

RPC meeting 13 November 2023 - minutes	
Attendees	
The Committee Chair: Stephen Gibson Jonathan Cave Daniel Dalton Stephen Giffords Hilary Jennings John Longworth Andrew Williams-Fry	RPC Secretariat Stuart Sarson – Head of Secretariat Smarter Regulation Directorate Chris Carr Better Regulation Executive Head of BR Frameworks Team National Farmers Union Nick von Westenholz - Director, Trade and Business Strategy Food and Drinks Federation Kate Halliwell - Chief Scientific Officer Jim Bligh - Corporate Affairs Director

A. Minutes of committee meeting 11 September 2023 and matters arising

1. The **minutes of the 11 September meeting were agreed** [and are now available on the RPC website].
2. **Register of interests:** committee members confirmed the accuracy of their entries in the RPC register of interests [available on the RPC website]. Members were reminded of the importance of ensuring that they are clear, when making any public personal statements, that they are not speaking on behalf of the RPC.
3. **Gifts and hospitality register:** committee members confirmed the accuracy of their entries in the gifts and hospitality register [available on the RPC and DBT websites].

B. Smarter Regulation Directorate (SRD) and Better Regulation Executive (BRE) update

SRD update

4. Chris Carr reported that the Better Regulation Executive and the Brexit Opportunities Unit have now merged, to become the Smarter Regulation Directorate, running the Smarter Regulation Programme.

BRE update:

Framework

5. The Head of the Frameworks Team gave an update on the Better Regulation Framework (BRF). He said that the revised BRF has been published in September. Initial stakeholder feedback on launch has been good.

Recruitment

6. Interviews of new members have now been completed; the final decision on these appointments will need approval by ministers.

RPC governance review

7. An RPC governance review will be undertaken shortly. It has been delayed slightly, pending implementation of the revised framework. The review will seek feedback from the committee and its external stakeholders. The committee will be provided with an opportunity to comment on the framework documents before they are finalised. It is anticipated that the review will be completed in about three months.

Revised framework launch event

8. A ministerial launch event for the revised BRF is planned for 24 January.

C. External presentation: National Farmers Union (NFU)

18. The NFU made the following comments:

- Brexit continues to have an impact on farming – the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), new independent trade policy, and changes to immigration policy are all key. Energy prices are the biggest single factor currently; huge input cost increases are not being met by revenue in some sectors.
- Volatility and uncertainty are present as well – this is reflected in NFU’s members’ 12-month and 3-years outlooks in their NFU confidence surveys. Farm payments are now being lowered as part of CAP changes; new schemes (no longer area-based formally) are still not all accessible.
- NFU recognises the need for regulation but wants the lightest-touch approach through the BRF – regulation is often seen as being burdensome and badly designed. NFU also believes that better (and ongoing) IAs on FTAs are needed; it is still very hard to see the impact of e.g. preferential access.
- NFU queried where government is going to gain evidence, if it is not actively monitoring and evaluating regulation.

D. Engagement updates

19. A list of engagements in which the chair and committee members had participated had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Stephen Gibson, Jonathan Cave and Andrew Williams-Fry gave an outline of their engagements.

E. External presentation: Food and Drinks Federation (FDF)

20. Kate Halliwell and James Bligh provided an overview of the remit of the FDF in support of the food and drink manufacturing sector, in which over 450,000 people are employed.
21. FDF has five pillars for its work – growing a resilient food industry; building a sustainable food system; its people; delivering a trusted food system; and supporting balanced diets. They cover ‘everything’ in the chain between farmers and consumers. There has been a huge impact of commodity price increases in recent years and margins have fallen to unsustainable levels.
22. The food regulatory landscape is complex; it would be even more so if the UK nations exercised their right to do things differently (FDF supports a single UK market). The FDF noted that it still tracks EU rules.
23. FDF has been heavily involved in Defra’s ‘Extended Producer Responsibility’ and ‘Deposit Return Scheme’ work, saying that costs have been wrong/lagging. FDF believes that this needs new infrastructure to ensure efficiency, but delays have stymied creation of a circular economy. FDF

stated that this can/should be industry-led as in other countries – it could, for example, be run by local authorities but paid for by industry.

24. FDF thinks immigration rules need amending to fit where labour demand is actually (so UK can produce more/import less food).