

**TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY- FOURTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL
CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD AT
ELIZABETH HOUSE, 116 HOLYWOOD ROAD, BELFAST, BT4 1NY, ON
WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY 2013 AT 9.30 AM**

244/1

ATTENDANCE

Mr Rick Hill Chairperson
Mr David Beattie
Mr Kit Chivers
Mr David Galloway
Mrs Jill Gillespie
Mr Sam Snodden
Dr Margaret Ward
Mr Lee Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Antoinette McKeown Chief Executive
Ms Scott Kennerley Head of Transport (for part of the meeting)
Ms Donna Magee Head of Finance and HR (for part of the
meeting)
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell Director of Policy and Consumer Education
(for part of the meeting)
Ms Elaine Topping Director of Corporate and Consumer Services
(for part of the meeting)
Mrs Rhonda Allen Personal Assistant

APOLOGIES

Mr Colm Bradley
Mrs Deirdre Fitzpatrick
Mrs Sarah Havlin
Mrs Mandy Patrick

BY INVITATION

Mr Paul Simpson Consultant

244/2

DETI REVIEW OF CONSUMER COUNCIL (CCNI)

Section of minutes redacted – it is the view of the qualified person that section 35 exemption should be applied at this time (Effective Conduct of Public Affairs).

Staff joined the meeting

244/3

CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

244/3.1

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 Consumer Council.

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

244/3.2 Any Other Chair's Business

There was no further Chair's business.

244/4 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

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

244/5 **MATTERS ARISING**

The matters arising were all main agenda items.

244/6 **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

244/6.1 Risk Register Quarter Three 2012 -2013

The Risk Register for the third quarter had been presented to the Audit Committee at their January 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 Chair of Audit confirmed that they had been content with the Register.

The Director reported that the register had been updated to include a cross-cutting risk in relation to damage to the Consumer Council's reputation generally. She explained that this was not a new risk but was a reflection of the broad range of issues presenting a risk to reputation that were not fully captured elsewhere in the risk register. The issues included partnership working, clarity on the Consumer Council's role and having a robust evidence base to support decision-

making within the Consumer Council, all of which had been discussed recently at Council.

Members approved the third quarter Risk Register.

244/6.2 Quarter Three Management Accounts 2012 – 2013

The forecast under spend at the end of March 2013 was £3,597 and work was ongoing with the senior management team to manage this. The Head of Finance explained that the underspend was largely due to net movement in staff.

Members noted the potential risk of an underspend in relation to the 'regulation working better for consumers' project. There had been no responses to the tender despite it being issued on two occasions. Discussions to consider a direct award contract were underway with DETI.

In response to members' concerns about the large spend in quarter four the Chief Executive advised that with so little programme spend the delay of even one project could cause significant problems as had happened with the regulation project.

Members also noted that the total income figure had been reduced, primarily due to the removal of unspent Atlantic Philanthropies funding.

A member expressed the opinion that the quarterly management accounts reports should compare expenditure against the organisations current budget plan as opposed to the original budget plan approved by the Board which had subsequently changed due to all of the forecasted income not being received. They believed that this would provide a more meaningful analysis if the current financial position of the organisation as it would show actual variances more clearly. The Chairperson advised that this would be followed up with the member concerned.

Members discussed the headings used in the management accounts. It was agreed to insert footnotes to explain the terminology of headings used in the management accounts.

Members approved the quarter three accounts.

244/7 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

244/7.1 Draft Operating Plan 2013 – 2014

The draft plan had been drawn up taking account of the members planning day in December 2012 and reflected the new template which the Department had asked the Consumer Council and other NDPBs to follow. The two key pillars of cost of living and consumer

proficiency/empowerment would continue in 2013/2014 as evidenced by what consumers priorities were. Pages 10 and 12 of the draft plan had been updated and included a new corporate project relating to preparation for the transfer of postal services functions to the Consumer Council. The revised pages were tabled.

Members complimented the plan saying it was easily understood, clear, condensed and compartmentalised. They discussed how funding was progressed, the efficiency savings required and measurement of consumer confidence, rights and knowledge particularly in the current economic climate.

