

Consumer Focus Board

Paper 5.1

Title: Chief Executive's report
Purpose: For information
Date of meeting: 20 January 2010
Responsible officer: Philip Cullum
Prepared by: Philip Cullum and Mark Steinmeyer
Attachments: None

1 Overview

- 1.1 This report is a short update on developments since the quarterly Chief Executive's report presented at the December Board. It is my final report as Acting Chief Executive; our new Chief Executive Mike O'Connor joins Consumer Focus on 19 January and will be present at this Board meeting. This paper reports on our impact in the past few weeks and flags up forthcoming initiatives. There will be a full quarterly Chief Executive's report at the February Board.

2 Action for the Board

- 2.1 The Board is asked to **NOTE** the contents of this report.

3 Senior Management Team

- 3.1 As noted above, Mike O'Connor will be Chief Executive from 19 January, at which point I will return to being Deputy Chief Executive and hand over the role of Accounting Officer to Mike. It has been a privilege to undertake the acting role over the past four months and a particular pleasure to work closely with my talented and effective Senior Management Team colleagues as well as the strong staff team which we have across the organisation. We have seen real progress and impact, both internally and externally, over the last few months, although we are not complacent and remain committed as a team to driving further development under Mike's leadership.
- 3.2 I have agreed with Larry that Adam Scorer, Interim Director of Reputation and Impact, should have his contract extended until the end of March; I believe this will help deliver improved stakeholder engagement and better reporting on our impact. I have also agreed that Sarah Brooks will continue as Interim Director of Policy until the end of April, with Jill Johnstone backfilling as Interim Head of Fair Markets in addition to her substantive role as Director of International Advocacy. This will enable us to deliver the additional workplan projects and put in place arrangements for more effective cross-team working.

- 3.3 Marieke Dwarhuis joins us as Senior Director, Consumer Focus Scotland on 1 February 2010, at which point Trisha McAuley will return to her role as Director of Services and Advocacy. Trisha has done an excellent job as Acting Senior Director and I would like to place on record my great thanks for her work over the last period.

4 Impact

- 4.1 Consumer Focus saw real success in the Pre-Budget Report, with a funding increase to the Government's flagship fuel poverty scheme Warm Front. We lobbied hard behind the scenes for this funding increase, working with a coalition of other organisations, and used an open letter in the Daily Telegraph to emphasise the issue in the run-up to the Pre-Budget report. This will help 75,000 vulnerable households, who would otherwise have missed out, to make their homes more energy efficient and cut their bills.
- 4.2 Our ongoing lobbying on smart meters appears to be paying off at both a UK and European level. The Government's consultation response on smart meters supported our view that all consumers should be offered a standalone display with their smart meter despite hard campaigning against. Government has given much greater recognition and commitment to addressing potential consumer risks resulting from smart metering, especially around data protection, privacy, remote disconnection and switching. As part of this, Ofgem and DECC are setting up a consumer working group of which we will be a lead member.
- 4.3 One-third of National Assembly Members (AMs) have now signed our Fuel Poverty Charter, following a drop in for AMs held at the National Assembly for Wales in December. During this event they had a photo opportunity and were encouraged to communicate their support to their local press using our template press release. The Fuel Poverty Coalition response to the Welsh Assembly Government consultation on its fuel poverty strategy was submitted on 4 January. So far we have been successful in persuading the Welsh Assembly Government to: put the strategy out to consultation; be specific about who will be helped and how; agree to provide better direction towards emergency heating support; recognise the importance of a range of referral networks rather than just a preferred one and for advocacy providers to act on behalf of those who are most vulnerable in seeking support; recognise and incorporate the health impacts of living in fuel poverty into the strategy; develop a monitoring and evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the programme; and include fuel poverty as a priority area in their guidance on other areas of responsibility.
- 4.4 Consumer Focus Scotland achieved further impact in its work to improve and enhance parental involvement and representation in schools. The Schools (Consultation) Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 19 November. The Act represents a significant improvement in consultation mechanisms for parents when schools are threatened with closure. Our work builds on the longstanding interest of the Scottish Consumer Council in this area. In April 2009, Consumer Focus Scotland held a parliamentary reception with the SRSN in April 2009 to give MSPs the opportunity to hear directly from parents about their experiences. Our research on this issue helped ensure that the proposals were in the best interests of parents, pupils and communities.

- 4.5 November also saw the first meeting of the National Parents Forum, a new national parents' organisation, set up in response to the SCC/CFS campaign for the establishment of a national parents' body in Scotland.

