

CONSUMER FOCUS WALES

Senior Director: Maria Battle

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

1.1 Post

- 1.1.1 Together with colleagues from Consumer Focus we met with Welsh Assembly Government civil servants to inform them of our work on what Post Office Card Account holders and other low-income consumers want from banking services ahead of their response to BIS's consultation on extending financial services at the post office.
- 1.1.2 We met with Prof Nick Bourne AM, leader of the Welsh Conservatives and with Dr Dai Lloyd AM, Plaid Cymru Social Justice Spokesperson, and are meeting with Carl Sargeant AM, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to discuss post offices and post banking. We also met with Dr Brian Gibbons AM, to discuss this and our wider financial inclusion work, in particular credit unions.
- 1.1.3 Consumer Focus Wales hosted the regular Consumer Focus Post Office Policy meeting. The group includes the GB, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland post teams. Welsh Assembly Government officials addressed the group on the Post Office Diversification Fund.

1.2 Energy

Party Conferences

- 1.2.1 We held a series of fringe events at all the party conferences pushing forward our work on fuel poverty. The conferences have also been an opportunity for us to talk to elected representatives and candidates about the issue, about our campaign and to get them all signed up to our regular newsletters and briefings.
- 1.2.2 We are working on a 5 year energy strategy for CF Wales which has been considered the CF Wales Board energy sub group.
- 1.2.3 Stakeholder meetings have included the Energy Savings Trust stakeholder form. Wendy Marino Director of EAGA Cymru, Welsh Assembly government to discuss HEES and OFGEM.

1.3 Welsh Language Measure

- 1.3.1 The Welsh Language Measure has now been published. We have received the results of our research which we are currently analysing and will feed into the process. We are discussing the research with Gwion Lewis a Barrister who has a long standing interest in language law and in 2008 published his first book *Hawl ir Gymraeg (The Right to Welsh)* which discusses the provision made for lesser used languages in UK, US and EU Law.
- 1.3.2 Gwion is advising us on the impact of legislation on languages in other European countries.

1.4 Consumer Food Safety Monitoring Group

- 1.4.1 The E.coli report has been through an extensive peer review process. We have continued to meet regularly with families affected by the 2005 outbreak and has also met people affected by the 2009 Wrexham outbreak. These conversations have helped to shape the content of our report and have signposted a number of possibilities for future work.

- 1.4.2 During the peer review process a number of individuals have expressed gratitude for informing them what has been done to implement Professor Pennington's recommendations – before we began this project they knew very little about the extent of implementation work although this was information they had requested. Professor Pennington has drafted the foreword and will be attending the launch. Ms Mill, who lost her 5 year old son in the our beak, has drafted a note welcoming the report.
- 1.4.3 LBRO have welcomed our report's recommendation on raising awareness among LAs of the principles of good regulation and that they should be consistent with Prof Pennington's recommendations on keeping the choice of 'light touch' regulation under review. Graham Russell CEO of LBRO has asked to meet to discuss how we can work together to constructively collaborate to challenge and change cultures and ways of working within regulatory services in Wales. The Presiding Officer Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas will formally accept our report at the launch on 23 March on behalf of the National Assembly. We have met with the Counsel General for Wales to inform him of the changes we will be calling for in legislation.
- 1.4.4 At the 'Scores on the Doors' Wales Stakeholder Group meeting FSA Wales informed us that our briefing paper has had a strong influence on the toolkit of communications techniques being recommended to local authorities as part of the Wales SotD communications strategy. It agreed Wales needed a more inclusive approach than a website to incorporate tools such as newspaper adverts with the best and worst performing local food outlets

1.5 Financial Services

1.5.1. Financial Exclusion amongst Care Leavers

- 1.5.1.1. Meetings have been held with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Voices from Care, Children in Wales, the National Youth Advocacy Service Cymru Shelter Cymru. Our aim is to run a participatory style project, involving young care leavers throughout. We also intend to set up a 'virtual' advisory group of representatives from key organisations to help guide us through the project.

