

CONSUMER FOCUS STATUS UPDATE - PROGRAMMES AFTER FIRST SIX MONTHS

This report sets out progress against the activities set out in the Forward Work Programme for Phase 1 (i.e. October-March). It uses the following key for the assessment of status:

GREEN (on track)

AMBER (behind schedule)

RED (significantly behind schedule)

BLUE (activity completed)

The numbers in brackets for some Forward Work Programme activities are the operational references approved by Consumer Focus Scotland Board in November 2008.

The report then has two other sections: details of activities which were scheduled in the Forward Work Programme for Phases 2 and/or 3, where the work has in fact already begun; and details of substantial new activities which have started but were not listed in the Forward Work Programme.

WORKPLAN PHASE 1 ACTIVITIES

DISADVANTAGE

FWP No	Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
1.1	Campaign in partnership with others around an agreed Fuel Poverty Charter for the implementation of an urgent package of	1-3	Consumer Focus pulled together a coalition of national organisations (Disability Alliance, Age Concern England, Child Poverty Action Group, Help the Aged, Friends of the Earth, National Right to Fuel Campaign, Association for the Conservation of Energy, Centre for Sustainable Energy, Unison and the Sustainable Energy Partnership) and with them wrote a ten point fuel poverty charter. David Heath MP (Lib Dem) came second in the private members' ballot and he adopted our Private Members Bill to end fuel poverty. The public were asked to contact their MP via extensive news coverage in local media, the End Fuel Poverty Coalition webpage and a Facebook group. Over 170		GB

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[1-3]	measures that will address the needs of consumers in the face of rising energy prices. We will collaborate with the key groups in Scotland, Wales and England that are concerned with fuel poverty, low-income, disability and the environment.		<p>MPs signed an early day motion in support of the Bill. However the Bill was talked out by the Government Minister, Joan Ruddock MP. It will be back in the House of Commons in June.</p> <p><u>Scotland</u></p> <p>Energy efficiency is a devolved issue and policy development rests with Consumer Focus Scotland, though we have of-course been heavily involved in public affairs work supporting the Consumer Focus message on unjustifiably high domestic fuel prices.</p> <p>We are key members of the Scottish Fuel Poverty Forum, which was re-established by the Scottish Government at our suggestion. The Forum published its urgent review of existing energy efficiency policy in November 2008. The Scottish Government quickly agreed all the recommendations within its devolved remit and implemented them from 1 April 2009.</p> <p><u>Wales</u></p> <p>CFW responded to the Ofgem probe in December. Welsh Assembly Government has set its own fuel poverty targets and for tackling them. CFW will respond and, along with NEA Cymru, has created a cross-party group of Assembly Members to focus on the issue of fuel poverty in Wales. This will give CFW a direct connection to the elected members.</p>		
1.9	Children as consumers	1-3	Ed Mayo's book published in January, with substantial media interest and follow-up discussion. Our advocacy focus is on improving marketing codes.		England
1.10	Build on former Welsh Consumer Council (WCC) work by continuing to monitor trends in indebtedness and financial exclusion in	1-3	<p>Focus groups commissioned to look at issue and experiences of financial exclusion. Groups will focus on families living in poverty in some of Wales' most deprived areas.</p> <p>The Welsh Assembly Government in their Financial Inclusion Strategy name the project as key in helping them achieve their goal of improving financial inclusion</p>		Wales

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	Wales				
1.12	Respond to Welsh Assembly Government forthcoming financial inclusion strategy consultation	1	WAG issued consultation later than originally expected. CFW named in strategy as a key partner in helping WAG to deliver the strategy. Response being drafted and on course to submit by deadline of 1 st May.		Wales
1.14 [1P+2B]	Access to Civil Justice Public legal education seminar	1	Attended meetings of the Civil Courts Review, initiated following our publication of a policy report led by Lord Coulsfield. The review is now likely to report in May/June. We held a seminar in March in conjunction with the Scottish Government Courts and Constitution Analytical Team. A seminar report has been drafted and will be circulated to interested parties.		Scotland
1.15 [2A]	Provide policy support for the Administrative Justice Steering Group	1	The Administrative Justice Steering Group tribunals report published by SCC was launched at the Scottish Committee of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council's annual conference in October. Sarah O'Neill led a workshop at the stakeholder event run by the AJTC Scottish committee in January on the options set out in the tribunals report, to inform the committee's response to the Scottish Government. We will publish our report in April/May, with a foreword by Lord Phillips.		Scotland
1.17 [3E]	Making Markets Work (Phase 3): Consumer Experiences (in partnership with the Scottish Council	1-3	A YouGov poll of Scottish consumers' behaviour and attitude to payment methods has been carried out, followed by qualitative research. However in March 2009 the Trustees of the Scottish Council Foundation wrote to Consumer Focus Scotland informing us that the SCF had ceased trading. We have requested the draft report of the survey be provided to us.		Scotland

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ENERGY MARKET

FWP No	Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
2.1	Ensure that the consumer voice is heard in the ongoing market reviews, and the recommendations of the 2008 BERR Select Committee and the Ofgem probe are acted upon and deliver improvements for consumers	1	<p>Commissioned an omnibus survey to gather some initial views from consumers on the Ofgem initial proposals. Submitted response to the Ofgem energy supply probe initial findings report, followed by ongoing discussions with the Ofgem probe team to influence the direction and outcomes. Attended and fed into series of bilateral meetings and industry working groups on energy probe related issues including information remedies, sales and marketing, confidence code, unfair pricing differentials, small business issues, token prepayment meters, direct debit, debt and disconnection, complaint handling standards, etc.</p> <p>Submitted responses to the Ofgem consultations on unfair price differentials, the 65 day rule, the renewal of marketing licence condition and the Ofgem strategic plan 2009 – 2014. Submitted consultation response to OFT in February on potential accreditation for ERA EnergySure Code of Practice</p> <p>Participated in the Ofgem information remedies and sales and marketing remedies roundtable. Attended industry working group on Ofgem’s direct debit investigation in January and have provided guidance to regulator on issues they should be considering as part of investigation as well as proposed remedies. Attended European energy billing working group as expert and submitted response to European energy billing group.</p> <p>Met with Ofgem and the NSMC to discuss behavioural change in the energy market.</p> <p>Developed historical data on the link between wholesale and retail prices, used for media work.</p> <p>Held initial meetings with Customer Service Directors at a wide range of companies, and Ed Mayo met CEOs of British Gas, Scottish and Southern Energy, Npower and EDF Energy.</p>		GB

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			<p>Ofgem levied £1.8 million fine on Npower in February for its sales and marketing practices; then the following month ordered Npower to return £1.2 million to customers over-charged as a result of changes to its gas tariffs. Both actions followed energywatch referrals. Further analysis currently being carried out into Ofgem's enforcement investigation in Npower's gas sculpting charges.</p> <p>Identified and investigated concerns with British Gas' debt recovery policy, with the matter informally referred to Ofgem (follow up work is underway).</p> <p>Produced briefing for DECC Select Committee members (with Regulated Industries) for session questioning Ed Miliband. We spoke to 12 MP's researchers and to the Chair Elliot Morley MP.</p> <p>Submitted response to the Commission consultation on the merger of EDF and British Energy. Lobbied for important measures to be in place on the deal including plant divestment and measures to support liquidity in the wholesale electricity market.</p>		
2.6	Explore campaign action on the indexation of gas in relation to oil, including through the International Programme, in engaging the European Commission and MEPs	1-3	Exploring with DECC and the Commission the scope for breaking the link between oil and gas prices. We met with DG COMP to discuss a series of proposals that energywatch had put forward to address concerns about the impact of high oil prices on consumers. A meeting with DECC has been scheduled for April 09. Met with business consumers and their representatives to discuss their views on oil indexation.		GB
2.7	Ensure the consumer voice is represented in Ofgem's	1-3	Response submitted to Ofgem. Ongoing work around Consumer Focus representation of industry code panels. A staff member has joined the Balancing and Settlement Code Panel as a Consumer Focus appointee.		GB

