

CONSUMER FOCUS: MINUTES OF HR COMMITTEE MEETING No.23

**Draft Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2011, 12.30 – 1.15 pm
at Artillery House, Artillery Row, Westminster, London SW1P 1RT**

This was a special teleconference meeting called for the Committee to discuss the phase one redundancy process.

Present

Enid Rowlands	(ER)	Chair of Consumer Focus HR Committee
Vivienne Sugar	(VS)	Chair, Consumer Focus Wales
Rick Hill	(RH)	Chair, Consumer Focus (Post), NI
Stephen Locke	(SAL)	Board member, Consumer Focus

In attendance

Mike O'Connor	(MO'C)	Chief Executive
Graham Clark	(GC)	Director of Finance and Operations
Clare Roach	(CR)	Head of HR
Susannah Hughes	(SH)	Head of Secretariat

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

- 1.1 ER, VS, RH joined the teleconference; SAL attended in person. Apologies were received from CF, DS and AW. The Chair thanked attendees for joining this additional meeting which was to keep up to date with fast moving issues; a full meeting of the Committee would take place in February.
- 1.2 RH expressed his reservations at the meeting being held by teleconference rather than videoconference. It was confirmed that this was an exception and in future such meetings would be held by video conference if not in person.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 RH again declared an interest in respect of General Consumer Council Northern Ireland (GCCNI). He was not leading any of the discussions at GCCNI concerning the potential transfer of Consumer Focus (Post) Northern Ireland and this matter had been delegated to the Vice Chair, GCCNI. This was an ongoing situation and therefore the interest would be declared at each meeting.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (15 December 2010)

- 3.1 No amendments were proposed and the Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2010.

4 MATTERS ARISING

- 4.1 All the matters arising from the December meeting had been covered on the action sheet or were on the agenda for this meeting.

5 REDUCTION PROGRAMME (Paper 4.1)

- 5.1 **Voluntary redundancy scheme:** ER thanked MO'C and the team for very clear papers and opened the discussion. CR reported that feedback from the consultation had been received and had been incorporated in the document sent to Government for approval. As agreed previously, the scheme had been signed off by ER and CF before it had been sent to Government. It would be circulated to staff the following day, on the basis that it was not yet approved by BIS but would give staff the opportunity to view the proposed scheme in advance of it opening formally, as thereafter there would be a short application deadline.
- 5.2 The Committee noted that the Equality & Diversity Impact Assessment for the scheme, which they had requested at the last meeting, had been circulated as agreed.
- 5.3 **Potential compulsory redundancies:** consultation had taken place with the unions and open consultation had started, with some eight posts identified as potentially compulsorily redundant due to organisational changes as opposed to the need to cut budgets. Discussions had taken place with post holders and consultation was still underway.
- 5.4 MO'C explained that if the voluntary scheme did not deliver sufficient savings, it might become necessary to consider more potential compulsory redundancies. The Committee agreed that it was essential to try to preserve policy capacity, which was already under severe pressure.
- 5.5 In December, Parliament had passed legislation setting out levels of compensation for public sector staff taking voluntary or compulsory redundancy. HR were preparing a guide for staff and the Committee would receive a full briefing at the next meeting.

Action: CR

- 5.6 The Committee **NOTED** the update on the reduction programme.

6 HR IMPLICATIONS OF CLOSURE (Oral update)

- 6.1 The organisation was continuing to lose staff through natural wastage: this was contributing to the savings which needed to be made, but resources were becoming extremely stretched and the situation was serious. Morale varied across the organisation and was currently particularly difficult to maintain in London. Office moves were due in February and momentum was building in London for GB work to be restructured sooner rather than later. Everyone was working hard to try to maintain morale in very challenging circumstances. Communication with all staff was key and there was a need to review processes regularly to ensure their effectiveness.
- 6.2 **Transfer arrangements:** A Citizens Advice and Consumer Focus Transition Working Group had been set up and had its inaugural meeting. TUPE had been raised but clarity was not expected until the secondary legislation was passed, although it was possible for BIS to legislate for TUPE-like arrangements; Citizens Advice currently had approximately 10 policy staff, whereas Consumer Focus had 49. GC was on the Working Group and stressed the need for appropriate sensitivity as the group sought to have open early stage discussions and explore ideas in a safe environment which respected confidentiality. Other transition groups were also being established and it was recognised that clarity was needed on the remit of each and some decisions would need to be taken at full Board level.

