

CONSUMER FOCUS WALES

Senior Director: Maria Battle

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

1.1 Post report

- 1.1.1 We launched our first piece of postal work this month at a reception in Westminster. The event was hosted by Mark Williams MP and had good cross party attendance from MPs including the Secretary of State for Wales, Peter Hain MP.
- 1.1.2 The report, which focussed on the impacts of closure on communities that had lost their post office, gained blanket coverage across TV, radio and print media in Wales. We have also been able to use it as a tool to raise the issue of Postbank with elected members and are in discussion with one of the parties regarding a debate on the issue of Postbank in the National Assembly. A hard copy of the report is available on request or can be downloaded from:
<http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/assets/4/files/2010/02/CFW-Post-Office-Closures.PDF>

1.2 Party Conferences

- 1.2.1 Consumer Focus Wales is attending all of the political party conferences this spring. This month it was the turn of the Lib Dems to hold their conference in Swansea. Assembly Members, MPs and prospective parliamentary candidates all visited the CFW stand to sign our Fuel Poverty Charter and to subscribe to our e-newsletter and quarterly energy report. Our fringe event on fuel poverty was also well attended.

1.3 National Assembly for Wales

- 1.3.1 Charles Gallagher, Director of Scotland, Wales and the Regions at Ofgem attended the cross-party group on fuel poverty at our invitation to discuss what both the regulator and the Welsh Assembly Government could be doing to alleviate the problem in Wales.
- 1.3.2 Sarah Richards, Senior Policy Advocate, also attended the Senedd during February to give evidence to the cross-party committee on broadband as a result of our recently published report 'Logged in, Locked out'. The committee will now use this evidence in their plans to raise the issue of broadband roll-out with the Minister responsible for planning in the Welsh Assembly Government.

Complaints of General Interest Unit

1.4 Pushchairs

- 1.4.1 Before Christmas there was voluntary recall of Maclaren pushchairs in the US following allegations of children being injured. In the UK Maclaren offered free hinge covers via their website to consumers. Following receipt of detailed information about alleged serious injuries to 41 toddlers in the UK from the side hinge mechanisms of Maclaren pushchairs we commenced an investigation. The injuries sustained are amputations of half of the last joint of their fingers and in one little boy's case, the whole finger and some were allegedly sustained following the voluntary recall. Mystery Shopping was immediately conducted at Toys R Us, John Lewis and Mothercare stores in Birmingham

and Cardiff and at 21 outlets via the website/ and telephone. This showed there was very little knowledge by staff about the alleged injuries or the need for hinge covers.

- 1.4.2 84 pushchair users were also interviewed, 90.5% were aware of the recall however significantly only 14.2% were aware of the hinge covers. 67.3% of the consumers surveyed want hinge covers issued from the manufacturer.
- 1.4.3 The main aim of the investigation is to ensure that hinge covers are provided at the point of sale and consumers can access hinge covers easily where they already own a pushchair.
- 1.4.4 All retailers have been contacted and have responded acknowledging failures. A meeting was held with Maclaren on 5 February. All pushchairs that have left the Maclaren factory since the 1 January have hinge covers included in the main box of the pushchair. Maclaren have agreed to work with EBay, on our recommendation, to advertise the hinge covers on all second hand sales.
- 1.4.5 The injuries are allegedly caused by a fault in the side hinge mechanism used on a number of stroller type pushchairs. Therefore the original scope of the investigation has been widened to include other makes.
- 1.4.6 COGI is in talks with BIS, Trading Standards and the Baby Product Association, to ensure that our investigations are co-ordinated. Trading standards across the UK have been asked to contact COGI with details of any alleged injuries sustained in respect of a variety of manufacturers pushchairs.
- 1.4.7 COGI has issued a press release calling for parents to report injuries to us. COGI has also produced an on-line survey which will be publicised through a number of different channels.

1.5 **Next investigation**

- 1.5.1 COGI is seeking SMT approval of their next investigation into Shoppers Discount. This story has already been picked up by the Guardian Money section who were advised to contact Gemma Bowen as a result of her contact with Martin Lewis of MoneySavingExpert.

1.6 **Referral Criteria**

- 1.6.1 COGI has sent letters to stakeholders in England and Wales informing them of the existence of COGI, asking them to be designated bodies for referrals of complaints of general interest and setting out the proposed referral criteria for consultation.
- 1.6.2 Once responses are received, COGI will invite key stakeholders to seminars to set out the referral criteria formally and launch their work. It is anticipated that these seminars will be rolled out in Wales, England and Scotland. COGI is working with CF Labs to set up a web based complaint referral system to be accessed securely by the designated stakeholders and an internal referral structure is being set up.

1.7 **CF LABS**

- 1.7.1 StayPrivate.org, CF Labs' current website project, is a site intended to make the process of registering to suppress unsolicited mail more attractive to consumers. It will be offered as an alternative to the Direct Marketing Association's current online service, with the main aim of providing a simple one-off method of registration to the various opt-out streams (mail, telephone, fax etc). The DMA's system insists on users having to register

for each scheme separately; a repetitive and cumbersome process which could be a disincentive to consumers. stayPrivate.org has been to a select audience for feedback.

2 CHALLENGES RUNNING UP TO NEXT BOARD MEETING

- 2.1 Communication of Welsh Language research to time with Committee stage of the Welsh Language Measure.
- 2.2 Launch at the Senedd of the Ecoli monitoring report on 23 March 2010.
- 2.3 Communication of our key messages around our research on social exclusion and the recession.
- 2.4 We will be meeting with Consumer Focus Wales Board to design and finalise a work plan that focuses on delivering our agreed objectives in Wales.
- 2.5 We will also be finalising our year-end spending plans and receiving the results of a fairly sizeable number of research contracts. This will necessitate further planning in terms of timelines and resources.