

Consumer Focus Corporate Plan 2010 – 2013

Corporate Plan

The Consumer Focus Corporate Plan sets out, over the medium term, how the organisation will deliver its strategic priorities. It outlines how we will address the challenges ahead, the outcomes we will achieve and how we will achieve them.

The Corporate Plan is used to focus efforts on achieving results that are fundamental to the organisation's success and is intended to:

- Present a vision of success that will guide resource allocation and serve as a framework for decision making organisation-wide
- Reflect Consumer Focus' statutory duties
- Identify key priorities and a criteria for work planning
- Provide a basis for more detailed annual planning
- Provide the basis for performance monitoring and accountability
- Demonstrate how Consumer Focus contributes to the achievement of BIS' PSA targets and DSOs.
- Explain Consumer Focus to others in order to inform, motivate and involve

The corporate plan will be reviewed annually.

Who we are

Consumer Focus is the independent champion for consumers across England, Wales, Scotland and for postal consumers in Northern Ireland. We operate across the whole of the economy, persuading business and public services to put consumers at the heart of what they do.

Consumer Focus is a campaigning body that tackles the issues that matter to consumers, and aims to give people a stronger voice. Our aim is to achieve change in behavior by companies, government and suppliers of public services to improve access, fairness and customer service for all consumers, paying particular attention to the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable consumers.

We don't just draw attention to problems – we work with consumers and with a range of organizations to champion creative solutions that make a difference to consumers' lives.

We will work with companies to ensure they put consumers first, and challenge those who fail to do so.

Helping vulnerable consumers

Our Extra Help Unit works with vulnerable consumers to help resolve individual complaints in energy or post – for example, if someone is facing disconnection. Vulnerable consumers are referred to the Extra Help Unit by Consumer Direct, Ofgem and the Energy Ombudsman.

Consumer Focus also provides assistance to MPs, Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of the Welsh Assembly where their constituents have complained about energy or post. Support is also available for advice-agency staff with energy or postal queries via our online Knowledge Base and our telephone based Ask the Adviser service where we provide industry information and help answer queries.

What we do

Consumer Focus

- Identifies issues of concern within various markets and services that don't work for consumers
- Engages with issues through research, policy development, and working with stakeholders and consumers
- Campaigns to bring about needed change

Our vision

We believe that people are the best judges of their own needs and that Britain will be more successful if consumers, particularly those who are currently more vulnerable, have more of a voice in relation to the goods and services they receive.

We believe that it is not just the economy but society that benefits if consumers have robust rights. If given the right chance, consumers will play their part in promoting fairness and sustainability.

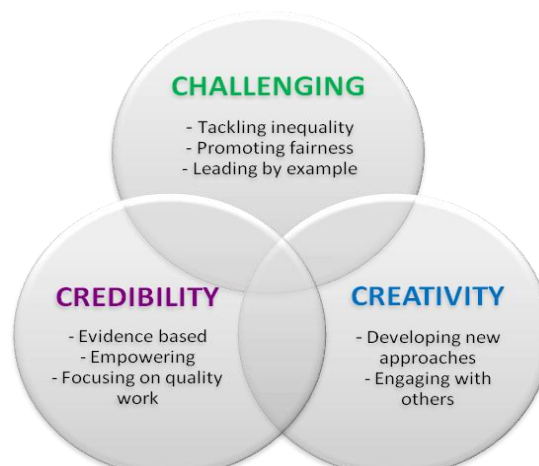
Our mission

We will make a difference to people's lives as consumers, particularly the more vulnerable, by championing policy changes that can help make people as powerful as the institutions that serve them.

We will engage, inform and support consumers to act. Where they cannot act for themselves, we will act for them through campaigning to improve the performance of those that serve them.

