

Consumer Focus Board

Paper 5.1

Title: Chief Executive's report

Purpose: For information and discussion

Date of meeting: 1 December 2009

Responsible officer: Philip Cullum

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Attachments: Annex 1: Balanced scorecard
Annex 2: SMT priorities
Annex 3: Update on potential revisions to Forward Work Programme

1 Overview

1.1 This is a quarterly report, setting out Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Consumer Focus in the period July-September. It also reports progress against milestones on the internal and external priorities identified by the Senior Management Team, details the impact for consumers from our recent work and highlights significant activities in the period ahead. It also updates the Board on potential revisions to the Forward Work Programme.

2 Action for the Board

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

3 The key issues

3.1 The key issues that I would like to draw the Board's attention to are:

- Balanced scorecard - KPIs
- Senior Management Team Priorities
- Impact
- Significant activities since the last Board meeting (internal)
- Significant activities since the last Board meeting (external)
- Stakeholder engagement
- Significant activities coming up
- Potential revisions to the Forward Work Programme.

4 Balanced Scorecard - KPIs

- 4.1 The Key Performance Indicators for the Consumer Focus Balance Scorecard for the second quarter, Jul – Sep 2009, are attached at Annex 1.
- 4.2 Key points to note are:
- 96 per cent of the Forward Work Programme is reported on track or has now been completed – see paragraph 4.3 below.
 - 68 per cent of employees indicated they have the corporate services tools and support needed to do their job - a 7 per cent increase over Q1. The increase reflects significant improvements in the rating of IT services (see paragraph 4.5 below). Continued improvement is expected in Q3.
 - Systems for reporting on training evaluation were implemented in Q2. 80 per cent of employees provided positive training evaluations for the learning and development opportunities offered in the quarter. A series of management development workshops were introduced last quarter to provide an opportunity for managers to revise or underpin their skills, within the context of Consumer Focus.
 - The Extra Help Unit recorded a £142 average compensation received per closed complaint.
- 4.3 In light of previous Board feedback, we have not attached the detailed 38-page report covering each workplan project. Instead the full report for Quarter 2 will be made available on the Consumer Focus intranet and sent to Board members on request. No projects have been rated red (i.e. significantly behind schedule), but five have been rated amber (i.e. behind schedule), largely because we are waiting for action by an external body or have chosen to prioritise other work in the immediate period.

5 SMT Priorities

- 5.1 A report on the SMT priorities is attached at Annex 2.
- 5.2 With regard to the internal priorities, I am particularly pleased to report a significant improvement in the quality of IT services within our offices. The technical changes that the team has been working on for some time are now making a clear difference to the user experience; and we have established better support services for each office. The technical work has revealed some poor quality work in the transition and then the failure of external suppliers to deliver what they promised. We are pursuing one supplier in particular on the latter issues.
- 5.3 The corporate plan and draft annual plan have been sent out to stakeholders and we are running a small number of engagement events as well as encouraging staff to solicit feedback from their contacts. The production of these plans was a major effort involving staff across the organisation and has resulted in a pleasing degree of cross organisational working. We now need staff to do further work honing the projects in light of internal and external feedback.
- 5.4 We have initiated a management training programme, which has had excellent feedback from participants; further sessions are planned. We have also undertaken a substantial amount of media training, again with more planned. More generally in terms of training, SMT recognises that attempts earlier in the year to produce a highly co-ordinated approach to training had the unintended consequence of stopping

colleagues from undertaking training activity which was perfectly sensible and worthwhile. We have now revised our immediate strategy and are taking a more encouraging and enabling approach, with managers empowered to authorise activity up to a certain level. This should result in a significant increase in training and development in the remainder of the financial year.