5 Developments and stakeholder engagement since the last Board meeting

- 5.1 We have been very active in our main areas of work in the short time since the last Board meeting, publishing a number of reports, commissioning new research, building new stakeholders relationships and maintaining our high media profile. One major focus has been scoping and initiating new workplan projects, in line with previous Board discussions.

Mail

- 5.2 Consumer Focus used a Panorama investigation into the Royal Mail to launch our survey of postal users. The key finding from our survey focussed on the many consumers who experience problems receiving parcels. The survey and our Head of Regulated Industries Robert Hammond featured strongly in the programme, which was used as a stepping stone to a wider launch – with several national newspapers, 35 regional BBC radio stations and 40 regional newspapers featuring the story.
- 5.3 We responded to Postcomm's consultation on *Royal Mail price control from April 2010*, reluctantly accepting that the changes and consequential price increases were a short term necessity to bolster the position of Royal Mail ahead of the commencement of a full market review next year.
- 5.4 Royal Mail announced price rises of 2p on both first and second class stamped mail which was slightly less than the 3p maximum they could have increased first class mail by. Metered mail is unaffected which is good news for small businesses. We have reacted with general disappointment whilst acknowledging that this is a necessary short-term evil to maintain the USO ahead of the full price control review which will begin in 2010. Additionally, Royal Mail has advised that it is increasing the cost of its Local Collect Service from Post Offices: 50p to £1.50p per item for social customers and it will now cost businesses £1 per item, in the past businesses paid a £300 annual licence fee.
- 5.5 We are currently seeking to recruit an experienced secondee with expertise in this sector and are more generally reviewing our resources with a view to enhancing our in-house expertise.

Post offices

- 5.6 Our research into the quality of service offered through High Street post offices was published in mid-December, and showed a worsening of queue times in crown office branches (those directly managed by Post Office Ltd). Average queue times in crown offices increased by 30 seconds to 6 min 7 seconds, compared to previous research published by us in December 2008. This suggests that many branches have failed to effectively accommodate additional customers following the post office closure programme.
- 5.7 We will be pressing Post Office Ltd to agree service improvements and to commit to prioritising the modernisation of crown offices. We also want POL to increase the number of counters open during busy periods. It is particularly important that POL

addresses the customer experience in crown offices if it is to capitalise on the new business opportunities offered by the Government's commitment to extend the range of banking services offered through post offices.

- 5.8 Research conducted by Consumer Focus Scotland into the closure of eight post offices across Argyll and Bute found that local consumers believe that services are poorer as a result of the changes. The closures took place last year as part of the Post Office Ltd's Network Change Programme. Argyll and Bute was one of the first areas of Scotland to be affected by the programme, which ran from 2007 to 2009. The report received widespread media coverage and a motion was passed by the Scottish Parliament in support of the report. We will be meeting Royal Mail later this month to discuss taking forward the report's recommendations.

Energy

- 5.9 We strongly rebutted a report by Energy UK on the wholesale / retail energy price gap which claimed suppliers are making only small profits; and we commented on Ofgem's figures that showed large, and increasing, profit margins for energy firms. We achieved very strong media coverage in most of the national daily newspapers on the two reports.
- 5.10 We published the Consumer Conditions Index on 18 December. Our press release emphasised the poor performance of energy suppliers compared to the 45 markets (covering 70 per cent of consumer spend) that MORI surveyed on our behalf.
- 5.11 We are continuing our work on the domestic heating fuels project and are planning to undertake some qualitative research into consumer issues. However a tender process for work on a market review came in three times over budget and was not regarded as offering value for money without further internal scoping work being completed first.
- 5.12 We very recently received Counsel's Opinion on the alleged breach of European Union law on the charges associated with different methods of paying for energy in 2004-9, an issue previously drawn to the Board's attention. This opinion concludes that '*a good argument can be made*' that the UK failed to implement the relevant Directives properly and that consumers lost out as a result. However it then explores our legal options in detail and very clearly concludes that most would not be possible while the remainder would be disproportionately and prohibitively expensive and would prove ineffective.
- 5.13 Senior Management Team has therefore reluctantly concluded that we should not take legal action on this issue. We are now developing a communications plan so that we can at least draw the attention of decision-makers at DECC and Ofgem to this failure and the impact it had on consumers, so that lessons are learned for the future. Our inability to take legal action to resolve this apparent consumer detriment also serves to highlight how important it is that the Consumer Advocate gains collective redress powers sooner rather than later.
- 5.14 We took part in the European Regulators (ERGEG) Workshop on 14 December and the second meeting of the European Task Force on Smart Meters and Smart Grids on 16 December. Participating in these two meetings in Brussels helped to strengthen our profile as one of the leading voices for consumers in the development of European policies on smart meters and smart grids. In turn, this is supporting our advocacy efforts on the roll out of smart meters in Great Britain.

