

Consumer Focus Scotland

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE CONSUMER FOCUS SCOTLAND BOARD, HELD ON TUESDAY 7 JUNE 2011 AT 11.00am.

Present:

Douglas Sinclair, Chair
Liz Breckenridge, Board Member
Angela McCormack, Board Member
Coinneach Maclean, Board Member
Nicola Munro, Board Member
John Sawkins, Board Member
Alan Hutton, Board Member
Alan Sinclair, Board Member

In attendance:

Marieke Dwarshuis, Senior Director
Trisha McAuley, Deputy Director
Sarah O'Neill, Head of Policy
Susan Kelly, Services Manager (minutes)
Heather Henderson (part-time)
Anne-Marie Sandison (part-time)
Gemma Crompton (part-time)
Andrew Faulk (part-time)
Annie McGovern (part-time)
Sue Rawcliffe (part-time)

Guest(s):

None

Visitor(s)

None

Apologies

None

ITEM 1: PRIVATE SESSION (Board Members and Senior Management staff)

The Board discussed a number of items within the private session.

ITEM 2: PUBLIC SESSION: Energy Best Deal Scotland presentation (Andrew Faulk, Senior Policy Advocate)

The Chair welcomed Andrew Faulk, Senior Policy Advocate to the meeting and invited him to speak to the Board about the Energy Best Deal Scotland (EBDS) campaign. The following was noted from the presentation and subsequent discussion with the Board:

Background:

Andrew explained the background to the EBDS work and campaign:

- Increasing numbers of households are in fuel poverty – including those in more energy efficient housing.
- Poorer consumers switch less frequently, less likely to adopt energy efficiency
- Energy Best Deal run by Ofgem / Citizens Advice in England & Wales, which included training sessions for advisers and consumers.
- There is less emphasis on switching in Scottish Government programmes.
- The cost of energy for those who have not switched remains around 10% higher

The Campaign:

- 3 pilot sessions with Network Volunteers and discussions with stakeholders were used to test content and the approach of the campaign. As a result, the range of issues covered was widened from switching to include wider energy policy and a specific section on energy efficiency issues, delivered in partnership with the Energy Saving Trust.
- Promotional materials were designed and distributed in a large number of locations around the country.
- The EBDS campaign has delivered around 30 training seminars for frontline advisers across the country. The uptake has been much higher than anticipated; Some 325 advisers have attended, representing slightly over 10% of all advisers in Scotland, and the feedback has been excellent.
- It is estimated that up to 5,300 consumers have achieved savings of up to £319,000.
- The campaign has attracted wide media coverage.
- Success based on strong partnership working.

What has CFS learned?

- Switching can and does reduce bills significantly.
- Customer loyalty remains very strong: still opportunities to move tariff with existing suppliers.
- Pre Payment Meter customers unable to access best tariffs – very limited savings available.
- Off gas issues, from storage heaters to the rising cost of heating oil and LPG, are increasingly important

CFS is planning to take EBDS forward by:

- Continuing to provide face to face training for advisers, and by responding to invitations from interested groups
- Commissioning Citizens Advice Scotland to produce an on-line version of the training

- Working with interested organisations to explore consumer energy issues in more detail
- Taking opportunities to raise issues at policy level, with colleagues elsewhere in CF

The Chair thanked Andrew for his informative presentation, and for taking the time to attend the meeting. The Board were very impressed with the campaign and agreed that it was a 'good news' story for Consumer Focus Scotland.

ITEM 3: Consumer Focus Scotland: Administration, Minutes and Update

3.1: Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3.2: Declarations of interest

John Sawkins (Board member) and Liz Breckenridge (Board member) expressed a declaration of interest as members of Waterwatch Scotland.

3.3: Minutes of the Consumer Focus Scotland Board meeting on 5 April 2011

The minute was approved as an accurate record.