- 5.5 Corporate understanding of our finances has improved significantly and the team have done a good job unravelling systemic issues resulting from the transition period. They are now focusing on work with individual managers to improve reporting at this level, building their skills and ensuring they get information in a way that best supports them. I have had good feedback from SMT colleagues on the flexible and helpful approach that Graham and his team are taking in this area.
- 5.6 In terms of the external priorities, I would draw attention to our work with Ofgem on vulnerable disconnections. This has been a valuable and constructive working relationship which is producing substantial dividends for consumers.
- 5.7 We published our report on Jobcentre Plus in November. We have positive reactions from officials to our recommendations and now have a good opportunity to ensure they are adopted; we are due to meet the minister and his Conservative shadow, and are undertaking some follow-up work.
- 5.8 It is worth acknowledging that this project received some adverse comment from officials with regard to the methodology, perhaps to some extent reflecting a lack of familiarity with qualitative approaches. We were careful not to over-claim in the report or press release. We are however aware that while qualitative research can often be far more sophisticated and insightful than quantitative work, one of its disadvantages is that the small sample sizes can look less robust to some observers, and we will continue to take this into account in project design, for example with regard to our planned project on the police.
- 5.9 We continue to input to the government's Consumer Advocate proposal – Larry Whitty will feed back separately on this.
- 5.10 We have now held three roundtable discussions as part of our Focus on Finance initiative, with at least one more planned for early next year. These have attracted a high level of speakers and participants, and we have had very positive feedback on the quality of discussion, so providing a platform for our future work in this sector.

6 Impact

- 6.1 We worked with the big six energy suppliers to extend the period to qualify for prompt pay discounts during the postal strike and obtained guarantees from all of them to accommodate late payments resulting from postal delays.
- 6.2 Ofgem has acted on our referral about British Gas' debt recovery rates which were excessive (up to £25 per week per fuel, on top of consumption) which left some people struggling to keep the heat on and spiralling into further debt. This problem was identified and evidenced by the Extra Help Unit. The final report is due to be published in December.
- 6.3 On 22 October, we published our Priorities in the Mobile Phone Sector, a report summarising our consultation and research activities to date and setting out the focus of our work up to March 2010. Broadcast and print media coverage accompanied the launch of this paper, with a focus on the complexity issues we uncovered, such as the

1.3 million packages in the market and the difficulty for consumers in navigating this and making informed choices. As a result of media coverage of our call for mobile users to look for better deals using an accredited site, BillMonitor (the only Ofcom-accredited mobile price comparison web) reported a 10-fold increase in traffic to its site. This is likely to have produced significant savings for consumers.

- 6.4 The leading sandwich chain Pret a Manger now has some nutritional information on shelf displays. The National Consumer Council campaigned on this issue, identifying Pret as a particularly poor performer. While by no means perfect, these new labels represent a significant and welcome change of approach.
- 6.5 Scottish Government proposals to reform both legal services and civil justice have moved beyond the broad policy shift that Consumer Focus Scotland campaigned for to practical recommendations that will bring real benefits to consumers, the detail of which draws heavily on Consumer Focus' Scotland work. In civil justice, the report of the Scottish Civil Courts Review accepted Consumer Focus Scotland's proposals for: introducing a new more user friendly, simplifies procedure for cases involving lower monetary value and housing matters, designed with unrepresented court users in mind; promoting increased public legal education; extending in-court advice services throughout Scotland; encouraging the use of mediation and other form of alternative dispute resolution and; introducing a procedure for class actions.
- 6.6 Consumer Focus Scotland also welcomed the publication of the Legal Services (Scotland) Bill which paves the way to opening up competition in the market and widening choice for users of legal services. Consumer Focus Scotland was able to provide direct comment on a draft version of the Bill as part of our involvement in the Bill's reference group.
- 6.7 The Board asked that we do further work developing our narrative on our impact as an organisation. Adam Scorer is leading this work and will bring a proposal to the next Senior Management Team meeting.

