

CONSUMER FOCUS SCOTLAND

Senior Director: Marieke Dwarshuis

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

1.1 Change/impact achieved

Policy

- 1.2.1** CFS have received a second draft of the Lord President's proposed rules for investigating and determining matters of judicial conduct. We submitted a response to the initial draft in February and several of our suggestions have been incorporated in the revised version. A full response to the revised rules and guidance will be submitted by 22nd October.
- 1.2.2** Following consideration by the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee' of a petition relating to the use of 'McKenzie Friends' in Scotland, rules on the use of McKenzie Friends have been introduced in the Court of Session. Consumer Focus Scotland submitted two pieces of evidence to the committee, supporting the introduction of McKenzie Friends. We did, however, express some concerns with the proposed rules, which we felt were disproportionate, particularly if they were to be used in the sheriff court. The Sheriff Court Rules Council, of which Sarah O'Neill is a member, considered draft rules in early August and we expect more proportionate and accessible rules to be introduced in the sheriff court later this year.

Extra Help Unit

- 1.2.3** The team met with Martin Lawrence, EDF Managing Director of Energy Sourcing & Customer Service on the 14th of July. Martin provided information on changes to their billing system and EHU members provided some suggestions for improving their service, particularly to vulnerable consumers, through tailoring this system.
- 1.2.4** The EHU met with the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland on the 9th of July for an introductory meeting to discuss shared concerns around issues affecting SMEs. Initial contact with the FSB had led to a challenge by the EHU on a Scottish Power policy which threatened existing SME customers with disconnection if a security deposit was not paid, even when there are no arrears on the account. We continue to pursue this issue, in conjunction with the Energy Team, and have already had some concessions from Scottish Power.
- 1.2.5** On the 23rd July Raymond Jack, Scottish Power Director of Energy Retail visited the EHU – concluding the visits from the 'Big 6'. Again, a wide range of subjects were raised around vulnerability and consumers in debt. The EHU expressed concern that Scottish Power's social tariff is only eligible for consumers of pensionable age.

Healthyliving award

- 1.2.6** 50 awards were achieved during this period. In addition, HLA worked in partnership with Scottish Government and DF Connections at the recent T in the Park. With the aim to get as many food outlets at the festival to achieve the award. The healthyliving award was embraced and achieved by all but one food traders in the 'Healthy T' arena. In total 21 awards achieved.

Community Food and Health (Scotland)

- 1.2.7 The selection and communication of the results for the annual small grants scheme resulted in awarding £147,000 to 56 community led initiatives, from a total of 261 applications.

Health Rights Information Scotland

- 1.2.8 In August 2010, NHS Scotland launched a new national health information service called NHS Inform. HRIS provided information for the Health Rights Zone of the NHS Inform website and the zone links to the HRIS website to enable members of the public to access our information.

1.2 Significant activity

- 1.2.1. We submitted written evidence to the Local Government and Communities committee of the Scottish Parliament on the Property Factors (Scotland) Bill on 13 August. The evidence supported the general principles of the bill, highlighted areas where it could be strengthened in the consumer interest, and drew attention to the difficulty in applying current legislation to the model of land owning maintenance providers. In addition, CFS submitted a report of three discussion sessions with consumers on the Scottish Government's draft accreditation standards for property managers to ensure that their voice was heard in the consultation process.
- 1.2.2. We published our report *Turning up the Heat: Benchmarking Fuel Poverty in Scotland* on 6 August. The report explores the reasons for higher rates of fuel poverty in Scotland than in England or Wales. It also highlights the need for a consistent and integrated approach to addressing fuel poverty across all relevant Scottish Government departments, and, in the longer term, for GB-wide support via energy companies to be more closely targeted at the fuel poor.
- 1.2.3. We published our report *Parcel Deliveries: Current Practice and Possible Solutions* on 12 July. The report was featured in both the *Scotland on Sunday* and *Inverness Courier*, received positive coverage in a number of other local newspapers, and has been well received by stakeholders.
- 1.2.4. For our project on sharing best practice in consumer engagement in public services we met with the 12 representatives from the successful projects identified by our expert panel. This very successful session, chaired by board member Nicola Munro, was the final pre-publication phase of the project and helped to inform the final report which is expected to be launched in October/November 2010.
- 1.2.5. Executive Liaison Team (EHU) travelled to the Welsh Assembly to hold an event promoting the service available to Assembly Members. All 60 AMs were invited and the event was attended by a good cross-section of AMs and staff from all parties. Jenny Randerson AM sponsored the event and it was chaired by Viv Sugar, Chair of Consumer Focus Wales. Monica Davidson, Acting Head of the EHU, spoke about the work of the EHU and how we can help AMs.
- 1.2.6. Scottish Accessible Information Forum have produced a new publication: 'Making information Accessible' – Guidelines for producing accessible printed and electronic information. SIAF have also produced an online information sheet on social networking and accessibility.

2 CHALLENGES RUNNING UP TO NEXT BOARD MEETING

- Developing CFS priorities for the CF draft annual plan
- Contributing to the input to the BIS review process, in particular regarding the complexity of the reserved/devolved divide and how it affects consumer matters
- Responding to the recent (since June) increase in numbers of highly complex cases coming to the Extra Help Unit
- Starting discussions with Scottish Government on options for future funding of the projects, in advance of spending review outcomes in Scotland
- Maintaining quality and momentum on key areas of policy work at a time of great uncertainty due to the ongoing institutional landscape review.