

FSS Strategy – an update

1 Purpose of the paper

- 1.1 To update the Board on the Executive's thinking with respect to development of FSS's Strategy for 2021-26, and to seek their views on the proposed approach.
- 1.2 Our operating environment has changed radically since we set out our initial strategy, and the Executive and Board feel that our new strategy needs to recognise and respond to new challenges with a new approach.
- 1.3 The Executive is proposing a values-driven approach, in order to provide a solid foundation with the flexibility to respond to emerging priorities.
- 1.4 The Board is asked to:
 - **Note** the information provided; and
 - **Discuss and provide a view** on the proposed approach.

2 Background

- 2.1 FSS was established in 2015 as a brand new Scottish public body with the primary aim of consumer protection with respect to food and feed matters: both in terms of safety and diet and nutrition. We set out our stall with a strategy that listed 6 outcomes that we intended to work towards. The first three – Food is Safe, Food is Authentic, and Consumers have Healthier Diets – were related directly to our statutory purpose and objectives. The fourth – Responsible Businesses Flourish – reflected our responsibilities as a regulator. Our final two outcomes – FSS is a trusted organisation and FSS is Efficient and Effective – set out our commitment to win the trust of those we serve and work with, and to operate in a way that met our duty to use public money responsibly.
- 2.2 Even with the major resource implications of Brexit preparation, we have made considerable progress towards all six outcomes during our first 4 years, as our Annual Reports and Accounts and regular reports to the Board demonstrate. However, our strategy was developed against the backdrop of a relatively stable food landscape. Our operating environment has changed radically since we set out our initial strategy, and the Executive and Board feel that our new strategy needs to recognise and respond to new challenges with a new approach.

