

Committee for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances

Minutes of meeting, Meeting 4, 18/06/2024, 10.00am – Thistle House, Edinburgh

Attendees

- Angela Morgan, Chair (Board, Consumer Scotland)
- Aaliya Seyal (Chief Executive Officer, Legal Services Agency)
- Twimukye Macline Mushaka (Representing herself)
- John McKendrick (Glasgow Caledonian University) - joined remotely
- Artemis Pana (Scottish Rural Action) - joined remotely
- Jane Williams (Head of Research, Consumer Scotland)
- David Jackson, Minutes (Policy and Advocacy Officer, Consumer Scotland)
- Eva Ablett (Policy and Advocacy Officer, Consumer Scotland)
- Sally Sandground (Corporate Services – Minutes)

Apologies

- Kendal Morris (SP Energy Networks)
- Tracey Reilly (Head of Consumer Markets, Consumer Scotland)
- Kirsten Urquhart (Young Scot)
- Karen Nailen (Chief Executive, West Lothian Citizens Advice Bureau)
- Nick Martin (Board, Consumer Scotland)
- Chris Birt (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

Agenda Item 1: Arrival

Agenda Item 2: Welcome and Introductions

- The Chair welcomed members.
- The minutes of the previous Committee meeting held on 21st March 2024 were approved, and will now be published.
- Committee members and the Chair thanked the Consumer Scotland team for the excellent quality of the papers provided prior to the meeting.

Agenda Item 3: Updates Log

- Consumer Scotland's 2024-25 Work Programme has been published. Consumer Scotland will engage with Committee on the development of the 2025-26 Work Programme with an agenda item likely to be dedicated to this at the next meeting;
- The Draft 'Statement of Consumer Scotland's Approach to Working with Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances' and 'Draft Principles for undertaking research and engagement with consumers in vulnerable circumstances' have been distributed to the committee and will be discussed in a later item;
- It was noted that Consumer Scotland's VOIP work discussed at the last meeting has had positive outcomes, and CS will continue to update the committee as appropriate;
- Consumer Scotland have issued a Prior Interest Notice for Research organisations to collaborate with on research projects along with an Invitation to Tender. Progress will be shared via the Updates Log;
- The 'Approach to Meeting Structure' paper has been distributed to the committee and questions and feedback were invited by the Chair. Committee members agreed it was useful and well presented, and the Chair thanked the Secretariat for preparing the paper.

Item 4: Draft Statement of Consumer Scotland's Approach to working with Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances

- The Head of Research provided an overview of the Statement and its development, highlighting the valuable contribution of the CCVC committee;
- Committee discussion noted that using appropriate terminology was important, to ensure it is accessible and easy to understand for target audiences;
- Committee members were happy with the approach taken to defining vulnerability. They acknowledged the importance of engaging with consumer bodies to represent consumer interests in decision making, as well as representing individual consumer

stories. Members also made further specific suggestions for final improvements to the Statement before it is published;

- Committee members acknowledged the thorough and reflective approach taken especially around the choice of language, and were happy with the tone of the document;
- Next steps: The committee will receive the final version of this paper for information after review by the Executive Team.

Agenda Item 5: Universal Service Obligation (USO) for Postal Services

- The Director of Policy & Advocacy provided an overview of Ofcom’s call for input on proposed changes to the USO, and our concerns regarding these;
- Consumer Scotland recommends obtaining further evidence to provide assurance that changes to the USO will not lead to harm for consumers. We have also recommended that a more inclusive process is developed for involving consumers in the decision-making process about USO design. There are issues around affordability and reliability of mail for consumers that have been highlighted as priority areas for action in any refreshed USO.
- The committee were asked to consider the importance of postal services for consumers and provide comments on where we should concentrate attention during the process of USO reform.
- The committee identified areas such as legal letters with specific timescales for response, health-related letters and prescriptions (especially for rural consumers), and the situation of small and micro businesses and small traders who are dependent on post to sell and send their products.
- Committee members also highlighted the “last mile” delivery issue. Members discussed what an equitable postal service could look like, for example, where a postal service could be used as a catalyst for wider opportunities in communities;
- The Chair thanked the Director of Policy & Advocacy for the presentation and the Committee members for the discussion;

- Next Steps – An update will be published by Ofcom in summer 2024 and Consumer Scotland will continue with engagement to address the evidence gaps.

Agenda Item 6: Ongoing Considerations for Priority Services Registers

- The Director of Policy & Advocacy provided a presentation on ongoing proposals for a cross-market Priority Services Register.
- The committee were asked for comment and thoughts on any questions or issues that Consumer Scotland should be prioritising. Some committee members were unaware of these mechanisms created by industry to support vulnerable consumers. Issues raised related to:
 - The ability for consumers to “share once” and the challenges relating to this, including data protection;
 - The need for registers to remain relevant, up to date to consumers’ personal circumstances, and future proof;
 - The Chair thanked the committee for the contributions and recommended follow up with absent committee members.

Agenda Item 7: Roundup of CS Work

- The ‘Round Up of CS Work’ paper has been distributed to the committee and highlighted some achievements and impactful work such as that related to VOIP, legal services, and affordability of services across multiple markets;
- The Policy and Markets Manager updated the Committee on the ‘Consumer Network’ regarding its purpose, members and structure and sub-groups. It was noted that feedback from Consumer Network members has been very positive. Minutes of the Consumer Network are published on the Consumer Scotland website;
- The Chair thanked the committee for their contributions and recommended follow up with absent committee members.

Agenda Item 8: AOB / Next Steps

- The Chair reminded the committee that this meeting is during pre-election period and of the relevant guidance relating to this, which had already been clarified in the meeting invite email message.
- Action: Follow up with absent committee members for contribution to agenda items as required
- Next meeting set for Wednesday 18th September 9.30-12.30, St Vincent Place, Plaza.

Confirmed Dates for Upcoming Meetings

- Wednesday 4th December, 2024 – 10.00 – 13.00
- Wednesday 12th March, 2025 – 10.00 – 13.00