

268/2 **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 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 conflict of interest and request board members compliance if this arose.

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

268/3 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the two hundred and sixty-seventh meeting which had been circulated were agreed and signed.

268/4 **MATTERS ARISING**

268/4.1 Members were updated on the issue of a water meter being disposed of following the resolution of a water complaint. NI Water had advised they photograph meters and store the image digitally. There was no requirement to keep meters after removal unless there was an ongoing dispute.

268/4.2 The information requested by members on ‘Unbanked’ consumers by social-economic group was circulated. The Director of Operations advised the data was inconclusive and a full report was being prepared for the March 2016 Board meeting.

The Matters Arising were noted.

268/5 **CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS**

268/5.1 **Corporate Plan 2016-2021**

The Chairperson advised the plan was based around stabilisation of the Consumer Council's role and to provide a mature contribution to relevant debates. Both of which would be dependent on adequate funding.

The Chief Executive reported the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) had approved the timeline for consultation with the caveat that the Plan would be reviewed following the development of the Programme for Government. They had also approved a reduced period of consultation to ensure the plan was completed by the end of March 2016.

Members noted DETI had requested the Plan run from 2016 to 2021 covering five years as opposed to the original timeframe of four years.

The Corporate Plan was approved.

268/5.2 **Any Other Chair's Business**

There was no further Chair's business.

268/6 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS**

268/6.1 **Chief Executive's Report**

Members had received a written report, paper CC16/2, of the work undertaken since the last Board meeting. It was the intention to provide members with this report every month including months when there was no Board meeting.

The Directors updated members on a number of specific areas of work.

Members suggested that all the Consumer Council's business led work should be linked to NI Business Info website, INI website and NI Direct. All of which were free of charge. They also suggested information be obtained on the devolution of health, education and transport currently being carried out in Manchester.

The Chief Executive outlined briefly a number of meetings and events he had attended since 9 December 2015.

The Chief Executive's Report was noted.

268/6.2 Management Dashboard – December 2015

The Management Dashboard had been created to increase transparency for both the Board and Senior Management Team.

The Dashboard would be circulated to members after the second Friday of each month.

Members agreed to send through any further comments/suggestions they had on the information being provided.

The Management Dashboard was noted.

268/6.3 Business Plan for 2015–16: Progress Report (Quarter Three)

It was reported that good progress continued to be made with 93% of the 44 targets in the Business Plan expected to be delivered by the year end. Three targets (7%) would not be delivered in 2015–16.

The three objectives were:

- 1(a) – Effective referral mechanisms agreed with the advice sector. The project had been delayed by the extended governance process required to approve the Memorandum of Understanding within one of the partner organisations.

- 3(b) – Food Challenge Week – Following consideration of alternative options it was proposed not to proceed with the project as it risked the Consumer Council straying beyond its remit.
- 9(e) – Research into cross-border mail issues. Staffing constraints and the expression of interest from the European Commission to be involved in the research meant the report and recommendations would not be ready for Board sign-off until 2016–17.

The Business Plan Progress Report was approved.

268/6.4 Draft Forward Work Programme 2016–17

Members discussed the plan in terms of whether it was challenging enough, while at the same time being achievable. The Chief Executive explained that provided the resources were available and partnership working proceeded within timeframes set the plan was both challenging and achievable.

The Draft Forward Work Programme was provisionally approved.

268/6.5 Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) 2016–17

The Board were advised funding of £109k had been secured to operate a VES in 2016–17. Unlike 2015–16 it was not anticipated that staff would need to be released in order to close a budget deficit. Any pay bill savings made from staff taking voluntary exit would be used to restructure posts in line with the 2016–2021 Corporate Plan.

Members asked that Point 10: Eligibility be changed to open the scheme to all employees regardless of grade.

The Voluntary Exit Scheme was approved.

268/6.6 Dilapidations on Elizabeth House

Section of minutes redacted – it is the view of the qualified person that a section 43 exemption (commercial interests) should be applied at this time.

268/7 **POLICY/STRATEGY**

268/7.1 Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) Roundtable – Consumers and Online Retail Deliveries

The Chief Executive reported the BIS roundtable had been hosted by the Minister for Skills, Nick Boles, MP on 12 January 2016. This meeting followed an adjournment debate brought forward by Gavin Robinson MP on the back of the Consumer Council’s online parcel research. The roundtable had support from Northern Irish, Scottish and Isle of Wight MPs. A further meeting was planned.

