

Health and Social Services Committee

HSS(2)-01-06(p.5)

Date: 19 January 2006

Venue: Committee Rooms 3&4, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Food Standards Agency Annual Report 2004/5

1. Purpose

The Committee is asked to note the Food Standards Agency's Annual Report 2004/5, and the information provided about the Agency's activities in Wales.

2. Summary / Recommendations

The Food Standards Agency's Annual Report for 2004/5, which summarises the Agency's activities and achievements, has been sent to Committee Members. It is also available on the Food Standards Agency website at <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/annrepac0405.pdf>. This paper includes more detail about the Agency's activities in Wales, and is presented to the Committee for information.

3. Background

The Food Standards Agency is a UK wide body – a non-Ministerial government department - operating at arms-length from Ministers and with a power to publish its advice to Ministers. It was set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food. The Agency is accountable to devolved administrations for its activities within their countries.

FSA Wales is a small Directorate, currently consisting of 25 staff. Much of our work is led by priorities set out in the Agency's Strategic Plan, and involves ensuring that work being led at a UK level is properly implemented in respect of Wales. But we also take forward distinctive policies for Wales, some of which are described below. FSA Wales is also responsible for a range of 'Government department' matters, including a large portfolio of legislation relating to the issues within its remit.

4. Food Standards Agency Annual Report

The Report summarises the Agency's main activities during the year to protect the public's health and consumers' interests. It reviews the Agency's achievements, the actions taken, and the progress made in building and maintaining consumer confidence. The report also looks to the future, through the publication of the Agency's Strategic Plan for 2005-2010. The report is divided into sections

corresponding to the Agency's key priority areas.

4.1 Food Safety

The Annual Report highlights the Agency's work in reducing food-borne illness, responding to food contamination incidents (such as Sudan I) and on implementing proposed changes to BSE controls across the UK. In Wales, the Agency is working closely with local authorities on initiatives to reduce food-borne illness. For example, the Welsh Food Hygiene Award Scheme aims to raise food hygiene standards and consumer confidence by providing public recognition for food businesses that have excellent hygiene procedures in place, and has made around 2000 awards since March 2002. Close working with local authorities is also playing a vital role in promoting food safety management systems based on HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points). For the past three years FSA Wales has worked very closely with local authorities, giving direct support by means of two initiatives – funding projects on raising HACCP awareness, and directly funding the development and printing of guidance materials. In 2004, FSAW provided funding for local authorities to produce or purchase guidance materials or equipment that would help them provide advice to food businesses. A steering group involving FSA Wales and local authority representatives has also been formed to agree the most appropriate implementation strategy for Wales.

The Agency also recognises the importance of promoting food safety messages, and in Wales the Agency's mobile education resource continues to tour extensively promoting key food hygiene (and healthy eating) messages in schools and at public events such as the Royal Welsh Show and the National Eisteddfod. FSA Wales has also developed, in conjunction with NGfL Cymru, 'Uncle Arthur's Barbecue', an on-line educational resource for primary schools delivering key food safety messages, designed to be used by teachers of Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils.

4.2 Eating for Health

The Annual report also highlights the Agency's work in helping consumers to make informed choices, make it easier for people to choose a healthy diet, and reduce diet related disease. A new consumer facing website, www.eatwell.gov.uk was launched in October 2004. The Agency also launched its Salt campaign in September 2004, which highlights the dangers of eating too much salt. The campaign is running again this year.

In Wales, the report highlights that the Agency is working with the Assembly on a project researching pupils' food choice and the factors influencing their choice in primary and secondary schools in Wales. FSA Wales also continues to contribute to the Assembly's 'Keep Well This Winter' (KWTW) campaign. In 2004, FSA Wales recruited volunteers across the country to work as peer educators, delivering key messages on healthy eating, budgeting, food safety and food labelling to the over 65s.

FSA Wales continues to make progress in implementing the joint Agency/Assembly nutrition strategy, 'Food and Well Being'. For example, the Agency has made substantial progress toward launching the

Nutrition Network for Wales. The need for such a network was identified by stakeholders during the development of 'Food and Well Being', as a means of providing information to key players, including health professionals, policy decision makers, teachers, voluntary organisations and others to improve nutrition, especially in priority groups.

FSA Wales is also working with the Wales Centre for Health and Bangor University on the development of a training module on nutrition for post-graduate health professionals. And we are working in partnership with Welsh local authorities and others including the Assembly to investigate the feasibility of introducing a scheme that would recognise nutritional standards in food businesses and work alongside the Food Hygiene Award Scheme in Wales (see above). The Food Hygiene Award Scheme has helped to drive up hygiene standards in food businesses, and it is felt that a similar scheme for nutrition could help to improve the nutritional options available to consumers.

We have also produced a new publication called 'Healthy Nosh for Less Dosh', which is aimed at giving young people both the insight and incentive to help them choose, buy, and cook healthy food cost-effectively.

4.3 Choice

The Annual report describes the Agency's work on Choice, including on the use of signpost labelling, the promotion of food to children, and community food award schemes. In Wales, we continue to run one such award, our Awards for Food Action Locally (AFAL). The Award, launched in November 2003, is a scheme to recognise individual or team contributions to local nutrition initiatives that have made a positive impact on the diet or eating habits in the communities they serve. There are five Award categories, which correspond to the various strands of 'Food and Well Being', the joint Agency/Assembly nutrition strategy for Wales. The 2005 Awards were presented by John Griffiths AM at FSA Wales' Nutrition Strategy conferences held in 2005, and the Award for 2006 has recently been launched.

4.4 How we will deliver

In addition to setting out the Agency's key policy aims and achievements, the Annual Report also sets out how these will be delivered, and includes details of the Dean Review of the Agency, and about how we work in partnership with local authorities across the UK.

In Wales, we have worked successfully with local authorities to establish a specialist Food Fraud Co-ordination Unit. Food Safety Officers from local authorities in West Wales have worked in partnership with the Food Standards Agency Wales to investigate the illegal slaughter of livestock and the supply of unfit meat for human consumption. The Agency in Wales provides funding for the co-ordination unit, which is hosted by Ceredigion County Council, and which is a resource available to assist and co-ordinate the enforcement endeavours of the 22 local authorities in Wales. Experience gained by the unit is shared with colleagues from local authorities across the UK, to assist in the development of good practice to help combat any illicit trade nationally or regionally.

5. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications for the National Assembly arising out of this paper. The Food Standards Agency Wales is funded by the Assembly via a single BEL (Food Standards) which sits within the Health MEG. For 2005/6, FSA Wales's total budget is £2,352,000. This has remained static for the last three years, apart from a transfer to fund the Food Fraud Co-ordination Unit. From 2006/7, the Assembly has increased the Agency's baseline allocation to £2,852,000.

6. Action for Subject Committee

The Committee is asked to note the Agency's Annual Report for 2004/5.

Food Standards Agency Wales

January 2006

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