**CONSUMER SCOTLAND STRATEGIC BOARD MEETING**

Tuesday 12th November 2024

10:00-12:30

In-person, Thistle House

**Minute**

**Board Members present:**

David Wilson, Chair

Angela Morgan, Member (AM)

Nick Martin, Member (NM)

James Walker, Member (JW)

Lesley Halliday, Member (LH)

**Also in attendance:**

Sam Ghibaldan, Chief Executive

Sue Bomphray, Director of Operations and Partnerships

David Eiser, Director of Research and Analysis

Douglas White, Director of Policy and Advocacy

Polly Mazurkiewicz (secretariat)

**Welcome and Declaration of Interest**

1. The Chair welcomed the Board to the meeting and invited declarations of interest.
2. No declarations of interests were raised in relation to the meeting. It was noted that an updated register of interests had been produced following discussion at the preceding Board meeting.

**Minutes from the Previous Board Meeting**

1. The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24th September 2024.

**Action Tracker**

1. The Director of Operations and Partnerships updated the Board on actions recorded in the Action Tracker. The Board noted this update.

**Key Issues Update and General Discussion**

Budget**:**

1. The Chief Executive updated the Board on ongoing budget discussions with the Scottish Government for FY2025-26.
2. Negotiations were following a revised approach this year, better reflecting Consumer Scotland’s position as a NMO.
3. We have requested a lean budget, significantly lower than initially planned in our medium-long term strategy and in the context of current public sector fiscal pressures. The budget requested would allow Consumer Scotland to continue to operate and to deliver its statutory functions including the consumer welfare report. There are active discussions taking place with the Scottish Government.
4. The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for this update and thanked the team for work on the budget to date, noting:
	* The Board was supportive in the approach taken in requesting a lean budget that reflected the organisation’s budget requirements
	* The process being followed was a significant improvement on the previous year
	* Given the reality that previous real-terms budget cuts meant Consumer Scotland does not have a contingency line in its budget, there were risks arising from any in-year pressures outwith our control, such as a lower vacancy rate than anticipated, or pay rises in excess of public sector pay policy. The Board therefore supported requesting the Scottish Government acknowledge these risks and use their best endeavours to make additional funding available in-year should that be necessary.

NMO Status:

1. The Chief Executive informed the Board of efforts to reach a common understanding with the Scottish Government on Consumer Scotland’s Non-Ministerial Office (NMO) governance and accountability status.
2. An **action** was taken to arrange an agenda item on this issue at the December Board.
3. An **action** was taken for the Executive Team to review the content and format of regular updates to the Scottish Government on Consumer Scotland’s activities.
4. It was also noted that the latest iteration of the framework agreement between Consumer Scotland and the Scottish Government was in the process of being updated, with the latest draft currently with the Government. An **action** was taken to formally follow up on its progress.

**Workforce Wellbeing**

1. The Director of Operations and Partnerships presented the updated Absence Overview paper.
2. Absence rates were discussed noting that as a small organisation, instances of long term absence influenced absence statistics more significantly than in larger organisations.
3. It was noted that employee assistance, occupational health, and mental health first aid services were available to all colleagues.
4. The Board thanked the Director for her helpful update.

**Looking Ahead to 2025-26**

Work Planning

1. The Director of Policy and Advocacy updated members on work underway to produce Consumer Scotland’s Draft Work Programme for 2025-26. The proposed format for the document had evolved since last year. The 2025-26 document would include outcome-focused headings and an emphasis on theory of change and impact.
2. Key feedback from Board members included:
* Support for the new structure, with suggestions for clearer visualisation of advocacy tools
* Acknowledgment of interconnected responsibilities among stakeholders in achieving outcomes
* The need to ensure work programme presentation aligns with longer term reports such as the Strategic Plan.
1. The Board agreed with the approach being taken for next year’s work programme. It was noted that the draft work programme will be discussed at the December meeting, with Board approval sought via email thereafter.

Public policy context

1. The Director of Research and Analysis led a discussion on Consumer Scotland’s work programme and outputs in the context of the public policy landscape, highlighting areas with particular public and political interest such as net zero, affordability, and consumer detriment.

**AOB**

1. There being no other business, the meeting closed.