3.4: Outstanding actions

The outstanding actions were noted. The Chair highlighted an outstanding action in relation to the CFS Board sponsor protocol and informed the Board that he had reached a decision in relation to sponsor areas and advised the Board of the following:

- Nicola Munro would be the sponsor for public services;
- John Sawkins and Liz Breckenridge would be the sponsors for water;
- Coinneach MacLean would be the sponsor for post;
- Alan Sinclair would be the sponsor for legal services;
- Alan Hutton would be the sponsor for energy and
- Angela McCormack would be the sponsor for the Consumer Network

In addition, the Board raised the issue of the Shoppers Rights cards and advised that they had not had the opportunity to see or approve the cards. It was agreed that Board members should have the opportunity to review the cards as this was a major piece of work, with potential reputational risks for CFS. The Board viewed the cards later in the meeting and were content with them. The Board were advised that Fergus Ewing, Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism had been invited to launch the cards. A response has not yet been received from the Minister. The Board agreed with the suggestion that the launch could be held, after Parliamentary recess, in the Minister's constituency area (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber).

The Board also agreed that Consumer Direct should be involved in the launch event.

ACTION: Gemma Crompton, Senior Policy Advocate

3.5: Senior Director's report

The Board noted the content of the Senior Director's report and the Chair invited the Senior Director and the Head of Policy to highlight any achievements/further news to the Board. The following was noted:

- *Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Bill*
The Head of Policy informed the Board that the above Bill was passed by Parliament on 17 March. CFS had been a member of the Scottish Private Rented Sector Strategy Group, which previously played an important role in identifying and agreeing the measures to be included in the Bill. The Bill will ensure better protection for consumers.
- *Civil Justice Advisory Group*
The Scottish Government has issued a formal response to the report of the Civil Justice Advisory Group, published by CFS in January 2011. Overall, the Scottish Government was supportive of the majority of the recommendations.
- *Consumer Network*
Since writing the Senior Director's report, there are now 482 members recruited to the Consumer Network. It is hoped a target of 500 members can be achieved soon.
- *Extra Help Unit (EHU)*
The EHU are noticing a decline in the high volume of calls that had been experienced over the winter period, this decline follows a similar pattern to last year.
- *Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF)*
SAIF have been asked by the Scottish Parliament to deliver training on accessible information.
- *Community Food and Health (Scotland) ((CFHS))*
CFHS are focussing on governance arrangement and new reporting structures.
- *Health Rights Information Scotland (HRIS)*
HRIS are focussing on the re-development of the Patients Right Charter.

3.6: Draft minutes of the Consumer Focus Main Board meeting on 30 March 2011

The minutes were noted.

3.7 Minutes of the Scottish Consumer Group meeting on 18 April 2011

The minutes were noted.

ITEM 4: Consumer Focus Scotland: Policy

For approval:

4.1 Meals and Messages: a focus on Food Services for Older People Living in the Community in Scotland

Anne-Marie Sandison, Senior Policy Advocate introduced this paper to the Board. Anne-Marie informed the Board that older people living in the community are one vulnerable group highlighted in the national food policy *Recipe for Success* and in the *Healthy Eating Active Living Action Plan*. Both stress the importance of good nutrition and access to affordable healthy food as playing a vital role in the wellbeing and health of older people.

Consumer Focus Scotland and Community Food and Health (Scotland) held a round table meeting on this topic in February 2010 for key stakeholders. One of the conclusions of the meeting was that there was no overall picture of food services offered to older people in Scotland and that this was a significant gap. There were a number of gaps in current support for older people to eat well, including a reduction in services from local authorities and a lack of clarity about what can be expected.

As there was a clear need for the evidence gap to be filled, funding for research in this area was agreed with the Scottish Government and CFS set up a stakeholder advisory group to help shape the research objectives and to advise on the recommendations. Liz Breckenridge, CFS board member, chaired the advisory group, and Anne-Marie thanked her for her significant contribution.

CFS commissioned ODS Consultants to:

- build a picture of the range and extent of food services provided for older people living in communities across Scotland, with a particular focus on those who are most vulnerable
- explore the consumers' view on these services
- establish gaps in current provision.

From this relatively small scale research CFS found that:

- Local authorities provide a range of food services for older people living in the community. These include hot meals, frozen meals, lunch clubs, and assistance with shopping and meals preparation.
- There is significant inconsistency between local authorities in the provision, access, information or price of food services offered to older people.
- Local authorities appear not to have a clear overview of the food services available in their area. Respondents were unable to provide a clear picture of the number of users accessing their services, the frequency with which these users access their services or the costs to them of providing the service. Without this information it is impossible to ascertain whether services are providing value for money or achieving the desired outcomes for consumers.

