

FINAL MINUTES

FSA Science Council

Final minutes of 1st meeting: 16 June 2017

Location: Conference rooms 4 and 5, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH

Attendees: See Annex 1

Materials: Agenda and slide pack¹

Questions and comments from the audience: Annex 2

Actions arising (high level):

Action number	Action	Owner	Deadline
June 17-1	To advise the Board on how it can get confident that we have access to the right science capability and capacity.	Science Council	Within next 6 months
June 17-2	What does the Council advise to be best practice in establishing and communicating risk and certainty.	Science Council	Within next 6 months maximum
June 17-3	What should the FSA do to improve its horizon scanning and its understanding of global food systems risks (and opportunities)?	Science Council	Next 12 months to input into future strategic plans
June 17-4	Circulate draft minutes	Secretariat	Within 3 weeks (by 7 July)
June 17-5	Develop an outline and proposals for the scope and possible approach to the three top questions, and share this with Council for their input and interest	Science Council Chair working with secretariat and FSA CSA	14 July (wash-up meeting planned for 6 July)

Agenda item 1: Welcome and introductions

1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the first meeting of the new Science Council. All members were present, and also joining the meeting were FSA Chairman Heather

¹ <https://science-council.food.gov.uk/science-council-meetings>

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Hancock and FSA Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) Guy Poppy. A full list of attendees is provided at Annex 1.

2. Members introduced themselves, providing a brief overview of their background and what they could bring to the Council.
3. The Council's register of interests is published on its website². Members confirmed to the Chair that they had no specific interests to declare in relation to the meeting agenda, and no additional interests to add to the register at this time.
4. The Chair outlined the agenda and approach for the meeting. As it was the introductory meeting for the Council, Members would have the opportunity to clarify the Council's role and purpose and relationship with the FSA. They would hear from the FSA Chair and CSA on the FSA's top strategic challenges. The FSA Chair would outline the top 3 questions on which Science Council input is needed, and 3 workshop sessions would provide the opportunity for the Council to begin to explore with the FSA how they would answer the questions, within the given timescales.
5. The Council will need to develop its ways of working, informed by this first discussion. After the meeting, the Chair would work with the Secretariat and FSA CSA to develop an outline of how the Council could take forward its initial tasks, for input and interest from members.

Agenda item 2: Role of Council and relationship with FSA

6. FSA Chairman Heather Hancock explained that the FSA had established the Science Council to deliver the best possible strategic science insight for the FSA. It was not designed to aggregate or duplicate the expertise in the other SACs that advise FSA, but rather to take a more strategic, cross-cutting, challenging and foresight-led approach. The Council is key to the FSA's core principle of using science and evidence to achieve its objective to protect public health. The Council will help the FSA to reinvigorate science at the heart of the department, and build trust in the FSA.
7. The Council Chair will meet the FSA Chairman annually to discuss the work of the Council, and will report to the FSA Board annually at an open Board meeting. The Council Chair and members have the right of direct access to the FSA Board members (via the FSA Chairman or deputy Chair), at all times. Council members are invited to meet Board members informally at the Board meeting in December 2017. The Council will play a critical role in giving the Board assurance on the way the CSA is delivering their role, through its relationship with the CSA.

² <https://science-council.food.gov.uk/science-council-members>

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8. FSA CSA Guy Poppy outlined his role and background. The FSA's requirements of its CSA centre around scrutiny and advice on developing and using science capabilities, evidence and information. The Council will support and advise the CSA and provide challenge as a critical friend when required. It will provide independent, expert authority to the CSA in ensuring the FSA is using the best science and evidence in decision making. For example, challenge may come on the priority of work or depth of evidence; and the Council could provide support on areas such as highlighting emerging issues, foresight and ensuring FSA is prepared for future challenges and opportunities.
9. As CSA, Guy Poppy directs a strategic evidence programme (up to £1.5 million per year) to fund work to understand new risks and opportunities, new technologies, develop new strategic science partnerships, and address cross-cutting issues. This could address specific evidence needs identified by the Council to inform and support its work, or to address its advice.
10. Patrick Miller, Secretary to the Council, noted that the Science Council has a code of practice which covers the operational aspects of how it will work. He encouraged the Council to use the Secretariat readily to support them in their role as required.
11. Council members asked about the pathways through which they would support Guy Poppy and provide their advice and challenge, and what success would look like for the Science Council. Guy clarified that the Council would deliver its advice and support to him in bringing issues and challenges to the Board, advising on best practice on use of science and how science and risk is communicated to the public. Heather Hancock noted that success for the Science Council is linked to success for the FSA in maintaining its global reputation on food safety and delivering public trust in the whole food system. It would also rely on clear lines of sight on the issues raised, the advice from the Council to the FSA, and feedback to the Council on the actions taken by FSA in response.

