

## Committee for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances

Meeting 1: 07/11/2023, 10.30am – St Vincent Plaza

### Attendees

- Angela Morgan, Chair (Board, Consumer Scotland)
- Nick Martin (Board, Consumer Scotland)
- Karen Nailen (Chief Executive, West Lothian Citizens Advice Bureau) - joined remotely
- Aaliya Seyal (Chief Executive Officer, Legal Services Agency)
- Douglas White (Director of Policy & Analysis, Consumer Scotland)
- Jane Williams (Head of Research, Consumer Scotland)
- David Jackson, Minutes (Policy and Advocacy Officer, Consumer Scotland)
- Twimukye Macline Mushaka (Representing herself)
- Kirsten Urquhart (Young Scot)
- Chris Birt (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
- John McKendrick (Glasgow Caledonian University)
- Kendal Morris (SP Energy Networks)
- Gemma Black (Business Support Officer – Minutes)

### Apologies

- Artemis Pana (Scottish Rural Action)

## **Agenda Item 1: Arrival**

## **Agenda Item 2: Welcome and Introductions**

1. The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the Advisory Committee on Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances.
2. The Chair noted the rapid follow up meeting in December. This meeting was to provide an opportunity for members to get to know each other, to hear further about Consumer Scotland's work in this area to date and to discuss effective means of working together collaboratively.
3. Members then provided introductions of themselves and their roles.

## **Agenda Item 3: The Story so far: Context Setting**

4. An overview of Consumer Scotland's role and its strategic approach to consumers in vulnerable circumstances was shared with members of the committee. It was noted that this committee follows on from the Short Life Working Group on consumers in vulnerable circumstances.
5. Discussion followed regarding the specific levy-funded activity that Consumer Scotland undertakes in the energy, post, and water markets. Outside of these areas, Consumer Scotland has to prioritise which services and markets to focus activity on. This is done through an annual work planning process, which includes a public consultation.
6. It was noted that "consumer" does not necessarily only equate to "buying" and that it was useful for committee members to be aware that Consumer Scotland's remit also includes users of public services.
7. An overview was then provided of the powers and duties held by Consumer Scotland.
8. There was a brief explanation about the progress of Consumer Scotland's 2023-24 work programme and how the committee will be asked to comment on it in the future.

9. An overview was provided of Consumer Scotland's interventions to date related to consumers in vulnerable circumstances across a number of markets.
10. There was then an overview of ongoing Consumer Scotland research insights and strategy. It was especially noted that Consumer Scotland are keen to develop ways to interact directly with consumers in vulnerable circumstances to gather more data and information from people with lived experience of relevant issues.
11. It was noted that Consumer Scotland should be sure to have a focus on inclusion and diversity in research design. It was agreed that this was an area where the committee would be able to offer valuable input.
12. It was also recognised that not all research should have to come from Consumer Scotland and that there should be a recognition of existing research that can be utilised.
13. The sentiment was shared by committee members that Consumer Scotland should have a commitment to the inclusion of lived experience in research. It was further suggested that Consumer Scotland should also be open to reaching out to smaller organisations for insight.

**Agenda Item 4 – Highlight of considerations papers from the outgoing Short Life Working Group and the briefing paper ahead of the meeting**

14. It was recognised that the content of the papers was very useful in providing background to Consumer Scotland's approach to date.
15. A point was raised about how Consumer Scotland may have to work in markets where there is divergence between UK and Scottish Government policy in the future, and this is something Consumer Scotland will consider.

### **Agenda Item 5 – How the work of the Committee will map against the Consumer Scotland strategic and delivery cycles**

16. It was noted that Consumer Scotland has published a strategic plan and an annual work programme. Consumer Scotland is well into this cycle of work programming for 2024-25, but will be able to engage the committee with an earlier role in the process for the next cycle.

### **Agenda Item 6 - Discussions on committee approach and priorities**

17. Summaries of group responses from the discussions were shared.

18. It was suggested that there should be a focus on clarity and consistency of communications and connections. Where there is contact between meetings, there should be a clear purpose for this, with an option to respond, but not necessarily a requirement.

19. It was suggested that a means of keeping up to date with the work of Consumer Scotland may also be helpful, and the option to sign up to the new mailing list for publications and updates was mentioned as a way to achieve this.

20. There was also a desire that the committee should maximise the value of its sessions by aiming to involve Consumer Scotland staff with relevant knowledge of specific work or issues being discussed, as appropriate.

### **Agenda Item 8 – Next Steps**

21. Next meeting set for 5<sup>th</sup> December, Meadowbank House, time TBC.

22. Discussions at the next meeting in December will surround sharing the draft Consumer Scotland work plan, discussing the statement about how Consumer Scotland aims to work with and for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances, and a discussion about affordability for consumers across markets. Committee to be provided with clarity of expectations in advance.

**Agenda Item 9 – AOB and close**

23. Consumer Scotland will continue working on gaining access to a secure shared space for members to communicate more efficiently.

24. The Chair closed the meeting with thanks for attending.