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	electricity distribution price review, along with the Industry Codes and Governance Review		Submitted response to Ofgem policy paper on the DPCR5 Prepared our response to Ofgem initial consultation document on RPI-X@20, for submission in April.		
2.8	Promote sustainable development by advising stakeholders on consumers' attitudes to renewable energy and energy efficiency, and how to influence them	1-3	Attended roundtable launch of EST Cymru strategic plan to discuss consumer attitudes to energy efficiency.		Wales
2.9	Advise the needs of consumers in relation to the Welsh Assembly Government on energy pricing and switching rates in Wales (once the results of the current Ofgem probe are known)	1-3	Lindsey Kearton (SPA CFW) and William Baker (PPA CF Disadvantage) gave evidence to National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee on fuel poverty, covering specific topics of pricing in Wales and switching rates. The Committee then used that evidence to question the main energy suppliers about their practices in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government is currently reviewing its fuel poverty strategy.		Wales

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POST

FWP No	Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
3.1	Promote quality customer service through the Hooper Review and related developments	1-3	<p>Raised consumer concerns, especially the retention of the Universal Service Obligation, before the review was published, in meetings with a member of the Hooper Review team</p> <p>Worked to ensure that the Postal Services Bill covers customer concerns regarding collection, deliveries, mail integrity, pricing etc. Drafting amendments to the Bill, attended the Bill Steering Committee and other meetings held by the Postal Services Bill, and hosted a stakeholder forum on 11 March to discuss consumer representation in the bill</p> <p>Produced a PID and ITT for a major research project into effects of part privatisation of Royal Mail Letters on Consumers/Competition – proposals currently being considered</p> <p>Provided a briefing paper to the BERR Select Committee and gather data relating to Royal Mail's historic capital investment.</p> <p><u>Northern Ireland</u></p> <p>A Consumer Focus Post position paper was produced on the Postal Services Bill and issued to all Northern Ireland MPs, peers, MLAs and major stakeholders, along with an invitation to attend one of two briefing and information forums in early April.</p>		UK
3.2	Track the universal service obligation of postal services	1-3	Received and analysed Royal Mail's delivery exceptions for 2008 (the numbers remain consistent with previous years).		UK
3.3	Encourage the regulator to incorporate consumers'	1-3	Regular meetings set up with Royal Mail's compliance manager and regulation team. Regular meetings with Postcomm Consumer Protection team are also held.		UK

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	needs into its policy and regulation development		<p>Responded to consultation on Royal Mail's request for a one month waiver of the 50p charge for the redelivery local collect service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer Focus supported this request and was pleased that it was introduced over the Christmas period. • Requested Royal Mail to provide feedback on how successful this was and more generally the delivery convenience services that Royal Mail provided at Christmas, such as evening delivery, later opening times of Caller Offices. <p>Royal Mail's application to introduce a sustainable mail product involves regulatory issues and sustainable issues. We discussed these issues with other postal operators, the Direct Mailers Association and DEFRA. We have also identified key contacts within Royal Mail who are working on sustainable mail products.</p> <p>Met Royal Mail and Postcomm to discuss procedure for future postal address disputes and what involvement, if any, Consumer Focus should have when these occasions arise.</p> <p>Awaiting and preparing for a draft consultation paper from Postcomm, we will respond to the consultation paper once it is issued.</p> <p>Picked up a few PAF change cases which have come to light in between the old Code of Practice and the new proposed Code of Practice as a temporary response.</p> <p>Wrote to Royal Mail following removal of a number of homes in the IV 54 8LR postcode from the postal address file, saying that the addresses should be reinstated and if necessary be treated as a delivery exception but the home owners were entitled to a delivery of mail every working day. We are aware that all the addresses in the IV54 8LR postcode have been reinstated.</p>		
3.4	Support advice agencies with information and resources	1-3	<p>Advice is contained within the Knowledge Base, available on the Consumer Focus website. More detailed information, targeted specifically at advice agencies, is provided on the Partners log-in section of the website. Work continues to develop stakeholder relations with the establishment of 'consumer community', a virtual forum where we promote the use of the 'Ask the Adviser' service in the EHU and provide updates on the energy and postal markets (as well as other relevant Consumer Focus campaign information). We have also established data sharing</p>		UK

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			agreements with advice agencies and mechanisms for them to alert us to problems or for us to call for evidence. This means we not only provide policy support, we receive and act on the trends identified by agencies.		
3.6	Provide evidence to Royal Mail and An Post of service failures in postal service between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland	1-2	Project Initiation document drafted, currently drafting Invitation to Tender. Meetings organised with interested stakeholders including Royal Mail, ComReg and An Post		NI
3.8	Ongoing evaluation of the impact of cross-channel deliveries between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the impact of quality of service for the Northern Ireland postal consumer	1-2	Project Initiation document drafted, currently drafting Invitation to Tender.		NI
3.9	Monitor and investigate issues in respect of the quality of service	1-3	Received Royal Mail's quality of service reports for quarters 2 and 3 as required by its Licence. Where standards were not achieved we are awaiting Royal Mail justification and will continue to monitor the situation. Raised the issue of redirections following stakeholder request. This was initially		England

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SUSTAINABILITY

FWP No	Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
4.1	Working with the Energy Market advocacy programme, promote ideas for a more transparent and effective market for sustainable energy. Make an authoritative consumer contribution to the Government's proposals relating to the new renewable strategy, and inform debates relating to the Energy Bill, including the scope for feed-in tariffs for electricity, gas and heat and the roll out of	1-3	<p>Working with colleagues in other teams, we secured amendments to the Energy Bill on smart meters, although our amendments on social tariffs were not successful. We have informed the Renewable Energy Association's preliminary proposal to DECC for the introduction of renewable energy tariffs, with particular concerns raised about the impact on consumers' energy bills.</p> <p>Attended Conservative workshop on their Low Carbon policy paper. Secured a commitment from Shadow Secretary of State for DECC, Greg Clark, to help with campaigning regarding transparency of existing energy efficiency programmes/spending. Renewed contact with Shadow Minister Greg Barker and Conservative energy policy staff.</p> <p>Attended CERT+ consultation workshop. DECC officials agreed to share data on changing consumer behaviour, smart meters and low income groups, consumer energy consumption and SAP ratings. Ofgem agreed to meet to discuss CERT costs to consumers.</p>		GB

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	energy efficiency and micro-generation to ensure that all consumers, regardless of income, tenure or social circumstance can benefit from micro-generation technologies		stakeholders and literature review ongoing.		
4.11	Develop scoping work on recycling in Scotland	1-3	Scoping work ongoing following Consumer Focus Scotland Board approval of the way forward.		Scotland
4.12	Contribute to the development of the Welsh Assembly Government's Quality of Food Action Plan to help implement the recommendations of the	1-2	Progress on plan has slowed since announcements of NHS restructure in Wales (same sponsor dept). Stakeholder group writing to Minister requesting update in first instance. The identified priority issues for the Welsh Assembly Government in this area are health, safety, environment, fair trade, economic viability, accessibility/affordability and culture. CFW and previously WCC have been working to make sure that consumer views are the driving force behind decisions in these areas.		Wales

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	recent WCC report on malnutrition amongst older people				
4.13	Publish a piece of WCC work in progress that looks at consumer attitudes to recycling, whether actions match attitudes and what kind of techniques are most successful in encouraging positive behaviour change	1-2	In discussions with stakeholder groups to measure this piece of work on our work planning criteria.		Wales
4.14	Input to the Welsh	1-3	Responded to Welsh Assembly Government Sustainable Energy Routemap		Wales

