

TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD AT ELIZABETH HOUSE, 116 HOLYWOOD ROAD, BELFAST, BT4 1NY, ON WEDNESDAY 22 OCTOBER 2014 AT 10.30 A.M.

257/1

ATTENDANCE

Mr Rick Hill	Chair
Mr David Beattie	
Mrs Deirdre Fitzpatrick	
Mr David Galloway	
Mrs Jill Gillespie	
Mr Sam Snodden	

IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs Kathy Graham	Interim Director of Policy
Mr Scott Kennerley	Head of Transport (for part of the meeting)
Mr Don Leeson	Director of Operations
Ms Donna Magee	Head of Finance and HR (for part of the meeting)
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell	Interim Chief Executive
Ms Jenny Robinson	Senior Consumer Affairs Officer, Transport (for part of the meeting)
Mrs Rhonda Allen	Personal Assistant

APOLOGIES

Mr Kit Chivers
Mrs Mandy Patrick
Dr Margaret Ward
Mr Lee Wilson

257/2

CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

257/2.1

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The Chair 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 Chair would have the ability to define a conflict of interest and request members' compliance if this arose.

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

257/2.2 Chief Executive Recruitment

The Chair advised that the job description and person specification had been agreed by the recruitment panel. Following this both documents had been forwarded to the Department's representative on the panel and comments had been received from them in relation to the job specification. The amendments would be circulated to the recruitment panel for approval. Following this the panel would meet to agree timescales for the process. It was noted that at this stage the Department's HR would provide assistance.

257/2.3 Remuneration Committee

Section of minutes redacted – it is the view of the qualified person that a section 40 exemption (personal information) should be applied at this time.

257/2.3.2 Members noted that the Interim Chief Executive had confirmed to the Remuneration Committee that there were no issues with payroll which was being managed in accordance with all NICS guidelines and policies. Audit Committee members reported that payroll was scheduled to be audited next year.

257/2.4 Any Other Chair's Business

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.

STAFF JOINED THE MEETING

257/2.4.2 Members were advised that the Chair had not written to the Minister re highlighting work which had taken place before the outcome of the review was known, and the work undertaken following the decision. Members agreed that as events had changed there was no longer any need to write to the Minister.

257/2.4.3 The Chair highlighted the ongoing relationships issues with the Department including the still unapproved 2014-15 business plan. It was agreed that a staged approach should be taken in managing relationships and approval processes for issues such as the business plan. If necessary the Chair was authorised to escalate the issue and request a meeting with the Minister.

The Interim Chief Executive advised that following yesterday's Oversight and Liaison meeting he was hopeful that work on the 2015-16 business plan and other issues would progress in a more timely manner but he would review the position at the end of November.

257/3 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The minutes of the two hundred and fifty sixth meeting; the Extra Ordinary meeting and Business Planning meeting which had been circulated were agreed and signed.

Members noted that a copy of the Extra Ordinary meeting had been sent to the Permanent Secretary for approval and as no amendments had been received they had been taken as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

257/4 **MATTERS ARISING**

257/4.1 **Budgetary Pressures**

Members were advised that confirmation had been received of a reduction of £163k in the core grant. This was slightly less than the original £195k as the Department had directed that £32k be used for specific HR and staff purposes. This included the Chief Executive recruitment, Chair and Deputy Chair appointments.

257/4.2 **Business Plan for 2014–15**

The Department had requested that the Business Plan be revised in light of the reduced budget. The revised plan would require Council approval before being resubmitted to the Department for approval.

Members agreed that tracked changes be made to the original plan to take account of the £163k budget reduction. The revised plan was to be emailed to members for approval.

257/4.3 **New Premises Business Case**

The Department had convened a ‘casework committee’ on 20 October 2014 to formally review the business case. The Operations Director advised that the business case had been approved and confirmation would be received within five days. Following this the Department would submit the business case to the Department of Finance and Personnel for their approval.

Members noted that a number of issues had yet to be resolved including availability of parking.

It was agreed that a relocation project plan would be brought to Council for information.

257/4.4 Travel Insurance Supercomplaint

The Interim Chief Executive reported that despite efforts from early June 2014 to secure a meeting with the Financial Conduct Authority and the Association of British Insurers no progress had been made. The Interim Chief Executive proposed that the Council should submit a super complaint.

Members agreed that the supercomplaint should be submitted.

Members were to be kept informed of progress and the public affairs plan.

257/4.5 Revised Code of Conduct for Board Members

Members had expressed some concerns about the Code of Conduct, particularly the text in respect of the handling of the Chief Executive recruitment process. In light of the outcome the Extra Ordinary Council meeting Members agreed they were content to accept the original wording.

The Code of Conduct would be brought to the next Council meeting for approval. This would also include clarification on the other issue raised by Council Members in relation to the rules in terms of taking up other employment/appointments during and after their term of office with the Consumer Council.

The Matters Arising were noted.

257/5 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

257/5.1 Draft Quarter Two Risk Register 2014-15

Members discussed the Risk Register including budgetary pressures and retention of staff.

The Audit Committee had recommended the Risk Register to Council for approval.

Members approved the draft Risk Register.

