

**THREE HUNDRED AND NINTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD
ON FRIDAY 26 MARCH 2021 AT 10.00AM VIA ZOOM CONFERENCE CALL**

309/1

ATTENDANCE

Ms Sheila McClelland	Chair
Mr Mick McAteer	Deputy Chair
Mrs June Butler	
Ms Lynne Crowther	
Dr Sinead Furey	
Mr William Leathem	
Ms Amanda Logan	
Dr Joan Martin	
Mr Gerry McCurdy	
Mr Alan O'Neill	

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Noyona Chundur	Chief Executive Officer (Except agenda item 309/10.2)
Mrs Carmel McConville	Director of EU Exit (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mr Scott Kennerley	Director of Illegal Money Lending and Financial Services (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mrs Dervla Kearney	Director of Consumer Insight, Empowerment and Protection (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mr William Warke	Director of HR and Business Transformation (Except agenda item 309/10.2)
Mrs Lisa Braniff	Interim Head of Finance (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mr Raymond Gormley	Interim Head of Energy (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mr Michael Legg	Interim Head of Postal Services (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mr Graham Smith	Head of Water (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mr Richard Williams	Head of Transport (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)

Dr Hannah Brown	Policy Officer, Energy (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mr Andrew Shiels	Senior Policy Officer, EU Exit (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Ms Lucy Duncan	Administration Officer, Postal Services (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)
Mrs Fiona Lavery	Personal Assistant (Except agenda items 309/10.1 and 10.2)

APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

309/2 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.

309/3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 February 2020, having been circulated, were agreed as a true and correct record.

The Minutes were agreed and signed.

309/4 MATTERS ARISING

Board Members noted the Matters Arising and no issues were discussed.

309/5 CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

309/5.1 The Chair welcomed the new Board Members, Ms Amanda Logan and Mr William Leathem to the Board, and introductions were made by existing Board Members and Officers.

309/5.2 The Chair welcomed Dr Hannah Brown, Policy Officer, Energy, Ms Lucy Duncan, Administrative Officer, Postal Services and Mr Michael Shiels, Senior Policy Officer, EU Exit who were in attendance at the Board Meeting as part of the diversity, equality and inclusion targets set for the accreditation of the Diversity Charter Mark.

There was no other Chair's Business discussed.

Board Member, Joan Martin entered the meeting at 10.20am

309/6 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

309/6.1 The Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive presented the Chief Executive's Report and highlighted the key issues arising, namely:

- The Consumer Council returning over £1 million to consumers in the last 12 months.
- The preparation for the first Northern Ireland Consumer Week.
- The development of the Consumer Tracker webpage to monitor Northern Ireland consumer data in comparison to Great Britain.
- The contributions to the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy, responses to the increases in energy costs and the recent SONI public consultation on options for renewable electricity generation.
- The meeting with Economy Minister, Diane Dodds and UK parcel operators and Claire Hanna MP on the ongoing issues with parcel deliveries to Northern Ireland.

- The extension of easyJet vouchers issued at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic by a further six months, with value of the vouchers issued at the time of the decision totalling £9,676,000.
- The research into the discretionary income of consumers in Northern Ireland compared with the UK, broken down by income quartile with comparisons on income and spending since COVID-19.
- The achievement of British Standard requirements for identifying and responding to consumer vulnerability, and ISO 9001 (Quality Management) and ISO22301 (Business Continuity).
- The appointment of Dervla Kearney (Director of Consumer Empowerment), Scott Kennerley (Director of Financial, Communications and Digital Services), Peter McClenaghan (Director of Infrastructure and Sustainability) and Michael Legg (Interim Head of Postal Services).

Board Members congratulated Officers on all the great work being done.

Following discussion, it was agreed that Board Member Mick McAteer would make introductions between the FCA and the Chief Executive in relation to doing more to tackle scams, in particular placing greater accountability for banks to do more for consumers.

It was also agreed that there should be more awareness campaigns about scams, using infographics to communicate with consumers, in particular vulnerable groups, through social media channels and proactive PR opportunities.