- 5.15 Consumer Focus met BEUC and DG SANCO to discuss the forward agenda for the ECCG energy working group and the 2010 Citizens Energy Forum. The meeting reviewed potential priority issues for the consumer movement for 2010. DG SANCO agreed to commit resources to re-launching the ECCG energy dialogue/meetings; it is hoped that this will also facilitate our efforts to increase consumers' input into the 2010 Citizen Energy Forum agenda.
- 5.16 We met DECC to discuss how we can most effectively contribute to the upcoming consultations to transpose the 3rd EU energy package adopted in 2009, into UK law. In addition to our formal response to consultations to be launched in 2010, we expect to continue to liaise with DECC on an ad hoc basis to inform the development of the consultation materials/meeting the requirements of the Directives.
- 5.17 Jonathan Stearn gave evidence to the Energy Bill Committee. I have agreed with Phil Wynn Owen, Director General of National Climate Change and Consumer Support at DECC, that we should meet regularly and look for opportunities to collaborate on sustainable behaviour change.
- 5.18 Richard Hall has recently joined the Regulated Industries team as principal policy advocate; he was previously at Ofgem.

Financial services

- 5.19 The Government's consultation on financial services at the Post Office was launched in December. It presents a unique opportunity to change the way that millions of people bank and also help strengthen the Post Office network by introducing specific transactional accounts. Our research on how the needs of low-income consumers can be met better at the Post Office, officially launched on 4 January, shows that nearly one million people could be lifted out of financial exclusion if a new, simple-to-use bank account is launched by the trusted Post Office network. The issue generated coverage in the Telegraph and Metro and interviews on BBC News and several regional radio stations.
- 5.20 Our Community and Public Services team met the Head of Policy at 10 Downing Street to discuss banking services at the Post Office and the findings of our research on the needs of low-income consumers.
- 5.21 We have been lobbying on the Financial Services Bill. One focus has been encouraging the Government to stick with its proposals on collective action and resist any attempts by business to undermine them.
- 5.22 We have moved to strengthen our resources in this sector – Linda Weatherhead, principal policy advocate, and Oliver Morgans, senior policy advocate, in the Fair Markets team will devote the bulk of their time to this sector. Sarah Brooks will be taking an active role in ensuring that the wider financial services team work well together – at GB level these include Andy Burrows (Community and Public Services) and Marie Burton (Disadvantage), as well as colleagues in Scotland and Wales. We are also aiming to get consultancy support on financial services regulation.

Communications and the digital economy

- 5.23 Anna Bradley, chair of the Communications Consumer Panel, and I sent a joint letter to the EU commission outlining our position on the T-mobile/Orange merger. We have called for the matter to be handled by the UK competition authorities, given the impact on the market here, while not taking a firm position on the outcome of such an investigation. This letter was a direct result of the meeting between the Panel and our Board and represents a welcome move towards greater collaboration with our fellow consumer bodies. We also met with T-mobile and Orange to discuss the merger.
- 5.24 In December we carried out mystery shopping/research into the cost of voting by mobile phone on popular participation TV shows – *The X Factor*, *Strictly Come Dancing* and *I'm a Celebrity*. This highlighted exceptionally poor levels of transparency around mobile charges as well as poor customer service. We are discussing the findings with Ofcom and PhonepayPlus and hope to publish the results and key recommendations in January.
- 5.25 We have flagged up concerns to Ofcom about a BT rollover contract. There are issues around unfair termination fees, unjustifiable lock-in times and a negative impact on competition in the telecoms market.
- 5.26 Consumer Focus attended the OECD conference on Strengthening Consumer Protection in the Internet Economy which was held in Washington DC on 8-10 December. During the conference we presented the results of our international comparative study of mobile commerce, *Pocket Shopping*, which is based on a cross-country mystery shopping survey of buying goods and services with mobile phones. The results were well-received and generated interest from media, industry and government stakeholders.
- 5.27 We have been lobbying on the Digital Economy Bill. While there is much to commend in the Bill, we consider that its proposals for punishing consumers who illegally share files online are shortsighted and overzealous. (I am pleased to report in passing that Larry Whitty's speech on the Bill in the House of Lords last month was the subject of positive real-time comment on Twitter.)