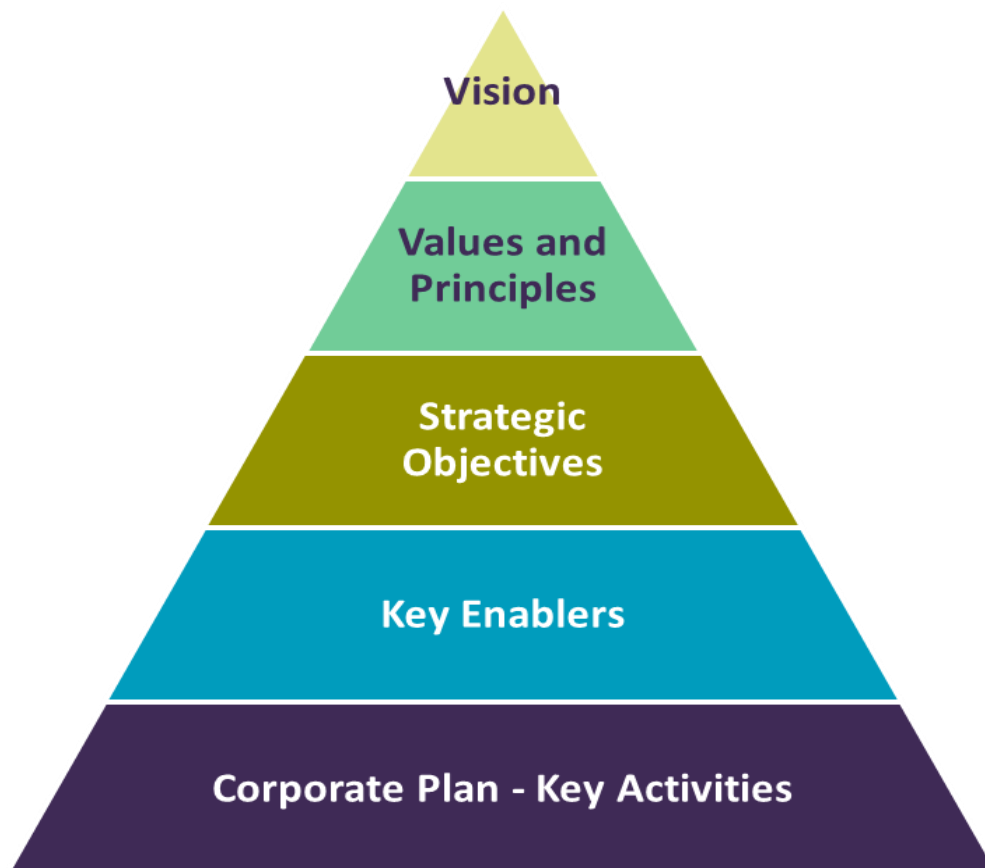
3 Discussion

- 3.1 The Board and Senior Management Team had an initial scoping discussion in October last year. Then we talked to consumers, who are our core stakeholders, and whose interests we protect, through focus groups. We also engaged with a range of stakeholders, with very different perspectives and interests, through conversations and an online survey. And we held lively discussions with our staff.

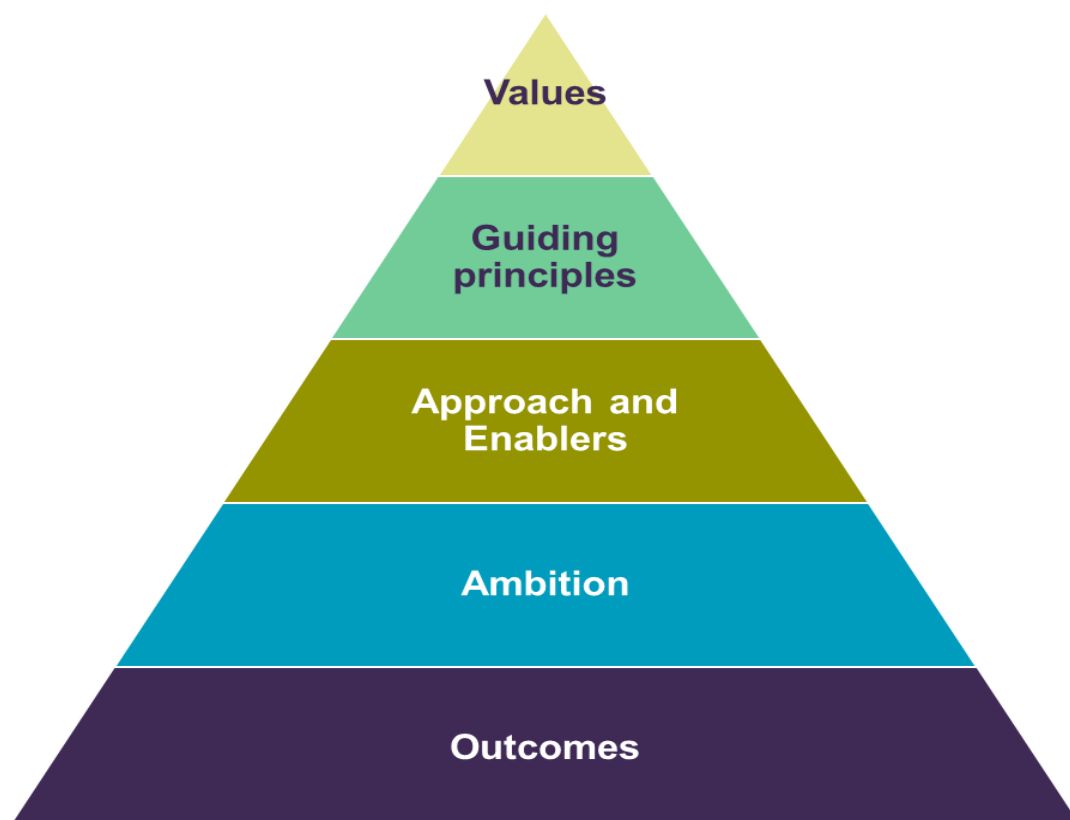
- 3.2 Taking the outputs of our discussions and engagement activities in the round, we came to the conclusion that they pointed to a radical change in the way we approached the strategy. Some key points resonated throughout the feedback:

Values

- 3.3 A thread running through our discussions and reflections was that the way we operate, and the values and principles that guide us, are fundamental. Our existing values resonated with all parties. They were seen as important both in terms of the way we work, but also in terms of the way we are viewed by others - particularly by industry and partners - and our ability to inspire trust and confidence in what we do and say. The concern expressed by all with respect to food inequality highlights the expectation that we will be a values-driven organisation. This has led to the Executive giving consideration to an evolution of our approach to our Strategy, moving from a Strategy driven by its outcomes and supported by its values, to one which has values at its core, with its outcomes being the result of that principled approach. In essence, moving from this ...



