

Minutes of the 35th Meeting of the Supervisory Panel
Renewable Energy Consumer Code
19th March 2015

Present:

David Laird (Chair)

Bryn Aldridge – Former Director of Trading Standards and Veterinary Services for The City of London

Walter Carlton- Deloitte

Stephen Lisseter- (Formerly OFT)

Gretel Jones- Independent Social Issues Expert

Zoe Leader – Citizens Advice Bureau

Observer:

Chris Wood- OFGEM

In Attendance:

Mark Cutler – RECC

Sarah Rubinson- RECC (part)

Samantha Bourne- RECC (part)

Sumandeep Sohi- RECC (minutes)

Apologies:

Martin Cotterell

Dave Sowden

Jim Thorneycroft

Philip Wolfe

David Frise

Heather Kerr

1. Welcome, introduction and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 35th meeting of the Supervisory Panel. Panel Members introduced themselves and apologies for absence were noted.

2. Minutes of the 34th Supervisory Panel Meeting

Panel members agreed the Minutes of the 34th Supervisory Panel Meeting as being an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

The Executive ran through the Summary of Actions from the 34th Meeting. He confirmed that most of the actions would be picked up later in the Agenda. Panel Members stated that they would like to discuss the MCS red flag system and the issue of multiple codes at the next meeting.

The Executive confirmed that they has been investigating the benefits and disadvantages of a consumer feedback/review system on the RECC website as well as the possibility of a star rating system which could be incorporated with the CSS form.

4. Highlight Report

Membership

The Executive explained that, over the previous quarter, RECC had been going through its membership renewal period. The Panel discussed the incentives offered to members to renew in a timely fashion, and the Executive explained that RECC currently offered a 5% discount for early renewals processed before 31 December. The Panel discussed whether the discount could be increased to 10% in the coming year.

The Executive reported that, to date, over 3,000 members had renewed their membership and 900 members had been sent a final demand for renewal. The Executive explained that some of the reasons companies gave for not renewing their membership were that they were no longer pursuing MCS Certification or were no longer operating within the renewables industry.

Monitoring

The Executive reported that, over the 9th round of audits, 159 audits had commenced and that 5 audits had been cancelled. The Executive explained that, in the case of just under half of these audits, RECC was waiting for the independent auditors return the audit report.

The Executive explained that the audit questionnaire had been recently updated to reflect the requirements of the revised Code. Some of these changes included switching the scoring to positive as opposed to negative, and bringing it into line with key compliance areas. The Executive explained that the positive scoring method was more accurate in reflecting members' practice.

The Panel suggested that it might be useful to show the key compliance areas in a graphic format. The Executive explained that the audits were allocated largely on a risk basis, and that auditors had the option of triggering non-compliance action if they considered the situation sufficiently serious to do so.

The Panel asked whether there should be an option to fast track the process for members found to be non-compliant at audit. The Executive explained that, as part of the monitoring strategy, it was important to allow for the full audit process to be carried out and to give the member the chance to issue a full response. Any outstanding issues could be picked up after that.

The Executive explained that mystery shopping was allocated on a risk basis and that 17 mystery shops had been commissioned since December 2014. The Executive explained the new format of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey which was also available on the RECC website. The Executive explained that QANW distributed the questionnaire directly to consumers along with their insurance policies. Consumers had returned some 300 surveys in January and February 2015.

Application and Non-compliance Panels activity

The Executive noted that the Applications Panel had rejected 6 applications for membership during the previous quarter, and had accepted 8 applications on a temporary basis, during which time they would be monitored closely. Panel Members asked whether granting temporary membership over a longer time period would ensure greater consistency.

Complaints

The Executive explained that RECC had received 350 domestic consumer complaints and 9 non-domestic complaints during the previous quarter. The Executive explained that 74 of the domestic consumer complaints received had been of a technical nature, and thus had been referred on to the relevant MCS Certification Body. Panel Members noted that the number of complaints registered had increased in comparison with the same period in 2013/2014. They requested figures for RHI broken down by technology.

The Executive explained that IDRS, the independent arbitration provider, had issued 10 arbitration awards during the last quarter, while and 19 complaints had submitted for arbitration. Panel Members discussed whether the Executive could provide figures on the total number of consumers who had been offered arbitration and, of these, how many of those had submitted an application to IDRS.

5. Update on implementation of ADR Directive

The Executive explained that the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, in implementing the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Directive, had designated Trading Standards Institute to be the UK's competent authority for the purpose of monitoring certified ADR providers. The Executive explained that the regulations which implement the Directive would be transposed into UK law in July 2015. The regulations set out the process by which ADR providers could be certified. The Executive explained that RECC planned to seek certification for its in-house mediation service and for its externally-sourced arbitration service. TSI would use the existing TSI CCAS audits to audit RECC's ADR mediation activities.

The Panel discussed the benefits of being certified as well as the costs involved in the certification process. The Executive explained that being certified would be a membership benefit, and that TSI approved Codes were likely to be offered a reduced rate for the certification fee, somewhere in the region of £5k per annum, although this had yet to be confirmed.

6. Update on marketing and communications

The Executive explained that it had held two training webinars for members on the Consumer Contract (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations and Cancellation Rights. Colin Meek, an experienced independent RECC auditor. The webinars had been based around real

scenarios from the small-scale renewables sector. They focussed on the sorts of problems that members were likely to encounter as a result of the introduction of the Regulations. Members were able to submit questions online and Colin attempted to answer as many of these as he could during the session. The Executive reported that around 140 members had registered for each webinar and that around 90 had actually attended. The Executive intended to continue with a programme of webinars on a range of consumer protection-related topics.

The Executive explained that it had exhibited in a range of trade shows and exhibitions over the past three months. Exhibiting in this way provided a valuable opportunity to interact with members and potential members. These shows included Eco Build, held in February at the Excel Arena, and the Solar Media Roadshows and various other exhibitions across the country. It would shortly be exhibiting at the All Energy show, to be held in the SECC in Glasgow, and Installer 2015, to be held in the Ricoh Arena, Coventry, both in May. Finally, it would be exhibiting at the Trading Standards Institute Conference in Bournemouth, in July, and would be speaking at a mini-theatre session there.

The Executive also reported that it had secured a feature in the Trading Standards Today magazine, an online publication, and that it had produced new leaflets aimed at members rather than consumers, to be distributed at the various shows. These outlined the membership benefits in more detail. There was also a new, more sophisticated, exhibition stand.

The Executive reported that RECC had been active on Twitter for the past three months, and that the Twitter handle was “@TheConsumerCode”. The Executive tweeted a different message each day. The Executive was currently in the process of developing a You Tube video based on the Top Tips for consumers. This would be available on the website and would be capable of being embedded on to members’ websites.

Panel Members suggested that stakeholders could assist RECC with improving consumer visibility. By way of example, they suggested that Ofgem’s Frequently-Asked Questions about the Feed-In Tariff Scheme could reference RECC.

7. A.O.B. and date of next meeting

The Chair requested that any items from the Summary of Actions that had not been covered in the meeting be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

He confirmed that the date of the next meetings of the Supervisory Panel would be held on **10 June, 9 September and 2 December 2015.**

There being no further business, he declared the meeting closed.