

**TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY- SECOND MEETING OF THE GENERAL CONSUMER
COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD AT
ELIZABETH HOUSE, 116 HOLYWOOD ROAD, BELFAST, BT4 1NY, ON THURSDAY
13 SEPTEMBER 2012 AT 10.30 A.M.**

242/1

ATTENDANCE

Mr Rick Hill Chairperson
Mr David Beattie
Mr Kit Chivers
Mrs Deirdre Fitzpatrick
Mrs Jill Gillespie
Mrs Mandy Patrick
Mr Sam Snodden
Dr Margaret Ward
Mr Lee Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Antoinette McKeown Chief Executive
Ms Donna Magee Head of Finance and HR (for part of the
meeting)
Ms Elaine Topping Director of Corporate & Consumer Services
Mrs Rhonda Allen Personal Assistant

APOLOGIES

Mr Colm Bradley
Mrs Sarah Havlin
Mr David Galloway
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell Director of Policy and Consumer Education

242/2

CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

Members met in closed session.

Staff joined the meeting

242/2.1 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 (CFPNI) he would leave the meeting during any discussions in relation to the proposed transfer of CFPNI to the Council.

David Beattie advised that as an employee of Ulster Bank he would leave the meeting if there were any discussions in relation to the Bank.

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

242/2.2 Appointment to Audit Committee

The Chairperson proposed that Lee Wilson be appointed as a member of the Audit Committee.

Lee Wilson left the meeting

Members approved the appointment of Lee Wilson to the Audit Committee.

Lee Wilson rejoined the meeting

242/2.3 Board and Committee Effectiveness and Structure Review

The Chairperson had written to Business Consultancy Service to outline the report findings and recommendations that the Board agreed with or did not accept. Members had been circulated with a copy of the Board Implementation Group's actions and progress to date.

Given the imminent Departmental review of the Council's Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) and the effectiveness review aligned to it the Chairperson recommended that not all of the work on the Board and Committee effectiveness and structure review should be

taken forward until the Department had completed their work. Members agreed with the recommendation.

The timescale of the Department's work was not yet known. The Director advised that Finance Branch had started work on the practical areas of the MSFM.

242/2.4 Any Other Chair's Business

The Chairperson advised that he had withdrawn from attending Departmental Oversight and Liaison meetings and the Department had confirmed that this was appropriate given the meetings were for the designated Accounting Officer to report to the Department. The Department had advised that the Chairperson would meet with the Minister more frequently given his responsibility for governance and accountability.

242/3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the two hundred and forty first meeting which had been circulated, were agreed and signed.

242/4 MATTERS ARISING

242/4.1 Stakeholder Mapping

The Chief Executive reported that the paper due to come to the September meeting had been delayed due to the extent of work the Consumer Council does with stakeholders and the nature of this partnership work.

The paper would be available for discussion at the November Council meeting.

242/4.2 Members were advised of a member of staff's upcoming retirement. They were also advised that plans were being made to recruit a replacement but that a temporary appointment may be made pending a peer review of Communication and Education teams.

The matters arising were noted.

242/5 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

242/5.1 Quarter One Management Accounts 2012 – 2013

The quarter one position was an under spend of £34,000. This had since been re-profiled to address unsuccessful in-year bids in the June monitoring round totalling £45k. The additional £11k had been delivered through administrative savings achieved in July and August. Members noted the position at the end of August was a £1k overspend.

Members approved the quarter one accounts.

(Donna Magee left the meeting)

242/5.2 Fuel Poverty Coalition (FPC) Update

The Chief Executive provided members with background information on the FPC. The FPC had been established in November 2010 and formally launched at an event in the Ulster Hall, Belfast on 15 April 2011. The current membership stood at 150 and included local councils, MPs, MLAs, and voluntary and community organisations.

Since its creation the FPC had been jointly chaired by the Consumer Council (CCNI) and National Energy Action (NEA). CCNI and NEA, on behalf of the Coalition, had secured three year's funding from Atlantic Philanthropies totalling £105k specifically for programme work. As the lead applicant CCNI held and administered the funding.

Given the size of the FPC a Steering Group had been established to oversee the FPC's work. CCNI had recently strengthened the Steering Group with Chief Executives from City and Borough Councils and NILGA. The original Steering Group met on 23 August 2012 to review a range of issues. At this meeting members reached a consensus view that NEA, as an organisation with a sole remit in relation to fuel poverty, should be the lead organisation for the FPC and that NEA should also be the sole Chair of the FPC. CCNI had supported these decisions and would remain a committed and active member of the Steering Group.