7 Significant activities since the last Board

Internal

- 7.1 The Complaints of General Interest team have been recruited and will all be in place by January 2010. They are a very able and enthusiastic team and will be led by an experienced commercial lawyer, Gemma Bowen, who has worked on behalf of various multi-national companies. The senior investigator, Lisa Hawkins, is a former metropolitan police detective who, following her law degree, worked as an investigator with the Competition Commission in New Zealand and London Borough of Hackney Trading Standards Department. The investigator, Rupert Roker, has recently qualified with a master's in law from Oxford specialising in consumer protection law.
- 7.2 Our new Head of Finance, Steve Jones, joined us in mid-November. Kingsley Arnold and Russell May will remain with us in interim roles until the end of December.
- 7.3 We hope to conclude a deal shortly on our legacy property in Birmingham, Civic House. The lease is likely to be ended early and the property transferred to West Midlands Police, saving us some £100,000, mainly in 2010-11.

- 7.4 We continue to consult with staff on proposed changes in the National Social Marketing Centre. In the meantime we have reorganised Artillery House to accommodate Centre staff, who will move in mid-December. This also means that GB Policy and Communications teams will all be on the same floor for the first time, aiding collaborative working.
- 7.5 The Centre has received a rating of ‘substantial assurance’ from our internal auditors. This is a major turnaround from the position some months ago, and everyone involved deserves to be commended – though we are not resting on our laurels and will continue to make improvements to processes and practice.
- 7.6 More generally, the Senior Management Team recently met the internal auditors to discuss our respective roles and the internal audit strategy going forward.
- 7.7 Work is also underway at SMT level in light of Board discussion on the need for a clear narrative about our impact. Adam Scorer and Mark Steinmeyer are leading on this, and will produce a paper for the next SMT meeting. This will in part touch on what information we will need to capture more effectively in future.
- 7.8 In October, staff working on Post Office policy issues across the Consumer Focus family met in Glasgow for their first face-to-face meeting. They discussed the GB work programme and identified linkages between the projects being undertaken in each nation. Meetings will subsequently take place on a quarterly basis to support the consistent delivery of this work programme across the organisation. Following the meeting, staff visited Pollok Credit Union, the first to take over a post office, offering both post office and credit union services from the same premises. The visit provided useful insights to further our understanding of how Post Office Ltd could work effectively with credit unions across the UK to offer a range of products targeted at consumer groups who have otherwise been overlooked by mainstream banking providers.

External

- 7.9 We launched our report ‘Green to the Core’ in early November, assessing the major supermarket chains on the extent to which they enable consumers to make sustainable choices. This builds on past reports from the National Consumer Council. As noted in another Board paper, Sainsbury took out national newspaper advertisements to draw attention to our conclusions, and we gained substantial media coverage for our analysis.
- 7.10 However I have to report that Asda deliberately breached the report’s media embargo, apparently in order to minimise the impact of the relatively low rating which they achieved. We provided the Asda team with an embargoed copy of the report as a matter of courtesy, so that they could deal with media enquiries and would not be taken by surprise. I have written in robust terms to the Asda Chief Executive Andy Bond to express our anger at this breach of trust, which in my experience is exceptionally rare, and suggesting that we meet. We are to some extent consoled by the backlash that this move prompted, not least amongst the media. The consumer editor of the Daily Telegraph commented ‘Asda you have destroyed goodwill you have build up over years’; and when Marketing Week conducted an online poll to ask whether Asda deserved its poor rating, 65 per cent said yes.
- 7.11 We will continue to monitor embargo compliance by companies. This longstanding and widely-used system benefits organisations affected by our reports, but if the short-sighted Asda strategy is adopted by others we may reluctantly have to come back to the Board with a view to revising our processes.