- Information on food services available within a local area cannot be found in one place, leaving older people, their families and advisors unaware of what might be available locally and what their entitlements are.
- There is an understandable reluctance of users to complain. Much more effective engagement is needed, and providers need to be able to demonstrate that the evidence consumer preference lies at the heart of decision making.

The research report from ODS Consultants will be published on the CFS and Community Food & Health (Scotland) websites.

Anne-Marie explained that the report makes a number of recommendations to the Scottish Government and to local authorities based on the findings. These recommendations have been considered and commented on by the Advisory Group. The Board was asked to approve the draft report for publication.

The following comments from the Board were noted:

- The Board agreed that the focus of the report should be in supporting and empowering people to help themselves as most people have a preference to live independently for as long as possible.
- The Board also agreed that many of the recommendations were dependent on money, therefore it was agreed that the report should focus on areas such as poor nutrition and volunteering in order to give it a bit more edge.
- The Board picked up on a few presentational/grammar changes which will be edited before the report is published.
- The Board agreed that the conclusions of the report should make a link to other areas and not just focus on food.
- The Board suggested that it might be worthwhile for CFS to look at producing a series of similar publications on different issues facing older people.
- It was agreed that MSPs should be invited to attend the launch event on 21 June.

ACTION: Anne-Marie Sandison, Senior Policy Advocate

4.2 Essential Services: a consumer perspective

Liz Macdonald introduced this paper to the Board. Liz explained that Consumer Focus Scotland has a long history of research and policy development in relation to consumers and Scotland's public services. However, despite this history, it is not always clear what CFS mean by a consumer approach to public services, or even how public services are defined.

The discussion paper sets out CFS's argument for describing certain services as 'essential services' rather than 'public services'.

In 21st century Scotland, some essential services are provided by a range of providers, extending well beyond the traditional public sector. Having set out a

definition of essential services, the paper then set out a consumer approach to the design, delivery and evaluation of these services.

Consumer Focus Scotland believes a radical consumer-focused approach to the provision of essential services in Scotland, supported by strong consumer engagement and representation, is needed. Ways in which we might move towards this position were set out in the paper, and include the following:

- placing consumers at the centre of service design and planning
- providing choice and control, for example through encouraging a diversity of providers
- engaging proactively with consumers
- providing accessible information about services, rights, or outcomes
- providing effective and accessible redress systems
- encouraging co-production
- using alternative locations
- making more effective use of early intervention
- using outcomes which matter to consumers as the basis for monitoring and regulation
- ensuring a strong user focus in the scrutiny of essential services
- improving the availability and accessibility of performance information.

The Board was asked to approve the draft discussion paper for publication. Liz added that it is hoped the paper will contribute to current debates on the future of Scottish public services, for example through the work of the Christie Commission, and ensure that consumers are placed at the heart of decisions about how Scotland responds to the dual challenges of changing demographics and the inevitable reduction in public sector budgets.

The following comments from the Board were noted:

- The Board discussed the definition of 'essential' and agreed that essential services to some people were not essential to everyone.
- It was agreed to remove the table of 'essential' services within the report.
- It was suggested that an alternative name should be found and 'services of general interest', a definition recognised across the EU, was suggested.
- It was also suggested that referring to 'public services' promotes the provider first rather than the consumer, and may therefore not be the best 'consumer focused' description.
- The Board agreed that it would be useful to have the opportunity to debate the detail of the paper further and it was suggested that a seminar or chair's lunch would be beneficial. It was agreed to bring this paper back to the August CFS Board meeting, with a proposed plan for the way forward.
ACTION: Sarah O'Neill, Head of Policy/Anne-Marie Sandison, Senior Policy Advocate

4.3 Life after work: what baby boomers want as they grow older

Liz Macdonald introduced this paper to the Board. Liz explained that providing good quality care and support for older people in a sustainable way is becoming an increasingly important issue. Baby boomers - those born in the 15 or so years after the Second World War, and now in their 50s and 60s - represent the older service users of forthcoming decades. Baby boomers have typically enjoyed greater freedom of choice and higher disposable incomes than those who went before, often living in double income households through a period of rapid increase in home ownership.

