

CONSUMER SCOTLAND STRATEGIC BOARD MEETING

Tuesday 14th May 2024

10:00 – 13:00

In person, Edinburgh

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

David Eiser, Director of Research and Analysis

Douglas White, Director of Policy and Advocacy

Jill Rosie, Assistant Director; Strategic Partnerships (item 5 only)

Eleanor Mullan, Head of Analysis (seminar session only)

Jane Williams, Head of Research (seminar session only)

Alistair Malcolm, Analysis Officer (seminar session only)

Fraser Stewart, Research Manager (seminar session only)

Camilla Barnett, Analysis Manager (seminar session only)

David Moyes, Analysis Manager (seminar session only)

Paul Smith, Investigations Manager (seminar session only)

Catriona Kirk, Governance, Digital and Communications Officer (minutes)

Welcome and Declaration of Interest

1. The Chair welcomed the Board to the meeting, noting that it was the first meeting in Thistle House – Consumer Scotland’s (CS) new shared office space with Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS). Prior to the meeting commencing, the Board were given a tour of the new office space.
2. Previous declarations of interest were noted. There were no new declarations of interest.

Minutes from the Previous Board Meeting

3. The Board approved the minutes of the previous Board meeting held on 14 March 2024.

Action Tracker

4. The Director of Operations updated the Board on the action tracker.
5. The Board thanked those involved in arranging the visit to the Scottish Water and Veolia water treatment and waste-water treatment sites earlier this month.

Key Issues Update

6. The Chief Executive provided a high-level update on key issues across Consumer Scotland. Topics discussed within this item are listed below:
 - **New Minister** – following the recent Scottish Government cabinet re-shuffle there is a new Scottish Government Minister for consumer protection, Mr Ivan McKee. An **action** was taken to invite the Minister and Scottish Government officials to a future Board meeting.
 - **Accommodation** – CS and ESS have now successfully moved into the new office space. The Chief Executive noted thanks to the Operations Team, and everyone involved in the process, for their efforts. The Director of Operations stated that CS and ESS have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to ensure effective collaborative working.
 - **Legal challenges to Investigations** – Scottish Government (SG) have responded to a CS letter highlighting the risk to our core budget in the event an investigation is legally challenged. SG has responded noting that should a legal challenge emerge, Consumer Scotland should advise the SG and finance officials will consider and if possible look to obtain additional budget.
 - **Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) funding** – CS have received a letter from SG confirming that CS will manage the grant agreement with CAS as of this financial year (2024-2025). CS is putting in place appropriate arrangements with CAS to agree and manage the grant agreement.
 - **Water legislation** – SG are currently reviewing water legislation and are actively engaging the water sector, including CS, in that process. The CEO set out some proposals being considered as they relate to CS's role in the sector.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

7. The Director of Operations provided an overview of the five-year medium term financial strategy (MTFS) and invited any questions from the Board.
8. The following points were made in discussion:
 - CS have mirrored the format of the SG MTFS. As SG's MTFS is being reviewed this month, we will revise ours in light of this;
 - The MTFS sets out capacity and resourcing assumptions for CS over the next five years. This includes staffing, operational requirements and programme costs;
 - The MTFS was carefully considered and structured to allow CS to continue its strategy of gradually growing into the statutory functions given to it by Parliament. The gradual evolution for CS inherent in the MTFS would help ensure best value was achieved from funding, and recognised the pressures on public spending.
 - CS do not anticipate any significant additional capital expenditures over the next five years;
 - It was noted that CS had faced significant increases in costs year-on-year as a young organisation as staff were progressing up pay bands, but these would level out as they reach the top of those bands. It was also noted that any additional recruitment dependent on additional funding would only take place once such resources had been confirmed.
9. The Board approved the paper, subject to amendments proposed at the meeting. It was also agreed that there should be a discussion about financial risks at a future Board meeting.

Framework Agreement

10. The Chair welcomed the Assistant Director of Strategic Partnerships to the meeting.
11. The Assistant Director of Strategic Partnerships thanked the Board for their feedback on the first draft of the Framework Agreement.
12. Further feedback had been received from Eleanor Ryan, an expert in public body governance issues. The Assistant Director of Strategic Partnerships provided an overview of the feedback and asked the Board for their approval before incorporating further changes to the Framework Agreement.
13. The Board also agreed to seek to include proposals made at the meeting including incorporation of the process set out in SG's letter to the CEO relating to legal risks arising from CS investigations.
14. The Board agreed and approved the paper, subject to final amendments, to be sent to SG for their considerations.

15. The Assistant Director of Strategic Partnerships left the meeting.

Affordability of Essential Services

16. The Director of Research and Analysis and Director of Policy and Advocacy presented on work CS have undertaken to look at affordability in targeted markets. The presentation focussed on data relating to water poverty in Scotland, approaches to affordability across different markets and principles developed by CS to assess affordability interventions across markets, including:

- a. Rationale
- b. Coverage
- c. Fairness
- d. Value
- e. Efficiency
- f. Transparency
- g. Fairness

17. The Board noted their support for the work carried out in this area with stakeholders. By continuing this work, CS will strengthen their position in advocating on behalf of consumers in these industries.

AOB

18. With no other business, the meeting was closed.

Seminar Session – Introduction and Our Work – provided by Consumer Scotland’s Research and Analysis Team

19. Consumer Scotland’s Research and Analysis Team joined the meeting to provide an overview of the team, their work, and their focus for the 2024-2025 financial year.