

**TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL
CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD AT
ELIZABETH HOUSE, 116 HOLYWOOD ROAD, BELFAST, BT4 1NY, ON
WEDNESDAY 17 AUGUST 2011 AT 10.30 A.M.**

236/1 ATTENDANCE

Mr Rick Hill	Chairperson
Mr Colm Bradley	
Mr Kit Chivers	
Mrs Anne Diamond	
Mr Michael Donnelly	
Mrs Deirdre Fitzpatrick	
Mrs Jill Gillespie	
Mr Bob McCann	
Dr Margaret Ward	
Mr Lee Wilson	
Mrs Sarah Havlin	

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Antoinette McKeown	Chief Executive
Ms Elaine Topping	Director
Mrs Loretta Daly	Head of Consumer Support
Mrs Carol Edwards	Head of Education
Mrs Kathy Graham	Head of Water
Mrs Keelin Kelly	Head of Communications
Mr Scott Kennerley	Head of Transport
Ms Donna Magee	Head of Finance and HR
Mrs Julie McCurley	Head of Money Affairs

APOLOGIES

Mrs Siubhan Grant	Deputy Chair
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell	Director

236/2 CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

236/2.1 Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The Chairperson advised members that any conflict of interest relating to agenda items should be recorded at the beginning of Council meetings. Should a member have a conflict of interest they should leave the meeting at that particular agenda item and the minutes would reflect this.

He explained that the Chairperson would have the ability to define a conflict of interest and request members' compliance if this arose.

The Chairperson informed members that given his position as Chair of Consumer Focus Post NI he would leave the meeting during any discussions.

No other members declared a conflict of interest on any agenda item.

236/2.2 Members were advised that payroll related agenda items would be dealt with in closed session.

Payroll Update

The Chief Executive updated members in relation to the business case being submitted to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and subsequently the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for approval, to provide for corrective action in relation to the historical irregular payment and the going forward position.

The associated risks and mitigating action were outlined by the Chief Executive. Members noted the work completed to date and agreed that the risk was being effectively managed.

236/2.3 Board and Committee Effectiveness and Structure Review

The Chairperson advised that a budget had been secured and that we would now move quickly to secure assistance with the process.

STAFF JOINED THE MEETING

236/2.4 Draft Corporate Plan and Equality Scheme

The Director confirmed that the consultation period had now ended and there had only been a few minor amendments to the draft corporate plan.

It was noted that a detailed response to the equality scheme had been submitted by Disability Action and staff were currently working through this but there were no issues that could not be addressed and they had no comments on the Corporate Plan.

Next steps actions were outlined in relation to Ministerial and ETI Committee approvals in advance of publication.

235/2.5 Any other Chair's Business

The Chairperson provided an update on the applications for Board members and confirmed that there had been a large range of applications representing a good geographical spread.

The Chairperson also welcomed Keelin Kelly who had returned from maternity leave and Julie McCurley who had been appointed to the position of Head of Money Affairs.

235/3 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The minutes of the two hundred and thirty-fifth meeting which had been circulated, were agreed and signed.

235/4 **MATTERS ARISING**

Current Remit/New Powers

At the previous meeting the Chief Executive confirmed that she wished to expand the original scope of the work planned to review the functions and powers of the Council. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Consumer Council's legal advisor was currently investigating the transport duties and powers. The Senior management team would then discuss how best to conduct a wider review/gap analysis.

Year End Accounts

It was confirmed that the year end accounts had been laid before the Assembly on 2 July 2011.

All other Matters Arising were main agenda items or would be covered in strategic updates.

236/5 **ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT ON SECTION 75 OF THE NI ACT 1998 AND SECTION 49A OF THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ORDER (DDO) 2001**

An overview was provided on the Consumer Council's annual progress report on Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and Section 49A of the DDO 2006.

Members discussed and approved the report.

236/6 **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

235/6.1 Quarter 1 Management Accounts 2011 – 2012

An overview was provided of the revised forecast which included agreed funding of £65,000 from the Department for Regional Development (DRD).

Members were advised of the funding shortfall and the range of options taken to make up this shortfall through diverting salary savings and removing or combining projects on the Operational Plan for 2011-2012.

 *Redacted under Freedom of Information Act Section 36: Effective conduct of public affairs.*

Members approved the quarter 1 management accounts.

235/6.2 Risk Register Reporting

Members noted that an active corporate risk register, supported by section risk registers, was in place and this was updated on an ongoing basis.

Members had previously discussed the key risks relating to payroll and funding. The funding risk was being managed however it remains at a high level on the risk register.

The June and August risk registers were being presented at the next Audit Committee meeting and would be on the agenda for September Council.

236/7 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS**

236/7.1 Revised Operating Plan 2011/2012

With a reduced budget available a priority matrix was applied to the draft operational plan to define key outputs and impacts. At the same time projects were reviewed adopting a programme approach to deliver efficiencies and to streamline existing work and activities.

Members discussed the conflicting arguments relating to air passenger duty (APD) and stressed the importance of providing clarity on this.

Members approved the operating plan taking into account the discussions on funding, associated risks and management of risks.

236/7.2 Performance Against Objectives to June 2011

The Director confirmed that there was potential to make an in year bid for some areas in transport for example as a lack of secured funding from DRD.

Members discussed the work on the cheque replacement programme. It was noted that whilst the industry decision had been taken there was still ongoing work in this area to manage the decline of cheques.

Members also discussed the importance of public transport and the Consumer Council's remit. The project on examining the barriers to public transport was also amber and a number of options were being explored to progress this work.

Members noted the progress made against objectives.

236/7.3 Strategic Updates

The Chief Executive updated members on the current consultation; the proposed way forward for postal services; transfer of powers from Consumer Focus Post NI; transfer of enquires from Consumer Direct . The Chief Executive advised that she would be meeting with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) in September.

The Consumer Landscape consultation response would be brought to September's meeting for approval.

Car Insurance

A confidential briefing was tabled on car insurance. It outlining a number of options that the Consumer Council could take to encourage a local focus on the high cost of insurance in Northern Ireland.

Members were advised that additional research was currently being completed which would assist in determining the final approach to take on this matter.

The options were discussed and members agreed to delegate the decision on how to progress this matter to the Chief Executive and the Chairperson and requested that members were advised of the decision.

236/8 **POLICY/STRATEGY**

Complaints Report Quarter One 2011 - 2012

Members noted that financial outcomes for consumers totalled £45K for quarter one.

Members noted the complaints report.

236/9 **GROUP MINUTES**

236/9.1 Business Committee

The Minutes of the seventh meeting which had been circulated, were agreed by the members who had been present at the meeting. Council noted the Minutes.

236/9.2 Utilities and Transport Policy Committee

The Minutes of the seventh meeting which had been circulated, were agreed by the members who had been present at the meeting. Council noted the Minutes.

236/9.3 Audit Committee

The Minutes of the fifty-fifth meeting which had been circulated, were agreed by the members who had been present at the meeting. Council noted the Minutes.

236/10 **OTHER REPORTS**

None to report.

236/11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 21 September 2011 at 10.30 a.m.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 12.20 p.m.

Signed _____

Date _____