Board Members noted the Chief Executive's Report.

Board Member, Dr Joan Martin left the meeting at this point, 11am.

309/6.2 Corporate Plan Consultation Update

The Chief Executive informed Board Members that 34 participants from 23 stakeholder organisations attended the Corporate Plan Consultation event on 26 February 2021. She stated that she would use their feedback to complete the final draft of the Corporate Plan, which would be emailed to Board Members for final approval.

She stated that once approved, the draft Corporate Plan would be forwarded to the Economy Minister for sign-off and it would be available on the Consumer Council website by the end of April 2021.

309/7 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

309/7.1 Management Accounts for month ending 28 February 2021

The Chair welcomed the Interim Head of Finance to the meeting who presented the Management Accounts for the month 28 February 2021 and highlighted the key issues for Board Members' information.

Board Members approved the Management Accounts for month ending 28 February 2021.

309/7.2 Draft Budget for 2021-2022

The Interim Head of Finance presented the draft Budget for 2021-2022 and the Chief Executive highlighted the areas of concern around the funding.

After discussion, Board Members approved the draft Budget for 2021-2022.

309/8 COMPLIANCE

309/8.1 Accreditations for 2021-2022

The Director of HR and Business Transformation presented the current proposal for Accreditations for 2021-2022 and sought

opinion on if the list be rationalised, or if it should remain but with the timetable for reaccreditations adjusted.

In response to Board Members, it was agreed that the report would be updated and brought back to Board with the real costs and value of each accreditation, identifying the essential, desirable and not necessary categories, and use of the traffic light system.

The Director of HR and Business Transformation also informed Board Members that the Consumer Council had attained Gold Accreditation in Investors in People.

Board Members congratulated the organisation for this excellent achievement.

309/8.2 Stakeholder Engagement Strategy 2021-2022

The Chief Executive presented the proposed Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for 2021-2022.

Board Members approved the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for 2021-2022 but suggested that evaluations of the current forums should be carried out and possible additional forums sought.

309/9 POLICY/STRATEGY

309/9.1 Consumer Position Paper

The Director of EU Exit presented the Consumer Position Paper for Board Members to note.

Board Members noted the Consumer Position Paper.

Board Member, Dr Joan Martin re-joined the meeting at 12.13pm.

309/9.2 Research into Older People, Transport and COVID-19

The Head of Transport presented the Research into Older People, Transport and COVID-19 Report for Board Members' information.

Following discussion, it was agreed that quality assurance should be included in the Methodology.

It was also agreed that Board Member, William Leathem would assist with introductions for proactive engagements with the local Councils.

Board Members noted the report.

309/9.3 Consumer Experiences of Installing Renewable Technology in Northern Ireland

The Interim Head of Energy presented the Consumer Experiences of Installing renewable Technology in Northern Ireland to Board Members and informed them that the report would be shared with the Department for the Economy and other stakeholders.

Board Members noted the Report.

309/9.4 Lending, Savings and Debt Research Paper

The Director of Financial Services presented the Lending, Savings, and Debt Research Paper.

Board Members noted the Research Paper.

309/9.5 Statistics from Financial Lives Survey

The Director of Financial Services presented the Statistics from Financial Lives Survey for Board Members' information.

The Chair stated that both the Financial Services reports were great work.

Board Members noted the Statistics from the Financial Lives Survey.

309.9.6 Political Monitoring

The Interim Head of Postal Services presented the Political Monitoring paper for Board Members to note.

Board Members noted the Political Monitoring paper.

309/10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

All officers with the exception of the Chief Executive and the Director of HR and Business Transformation left the meeting at this point.

309/10.1.1 Closed Session: Update with Chief Executive and Director HR and Business Transformation

The Director of HR and Business Transformation left the meeting at this point.

309/10.1.2 Closed Session: Update with Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive left the meeting at this point.

309/10.2 Review of the Meeting

Board Members were happy with the content and presentation of the papers.

309/11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Friday 14 May 2021 at 10am via either Zoom Conference or physical venue, subject to COVID-19 restrictions.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 1.20pm.

Signed _____

Date _____