CCNI, as the lead applicant and holder of the funding, was required by Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) to return the unspent funding for years one and two which totalled £55,117. Members noted that the FPC would now have to make representations to AP for the funding to be redistributed to the FPC via NEA.

The Chief Executive reported that CCNI's key priority in the current operating plan relating to fuel poverty would not change but the activities and measures had been revised to reflect the current situation. Members were also advised that as a priority, CCNI would still have a media presence on fuel poverty.

Members agreed that a statement should be issued, after the handover to NEA was complete and funds had been transferred back to Atlantic Philanthropies. This statement should outline clearly the reasons why CCNI was no longer co-chairing the Coalition and the legacy it had left i.e. a much stronger Steering Group and a commitment in the Programme for Government. Members noted that a joint letter from CCNI and NEA would be issued to all FPC members advising them of the change in roles.

As part of the key stakeholder mapping process the lessons learned from working with the FPC would be included.

Members agreed that CCNI's focus would now be on its whole energy remit and that the proposed revision to the operating plan had strengthened the work on fuel poverty.

Revisions to objective 4 of the 2012-2013 operating plan "fuel poverty" were approved. The revised plan would now go to the Department for their approval.

Members discussed the best way to monitor progress on the issue of fuel poverty and agreed that rather than set up a sub-group the issue would be monitored through the Performance Against Objectives Report.

242/5.3

Risk Register Quarter One 2012 -2013

The Risk Register for the first quarter had been presented to the Audit Committee at their September meeting.

The Audit Committee had reviewed the register in terms of the management system in place being appropriate and that the risks identified were being properly addressed.

The Director explained that the corporate residual risk assessment, relating to the securing of funding, remained High / Medium at the end of June given the uncertainties which remain in relation to future years funding. It was anticipated that the controls in place and planned actions would see this assessment move to High / Low in the second quarter but this was subject to successful outcomes in relation to planned work and communications.

Members approved the first quarter Risk Register.

242/5.4 Draft Risk Register to 31 August 2012

An updated draft Risk Register to the end of August was presented for noting. A full quarter two Risk Register would be presented at November Council.

Members noted the Risk Register to 31 August 2012.

242/6 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

242/6.1 Performance Against Objectives Quarter One 2012 - 2013

Members noted the report.

242/6.2 Managing Change in the Consumer Council

The paper circulated outlined the range of changes that had been ongoing within the Council during the last three years and provided a context for the forthcoming DETI review of effectiveness and efficiency.

Members noted the paper.

242/6.3 Annual Equality Return

The report circulated was a statutory requirement under Schedule 9 of the NI Act and reflected the progress within the Council's equality and good relations duties. The report had been approved this year by the Chairperson and Chief Executive and had been submitted to the Equality Commission for scrutiny. The Chairperson thanked the Director and Nora Quigley for their work in preparing an excellent, robust report.

In future years the return would be completed alongside the annual report and accounts which would allow the Board to discuss and approve before being submitting to the Equality Commission.

Members noted the annual equality return.

242/6.4 Strategic Updates

Members were updated on the DETI review of MSFM and effectiveness review; Office of Fair Trading (OFT) call for information on fuel prices; Ulster Bank; summer flooding; Competition Commission referral of Phoenix Natural Gas price control; Westminster cross party delegation on fuel duty increase; Common European sales law; and the laying of the Annual Report and Accounts.

David Beattie left the meeting for the Ulster Bank update.

It was agreed to keep the Board updated on the OFT call for information on fuel prices and the Competition Commission referral of Phoenix Natural Gas price control.

Members noted the strategic updates.

242/7 **POLICY/STRATEGY**

242/7.1 Complaints Report Quarter One 2012 – 2013

Members requested that when comparative figures were available for total complaints they should be included in the report.

Members also queried the disparity in numbers of complaints between different geographic areas. The Director advised that the reason for this was not known but that these areas would be specifically targeted through the Outreach Strategy.

Members noted the complaints report.

242/8 **COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

242/8.1 Audit Committee

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

242/8.2 Policy Position Record Year 1 April 2012 – 31 July 2012

The report provided an overview of all policy decisions agreed by Council and/or the Chief Executive year to date.

The report was noted.

242/8.3 DETI Oversight and Liaison Quarterly Meeting Minutes 4.4.12

The Minutes were noted.

242/9 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

242/9.1 Members were content with the conduct of the meeting and the content and quality of the papers provided.

242/9.2 Dates of 2013 Meetings

It was agreed that the Chief Executive would provide a schedule of dates for the 2013 meetings taking into account policy decisions to be made and accounting periods.

242/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Thursday 15 November 2012 at 10.30 a.m.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 12.55 p.m.

Signed _____

Date _____