Regulation

- 5.28 Work has continued on our draft pamphlet on regulation and we have also undertaken follow-up work relating to *Rating Regulators*. The Board may recall that the Office of Rail Regulation wrote some time ago to say how useful they had found the report and indeed had used it to self-assess. I recently met the ORR chief executive Bill Emery and some of his leadership team, as well as colleagues from Passenger Focus and London Travelwatch, to discuss this further, with a particular focus on consumer engagement and reputational regulation.
- 5.29 We have been scoping an update of the well-regarded work that the National Consumer Council did some years ago on self-regulation and will be looking to commission this shortly.
- 5.30 I spoke at the annual meeting in Paris of directors of civil aviation across Europe, on why airport regulation should be focused on the interests of passengers and freight users rather than airlines. I subsequently met Dame Deirdre Hutton, chair of the Civil

Aviation Authority, to discuss these issues and in particular the future of passenger representation.

- 5.31 We continue to get a substantial number of speaking requests and other invitations concerning regulation. I am for example speaking at a Chartered Institute of Environmental Health conference on regulation on 18 January – other speakers include John Penrose – and we have been invited to speak on '*what does good regulation look like?*' at a seminar being run by the trade union Prospect in early March. We remain active members of the Institute for Government network on regulation.
- 5.32 In light of Steve Brooker's departure we have sought to rebuild our working-level expertise on general issues of regulation. I will retain an active interest in this area, not least through my membership of the government's Regulatory Policy Committee, as will Robert Hammond, but Lucy Yates, principal policy advocate in the Fair Markets team, will take a lead role from now on, alongside her continuing work on sustainability.

Public services

- 5.33 We launched our consumer-based critique of Directgov, and Consumer Focus' first micro site for public feedback, in December. The report invites experts to join our campaign on how to put consumers at the heart of the Government's central online portal, developing online services that empower consumers and reflect their needs. Feedback so far is very positive.
- 5.34 Following Consumer Focus Scotland's evidence to the Accounts Commission on Best Value 2, Audit Scotland requested assistance with making their BV2 reports more user-friendly and accessible. The CFS consumer network was used to carry out a survey of views of the reports and in early December two discussion sessions were held between network volunteers and Audit Scotland staff. A full report of this is being prepared and will be submitted to Audit Scotland. Due to our past involvement in the complaints aspect of and user focus in the Crerar Review of Inspection, Audit, Regulation and Complaints Handling of public services in Scotland, CFS has been asked to join the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Complaints Handling Improvement Project Board and to take the lead in the workstream for a proposed national public services complaints signposting service.

Other markets and general stakeholder engagement

- 5.35 Consumer Focus Scotland released a report called '*Improving the private rented sector in Scotland for the benefit of consumers.*' The report, published jointly with Shelter Scotland, looks at the key issues facing consumers in the sector, particularly disadvantaged ones and it makes a series of recommendations on actions to improve the experience of those living in private rented accommodation. The Minister for Communities, Alex Neil, has written to us endorsing the report's recommendations.
- 5.36 Consumer Focus Wales attended and hosted a table at the 'Welsh Politician of the Year' event in December, providing an opportunity to engage with Assembly Members and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates as well as party policy staff and journalists.

- 5.37 Consumer Focus Wales had a number of key engagements including meetings with the Wales Audit Office Auditor General, Sir Ian McGee (inputting into the Review of legal aid), the Big Lottery Fund policy team and British Gas.
- 5.38 Consumer Focus Scotland and the Food Standards Agency Scotland received over 4000 entries from over 200 primary schools across Scotland for a joint calendar competition, promoting the healthy eating message. The overall winner and the highly commended designs now feature in the Food Standards Agency in Scotland and Consumer Focus Scotland Safe Food and Healthy Eating Calendar that was distributed to schools and stakeholders across Scotland in December. Celebrity chef James Martin will visit the overall winning school on 3 February.
- 5.39 We continue to work on possible supercomplaints, building on the Board discussion in December. We have arranged to discuss with the Consumer Council in Northern Ireland the possibility of a joint supercomplaint on heating oil, although our recent analysis of publicly available data on this market suggests that putting together a strong case will take more work than we first thought. It is therefore possible that we will not be able to submit a supercomplaint in this financial year, although we continue to investigate other options. We will report back to the Board on this in February.

