



CONSUMER FOCUS WALES

Senior Director: Maria Battle

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

1.1 Energy

Off-gas consumers and microgeneration

- 1.1.1 We published our report *Off-gas consumers and micro-generation* at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show on Tuesday 20 July. The Minister for the Environment, Jane Davidson AM and James Lambeth of the Solid Fuel Association responded to the report's finding in the presence of invited guests from the energy industry. Ofgem announced at the meeting that they will shortly be undertaking a review of their fuel poverty gas connections scheme which was one of our recommendations.

Welsh Assembly Government Fuel poverty strategy

- 1.1.2 Many of the calls made by our Welsh Fuel Poverty Charter were incorporated into the new Welsh Assembly Government Fuel Poverty Strategy. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to a further five years of funding to tackle energy efficiency in the poorest of homes in stark contrast to the UK coalition Government. This success was a result of our fuel poverty coalition campaign.

1.2 Post

Post Office diversification Fund

- 1.2.1 Consumer Focus Wales has been successful in ensuring that consultation with the community is a condition of the Welsh Assembly Government's Post Office Diversification Fund.

1.3 Financial Services

Tracking Over-indebtedness

- 1.3.1 We started to publish our '*Consumer Finances in Wales*' Series. The first set of results, released in early July, highlighted the impact of the recession on spending behaviours in Wales, particularly on the most vulnerable. We received excellent press coverage. Our research was also referred to in plenary by Business and Budget Minister Jane Hutt AM, when talking about the impact of budget cuts on the people in Wales. The second briefing was on debt and credit use in Wales and this again received substantial media coverage.
- 1.3.2 Other briefing papers we are proposing to publish as part of the same series include:- 'Attitudes towards money' – linking with our push to improve financial capability, 'Debt & fuel poverty' and 'Financial services at the Post Office' – using some of our research on public attitudes to/use of the post office.

1.4 Rights Redress and regulation

Welsh Language Measure

- 1.4.1 The National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee published its report on the proposed Welsh Language Measure in July. We gave evidence and the Committee has recommended the following key amendments based on our evidence
- a) a requirement for the Commissioner to consult the public in the development of the new Standards
 - b) that the Advisory Panel reflect the diverse needs of consumers in Wales
 - c) addressing issues that affect the take up of Welsh language service
 - d) strengthened monitoring and evaluation through the Record Keeping Standards.

1.5 Consumer Food Safety Group

- 1.5.1 As a direct result of our E Coli report, the Health, Well being and Local Government Committee held its own inquiry into the implementation of Professor Pennington's recommendations into the E Coli outbreak. The First Minister was called to give evidence about the role of the Government. When questioned the First Minister said that it was as a result our report and meeting with him that he had decided to ask the FSA to undertake a substantive review, evaluation and audit of local authorities to be completed by the end of the year. He also said he was unconvinced of the FSA stance on mandatory scores on the doors and would see if the Welsh Assembly government could take forward legislation.
- 1.5.2 As a direct result of our report the FSA has issued draft guidance for consultation in July on the separation of complex machinery for cooked and raw foods. We launched a public campaign to encourage consumers to respond directly to the FSA consultation. Hundreds of consumers have submitted responses directly to the FSA. The Women's Institute in Wales have circulated details to their members and Unison has expressed an interest in mobilising their members.

1.6 Significant activity

- 1.6.1 We published our domestic energy report on 28 July highlighting the impact of Scottish Power's prompt payment 'discount' which penalises people who don't pay their bill within 10 days of it being issued at a rate of up to £150 a year, which is around five times the rate of other companies. This is a particular problem for elderly consumers in North Wales, where Scottish Power is the main electricity supplier. This is compounded by Scottish Power's policy of overcharging its North Wales electricity customers by an around £71 a year, compared to customers in neighbouring regions.
- 1.6.2 We published our first postal report. CF Labs is developing a mobile website providing instant access to comprehensive information on shoppers' rights in an attempt to quickly solve disputes at point of sale or over the phone. CF Labs are working with Passenger Focus, exploring the possibilities of a website that provides comprehensive information on different aspects of service punctuality across the whole of the UK by journey, station and operator. We also represented consumers at the Public Services Summit in Wales which is led by the Welsh Assembly Government to bring the whole public sector together to plan for the transformation of public services in the face of budget cuts

2 CHALLENGES RUNNING UP TO NEXT BOARD MEETING

- Launch of Older Peoples Finance Report on 6th October 2010 with Gwenda Thomas AM, Deputy Minister for Social Services
- Delivering the work programme with less staff
- Planning for the comprehensive spending review, consumer review and annual plan.