TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY FIFTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD AT THE CONSUMER COUNCIL, SEATEM HOUSE, 28 – 32 ALFRED STREET, BELFAST, BT2 8EN, ON TUESDAY 27 MARCH 2018.

285/1 ATTENDANCE
Ms Sheila McClelland Chair
Mr Mick McAteer Deputy Chair
Dr Sinead Furey
Mrs Mary Woods
Ms Noyona Chundur
Mr Sam Snodden
Mr David Galloway

IN ATTENDANCE
Mr John French Chief Executive (Except agenda item 285/9.1)
Mrs Sinead Dynan Director of Regulated Industries (Except agenda item 285/9.1)
Dr Catriona MacArthur Director of Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection (Except agenda item 285/9.1)
Miss Debbie Newberry Quality Assurance and Performance Planner (Agenda item 285/6.3)
Ms Joanne Akkaya Accounts Assistant (Agenda items 285/7.1 and 285/7.2)
Mr Richard Williams Head of Energy (Agenda items 285/8.1 – 285/8.2)
Mr Scott Kennerley Head of Transport (Agenda items 285/8.1 – 285/8.5)
Miss Kellin McCloskey Head of Post (Agenda items 285/8.1 – 285/8.5)
Mr Graham Smith Head of Energy (Agenda items 285/8.1 – 285/8.5)
Mrs Fiona Lavery Personal Assistant (Except agenda item 285/9.1)
285/2  DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

She explained the Chair would have the ability to define a conflict of interest and requested Board Members’ compliance if this arose.

No Board Members declared a conflict of interest on any agenda item.

285/3  MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the two hundred and eighty fourth meeting, which had been circulated, were agreed as a true and correct record.

The Minutes were agreed and signed.

285/4  MATTERS ARISING

The Chief Executive updated Board Members on the matters arising from the previous minutes, and in particular progression on the Business Cases.

He informed them that the Water Business Case had received approval from the Department for Infrastructure. He also stated that the Postal Services Business Case was awaiting Ministerial approval from BEIS; that approval for the Energy Business Case was still pending from the
Department for the Economy; and that engagement was still ongoing with the relevant departments for Transport funding.

The Chief Executive also informed Board Members that the Financial Conduct Authority had agreed another Secondment to The Consumer Council for 18 months.

The Matters Arising were noted.

285/5  **CHAIRPERSON’S BUSINESS**

285/5.1  **Review of Brexit Negotiations**

The Chief Executive informed Board Members that he had met with The Rt. Hon. The Lord Whitty, to discuss Brexit issues.

The Chief Executive also informed Board Members that he would be meeting with the Retail Consortium to discuss Brexit issues.

After discussion, it was agreed to convene to discuss the possible risks that might affect consumers following Brexit.

285/5.2  **Any Other Chair’s Business**

285/5.2.1  The Chair stated that the recruitment competition for new Board Members was now complete and that fourteen names had been taken forward for a final decision on the appointments.

285/5.2.2  **Open Meeting**

Following a request from Noyona Chundur, the Chair suggested that the next Board Meeting be open to allow spectators to observe proceedings of the meeting.

It was agreed that the next Board Meeting would be open for observers to attend.

There was no other Chair’s business.
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BUSINESS**

285/6.1 The Chief Executive’s Report

The Director of Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection briefed Board Members on issues surrounding Communications, Consumer Insight, and Consumer Empowerment and Protection.

The Director of Regulated Industries briefed Board Members on issues surrounding Energy, Postal Services, Transport, Water and Sewerage and GDPR.

After discussion on the Water and Sewerage section of the report, it was agreed to check the allocation of budget awarded to NI Water.

Following discussion, it was agreed that Noyona Chundur would share useful links with staff on GDPR. It was also agreed that information should be provided to Consumers on what they should be aware of following the introduction of GDPR.

Board Members noted the Chief Executive’s Report.

285/6.2 Forward Work Programme 2018-19 Responses

The Chief Executive presented responses to Board Members on the Forward Work Programme 2018-19 consultation which closed on 9 February 2018.

The Forward Work Programme 2018-19 responses were approved.