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	Assembly Government on sustainable energy consumption as part of its statutory duty regarding sustainability		<p>consultation.</p> <p>Preparing response to Welsh Assembly Government National Energy Efficiency Savings Plan consultation.</p>		
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OPEN MARKETS

FWP No	FWD Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
5.1	Inform BERR's Review of Consumer Law so that it delivers appropriate protection for consumers. Work with the International advocacy programme to inform the EU review of consumer law	1-3	<p>Work on the Consumer Rights Directive (see 11.1) and made a submission to a Law Commission project on consumer remedies.</p> <p>We are preparing the groundwork for a campaign to give consumers private rights of redress under the Consumer Protection Regulations (general duty to trade fairly), which will include quantitative research on incidence of unfair commercial practices.</p>		GB NI (post)
5.2	Develop and promote best practice for regulators' advancement	1	<p>Rating Regulators, a year-long study which assessed six regulators from the consumer perspective, was published in February. A series of follow-up meetings have taken place and we plan to hold a good practice workshop in the summer.</p> <p>On the better regulation agenda more widely, we spoke at a major OFT conference</p>		GB NI (post)

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	consumers, particularly on consumers who are blind or partially sighted				
5.7	Keep capacity available to monitor issues of consumer detriment where new evidence emerges in our research, or in the media of problems that are current in relevant markets. This will include scope to conduct research on consumer experience of markets: that may deliver poor value – including sectors with high levels of complaints, such as garages,	1-3	<p>We have continued to put pressure on motor sector to sign up to the car servicing and repair code of practice, by writing to the independent garage chains and giving oral evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Motor Group.</p> <p>There is a lot of activity in the property sector and we have responded to initiatives by the Office of Fair Trading and the Property Standards Board. We have also intervened at ministerial level to seek Government support for the TrustMark scheme.</p> <p>Philip Cullum sat on a Department of Transport expert panel on airport regulation, which has resulted in government proposals to give the regulator a single statutory duty focused on airport users and to put in place stronger and more independent passenger representation, our two main objectives.</p> <p>To get a fresh perspective on failing markets and public services and identify ideas for innovation, qualitative research is currently in the field in Cardiff, Glasgow, London and Manchester, with ex-pats who have been based in the UK for 6 months – 3 years. This should help us identify topics for future work on areas of detriment in Open Markets and Public Services, as well as being a media-friendly output and providing the basis for building relationships with chief execs in key businesses and public services.</p> <p><u>Scotland</u></p> <p>Responded to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition Commission <i>BAA Airports Market Investigation – Provisional decision on remedies</i> • BERR <i>Digital Britain</i> 		GB

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	furniture and builders; where consumers may be particularly dependent, such as with vets, or users of residential homes; or day care where consumer representation is weak, such as airport regulation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scottish Government <i>Choosing Scotland's Future: A National Conversation</i> • Scottish Government <i>Registration of Private Landlords: Consultation on amendment of secondary legislation</i> • Scottish Government <i>Coverage of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 – Discussion paper</i> • Scottish Parliament Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change <i>Call for Views on the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill</i> • Scottish Government <i>EU proposals for a directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border care</i> • General Medical Council <i>Confidentiality</i> • Audit Scotland <i>Statutory Performance Indicators – 2008 Direction</i> 		
5.10 [2E]	Campaign for effective governance of any new system of regulation for the Scottish legal profession	1-3	Following a number of meetings of the Legal Profession Bill reference group, on which Sarah O'Neill represents Consumer Focus Scotland, a consultation paper on a draft bill was issued by the Scottish Government on 6 January. We submitted a response to <i>Wider Choice and Better Protection: a consultation paper on the regulation of legal services in Scotland</i> .		Scotland
5.18 [2D]	Champion the interests of consumers in relation to property management services,	1-3	<p>We have been liaising with the OFT as part of their market study (initiated by Consumer Focus Scotland) into property management in Scotland, due for publication in Feb 2009. We have also had discussions with the Property Managers Association of Scotland and the Scottish Government about accreditation and regulation of property managers. Jennifer Wallace spoke at a Scottish Federation of Housing Association conference on property management.</p> <p>The OFT reported on the findings of its market study in February 2009. The report supported the establishment a voluntary accreditation scheme and an advisory</p>		Scotland

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	working with the Office of Fair Trading to ensure their work is informed by the consumer perspective		group has been convened by the Scottish Government to take this forward. CFS is represented on the group. The report also recommended that CFS support owners who have responsibilities for land management to take a case to the Lands Tribunal and clarify the legal situation regarding appointing and dismissing land management companies. A paper on taking this forward will be submitted to the Consumer Focus Scotland Board for consideration in May 2009.		
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COMMUNITY SERVICES

FWP No	FWD Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
6.1	Scrutinise the final closure proposals in the current post office closure programme under the time limited branding of Postwatch	1	Inherited scrutiny role ongoing, including 'on the ground' activity. Four cases to rollover into next financial year - this work will be completed early in phase 2 . Ongoing monitoring of promised improvements to PO branches anticipated to receive additional custom as a result of nearby closures.		UK
6.2	Working with the Disadvantage advocacy programme, co-ordinate provision of information to, and responses from, stakeholders to	1	<p>Active briefing of MPs prior to announcement, resulting in Parliamentary profile for CF.</p> <p>In line with the Consumer Focus agreed position on the possible loss of the POCA from the post office network, Consumer Focus Post revised and adapted the Consumer Focus position paper to take account of the unique circumstances of Consumer Focus Post and the Northern Ireland postal consumer. This document was circulated to all NI MP's, MLA's and interested stakeholders and a press release was issued.</p> <p>A substantial piece of research has been commissioned that will examine the</p>		UK


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	the Government's upcoming decision on the future of the Post Office Card Account. Develop understanding of the impact on the consumer experience (access to benefit payments, bill payments, postal services etc) and promote the need for alternatives as appropriate		experiences of POCA holders and others at the margins of financial inclusion, with a view to establishing whether a bespoke account product could be developed for this group and offered by the post office as a key part of its expansion into financial services.		
6.5	Monitor changes to the post office network, including evaluation of outreach services in urban and rural areas	1-3	Qualitative and quantitative research has been commissioned from the agency DVL Smith, with initial findings expected at the end of April. This will build on an interim assessment of outreach arrangements to be published in May, which is based on research undertaken by Postwatch's regions.		UK
6.8	Explore the scope for a Community Services	1-3	The CAG has been reconvened and rebranded as the Post Offices Advisory Group. It had its first meeting in March and will meet quarterly.		UK

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	Advisory Group, to take forward the successful work of CAG				
6.9	Determine and promote as necessary the need for a cross-Whitehall Community Service Action Group	1	Government itself has convened a cross-departmental committee to investigate services that can be offered through the PO network. CF will work with the POAG to influence this.		UK
6.11	Scrutinise Post Office Ltd's review on each closure and outreach service as per their agreed review time frame	1-3	A project to evaluate the impact of Outreach services in Northern Ireland has been prepared and is now at Invitation to Tender stage. The project is a companion to that for GB at 6.5. which is currently underway. The Northern Ireland component needed to be held back because Outreaches in the Province were a late element in the Network Change Programme, mostly set up at the end of 2008 – and it is still too early to carry out an evaluation.		NI
6.12 [1E]	Production of an Updated (3 rd) Edition of Moving Home in Scotland	1	Original author commissioned to produce first draft text by mid-January, final draft by mid-February. Final publication scheduled for publication by the Stationery Office in April 2009. There has been a slight delay in the schedule, and the book is now expected to be published in May.		Scotland
6.13 [1G]	Information Guide for Owners with Common Repair Responsibilitie	1	The original author and an additional author have submitted the text for the second edition. The Scottish Government guidance was available in March 2009. This will be published in June 2009.		Scotland

