**THREE HUNDRED AND SECOND MEETING OF THE GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD WITH ZOOM TELECONFERENCE**

**ON FRIDAY 22 MAY 2020 AT 10.00AM.**

**302/1 ATTENDANCE**

Ms Sheila McClelland Chair

Mr Mick McAteer Deputy Chair

Mrs June Butler

Ms Noyona Chundur

Ms Lynne Crowther

Dr Sinead Furey

Mr Gerry McCurdy

Mr Alan O’Neill

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Mr John French Chief Executive (Except agenda item 302/10.1)

Mrs Sinead Dynan Director of Regulated Industries (Except agenda item 302/10.1)

Mr Scott Kennerley Director of Illegal Money Lending and Financial Services (Except agenda item 302/10.1)

Mrs Carmel McConville Director of Brexit, Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection (Except agenda item 302/10.1)

Mr Mark Crawford Head of Consumer Empowerment and Protection (302/7.1)

Mr Paulino Garcia Head of Energy (Except agenda item 302/7.1)

Miss Paula McCann Head of Finance (Except agenda item 302/7.1)

Ms Kellin McCloskey Head of Postal Services (Except agenda item 302/7.1)

Mr Graham Smith Head of Water (Except agenda item 302/7.1)

Mr Richard Williams Head of Transport (Except agenda item 302/7.1)

Mrs Noleen Charnley Consumer Empowerment Officer (Except item 302/7.1)

Mrs Fiona Lavery Personal Assistant (Except agenda items 302/10.1)

**APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies.

**302/2 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.

**302/3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 March 2020, which had been circulated, were agreed as a true and correct record.

The Minutes were agreed and signed.

**302/4 Matters arising**

302/4.1 It was agreed that DfE Energy would attend the fortnightly Board Catch-up Meeting on 5 June 2020 to discuss the Energy Strategy document.

It was also agreed that the Director of Regulated Industries would circulate the previous Energy Strategy Document and a brief to Members in advance of 5 June 2020.

302/4.2 It was agreed that Board Members would receive a regular written Covid19 update rather than undertaken fortnightly catch-up meetings.

**302/5 Minutes and Matters arising from Covid19 catch-up Meeting held on 7 may 2020**

The minutes of the previous Covid19 Catch-up Meeting held on 7 May 2020 which had been circulated, were agreed as a true and correct record.

The Action Report of the previous Covid19 Catch-up Meeting held on 7 May 2020 which had been circulated, was noted.

**302/6 CHAIRPERSON’S BUSINESS**

302/6.1 Review of Brexit Negotiations

There were no Brexit issues discussed.

302/6.2 Any Other Chair’s Business

302/6.2.1 Year End Assessments

The Chair confirmed that Board Members’ Year End Assessments wold be arranged when the assessment paperwork was confirmed by the Department for the Economy.

302/6.2.2 Letters of Appointment

The new Board Members confirmed that they had received their letters of appointment from the Minister for the Department for the Economy.

302/6.2.3 Corporate Planning

The Chair stated that work on the Corporate Planning process for the next five years would commence with a Board Away Day.

**302/7 Chief Executive’s Business**

302/7.1 The Chief Executive’s Report

The Chief Executive presented the Chief Executive’s Report, and the heads of each section highlighted the key issues arising from their sections.

Referring to the arrangements that the gas industry has put in place for vulnerable consumers, it was agreed that The Consumer Council should take the lead on setting standards, and it was agreed that the Director of Regulated Industries would share information and add input on the longer term solution to the issue.

Following discussion on the timetable of the PC21 process, it was agreed that the Head of Water would prepare a brief on the UR Draft Determination and ask a representative from UR to come to Board to brief Members.

The Head of Postal Services stated that there had been increased interaction with stakeholders with regards to the Northern Ireland Brexit Protocol. It was agreed that she would draft a report on the research findings on the impact on consumers of goods moving from GB to NI post Brexit, and bring to the June Board Meeting.

302/7.2 Stakeholder Engagement Table

The Director of Brexit, Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection presented the Stakeholder Engagement Table for Board Members to note.

