trends in the volume of food and drink purchased (including online), spend, trips, purchase of calories and nutrients, and purchase on price promotion, including by promotion type and food and drink categories. The data in this report has been cited and used to inform the development of the recent Scottish Government consultation on [‘Restricting promotions of food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt - proposed regulations’](#).

9. Publication of 'Food on the Go' report

9.1 The report [“An Analysis of the Calorie Content of ‘Food on the Go’ Products in the Out of Home Sector in Scotland 2023”](#), was published in May 2024. Working with the Rowett Institute (University of Aberdeen), the research explored the calorie content of food on the go products available out of home in Scotland. Food on the go, for example food eaten outside, at work, or when travelling, makes up the highest proportion of out of home trips in Scotland. It was found that the calories available for food on the go main meal options generally fell below the UK Government calorie reduction guidelines on an individual product basis. Burgers were found to have the highest median (556 kcal) and maximum (1,155 kcal) calories per portion, and almost half (43%) were higher than 600 kcals. The data forms part of monitoring of the nutritional content of food and drinks available outside the home.

10. Food Foundation webinar

10.1 Gillian Purdon participated in a Food Foundation webinar held in May, discussing how well the supermarkets have supported families during the cost of living crisis. She presented FSS data on sales and promotion of different food categories and highlighted the need to rebalance promotions in the retail food environment to support consumers to have access to healthier diets. She also encouraged participants to respond to the Scottish Government consultation on restricting high fat, salt and/or sugar promotions which closed on 21 May. [How well have supermarkets supported families through the cost of living crisis? | Food Foundation](#)

11. Scottish Public Health conference

11.1 Laura Wilson and Nikki Fernie attended the Scottish Public Health Conference in Glasgow in May. This was jointly developed by the Faculty of Public Health, Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Directors of Public Health Group. The theme of the conference was ‘inspiring change’ and reflected the leadership role of public health professionals in tackling the big health challenges we face today, with climate change, infectious disease, and health and social inequalities all requiring dedicated public health leadership.

11.2 The PHN branch submitted had an abstract accepted for our publication “Exploration of the current out-of-home landscape within independent outlets in Scotland”, conducted in collaboration with Taylor McKenzie and Public Health Scotland. This research was presented as a poster to the 400 delegates at the conference and sat amongst an array of other excellent work being conducted across Scotland.

12. World Public Health Nutrition conference

12.1 Gillian Fraser and Alana McDonald attended the World Public Health Nutrition Conference in London to present four posters on some of our recently published work. This was a fantastic opportunity to showcase our work to a global professional audience and there was a lot of positive engagement with the posters during the session.

13. Being Innovative About Food Innovation conference

13.1 Laura Wilson presented at the conference Being Innovative About Food Innovation at Queen Margaret University. The theme of the presentation was reformulation for public health and set out why reformulation is a key part of changing our food environment, our evidence on where this is needed and how innovation can support this.

14. FSS Strategy for 2021-26

14.1 On 19 May 2021 we published our [Strategy for 2021-26](#) which set out our strategic ambitions for the next five years. It sets out our vision for a safe, healthy and sustainable food environment that benefits and protects the health and wellbeing of everyone in Scotland. It also describes how we will meet our statutory objectives over the five year period, building on the progress we have made since FSS was established in 2015.

14.2 This was supported by our three year 2021–24 Corporate Plan, also published in 2021, which outlined actions against the ambitions of our strategy. Our new [2024–26 Corporate Plan](#) has now been published and describes how we will build on the achievements of our first nine years, whilst aligning our five strategic outcomes to a set of core values and guiding principles.

15. Local Authority Audit Programme

15.1 FSS wrote to all 32 Scottish Local Authorities on 22 March to inform them of the intended Audit Programme for 2024/25.

15.2 The primary focus of the programme this year will be to carry out a review of the delivery of Official Controls in Local Authority Approved Establishments. The Audit team plans to carry out the review throughout the year, covering as many Authorities as possible, with the aim of producing a summary report at the end of the

programme. The outcomes and findings will also be discussed and presented to each as their review is completed.

15.3 The programme has now commenced with West Lothian and East Dunbarton being the first selected. It is hoped this will provide assurance as to delivery of official control in these establishments, establish and disseminate best practice, produce recommendations as to potential delivery improvements, and act as a performance monitoring indicator across Local Authorities.

15.4 In addition to this, the audit team will also build on last year's Planning and Prioritisation desktop review and assess whether Authorities met the expectation of their service plans submitted for 2023/2024.

15.5 Should it be necessary, broader capacity and capability audits may be carried out throughout the year, particularly where performance concerns are raised or identified by this or other means of intelligence.

16. Export Missions

16.1 Dates have been confirmed for the following inward missions from countries wishing to import food from the UK. This year we will receive the following:-

- 9 to 17 July, South Korea, fishery products. The opening meeting and one establishment inspection will take place in Scotland.
- 16 to 27 September, Canada, red meat and meat products. Four establishment inspections in Scotland and a meeting with FSS are planned from 16 to 19 September.
- 11 to 15 November, EU, poultry meat and egg products (controls against Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza). It is not yet known if they will visit Scotland.

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