

**THREE HUNDRED AND EIGHTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD
ON FRIDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 10.00AM VIA ZOOM CONFERENCE CALL**

308/1

ATTENDANCE

Ms Sheila McClelland	Chair
Mr Mick McAteer	Deputy Chair
Mrs June Butler	
Ms Noyona Chundur	
Ms Lynne Crowther	
Dr Joan Martin	
Mr Gerry McCurdy	
Mr Alan O'Neill	

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Noyona Chundur	Chief Executive Officer (Except agenda item 308/11.2)
Mrs Carmel McConville	Director of EU Exit (Except agenda items 308/11.1 and 11.2)
Mr Scott Kennerley	Director of Illegal Money Lending and Financial Services (Except agenda items 308/11.1 and 11.2)
Mr William Warke	Director of HR and Business Transformation (Except agenda item 308/11.2)
Mrs Lisa Braniff	Interim Head of Finance (Except agenda items 308/11.1 and 11.2)
Mr Mark Crawford	Interim Head of Consumer Empowerment and Protection (Except agenda items 308/11.1 and 11.2)
Mr Raymond Gormley	Interim Head of Energy (Except agenda items 308/11.1 and 11.2)
Ms Kellin McCloskey	Head of Postal Services (Except agenda items 308/11.1 and 308/11.2)
Mr Graham Smith	Head of Water (Except agenda items 308/11.1 and 11.2)
Mr Richard Williams	Head of Transport (Except agenda items 308/11.1 and 11.2)

Mrs Fiona Lavery Personal Assistant (Except agenda items
308/11.1 and 11.2)

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Dr Sinead Furey.

308/2 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.

308/3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 December 2020, which had been circulated, were agreed as a true and correct record.

The Minutes were agreed and signed.

308/4 MATTERS ARISING

The Chief Executive informed Board that she was awaiting clarity from the Department for the Economy (DfE) for funding for the Transport section.

308/5 CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

308/5.1 The Chair informed Board Members that she had confirmed with DfE that the reserve list from the previous appointment of Board

Members could be used for the replacement of the two vacant Board Members places.

308/5.2 Ms Niamh Kearney and Ms Rachel Coulter attended 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.

308/6 PRESENTATION BY NEIL GIBSON, EY ON EU BREXIT

The Chair welcomed Mr Neil Gibson, Chief Economist, EY Ireland to the Board Meeting.

Mr Gibson delivered a presentation covering the challenges for the Northern Ireland economy and consumers; comparisons across the island of Ireland; labour market impacts on jobs and key sectors; risks to Northern Ireland's policy agenda; changes in consumer behaviour; and the top global consumer trends for 2021.

The Chair thanked Mr Gibson for his very informative presentation, and having answered Board Members' questions, he left the meeting at 11.30am.

308/7 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

308/7.1 The Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive presented the Chief Executive's Report and invited Board Members for their comments.

Board Member, Lynne Crowther queried the analytics on social media on page five of the report, and it was agreed that the Interim Head of Consumer Empowerment and Protection would seek clarity and report directly back to the Member.

It was agreed relevant updates on parcel deliveries to Northern Ireland would be shared with Watch Dog - The One Show team, following agreement with the Department for the Economy.

It was also agreed that Professor David Phinnemore should be invited to present at a future Board Meeting or Policy Group Meeting.

Board Members noted the Chief Executive's Report.

308/7.2 Draft 2021-2024 Corporate Plan and Draft 2021-2022 Forward Work Programme

The Chief Executive informed Board Members that an on-line consultation event for the Draft Corporate Plan and the Draft Forward Work Programme had taken place on Thursday 11 February and had 44 virtual attendees.

308/7.3 2021-2024 Corporate Plan Briefing Presentation

Board Members noted the 2021-2024 Corporate Plan Briefing Presentation.

308/8 FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

308/8.1 Management Accounts for month ending 31 January 2021

The Chair welcomed the Interim Head of Finance to the meeting who presented the Management Accounts for the month ending 31 January 2021 and highlighted the key issues for Board Members' information.

Board Members approved the Management Accounts for month ending 31 January 2021.

308/8.2 Papers from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 9 February 2021.

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Head of Finance presented the papers from the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 9 February 2021 to Board Members for approval.

After discussion, Board Members approved the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee papers.

308/9 **COMPLIANCE**

308/9.1 **Code of Conduct for Board Members: Annual Review**

The Director of HR and Business Transformation presented the Code of Conduct for Board Members for annual review.

After review and discussion, it was agreed that there were no recommendations for improvement or additions to the Code of Conduct for Board Members.

308/10 **POLICY/STRATEGY**

308/10.1 **Forward Work Programme Progress Report for Quarter 3 2020-2021**

The Chief Executive presented the Forward Work Programme for Quarter 3 of 2020-2021, and highlighted the areas of work classed as “Red” RAG status due to capacity issues and delays due to COVID-19.

The Chief Executive drew attention to the key areas of risk highlighted in the report and explained that these projects were delayed due to restrictions, staff shortages and/or other work priorities all due to COVID-19.

- To develop a consumer guide on Alternative Dispute Mechanisms in Northern Ireland.
- To use the findings of the Community Switching Feasibility Study, to deliver one pilot project to facilitate collective switching to better value electricity tariffs.
- To undertake accessibility audits with the three Northern Ireland airports.
- To clarify the process for “deadlocked” bus and rail complaints with DfI and Translink.
- To develop a Consumer Council Strategy for Future Consumers.

Board Members notes the areas of risk, and approved the Forward Work Programme Progress Report for Quarter 3 2020-2021. After discussion it was also agreed that the Head of Transport should contact RQIA for information on how to deliver remote accessibility auditing given the ongoing lockdown restrictions.

308/10.2 Translink Complaints Report

The Head of Transport presented the Translink Complaints Report for Board Members' information.

Board Members noted the report and concurred that The Consumer Council definition for a "vulnerable person" needed to be clarified.

308/10.3 2021 NI Consumer Week

The Head of Consumer Empowerment and Protection presented the plans for the NI Consumer Week event to be held week commencing 22 March 2021. He informed Board Members that due to COVID-19, The Consumer Council was unable to deliver the traditional Consumer Parliament in March as planned, and explained that this had provided the opportunity to deliver a week-long event instead.

Board Members suggested the following recommendations for NI Consumer Week:

- To approach the Minister to open the Week with the Chair.
- To include Safe Food as a stakeholder when developing the food theme for the Week.
- To leverage the digital programme to access new, younger audiences.
- To ensure that the demographic that attended the live events is also included.
- To agree key performance indicators and targets for the Week and monitor progress.
- To consider a role for Linda McAuley.
- To provide updates to Board by email.

Board Members noted the plans for the NI Consumer Week, and approval was given to invite the Minister of the Department for the Economy to open the event with the Chair.

308/10.4 Consumer Position Paper

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

Board Members stated that they found the information very useful and that it could also be used externally. It was agreed that this would be presented on a monthly basis.

308/11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

All officers with the exception of the Chief Executive and the Director of Corporate Services left the meeting at this point.

308/11.1.1 Closed Session: Update with Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services.

The Director of Corporate Services left the meeting at this point.

308/11.1.2 Closed Session: Update with Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive left the meeting at this point.

308/11.2 Review of the Meeting

The Board was content with the volume and quality of the papers and was interested in assessing how the new Chief Executive would propose new changes.

308/12 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Friday 26 March 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 1.50pm.

Signed _____

Date _____