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	s				
6.14 [2F]	Promote the development of the single survey and home report, taking part in the Scottish Government's Home Report Implementation Group	1	<p>The home report was introduced on 1 December as planned, despite considerable opposition by sections of the legal profession. Research will be conducted by the Scottish Government into how the system is working in practice, and also into the view of those involved in the process, including buyers and sellers. A joint Consumer Focus Scotland and Which briefing paper on the changes was sent to MSPs on 1 December.</p> <p>A response to the launch of the OFT home buying and selling market study was submitted in January</p> <p>A full response to the OFT home buying and selling market study was prepared for submission in April</p>		Scotland
6.15 [1J]	Promote the voice of rural communities by working with the new Rural Development Council	1	Nothing to report, Scottish Government cancelled conference on matter.		Scotland
6.16	Monitor and inform the development of legislation on consultation and school closures by the Scottish Government	1	Scottish Government published the Schools (Consultation) Scotland Bill in March 2009. Consumer Focus Scotland prepared written evidence to be submitted to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee in April 2009.		Scotland

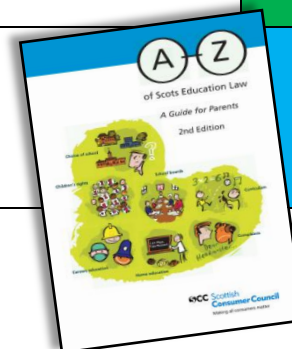
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PUBLIC SERVICES

FWP No	FWD Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
7.1	Promote high-quality consumer engagement in public services, for example by exploring the next steps for the current partnership in England with Involve and related actions in Scotland and Wales	1-3	We have commissioned a paper about the potential for using professional competencies on engagement to drive up the quality of consumer engagement, and are also exploring how to continue our partnership with Involve to promote high quality engagement.		GB
7.5	Advise the Welsh Assembly Government on its programme of citizen-centred public service reform	1-3	CFW Chair was a member of the selection panel for new Ministerial Advisory Board. She was asked to undertake the work to ensure that the candidates prioritised the consumer perspective CFW has now been commissioned by Welsh Assembly Government to undertake a scoping study, looking at whether advice services could provide a data source that could push improvement of public services.		Wales
7.7	Campaign for a reliable and affordable transport infrastructure through evidence provided to the	1-3	Meeting held with Welsh Assembly Government transport dept officials. CFW invited onto working group looking at how to take forward responses to the consultation on a Public Transport Users Group.		Wales

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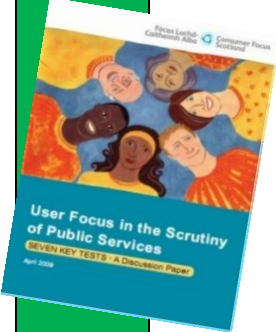
	Public Transport Users Committee				
7.8	Review patients' and communities' involvement in decision making in the light of the proposed restructuring of the NHS in Wales	1-3	Roundtable discussion held on future of Community Health Councils. Report being prepared.		Wales
7.10 [1C]	Identify the current levels of parental involvement and representation in education, and assess the impact of the legislation by comparing the results to previous SCC surveys	1-3	Following a competitive tender, TNS Global have been contracted to carry out a telephone survey of 1000 parents across Scotland to identify levels of parental involvement and representation in education. The findings are currently being analysed and will be presented to the Board in May 2009.		Scotland
7.11 [1F]	Publication of the <i>A-Z of Scots Education Law:</i>	1	Published December 2008.		Scotland



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	<i>A Guide for Parents</i>				
7.12 [1N]	A significant programme of work in the area of e-Health is likely to be taken forward in the year 2008-9 by the Scottish Government. Opportunities for Consumer Focus Scotland include the promotion of greater patient and public involvement at all levels; direct involvement in the development of information governance, with particular reference to patient confidentiality	1-2	Consumer Focus Scotland is being funded to commission focus group research in this area, which will be used as the basis for further quantitative research, and ultimately to develop a clear model for seeking consent to information sharing in the NHS. We commissioned the Research Shop to run groups in May and June with a final report expected by the end of June.		Scotland

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	and promotion of patient access to electronically held records				
7.13 [1M]	Work with key stakeholders to tackle the significant gap in public and patient involvement at national level	1-3	<p>Attended meeting of NHS Health Scotland's Equality and Health Reference Group which was discussing public involvement at national level. Spoke about Consumer Focus Scotland's views in this area.</p>		Scotland
7.14 [1D]	Develop and promote the user focus in the inspection, audit, regulation and complaints handling of public services in Scotland in the light of the programme of reform following the Independent Review of Inspection, Audit,	1-3	<p>Joint report with the Improvement Service on <i>Customer Satisfaction and Experience with Local Government</i> published November 2008. An implementation project is being led by the Improvement Service, we are represented on the advisory group.</p> <p>We provided evidence to the Scottish Parliament Review of Supported Bodies Committee covering the proposed abolition of Waterwatch Scotland and the role of the SPSO more generally.</p> <p>Martyn Evans represented Consumer Focus Scotland on the User Focus Action Group which reported in November 2008. A briefing paper on User Focus in Scrutiny has been drafted to expand on the issues raised in the User Focus Action Group report, to be published in April 2009.</p>		Scotland

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	Regulation and Complaints Handling of Public Services in Scotland (the Crerar Review)				
7.15 [10]	Continue the work of the SCC to promote the needs of all parents, including the need for stronger parental representation in relation to schools, particularly in consultations on school closures and the future of rural schools	1-3	Scottish Government published the Schools (Consultation) Scotland Bill in March 2009. Consumer Focus Scotland prepared written evidence to be submitted to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee in April 2009.		Scotland
7.16 [2C]	Campaign for better ways of informing consumers	1-3	Influenced FSA Board decision in December on 'Scores on the Doors.' Steering Group produced a Local Authority Guidance on the operation of Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS) and agreed updated promotional literature. Group has now been disbanded and an Implementation Group set up under		Scotland

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	<p>about the results of local authority hygiene inspections when they are looking to eat out, drawing on the success of the Scottish scheme launched by FSA in late 2006.</p>		<p>SFELC. FSA has held 2 meetings for Local Authorities to promote the scheme and CFS Chair has written to all CEOs of LAs encouraging them to implement CFS. Feedback from Councils is encouraging and some have already started rolling the scheme out.</p>		
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CUSTOMER SERVICE

FWP No	FWD Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
8.1	Track complaints data in key sectors	1-3	<p>Requested specific data on mobiles, e-commerce and domestic heating fuels from Consumer Direct. On going negotiation with Consumer Direct for access to more and better data across key Consumer Focus markets.</p> <p>Negotiated information sharing agreement with Citizens Advice (England and Wales) with similar agreement to be worked out with Citizens Advice Scotland. Developed strategy for negotiating similar arrangements with other advice agencies with aim of reaching further agreements in next two months.</p> <p>We negotiated to receive more performance information from the Energy Ombudsman than that originally agreed with Ofgem.</p> <p>Developed framework for monitoring direct complaints performance of energy</p>		<p>GB</p> <p>NI (post)</p>

