

**THREE HUNDRED AND TENTH MEETING OF THE GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND HELD
ON FRIDAY 14 MAY 2021 AT 10.00AM VIA ZOOM CONFERENCE CALL**

310/1

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Noyona Chundur	Chief Executive Officer (Except agenda item 310/11.1)
Mrs Carmel McConville	Director of EU Exit (Except agenda items 310/11.1)
Mr Scott Kennerley	Director of Financial, Communications and Digital Services (Except agenda item 310/11.1)
Mr William Warke	Director of Corporate Services (Except agenda item 310/11.1)
Mr Peter Edwards	Interim Head of Finance (Except agenda item 310/11.1)
Mr Raymond Gormley	Interim Head of Energy (Except agenda item 310/11.1)
Mr Michael Legg	Interim Head of Postal Services (Agenda item 7.1)
Mr Graham Smith	Head of Water (Except agenda item 310/11.1)
Mr Richard Williams	Head of Transport (Except agenda item 310/11.1)
Mrs Fiona Lavery	Personal Assistant (Except agenda item 310/11.1)

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Board Member, Mr Alan O'Neill.

310/2

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.

310/3 **PRESENTATION BY STEPHANIE MCCUTCHEON, INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**

The Chair welcomed Stephanie McCutcheon of Investors in People (IiP) to the Board Meeting to give Board Members an overview of IiP following the Consumer Council's recent success in attaining the Gold Standard.

Ms McCutcheon congratulated the Consumer Council on the great achievement, and explained to Board Members that a rigorous and robust assessment had been carried out. She stated that the assessment gave the organisation the opportunity to move forward with good indicators and measures for continuous improvement.

Board Members agreed that the excellent result was a testament to the work of the staff and leadership of the organisation in the unprecedented environment of COVID-19 and Brexit.

Having answered Board Members questions, Ms McCutcheon thanked the Chair for allowing her to present, and she left the meeting at this point.

310/4 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 March 2021, having been circulated, were agreed as a true and correct record.

The Minutes were agreed and signed.

310/5 **MATTERS ARISING**

Board Members noted the Matters Arising and an update was given on the following items.

Referring to Item 6.2, it was agreed that the Chief Executive would proceed with preparing the Foreword of the draft Corporate Plan to progress sign-off.

Referring to Item 9.2, Board Member William Leathem agreed to assist with introductions to Lisburn and Castlereagh Borough Council regarding Research into Older People Transport and COVID-19.

310/6 **CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS**

The Chair reminded Board Members that the Director of EU Exit was leaving her role in the Consumer Council. She thanked her hard work and contribution to the Consumer Council and wished her well in her new role.

Board Members concurred with these remarks.

310/7 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BUSINESS**

310/7.1 **The Chief Executive’s Report**

The Chief Executive presented the Chief Executive’s Report and highlighted the key issues arising.

Referring to point 1.14 in the Chief Executive’s Report, Board Member William Leathem stated that he could assist with the distribution of the Scamwise Champion resources through USEL and Disability Action.

Board Member Mick McAteer stated that he would forward the details of the UK Regulators Network event on the road back to Net Zero to the Interim Head of Energy on 27 May 2021.

The Head of Transport referred to point 1.42 on Bus Permits in the Chief Executive’s report and highlighted the concern from the industry that the new guidelines had not been properly consulted on, and that the new terms unfairly restricted private operators from competing with Translink. He informed Board Members that discussions were on-going with DfI and the industry on this issue.

He also informed Board Members that the Consumer Council is in discussion with DfI on the anticipated next steps following the refusal of the application from a Bus Operator for an additional six express routes. He informed Board Members that the decision would be challenged through another judicial review.

Board Members noted the Chief Executive’s Report.

310/8 **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

310/8.1 **Management Accounts: Month Ending 31 March 2021**

The Director of Corporate Services presented the Management Accounts for the month ending 31 March 2021 and highlighted the key issues arising for Board Members’ information.

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

310/8.2 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Papers: April 2021

Board Member and Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), June Butler, presented the papers that had been circulated to Board Members following the last ARAC held on 27 April 2021 for approval. She also stated that the ARAC Annual Report for 2020/21 had also been discussed during the meeting.

She informed Board Members that the current risk of the staffing situation had been discussed at length. She also stated that the Terms of Reference of the ARAC had been reviewed and revised, and would go back to the next ARAC meeting in June 2021 for approval.

She reminded Board Members that the completion of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2020-2021 would be delayed, and it was agreed that a Special Board Meeting would be convened on 20 August 2021 for final sign-off.

Board Member Lynne Crowther reminded Mrs Butler that her apologies for the last ARAC meeting should be added to the Minutes.

The Chief Executive stated that the current Corporate Risk Register template was being revised and the new version will be brought to the June ARAC meeting then the June Board Meeting.