Actions: All / MO'C

- 6.3 The Committee was pleased to note that Rev. John Gladwin, Chair of Citizens Advice, had accepted an invitation to attend the next Consumer Focus Board meeting and agreed that it

would be helpful to give some advance thought to potential areas for discussion.

Action: MO'C

- 6.4 **Staff retention:** The Board Chair had written to the Minister to ask about the possibility of retention payments; this issue and other financial and non-financial incentives for staff were being discussed at SMT that day. Major considerations were job security, clarity on TUPE and being engaged and excited about their work: it was hoped that the re-formulation of the workplan and any consequent restructure of GB work would help to enthuse and re-motivate staff. It was also hoped that Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland would give formal input to the Consumer Focus workplan. The case for some recruitment must be made and heard by Government in order for the organisation to continue to deliver on its remit.
- 6.5 In Wales, policy capacity was also approaching critical, with the potential for severe detrimental impact on consumers. Consumer Focus Wales was receiving strong support for an amendment to the Public Bodies Reform Bill and it was possible that the First Minister would make a request to the UK government.
- 6.6 In Northern Ireland, morale was reasonably good as there was a known eventual destination for the team and RH commended MO'C and CR's good communications with staff in Belfast. There were outstanding issues of timing, transfer and resources and it was hoped to secure the support of the Deputy First Minister.
- 6.7 In Scotland, permission had been obtained to recruit to Scottish government funded posts; a case would now need to be made to BIS in respect of recruitment needs related to Consumer Focus Scotland's takeover of WaterWatch.

Actions: GC

The Committee **NOTED** the oral update.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 7.1 **Terms of Reference and Objectives:** By email correspondence, the Chair had proposed that revised Terms of Reference be accepted as previously drafted and, relying on the existing workplan, three key objectives be used for the year to guide the work of the Committee. As currently, the Committee would report to the Board regularly and provide an Annual Report.

Objectives:

1. To monitor the management of the redundancy process for staff to make sure it is fair, appropriate and timely.
2. To ensure appropriate actions are taken to retain critical skills in Consumer Focus in the period between now and final closure and advise the Board accordingly.
3. To support and oversee the planning process for the transfere of staff to CitA, CAS and other organisations as appropriate and possible.

The Committee **AGREED** the revised Terms of Reference and the three key Objectives. The revised Terms of Reference would be put to the Board for approval.

Action: Secretariat

7.2 The Chair thanked attendees for the brevity and clarity of the meeting and commended the Executive and teams for the careful attention to detail and the professional handling of difficult and sensitive issues. On behalf of members, ER reiterated the Committee's full support and indicated that any issues arising between meetings could be dealt with by email if need be.

Action: Secretariat

7.3 There was no other business and the meeting closed at 1.15pm.

8 NEXT MEETING

8.1 **24 February 2011 11.30 – 1.30pm**

Signatories

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Chair, HR Committee

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Date

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Chief Executive, Consumer Focus

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Date

CONSUMER FOCUS HR COMMITTEE MEETING No. 23

ANNEX TO MINUTES: ACTION POINTS

Minute	Action Agreed	Owner	Timing
5.5	Staff guide to compensation scheme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To next Committee meeting 	CR	February
6.2	Transition Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure appropriate sensitivity and confidentiality respected Ensure clarity of remit of Groups and appropriate referrals to Board 	All MO'C	Ongoing Ongoing
6.4	Staffing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make case to BIS to recruit to WaterWatch and other business critical posts 	GC	January and as needed
7.1	Terms of Reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised HR Committee ToRs to be put to the Board for approval 	SH	February
7.2	Email correspondence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate arrangements to handle issues by email between meetings if necessary 	SH	Ongoing