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			<p>suppliers.</p> <p>Developed framework for monitoring performance of all Consumer Voice bodies which will be produced as a report to be circulated to BERR and Ofgem.</p> <p>Carrying out scoping work on development of internal database that will allow teams to store and utilise information more effectively (database to be delivered in April)</p>		
8.2	Publish data on complaints in the post and energy sectors to help consumers make an informed choice	1-3	<p>Analysed initial energy supplier direct complaint returns (Oct 2008 – Jan 2009) and shared summary findings with Ofgem. Further information was requested from suppliers to assist us in understanding the variance in performance on direct complaints.</p> <p>Analysed initial energy and post consumer contacts from Consumer Direct Northampton (Oct 2008 to Feb 2009) and shared summary findings with Ofgem. Identified potential data quality issues and fed back to Consumer Direct to ensure processes were changed, where necessary, to ensure the quality of the data collected before publication.</p> <p>Proxy measure based on Consumer Direct energy cases developed and shared with suppliers and Ofgem.</p> <p>Analysed postal licensee’s quality of service information and shared internally.</p> <p>Hosted summit on future of the Confidence Code for online energy price comparison sites, which was attended by all suppliers, price comparison sites and Ofgem. This was an initiative identified in Ofgem’s probe document aimed at improving consumer confidence in the energy market. The summit was successful, with Consumer Focus given a clear set of priorities</p> <p>Tendered for energy pricing database and in process of appointing provider.</p> <p>Day to day management of the Confidence Code including the resolution of any new or emerging issues (e.g. inclusion of smart meter tariffs).</p>		<p>GB</p> <p>NI (post)</p>
8.4	Support advice	1-3	Both energy and post advice is contained within the Knowledge Base, available on		GB

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	<p>agencies through the provision of information and policy resources to help them advise energy and post consumers</p>		<p>the Consumer Focus website. More detailed information, targeted specifically at advice agencies, is provided on the Partners log-in section of the website. Work continues to develop stakeholder relations with the establishment of ‘consumer community’ a virtual forum where we promote the use of the ‘Ask the Adviser’ service in the EHU and provide updates on the energy and postal markets (as well as other relevant Consumer Focus campaign information). We have also established data sharing agreements with advice agencies and mechanisms for them to alert us to problems or for us to call for evidence. This means we not only provide policy support, we receive and act on the trends identified by agencies.</p> <p>We have built on this work by developing some targeted information directly for consumers. We published an updated guide to green tariffs on website. (We will be consumer representative on Ofgem’s new independent panel responsible for monitoring set up of green tariffs accreditation scheme.) We also updated the online benefits checker which enables consumers to see what social tariffs or initiatives they may be eligible for – this will be re-launched in early April.</p> <p>We met with ERA and Ofgem to discuss our back billing work. Back billing case studies sent to ERA for comment ahead of sending them to all suppliers in effort to gain collective agreement on where rules must be proactively applied. These will form the basis of a consumer guide.</p> <p>Mapping work has been carried out to determine gaps in consumer information provision in sectors outside of energy and post.</p>		<p>NI (post)</p>
<p>8.6</p>	<p>Monitoring information about the experience of Welsh consumers and in particular Welsh Language speakers who contact the Extra Help</p>	<p>1-3</p>	<p>Report published in January – ‘Double Trouble: Debt and Disconnection’ – analysing the first three months of calls to EHU from consumers in Wales. Launched at the official public launch of CFW in Senedd in Cardiff by the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan AM. Report demonstrated to stakeholders that not only are we dealing with ‘on the ground’ issues on behalf of individual, vulnerable consumers but that we are also considering root-cause policy solutions to those repeat problems.</p> <p>Mystery shopping on the CD/CF Welsh language service revealed unacceptable level of service being offered to Welsh language callers by CD. Matter raised with CD and Welsh Language Board. As a result, both CD and CF now outsource all Welsh language call handling to the CD Wales team</p>		<p>Wales</p>

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	Unit. Advise on any Welsh Assembly Government initiatives that Welsh consumers might be eligible for				
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COMPLAINTS OF GENERAL INTEREST

FWP No	FWD Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
9.1	Determine the needs of micro-enterprises as consumers, with particular regards to their energy and postal needs and the role of consumer focus in representing them	1	<p>Research was completed in December 2008, with staff and Board members providing comments for the final report through an in-house presentation in November and a paper to the SMT in January. We need to publish a clear statement of our position.</p> <p>Consumer Focus continues current work supporting the needs of SMEs through the work of the Extra Help Unit and the work currently underway in the reviews of the postal and energy markets. We also continue to raise concerns about the visibility of Consumer Direct to small businesses.</p>		GB NI (post)

EXTRA HELP UNIT

FWP No	FWD Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
10.1	Provide an advice function for vulnerable postal or	1-3	3834 energy cases were received, 72% of these were investigated complaints and 28% enquiries. 23 postal cases were received, 48% of these were investigated complaints and 52% enquiries.		GB NI (post)

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	energy consumers, including those at risk of disconnection		<p>Business cases accounted for almost 6% of total cases received.</p> <p>A range of policy issues have been identified by EHU and passed on to policy colleagues</p>		
10.2	Help vulnerable consumers of energy and postal services (including vulnerable businesses) reach a satisfactory resolution	1-3	<p>610 consumers were given urgent assistance as they were off supply or at threat of imminent disconnection. Cases of an urgent nature account for 22% of complaints. Compensation of £234,591 has been secured for consumers. This includes guaranteed standard payments, goodwill, reductions to bills and refunds and equates to £87 per closed complaint.</p> <p>In handling cases, the Extra Help Unit not only focuses on the resolution of the complaint, but also identifies if the consumer could benefit from the Priority Service Register and the supplier's social tariff. The EHU also ensures that payment plans offered to the consumer are sustainable and take into account the consumer's ability to pay.</p>		GB NI (post)
10.3	Deal with related queries from elected and other consumer and citizen representatives	1-3	<p>We have handled 191 calls through the 'Ask the Adviser Service'. Citizens Advice Bureaux are the biggest users of the service. Queries generally relate to debt and billing queries. We have provided support to 122 elected representatives who have sought help on behalf of their constituents on wide range of complaints. Contacts have been from 105 MPs, 14 MSPs and 3AMs.</p>		GB NI (post)

INTERNATIONAL

FWP No	FWD Activity	Phase	Progress to date	Status	Geog
11.1	Contribute to the reviews of consumer law underway in the EU, for example on issues of	1-3	<p>The European Commission published a very poor and contentious proposal for a Consumer Rights Directive in October, which potentially removes important UK consumer rights and fails to address key consumer issues. We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actively participated in the BEUC campaign group influencing their policy and advocacy strategy; • had meetings with Commission Kuneva, her cabinet, and with the Commission officials responsible for the proposal; 		GB NI (post)

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	redress. Explore and advocate options for improvement, which might include consolidation of legislation, more effective private and collective redress and improved enforcement		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintained close contact with the BERR team attending the Council working group, responded to the BERR consultation on the Directive, and ensured that the Minister, Gareth Thomas, is briefed on our views; provided briefings and had meetings with key UK MEPs on the lead European Parliament committee – the Internal Markets and Consumer Committee (IMCO) and briefed UK MEPs on the Justice committee (JURI) which is also preparing a working paper on the proposal. <p><i>Collective redress</i> The Commission has published a white paper on private damages actions for breach of EC competition rules and a green paper on consumer collective actions. We have participated in BEUC expert meetings, briefed UK MEPs on the white paper before the vote in the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee (ECON), and inputted into BEUC’s position paper on consumer collective actions.</p>		
11.2	Contribute to the new Citizens’ Energy Forum and the third energy package, campaigning for appropriate amendments to be retained and the work on the Charter taken forward	1-3	<p>The third energy package has nearly completed its passage through the EU legislative process; the second reading will take place on 20 April or 4 May. Building on the work of Energywatch, NCC and BEUC we have lobbied to retain the pro-consumer measures agreed by the European Parliament at its first reading such as on switching and final bill settlement, access to consumption data, fuel poverty and smart meters. This has involved briefings and meetings with UK MEPs , DG TREN (transport and energy) officials, officials in the Commissioner for energy’s cabinet, and UK officials in the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and the UK Permanent Representation in Brussels. We have worked particularly closely with Eluned Morgan MEP rapporteur on the electricity directive.</p> <p>We have also participated in the new EU Citizens Energy Forum, set up to take forward the implementation of the energy package, and we are members of the new ECCG sub-group on energy which co-ordinates the consumer input into the Forum, and the BEUC energy expert group.</p>		GB
11.3	Work with the Open Markets team to lobby on EU	1-3	<p><i>Telecoms package</i> We have been lobbying to retain the pro-consumer amendments agreed by the Parliament at first reading. This has involved meetings with UK MEPs, Commission and UK government officials. We have worked very closely with Malcolm Harbour</p>		GB