... to this:



The principal difference is that outcomes underpin and support the other elements rather than drive strategy per se.

Visibility and authority

- 3.4 The need to be more visible, and specifically as a voice of authority across all areas, was a key theme, raised throughout, and by all parties. This is much more than more frequent marketing campaigns: consumers are looking for advice that they can trust, and that is easy to understand and practical to apply. Stakeholders and staff stressed the importance of evidence based information and guidance, and the need to look forward. And staff are concerned about loss of visibility of FSS's identity and role on diet and health in a very busy/noisy environment. Going forward we need to think about our "Unique Selling Point" in an area that has so many interested parties in it. Maintaining and raising our profile is therefore going to be a key underpinning in the next strategy period.

Engagement, partnerships and influence

- 3.5 Linked to the visibility/authority issue were thoughts about stakeholder engagement, partnerships and the levels at which FSS could and should influence. There was a feeling among some staff that connections with some groups of stakeholders had been lost over the years, particularly with 3rd sector/community organisations, such as Age Concern, where work had been helping to tackle inequalities. There was also a feeling that in some areas stakeholder work can be ad hoc and tied to specific issues – ongoing

stakeholder communication and partnership working was seen as important, albeit needing time and resource.

Information, data and technology

- 3.6 Use of information, data and technology is a key concern for FSS, and one which links to the question of authority. Both staff and stakeholders highlighted the importance of being on top of, and able to utilise, the latest developments in food and information technology, for a variety of reasons including increasing visibility of FSS, providing information, guidance and advice, combatting misinformation, ensuring visibility of data and evidence across a complex supply chain, improving enforcement processes, and sharing learning. It was seen as vital that FSS not only keeps abreast of new technologies to identify emerging trends and risks, but also adopts new systems and processes and makes much better and fuller use of data analytics. The new strategy therefore should recognise the significant importance of being digitally driven and the increasing importance of the use of data and data analytics as integral to our evidence based approach.

Reflections

- 3.7 The Executive has reflected on all that they've heard, and on recent developments and events that will bring deep and long-lasting changes to the world in which we operate. We would like to propose that our strategy for 2021-26 has a different balance, in that our values, guiding principles, and approach are at its core: consumers are clearer on what we stand for, not just on what we say we will deliver. In an uncertain world, these will be our point of reference whenever we need to respond to unforeseen events, or to change our plans or our objectives to match emerging priorities. This is also heavily influenced by our experience in this strategy period where external influences have had a significant impact on our ability to deliver the corporate programme we intended. Certainly, given the volatility and uncertainty going forward, the ability to be flexible – while having solid foundations on which we can rely – will be important.
- 3.8 Our purpose will not change – it is set in statute. FSS was established to protect the public from risks arising from consuming food, to improve the diet of the public and to protect consumers' other interests with regards to food.
- 3.9 However, as the Scottish Government makes clear in the explanatory note to our founding legislation, these objectives are deliberately wide in scope. They are intended to give FSS flexibility to be involved in a very broad range of policies. For example FSS could, under these objectives, contribute to policies on animal health or to policies which would be marginal to food itself such as food sustainability or food poverty. The general nature of the objectives gives FSS the flexibility and authority to act in relation to a wide range of food matters.
- 3.10 We still aim to ensure that food is safe, that it is authentic, and that the Scottish public have healthier diets. These outcomes are central to our core purpose.