Members noted the paper.

268/7.2 Energy Anti Theft Project

The Senior Energy Policy Officer outlined the objectives, sensitivities and industry concerns surrounding the project. Members were advised the Board would be provided with regular updates once the programme was rolled out in 2016-2017.

Members asked if they could be advised of the number of gas household alerts. Members also recommended that all parties involved should use the same hash tag at the start of the project to ensure reach and impact could be measured.

Members approved the project.

268/7.3 Consumer Proficiency Research: Initial Findings

Members discussed and noted the report. They also noted the full report would be presented at the March 2016 Board meeting.

268/7.4 Consumer Resources for Girlguiding Ulster

Members discussed the methods of evaluating the project and suggested making contact with C2K to enquire if they had a method of tracking messages going back to families.

Members noted the report.

268/7.5 Living with Water Programme

Members discussed and noted the report.

268/7.6 Department for Regional Development Bus Service Permit

Paper CC16/13 outlined the proposed process of how the Consumer Council would manage Bus Service Permit Applications. It was the intention that the Transport Team would make a recommendation which the Chief Executive would approve.

Members confirmed the Consumer Council's decision was only a recommendation and the final decision on whether to grant a permit remained with the Department for Regional Development (DRD). They also noted the risks with being involved in the process and that funding for this role was not provided by DRD.

Members approved the process.

268/7.7 Consumer Support Contacts and Complaints Report Quarter Three 2015-2016

Members noted the report.

268/7.8 Policy Position Record 1.4.15 – 31.12.15

It was agreed the Policy Position Record was no longer required as the information was now included in the Management Dashboard.

Members noted the Policy Position Record.

268/8 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

268/8.1 Budget for 2016-17 – Current Position

The Director of Operations advised DETI had confirmed a 2% (–£24k) reduction in the Consumer Council’s core funding. If the business cases for funding streams for energy, postal services, transport, and water were agreed, then the Consumer Council’s budget for 2016–17 would be similar to 2015–16. This was due to the reinstatement of transport funding.

Members noted the current under spend position. The Chief Executive outlined a number of areas which would benefit from the under spend. One was staff training with work commencing to model out training in essential statutory areas weighted against delivery of the work programme. Another was replenishment of literature stocks.

Members noted the current budget position.

268/8.2 Management Accounts for the Period Ending 31.12.15

Under spend position had been discussed in previous agenda item.

The Management Accounts for the third quarter were approved.

The Management Accounts for the period ending 31 January 2016 were tabled. Members noted the current position.

268/8.3 Draft Business Cases 2016-2017

The draft business cases for water, transport, energy and post were approved.

268/8.4 Pay Award 2015–16

The Director of Operations advised the Minister for Finance and Personnel had recently approved a pay award for the NI Civil Service (NICS). Given the links between Consumer Council staff terms and conditions and those of the NICS the pay award was due to Consumer Council staff. Following Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and DETI approval of the business case for the pay award it was anticipated it would be processed in time for payment with salaries in March 2016.

Members approved the pay award 2015-16.

268/8.5 Corporate Risk Register Quarter Three 2015–16

Section of minutes redacted – it is the view of the qualified person that a section 43 exemption (commercial interests) should be applied at this time.

Members were advised that the Risk Register was normally reviewed by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee before coming to Council. This had not been possible in this case as the Committee required members to be appointed from the recent Board appointments.

Members approved the Draft Risk Register Quarter Three 2015–16.

268/9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

268/9.1 Committee Terms of Reference (TOR)

268/9.1.1 Members noted the Council’s Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation, TOR for Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Remuneration Committee.

268/9.1.2 It was agreed to appoint Noyona Chundur, Lynne Crowther and Mary Woods to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

268/9.1.3 It was agreed to appoint Sinéad Furey and Joan Martin to the Remuneration Committee.

268/9.2 Policy Areas of Interest

Documents/policies were to be sent to members to improve their knowledge and understanding of the Consumer Council's work. Members' specific areas of interest were noted.

268/9.3 Policy Group Meetings

It was agreed to discuss re-establishing policy group meetings in 4-6 months.

268/9.4 Review of the Meeting

The members considered the meeting and although they noted that there had been a large amount of information provided and needing to be considered, they believed that the officers were extremely well informed on the wide range of topics and that they were confident in the level of information.

268/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 15 March 2016 at 10 am in Seatem House, 28-32 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8EN.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 5.10 p.m.

Signed _____

Date _____