- 7.12 We are now working on our small collaborative project with Coca Cola UK on marketing to children.
- 7.13 We have carried out the fieldwork in our joint review with Ofgem of energy suppliers' debt and disconnection policies. This immediately highlighted a number of issues including unfair and inconsistent debt recovery rates and problems around usage of fuel direct.
- 7.14 We have asked Ofgem to investigate prompt pay discounts and how these fit with the new licence condition on price differentials. Our fear is this practice is being used by suppliers to side step new licence conditions on cost-reflective pricing and that charges are disproportionate to the cost incurred by the supplier for late payment.
- 7.15 We have undertaken an investigation into energy doorstep mis-selling which has highlighted, as one consumer put it, 'awful and upsetting marketing practices.' We also identified a rise in direct selling cases to Consumer Direct despite a reduction in contacts overall. We have submitted our findings to the Energy Retail Association (ERA) as we identified potential breaches to the self regulation initiative, the Energy Sure Code.
- 7.16 As part of the investigation, we commissioned an omnibus survey into consumers experiences of doorstep selling and will be exploring how best to use this. This showed that over two-thirds of people rated their experience of energy doorstep sales as 1, on a scale of 1-5 where 5 was the best and 1 meant "very negative". 34 per cent specifically described the call as 'intimidating' in a free text box without any prompt in the question.
- 7.17 We have received advice from solicitors on potential overcharging by npower of 2.2 million gas customers as a result of changes to its tariff structure. This suggests there has been a breach of contract and there is a strong case for compensation. Senior Management Team has had an initial discussion on whether we should assist consumers on pursuing the case on a 'conditional fee light' basis; as a result we are now getting Leading Counsel's opinion. Depending on this opinion, we will bring a proposal to the Board in January.
- 7.18 Following the Board's previous discussion we sought Counsel's opinion on the viability of compensation and redress for consumers who may have been overcharged as a result of failure to implement 2003 European energy directives on cost reflectivity. This advice is expected at the end of November.
- 7.19 We achieved a high public profile on the industrial action affecting Royal Mail, giving many interviews to a wide range of audiences, across the nations. We met Royal Mail and the Communications Workers Union to discuss the ongoing industrial action in an effort to minimise the consumer detriment. Our call for
- 7.20 The Consumer Focus Post Board considered a report on the accessibility of free-to-use ATMs in the Northern Ireland post office network and agreed policy lines.
- 7.21 Consumer Focus Wales and NEA Cymru launched the Fuel Poverty Charter Cymru. The wide ranging coalition included cancer, housing, poverty, older people and children's charities. The coalition ensured we were able to provide real life stories of consumers who were suffering the effects of fuel poverty to the media. We were the top news item on BBC Wales (both languages) and ITV Wales throughout the day. An hour-long phone in was held by BBC Radio Wales with consumers across the country ringing in to talk about their personal experiences of fuel poverty. We launched a

microsite to harness support and placed a full page advertisement in the national newspaper. The Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, Jane Davidson AM welcomed the Charter and indicated that her Fuel Poverty Strategy will take into account our recommendations.

- 7.22 Consumer Focus Wales published two new reports: 'Cost of Cash' (which looks at the premium paid by those who live on cash budgets) and 'Logged in, Locked out' (updating work on access to ICT in Wales, first done by the Welsh Consumer Council 10 years ago).
- 7.23 Consumer Focus Scotland published "Switching Off" its report of a series of focus groups across Scotland with disadvantaged groups of consumers on attitudes and barriers to switching in energy. The publication generated widespread interest from the media.
- 7.24 In the light of forthcoming Scottish Government proposals to introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol. Consumer Focus Scotland prepared a policy briefing for parliamentarians. There are clear policy tensions between intervening in a competitive market and taking into account the paramount interest in improving the health of consumers. Following a lengthy discussion by the Consumer Focus Scotland Board, the policy paper supports minimum unit pricing, but only if it is part of a wider package of public health measures aimed at reducing alcohol intake.