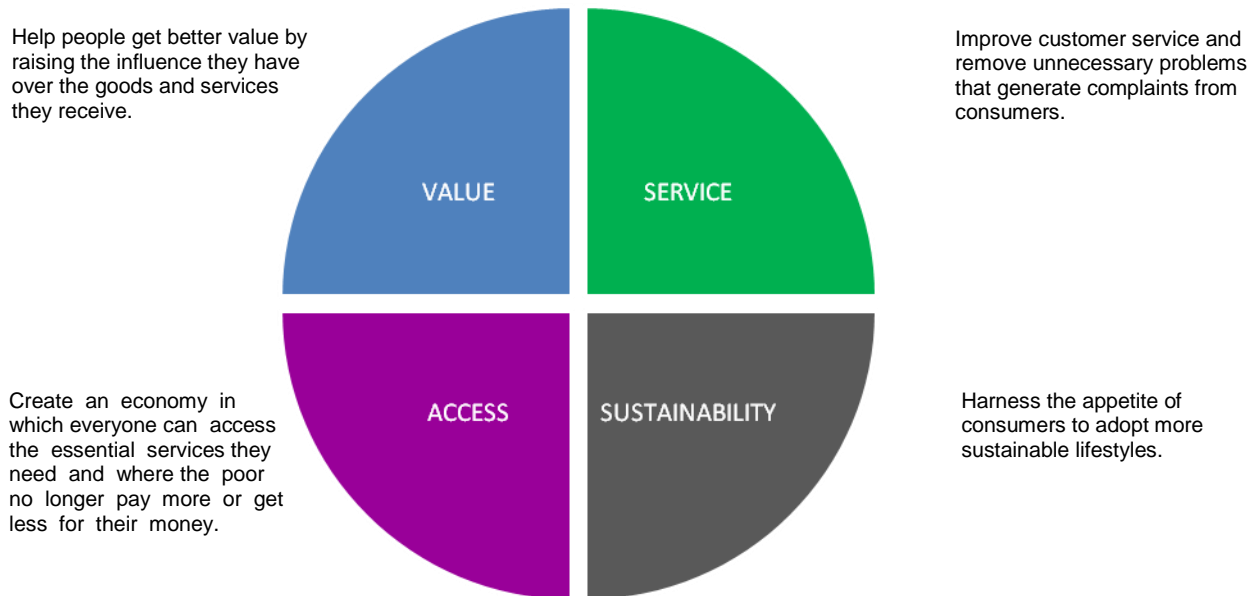
Our values

Our core values for empowering consumers and campaigning for a fair deal are:



Strategic aims

Consumer Focus has set four strategic aims that underpin our work:



Operational philosophy

Consumer Focus will operate at all times in the consumer interest, with a strong spirit of independence and open to collaborative partnerships.

We will act in the consumer interest, by taking steps to operate with:

- The intelligence required to track changing consumer experience and the needs of different groups of consumers
- A culture of empathy and respect for consumers
- An agreed methodology for assessing consumer 'detriment' (the welfare loss to consumers) and the consumer 'interest' (the configuration of goods and services of most benefit to consumers)
- A clear evidence base for the interventions that we make

We will act in the spirit of independence by operating:

- Solely in the interests of consumers, recognising that there are many other voices for the interests of producers
- In tune with the perspectives of consumers themselves
- In line with the context of devolution, where the experience people have as consumers and the decision-making over policy that affects them may vary across Great Britain and Northern Ireland

We will build proactive and productive partnerships where these benefit consumers, recognising that:

- Many businesses, public service and voluntary sector providers are close to their customers and have a strong interest in seeing a better deal for consumers
- There are many legitimate and effective civil society organisations that involve and speak for different people's interests, without necessarily seeing themselves as 'consumer' groups
- A growing number of social enterprises are providing services for consumers in the gap between market, state and philanthropy

Challenges

This is a dramatic time for consumers. The impact of a recession that hit with alarming speed in 2007/2008 has created a different economy and wider areas of detriment as compared to the circumstances that prevailed when Consumer Focus was established. This, together with continuing rapid advances in technology, an extraordinary array of goods and services for those that can afford them, and at the same time a growing concern for well-being and sustainability, all present considerable challenges to a consumer organisation.