In planning future provision, there is a need to identify and understand the lifestyle, aspirations, and the care and support expectations, of this generation – a cohort that may have higher expectations, but also more resources of their own to contribute towards meeting their living costs after they stop working.

Liz informed the Board that CFS's research aimed to find evidence about what the baby boomer generation will want when they are older and if they are in need of care, and about what kind of services would contribute to them living independently for longer, and not needing some of the more intensive interventions which will become less affordable in the future.

CFS wanted to use a deliberative methodology which challenged participants to consider how their choices might be affected by factors such as the state of the economy, the impact of climate change, and patterns of demographic change. CFS commissioned the new economics foundation (nef) to produce a card game, with challenge and solution cards, to spark discussion and debate. George Street Research were commissioned to carry out qualitative work using the card game as part of the process, alongside a traditional topic guide.

Liz explained that it is clear from the research that the majority of baby boomers have given very little thought to their retirement and old age.

- Life after retirement is seen very much as continuing on the same terms as life before retirement, but with more time available to pursue interests or provide family support to parents, children or grandchildren.
- Most people are unable to think clearly or make decisions about life when they become frailer, and less able to live independently. This is considered to be too far in the future, and to involve too many uncertainties, to be able to plan for in any degree of detail.

One of the most effective ways of responding to the challenges which will be faced when this generation does become older and frailer is to provide more options and support during the post-retirement years to help people make choices and decisions which will enable them to continue to live independently for as long as possible.

The draft report made a number of recommendations to the UK Government, the Scottish Government, local authorities and health boards, housing associations and regulatory bodies in Scotland.

The board was asked to approve the draft report for publication.

The following was noted from the Board's discussion:

- It was suggested that the reference to the compulsory retirement age should be removed;
- The Board noted that people are not always in a position to save, even if they want to;
- It was suggested that it may make more sense to focus on the younger generation in order to influence people's views at an earlier stage;
- It was also suggested that, given the findings, it may be more helpful to policy makers to speak to the current generation of older people about their needs and preferences;
- The Board considered how CFS should interpret its role – how can consumers be empowered to help themselves?
- It was agreed to publish the report and to consider further work in this area.

ACTION: Sarah O'Neill, Head of Policy

4.4 Response to the Scottish Government consultation on the Maintenance of Land on Private Housing Estates

The Board approved the response and agreed it was a very credible piece of work. The Head of Policy advised the Board that CFS would no longer be able to continue work in this area due to a change in staffing resources. The Scottish Government has been informed of this.

For Information:

4.5 Annual Plan

The Annual Plan was noted. The Head of Policy advised that it would be circulated to stakeholders with a covering letter from the Chair.

4.6 Complaints Signposting in the Public Sector: Report of a Scoping Study

The report was noted.

ITEM 5: Publications of Interest*

Items 5.1 – 5.3 were noted by the Board.

ITEM 6: Date of next meeting and Future Speakers

The next CFS Board meeting is scheduled to take place on 9 August 2011 at 11 a.m. in CFS offices, due to this being over the holiday period the Chair agreed to consider an alternative date as three board members were unable to attend. **ACTION: Douglas Sinclair, Chair.** Susan Love (Federation of Small Businesses) will be invited to attend the next meeting.

The Chair asked the Board for suggestions of future guest speakers. The following were suggested:

- Mark Powells, Business Stream
- Jim Martin, SPSO
- Derek Feeley, Quality Alliance Board
- Anne Kidd, Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire
- Ofgem
- Energy Action Scotland
- Royal Mail

The Board also agreed that it would be useful for the Board at some time to meet with the Board of Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) **ACTION: Douglas Sinclair, Chair**

ITEM 8: Any other business

The Chair and the Board noted their thanks and appreciation to Liz Macdonald, Senior Policy Advocate who recently left Consumer Focus Scotland after 18 years. Liz had achieved a significant amount for consumers in Scotland and will be missed by colleagues and the Board.

**Prepared by: Susan Kelly, Services Manager
10 June 2011**