8 Key stakeholder engagement

- 8.1 The inaugural meeting of the Consumer Food Safety Group, chaired by Consumer Focus Wales was held on 17 November 2009. Sharon Mills, the mother of five year old Mason Jones who tragically died in the E. coli outbreak in 2005, addressed the start of the meeting. Members of the group were moved by her dignified address, which asked them to ensure the Pennington Recommendations are implemented so that no other child or family suffers. We presented the results of our consumer survey on food safety indicating that nine out of 10 consumers in Wales want access to food hygiene ratings and 40 per cent want mandatory food certification at food outlets. The Minister for Health and Social Services, Edwina Hart, has indicated to us her support for a single website for consumers in Wales to access food hygiene ratings. The outcome of the meeting was an agreement by the Welsh Assembly Government to hand over their monitoring report for scrutiny by Consumer Focus Wales, the families and the members of the group. This will be published by Consumer Focus Wales on the first anniversary of the Pennington Report in March 2010. This project has attracted publicity in Wales particularly in the local press in those areas which have experienced an E. coli outbreak.
- 8.2 On 29 October, Consumer Focus Scotland held its 'Fairness and the Consumer' conference. This highly successful event brought together senior speakers and key stakeholders from the public, private and third sector to explore how we can ensure that consumers in Scotland are treated fairly as all sectors respond to the pressures of the recession.
- 8.3 We have continued with the programme of events promoting our support/information for front-line advisers. In October these were held in Glasgow, Birmingham and Manchester, with November sessions held in Leeds, London and Bristol. We also provided energy training to 52 Consumer Direct advisers on 8 and 9 October at their centre in Northampton.

- 8.4 The National Social Marketing Centre has been rolling out a programme of free social marketing training for the NHS. So far, we have delivered 78 courses and trained just under 1,300 NHS staff. Two new course are being launched in Jan 2010 – a ‘masterclass’ for NHS directors, and training on ‘evaluating success’. We are using Webinars to update trainers on new and improved course materials.
- 8.5 Responding to demand from PCTs, the Centre has recently launched the ‘Procurement Guide for Social Marketing Services’ for public sector commissioners. It gives detailed guidance on the full procurement process and how to get the best chosen suppliers. It has been sent to all directors of commissioning at the Department of Health.
- 8.6 We have continued to work with the Helplines Association (THA) on the development of a new scheme to zero-rate or cap call costs to designated public sector helplines.
- 8.7 We gave oral evidence to the Business and Enterprise Committee inquiry into broadband speed. Consumer Focus Scotland hosted Peter Peacock MSP and Stephen Timms MP, Minister for Digital Britain, meeting with a range of key stakeholders with an interest in driving forward the delivery of faster and more effective broadband technology to Scottish consumers, particularly those in remote and island areas not served, or likely to be served, by the market. A few days later, Consumer Focus held a joint seminar on Digital Britain with the Communications Consumer Panel to discuss the wider implications of delivering Digital Britain in the devolved context. The key outcome from both meetings was the agreement of stakeholder organisations at both (around 30 organisations) to work in consensus, led by Consumer Focus Scotland, to ensure that UK and Scottish government worked together to produce a coherent Digital Strategy for Scotland.
- 8.8 The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Consumer Affairs and Trading Standards met at the end of October. Consumer Focus and Trading Standards Institutes are joint sponsors of the group. Larry Whitty gave a short presentation on why Consumer Focus is campaigning for a private right of redress under the Consumer Protection from unfair Trading Regulations 2008. Consumer Focus’s views were supported by Trading Standards Institute. This is the second meeting since we started co-sponsoring with TSI and despite low MP attendance on this occasion contributed to building a foundation for future work.
- 8.9 We met with Ofgem on the implementation of the Probe remedies, in particular the communications package to advice providers and Consumer Direct and the Energy Ombudsman.
- 8.10 We met with the OFT to negotiate publication of their data in an interim performance metric for energy suppliers. This has been a difficult situation with Consumer Direct withholding the agreement due to concerns around part 9 of the Enterprise Act. We have managed to move the situation forward and are currently consulting with suppliers on publication.
- 8.11 We met Exchequer Secretary Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP to discuss the Pre Budget Report; and we met energy secretary Ed Miliband’s special adviser Polly Billington to discuss the energy bill and price support proposals. We met energy minister David Kidney twice on 4 November to discuss energy policy. The first meeting was organised by DECC officials; the second was at a Warm Homes Group dinner in the evening. We also had a third meeting with officials leading the energy bill team on 5 November.
- 8.12 We met three Welsh ministers in this period, Andrew Davies (Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery), Edwina Hart (Minister for Health and Social Services) and

Gwenda Thomas (Deputy Minister for Social Services). We held a private dinner with Nick Bourne, Conservative Leader in Wales, and some of his AMs and PPCs.

