

Consumer Focus – what are we planning for?

WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE

We help all consumers get a fair deal, especially the vulnerable or disadvantaged.

WHY DO CONSUMERS NEED CONSUMER FOCUS?

Too often private markets and public services fail consumers. They fail because consumers themselves cannot influence levels of value and service, because decisions happen without a proper account of consumer needs or, for too many people, because markets and services neglect or punish disadvantaged and vulnerable consumers with poorer choices, value and service.

- *Consumers need a body like Consumer Focus to make them more powerful in relation to private companies and public institutions.*
- *Consumers need a body like Consumer Focus to represent them when the big decisions are being made.*
- *Most of all consumers who are disadvantaged or vulnerable need a body like Consumer Focus to stand up for them when no-one else will.*

The purpose of Consumer Focus is to make a material and positive difference to the lives of consumers by empowering, advocating and representing their interests.

WHAT DO WE DO?

- **We empower** consumers by encouraging, supporting and enabling them to take action for themselves.
- **We represent** consumers by working with government, businesses and public services providers, across the whole of the economy, to champion creative and sustainable solutions that make a difference to consumers' lives.
- **We safeguard** the interests of vulnerable consumers and those at a disadvantage. We recognise that all consumers can become disadvantaged or vulnerable and that the needs of current consumers must be met without compromising the needs of future generations.

HOW DO WE WORK?

We do what's most likely to achieve our priorities.

We use evidence of consumer harm, identify positive solutions for change, work with those best placed to make a difference for consumers and we are prepared to challenge vested interests and campaign for change where necessary.

We focus throughout our planning on what we can do to make a difference for consumers. There will be many institutions and organisations that want us to contribute to a great many debates. There are many more consumers want us to achieve positive change. Our first duty is to pay attention to what consumers need us to do.

- **Identify problems:** We use the best available research and intelligence to highlight all aspects of consumer experience and look across sectors and departmental boundaries for best practices and lessons learned.
- **Devise solutions:** We vary our advocacy approach from ‘think tank’ to ‘watchdog’ to ‘campaigner’ and can adopt range of styles according to need – from stern critic to critical friend. Depending on the issue, we may use any one or all of these approaches and at different times.
- **Intervene across sectors:** We intervene on behalf of consumers across a range of sectors and markets. We help the most beleaguered energy and postal consumers resolve complaints, we deliver fast-paced market investigations on the issues that are important to consumers, and we develop targeted online empowerment resources.

OUR PLANNING PRIORITIES

1. **Doing fewer things better**

- Concentrating on the areas where evidence reflects that consumers are suffering significant detriment and where we can achieve the most impact with the resources available
- Using resources better by increasing the efficiency of our operations and demonstrating value for money in everything we do

2. **Maximising consumer empowerment**

- Increase our work encouraging, supporting and enabling consumers to take action for themselves
- Investigate opportunities to build effective empowerment initiatives with others
- Work with advice providers and make better use of online opportunities

3. **Being responsive to change**

- Taking advantage of changing opportunities as they arise
- Developing Consumer Focus resources in a way that maximises flexibility and the ability to respond to future challenges
- Building a broad based consumer organisation as set out in our response to the BIS Consumer Landscape review

4. **Promoting sustainable solutions**

- Paying particular attention to those consumers who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable
- Balancing the interests, rights and responsibilities of both current and future consumers
- Promoting equality and diversity in our work

WHAT ARE OUR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES?

IMPACT

- 1. Help consumers get better value from goods and services*
- 2. Identify and close the gap between disadvantaged, or vulnerable, and the average consumer, reducing the detriment they suffer*
- 3. Promote an environment in which consumers can take action for themselves*
- 4. Improve the mechanisms of redress, helping consumers access it when something goes wrong*
- 5. Ensure that the interests of current and future consumers are at the core of consumer policy development by government and regulators*
- 6. To deliver results that help vulnerable people resolve complaints about energy and postal services*

PARTNERSHIPS

- 7. Maintain a strong external profile in which stakeholders understand our role and see us as credible and influential*
- 8. Work closely with stakeholders across sectors and build productive partnerships that deliver more for consumers*
- 9. Maximise the benefits of being a cross-nation organisation through effective communication and identifying opportunities for collaboration*

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

- 10. Maintain a strong external profile in which stakeholders understand our role and see us as credible and influential*
- 11. Work closely with stakeholders across sectors and build productive partnerships that deliver more for consumers*
- 12. Maximise the benefits of being a cross-nation organisation through effective communication and identifying opportunities for collaboration*

VALUE

- 13. Deliver our work on time, on budget and to a high quality standard*
- 14. Provide effective and efficient corporate services*
- 15. Promote efficiency savings and operate in a sustainable way*