- 3.11 But it has become increasingly evident, especially in light of EU Exit and COVID-19, that consumers' interests with respect to food are much broader than the core concerns of safety, authenticity and health. Matters such as sustainability of the food supply, traceability through a complex food supply chain, ethical production, climate change, food and health inequalities, the impacts and implications of technological advances in food production and retail, all have a potential impact on consumers' food-related interests. We should recognise, understand, and take these concerns into consideration as we deliver our existing functions and those enhanced functions – such as risk analysis – that will be our responsibility post EU Exit.
- 3.12 We need a broad, deep, and constantly updated understanding of the food landscape and food policy, and of the wider interests and concerns of the Scottish public, to underpin our advice to government and ensure that we are protecting the full range of consumer interests with respect to food. To achieve this we need to be forward looking, horizon scanning, alive to technological advances that impact on the food supply or consumer behaviour, and supported by the skills, systems and expertise to gather, analyse and share data effectively. And in order to act upon the evidence that we gather and analysis that we undertake, we will need authority, influence, and strong partnerships and relationships. This is where we will be supported by our values, our guiding principles, and our approach.
- 3.13 Our experience of COVID-19 has shown that we can respond quickly and adapt our skills and experience to the public good in new ways and to good effect. We were called on to support the Scottish Government and the public through lockdown in a number of ways, and our response was rapid, comprehensive and effective. Our depth of understanding of the food supply system and of nutritional needs, together with our strong working relationships and ability to quickly build new ones, and our organisational and policy skills meant that we provided an invaluable public service and served consumers' food-related interests in ways we had not hitherto anticipated.
- 3.14 We should be proud of what we achieved, and build on it in our new strategy. Building, for example, on the way we worked together with those we regulate at pace and for the public good (getting food to the vulnerable, making changes to keep supplies moving, maintaining meat inspections). We could also make good use of all the working relationships that have been developed to deliver via the third sector, communities and local authorities – they could help us to reach the people who suffer most from health inequalities and/or food poverty, and who may not be easily reached by our marketing campaigns. Public trust in science is reported to have increased in the COVID-19 context, as people balance it against misinformation, according to an opinion poll reported in the [Guardian](#) – FSS can and should be a trusted voice of authority that counteracts false information.

4 Our new Strategy

- 4.1 It's important to reflect that the current strategy was developed for a new organisation where, aside from establishing credibility, the focus was on delivering core functions well and being clear on why we were established. That focus meant that we tended not to engage in broader issues of interest to consumers in relation to food. The question we need to ask now, given that we have been operating for five years, is – are we now mature enough to move away from an objectives-led approach? In discussions, staff were keen that the new strategy should be well-articulated, clear on what we aim to do, what success looks like, and what we need to do to deliver it. To be clear, objectives will still be important, because we will need to monitor and measure what we do to demonstrate the difference we make. However, the challenge now is whether we can be more ambitious, broadening our vision, setting out where we want FSS to be in 5 years' time, what we aim to achieve in the protection of Scottish consumers' food-related interests, and the approach we will take to get there.
- 4.2 We would all agree that what we now need a future-proofed Strategy that will stand up on principle, and that will allow us to exert influence in the arenas and at the levels that will achieve outcomes that best protect consumer interests. Our Strategy must provide a firm and principled foundation, while ensuring that we are able to flex and adapt to respond to events, to emerging issues, and to changing consumer interests.
- 4.3 To deliver on this, we think that the focus of our new Strategy should be on what we stand for – our values and guiding principles – and on our approach. We will set out our 5 year ambition and the outcomes that will support that ambition, but it will be our core values, principles and approach that will be our lodestone, as we face the uncertainties and challenges of the next five years.
- 4.4 An overview of our proposed draft Strategy is at Annex A, pages 8-11.