- 8.13 Consumer Focus Scotland took part in two David Hume Institute/Scotland Office seminars and dinners with the Secretary of State for Scotland on financial services and on quality food and drink.
- 8.14 We spoke at a European conference on fuel poverty and have written a draft position paper for Consumers International on energy efficiency and recommendations for improved policies.
- 8.15 Consumer Focus took part in the World Forum on Energy Regulation in Athens and we chaired session entitled “Regulatory issues of importance to residential and small customers”. This was an excellent opportunity to meet consumer advocates from a wide range of backgrounds that represent a broad spectrum of consumers. I spoke at the Institute for Government regulation summit, which Roger Darlington and Stephen Locke took part in too.
- 8.16 On water issues, we met with both the Walker Review team and CC Water to share our experience on debt and disconnection and affordability issues in the energy market and how these can be applied in water. We have now committed to ongoing liaison and possible joint work with CC Water.
- 8.17 We have agreed to work with OFT on research into the poverty premium – the extra money which low income consumers pay for services. We responded to the OFT High Cost Credit review and the OFT consultation on Irresponsible Lending guidance, which has particular significance for low income consumers and the assessment of affordability. We also met Treasury officials to co-ordinate research into the experiences of unbanked consumers.
- 8.18 We met Mary McAnally and Arnold Pindar, respectively President and Chair of the National Consumer Federation, to discuss opportunities for collaboration and the scope for a more strategic partnership in future. We have agreed to meet again in January with a view to work up some tangible actions. In the meantime we are sponsoring Consumer Congress, which they have reactivated, which takes place on 10 December, focused on the topic of ‘Consumers and the Credit Crunch’. Larry Whitty is speaking and we have a number of places if any Board members would like to attend.
- 8.19 We also met Adam Phillips, chair of the Financial Services Consumer Panel, and discussed how we might deepen our relationship. We aim to bring some Board and Panel members together for a further discussion early next year, along the lines of the lunch held recently with the Communications Consumer Panel.
- 8.20 Consumer Focus Scotland met with David Scott, CEO of digital UK, to discuss working together in the consumer interest as digital TV switchover continues in Scotland. Based in our experiences with vulnerable consumers in the Borders, through our “Digital Diaries” project, we are producing a simple resource to support vulnerable consumers. The resources will be for use by intermediary organisations, to enable them to support their clients/service users to switch to digital TV,

9 Significant activities coming up

- 9.1 On 24 November, Consumer Focus and the Office of Fair Trading is hosting a senior-level roundtable discussion of the challenges to putting active consumers at the heart

of fair, innovative and dynamic markets. Later that week, Roger Darlington is representing Consumer Focus at an Equalities and Human Rights Commission roundtable on regulation.