Corporate services

- 5.40 We have successfully disposed of a further legacy property – 9th floor, Civic House, Birmingham, which was an energy watch office. This property was surrendered back to the landlord 17 months early, as part of a three-way deal involving the West Midlands Metropolitan Police Service. The overall savings, after payment of the surrender premium (£98,500) and agreed dilapidations (£43,000), will be in excess of £160,000.
- 5.41 The National Social Marketing Centre has moved from Grosvenor Gardens to join other Consumer Focus colleagues in Artillery House. Their IT was successfully moved onto the CF system at the same time.

Staffing

- 5.42 In addition to the changes mentioned at various points above, Kallon Basham has moved to the Communications team, from Regulated Industries, following his appointment as our first Public Affairs Manager. Emma Adler has taken up her role as Media Relations Manager. Helen Newton has left us to become Head of Communications at the Money Advice Trust and Lisa Hawkins has joined the Complaints of General Interest team. Monica Davidson has been promoted to Acting Head of the Extra Help Unit to cover the period of Natasha Murray's maternity leave.
- 5.43 Senior Management Team recently reviewed our HR arrangements, building on an HR Committee discussion at the end of last year, and concluded that the current model and staff complement does not meet our needs. We have therefore agreed an increase in resource, paid for in part by existing income from our funded projects. These new arrangements will provide an increased level of service, particularly in Glasgow and London, and allow a greater focus on both training and organisational development.

5.44 We are currently developing the questionnaire for our major annual staff survey, which we plan to undertake in February. The most recent staff survey results date back to October and have been discussed in depth at senior Management Team and shared with the HR Committee. There are areas of improvement, not least in terms of some support services, but also issues where progress has been slower than we would like. We are making renewed efforts to engage and communicate effectively with staff in London, for example – I am taking an active role on this personally – and also working hard to enable effective cross-team collaboration. A facilitated meeting of programme leads from all parts of the organisation was for example held in Birmingham on 11-12 January under the leadership of Sarah Brooks, with a clear action plan developed during the course of discussions.

6 Looking ahead

- 6.1 We are waiting for the counsel's opinion on the potential breach of European legislation and overcharging of energy consumers. This is expected in early-mid January. A full paper will be made available as soon as this is completed.
- 6.2 During January we will be liaising closely with the stakeholders including the Energy Networks Association about the impacts for consumers on the expected changes to distribution charges. We are also looking closely at the issue of the impact for consumers of the introduction of smart grids and smart meters and feeding into working being undertaken at the EU level.
- 6.3 We, along with DECC, Ofgem and some energy suppliers and metering manufacturers, have jointly commissioned a literature review of the impact of smart metering tariffs. This looks at the impact of smart tariffs in other countries and will be published in February. It recommends that all smart meters offer prepay as a standard function and should help strengthen our campaigning in this area.
- 6.4 We are currently reviewing the journey and experience of energy customers should they have a complaint. As part of this 700 telephone consumer interviews and some in-depth interviews are being conducted, starting in January. We will be reporting on the service that consumers are receiving, levels of customer satisfaction and making recommendations by April.
- 6.5 CF Labs has been working to update the energy help and advice section of our website. This includes new advice leaflets for consumers and advice providers, updates to pages and the knowledge base in the light of new licence conditions. The new website will go live on 18 January to coincide with the start date for changes resulting from the Ofgem Probe.
- 6.6 We are currently working through the responses to the Confidence Code consultation and will be adapting the Code accordingly. Later this month we will be meeting with switching sites to discuss the new proposals. We are also in the process of carrying out an internal audit of the switching sites to ensure ongoing compliance with the Code.
- 6.7 Consumer Focus Wales will be hosting fringe events on fuel poverty and attend dinner at all the Welsh party conferences in February and March.