Value for money counts more than ever in both private and public sector markets. Complaints are high and growing and the number of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers is growing as a direct result of the recession. In addition, the Issues of climate change, and the need to move towards sustainable patterns of consumption, give Consumer Focus an ever-increasing responsibility to act in this area in the long-term interests of all consumers.

Against this backdrop, Consumer Focus needs to continue to advocate on all these issues on behalf of consumers. At the same time, we need to learn lessons from the recession and prepare for the upturn.

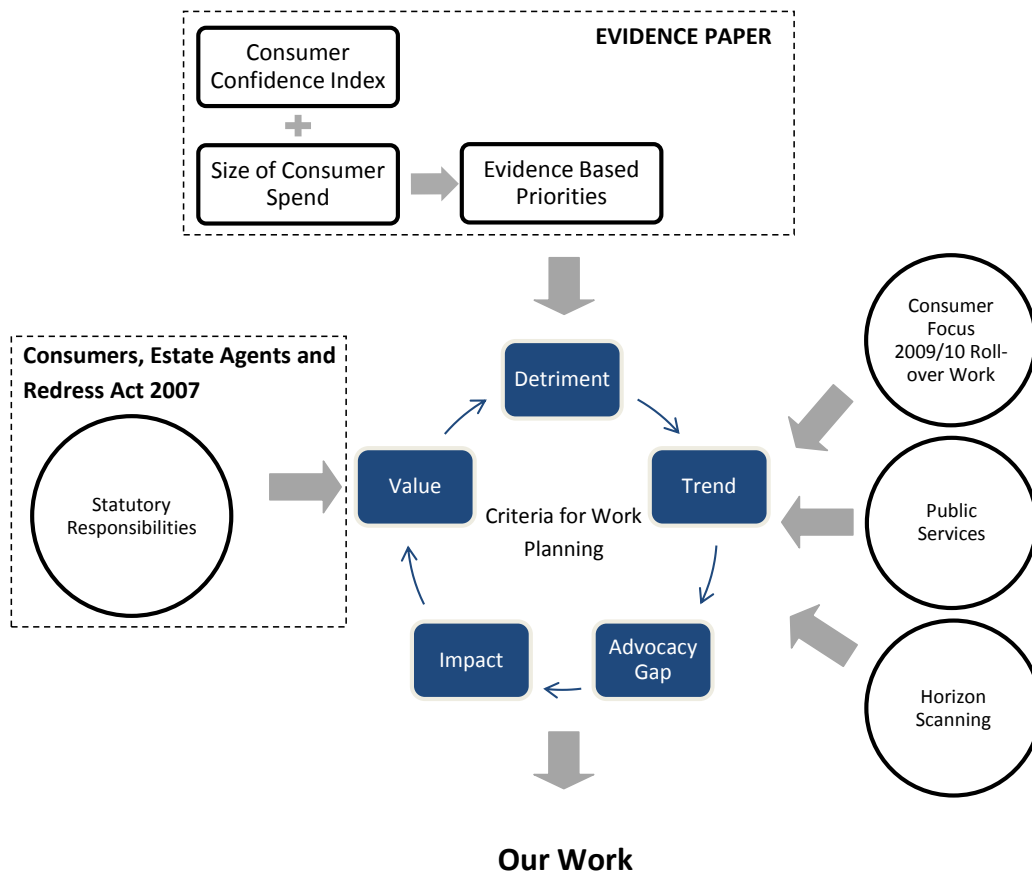
The White Paper 'A better deal for consumers' in July 2009, paves the way for the appointment of a Consumer Advocate who will sit alongside Consumer Focus with real power and authority to act on behalf of all consumers in the areas of education and redress. We welcome this development and look forward to working with the Consumer Advocate to leverage and maximise our advocacy work for the benefit of all consumers.

In addition, it is highly probable that the fiscal year 2010/11 will see a merger of Consumer Focus with the Consumer Council for Water, as provided for in the Consumers, Estate Agents and Redress Act 2007. We welcome this merger as it will enable one unified strategic approach to our work on utilities.

Our evidence-based approach to work planning

To identify where we can have most impact and make a difference, we have analysed research and drawn on our experience to date to generate our strategic priorities and the annual plans that will fit under this Corporate Plan.

