

CONSUMER SCOTLAND BOARD MEETING

Tuesday 21 June 2022

10.25 am to 12.00 pm

Via MS Teams

Minutes

Attendees

Present

David Wilson (DW), Chair

Angela Morgan (AM), Member

Nick Martin (NM), Member

James Walker (JW), Member

In Attendance

Consumer Scotland:

Sam Ghibaldan (SG), Chief Executive

Sue Bomphray (SB), Interim Director of Operations

Andy Denholm (AD), Head of Communications (first half of meeting)

Jamie Steed (JS), Head of Strategic Coordination (Secretariat)

Scottish Government (first half of meeting):

Mr Tom Arthur MSP – Minister for Public Finance, Planning & Community Wealth

Joe Dickson - Minister's PS

Neil Ritchie - Energy Services and Consumer Policy Unit, Scottish Government

Tanya Friel - Energy Services and Consumer Policy Unit, Scottish Government

Welcome and Update

1. The Chair welcomed the Minister who joined for the first part of the meeting. He extended welcomes to JS who carried out the secretariat function for the meeting, and to AD, Head of Communications.
2. The Chair congratulated Sam Ghibaldan on his appointment as Chief Executive and Sue Bomphray on taking on the role of Interim Director of Operations.

Discussion between the Minister and Consumer Scotland Board

3. The Chair set out for the Minister Consumer Scotland's progress to having become an operational and active organisation with a clear focus on areas including transition to net zero, the cost of living

crisis and consumers in vulnerable circumstances. These align with Scottish Government priorities and the tools and powers available to Consumer Scotland mean it will be able to meaningfully contribute to progress. He noted that the Resource Spending Review (RSR) raised potential concerns for CS and other bodies and recognised that there is no specific number associated with consumer activity in the level 2 published figures. It was recognised that the RSR set out planning assumptions and did not replace normal budget processes.

4. JW highlighted that we operate in a charged and changed consumer landscape. The Interim Strategic Plan (ISP) focuses on what we will do, including achievable but stretching targets. We will collaborate with others to achieve more than sum of our collective parts. It was noted that we we're still developing our staff and capacity, that we will be evidence led and provide impartial analysis and insights.
5. NM updated that we are building strong governance framework. He recognised the fiscal pressures underpinning the RSR but noted concerns for fledgling public bodies such as CS. He set out CS's intent to seek best value for public sector in area such as shared services and accommodation.
6. AM set out CS's vision for success in relation to consumers in vulnerable circumstances. A short life working group for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances (CVC) has been established with a small, expert and diverse membership. It was noted that anyone can be vulnerable and that lots of Scots live in poverty which has disproportionate impacts on those with other vulnerabilities. CS is developing holistic picture of the experience of CVC including data collection and case stories. Whilst the immediate pressures on consumers in vulnerable circumstances require an emphasis on mitigation of impact, Consumer Scotland has a unique role in also considering how and where prevention can be developed, working with business to identify and promote good practice and also the public sector where prevention is key in public sector reform.
7. The Minister formally thanked everyone for their work on the establishment of Consumer Scotland and was delighted to see CS up and running. He stated that it was encouraging to hear that CS intend to collaborate effectively to meet shared challenges and such strong governance arrangements. The Minister noted that CS will need to be flexible to respond to emerging issues.
8. The Minister set out the government's thinking on the RSR and priorities include child poverty, climate emergency, public sector reform and cost of living. He noted that consumers need to be protected, especially in the just transition to net zero with challenging targets to be achieved by 2030 and 2045, and that informed consumers are key to a strong economy. He encouraged CS to engage across UK as the challenges consumers face have much in common in different parts of the UK.

9. In discussion the following points were made:

- We are all consumers and that the theme of empowering consumers should permeate across government; CS looks forward to working together on championing the role
- Engaging consumers will create a more healthy economy, with better business practices built on consumer trust
- Developing partnerships is critical to CS's success and we look forward to engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders.

10. The Minister noted that consumer issues impact all and that CS has a role to play in local and regional economics and helping to transforming public sector approach in these areas.

11. The CEO highlighted that a successful transition to net zero will require business and public bodies to work with the grain of consumer behaviour. He set out plans for the public launch of Consumer Scotland and the Interim Strategic Plan the following day, which, while mindful that we are still developing capacity and functions, will announce our programme for the next few months and our medium-term priorities. Launch plans include a media release, video clips, an opinion piece and the activity on our new website and social media channels (Twitter & LinkedIn). The Minister gave his best wishes for the launch.

12. The Minister, Scottish Government Officials and AD left the meeting.

Minutes and Actions from Previous Meetings

13. The Board agreed the minutes of their last meeting on 19th May.

14. SB took the board through the governance action tracker. The format has been updated to move closed actions to a centrally maintained tracker and also to add due dates against each action with remaining actions being in progress.

15. It was noted that Kersti Berge (Action 117) has now approved the Framework Agreement on behalf of the Scottish Government. It has been uploaded onto our website as part of our publication scheme.

Chief Executive's Report

16. There were two papers for this agenda item: Chief Executive's Report and a Lead Responsibilities Organogram.
17. The CEO provided an overview on progress on all areas of work required to ensure that Consumer Scotland is fully up and running. He noted that the programme of work set out in late 2021 to establish Consumer Scotland will be successfully completed with the launch tomorrow.
18. The report set out a series of objectives and tasks for each directorate over the next few months. A Lead Responsibilities Organogram sets out the key areas of activity for each of the three directorates within Consumer Scotland: Operations, Analysis and Investigation, and Policy and Advocacy. The CEO emphasised that these are areas of lead responsibility and it is expected that there will be significant cross team collaboration. JS has been developing a programme planner and project planning procedures and policies in collaboration with other teams.
19. The CEO noted that following the recent recruitment round, nine candidates are going through security checking. The Director of Analysis and Investigation, and Director of Policy and Advocacy roles were currently being advertised. Interviews for the Director of Operations will take place in early July.
20. The CEO noted that the RSR set a challenging context for 2023-24 funding that may impact the pace at which we are able to develop some of Consumer Scotland's functions. We will engage closely with the Scottish Government as their budget planning develops. It was agreed that the September Board meeting would consider a budget forecast for the rest of the year and budget options for 2023-24.
21. The CEO discussed the proposed future Board meetings (virtual & in person) and suggested that August's meeting be focussed on the Communications Strategy and Data Strategy. He noted that the ISP consultation will be launched tomorrow and will help with the drafting and prioritisation of the Strategic Plan.
22. Discussions would take place soon with the Chair of the Energy Consumers Committee about its remit.
23. It was agreed to develop a learning and development strategy. **(Action - SB)**

Future Board and Audit and Risk Committee meetings

24. SB shared a paper and sought the board's views on the timetabling and structure of its future meetings and those of the Audit and Risk Committee. Board members agreed:

- There should be eight Board meetings for 2022-23, four in-person and four virtual, in line with the schedule set out in the paper
- Four meetings should primarily be about governance issues, and four strategic issues (the latter could include some sessions for advisory sub-committees)
- The Audit and Risk Committee should meet quarterly on the same day as in-person Board meetings.
- The Chair noted his thanks to Jill Rosie for developing the paper.

Any other business

25. There being no other business, the date of next meeting was confirmed as 16th August at 10am, online.