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	telecommunications legislation and the review of copyright in the EU		<p>MEP, rapporteur on the e-privacy and universal access directives.</p> <p>We are active participants in the TACD Information Society working group and have drafted policy positions on marketing to children online and social networking. We are currently scoping the feasibility of a cross-country shopping survey on e-commerce/ mobile commerce with partners drawn from the TACD membership in order to influence the review of the OECD e-commerce guidelines and reviews of related legislation in the EU.</p> <p><i>Copyright</i> The main area of activity over the last six months has been on the Commission's proposal to extend the term of protection for sound recordings from 50 to 95 years. This is a contentious proposal and both Parliament and the Council are divided on it. The parliamentary 1st reading was scheduled for March but has now been postponed. We have worked with an alliance of public interest organisations including Open Rights Group, libraries, academics and BEUC to oppose, or amend, the Commission's proposal.</p> <p>At international level we play an active role in the TACD (Jill Johnstone co-chairs the intellectual property working group) and we are participating in a Consumers International project.</p>		
11.5	Collaborate proactively with DG Sanco on the consumer markets scoreboard, which is going into its market investigation phase	1-3	Met DG SANCO to discuss and input views into the issues that should be considered as part of the electricity market investigation that the Consumer Commission launched following the publication of the Second Consumer Markets Scoreboard (Feb 09). Preparing our draft submission.		GB
11.7	Lead the TACD Intellectual Property	1-3	Our major area of international activity is the TACD, which is part of the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) and provides a forum for European and US consumer groups to work together to influence the EU and US administrations. We are on the steering committee of TACD and co-chair two of the working groups,		GB

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	Working Group and participate in the TACD Information Society Working Group		intellectual property and climate change. We also participate in the information society and food working groups and are gearing up to increase our role in these and to become involved in the recently established financial services working group.		
11.9	Participate actively in the BEUC Sustainable Energy Campaigns Group, with major input on energy labelling and the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production	1-3	<p><i>Energy label</i> We have been lobbying to influence the EU energy labelling proposals, particularly the retention of the A-G label which has very good consumer recognition. This label will be eventually placed on all energy-using products. Despite our best efforts there will be a compromise, slightly changed label, but we are insisting that a proper evaluation of the consumer understanding and use of this label is carried out within 3 years.</p> <p><i>Greening Retailers</i> Following earlier lobbying on the EU action plan for sustainable consumption and production and the setting up of the retailers forum, we have been scoping the feasibility of running a European rating retailers shopping survey. We are working closely with BEUC and Consumers International (CI) to seek funding opportunities.</p>		GB
11.10	Participate in the TACD Climate Change and Sustainability Working Group	1-3	We have been working with the TACD secretariat to get the new TACD climate change working group off to a good start and so able to exert influence on the US and EU administrations.		GB
11.11	Inform the development of European quality standards for mail services which underpin	1-3	Met the ANEC rep for postal standards, earlier this year to discuss how CF could usefully contribute to European standards work. (ANEC is the BEUC equivalent for European standards.) Agreed that providing intelligence about the UK market to her is the most helpful contribution, and we are now doing this.		UK

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	the European Directive on Postal Services				
11.12	Maintain relationships with the European Commission's Cardiff office and monitor the Welsh Assembly Government's implementation of European directives, which may have particular relevance to consumers in Wales	1-3	Arrangements in place for Senior Director to meet Commission's representative in Wales and attend Europe Day event in Commission Office.		Wales

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FWP ACTIVITIES THAT ARE AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

DISADVANTAGE

1.2	Develop and promote our understanding of the needs of vulnerable consumers	3	Paper commissioned and completed on vulnerable consumers and advice needs.	GB NI (post)
1.3	Identify and promote good practice by businesses across a number of sectors for dealing with vulnerable consumers	2-3	Mapping of this work has started. To inform this work, an omnibus survey has already been commissioned to understand how consumers are prioritising debt. A short report on the growth of high street pay day loan companies has been commissioned to look at these new lenders and the experience from other countries.	GB
1.4	Identify and promote the needs of consumers who are disadvantaged by their lack of access to the internet	3	Written response to Government's interim report, <i>Digital Britain</i> , with campaigning activity.	GB
1.13	Organise a working group to discuss and make recommendations about the poverty premium paid by people on low incomes who have pre-payment meters, no internet access, etc	2	Research referred to above (1.10) will feed in to this. CFW is a partner in this project, which is being led by the Bevan Foundation. In discussion with the Bevan Foundation about an appropriate date for the working group event. This project has been named by the Welsh Assembly Government in their Financial Inclusion Strategy as being key in helping them achieve their goal of improving financial inclusion	Wales
1.16 [3C]	Promote the interests of consumers in relation to services such as energy, telecoms and personal financial services	3	Focus groups carried out Feb/March. Contractor submitted final report end March. Report being prepared for publication.	Scotland

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ENERGY MARKET

FWP No	Activity	Phas	Progress to date	Geog
2.3	Develop a strategic plan for Consumer Focus's role in improving the working of energy markets at UK, EU and international levels	2	Staff workshop held on 10 March, with introduction by Sharon Darcy. Now working in a cross team, cross country group to produce the written plan. See 2.5 for background work conducted.	GB
2.4	Developing our understanding of the needs of energy consumers who are outside mainstream regulation	3	Scoping underway and currently building up contacts across NGOs and have met both LPG UK and Petroleum Suppliers Association to improve industry understanding	GB
2.5	Implement the initial stages of Consumer Focus's Strategic Energy Plan	3	<p>Prior to agreeing and implementing plan:</p> <p>Commissioned and reviewed an analysis of the costs of electricity network charges across GB (Mar 09), confirming that Scottish and Welsh consumers typically pay more in electricity network charges than English consumers.</p> <p>The network charging research was used as the basis of the Consumer Focus submission to the Energy and Climate Change Committee inquiry into the future of Britain's electricity network (Mar 09).</p> <p>We are currently drafting terms of reference for an analysis of the social, economic and behavioural impacts of regional versus national charging for domestic consumers.</p> <p>Submitted response to the Ofgem consultation on the next steps in delivering the electricity structure of charges project.</p>	GB

SUSTAINABILITY

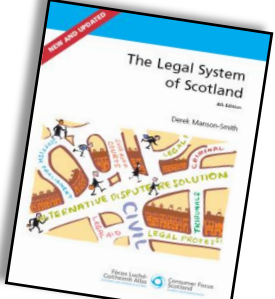
CONSUMER FOCUS STATUS UPDATE - PROGRAMMES AFTER FIRST SIX MONTHS

FWP No	FWD Activity	Phas	Progress to date	Geog
4.2	Review the advice (including 'green claims') and measurement tools available to carbon-conscious consumers	2-3	We secured funding from Defra to undertake consumer research on green claims made by businesses across a range of economic sectors to inform their forthcoming initiative to revise the Green Claims Code. The research phase is nearing conclusion and we look forward to publishing a report in the Spring.	GB
4.3	Explore and scope the consumer agenda on adaptation to climate change	3	We have started a literature review.	GB
4.4	Develop a plan to take forward the National Consumer Council's (NCC) programme of mystery shopping in order to address the performance of supermarkets on key sustainability issues, such as health and resource use	3	A staff workshop was held in February to discuss the future scope of the research. An external expert workshop was held in March to inform this process.	GB
4.5	Conduct research on responsible clothing retailers	3	We have commissioned a scoping paper to advise us on the scope of the project. Lucy is a member of two Defra steering groups: Sustainable Clothing Roadmap; and Reducing the Environmental Impact of Clothes Cleaning project.	England