Board Members approved the ARAC papers from 27 April 2021.

310/9 **COMPLIANCE**

310/9.1 Forward Work Programme: Quarter 4 Progress Report

Board Members noted the Progress Report of the Forward Work Programme for Quarter 4 2020-2021.

310/9.2 2021-2022 Forward Work Programme

Board Members approved the 2021-2022 Forward Work Programme.

310.10 **POLICY/STRATEGY**

310/10.1 Consumer Vulnerability Paper

The Head of Water presented the proposed definition of consumer vulnerability, and following discussion, it was agreed that a separate session should be convened with Board Members to discuss the issue in greater detail.

310/10.2 Research on EU Exit Real and the Views of Northern Ireland

The Director of EU Exit presented the Research on EU Exit Real and the Views of Northern Ireland for noting.

She informed Board Members that the research had been carried out by two separate research agencies and early drafts of the research reports had been received. She stated that the intention with this research was to highlight the key findings from both pieces of research and amalgamate it into one report, and also to produce a succinct one pager with infographics and visuals highlighting the main findings.

Board Members noted the Research Report, and agreed to the proposal to merge the two documents into one, and produce a one pager with infographics and visuals highlighting the main findings.

310/10.3 Consumer Insight Survey 2021 Update

The Chief Executive presented the Consumer Insight Survey and highlighted some of the key findings from the survey for Board Members' information.

Board Members noted the Consumer Insight Survey 2021 update.

It was agreed that the Chief Executive would reply to Board Member Mick McAteer after checking if there was a variance in awareness of the Consumer Council between various groups this year, compared to last year.

310/10.4 Research on the Impact of Digitalisation on NI Consumers

The Director of EU Exit presented the research on the Impact of Digitisation on NI Consumers.

She reminded Board Members that the research had been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, given the unprecedented shift to online services and the potential for increased consumer detriment.

She stated that the results of the research would be used throughout 2021-2022 in the media, consultation responses, presentations and formulation of policy work, and that a thought leadership piece from the Chief Executive would be published alongside a campaign activity to focus on the needs of vulnerable consumers, and highlighting the recommendations from the report.

She also stated that a consumer friendly summary report was being developed by Perceptive Insight and would be published on the Consumer Council's website and circulated to Board Members alongside the main report.

In response to Board Member Mick McAteer, The Director of EU Exit stated that she would check and reply to his query of any significant differences between the UK and NI.

Board Members noted the Research on the Impact of Digitalisation on NI Consumers.

310/10.5 NI Consumer Attitudes to Energy Transition Issues Research

The Interim Head of Energy presented the findings of the NI Consumer Attitudes to Energy Transition Issues to Board Members, and stated that the re-occurring theme throughout the report was lower costs.

Following discussion, Board Members approved the NI Consumer Attitudes to Energy Transition Issues Research, and it was agreed that it should be circulated to stakeholders, and a user-friendly version created for the Consumer Council website.

It was also agreed that the short video clips would be circulated to Board Members and shared on social media.

310/10.6 Research on Decarbonisation - Empowering and Protecting Energy, Transport and Water Consumers

The Head of Transport presented the Research on Decarbonisation – Empowering and Protecting Energy, Transport and Water Consumers for Board Members to note.

He stated that The Consumer Council had commissioned research to investigate the strategy and activity in the decarbonisation of energy, transport and water in other jurisdictions that were examples of current best practice. He informed Board Members that the report proposed a consumer protection model based on six pillars of affordability, simplicity, protection, inclusiveness, reliability and empowerment, and that it would be used to inform our response to the ongoing debate and DfE consultation on decarbonisation within energy, transport and water.

The Chair welcomed Cathal Ryan of Cornwall Insight to the meeting who presented the findings of the research to Board Members.

Board Member Mick McAteer stated that it was a really useful model and suggested it would be useful to break the pillars down into those that are outcomes and those are mechanisms for achieving outcomes. He stated that stress tests should be carried out using the model against real life scenarios to understand what the difficult issues will be.

The Chair thanked Mr Ryan for presenting his very interesting research, and having answered Board Members questions, he left the meeting.

Board Members noted the Research on Decarbonisation – Empowering and Protecting Energy, Transport and Water Consumers.

310/11 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

All officers left the meeting at this point.

310/11.1 **Review of the Meeting**

Board Members reviewed the Board Meeting, and the following issues were raised:

- Board Members Amanda Logan and William Leathem have not yet received their Tablets to enable them to use Decision Time.
- Papers for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee should also be disseminated through Decision Time.
- Board Papers to be more easily referenced against the agenda.
- The CEO Report should be streamlined with no duplication of information.
- The Agenda should be prioritised to ensure time for discussion on strategic items.

310/12 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Friday 26 June 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 1.45pm.

Signed _____

Date _____