

HM Government

Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Note of meeting with IFST

Location: IFST, Hammersmith

Date: 28th February 2014

Attendees:

Jon Poole (JP) - Chief Executive - Institute for Food Science and Technology

Michael Walker (MW) – Subject Matter Expert - Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Rebecca Kenner (RK) – Assistant Secretary - Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

1. Introduction

MW gave an overview of the work of the Review, including current situation for official food control laboratories and the process of developing recommendations. It's the view of the Review that there needs to be a mix of private and public sector official food control laboratories; the public sector laboratory service as a "national asset" to provide longevity, sustainability and strategic direction.

The Review team has taken the view, in the interim report, that a similar exercise to that currently being taken in Scotland needs to take place in England e.g. a systematic consideration of each of the remaining labs and how a process of bringing them together might work and the possible barriers that may prevent this from happening.

JP explained that the IFST Board are keen to help in this area, but wanted to know whether they were going to play a broker role or an oversight role.

2. Recommendations made in the interim report

MW explained the rationale to making this recommendation. MW feels that for Local Authority owned labs there would be substantial benefits to be gained from bringing together equipment, expertise etc., along with the overall operation being more resilient. MW explained that the interim report suggested that a modelling exercise should be initiated, collecting information about the sampling going on at the moment and projecting them to model future sampling so those involved can consider what service is needed in order to meet that demand.

MW feels that a public sector laboratory service would need to have combination of commoditised analysis for efficiency, along with a very high level of scientific knowledge and experience to interpret and troubleshoot any issues. At the moment, it's not clear whether there will be agreement to provide the funding to undertake this project. MW also

mentioned that the Review has been consulting with Public Health England, which has already undertaken their own laboratory rationalisation process.

3. IFST's role

JP explained what he felt IFST's role could be, as a professional body, including the potential limitations. For example, IFST could comment on the current resources available and where they think there are current gaps and what is missing, having looked at an analysis of what is available and what is needed. However, the IFST are not in a position to make political statement relating to actions that should be taken by whom.

JP asked what MW felt that role would that look like, and what would be their involvement, as there are likely to be cost and resource implications, which they would need to consider.

MW envisages that IFST could consider and advocate the benefits of a modernised strategic public sector lab organisation making it sustainable for the future.

MW explained that, if progress begins to take shape in this area, MW would like IFST to facilitate an open meeting of stakeholders, where they all commit to the project in public forum. Ideally this could take place at a similar time to the publication of the final report, as there needs to be a method to maintain momentum for the final recommendations.

4. Discussion

JP explained that, of those outlined, the easiest step would be for the IFST to publish some sort of editorial about the landscape at the moment. JP felt that the stakeholder meeting should not take place until we reach a point where direction of progress has been agreed. JP explained he will need to present this proposition to the Board and get their agreement before making any commitments. MW offered to come and talk to the Board, although the next meeting is not until April 8th, so will need to get some information to the Board before then.

ACTION: MW to put a paragraph together on his thoughts and vision for the project, to send to JP for him to present to the Board.

MW explained that the Scottish project has been in place for some time, so he doesn't see anything advanced being in place by June, but MW wants to be in a position where we have teased out the issues and have brought together a coalition of all those who would be interested in the project. The role of IFST will really depend on the views of whoever takes this forward, they may want IFST involvement, or they may not, but MW would be keen to emphasise [to whoever takes on this work] the IFST's ability to facilitate discussion, from an independent viewpoint (or their own viewpoint), as a professional, scientific body.

ACTION: Review Secretariat to clarify the use of "broker" – so it's more facilitator – in the final report, along with examples of what could be done and possible actions.

1 March 2014