- 9.2 The Government's decision document on smart metering is expected at the end of November. The government's commitment to mandate social tariff/price support for energy consumers will appear in the energy bill to be announced in the Queen's speech. We have research that has produced strong evidence to indicate who the government's price support proposals in the Bill should be aimed at. We have been discussing the findings with DECC fuel poverty review officials prior to any publication.
- 9.3 We are about to publish a report commissioned from Cornwall Energy on proportionality of social tariffs. This is an update on research carried out for energywatch.
- 9.4 We will be pressing ahead with activities in the priority areas set out in our recent paper on the mobile phone sector. We are due to meet a number of mobile network operators (MNOs) to discuss these plans.
- 9.5 We are set to launch a consultation on the Confidence Code, our accreditation scheme for online energy price comparison services. Additionally, we expect to publish findings of the joint review with Ofgem of energy supplier Debt and Disconnection policies.
- 9.6 Consumer Focus will present at the Sofia Economics Conference, entitled Smart Consumers, in late November. The title of the presentation is 'British protection – consumer experience in regulated industries.' This invite was received through contacts made at the World Forum on Energy Regulation. Also on the international stage, Department for Transport has asked me to present to the annual forum of the European Civil Aviation Conference, based in Paris, on consumers and regulation. This is the result of my membership of the expert panel, chaired by Martin Cave, advising the Transport Secretary on airport regulation.
- 9.7 We will shortly be holding meetings with key stakeholders in preparation for the publication of our heating fuels report.
- 9.8 Postal Omnibus survey findings on consumers' perceptions and needs are expected in mid-November. We are currently scoping the possibility of commissioning regular omnibus surveys to ascertain consumers' attitudes towards Royal Mail and the postal market more widely. This will allow us to monitor trends in consumer attitudes of the postal service.
- 9.9 We are currently developing recommendations resulting from our research on the performance of the mail service between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland undertaken by Ipsos MORI. A report on post office outreach in Northern Ireland is expected from Millward Brown in November.
- 9.10 Training Seminars for Northern Ireland Advice Services on Royal Mail Complaints process will take place from December to February 2010.
- 9.11 BIS has signalled that it will launch a consultation on extending the financial services offering available through Post Offices. The consultation should promote the objectives of driving financial inclusion and securing the long-term viability of the PO network and is likely to commence in late November. We have already met with officials to inform the framework for the consultation. The consultation follows our engagement with senior No10 officials ahead of the Prime Minister's speech to the Labour conference,

in which Gordon Brown signalled the Government's commitment to extending the role for POs in 'bringing banking services to the heart of people's communities'.

- 9.12 Interest is growing in Wales in our project to ensure the voice of the consumer is heard in the public sector cuts debates. The Wales Local Government Association, the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery, Andrew Davies AM and the Local Better Regulation Office have voiced their support. We are planning a series of seminars in partnership to showcase best practice.
- 9.13 We have prepared invitations to quote in relation to payday lending research, both in terms of a comparative study of the market in the UK and the US and qualitative research with users of payday lending. There is growing media interest in this area – we understand Watchdog and Panorama have programmes planned, for example.
- 9.14 I am speaking at two public services conferences in the next few weeks, the Civil Service World event on 'Delivering more for less' and the Annual International Conference on Governance, Public Services and Administrative Reform, run by the Centre for Parliamentary Studies in association with Government Exchange.
- 9.15 In December, the National Social Marketing Centre is running a five-day training course in social marketing in Chengdu, China with a broad range of stakeholders working in HIV/AIDS-related fields, including academics and practitioners. The training is being run in collaboration with the Chinese University of Hong Kong and has been funded by DFID.
- 9.16 On 30 November, the Scottish Government is expected to publish its National Conversation White Paper, outlining its proposals for constitutional change. In addition to the containing proposals for any independence referendum, the paper will pull together and finalise the Scottish Government's views on the future governance of key sectors including energy, enterprise, broadcasting, environment and financial services. Consumer Focus Scotland has previously submitted evidence to the National Conversation and will be scrutinising the White Paper to assess the consumer interest in the proposals. In relation to energy, we will be jointly hosting a seminar with Ofgem to discuss with senior stakeholders, the consumer interest in energy policy in Scotland.
- 9.17 On 10 December, the Extra Help Unit will hold its first awareness raising parliamentary event in Holyrood, with the aim of ensuring that SMPs know about, and can access the support provided by the Executive Liaison Team within the EWHU. This will be followed with events in the UK Parliament and Welsh Assembly as early as possible during 2010.

10 Potential revisions to the Forward Work Programme

- 10.1 We have been working on the ideas considered at the last Board meeting, developing and starting those projects which were agreed, and identifying and assessing further options. This is discussed more fully in Annex 3 and as before we would welcome Board feedback, either in the Board meeting or on an individual basis.

11 Proposal

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