

CONSUMER FOCUS: MINUTES OF HR COMMITTEE MEETING No.22

Approved minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2010, 2.30 – 3.50 pm
at Artillery House, Artillery Row, Westminster, London SW1P 1RT

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
Anna Walker	(AW)	Board member, Consumer Focus
Christine Farnish	(CF)	Chair of Consumer Focus Main Board

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 Apologies had been received from DS. The Chair welcomed CF, who was attending her first meeting of the HR Committee, and all attendees.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 RH declared an interest in respect of General Consumer Council Northern Ireland (GCCNI). He informed the Committee that he was not leading any of the discussions at GCCNI concerning the potential transfer of Consumer Focus (Post) Northern Ireland and that this matter had been delegated to the Vice Chair, GCCNI.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (3 November 2010)

- 3.1 It was agreed that **minute 6.2** should read: "The Chair, Consumer Focus Wales, asked whether, as this might be Consumer Focus's last year ..." With this amendment, the Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2010.

4 MATTERS ARISING

- 4.1 All the matters arising from the November meeting were agenda or update items for this meeting.

5 HR UPDATE (Paper 5.1)

- 5.1 **Flexi-time:** The policy was implemented in the summer of 2010, with the six month review due in December. Feedback had been collated and was with the Head of HR for review.
- 5.2 **Policy consultation:** A working group had reviewed the policy consultation process and the report was currently with the Negotiating Committee. Main lessons learnt would be reported to SMT by GC.

Action: GC

- 5.3 **Competency framework:** A working group had reviewed the framework and the report and recommendations would be submitted to SMT. An agreed, updated framework would be communicated in time for the 2010/11 appraisal process.
- 5.4 **Appraisal process:** The 2009/10 round had been concluded and moderated. Individual letters confirming outcomes were being prepared for all members of staff. The process had been timed to coincide with the pay remit, but with the government's pay freeze in place, outcomes could not be linked to pay. The 2010/11 appraisal process would start in April 2011. The Committee noted with approval that the competency framework had been developed and reviewed and the appraisal round had been concluded satisfactorily.
- 5.5 **Absence:** Absence management workshops for managers had taken place and support systems were in place for all staff. There had been no notable increase in absence due to work related stress. The HR team was continuing to monitor carefully in view of the uncertainty within the organisation.
- 5.6 **HRPro:** The rollout of the self-service facility within the electronic database system had started successfully.
- 5.7 **Staff representation:** In line with the result of the all staff ballot, the staff representation group ceased to operate and the Negotiating Committee continues. The trade unions hold collective bargaining rights and have also agreed to share information with all staff through the current reduction programme.
- 5.8 **Legal cases:** An employment tribunal case was scheduled for 19/20 January 2011.
- 5.9 **Forward workplan:** Scheduled work was continuing as far as possible, although inevitably issues arising from government direction on budgets and the consumer landscape were taking priority.
- 5.10 **Developmental support during reduction programme:** Support was currently being provided in-house and via the established Workplace Options employee assistance programme. The need for any additional support would be kept under review. Every effort would be made to make sure staff were aware of how to access the support available.
- 5.11 The Committee thanked the team for maintaining the HR function in a steady state despite the new environment and commended the face to face consultation meetings with groups and individuals across the organisation, which had been appreciated despite the challenging circumstances.

The Committee **NOTED** the HR Update.

6 HR MANAGEMENT INFORMATION (Paper 6.1)

- 6.1 The Committee discussed the data reports, including an additional sheet detailing vacancies and leavers, which they agreed would also include payband information in future. The Committee noted that the loss of staff and inability to recruit posed further significant challenges, and was supportive of looking at ways of filling critical gaps through research contract work if this were possible. The Committee welcomed the support being given to staff and the clarity of messages, which would need to be repeated and reinforced. The Committee asked for further information on trends and how staff might be grouped to achieve as much as possible with the available resources to be brought to the February meeting.

Action: CR

The Committee **NOTED** the HR Management Information update.

7 EQUALITY: EQUAL PAY REVIEW 2010 (Paper 7.1)

- 7.1 The Committee considered the review which, in summary, showed that Consumer Focus had more female than male employees and that the pay gap between average male and female salaries at each pay band was not deemed to be at a level to cause concern.
- 7.2 CR advised that recent changes to the Equalities Act meant that it was no longer a statutory requirement to publish this information, but the Committee welcomed the assurance given by the data and agreed that it should be published. The Committee agreed that for the next review it would be useful to try to benchmark against broadly comparable organisations.

