

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

PAPER NSMC HEFS 1 (13) JC

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

HEALTH & FOOD SAFETY MEETING

**NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES,
ARMAGH**

18 OCTOBER 2013

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The sixteenth North South Ministerial Council Health and Food Safety meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh on 18 October 2013. The meeting was attended by James Reilly TD, Minister for Health, Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Michelle O'Neill MLA, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Minister Reilly chaired the meeting.

FOOD SAFETY PROMOTION BOARD (*safefood*)

2. The Council received a presentation on the work of **safefood** from the CEO, Martin Higgins. The presentation highlighted the completion of the Infectious Intestinal Disease (IID) Telephone Survey and its publication which allows for a comparison between disease incidence in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and facilitates an all-island estimate of the burden of the disease. The survey revealed that the estimated rate of IID in Ireland is similar to the rate in Northern Ireland and the UK, as a whole. The CEO's report also included findings of research exploring the knowledge, attitude and skills of primary care health professionals on the island of Ireland towards weight management. The

success of the All-island Obesity Action Forum workshop and meetings which focussed on childhood obesity was referred to in the presentation as was the commencement of a new communication campaign on childhood obesity. The new campaign, which will be launched on the 21st October, will focus on helping parents tackle the everyday habits that are associated with excess weight in childhood and to maintain awareness of the health challenges posed by excess weight. One in four children starting school are overweight or obese and the campaign is **safefood's** contribution to tackling the problem.

Community Food Safety Initiatives

3. Ministers welcomed a presentation from Ms Anne Walsh of the East Belfast Mission on the practical work undertaken by the Mission in tackling health inequalities, access to healthy and nutritious diet and healthy eating education programmes for those in poorer circumstances. The presentation focussed on the positive impacts of the funding provided by **safefood** over the period 2011-2013.

2012 Annual Report and Accounts and Business Plan 2013

4. Ministers reviewed progress on the development of the **safefood** Business Plan and Budget 2013 and the delivery of efficiency savings. The Council also received an update on the **safefood** 2012 Annual Report and Accounts, which have now been signed off by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland and the Irish Comptroller and Auditor General.

safefood Corporate Plan 2014-2016 & Business Plan 2014

5. Ministers were updated on the development of **safefood's** draft 2014-16 Corporate Plan and draft Business Plan 2014. The key priority for the Corporate Plan 2014-2016 is centred on enhancing the relationship with and relevance of **safefood** for the island of Ireland consumer. The strategic intent is to maintain consumer confidence in the food supply chain, supported by relevant robust research and targeted communication and education initiatives, encouraging ultimately safer and healthier food choices.
6. A particular priority will be to help communities at disadvantage, particular those in or at risk of food poverty or deprivation, by continuing the development of the Community Food Initiatives programme, which supports food safety and nutrition programmes in disadvantaged areas.
7. There will also be an emphasis on the environment in which food is sold in order to influence choices made in the interests of food safety and healthy eating by working with the broader food industry and developing research programmes on the psychology of consumer choice.
8. The 2014 Business Plan will identify the specific deliverables required in the first year of the corporate Plan 2014-2016.

9. In 2014 **safefood** will continue the delivery of the three year childhood obesity campaign in partnership with key agencies on the island of Ireland.
10. A key priority for 2014 will be the development of the website and other digital/social media channels as access points and information channels for all stakeholders.

Scientific Advisory Committee

11. The Council approved the appointment of Dr Christine Domegan as a new member of **safefood's** Scientific Advisory Committee, the reappointment of Mr Robert Huey as Vice-Chair and the reappointment of six existing members of **safefood's** Scientific Advisory Committee.

Health Promotion

12. The Council recognised the progress made on strategies to prevent the harm related to alcohol misuse in both jurisdictions including close co-operation on the North/South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group and on awarding a joint contract to conduct research/Health Impact Assessment on minimum unit pricing. It is anticipated that the research will be available in early 2014.
13. Ministers commended the progress made on strategies and initiatives to prevent overweight and obesity in both jurisdictions, including the Northern Ireland Obesity Prevention Framework, Caloriewise and Front of Pack labelling and similar measures in Ireland under the aegis of the Special Action Group on Obesity and the agreement at EU level for an Action Plan on Childhood Obesity.
14. Ministers welcomed the launch on 3 October of the Report of the Tobacco Policy Review Group titled Tobacco Free Ireland and agreed that an All Island Tobacco Conference should be held in November 2013.
15. The Council welcomed the joint launches of the All-Island "Young Men and Suicide Project report in January 2013.
16. Ministers were also briefed on the new Northern Ireland Breastfeeding Strategy. The strategy includes actions for partnership working with Ireland including exploring opportunities for all island research and campaigns to raise awareness and promote public acceptance of breastfeeding, particularly in public.

Cancer and Health Research Co-Operation

17. The Council received an update on the business planning process for the establishment of a new radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin. This is progressing on time with the construction due to commence in the Spring of 2014 and completion scheduled for the summer of 2016. Officials from both jurisdictions have developed an agreed text for a Memorandum of Understanding on the

project and continue to work together to ensure the delivery of a service level agreement for the operation of the unit.

18. Ministers were informed that the Health Service Executive, Health and Social Care Board and the Western Trust have intensified discussions on service delivery costs for patients from the Irish healthcare system as there is an urgency to reach agreement on the Service Level Agreement in order to deliver the project within the required timeframe.
19. Ministers acknowledged continued progress through the work of the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium.
20. The Council acknowledged the continuing success of the US-Ireland R&D Partnership and plans to raise awareness internationally of the value it adds to excellent research focussing on improving healthcare, population health and economic development.

Child Protection

21. The Council welcomed the success of the All-Island Child Protection conference held in May 2013 which was attended by over 250 delegates and facilitated practitioners, managers, policy makers and legislators from both jurisdictions to share practice knowledge, research, experience and learning in relation to safeguarding and child protection practice.
22. Ministers reviewed the continuing progress with the agreed work programme on child protection and agreed that further progress on work on the child protection programme will be reported at future NSMC meetings.

EU Matters

23. Ministers acknowledged the North/South engagement during Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the progress made during the course of the Presidency in the area of health including:
 - agreement of a general approach on a revised draft EU Tobacco Directive; and
 - First Reading Agreement being reached with the European Parliament on a Decision on Serious Cross Border Threats to Health.

Date of Next Meeting

24. The Council agreed that the next NSMC Health and Food Safety meeting will be held in April 2014.

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