

TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD AT TRANSLINK, 22 GREAT VICTORIA STREET, BELFAST, BT2 7LX ON TUESDAY 16 MAY 2017.

278/1

ATTENDANCE

Ms Sheila McClelland	Chair
Mr Mick McAteer	Deputy Chair
Ms Lynne Crowther	
Mr Sam Snodden	
Dr Joan Martin	
Mr David Galloway	
Mrs Mary Woods	
Ms Noyona Chundur	
Dr Sinead Furey	

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr John French	Chief Executive (Except agenda item 277/11.1)
Dr Catriona MacArthur	Director of Consumer Advocacy, Empowerment and Protection (Except agenda item 277/11.1)
Ms Paula McCann	Head of Finance (Except agenda item 277/11.1)
Mr Scott Kennerley	Head of Transport (Except agenda item 277/11.1)
Mr Graham Smith	Head of Water (Except agenda item 277/11.1)
Mr Richard Williams	Head of Energy (Agenda items 278/6 – 27/10.6)
Ms Jenny Robinson	Senior Policy Officer, Transport (Except agenda item 277/11.1)
Mr Douglas Hogg	FCA Secondment, (Agenda item 277/10.6)
Mrs Fiona Lavery	Personal Assistant (Except agenda item 277/11.1)

APOLOGIES

Mr David Beattie

BY INVITATION

Mr Chris Conway, Translink

278/2 **PRESENTATION BY CHRIS CONWAY, TRANSLINK**

The Chair welcomed Mr Chris Conway, Group Chief Executive of NITHC and Translink, to the meeting and thanked him for allowing The Consumer Council to use the Translink meeting facilities for their Council Meeting.

Mr Conway provided Members with an update on Translink statistics and future developments for the forthcoming year.

The Chair thanked Mr Conway for his very informative presentation, and having answered Members' questions, he left the meeting at 11.00am.

278/3 **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 a conflict of interest and requested Board Members' compliance if this arose.

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

278/4 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the two hundred and seventy-seventh meeting which had been circulated were proposed by Lynne Crowther and seconded by Mary Woods.

The Minutes were agreed and signed.

278/5 **MATTERS ARISING**

The Matters Arising were noted.

278/6 **CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS**

278/6.1 **Any Other Chair's Business**

The Chair informed Members that the next Council Meeting, dated 20 June in Seatem House, would commence with lunch at 1pm followed by a presentation by Angela McGowan at 1.30pm.

The Chair reminded Members that an invitation had been circulated to Members and staff to attend a presentation on 5 June in Seatem House, by David Phinnermore on the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland.

She also informed Members that the Council Meeting on 15 August would be held at Phoenix Natural Gas, 197 Airport Road West, Belfast.

278.6.2 **Annual Performance Assessments**

The Chair reminded Members that their Annual Performance Reviews were due, and that one to one meetings would be scheduled within the next couple of weeks.

278/7 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS**

278/7.1 **The Chief Executive's Report**

278/7.1.1 **Boys Brigade / Scouts NI educational partnership project**

The Chief Executive informed Members that there had been an expression of interest from the Boys Brigade, and the NI Commissioner for Scouts in developing resources in partnership with The Consumer Council for young consumers to learn about their consumer rights. He stated that a draft version of resources was currently being developed, with the aim of being launched in September 2017.

278/7.1.2 Banking Comparison Tool

The Chief Executive stated that The Consumer Council had launched a new current account comparison table on 11 April to help consumers compare products currently available from banking providers in Northern Ireland. He informed Members that positive feedback had been received, and that the table is available on The Consumer Council website to view online or print.

278/7.1.3 GD17 Firmus Energy CMA Appeal

The Chief Executive reminded Members that The Consumer Council had provided oral evidence to the CMA appeal panel on 14 March and that they had been invited to attend a Remedies Hearing in London on 1 June. He stated however, that due to the outcome of the appeal, CMA has advised that a Remedies Hearing would not be necessary.

278/7.1.4 HR – Staffing Issues

The Chief Executive informed Members that all posts under the new restructure are expected to be in place by July 2017.

278/7.1.5 Consumer Parliament

The Chair commented on the Consumer Parliament event that was held on 24 March, and stated that it had been very well organised, had a great number of stakeholders and consumers in attendance, and that excellent feedback had been received.

Other Members that had been in attendance at the event, concurred with these remarks.

278/7.2 Staff Survey

The Chief Executive stated that the results of the recently completed annual Q12 Staff Survey showed a marked improvement in employees' perceptions from the previous survey undertaken in February 2016.

After discussion, Members noted the improvement.

278/7.3 Management Dashboards – April 2017

The Management Dashboard for April 2017 was noted.