Agenda item 3: Top 3 Strategic challenges for FSA

12. Heather Hancock outlined the three strategic priorities the FSA needs to concentrate on over the next two to three years: Delivering the Regulating Our Future (ROF) transformation; anticipating, planning for and delivering the consequences of exiting the EU; doing the day job exceptionally well.
13. The ROF programme will deliver a new regulatory regime to fulfil the FSA's aspiration to be an excellent modern regulator. This includes the ability to segment and tailor action according to businesses' risk profile, now and in the future, in a system which is increasingly global, innovative and diverse. There are significant information and data requirements, and a need to harness technologies and use them intelligently, including to provide evidence on compliance and in how we select,

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access and use data. It should free up resources to strengthen enforcement in parallel with a proportionate regime. The FSA wants to implement or be ready to implement by 2020, and there is international collaboration and interest in our approach and working with us on this.

14. There are constraints on what FSA can comment on publicly in relation to EU exit. It is consulting widely on consequences. There are opportunities for innovation in regulation, as well as potential risks and challenges, including those relating to science capability. FSA is contributing to work across government to support negotiation and to ensure we are well prepared.
15. Doing the day job exceptionally well is about ensuring FSA continues to be effective and trusted as a regulator and in protecting consumers health and interests, focusing on food being safe and what it says it is, both under the current system and as we develop and implement change.
16. Heather Hancock introduced the main issues and challenges on which the FSA would like input from the Science Council in the next two years. The Council Chair invited Members to discuss and clarify the questions they were being asked. On all three areas, members wanted to understand better the current approach and what success would look like for the FSA. The following summarises the questions and initial discussion to clarify the questions. The subsequent workshop sessions provided the opportunity to unpack the questions in more detail.

Question 1 - Science capability and assurance: To advise the Board on how it can get confident that we have access to the right science capability and capacity.

17. Heather Hancock noted that the FSA wants to reinvigorate science at the heart of the organisation and ensure access to the best capability and capacity and have a good framework for this. The FSA wants advice on the smartest and most efficient way to get the right science, considering the balance of in-house and external expertise, ensuring appropriate independence and impartiality, and achieving value for money.
18. The Council will:
 - help the FSA identify, target and access external science resources, and networks and to develop relationships, including with UKRI
 - help the FSA to develop as an intelligent customer in commissioning and managing science and using it to get a good outcome
 - provide assurance to the Board on FSA's use of science.
19. The Council asked Heather Hancock and Guy Poppy to outline the strengths and weaknesses in the FSA's current capacity and capability, and the following points were raised:

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- Some stakeholders consider that science does not have the profile within the organisation that it once had.
- In some disciplines the in-house, topic-specific expertise has declined and has been replaced by more generic expertise, with more use of subject-specific, deep expertise from external sources. However some areas of internal expertise and capacity have been significantly strengthened such as the social and data sciences.
- There is scope to look at the peer review process for externally funded research (e.g. role of review by internal or external experts or going to full academic, external peer review).
- Another aspect is how to improve understanding on reliability of data, and what this means in the context of prioritisation (e.g. value of reducing uncertainty versus cost of additional work this would require) or in terms of how confidence/reliability of evidence is reflected in the decision.

Action June-17-1: Council to provide advice in next six months

Question 2 - Risk and certainty: What does the Council advise to be best practice in establishing and communicating risk and certainty?

