

**CONSUMER
FOCUS WALES****Senior Director: Maria Battle**

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING**1.1 Change/ Impact Achieved****1.1.1 CF Labs**

1.1.2 The Stayprivate.org website was launched on the 10 June. Media coverage was good with Joe Cicero, CF Labs Manager, interviewed on BBC Radio 5 Live's Breakfast show and BBC Radio 2's Drivetime show. Adam Scorer, Interim Director of Reputation and Impact, was interviewed on BBC 2's Working Lunch.

1.1.3 As a result of this coverage, and coverage in various print and across social media, the Stayprivate website has received an unprecedented amount of traffic and interest. In the few days since launch they have had over 10,000 visitors to the site and 7,600 consumers signing up for the various services. Stayprivate.org is also on the DirectGov website

1.1.4 The team has spoken with the Direct Marketing Association about the site and the potential for a second phase development to include more services.

1.1.5 The team have also finished the development work for a re-launch of the corporate site and are just awaiting content from GB colleagues to be finalised.

1.2.1 Energy

1.2.2 Responding to the publication of our report on the cost of household electricity in Wales on 9 June, the Environment Minister said she would be raising the issue with the Secretary of State for Energy. The Welsh Assembly Government has adopted a stronger position on electricity distribution charges.

1.2.3 Scottish Power has promised to review its regional price differences in response to an investigation by Radio Cymru, which used Consumer Focus figures to reveal that the company charges its north Wales customers £75 more than those in England.

1.3.1 Rights, Redress and Regulation

1.3.2 On 20 May the Chair and Rhys Evans met with the Deputy First Minister to discuss the recommendations of the 'Logged in, Locked out' report. The Deputy First Minister confirmed that the Welsh Assembly Government are due to announce a new, European-funded initiative to eradicate broadband 'not-spots' at the Royal Welsh Show on the 21 July. His officials also assured us that the other main concerns raised in our report would be addressed in the Government's forthcoming Digital Inclusion Strategy, due to be published for consultation on 17 June.

1.2 Significant Activity

1.2.1 Energy

- 1.2.2 We are working in partnership with Children in Wales to collect evidence on children and young people's experiences and understanding of fuel poverty. 6 schools have agreed to take part in the project (3 primary and 3 secondary) in Swansea, Caerphilly, Anglesey, Builth Wells and Carmarthenshire. All schools are either in a Communities First or ESF area.
- 1.2.3 Workshops are currently being held in each of the schools with mixed age groups of young people. The workshops are interactive, informative and participatory. Children and young people have the opportunity to discuss their experiences of heating their home and what they, the Government and others can do to help people to keep their homes warm.
- 1.2.4 The findings of research will be launched in the New Year at a joint event between Children in Wales and Consumer Focus Wales, with the voices of children and young people being central to this.
- 1.2.5 The Consumer Wales Board/staff group presented their Energy Strategy to the meeting of the Board on 1 July which sets our priorities for the next three years and maintains an emphasis on fuel poverty.
- 1.2.6 On 23 June the Extra Help Unit held an event for AMs and caseworkers in the National Assembly for Wales which was a great success and very well attended by AMs who were complimentary about the work of Consumer Focus Wales and the EHU.

1.3.1 Post

- 1.3.2 Our first quarterly postal services report for stakeholders was published at the end of June. This included updates for stakeholders on our work around Royal Mail and post offices. It highlighted the latest performance figures for Royal Mail, specifically focusing on their quarterly quality of service targets, which they have failed to meet for a 2nd quarter. The reasons behind this are the industrial action that took place in quarters 2 and 3 (July- December) and adverse weather conditions in quarter 4 (January to March). Consumer Focus Wales will be highlighting our concern around the failure to meet these targets with Royal Mail.
- 1.3.3 One of the series of postal strategy roundtable meetings was hosted at Consumer Focus Wales on 27 May. This ensured the Welsh perspective is fed into the discussions. Guest speakers at the event included the Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses, Clive Davenport, and Darren Thompson, Head of Major Categories at DVLA.
- 1.3.4 The work on our Good Practice Diversification Guide is ongoing and will be published in the autumn. The guide is for sub postmasters/mistresses and will highlight ways in which they can effectively engage with the community when planning to diversify. Mike Granville Head of Regulatory Relations at Post Office Limited was very interested in the report and how the fund could be encouraged in England.

1.4.1 Welsh Language Measure and Consumers

- 1.4.2 Rebecca Thomas and Liz Withers gave oral evidence to the National Assembly Committee, Legislation Committee scrutinising the Welsh Language Measure on 10 June. Consumer Focus Wales was asked to further elaborate on our written evidence, including why we felt engaging with consumers was important and why the extension

of Welsh Language services would be a positive thing for consumers. We were commended for providing specific suggestions on how the Measure could be amended.

1.4.3 Following the Committee, the Welsh Language Board complemented us for giving authoritative evidence and has asked us to meet with them to discuss further issues surrounding Welsh Language services in the private sector. Members of the Committee also asked for a follow up paper summarising more of our research findings, to feed into their deliberations, which we have agreed to provide on a confidential basis (ahead of publication).

1.5.1 GM Dialogue Steering Group

1.5.2 There have been several developments concerning the Food Standards Agency's GM Dialogue over the last couple of weeks. Despite the resignation of two members of the Steering Group and the subsequent negative publicity that followed these resignations the remaining members of the Steering Group, including Lindsey Kearton, have overwhelmingly expressed a view that the process should continue as long as the original intentions of undertaking a fair and balanced dialogue with members of the public is still achievable. A decision from the new UK Government Minister on whether the Dialogue will go ahead is pending.