1.5.2. Moneymadeclear

- 1.5.2.1 The procurement process for the Financial Services Authority (FSA) Moneymadeclear service has started. We attended the Wales networking event on 17 February. Reassurance was given that the timeline for the national rollout will continue whatever happens with the establishment of the Consumer Financial Education Body (part of the Financial Services Bill). The Financial Services Authority is looking for one prime contractor to deliver the service for each country of the UK. It will then be the responsibility of the prime contractor to ensure effective delivery in their respective territory via sub-contractors and other 'intermediaries'.
- 1.5.2.2 This situation will need careful monitoring to ensure access to the service for consumers across Wales is as inclusive and universal as possible. The contracts will specify that between 80-85% of the sessions must be with people who are most vulnerable to the consequences of poor financial decision-making.

1.6 ICT

- 1.6.1 We have been using the recommendations of the 'Logged in or Locked out' report as the basis for meetings with the Head of Ofcom Consumer Policy, the Director of Ofcom Wales; and the Chair of the Ofcom Consumer Panel. Regular follow up meetings have been arranged and further discussions which may be helpful in relation to the implementation of the recommendations.

1.7 Complaints of General Interest Unit

- 1.7.1 COGI has continued to gather information and evidence with regard to the pushchair and light weight stroller investigation. This investigation is an industry wide investigation and as such 16

manufacturers, distributors and retailers have been issued with Section 24 Notices requiring the businesses to provide COGI with information and records. The information required is centred around injuries that may have been reported to the business and also asks detailed questions as to the businesses current position with regard to issuing hinge covers.

1.7.1.1 COGI has also conducted interviews with Britax Childcare Ltd and Britax is now providing hinge covers to all affected pushchairs at the point of sale. This is a fundamental objective for the investigation and COGI will work with Britax further, in dealing with affected pushchairs in the second hand market.

1.7.1.2 COGI continues to receive steady responses to its press release and survey request which is also on Facebook. To date 93 individuals have completed the online survey and victims of injuries are currently being examined to establish case studies for the final report.

1.7.2 Shoppers Discount

1.7.2.1 After National media coverage, including the Guardian and the Daily Mail, of the imminent investigation by COGI of Shoppers Discount we have been contacted by Shoppers Discount wishing to work with COGI and seeking a resolution. This is currently under review and we are looking to achieve a speedy outcome by encouraging Shoppers Discount directly to incorporate our recommendations.

1.7.3 Referral Letters

1.7.3.1 COGI has received an extremely positive response to their referral letter which was distributed to stakeholders in England and Wales. The closing date for responses has now closed. Responses are being considered and COGI'S remit will be re-examined to incorporate any changes or amendments which may be required. It is intended to invite key stakeholders to seminars to set out the referral criteria formally and launch their work. COGI is working with CF Labs to set up a web based complaint referral system to be accessed securely by the designated stakeholders.

1.7.4 Rebranding & Renaming

1.7.4.1 It has been highlighted to COGI that the name *The Complaints of General Interest* can lead to confusion and misconceptions about the nature of the team's work. Predominately the team is incorrectly perceived as a complaints handling team, similar to the EHU, rather than an over-arching systemic focused team which seeks to operate strategically on consumer issues. It is also cumbersome for media reporting.

1.7.4.2 It is therefore proposed that the team changes its name to CF Investigations which is the same brand as Consumer Focus and ties in with CF Labs.

2 CHALLENGES RUNNING UP TO NEXT BOARD MEETING

2.7 Launch at the Senedd of the Ecoli monitoring report on 23 March 2010.

2.8 Communication of our key messages around our research on social exclusion and the recession.

2.9 Communication of our key messages around the Welsh Language Measure.

2.10 Internal launch of the draft sustainable development action plan for consultation. Part of the work on sustainability and consumer policy principles will be fed into the All Boards meeting in June.