OPEN MARKETS

5.4	Define and implement a rolling campaign on consumer 'digital rights' in the information society	3	Written submission made to Government's Digital Britain project, with accompanying campaigning activity, and submitted responses to consultations on peer-to-peer file-sharing, copyright and proposals for a Rights Agency.	GB
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5.8	Explore options with BERR on possible consumer interest and involvement in employment standards	2	<p>We have participated in the Unite/Daily Mirror Fair Tips campaign to ensure that tips and service charges given to restaurant staff are not used to top up the National Minimum Wage. We also responded to a Government consultation on this issue.</p> <p>Steve Brooker was a member of the Hampton Review Team which assessed the Gangmasters Licensing Authority.</p> <p>We have started scoping an options paper for further work in this area.</p>	GB
5.9	Produce an updated (fourth) edition of 'The Legal System of Scotland'	2-3	<p>Updated (4th) edition of <i>The Legal System of Scotland</i> published in October 2008.</p> 	Scotland
5.12 [4C]	Promote appropriate consumer information on the labelling of meat by the retail sector in Scotland	2-3	<p>Report published November 2008. Work Stream 2 of national food policy asked to look possibility of developing a clearer common definition for what Product origin –Scotland means. Tender document discussed at Work stream meeting 1 Oct. Scot Gov set up Project Advisory group –CFS member. Meeting 16 Dec –could not attend, email comments given.</p> <p>Product Advisory Group met 20 Jan, 16 Feb and 27 Feb. Stressed –need to act within draft EU legislation on food information to consumer, difficulty in having a catch all term for Scottish for all product groups, problems with linking origin labelling with sustainability due to lack of clarity of indicators.</p>	Scotland
5.13	Work with Trading Standards to promote awareness of digital switchover scams	2-3	<p>Currently working on a communications campaign focussing on raising awareness of aerial rogue trading. Th campaign has backing of TS Wales, Consumer Direct Wales, Ofcom and Digital UK.</p>	Wales
5.16	Conduct a review of the advantages and	3	<p>CFW has now been commissioned by Welsh Assembly Government to undertake a scoping study, looking at whether advice services could provide a data source that could</p>	Wales

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	disadvantages of advice services in Wales		push improvement of public services and make services more responsive to consumer needs.	
5.17	Conduct a survey to establish the extent to which people experience difficulty in accessing national events (Eisteddfod, Royal Welsh Show etc)	2-3	Initial meeting held with disability groups to discuss their members' experience of accessing events, and of being disadvantaged by poor planning or a lack of consideration for their needs.	Wales

COMMUNITY SERVICES

6.6 [3.B]	Analyse the effectiveness of engagement of consumers and other stakeholders in the post office closure programme	2	Qualitative and quantitative research commissioned from the agency Accent, with the final research report expected to be completed in early May. <u>Scotland</u> Network Change Programme - One Year on in Argyll & Bute. Focus groups carried out Feb/March. Contractor submitted final report end March. Report being prepared for publication.	UK
6.7	Investigate alternative models for the delivery of services traditionally offered at the post office.	2-3	The Social Enterprise Coalition has prepared a proposal on the creation of a 'national inventory' on social enterprises offering post office services across the UK. The team's network adviser will assist in investigating these and other arrangements. Work has been undertaken for Select Committee written evidence and oral hearing on the future of the PO network. This will form the basis of a Consumer Focus manifesto on the network's future once the research detailed above is complete. We have developed amendments for the Postal Services Bill on network issues. Engagement and meetings with Postal Services Minister and shadow spokespeople from main opposition parties. Engagement is also underway with other parliamentarians and key stakeholders including Alan Cook, MD of POL.	UK

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PUBLIC SERVICES

FWP No ¹	FWD Activity	Phas	Progress to date	Geog
7.4	Scope and identify up to three projects to address areas of consumer detriment representative of all Consumer Focus' strategic goals and avoiding duplication with existing campaigns.	2-3	<p>We have commissioned Ipsos Mori to undertake consumer research to explore people's experiences of using Jobcentre Plus services, and to identify what changes are needed to meet their needs effectively. This is particularly relevant given the increased need for employment services in the current economic climate.</p> <p>We are conducting a review of Directgov to see how well it currently serves user needs, and how to make e- government more consumer-responsive. Two papers commissioned from expert consultants to inform our analysis have been received.</p> <p>As noted at 5.7, to get a fresh perspective on failing markets and public services and identify ideas for innovation, qualitative research is currently in the field in Cardiff, Glasgow, London and Manchester, with ex-pats who have been based in the UK for 6 months – 3 years. This should help us identify topics for future work on areas of detriment in Open Markets and Public Services, as well as being a media-friendly output and providing the basis for building relationships with chief execs in key businesses and public services.</p> <p>As part of our scoping on public services work, the Centre for Public Service Partnerships has been commissioned to produce a report that will estimate the number of public service partnerships in England, the features of those partnerships and resultant issues of concern for consumers .</p>	England
7.6	Promote consumer and citizen-centred reforms on health, building on previous work by the WCC	2-3	Responded to Welsh Assembly Government consultation on NHS reform to offer the potential for greater patient/consumer involvement in NHS decision making. (See also 7.8.)	Wales

¹ Where applicable, [in brackets] the operational reference approved by Consumer Focus Scotland Board November 2008.

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7.9 [1B]	Engage parents on national representation, building on previous work by the SCC	2-3	Discussions on the focus of this work have taken place with the Scottish Government and Learning and Teaching Scotland. Both welcome CFS involvement and focus on disadvantaged parents. Work is expected to begin in May 2009.	Scotland
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CUSTOMER SERVICE

8.3	Monitor and report on the implementation of redress systems and complaint handling standards	3	<p>Agreed a joint framework for the project with Ofgem to avoid duplication of effort.</p> <p>Frequent liaison with Ofgem over their independent audits of energy licensees' implementation of the complaint handling standard.</p> <p>Analysed energy and post cases to the Extra Help Unit (Oct 2008 to Feb 2009). Shared information internally and with industry. Identified data quality issues which will be addressed by EHU, companies and Consumer Direct.</p> <p>Developed internal management reporting structure for the Extra Help Unit to measure their progress against Key Performance Indicators. Developed automated reporting schedule for energy suppliers on Extra Help Unit cases to enable them to monitor their performance and identify issues on a weekly basis.</p>	GB NI (post)
8.5	Scope consumer needs and the opportunities to influence improvements in the mobile phone sector, working with the Ofcom Consumer Panel	2-3	<p>We have commenced scoping work on mobile number portability and established key contacts in this sector. Commissioned a literature review/scoping paper on current key mobiles consumer issues and commissioned an online panel survey to probe consumer priorities in the GB mobile phone sector. Cross-organisation strategy discussion on mobiles/telecoms held in late March.</p> <p>We started drafting our consultation paper to shape priorities and focus: <i>What's the problem? Consumer priorities in the GB mobile phone sector</i> – to be launched April 2009.</p> <p>We have provided input to consultations through dialogue and submissions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meeting with Ofcom on mobile number portability – March 09 ○ Meeting with Ofcom on fixed line narrowcasting (potential further deregulation of fixed line market) – Feb 09; 	GB

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Submission on Ofcom's draft Annual Plan 09/10 – March 09; ○ Digital Britain (input) – March 09. <p>Early campaigning/public affairs/comms activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supported BT's move to make calls to 0800 numbers from their mobiles free/inclusive – Feb 09 ○ Supported Ofcom's regulatory activity and campaign cracking down on silent calls to fixed lines – March 09 	
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INTERNATIONAL