278/7.4 Any Other Chief Executive’s Business

278/7.5 Balmoral Show

The Chief Executive informed Members that The Consumer Council had occupied a stand in the NI Food Pavilion and that staff had attended on all four days of the Balmoral Show. He stated that staff engaged with over 500 members of the public through the competition, food quiz and photo-booth, which lead to an increase in subscriptions to The Consumer Council Monthly Newsletter.

278/8 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

278/8.1 Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17

The Head of Finance and the Chief Executive provided Members with an overview of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17.

After discussion, it was agreed that Members would email the Head of Finance with any queries, which she would respond to immediately to ensure sign off of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17 at the Council Meeting to be held 20 June 2017.

278/8.2 Provisional Budget Outturn – Oral Report

The Head of Finance informed Members that the DfE Core Grant funding for 2017-18 was yet to be approved but that contingency plans were being put in place.

278/8.3 DEO December 16 – Remuneration and Chairmen and Members of Public Bodies and Other Fee Rates – Daily Rates for 2016

The Head of Finance stated that the fees for Chairmen and Members of Public Bodies and holders of similar appointments are reviewed annually in accordance with wider public sector pay policy. She informed Members that the Finance Minister had announced that public sector pay awards were limited to a one percent maximum in 2016-17.

She stated that in light of the current pay policy, it had been decided that fees for Chairmen and Members should be uplifted by one percent, subject to fully satisfactory performance.

She informed Members that the Finance Section would be issuing letters and new fee rate templates for all Members, and that they would be implemented, and the amounts due in arrears, processed by HR Connect.

Members noted the uplift of Chairmen and Members' fees.

278/9 PAPERS TO BE APPROVED BY BOARD AFTER AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The Head of Finance stated that a number of papers had been circulated for Board approval following the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee approval on 25 April 2017.

Following discussion, Members approved the papers that had been approved by the Audit and Risk Committee.

278/10 POLICY/STRATEGY

278/10.1 Social Value Framework

Mr Fitzpatrick and Mr O'Donnell of Gauge NI entered the meeting at 12 noon.

The Chair welcomed Mr Finbar Fitzpatrick and Mr Fergal O'Donnell of Gauge NI to the meeting to discuss the results of their work to develop a Social Value Framework Model to provide a structure to develop robust and measureable indicators on the social value of the work of The Consumer Council to be implemented across the organisation.

The Chair thanked Mr Fitzpatrick and Mr O'Donnell for their presentation, and they left the meeting at 12.45pm.

After discussion, Members approved the Social Value Framework.

278/10.2 Research Paper – Use of Public Transport

The Head of Transport presented a review of The Consumer Council research to consider the factors that would encourage greater use of public transport. He stated that the report had been forwarded to Translink and the Department for Infrastructure and would be used to progress the issues outlined.

Members noted the research paper.

278/10.3 Translink Fare Levels and Service Standards

The Head of Transport highlighted the review of the service standards in public transport and the typical fares that passengers pay. He stated that the report compared these factors with similar operators in GB and ROI, and how well Translink measured up. He informed Members that the report had been forwarded to Translink and the Department for Infrastructure for information.

Members noted the report.

278/10.4 CCNI Response – DfT Airport National Policy Statement

The Head of Transport briefed Members on The Consumer Council response to the Department for Transport's Airport National Policy Statement on the expansion of Heathrow Airport. He stated that the response largely mirrored the previous responses to the Airports

Commission which concluded that Heathrow should have a third runway. He pointed out however that the main direction of the response was to seek clarity on the protections for regional airports.

Members noted the report.

278/10.5 Air Passenger Duty – Policy Position

The Senior Transport Policy Officer reminded Members that Air Passenger Duty (APD) is charged on all passenger flights from UK airports, and that it was the view of The Consumer Council that APD should be reduced or removed in line with the Republic of Ireland APD equivalent.

She proposed that Members approve the proposed policy position and for The Consumer Council to write to HM Treasury and the Department for Transport, to see what action can be taken to remove or reduce the disproportionate tax burden of APD for NI passengers.

After discussion, Members approved the proposed policy position.

278/10.6 Financial Services Comparison of GB vs. NI

The FCA Seconded reminded members that following the research undertaken and reported in the Webb Report, it was agreed that The Consumer Council would undertake a specific GB vs. NI Financial Services comparison focussing on general insurance, lending, banking and pensions.

The Deputy Chair left the meeting at 1.30pm.

After discussion, Members noted the preliminary findings of the research and it was agreed that the FCA Seconded would attend a further Council Meeting with a draft report on lending and banking.

278/11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

278/11.1 Review of the Meeting

Members stated that they were satisfied with the papers for the meeting and delighted with the results from the recent Staff Survey.

278/12 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held at 1pm on Tuesday 20 June 2017 at Seatem House.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 2.00pm.

Signed _____

Date _____