- 6.8 We met Postcomm to discuss the large piece of research that will feed in to their market review in 2010. We are close to agreeing the aims and objectives as well as the Terms of Reference between the two organisations. We have agreed with Postcomm that there should be regular meetings between Postcomm Commissioners and Consumer Focus Board Members, as well as staff from both sides. These are expected to happen quarterly and will start in March/April.
- 6.9 Conclusions and recommendations resulting from the research findings on cross-border mail service performance, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, are now in draft form and will be presented to the next Consumer Focus Post Board meeting on 14 January. Publication is anticipated in late January/early February.
- 6.10 Research on First Class Mail Performance Northern Ireland/Great Britain will be carried out in January/February 2010, sampling mail between 60 points in Great Britain and points in all six Northern Ireland counties plus Belfast.
- 6.11 Our annual omnibus survey on consumer satisfaction with mail and post office services in Northern Ireland will be carried out in mid-late January. Consumer Focus Post is currently refining the questionnaire to include issues relevant to next year's Annual Plan.
- 6.12 Consumer Focus Wales' report on the Impact of Post Office Closures will be shared with MPs at a pre-launch briefing in Westminster on 3 February. The report highlights the impact of the closure programme in Wales. Recommendations include continued support for the network, lessons for any future closures and improvements to the consultation process. This will also provide an opportunity to communicate our key messages about Post Bank to Welsh MPs.
- 6.13 A number of Postbus routes in rural Scotland have been terminated in the last year. Consumer Focus Scotland has commissioned a briefing paper to identify the role that Postbuses play in rural transport strategies, and the possible detriment caused to consumers by the removal of Postbus routes. The paper will be completed by the end of January 2010.
- 6.14 As part of our work to influence the debate about a Post Bank, Consumer Focus Wales will be hosting a meeting with Welsh Assembly Government officials and our GB colleagues to communicate the findings of our research and our key issues to inform the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the consultation.
- 6.15 The next Focus on Finance seminar, considering issues around financial inclusion, will be at the RSA on 10 February. Brian Pomeroy, FSA Board member and Chair of the Financial Inclusion Taskforce, has agreed to be the author of the seminar paper and Alan Cook, Managing Director of Post Office Limited, will be a panellist. Sukhvinder Kaur Stubbs will chair the event.
- 6.16 I have been asked by HM Treasury to chair the opening session of a conference on remittances and financial inclusion on 9 February. On the same day, Mike O'Connor and Maria Battle will be visiting Tony Smith, chief executive of Consumer Council for Water, in Birmingham to discuss future collaboration. I have also arranged to meet Tony and his counterpart Anthony Smith at Passenger Focus to discuss opportunities for joint initiatives on regulation.

- 6.17 We are working with Ofcom, and have invited the Consumer Panel to participate, on a joint switching campaign for mobile phones. The aim is to encourage consumers to switch to a better mobile phone deal and advise them how they can make informed and effective purchasing decisions. This will be launched in March.
- 6.18 Consumer Focus Scotland is building on its experience of working with vulnerable consumers in the Borders Digital Diary Project to develop a simple resource to support vulnerable consumers to make the switch to digital TV. The resource will be for use by intermediary organisations working with vulnerable consumers, to enable these organizations to support their clients/service users to switch to digital TV. We have now circulated a first draft to stakeholder organisations (Digital UK, Switchover Help Scheme, Digital Outreach) for feedback comment. These organisations are supportive of the resource, and we have agreed to work with them on content and dissemination. We aim to have the resource ready for distribution in February.
- 6.19 Consumer Focus Wales' review of the implementation of the E coli recommendations for consumers will be launched at the Senedd on 23 March.
- 6.20 Tim Smith, chief executive of the Food Standards Agency, has asked me to co-chair (with Joanne Denney-Finch of the Institute of Grocery Distribution) a stakeholder meeting on front of pack labelling, in an effort to move things forward in this important but hotly-disputed area. This will take place in late January or early February.
- 6.21 We are supporting a series of roundtables being run by the University of Leicester Centre for Consumers and Essential Services. I will be chairing the next one, which looks at the impact of new business models and marketing techniques on the delivery of essential services, on 25 January.
- 6.22 Since Consumer Focus Scotland was established, we have produced five separate consumer guides. We have now commissioned a marketing agency to effectively promote these guides to consumers. This also provides a useful opportunity to raise awareness of Consumer Focus Scotland among key stakeholder audiences. The first phase will be launched in mid-January (Legal System of Scotland & A-Z of Scots Education Law). The second phase (Moving Home, Buying and Selling a House & Common Repair, Common Sense) will start in February. Both phases will feature direct mail, advertising and PR to promote the guides to key stakeholders and consumers.
- 6.23 Mike O'Connor will be hosting a table at the first Citizens Advice annual awards in late January; Sharon Darcy will be joining Mike and a number of our key stakeholders. I was one of the judges and will be presenting an award. This is a good opportunity for us to build informal relationships with senior people while demonstrating our support for the valuable work of Citizens Advice and bureaux around the country.

7 Proposal

- 7.1 The Board is asked to note the contents of this report.