20. This is an open question - the FSA needs a framework for use of science in decision making to demonstrate and deliver consistency of approach - what does good practice in this look like?
21. Heather Hancock noted that there is not a sense that this is broken but that currently it is done on an issue by issue basis and that the FSA would benefit from a framework of clear principles for establishing risk and certainty to provide more clarity and consistency in making decisions and in communicating about risk. Some decisions are taken at a European level but this may change in the future. FSA needs to be confident that its approach works now and will work outside the existing regulatory framework.
22. Guy Poppy is working with CSAs in other government departments on public health messaging in different contexts, such as reactive (emergency issue, or an ongoing issue where new evidence is brought to bear), or proactive communication.
23. The Council should focus first on principles for establishing risk and certainty; getting this right will go a long way to addressing how to support effective communication.

Action June 17-2: Council to provide advice in next six months maximum

Question 3 - Horizon scanning: What should the FSA do to improve its horizon scanning and its understanding of global food systems risks (and opportunities)?

24. There is a central and ongoing role for the Science Council in supporting and advising the FSA on its horizon scanning and foresight activity. The background to

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this question and the role of the Council are set out in a paper for the FSA Board meeting the following week³.

25. The FSA wants to:

- be more on the 'front foot' and agile;
- understand and to be able to harness innovation;
- be able to start from a big picture understanding of the global food system and to then apply different filters to this to identify implications for FSA priorities and for UK consumers.

26. This includes identifying and prioritising issues FSA is responsible for but also to flag to others when responsibilities lie elsewhere or are shared, which relates to FSA role in protecting consumers' wider interests in relation to food. Horizon scanning is critical for this stage of delivering the Regulating Our Future programme.

27. The Council noted that there were links between the three questions which would need to be reflected in its approach and advice; part of the approach to foresight and horizon scanning and to risk would be about capabilities; while an effective capability in horizon scanning would identify new needs for capability and use of science, and new risks and challenges to understanding and communicating risks.

28. The Council noted that while FSA might not expect to have significant additional funds to address these challenges, there were significant resources elsewhere which could help (examples include the Industrial Challenge Fund led by UKRI), and part of the addressing these questions would be to identify where and how FSA could better link to external resource, information and capability.

Action June 17-3: Council to provide advice in next 12 months to input into future strategic plans

29. The top three questions for the Council were unpacked further in three workshop sessions, facilitated by the Science Council Chair. The meeting slide pack⁴ provides more background detail to the questions. The last slide in this pack provided a structure for the discussions. The aim of the workshops was to establish a shared understanding of the question, and of what a good outcome would look or feel like for the FSA and to start to think about what inputs the Council would need to address this.

Agenda item 4: Workshop session 1: Science capability & assurance

³ <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fsa170606.pdf>

⁴ <https://science-council.food.gov.uk/science-council-meetings>

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30. The Council explored a number of elements of FSA's current practice and capability including: how things work at the FSA at present, how well does the FSA understand what inputs to use and when, the current prioritisation process, and whether impact is considered at the outset of the commissioning process.

Comments by Guy Poppy, FSA Chief Scientific Adviser:

31. The FSA's science governance framework⁵ outlines the current approach and could be a useful input in addressing the question. FSA's capability is delivered through a balance of internal expertise, Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) and external expertise. The Council could consider and advise on what an optimal balance would look like with regards what inputs to use and when.
32. The FSA is currently undertaking reviews of its social science and risk assessment capabilities and needs. Looking ahead, the Science Council could take a role in monitoring and advising on other areas or specialisms that would benefit from review. Building capacity will involve developing external links - big data is an example of an area where the FSA has done this.
33. The Council could offer advice on the balance of FSA's science spend at strategic level (across the 3 categories of core, strategic and investment spend).
34. The FSA has developed a sophisticated approach for prioritisation through its investment board, and it is in the process of developing likelihood of impact measures. An important question to ask is: on which of the priorities can we have most impact? However we don't have well defined characteristics that increase the likelihood of science impact on public health.

