

Consumer Focus Board

Paper 4.1

Title: Corporate and Annual Planning

Purpose: For decision

Date of meeting: 16 September 2010

Responsible officer: Adam Scorer

Prepared by: Mark Steinmeyer

Attachments: None

1 Overview

- 1.1 Consumer Focus is required to release a revised 3-year Corporate Plan along with a budgeted Annual Plan for the year ahead. Drafts of these documents must be made available by 30 November 2010 and the Annual Plan is subject to a stakeholder consultation process.
- 1.2 The CEAR Act and our finance framework with BIS provide specification as to the content of these planning documents and deadlines for release – these are summarised in section 3 below.
- 1.3 Across the organisation, teams have recently begun the process of planning their future policy work in preparation for the release of our 2011-12 draft Annual Plan for consultation. Consumer Focus, Consumer Focus Post, Consumer Focus Scotland and Consumer Focus Wales are all running similar, but separate planning processes, each at different stages and guided by their respective Board.

2 Action for the Board

- 2.1 To **agree** the key planning themes set out in 5 below to help frame thinking across the organisation.
- 2.2 To **agree** the approach and timeline of activity set out in 6 below.

3 Our planning requirements

- 3.1 The CEAR Act 2007 requires us before each financial year to publish a document containing:
 - a A statement of any priorities for the year in relation to designated consumers generally or any description of designated consumers
 - b A general description, including objectives, of the main activities (including any projects which it plans to undertake during the year in relation to designated consumers generally or any description of designated consumers
 - c A statement of any other priorities for the year
 - d A general description of any other projects planned during the year (other than those comprising routine activities in the exercise of our functions)
 - e An estimate of the overall expenditure
 - f An estimate of the expenditure in relation to designated consumers.

- 3.2 The Finance Framework we have with BIS indicates that:
- a Consumer Focus must submit annually to BIS a draft of the corporate plan covering 3 years ahead – submitted by no later than 30 November.
 - b The first year of the corporate plan, amplified as necessary, shall form the Annual Plan to include key targets and milestones for the year ahead and linked to budgeting information.
 - c The corporate and annual plan should reflect key objectives and associated key performance targets for the forward years, and the strategy for achieving those objectives including milestones.

4 The key issues

- 4.1 Consumer Focus, Consumer Focus Scotland, Consumer Focus Wales and Consumer Focus Post have all begun to identify priority issues for 2011-12, in most cases building on the existing work areas (energy, post, financial services, etc.).
- 4.2 Annual planning processes differ across the Consumer Focus family, in part because national Boards have a remit to guide policy priorities and for approving their nation's Annual Plan.
- 4.3 It is reasonable for parallel planning processes to occur; however, a degree of convergence will be necessary by November, in order to consult on a document that meets our statutory requirements (summarised in section 3 above). An initial meeting was held with the Board sub-group on Annual Planning to oversee this convergence and cross-national staff have committed to work together to the agreed timeline.
- 4.4 Similarly across the Consumer Focus family, this year's planning process emphasises continuity from the current work plan with a bias towards advocacy and follow on, rather than new issues. Teams have been directed to focus more on achieving change, with less emphasis on scoping new projects or evidence gathering. Flexibility in our work planning remains critical as Consumer Focus will need to adapt to any changes in the consumer landscape, uncertain budgets and other external factors.
- 4.5 Consumer Focus has maintained a long standing commitment to a 12 week government consultation period. This is not a fixed requirement; therefore we could consider a reduction in the consultation period for 2011-12. The 30 November deadline for submitting our draft planning documents remains fixed in our agreement with BIS.
- 4.6 Many strategic Board discussions have been delayed until the all Boards' meeting on 3 November 2010. However, 3 main themes – empowerment, representation and disadvantage set out in section 5 below – have emerged which should increasingly facilitate cohesion across the work plans over the coming months. The SMT and the Board sub-group have agreed that these themes could be used to bring the respective plans into a more coherent package – particularly when business cases begin to be developed after the all Boards' meeting in November.
- 4.7 These themes are not new. The Board reflected these three themes when articulating “what Consumer Focus does” in June and July 2010.
- 4.8 The all Boards' meeting on 3 November will be used in part to generate consensus on work themes, priorities and objectives to feed into the rewrite of our Corporate Plan. This consensus will also help to shape the final Annual Plan prior to its release for April 2011.

5 Proposal

5.1 The Board is asked to agree the three planning themes below to help frame thinking across the organisation and drive cohesion in the planning process.

5.2 These planning themes are:

- a **Empowerment:** Empower consumers by encouraging, supporting and enabling them to take action for themselves.
- b **Representation:** Impact on the major decisions by government, industry and regulators that will have a material impact on consumers.
- c **Disadvantage:** Protect the interests of vulnerable consumers and those at a disadvantage.

5.3 The Board is asked to **agree** the next steps set out in section 7 below.

6 Resources

6.1 Philip Cullum and Adam Scorer will lead on Annual Planning for GB and Northern Ireland

6.2 Trisha McAuley and Sarah O'Neill will lead on Annual Planning for Scotland

6.3 Rhys Evans will lead on Annual Planning for Wales

6.4 The Board sub-group on Annual Planning – Stephen Locke, Anna Walker, Sharon Darcy and Sukhvinder Kaur Stubbs - will have responsibility for overseeing the GB programme and for collating plans from across the Consumer Focus family into one Annual Plan with thematic cohesion.

7 Next steps

7.1 Identification of key issues that would run across the three planning themes with outcomes crystallised into a draft plan – **September/October**

7.2 Agreement across the Consumer Focus family on how we will converge the work plans by November so that there is presentational and thematic coherence in the consultation document while allowing for appropriate national direction of the planning process – **31 October**

7.3 All Boards' meeting to consider broader strategic priorities and work towards a shared organisational vision. Decisions about key themes, priorities and objectives to feed into the re-write of the Corporate Plan 2011-14 – **3 November**

7.4 Board agree the draft plan and its priorities (with a better sense of realistic budget settlement for 2011 onwards) – **4 November**

7.5 Provide BIS with a draft Corporate Plan 2011-14 and release a draft Annual Plan for consultation – **30 November**

7.6 Development of a small number of specified business cases which will show how we will tackle the agreed priority issues **November – February**

7.7 We publish a revised Corporate Plan and a costed Annual Plan – **1 April**