1.6.1 Older People's Finances and Tracking Over-indebtedness Projects

1.6.2 The research for these projects has now been completed and the results were presented to staff by Beaufort Research on 11 June. The wealth of data from the research is extensive and cuts across other areas of policy work in addition to financial inclusion e.g. fuel poverty. The policy team will be discussing the best ways to disseminate these results in addition to the two reports planned – both of which are now likely to be published in the autumn.

1.7.1 Financial Gobbledygook

1.7.2 We have secured four external panellists to judge the worst examples – bringing expertise in finance, advice and communication: Sion Barry, Western Mail Business Editor; Fran Targett CEO of Citizens Advice Cymru; Les Cooper (N Wales Financial Capability Forum) and Lee Phillips (Consumer Financial Education Body). The panel will be convening in September. Beaufort Research are conducting some questions for us as part of their June Omnibus, which will give us a peg to open the call for people to submit examples from mid-July. We expect to announce the winners/losers in September.

1.8.1 Consumer Food Safety Group

1.8.2 On 7 June Jennie and I met Steve Wearne (Director Food Standards Agency Wales) to discuss new research on the Scores on the Doors scheme which has found that consumers do not relate to star ratings and would prefer a points-based system. CFW has been arguing for this approach for some time and we welcomed the FSA's willingness to act on the research findings.

1.8.3 On 10 June Viv, Jennie and I had a meeting with the First Minister to discuss the Welsh Assembly Government's role in implementing the Pennington Report recommendations. As a result he will be seeking a meeting with the FSA to discuss their role in issuing further guidance on the implementation of the Pennington recommendations, mandatory display of food hygiene ratings and a review of the effectiveness of emergency Prohibition notices. Jennie and I also met with the Shadow

Minister for Health and Social Services on 22 June and the Presiding Officer on 23 June who are all supportive of the report and the changes we are seeking.

1.8.4 Consumer Focus Investigations

1.8.5 The referral criteria have been sent out to over 150 UK stakeholders and to all Trading Standards offices by LACORS. CFI is now logging all referrals on its database and has received over 25 external and internal referrals. A recent referral from DirectGov about the charges levied by driving theory test companies is being considered with a possible joint investigation with DirectGov, Trading Standards and the DSA.

1.8.6 CFI attended the TSI Conference in Edinburgh on 15 June and had a stand with the EHU and CFS. The Consumer Minister, Ed Davey came to meet CFI and is now aware that Consumer Focus has an investigations team. Gemma held a theatre session on the first day of the Conference. About 30 people attended the session and listened with interest. They made a number of good contacts, particularly at LACORS and the various Trading Standards teams across the UK. The Conference raised the profile of Consumer Focus and CFI. Contact has already been received from some of the attendees, with ideas for joint working with CFI.

1.8.7 CFI has received the opinion from Counsel in relation to Consumer Focus' disclosure obligations under both the Enterprise Act 2002 (EA) and the Consumers Estate Agents and Redress Act 2007 (CEAR). In brief, Counsel has agreed with CFI that Consumer Focus does not have to adopt the cautious approach to disclosure which the OFT has adopted. When considering whether to disclose information about an individual or business, Consumer Focus should consider everything in the round. This will mean taking in to account its statutory functions as well as any harm which the disclosure may cause.

1.8.8 CFI will be working with the rest of Consumer Focus to put together a disclosure and consultation policy which will be published. Graham Clark will take on the role of arbiter in the event that there is any dispute. CFI will offer training across Consumer Focus about disclosure, consultation and the use of section 24 requests under CEAR.

1.8.9 The final amended draft of the data sharing agreement is with the OFT for approval. Once returned Consumer Focus can start to get full access to the Consumer Direct database. The OFT is to amend its privacy policy so that people using the service give their permission to the OFT/CD to share information with CF. Training will be required to make the best use of access to the database.

1.8.10 CFI is also in discussion with the OFT over access to the CRW database which all Trading Standards services use to discuss cases, raise questions etc. This will help CFI to gather early intelligence and facilitate "smart" working with the Trading Standards services.

1.9.1 Stakeholder Engagement

1.9.2 On 15th June we met with Mike Granville (Head of Regulatory Relations) at Post Office Limited in Wales to discuss the findings of our Impact of the Network Change Programme in Wales report and to clarify and formalise the relationship between Royal Mail Group External Relations, Wales and Consumer Focus Wales.

1.9.3 Board Member Bob Chapman, Lisa and I met with members of the Legal Services panel on Monday 24 May.

1.9.4 Lindsey Kearton attended a Care Leavers roundtable meeting with Cardiff University and Voices of Care Monday 21 June

- 1.9.5 Ceri Williams attended a Fuel Poverty coalition meeting, which will discuss the next stages of the campaign Tuesday 15 June:
- 1.9.6 Rhys Evans and Gareth Williams met with Rhodri Williams, Hywel Williams, Karen Roberts and Kim Brook from the Consumer Panel, Ofcom for the quarterly Ofcom/Consumer Focus meeting on Monday 21 June
- 1.9.7 Jennie and I gave evidence to National Assembly Health and Wellbeing and Local Government Committee on the findings of our report on E coli on Thursday 24 June

2 CHALLENGES RUNNING UP TO NEXT BOARD MEETING

- 2.1 We will launch our report on off gas consumers on July 20 at the Royal Welsh Show, at an event attended by Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Environment, Housing and Sustainability and organising a panel discussion including the Minister for the Environment, Jane Davidson. We will also be publishing our quarterly energy report.
- 2.2 The National Eisteddfod will be held in Blaenau Gwent between 31 July and 7 August. We will share an exhibition stand with Consumer Direct and Wales Heads of Trading Standards and we have invited the Consumer Council for Water (Wales) to join us. As well as networking we will be showcasing our report on Welsh Language use.
- 2.3 We are also planning a Westminster event in September or October to highlight the findings of our off gas work.