Comments by the Science Council:

35. There are clear links between questions 1 and 3.
36. Although the FSA has well established connections and joint funding arrangements with research councils and other bodies, the Council can help the FSA to identify and access additional sources of funding, expertise, evidence and capability.
37. The intelligent customer capability relies on a number of different skills and roles. Different expertise and capability is required for the different activities involved. Some of the distinct activities involved in being an intelligent customer (all requiring different expertise) are:
- being able to formulate the right scientific questions in the right way;
 - commissioning and delivering science;

⁵ <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/governance-framework.pdf>

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- understanding of the nature and quality of the science (a more specialist expertise);
- using this science effectively and appropriately to inform a policy, advice or a decision.

38. The FSA and Council agreed that FSA would always need in-house capability to be able to deal with emergencies and to carry out risk assessment so that the food industry had a direct line of contact on science issues with FSA staff. They agreed that internal roles need to be career enhancing.

39. A heat map to capture upcoming threats and issues and to set priorities could be useful. One focus could be on the issues with the biggest threat to public health.

40. The Council requested illustrative materials to help them to answer the question effectively and deliver a framework for advice:

- How things work at the FSA right now: flowchart of how science and evidence base leads to policy decision; profile and shape of the FSA; requirements for assurance
- FSA case studies to cover a range of areas (e.g. campylobacter, meat/pig inspection, incidents and withdrawals) and also illustrate what has and hasn't worked so well (examples where FSA was pleased with outcomes and not so pleased, or which presented challenges)
- Examples of research commissioned to illustrate how quality and impact are reflected/considered in the approval and delivery of projects, including key drivers for different areas of FSA science (core, investment, strategic).

41. Key issues or questions the Council plans to consider in developing its advice:

- How good is the FSA at asking the right question in relation to a science need? What traits does an intelligent customer have?
- How is science currently commissioned and applied/used? What use is this to the consumer? Can businesses act in a different way to provide public health benefits?
- Can FSA decrease our 'Core' category spend while still meeting statutory requirements? Curiosity driven science is also important to tell us things we would wish we had known about.
- Incorporating an understanding of future drivers (competency, core, future regulation, contingency) into our capability; the private sector shares these challenges.
- The FSA needs to tap into international expertise; strengthen value in UK food science and ability to reach internationally by being better at recognition, resulting in increased trust. How can it do this?

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- Raising the profile of FSA Science in association with better communication on how science enhances food safety and integrity would be a good starting point to enhancing public trust.
- The Council's role should focus more on helping to identify what the elements of a good system and its assurance would look like, rather than the detail of all the mechanisms that support it in practice
- A good first step could be to establish some framing principles to shape how the Council will formulate its advice, then populating this by elaborating on different elements of the approach.

42. What would a good outcome look or feel like? Some elements would be:

- Excitement about working for the FSA;
- Advertising better what the SACs do;
- Increased prestige of being a research contractor, SAC member, or scientist at/for the FSA;
- Maintaining the level of FSA transparency;
- Ensuring a clear line of sight between science and its use and impact on policy and advice.

Agenda item 5: Workshop session 2: Risk and certainty

43. The Council explored a number of elements of FSA's current practice including how effectiveness current decision making is; where the FSA would like to get to; and challenges and opportunities.

Comments by Heather Hancock, FSA Chairman:

44. The FSA aims to be the place that people approach first for advice on food safety and authenticity.

45. Consumers make risk decisions every day; FSA wants to provide advice to help them to make their own risk decisions (not to tell them what to do) and to be honest about the limitations of knowledge. Consumer perceptions of the new regulatory framework will be particularly important - how to ensure both continuing consumer confidence in current regulatory regime and confidence about changes being made?

46. Aspects that could be considered in relation to communication of science include tone and style, consistency, openness, and nature of change of the evidence base. We need to develop consistent and clear language.

