

**CONSUMER SCOTLAND  
STRATEGIC BOARD MEETING**  
Tuesday 15 August 2023  
10:00 – 15:30  
Meadowbank House, Edinburgh

**Minutes**

**Board Members present:**

David Wilson, Chair  
Nick Martin, Member (NM)  
Angela Morgan, Member (AM)  
James Walker, Member (JW) (Remote)

**Also in attendance:**

Sam Ghibaldan, Chief Executive  
Sue Bomphray, Director of Operations  
David Eiser, Director of Research and Analysis  
Douglas White, Director of Policy and Advocacy  
Gail Walker, Head of Water and Post  
Emma Ash, Water Policy Manager  
Polly Mazurkiewicz (Secretariat)  
Catriona Kirk (Secretariat maternity cover)

**Apologies:**

None

**Welcome and Declaration of Interest**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies were noted.
2. No declarations of interest were noted in regard to the agenda.

**Minutes from the Previous Meeting**

3. Subject to comments made ahead of time, the Board approved the minutes of the previous Board meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> June.

## **Action Tracker**

4. The Chair invited the Director of Operations to provide an overview of the Action Tracker and outline any points of interest.
5. The Director of Operations noted that the majority of actions were scheduled or completed ahead of the Board meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> August.
6. There was one action noted as still in progress. This referred to action point 147 concerning the handling of UK Legislation Conferring Functions and their impact on Consumer Scotland (CS). The Director of Operations noted there will be an update provided at the Board meeting scheduled on 3rd October.
7. No further points noted.

## **Key Issues Update**

8. The Chief Executive provided the Board with a key issues update.
9. The first point noted was that, following the June Board meeting, colleagues had met with Scottish Government officials regarding the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill. It was agreed that CS would submit responses to both the Finance and Public Administration, and Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee's calls for evidence on the bill. The Chair had also written to the portfolio minister on our position which had been shared with members for information.
10. The Board agreed that the committee response was very well written and expressed their thanks to the Head of Policy and Markets for her work on its preparation. It was a model document which should be used to inspire future papers.
11. Regarding publication, the Chief Executive noted that the Scottish Parliament routinely publishes consultation responses received, and that CS consultation responses are being proactively uploaded to our website.
12. In the context of the increasing number and range of publications available on the Consumer Scotland website the Chair noted that there may be benefit in reviewing its navigability.
13. The Chief Executive then went on to discuss Heat Networks and noted there had been positive progression in this area of business activity with Consumer Scotland being designated as consumer advocate in Scotland once relevant UK legislation comes into force.

14. Three Scottish Government ministerial working groups on energy have been attended over the last quarter. These included vulnerable consumers, rural consumers and non-domestic consumers. Consumer Scotland was closely engaged in work relating to those groups.
15. The Chief Executive updated the Board on the creation of a water sector steering group including the Chief Executives of Scottish Water, the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland (DWQR). A meeting is to be planned for further discussion (date tbc).
16. An update was provided on the Recall of Goods Register, noting that CS had a statutory duty to “establish and operate, or secure the establishment and operation of, a publicly available database of recalls of goods in Scotland.” It was noted that following the establishment of CS, the Office of Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) had launched its own UK wide recall register. Given this, CS had met with OPSS and discussed a partnership approach to recall what would be likely to offer benefits of simplicity and best value for consumers. A working group would be set up between CS and OPSS to develop a proposal that aligned the recall register with the needs of consumers in Scotland. The Board supported the constructive approach being taken which was consistent with Consumer Scotland’s commitment to partnership working.
17. The Chief Executive and Director of Operations updated the Board on the submission of the draft annual report of accounts to Deloitte. The Chair noted formal thanks to everyone involved in the preparation and audit process for the first annual report.
18. The Director of Operations gave a short update on the proposed move of Edinburgh office space. A decision from the Scottish Government Estates Team was expected imminently.
19. The Chief Executive also updated the Board on recruitment. An **action** to update the existing Organogram was noted.

