

# SAFER Programme Update

## 1 Purpose of the paper

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide the Board with an update on the SAFER programme and an opportunity to discuss the new draft vision statement and objectives for 2025/29. The Board is asked to:

- **Discuss and provide a view** on the role and interactions of the FSS Board with the newly formed SAFER Programme Board, and the proposed governance arrangements.
- **Agree** to the proposal for the FSS Board to be the sponsorship group as part of SAFER programme organisational hierarchy.
- **Provide comments on** the new draft vision statement and objectives for SAFER for 2025- 2029, the proposed governance structure for the Programme Board and its interactions with the FSS Board.

## 2 Strategic aims

2.1 This work supports FSS Strategic Outcome 1 – Food is Safe and Authentic; 3.– Responsible Food Businesses are enabled to thrive; 4 – Consumers are empowered to make positive choices about food; 5 – FSS is trusted and influential.

## 3 Background

3.1 As detailed in the board paper dated 18 June 2025, (Please see Annex A). FSS has successfully secured SAFER Programme funding of £3,247M for 2025/26. following our application into the Scottish Government (SG) Public Service Reform, Invest to Save initiative, which was confirmed on 21 May.

3.2 All communications with Ministers and SG have clearly stated that SAFER is a 4-to 5-year programme of reform and that a multi-year funding approach will be required. Funding for the duration of the programme does remain a concern however and discussions remain ongoing regarding confirmation of funding for future years.

3.3 SG have confirmed that the initial funding and any savings generated by the programme can be re-invested and we will keep the Board approved regarding discussions with SG on the funding for the duration of the programme.

3.4 As highlighted in the board paper dated 18 June 2025, there remains significant challenge around our ability to fully spend this financial year, in line with our programme plan timescales. The risks therefore remain around the timescales and constraints presented by procurement and recruitment processes; however good progress is now being made through recruiting through fixed-term appointments.

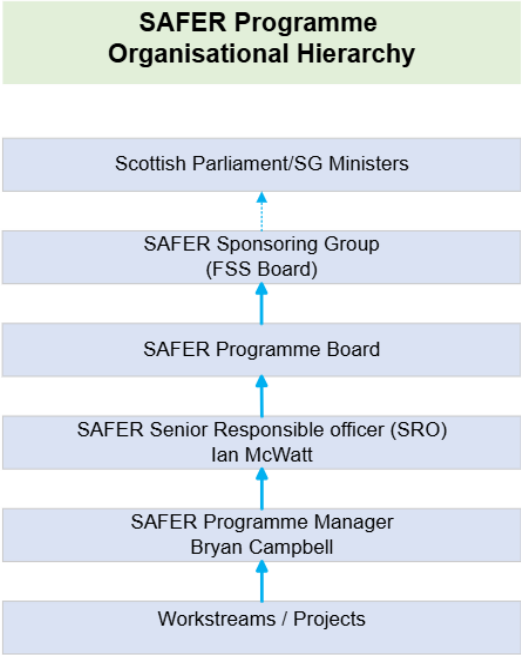
4 Discussion

4.1 SAFER is the FSS strategic response to the risks around the food law delivery model in Scotland and clearly supports Ministerial commitments to wider Public Service Reform. SAFER proposes a programme of reform to secure improved public health outcomes through model redesign, developing and embracing new and more efficient ways of working, better use of data and digital technologies, and ensuring financial sustainability.

4.2 Evidence gathered by FSS and the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland (SOCOEHS) continues to highlight that LA official control delivery is under pressure, with a year-on-year shortfall in Authorised Officer numbers. This has resulted in some LAs being unable to deliver all food law activities required under the Food Law Code of Practice. In addition, the current framework is outdated and requires modernisation to embed digitalisation and data-led efficiencies. Action to address the future of food law delivery is therefore required urgently.

4.3 The inaugural programme board meeting is scheduled to take place on 7 October 2025. Membership consists of representatives from FSS, Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, SOCOEHS, Food Standards Agency, and strategic leaders from across the Food industry.

4.4 Detailed below is an overview of the proposed organisational governance structure for the SAFER programme.



July 2025

4.5 As part of this governance structure, it is proposed that the FSS Board undertake the role of Programme Sponsorship Group. The role of this group is to provide strategic direction and oversight and to ensure the SAFER programme aligns with FSS goals and objectives. FSS Board will have a clear interest with the SAFER Programme, particularly around any significant structural, policy, or organisational decisions or changes that may impact the constitution or construct of FSS.