285/6.3 IiP Award

The Quality Assurance and Performance Planner informed Board Members that The Consumer Council had been awarded Silver Accreditation on the sixth generation Investor in People Award in February 2018 and she highlighted the areas that were assessed and the outcomes of the assessment for Board Members’ information.
After discussion, Board Members congratulated staff on the excellent result.

285/6.4 HM Treasury

The Chief Executive reminded Board Members of the proposed HM Treasury Illegal Money Lending Project which was originally presented and proposed at the May 2016 Board Meeting, and confirmed that notification had been received that the proposal had been successful.

After discussion, Board Members noted the paper and agreed that a meeting with Peter Sheridan of Co-operation Ireland should be convened.

285/6.5 Any Other Chief Executive’s Business

There was no other Chief Executive’s Business.

285/7 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

285/7.1 Management Accounts for the month ending 31 January 2018

Board Members approved the Management Accounts for the month ending 31 January 2018.

285/7.2 Management Accounts for the month ending 28 February 2018

The Accounts Assistant presented the Management Accounts for the month ending 28 February 2018 and highlighted the key issues arising.

After discussion, Board Members approved the Management Accounts for the month ending 28 February 2017.
The Head of Water presented the reviewed NI Water tariffs and charging policies to Board Members, and explained that when NI Water reviews the tariffs, they then submit them to The Consumer Council for comment, and are then passed to the Utility Regulator for approval.

He stated that through meetings and correspondence, The Consumer Council made representations to NI Water on the proposed tariffs and the charging policies used for their implementation.

Board Members noted the papers and were pleased with the impact that The Consumer Council’s input to the process of considering the review had had.

The Head of Energy presented the natural gas regulated tariff review to Board Members.

He stated that both SSE Airtricity and Firmus Energy had announced increases for their domestic natural gas tariffs following consultation with The Consumer Council, The Department for the Economy and approval from the Utility Regulator.

He informed Board Members that during the consultation, The Consumer Council had sought clarity from the suppliers and the Utility Regulator on the reason for this increase.

Board Members noted the report and acknowledged The Consumer Council’s input into the review.

The Head of Transport informed Board Members that a request had been submitted to the Competitions and Market Authority (CMA) for
a review of the NI Ferry Market, to consider whether it was working in the interest of consumers in Northern Ireland. He presented CMA’s response which outlined its reasons for not taking forward a market study into this issue.

Members noted the CMA Response to the Consumer Council request for a review of the NI Ferry Market and it was agreed that an information resource on ferry prices should be made available to consumers via The Consumer Council’s website.

285/8.4 Passenger Charter Results

The Head of Transport presented the PwC Passenger Charter results for the last two years to Board Members and highlighted The Consumer Council input into these results.

He presented bi-annual statistics since spring 2013 to autumn 2017 and stated that there had been significant improvements in passengers’ perceptions on areas such as punctuality and value for money which had been identified as key factors for NI Consumers.

Board Members noted this presentation.

285/8.5 Consumer Parliament

A briefing was presented on the Consumer Parliament event which had taken place on 23 March 2018 in the Guildhall, Londonderry.

Although the attendance was considered to be reduced from the first Consumer Parliament in 2017, the level of debate and interaction with the audience was considered extremely positive and an improvement on the previous event.

The Chair congratulated the facilitators for the brilliant job they did at the Consumer Parliament event.

Board Members concurred with this remark and also mentioned the background administration and organising that was carried out to make the event such a success.
The Head of Sections informed Board Members on the information that they had taken from consumers at the event and how it would benefit the approach to their work programmes.

Mick McAteer let the meeting at 1.20pm.

285/9  ANY OTHER BUSINESS

285/9.1  Review of the Meeting

Officers left the meeting at this point.

The Board Members remaining stated that they were impressed with the presentation of information both on the papers and also through the verbal briefing provided in the meeting.

Some long standing Members of the Board commented positively on the significant improvements that they had witnessed in professionalism, collegiality, quality of papers, evidence and output, and the relationship with the Board.

Officers returned to the meeting at this point.

285/10  DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 15 May 2018 at 10am in Seatem House, Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8EN.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 1.25pm

Signed _______________________

Date ________________________