5 Next steps

- 5.1 Our aim is to produce, and agree with the Board, a draft Strategy document for formal public consultation from August to November 2020. During the consultation period, the Executive will focus on developing a draft Corporate Plan and review of our Statement on Performance of Functions..
- 5.2 We will then return to the Board in December 2020 or January 2021 with draft Strategy, Corporate Plan, and Statement on Performance of Functions for discussion, with the intention of finalising these documents and achieving Board approval in early February 2021, to allow time for Ministerial approval of the Statement on Performance of Functions and preparation of the Strategy and Corporate Plan for publication by April 2021.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The Board is asked to:

- **Note** the information provided; and
- **Discuss and provide a view** on the proposed approach

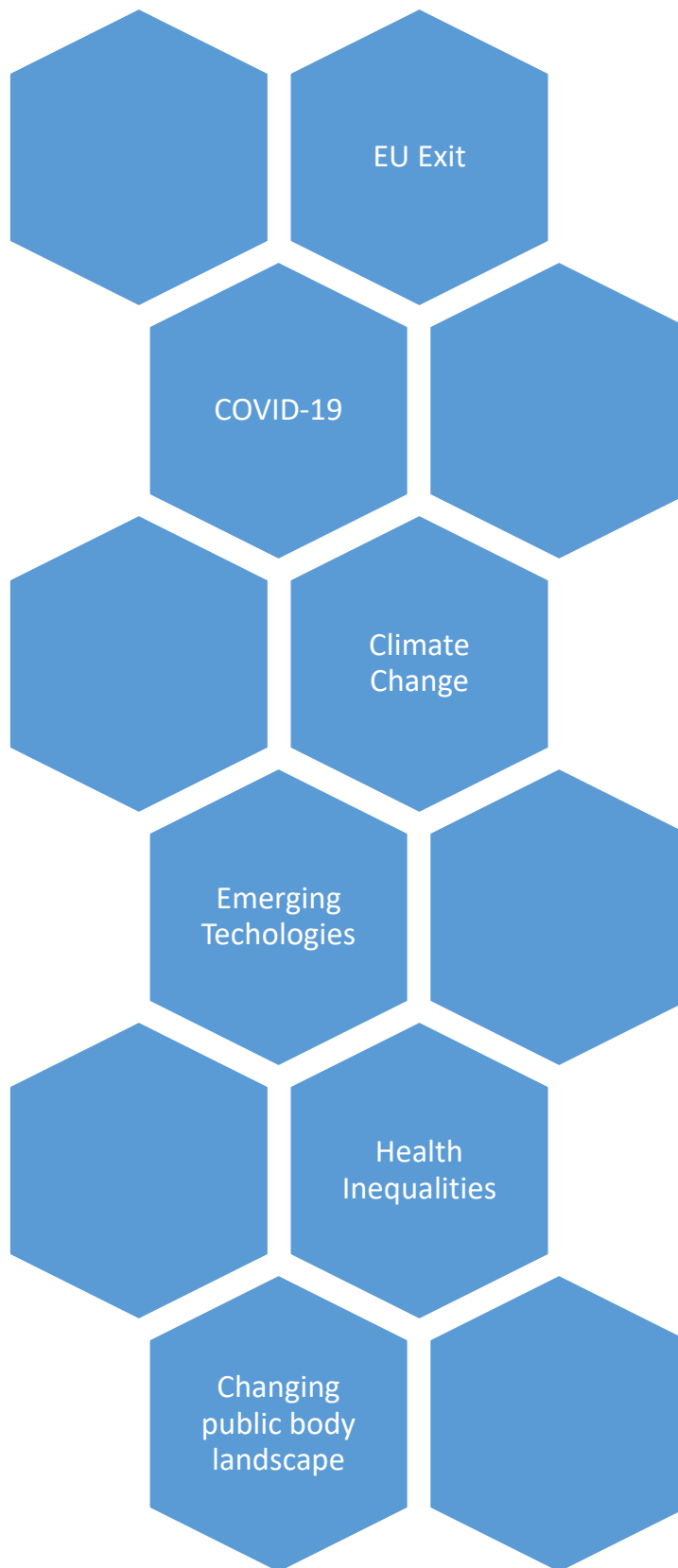
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2 June 2020

Annex A The new landscape – our challenges and opportunities



Our Strategy Overview

Why are we here?

