

CONSUMER FOCUS: MINUTES OF MAIN BOARD MEETING No.11

Wednesday 8th October 2008
Artillery House, Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RT

Present

Lord Larry Whitty	(LW)	Chair, Consumer Focus
Sharon Darcy	(SD)	Board member
Roger Darlington	(RD)	Board member
Ed Gallagher	(EG)	Board member
Rick Hill	(RH)	Board member / Consumer Focus Post Chair
Dame Suzi Leather	(SL)	Board member
Stephen A Locke	(SAL)	Board member
Enid Rowlands	(ER)	Board member / HR Committee Chair
Douglas Sinclair	(DS)	Board member / Consumer Focus Scotland Chair
Vivienne Sugar	(VS)	Board member / Consumer Focus Wales Chair
Anna Walker	(AW)	Board member

In attendance

Ed Mayo	(EM)	CEO, Consumer Focus
Addea Amoa	(AA)	Consumer Focus Start-up Team
Anna Burford	(AB)	Consumer Focus Start-up Team
Rachel Carmen	(RC)	Consumer Focus Start-up Team
Philip Cullum	(PC)	Deputy CEO, Consumer Focus
Martyn Evans	(ME)	Senior Director, Consumer Focus Scotland
Katherine Hathaway	(KH)	Consumer Focus Start-up Team
Liz Laine	(LL)	Consumer Focus Start-up Team
Philip Monaghan	(PM)	Consumer Focus Start-up Team
Louisa Moreton	(LM)	Central Office of Information
Fiona Rodgers	(FR)	Central Office of Information

Summary

Item 1 Welcome

1.1 The Chair welcomed Rick Hill, the newly appointed Chair of Northern Ireland, to the Board and Martyn Evans, Senior Director of Consumer Focus Scotland.

Item 2 Apologies

2.1 Apologies were received from Christine Farnish and Millie Banerjee.

Item 3 End of week one: CEO oral report

3.1 EM reported on the first week of business in Consumer Focus, acknowledging staffing gaps across the organisation. Gaps were most prominent in Cardiff and London due to the relocation of corporate services and policy changes respectively. It was acknowledged to the Board that, of the 114 staff in post, about 50 were working on externally funded contracts that had been carried over unchanged from the new organisation. This meant that, against the target permanent headcount of 170, only 64 staff were in post. 113 staff were awaiting redeployment and 147 staff to date had been made redundant. The Board were reminded that a key role for the transition is to help to cover for such posts until appointments have been made. It was noted that there had been a smooth transition of the complaints handling function and minimal negative impact within the public domain. EM and the Board thanked the transitional team for their continued efforts in supporting what was seen as a challenging and complicated process.

3.2 The Chair of the HR Committee gave a brief overview of the HR state of play. The HR team were working to redeploy staff where suitable and externally recruit to fill the staffing gaps as quickly as possible. The Board were provided with a complete break down of staffing figures and KH advised that transitional staff were in place to provide support until the recruitment process was complete. It was **agreed** that Board members be provided with a regular update of staff recruitment until the process had completed. It was confirmed that Consumer Focus had met its obligation of advising all staff of their status by vesting, with redeployment opportunities being finalised by 17th October 2008.

3.3 VS reported that many stakeholders were keen to engage and that there was a strong, positive interest in Consumer Focus Wales. It was noted that there was some feeling of frustration within the Cardiff Office because of staffing gaps and motivational work would need to be done whilst the recruitment process was finalised.

3.4 DS reported that there had been a smooth transition in Scotland and morale was high. The Extra Help Unit was praised for the outstanding work undertaken. It was requested that, if possible, the complaints teams were not asked to relocate in January 2009 as additional pressure during the Winter period was expected. At the same time, relocation was crucial as extra capacity would need to be recruited to deal with Winter complaints and going forward per se.

3.5 It was **agreed** that a management framework needed to be in place by April 2009. KH reported that external resource would be brought in to develop the performance management structure in due course. The Board thanked the HR Committee for its work.

Topical Policy Issues

3.6 The following topics were raised for immediate or pending discussion:

- Fuel Poverty;
- Post Office Card Accounts;

- Energy markets and the Ofgem probe;
- The Hooper review;
- The current economic decline.

3.7 In the ensuing discussion the Board heard feedback on the energy and postal markets and fuel poverty. The fuel poverty charter was tabled. It was reported that EM, LW and RD had met with R. Hooper ahead of his report which was to be released shortly. It was recommended that Consumer Focus had a strong involvement with Ofgem and **agreed** that LW and EM should meet with the Ofgem in the near future to discuss the forthcoming probe into the energy market.