47. Stakeholder feedback has indicated the FSA could be better, in terms of articulating the basis for a decision and how risk is reflected in this. For the Board, the scope to improve is more around in the extent to which the Board sees and understands the wider context of the risk, and consistency across different issues and types of risk and decision, rather than the specifics of assessing individual risks. Guy Poppy

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noted that clarity and consistency in the approach to precaution and risk appetite are also part of this. This will inform quality of evidence required, by comparing issues on a risk spectrum.

Comments by Guy Poppy, FSA Chief Scientific Adviser:

48. The FSA and CSA work with other government departments on communicating risk and uncertainty to the public (e.g. Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Public Health England, Department for Transport, Defra). Workshops are held with other regulators including on how to assess risk, how acceptable/tolerable risks or limits are set, and what this means for how we seek compliance through regulation.
49. The FSA needs to tailor the outputs from these discussions and learning in other areas to its own needs.
50. Some elements of the FSA's approach are not captured on paper but embedded in ways of working.

Comments by the Science Council:

51. The Council needs to understand the current framework and where the FSA is now, including any current issues.
52. The Council can look at what other opportunities exist for FSA to work with others, including outside government. Some initial examples include the International Risk Governance Council (works across sectors, common principles) and Horizon 2020 work starting on proactive risk models for new technologies.
53. Evidence is the prior step to communicating. Quality of evidence and concept of systematic review are difficult to get across. The FSA will not have full control of public conversation on science and food risks. Communication on risk is often mediated by food businesses and people will often get direct information on risk when they buy food. FSA can support knowledge and training for food businesses on consistent and quality communication to the public about risk, and about the food system to develop public trust. (Heather Hancock noted that this is being considered as part of the ROF programme).
54. It was noted that confusing allergy labelling (such as 'may contain') can undermine public trust in science.
55. The Council requested illustrative materials to help them to effectively deliver framework for advice:
 - Scientific Advisory Committee risk assessment frameworks
 - FSA work on risky foods which developed a framework of three zones of tolerability of risk

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- Guy Poppy to speak to CSAs from other departments about bringing in others to this work: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have resources that could be adapted for FSA purposes.
- Case studies, ideally covering cases where there was substantial strong evidence and those where evidence was sparse or weak, as well as cases where the hazard or impact were high or low.
- Methods and approaches from elsewhere such as EU and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) methodology, the Benefit-Risk Analysis of Foods (BRAFO).

56. Key issues or questions the Council plans to consider in developing its advice:

- FSA wants clear guidance on best practice to be in a position to demonstrate consistency in how we've reached a decision with comparable discipline and rigour of thinking across different types of risks (e.g. microbiological, chemical, acute/chronic).
- A strategic framework of underpinning principles is needed: the building blocks and components of a consistent approach with a comparative starting point across different risks, and as risks change.
- Consider good scientific practice, grade of evidence and confidence (whether it's likely to change), assurance, embedding good practice in organisation
- Build on existing material to get to best principles and practice - and what in this is specific or important to FSA.
- Consider science of communication as well as communication of science.

Agenda item 6: Workshop session 3: Horizon scanning

57. The Science Council Chair noted her significant expertise in horizon scanning and foresight and that she can advise on a tailored approach.

58. Heather Hancock said the FSA needs a medium term big picture view of the global food system to which we can then apply filters to pick out issues relevant to FSA priorities - e.g. food safety, impacts on UK consumers authenticity, fraud. This will also allow FSA to identify wider system issues.

59. Guy Poppy noted that there is a lot of external activity on horizon scanning; there is scope for undertaking a gap analysis and for synthesising existing materials and exercises, to put material together, and pick out from this what the priority issues are for the Council, for FSA and for others. FSA is well connected to academia and learned societies etc. but links with industry and other Government Departments on horizon scanning could be improved. Two key areas for focus are i) to consider the global system through a safety/authenticity lens and ii) through the lens of the UK consumer.

