

CONSUMER FOCUS SCOTLAND

Senior Director: Marieke Dwarshuis

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

- 1.1 Having focused my first few weeks internally, I have started to meet a wide range of external stakeholders. One of my areas of focus is to meet with Scottish Government officials leading on policy areas that cover the 4 different SG funded projects that CFS run – 3 of these are moving into their last year of current funding.
- 1.2 **Change/impact achieved**
 - 1.2.1 Marieke Dwarshuis and Sarah O'Neill met with Fergus Ewing, Minister for Community Safety, to discuss the Legal Services (Scotland) Bill. This Bill seeks to introduce the ability for legal practitioners in Scotland to operate in 'alternative abusiveness structures', i.e. not only in exclusively legal practices. We were able to clarify the need for not-for-profit organisations (such as advice agencies and CABx) in Scotland to be able to employ solicitors and gained assurance that the Scottish Government would seek a way to make this possible. We were also able to offer suggestions on how the proposed 'veto' for the Lord President in the approval of regulators of licensed legal services partnerships may be reconsidered, and reiterated the need for effective lay representation in the governance of the Law Society for Scotland.
- 1.3 **Significant activity**
 - 1.3.1 The Health Rights and Information Scotland project published a DVD, and associated website resources on how to use the health service in Scotland: www.howtousethenhs.com which received wide coverage in the national and local press.
 - 1.3.2 The second phase of our campaign to promote the CFS series of specialist consumer guide publications was started in March. The guides *Common Repair*, *Common Sense: a short guide to the management of tenements in Scotland*; *Moving Home in Scotland: a guide to buying and selling your home* and the free guide *Buying and Selling a Home in Scotland*, are part of this.
 - 1.3.3 Liz Macdonald gave evidence on the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, which seeks to introduce minimum unit prices for alcohol in order to reduce levels of harmful drinking.
 - 1.3.4 Jennifer Wallace spoke at a conference on How to Turn Scottish Public Sector Complaints into Service Improvements.
 - 1.3.5 We provided briefing papers for debates in the Scottish Parliament on improved availability of broadband, on factoring services and for stage 1 of the Legal Services (Scotland) Bill
 - 1.3.6 We provided a response to the Food Standards Agency Consultation on 'Provision of Calorie Labelling at Point of Choice in Catering Outlets'
 - 1.3.7 We provided evidence to the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee on Petition PE1303, which urges the Scottish Government to restore access to justice for all by abandoning its policy of full cost recovery in the civil courts through court fees ,

- 1.3.8 We provided a response to the Judicial Office on Judicial Conduct: Rules for Investigating and Determining Matters, and a response to the Thomson Review of Rights of Audience in the Scottish Supreme Courts

2 CHALLENGES RUNNING UP TO THE NEXT BOARD MEETING

- 2.1 Tim Brown, Chief Executive of Postcomm will be the guest speaker at the next meeting of the CFS Board. We will use this opportunity to highlight the inadequacies of the Royal Mail/Postcomm complaints process (which came to light as a result of a recent case handled – and resolved very satisfactorily – by the Extra Help Unit). The timescales are problematic – a complaint could take 8 months to be resolved and there is no definitive timescale for Postcomm, the last court of complaints to resolve outstanding cases. In addition, from a Scottish perspective, the fact that there is no role in the review process at the devolved level adds to the perception of a very remote complaints process. I don't see why there could not be a review mechanism using the Royal Mail's headquarters in Scotland to do this.
- 2.2 Douglas Sinclair and Marieke Dwarshuis will be meeting with officials from BIS in the context of the Review of the Consumer Landscape. BIS officials are meeting with a range of Scottish stakeholders, and with officials from the Scottish Government.
- 2.3 We will host an 'Energy and the Consumer seminar', jointly presented by Trisha McAuley (CFS) and Sarah Harrison (Ofgem).
- 2.4 By the time of the Board meeting we will have published 'Making Civil Justice Work for Consumers: The consumer perspective on making the civil justice system in Scotland fit for the 21st century'
- 2.5 Ensuring that the changes that will result from the restructuring if the GB policy teams can contribute to better collaboration between the London and Glasgow based policy teams, by ensuring clarity of function and ensuring that changes are communicated clearly.