Members queried how the Consumer Council's operating plan linked to the Departments. The Chief Executive explained that the Consumer Council fed directly into the Department's operational plan and that the Consumer Council's Corporate Plan took account of the Department's objectives at a strategic level.

Members approved the draft operating plan subject to changes due to budget allocations and bids. The final plan would be brought to March Council for approval.

244/7.2 Draft Combined Forward Work Programme (FWP): Energy, Water, Transport

The Chief Executive advised that the FWP circulated for information was reflective of the 2013 – 2014 Operating Plan. As management had sought and received approval for the general "direction of travel" of the Operating Plan at an earlier stage this year, they had been able to improve the specificity of the proposed work to be taken forward in the FWP. Members noted that the FWP was out for public consultation and that the final post consultation plan would be presented to the Board.

244/7.3 Performance Against Objectives Quarter Three 2012 - 2013

The Chief Executive highlighted the one area showing as amber, 'regulation working better for consumers', which had as discussed previously been delayed due to procurement issues in terms of attracting bidders. The project brief had been reviewed and redefined to send back to the market. It was also being closely managed by the Project Manager and the Director of Policy.

Members noted the report.

244/7.4 Strategic Updates

244/7.4.1 Members had been circulated with a paper following the Chief Executive's visit to Brussels in November 2012.

- 244/7.4.2 Members were also updated on the visit from the Chair and Director of the Jersey Consumer Council, successful launch of “Hard to Stomach”, the new year diet campaign, implementation of the new maritime regulations, joint event held with the Department of Justice on how to use the small claims court and, evidence sessions with the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee and the Regional Development Committee.
- 244/7.4.3 Members queried if the Consumer Council had any advice for consumers in relation to gift vouchers from businesses in administration. The Chief Executive advised that key messages were currently being drawn up in relation to this issue for release to the media.

Members noted the strategic updates.

244/8 POLICY/STRATEGY

244/8.1 Public Transport: Consumer Council Position Paper

Paper CC13/8 gave a comprehensive brief of key transport areas relating to the design and delivery of public transport services and also some of the current challenges in relation to transparency of planning and information processes and decisions within Translink. It sets out the continuing issues that the Consumer Council strives to overcome in order to fulfil its representation role in terms of public transport and in particular getting access to the right information, at the right level and at the right time to accurately assess the benefit or otherwise to consumers. The work being taken forward reflected policy positions endorsed and adopted by Council and this paper was an opportunity to look at actions again in the context of the current operating environment, Translink’s draft Corporate Plan and reduced public expenditure.

Members discussed the revisions being made to the Public Transport Agency due to financial constraints. The Consumer Council had sought, and received, confirmation from the Department that all consumer aspects were unchanged and would still be included in the changed, more cost effective, Agency.

Members acknowledged the concerns the Consumer Council had in relation to passenger fare increases and agreed that more scrutiny of Translink’s efficiencies was required.

Members also agreed that the best way in which to monitor progress was through the Performance Against Objectives report.

Members endorsed the actions aligned to adopted policy positions.

244/8.2 Complaints Report Quarter Three 2012 – 2013

The Director of Corporate Services reported that during the period 1 October 2012 – 31 December 2012 the Consumer Council had received a total of 686 enquiries and complaints. Members noted that electricity contacts accounted for 57 per cent of all contacts received. Members also noted that in Quarter three the Consumer Council had achieved financial outcomes for consumers totalling £40,533.33.

Members were advised that meetings had taken place with Airtricity, the Utility Regulator and Trading Standards Service and the situation was being monitored closely at Director level. Monthly meetings had been offered to Airtricity and they were grateful for the Consumer Council's assistance and support whilst still recognising the Consumer Council's statutory role.

Members noted the complaints report.

244/9 **COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

244/9.1 Audit Committee

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

244/9.2 Policy Position Record Year 1 April 2012 – 31 December 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.

244/9.3 DETI Oversight and Liaison Quarterly Meeting Minutes 21.11.12

The Minutes were noted.

244/10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Review of the meeting

Members confirmed they were content with the conduct of the meeting and the content and quality of the papers provided. They mentioned in particular the quality of the transport paper.

The Chairperson confirmed that if Mr Simpson requested a further meeting he would contact members.

244/11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 13 March 2013 at 10.30 a.m.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 12.45 p.m.

Signed _____

Date _____