11.4	Participate in the BEUC team and project for the pan-EU consumer manifesto leading to elections in late spring 2009, and promote to UK candidates.	2	<p>Our membership of BEUC was confirmed at the General Assembly in November and we are members of the campaign teams for consumer contracts, digital rights and energy and sustainability. We are also members of the food, group actions, and consumer manifesto working groups. Our membership of CI was confirmed at the Executive meeting in March.</p> <p>In addition to working with the international consumer organisations we are developing our relations with national consumer organisations in other countries so that we can develop partnership projects and learn from their experience and approaches to inform the work we do here. To this end we are developing a database of their work programmes, research and policy projects and campaigns.</p> <p>At UK level we are working with Which? to jointly organise and host the UK European Consumer Consultative Group which includes consumer groups with an interest in European policy and now meets four times a year to provide input to the quarterly meetings of the ECCG. The ECCG is the formal mechanism through which the European Commission consults consumer organisations and we intend to stand for membership when one of the current members term comes to an end in the autumn.</p> <p>European institutions The key organisations we aim to influence in Europe are the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. In our first six months we have</p>	GB NI (post)
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CONSUMER FOCUS STATUS UPDATE - PROGRAMMES AFTER FIRST SIX MONTHS

			<p>concentrated on our stakeholder relationships with those involved in policy on our priority issues. We have also been involved in BEUC's consumer manifesto project and, with Which?, have sent copies of the European Consumer Pact to candidate MEPs. During the next quarter we will be extending our contacts with Commission and UK government officials and developing our strategy for high level engagement with the new Parliament and the new Commission in the second half of the financial year.</p> <p><i>International institutions</i> At the international level we are currently focusing on the OECD and, through the TACD, the new US administration.</p> <p>We have also hosted a number of foreign delegations, seeking to draw on our expertise on particular markets and our approach to consumer matters more generally.</p>	
11.6	Participate in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Committee on Consumer Policy	2-3	We are involved in CI work on copyright, sustainable consumption and food and nutrition and hope to expand our collaboration as CI's work programme develops under its new Director General. In addition we represent CI on the OECD Consumer Policy Committee (CCP) and we are members of the CCP economics of consumer policy and e-commerce working groups.	GB NI (post)
11.8	Explore on the global level how to take forward the work of energywatch together with Consumers International in developing a global Energy Consumers' Charter	2-3	Work underway	GB

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NEW ACTIVITIES UNDERWAY THAT ARE NOT IN THE FWP:

DISADVANTAGE

Research into the experiences of court users	1-2	Joint qualitative research commissioned in partnership with the Scottish Legal Aid Board into the views and experiences of individual and particularly unrepresented court users, intended to help inform the civil courts review. Phase 1 research carried out during December, and a report on that research has been prepared for submission to the civil courts review. The research report is currently being finalised for publication.	Scotland
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SUSTAINABILITY

Food policy	1-3	We have developed an options paper on food projects, with the benefit of a secondee from the Food Standards Agency. An early future initiative could be to update NCC research on healthy eating and sandwich chains. We have also responded to BEUC and FSA consultations on nutrition profiling.	GB
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OPEN MARKETS

Financial services and the recession	1-3	<p>The banking crisis was at its height during Consumer Focus's first week. We ran a roundtable of civil society organisations to discuss the consumer response to these dramatic events, in partnership with the Financial Inclusion Centre. Following this, we wrote to Lord Mandelson and John Fingleton to express our concerns on the possible adverse consequences for consumers that might result from the proposed Lloyds/HBOS merger.</p> <p>We have published a paper prepared by the Financial Inclusion Centre on the rationing of consumer credit in light of the financial crisis.</p> <p>We have commissioned consumer research – the first for 25 years – on the scale of lost prepayments in the economy. We anticipate publishing a discussion paper in the Spring.</p>	GB
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		Going forward, the Board has concluded that Consumer Focus can best add value to the debate by considering longer-term reform of financial services regulation. We are currently acting to establish a short-term think tank - built around a series of commissioned essays and seminars – to provide an authoritative and novel consumer perspective on the issues.	
Consumer Conditions Survey	1-3	We have commissioned quantitative research on consumer views of 45 economic markets. This will be a flagship survey for Consumer Focus that will give us a unique insight into consumer attitudes and experience across the economy.	GB
Consumer Remedies for Faulty Goods	1	Joint response to the Law Commission/Scottish Law Commission with Consumer Focus and Consumer Focus Wales; led by Consumer Focus Scotland. We commissioned Cowan Ervine of Dundee University to draft a detailed response to this consultation which covers some of the same issues as the BERR consultation on the consumer rights directive.	Scotland England Wales
Report on microbiological quality of water in water coolers	1	Report published in March, generating much media interest. PQs raised in Holyrood.	Scotland
Commercial Sponsorship in the Public Sector/ Commercial Sponsorship in Schools	1	<p>During 2007/08 the Scottish Consumer Council developed guidelines on commercial sponsorship in the public sector. These were published by Consumer Focus Scotland, with the support of the Scottish Government and the endorsement of public and private sector organisations, in October 2008.</p> <p>We updated the 2006 SCC guidelines on sponsorship in schools to take account of new developments and to bring them into line with the key messages of the public sector. These were published in March 2009.</p>	Scotland



COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Code of Practice for PO Business as Usual Changes to the Network	1-3	We have worked with POL on the drafting of the Code, resulting in a number of additional safeguards being secured. A process for handling consumer complaints that arise has been developed with Consumer Focus Post and is being implemented.	GB
Monitor the experience of communities that have lost their post office as a result of closure programme	1-3	Scoping work being undertaken to identify communities to use as subjects. Identifying a spread of communities, to also include those who have and haven't service replaced by outreach. Monitoring will be ongoing to evaluate coping strategies, formal and informal. This will give a voice to those communities that have lost their post offices and their experiences.	Wales

PUBLIC SERVICES

Promote an effective health information strategy for patients and members of the public [1Q]	1-2	Attended first two meetings of steering group which will develop this strategy with a view to launching elements of the strategy in April. Consumer Focus will contribute elements of this strategy including the role of Health Rights Information Scotland and the DVD on how the NHS works for people who do not speak much English. Responded to the Scottish Government <i>A Patients' Rights Bill for users of the NHS in Scotland</i> consultation	Scotland
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CUSTOMER SERVICE

Debt and disconnection	1-2	<i>Debt & Disconnection</i> We wrote to Ofgem in November expressing concern about E.ON, current robustness of ERA safety net based on experience of EHU, desire to carry out new joint review of supplier processes with Ofgem, and a call for Ofgem to show leadership on issue of considering whether new licence conditions are required. Met with Energy Retail Association in January and raised concerns over the issue of vulnerable disconnections for debt. Individual suppliers were sent details of all EHU vulnerable disconnections for debt in February and asked to provide a detailed explanation. The companies will continue to be	GB
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	<p>sent any new cases on an ongoing basis and will be sent the next batch of cases next week. We are currently analysing the information returned by suppliers.</p> <p>We met with Ofgem in February and agreed to carry out a joint review of suppliers' debt and disconnection processes. We pushed for a two track process to prioritise the issue of vulnerable disconnections and agreed to send through the EHU cases after carrying out data cleansing.</p> <p>We met with E.ON in March to discuss the policy and process changes made following its discovery that it had disconnected vulnerable households.</p> <p>We sent ERA details of all EHU vulnerable disconnections for debt in March and asked for comments regarding the apparent failure of the safety net.</p> <p><i>Revenue Protection</i></p> <p>Made an information request to all suppliers in January asking for details of their revenue protection policies including the level of charges. This led to a formal referral to Ofgem in February regarding British Gas' revenue protection policies. After a disappointing initial response, we scoped supercomplaint on disconnections in line with Board decision. Ofgem subsequently initiated an urgent investigation.</p>	
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