After discussion, it was agreed that the Stakeholder Engagement table should be ranked by priority, key objectives and outcomes with an annex summary. It was also agreed that a proposal should be sent to the Chair with the paper to return to June Board Meeting.

**302/8 Finance and Governance**

302/8.1 Draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2019-2020

The Head of Finance presented the draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2019-2020 to Board Members, and confirmed that the final report would be presented at the June Board Meeting.

Board Members approved the draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2019-2020.

302/8.2 Papers to be approved following the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 28 June 2020

Board Member Noyona Chundur and the Head of Finance presented the papers to be approved following the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting (ARAC) on 28 June for approval by Board Members. Ms Chundur stated that The Consumer Council had received a satisfactory Internal Audit Report.

Board Members thanked the Head of Finance and her team for their hard work, and after discussion, the papers from the ARAC meeting were approved.

It was agreed that the HR Consultant would provide a list of CAL training courses to Board Members for remote training.

It was also agreed that the HR Consultation would conduct a skills analysis for Members.

**302/9 POLICY/STRATEGY**

302/9.1Annual Review of Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

The Director of Brexit, Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection presented the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for Board Members to approve.

Board Members approved the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

302/9.2 Annual Strategic Review of Consumer Insight

The Director of Brexit, Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection presented the Stakeholder Engagement Table for Board Members to note.

Board Member Mick McAteer stated that it was a really good strategy and after discussion the Annual Strategic Review of Consumer Insight was approved subject to building in a more forward looking insight to predict where we think we are going, general trends, and emerging risks.

302/9.3 Annual Consumer Insight Survey

The Director of Brexit, Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection presented the Annual Consumer Insight Survey to Board Members.

After discussion it was agreed that future surveys should have “false clauses” included in questions to ensure validity of respondents’ answers.

The Insight Survey was noted and it was agreed that it could be loaded onto The Consumer Council website.

302/9.4 Illegal Money Lending Vision Paper

The Director of Financial Services presented the Illegal Money Lending Vision Paper to Board Members for approval and stated that the intention was to request funding for the long term.

Board Member Mick McAteer stated that it was a very comprehensive report, but concurred with the Chair that the impact of Covid19, credit scores and alternative forms of lending should be included.

He also stated that Northern Ireland should be used as a testing ground for a no interest loan scheme.

After discussion, Board Members approved the Illegal Money Lending Vision Paper subject to including:

* + The clear impact of Covid19;
  + Credit scoring/facilities – alternative forms of lending; and
  + The suggestion of using Northern Ireland as a testing ground for a no interest load scheme.

302/9.5 Customer Satisfaction Reports for March and April 2020

The Director of Brexit, Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection presented the Customer Satisfaction Reports for March and April 2020.

Board Members noted the reports and congratulated the team on their hard work.

302/9.6 Recruiting Remotely

The HR Consultant presented the paper to Board Members for approval on Recruiting Remotely.

He stated that there would be training for panel members and a good audit trail, and after discussion, Board Members approved the Recruiting Remotely paper.

It was also agreed that the Chair would put the HR Consultant in contact with someone from PAS in RoI.

302/9.7 Returning to the Workplace

The HR Consultant presented the Returning to the Workplace report to Board Members for approval.

Board Members noted the Returning to the Workplace report and stated that Landlord responsibilities should be clarified.

It was also agreed that Board Member Noyona Chundur would circulate the HSA Ireland link on returning to work safely by the Irish Government to Board and HR Consultant.

**302/10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

302/10.1 Review of the Meeting

The Officers left the meeting at this point.

While discussing the review of the meeting, Board Members highlighted the following areas to be noted by Officers:

* The Next scheduled Covid19 fortnightly meeting will be on 5 June where Energy Strategy will also be considered. A written Covid19 update will be circulated. Less formal Covid19 related information provision will follow after the next Board Meeting; likely to be a paper update and a Chief Executive briefing, but this is still to be decided.
* More time during the meeting should be devoted to Strategic Direction.

**302/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Friday 26 June 2020 at 10am via Zoom Conference.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 1.40pm.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_