4.6 As the Sponsorship Group, FSS Board's role is to provide strategic direction, ensure alignment with FSS's statutory objectives, and hold the Programme Board to account for delivery. The Programme Board remains the primary decision-making forum for programme scope, priorities, and delivery within the agreed mandate. Engagement with the Board should therefore focus on matters that are strategic, high-impact, or outside the Programme Board's delegated authority, such as changes that affect FSS's statutory remit, organisational structure, or financial model. In practice, this means the Programme Board will consider and agree proposals first and only escalate recommendations to the FSS Board for endorsement or approval where required. Effective engagement will include regular reporting, early visibility of emerging strategic issues, and opportunities for the Board to shape direction without duplicating the SAFER Programme Board's role.

4.7 The Scottish Parliament and Scottish Ministers are also listed in the organisational hierarchy, as it is anticipated they may have a role, especially if any outcomes of the programme trigger the need for legislative change.

4.8 A key outcome from the 7 October Programme Board meeting will be agreement and approval of the scope and purpose of the programme. A new vision statement and objectives for SAFER have therefore been drafted. These are detailed below:

#### **(Draft) Vision Statement**

***To reform and modernise the delivery of food law in Scotland to ensure safe food for consumers by:***

- Creating a delivery system that is sustainably resourced.***
- Being intelligence-led, risk-focused and assurance-driven.***
- Harnessing data and digital technologies to improve compliance.***
- Driving efficiency and effectiveness across the system.***

#### **(Draft) Objectives:**

- 1.Review and reform the food law delivery model for Scotland.**
- 2. Consider options to sustainably fund delivery of official controls and develop a transparent and proportionate cost recovery system.**
- 3. Explore innovative regulatory strategies for reform, focused on risk, assurance and increased efficiency.**

**4. Utilise new technologies to support food safety professionals, incentivise business compliance and enhance consumer protection.**

## **5 SAFER update position and activity underway**

The Board will recall the decision to separate out SAFER programme activities from the Local Authority Delivery Division (LADD) BAU activity in July 2025. Since the last SAFER Programme Board update, work has progressed at pace with significant momentum across key areas of the programme. This has included:

- A review of the purpose and scope of the programme, resulting in a revised draft vision statement and objectives for 2025-29. (Detailed in section 4.7)
- Appointment of Programme Board membership.
- Creation of governance and organisational structures.
- Development of the programme's critical path, work stream and project priorities.
- Initiation of recruitment and transfer of key personnel from LADD to the SAFER programme.
- Development of a strategic communications and stakeholder engagement plan.
- Completion of the joint FSS and SG Digital CivTech proof-of-concept phase, developing a prototype to support proposals for a food business registration and charging system. The Programme Board will now consider advancing to phase 2, focusing on data and delivery options, using a co-design approach with industry and stakeholders.
- Establishment of key stakeholder codesign approaches, including initial engagement with Scotland Food and Drink on the establishment of a industry engagement subgroup that will focus on the codesign aspects of the programme.
- Development of a Voluntary Third Party Assurance project plan, including a proof-of-concept phase focused on governance, frameworks, and standards. This will be followed by a small, targeted pilot phase to test and refine the approach.

## **6 Identification of risks and issues**

6.1 Programme risks continue to surround our ability to spend, recruit personnel and complete procurement within this financial year and progress continues to be made at pace in this area with the appointment of staff on an FTA basis. As the Programme develops, so too will the risk profile especially around change management and stakeholder engagement, and consideration will be given to this as part of team requirements development.

## 7 Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty

7.1 There are no specific issues relevant to this paper as it is an overview of the approach to the initiation of the SAFER Programme Board and associated governance. The outputs from the Programme will clearly have considerations in this area and will form the part of specific workstream and project planning activity.

## 8 Consumer Duty

8.1 The SAFER programme proposes reform to the way in which food official controls are delivered in Scotland which clearly intersects with our consumer duty. Future Programme outputs and Board discussions will therefore need to take this into account.

## 9 Conclusion/Recommendations

9.1 SAFER is a complex strategic priority that presents a significant commitment for the wider FSS and is reflective of the scale of the risks and issues we are aiming to mitigate. As previously highlighted, given the scale of this reform there is a commitment, to effective future engagement and communication with the Board, SG, Ministers and stakeholders.

9.2 The Board is asked to:

- **Discuss and provide a view** on the role and interactions of the FSS Board with the newly formed SAFER Programme Board, and the proposed governance arrangements.
- **Agree** to the proposal for the FSS Board to be the sponsorship group as part of SAFER programme organisational hierarchy.

Please direct queries to:  
Ian McWatt Deputy Chief Executive

Date: 17 September 2025

Annex A - SAFER Programme Board Update Paper. 18 June 2025



FSS Board - SAFER  
update - 18 June 2025