### **FY 2024/2025 Budget Planning Update**

20. The Director of Operations led the discussion on the 2024-25 Budget Planning Update.
21. The first point noted was with regards to the Scottish Government pay deal. This pay deal was announced on 14<sup>th</sup> August and covers both financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25. The Director of Operations noted that this would now be modelled into CS’s budget forecasting.
22. The Chair summarised key points, noting that the Board fed back that:
  - a. There should be a return to the budget discussion at the October Board meeting. An **action** was taken to add this to the agenda.

- b. Compounding increases relating to the pay award, including pay progression and pension spend, should be considered in future budgets.
- c. It would be necessary to ensure the new financial system (and associated reporting) was able to accommodate Consumer Scotland having multiple sources of funding. It would endorse an innovative and flexible strategy to how CS costs and utilises levy funding, and the approaches of previous financial years need not necessarily be used moving forward.

## **Work Programme – Progress and Forward Planning**

23. The Work Programme paper was introduced by the Director of Policy and Advocacy and presented to the board in partnership with the Director of Research and Analysis, setting out forward planning for the 2024-25 Work Programme.

24. The Director of Policy and Advocacy noted a number of points of interest of the paper:

- a. This paper will guide points of discussion at future Board meetings.
- b. It is notable that, with a fuller staff complement, delivery of the Work Programme is progressing well this year.
- c. The paper has been steered by learning on delivery objectives from last year, resulting in a strategy from the outset which positions us strongly for forward planning for next year.

25. The Board noted the paper was extremely helpful and the Chair summarised Board feedback:

- a. It was important that next year's workplan is based on evidence.
- b. To that end, a prioritisation framework would be necessary, and it will be important to document our decision making as to why items are included or excluded from the final plan.
- c. Work programme planning should start with the identification of themes, with workstreams following.

26. The Director of Policy and Advocacy thanked the Board for their feedback and advised that aspects of the Work Programme were to be further developed and investigated at the internal All Staff Meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> August. The Board feedback would be helpful in framing this session.

## **Consumer Principles**

27. The Head of Water and Post joined the meeting to host an interactive Consumer Principles workshop with the Board and introduced the Consumer Principles and noted that by the end of the session the Board would have more information on the tools needed to analyse issues impacting consumers. The eight main key consumer principles were outlined to the Board, noting that CS had reviewed the principles and added an eighth one relating to sustainability:

- Access
- Choice
- Safety
- Information
- Fairness
- Representation
- Re-dress
- Sustainability

28. Discussion was had about how the Consumer Principles are used to form framework within policy development. Ultimately, they are used to support and influence policymaking as they allow external stakeholders to see issues from a consumer perspective. The Board then participated in a workshop exploring how the principles can be used in practice.

29. The Director of Policy and Advocacy closed the group work session and stated that similar workshops were being organised with internal staff to inform them on Consumer Principles. The Board agreed that the group task was very useful for awareness and noted that it was a great exercise to engage people in the reality of the importance of consumer rights. It was agreed by the Board that it would be helpful to have a document that outlines how the Consumer Principles are used to influence real-life examples. The Chair thanked the Head of Water and Post and the Director of Policy and Advocacy for their contribution to the meeting.

30. The Head of Water and Post left the meeting.

#### **AOB**

31. The Chair invited any other business.

32. AM noted that she would be unable to attend the next Board meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> October. An **action** was taken to organise a pre-meeting with AM to brief her on the Annual Accounts.

33. The Chair extended particular thanks to the Secretariat (PM) for her contribution, specifically towards Board meetings. The Board offered their best wishes.

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

#### **Seminar Session – Water – provided by Emma Ash and Gail Walker (water policy team)**

35. Following the formal Board meeting, an informal seminar session took place to introduce the Board to the Water Policy Team and CS's role in the water sector.

36. As part of the session, an update was provided on the water industry Market Health Checker function, which CS was helping to develop. A draft code of practice was in development with consumer-focused research informing the code.
37. The Chair drew the seminar session to a close, thanking the Water Policy Team for their contribution and noted recognition from the board with regards to the high quality of work produced by the Water Policy Team. An **action** was taken to organise a Board trip to a water treatment facility in order to increase the Board's understanding of the water industry.