Our Statutory Objectives		
To protect the public from risks to health which may arise in connection with the consumption of food, including risks caused by the way in which food is produced or supplied	To improve the extent to which members of the public have diets which are conducive to good health	To protect the other interests of consumers in relation to food
Our Mission		
To use science, policy, regulation, enforcement, audit and the provision of information and advice to Government, stakeholders and the public to promote a food environment that protects and supports the health and other food-related interests of the Scottish population.		

What are our aims?

Our Five Year Ambition					
To be a forward looking, evidence-based and data-driven food body, the primary voice of authority on all aspects of consumer interests with respect to food: seeing further and reaching out more widely to deliver advice, policy, regulation and assurance that inspires confidence and compliance, and supports an ethical and sustainable food environment and positive food culture in Scotland that benefits, protects and is trusted by consumers					
Our Five Year Outcomes					
A food safety and standards system that commands national and international respect and confidence, protecting consumers and supporting the Scottish economy	The capability, technology and systems to identify emerging risks, anticipate industry innovation and trends in consumer behaviour, sharing data, intelligence and information to collaboratively tackle threats and maximise opportunities	National and international standing as a voice of authority on food safety, standards, and nutrition, with enduring and productive relationships within and beyond Scotland enabling us to influence, learn, and collaborate	A principled, sustainable regulatory system that promotes ethical culture and behaviour, builds in systemic learning, rewards compliance with trust and applies proportionate sanctions where compliance fails.	Well-informed consumers in all walks of life across the whole of Scotland, confidently making healthy choices, on the basis of accessible information and raised awareness, delivered directly and through partnerships to reach the widest audience	
Our contribution to the National Performance Framework					
We are healthy and active	We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment	We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination	We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy	We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally	We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone

How will we do this?

Our Values								
Consumer focussed - putting consumers first		Evidence based - basing our decisions and advice upon sound science and evidence		Openness - being open and transparent with the public, stakeholders, and partners		Independence - at arm's length from Ministers and independent of industry		Inclusive - collaborating with others to achieve the best outcome for the public
Our Guiding Principles								
Keep public health and consumer protection at the heart of what we do	Contribute to narrowing inequalities in Scotland	Ensure we understand what matters to consumers in relation to food	Use and share evidence and data to the utmost for the public good	Work collaboratively with other bodies in Scotland, the UK and beyond to achieve the greatest benefit for Scottish consumers	Preserve our independence, while contributing to the National Outcomes and the public good	Treat with respect every person, body or business that we engage with	Be clear that those who generate risks in the food chain are responsible for controlling them to protect consumers	Protection of public health can be compatible with business and economic growth – support compliance by regulating fairly, firmly and proportionately
Our Approach								
We will make good use of strong and influential relationships, within Scotland, across the UK, and internationally; consolidating and enhancing the levels of trust and respect that we already enjoy to allow us to make authoritative interventions in the interests of Scotland and Scottish consumers	We will be a visible and audible voice of authority, for consumers and all our stakeholders and partners, providing pragmatic, relevant and targeted advice, re-engaging and working closely with communities to tackle the effects of food inequality, to educate, and to promote a positive food culture and healthier relationship with food	We will build on our unique position as both policy-maker and regulator, using regulation positively for the public good, calling upon the principles of ethical business regulation to inform our work with those we regulate, and strengthening both our long-held and our newly forged working relationships with stakeholders and partners, seizing opportunities to work with new partners in the best interests of consumers	We will embrace technological advances, ensuring that we understand current and future developments, and ensuring that we are equipped and eager to make best use of the increasing amount of data that is available to us	We will be open and transparent about the evidence we have. We will follow that evidence and apply judgement to it, assessing options for viability, and against broader considerations such as equality impacts and the other interests of consumers	We will operate within UK frameworks and align our decisions as far as possible, but we will take distinctive decisions for Scotland if the evidence tells us that is necessary.	We will explore new ways to engage with the public, our stakeholders, and those we regulate, to ensure that we have a deep understanding of what matters to them, and how our policies and actions impact upon them.		
Our Enablers								
Our people	Our ways of working	Adaptability	Our partners	Evidence and understanding	Data and digitalisation	Sustainable delivery		

Our plan for delivery