3.8 It was **agreed** that Consumer Focus take an interest in financial markets to ensure consumer interests were seen and considered. LW **agreed** to schedule a meeting with the new Secretary of State and floated the possibility of attendance at a future Board meeting.

Item 4 The role of the board in staff culture

4.1 The HR Committee Paper on Board development (Paper 8.3) was tabled with a presentation on policy governance. EM talked through the salient points of the presentation and asked Board members to take away and consider the action points outlined. The Framework was broadly endorsed by the Board, subject to minor revision. Working up a revised template for bringing papers before the Board was requested, including a high level summary and the listing of options in terms of recommendations for board action. The importance of monitoring long term substantial issues was noted and acknowledged as needing further attention.

4.2 The Chair then called for a closed session of the Board with COI to hold a workshop surrounding member and Board development. At the conclusion of this session Board members fed back to the Board and it was **agreed** a follow up session would be held before January 2009. COI **agreed** to draft a summary report and circulate it to the Board. It was **agreed** that the agenda for the 8th December 2008 Joint Board meeting would be circulated with the November 2008 Board papers.

Item 5 Memoranda of understanding with partners (Paper 11.1)

5.1 The Board were invited to respond to the draft memoranda of understanding with BERR, Ofcom and the Financial Services Authority. Comments were received for redrafting and the Paper was broadly endorsed, noting there should be scope for maximising capacity for consumers and options for partnership work when beneficial. It was also requested that reference be made to the devolved offices and cross Whitehall working. The Board were advised further MOU's were in the pipeline and current agreements would be redrafted and returned to the Board in November 2008.

Item 6 Approval of Minutes

6.1 It was acknowledged that the minutes of the 1st September were **agreed** in draft and comments were welcomed via email before the next meeting of the Board. The minutes of the 11th September 2008 were **agreed** subject to the following change:

- Item 4.2 should read "Apart from those agreed for post, the Board were not in favour of maintaining a wide range of standing stakeholder forums. They considered it prudent to move to a single over arching advisory group, whilst maintaining informal connections with others pending a wider review of engagement arrangements at a future date. The Board **agreed** on the need for effective stakeholder engagement on an ad hoc basis, according to the requirements of individual projects, but stressed that this should be done flexibly".

Item 7 Matters arising

7.1 In the continuing discussion the Board **agreed** that a page of key messages would be written after each meeting to be published on the Consumer Focus website for transparency. The Board were in favour of retaining the current method of approving formal minutes, confirming they should not be made public until all members of the Board had the opportunity to review them.

7.2 LW confirmed he was due to meet Sarah Chambers, who would be taking over from David Saunders at BERR.

7.3 It was noted that some Board members had not received the e-newsletter and it was requested that the Secretariat ensure Board members details were provided and correct where appropriate.

Item 8 Date of next meeting

8.1 The next meeting will be held on the 5th November 2008 on the 4th Floor of Artillery House, Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RT.

Item 9 AOB

9.1 RD invited the Executive to bring proposals to the Board on reaching out to England and English regions specifically and asked that different models be considered in the coming months. EM **agreed** to scope out the work and report his findings to the Board in the New Year.

Action points

Minute	Action	Owner	Timing
Item 3 / 3.2 HR recruitment	Board members be provided with a regular update of staff recruitment.	JT	Ongoing
Item 3 / 3.2 HR recruitment	Redeployment pool to be worked through and finalised.	JT	17 th December 2008
Item 3 / 3.5	Management framework to be drafted and finalised by the Board.	KH/JT	April 2009
Item 3 / 3.7 Topical Policy	Ofgem meeting to be arranged prior to the release of their recent probe.	LW/EM	5 th November 2008
Item 3 / 3.8	Meeting with Secretary of State and invitation to a Board meeting.	LW	5 th November 2008
Item 4 / 4.1 Board development	Revision of Policy Governance framework.	EM	January 2009
Item 4 / 4.2 Board development	Summary of COI workshop and agenda for December Board meeting to be circulated.	LW/AB/COI	5 th November 2008
Item 5 / 5.1 Memorandums of Understanding	Revised of MOU's to be returned to the Board for approval.	LL/LW	5 th November 2008
Item 6 / 6.1 Minutes	Revision to the minutes of the 11 th September 2008.	AB	October 24 th 2008
Item 7 / 7.1 Matters arising	Key messages to be written after each meeting & published on the Consumer Focus intranet & website.	EM/AA	Ongoing
Item 7 / 7.3	Board members to be on the distribution list for e-newsletters.	PM/AB	17 th October 2008
Item 9 / 9.1 AOB	Paper on England with English regions to be drafted for the Board.	EM	28 th February 2009