257/5.2 Risk Strategy Policy

The Head of Finance and HR explained that the new Risk Management Strategy and Policy had come from an internal audit recommendation. Previously the Council had followed the Department's procedures whereas the new policy had tailored these procedures specifically to the Council.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and reviewed the policy and together with the internal auditors had made one recommendation to explore how risks were escalated and de-escalated during the risk assessment process. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee were content that the process was correct but the policy needed to reflect the process.

The Risk Strategy Policy was approved with amendments as per the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee discussions.

257/5.3 Draft Quarter Two Management Accounts 2014–15

Members approved the draft accounts.

257/6 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS**

257/6.1 Draft Business Plan 2015–16

The Interim Chief Executive explained that given the time constraints and lack of information on the Council's budget for 2015–16 the paper circulated reflected the ongoing progress, overall format, structure and approach at this stage rather than specific details.

Members were content with the format and layout.

Members asked that an internal document be produced to highlight what work was essential and what work could be dropped if further budget cuts were implemented.

Members also asked that a summary for delivery of projects be included in the balanced scorecard.

It was confirmed that the savings achieved baseline would be approved by Council once they had been established.

A Council meeting was to be arranged mid November to agree the plan.

257/6.2 Draft Vision and Values

The Head of Finance and HR explained that following recommendations from the liP report in July 2014 an Organisational Development (OD) Plan had been developed. Two of the five key themes, development of vision and values, were part of the overall aim of the OD Plan.

Jenny Robinson, a member of the OD working group, explained that all staff had been involved in developing the vision statement and the values have been developed by the OD working group which was made up from 10 staff from across the organisation. The values were the ways of working that would underpin the achievement of the draft vision.

Board, staff, stakeholders and consumers should be involved in setting the Council's vision and values.

Members queried what, if any, external input had been sought in developing the draft vision and values. The Chair explained that external input would be from the corporate planning consultation process and if necessary there would be an opportunity to adapt/change the draft visions and values following consultation. It was also noted that external views would have been captured as part of the Ministerial Review consultation responses.

Members agreed the draft vision and values were a good starting point and that the Board could work to strengthen them. It also gave the Board an insight and shared understanding of staffs views and expectations. The Board agreed it was reassuring that staff had the same expectations as the Board.

Members agreed to continue with the current vision and values and to use the draft vision and values presented today as the basis for developing the new Corporate Plan. They also agreed that for organisational development purposes the new draft vision and values could be used.

(Donna Magee and Jenny Robinson left the meeting)

257/6.3 Performance Against Objectives Quarter Two 2014–15

The Director of Operation explained that given the timing the report was based on progress before the budget reduction had been confirmed and was based on the original Business Plan. The report highlighted the slowdown in activity and expenditure in those areas where budget cuts were proposed.

Members noted the quarter two progress report.

257/6.4 HR Reports

The Interim Chief Executive advised that he was working with staff to address the issues raised in the staff survey. Members asked the Interim Chief Executive to provide Council with a paper outlining how the issues were being addressed including how the reduced budget was affecting staff learning and development.

Members noted the reports.

257/6.5 Strategic Updates

The Interim Chief Executive provided members with updates on:

- Postal Complaints

Members noted that the handover of the complaints handling role for postal issues had now transferred to the Council from Citizens Advice in Great Britain. As well as signposting consumers to Royal Mail's complaints system the role involved supporting vulnerable consumers through the complaints process.

- Ongoing political engagement and party conferences
- Engagement with Super Councils
- Switching events
- Recent briefings and meetings with Assembly Committees
- Internal staff transfers

Members noted the strategic updates.

257/7 POLICY/STRATEGY

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.

257/7.2 Joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NI Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) and Consumer Council (CCNI)

NIAUR and CCNI were required to develop and agree a MOU to reflect respective statutory roles and working arrangements in both energy and water. Previous versions had been developed but never formally agreed between both organisations. Following a recent joint review it had been agreed to develop a high level principle based agreement which sets the context and approach for working arrangements. This reflected the approach adopted in other sectors, for example between NIAUR and Commission for Energy Regulation (ROI).

Members approved the joint Memorandum of Understanding. They also noted the good relationship with the Regulator.

257/7.3 Quarter Two Complaints Report 2014-15

The complaints report was noted.

257/7.4 Policy Position Record 1 April 2014 – 30 September 2014

The report provided an overview of all policy decisions agreed by Council and/or the Interim Chief Executive for the year.

The report was noted.

257/8 COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Minutes of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting 11.6.14

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

257/9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

257/9.1 Dates for 2015 Meetings

Members requested a week to 10 day gap between Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meetings and Council where possible. It was agreed that the June meetings could be held on the same day.

Both January meeting dates were to be changed and a new schedule brought to December Council.

257/9.2 Members Expenses

Members were asked to complete forms after every meeting and to use the forms issued with their Board papers.

257/9.3 Review of the Meeting

Members confirmed they were content with the conduct of the meeting and the content and quality of the papers provided.

The Chair acknowledged the meeting had overrun but it had been necessary to have additional time on a number of the agenda items.

257/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held in November 2014 on a date to be agreed.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 1.25 p.m.