Action: CR

The Committee **NOTED** the Equal pay review 2010.

8 REDUCTION PROGRAMME UPDATE (Paper 8.1)

- 8.1 CR gave an update on the scheme, which was due to be considered by SMT. The scheme criteria had gone through an equality impact assessment: the Committee requested sight of this and it would be circulated.

Action: CR

- 8.2 There was a tight timetable for the scheme and the organisation was working closely with the unions, who had agreed that they would consult across the organisation, not just with their members. HR were also working closely with BIS, who would have to agree any scheme and, in the meantime, current information on the Civil Service Compensation Scheme was awaited. It was agreed that SMT must retain some flexibility and the scheme must be without prejudice to consultation on the workplan. Once agreed by SMT and consulted with the unions, the scheme would be signed off by the Chief Executive, Board Chair and HR Committee Chair and published.

Action: MO'C

The Committee **NOTED** the Reduction programme update.

9 HR IMPLICATIONS OF CLOSURE

- 9.1 MO'C advised that the BIS timescale was now that Consumer Focus should plan to be in operation until 1 April 2013; however, funding was uncertain and likely to reduce further. A full discussion of this and related matters would take place at the Board the following day (see Board minutes for 16 December 2010). From the HR perspective, the current priorities were to support staff and minimise uncertainty as far as possible through the redundancy process; to identify and develop approaches on how to retain key staff; in due course to plan and manage the transfer of certain staff to other organisation and to ensure that processes were demonstrably fair and transparent. The Committee asked the Executive to report at the next HR Committee the safeguards which would ensure appropriate equity, fairness and transparency.

Action: CR

- 9.2 ER thanked contributors for their updates. ER had asked for this topic to be added to the agenda and the Committee agreed that it be a standing item, with papers or oral updates, to keep up with fast moving events.

10 HRC 2011 MEETING DATES

10.1 Some offline discussions about dates had taken place but not yet been concluded. Recognising some plus-es and minus-es on both sides, on balance the Committee agreed that meetings should be de-coupled from Board meetings and that members could attend by telephone or video conference if they wished. ER would discuss with DS off-line. Proposed dates would be revisited on this basis and agreed where the majority of members could attend.

Action: ER / SH

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 There was no other business. The Chair thanked all attendees and the meeting closed at 3.50 pm.

12 NEXT MEETING

12.1 **Special teleconference meeting on reduction process: 25 January 2011 12.30 – 1.30pm**

<u>Signatories</u>	
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Chair, HR Committee	Date
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Chief Executive, Consumer Focus	Date

CONSUMER FOCUS HR COMMITTEE MEETING No. 22

ANNEX TO MINUTES: ACTION POINTS

Minute	Action Agreed	Owner	Timing
3	Minutes of meeting held on 3 November 2010 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend minute 6.2 as indicated 	SH	Done
5.2	Policy consultation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GC to report to SMT on main lessons learnt 	SH	Feb
6.1	Management information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add payband information to vacancies and leavers sheet Provide further information on trends and how staff might best be grouped together Imperative to continue communicating openly, to reinforce messages and support staff 	CR “ MO’C/HR	Feb mtg “ Ongoing
7	Equal Pay Review 2010 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish 2010 data For 2011 review try to benchmark against broadly comparable organisations 	CR	Dec/Jan Autumn 2011
8	Reduction Programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circulate equality impact assessment to HRC Scheme to be signed off by MO’C; CF and ER (when agreed by SMT and unions) 	CR MO’C	Dec/Jan Jan/Feb
9	Implications of Closure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report to next HRC on safeguards to ensure appropriate equity, fairness and transparency 	CR	Feb
10	Committee meeting dates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair to discuss with Douglas Sinclair Confirm dates where majority can attend in person or by telephone/videoconference. <p>CONFIRMED MEETINGS (with some apologies received)</p> <p>Special meeting re reduction programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 January 12.30 – 1.30: <p>Regular meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24 February 11.30 – 1.30 12 May 11.30 – 1.30 14 September 11.30 – 1.30 8 December 11.30 – 1.30 	ER SH	Dec/Jan Dec/Jan