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The Council comment's

60. FSA Scientific Advisory Committees could benefit from doing horizon scanning together rather than in silos and to aid prioritisation. They have found a longer term look more difficult to do.
61. Science Council could help identify frameworks that FSA could harness at national level.
62. The Council requested illustrative materials to support them to deliver an effective framework for advice. Heather said that snapshots of current approaches and connections to wider work could be provided. John O'Brien offered to share work from the EFSA emerging risks panel.
63. On the key issues or questions for the Council to consider in developing their approach and advice, the Council Chair noted the following:
- A number of activities could be part of a developing and/or delivering capability - including commissioning work, adapting work by others, workshop to synthesise a view of global trends.
 - There are many approaches, two which seem relevant are:
 - i) Identifying emerging technologies (readiness, investment, priorities). This generally relies on opinion, albeit informed opinion, so is subjective,. As well as looking at specific innovations, it could be useful to get an overview of technologies that allows FSA to identify priorities and understand connections and how innovations in one area affect others.
 - ii) Identifying drivers of change, of which there are many in the global food system (e.g. climate, sustainable development, investment, economics, trade, business models, etc.) and understanding how these affect the food system. There is a lot of existing work but this does not always look at the system as a whole.
 - A key question is how far is it useful to look ahead – this could be medium term 2025-30, as beyond this becomes increasingly uncertain, but 2050 could be useful for looking at big systems and major trends e.g. demographic change. Confidence levels in outputs will vary depending on timescale.
 - In both approaches, it is key to consider how to manage uncertainty. Outputs need to help FSA understand the best pathways for policy that are resilient to these uncertainties.
 - Consider technology for foresight including data capture and data analysis.
64. The Council Chair and Guy Poppy will talk about options and outputs with a range of utilities (e.g. that would help to increase the Board's confidence and support the CSA).

Agenda item 7: Wrap up and close of formal business

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65. The Chair thanked all those present for attending what she felt was a successful first meeting of the Council. She emphasised that the Science Council needs to be an intelligent customer and to be very clear on the task, approach, and timeframe. The Council had succeeded in the aim of its first meeting to explore with the FSA how it would answer the three questions asked of it.

66. For operation going forward, the Council will evolve a system of working that people are happy with, which will involve some work between meetings to deliver to the required timescales. The Chair will work with the Secretariat and Guy Poppy to build on the outputs from today to produce a proposed outline of how the Council could address the three questions, for input from members and interest in working on them between meetings. Draft minutes will be circulated by the secretariat within 3 weeks. The provisional date of next meeting is 13 December 2017.

Action June 17-4: Secretariat to circulate draft minutes

Action June 17-5: Sandy and Guy to discuss next steps

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Annex 1: Science Council Meeting attendees 16 June 2017

Science Council	
Sandy Thomas	Council Chair
Laura Green	Council Member
John O'Brien	Council Member
Sarah O'Brien	Council Member
Mark Rolfe	Council Member
Paul Turner	Council Member
Patrick Wolfe	Council Member
Mark Woolhouse	Council Member

Food Standards Agency	
Heather Hancock	FSA Chairman
Guy Poppy	FSA Chief Scientific Adviser
Patrick Miller	Science Council Secretary
Gwen Aherne	Science Council Secretariat
Ruth Kennedy	Science Council Secretariat
Emma Lamb	Science Council Secretariat

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Annex 2: Questions and answers to the FSA Science Council 16 June 2017

The Secretariat had invited questions in advance of the meeting and one written question had been received from Professor Anne Murcott (*SOAS University of London, member of the FSA's Advisory Committee on Science (ACR) 2002-2008, and of the FSA's General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS) 2008-16*)

"Given that the Science Council is half the size of its predecessor, the General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS), resulting in reduced representation of relevant scientific specialties, what arrangements are being made for the Science Council's access to the full range of disciplines the FSA needs?"

In response, the Science Council Chair noted that the Council will want to identify and access any inputs it needs in order to formulate properly informed advice, from whatever disciplines are relevant; it can never hope to have every discipline represented on the Council. As Council Chair she will have regular contact with other SACs and will attend the regular workshops with SAC Chairs.

FSA Chair Heather Hancock added that the Council was not intended to aggregate or duplicate expertise available in other SACs or wider networks, and FSA expects the Council to identify and draw in whatever other expert input it needs.