CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

1   Chief Executive's engagements

1.1 On the 21st November 2019, the Chair and I met with Professor Jim McGoldrick, Shadow Chair of Public Health Scotland for an introductory meeting to discuss the importance of the two organisations working together. FSS had worked with Health Protection Scotland and NHS Health Scotland and it is important that those relationships continue. It was a constructive and worthwhile meeting.

1.2 During December 2019 and January 2020, I held on-going Brexit discussions with senior representatives of a number of retailers. I attended the Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) Parliamentary reception "Meat the Future" at the Scottish Parliament. The speakers at this event were Peter Chapman, Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP), Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Kate Rowell, Chair of QMS and Alan Clarke QMS Chief Executive.

1.3 On the 5th February 2020, I attended the Public Sector Leaders Cyber Forum in Perth. It was aimed at senior staff to raise awareness of the cyber risks we all face. For FSS, the risks are limited in organisational terms because most of our systems are on the secure Scottish Government (SG) SCOTS network, but it certainly confirmed there is no room for complacency. I have decided to look at what further training we can provide focussing on both personal and work cyber security.

1.4 On the 6th February 2020, I attended the National Farmers Union for Scotland (NFUS) conference in Glasgow.   I gave a speech on regulatory impacts post Brexit as part of the agenda item *"What do we want from future trade agreements between the UK & Europe and the UK and the rest of the World".*   I explained the practical implications of Brexit and the difference between alignment and equivalence. The reaction seemed to be generally positive although a fair number of people told me that they hadn't quite understood the extent of the implications for them. Unsurprisingly, there were a few questions about food standards and how they can be maintained. The day overall was really interesting with a strong focus on climate change and sustainability.

2. Senior Appointments

2.1 I am delighted to confirm that Ian McWatt was successful in his application for the Deputy Chief Executive and he took up the post with immediate effect. However, the other post remains unfilled and I am currently looking at other possible options to fill it. While one senior appointment is now in place, the intention will be to move to the new structure from April 2020 which enables the executive to undertake some of the underpinning work that is needed to support the new structure (e.g. the finance structures for budgetary purposes).

3   Regulatory Policy

3.1   European Union (EU) Official Controls Regulation

3.1.1 The new EU Official Controls Regulation (OCR) applied fully as of 14th December 2019 and is integral to the activities of FSS as the national competent authority responsible for the delivery of official food and feed controls in Scotland, and the activities of food and feed law enforcement authorities. Successful implementation of the required changes to domestic food and feed law in Scotland was achieved in coordination with SG Animal and Plant Health,

who are responsible for the respective animal and plant health elements of the OCR, and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Defra as part of the significant UK wide effort to implement the OCR within compressed timescales in light of Brexit uncertainty.

3.1.2 FSS is continuing to progress operational and policy elements of OCR delivery. The OCR provides a harmonised approach to import controls on animal and plant products, and the Scottish ports of Grangemouth and Rosyth have been re-designated as Border Control Posts (BCPs) under the OCR as part of the UK exercise to re-designate all existing designated points of entry as BCPs. Audits of BCPs to ensure they meet the new minimum requirements are ongoing across the UK. Editorial changes are also being made to relevant enforcement manuals and guidance; the Scottish Manual for Official Controls (SMOC); FSS Food and Feed Law Codes of Practice and associated Practice Guidance to update existing references.

3.1.3 While the OCR introduces more prescriptive controls in certain areas, greater flexibility is provided in others, and the overall impacts on the existing food and feed official control regime in Scotland are expected to be broadly policy neutral. There are, however, some aspects of the meat hygiene official controls contained within the OCR package which require further analysis and risk assessment. These risk assessments include changes to ante-mortem inspection (AMI) and post-mortem inspection (PMI). This analysis will be undertaken by FSS in collaboration with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) across the UK and will be completed by July 2020. Therefore, there will be no immediate change to current official control duties in these areas until this assessment takes place.

4.   Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit

4.1   FSS collaborates with Scottish businesses to tackle food crime

4.1.1 On the 17th January 2020, FSS announced that 17 food and drink industry partners have pledged to support the Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit (SFCIU), in raising awareness of food crime and how to report it. Collaborating organisations include Seafood Scotland, Scotland Food & Drink, Quality Meat Scotland, Crimestoppers and Safe and Local Supplier Approval (SALSA). Any knowledge or suspicions of food crime can be reported to the SFCIU's free and confidential Scottish Food Crime Hotline, run in partnership with Crimestoppers, on 0800 028 7926 or the secure online form.

4.1.2 We recently collaborated with Professor Chris Elliott, Director of the Institute for Global Food Safety at Queen's University Belfast, on a video examining key issues facing industry and businesses when tackling food crime. The webstory and link to the video is available here.

5   Food Protection Science and Surveillance

5.1   Whole Genome Sequence Typing and Analysis of Non-O157 STEC

5.1.1 On the 5th February 2020, we published a new report on research we funded with the Scottish *E. coli* O157/STEC Reference Laboratory (SERL) to undertake Whole Genome Sequencing on its historical collection of patient isolates to examine the profile of Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC) that has been implicated in illness in Scotland. This included looking for the presence of different genes which are thought to be associated with more severe disease, genes which may confer antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and the genetic relatedness of the different strains.

5.1.2 The project identified considerable diversity in relation to the genes that are considered to be important in the ability of these strains to cause illness, and showed that we are currently unable to rely only on the presence of particular genetic markers to determine pathogenicity. This supports our current position on appropriate risk management actions when STEC is detected in food.

5.1.3 We are using the findings of this work in further research to compare the genetic profile of the non-O157 STECs in clinical cases in Scotland with the symptoms that have been reported by these patients. This will provide valuable insight into the severity of illness caused by non-O157 STEC strains, which may help us move towards a more detailed, molecular approach for assessing the risks associated with STEC detection in food.

5.1.4 The findings also align with the most recent Opinion published by the European Food Safety Authority (published in December 2019) which states:

"All Shiga toxin (Stx) subtypes were associated with some cases of severe illness suggesting all STEC strains are potentially associated with bloody diarrhoea, haemolytic uraemic syndrome and/or hospitalisation. Thus, the molecular approach for categorisation of STEC pathogenicity can be revised with all STEC being considered to be pathogenic and capable of causing severe illness."

6   Corporate Services

6.1   People Survey 2019

6.1.1 The overall engagement score in the annual staff People Survey was 70%, making FSS one of the top Civil Service performers. Given the degree of challenge and uncertainty we have faced over the last year, that is a very good result. The executive will consider the directorate level results in more detail to identify the organisational priorities and discuss the more specific feedback.

7   Brexit

7.1 Work continues on Brexit and the programme remains in place and will do for some time to come. While we have stepped back from No Deal Planning, it still features as a potential outcome for the UK if the UK Government fails to reach an agreement. There have been some references to an "Australia Deal" but as far as we can tell this would be technical/sectorial agreements underpinned by World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms so seems extremely similar to No Deal. In the meantime, work continues to progress on development of the relevant Frameworks, on the Risk Assessment process with FSA and we are working closely with SG on EU negotiations. We have also started the first recruitment for Brexit posts with adverts going out last week.

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11th February 2020