Our approach is illustrated in the following diagram:



Criteria for work planning

With limited resources and a wide remit, Consumer Focus must maintain a concrete process for prioritizing work. The criteria for work planning considers the factors of detriment, trend, advocacy gap, impact and value when determining which projects to undertake.



Core work and statutory requirements

Consumer Focus's core work is derived from our funding streams and the Consumers, Estate Agents and Redress Act 2007.

Our core work consists of:

- Securing a fair deal for energy consumers
- Securing a fair deal for postal consumers
- Work on areas of private sector markets where available evidence points to consumer detriment
- The Extra Help Unit to assist vulnerable consumers
- Our work on Complaints of General Interest
- The work of Consumer Focus Scotland on behalf of Scottish consumers
- The work of Consumer Focus Wales on behalf of Welsh Consumers
- The work of Consumer Focus Post on behalf of postal consumers in Northern Ireland
- Our earned income projects

Our strategic priorities

To enable Consumer Focus to deliver our work most effectively, including the delivery of our statutory responsibilities, six strategic priorities have been identified ensure that value is maximised for consumers.

Consumer Focus's strategic priorities for 2010-13 are as follows:

Strategic priority 1

Consumer Focus is currently positioned primarily as an evidence-based advocacy organisation. This will continue to be true for the bulk of our work but we will undertake some re-balancing of our approach to develop and provide greater organisational capacity for empowering consumers to sit alongside our existing advocacy skills.

As we are developing this over the next three years, we can begin to build on empowerment work in existing projects, for instance Energy and Digital Rights. As part of this, the following are activities we will to focus on:

- New empowerment models
- Review of intermediaries
- Developing web and other communication capacity
- Skills and competency audit across organisation

Strategic priority 2

Develop a methodology for using disadvantage as a 'filter' through which to determine projects and work. Develop a common vocabulary and definition of disadvantage and vulnerability within Consumer Focus.

Activities to develop this will include:

- Coalition building with organisations working in the disadvantaged field
- Research and understanding of the disadvantaged agenda
- Outreach and engagement strategies
- Development of a common vocabulary across Consumer Focus
- A need for a more inclusive definition of disadvantage, recognising that disadvantage is not static but dynamic

Strategic priority 3

Develop a strategy in relation to sustainability which includes sustainability indicators for consumers and measures to drive behavioural change.

- Developing our own methodology in this area

- Leveraging social marketing
- Offering our expertise to producers and businesses to advance the cause of sustainability
- In addition, we would continue to build on our existing work in Energy (smart-metering, energy efficient housing stock, green tariffs). This work provides synergies with the existing work of the Consumer Council for Water.

Strategic priority 4

Recognising the growing trend of services delivered to consumers by the public sector either directly or indirectly via private or 3rd sector entities, we will move to a private: public split in our work that reflects consumer detriment across both sectors

- Develop an evidence base to provide public sector information on detriment to enable more effective targeting of our work
- Identify other organisations with whom we can work in this area including third sector bodies, community groups and others
- Develop new skills internally to respond to this area of work

Strategic Priority 5

Continue to develop the capacity and capability of the organisation to respond to change and deliver benefits for consumers. This includes:

- a. How we operate, including style, tone, research**
- b. With whom we work, including other organisations, voluntary and community groups**
- c. What role do we take, both in the above and in relation to Government, central Government bodies**

Key activities in this area will include:

- Ensuring we have the ability to manage future change
- Support the delivery of our work by developing relationships with other organisations, working with those organisations in different ways and broadening our alliances
- Developing our technological capacity to take advantage of new forms of communication
- Developing our evidence base and use of research
- Developing more effective and efficient ways of delivering cross functional themes
- Embedding social marketing techniques across Consumer Focus

Strategic priority 6

Develop and embed a method for demonstrating impact which has external validity and enables us to reinforce our salience and legitimacy.

- Simplifying the discussion by demonstrating a clear linkage between outcome and impact

- Fully embed Pride in Performance, as clear framework for managing this process
- Safeguard longer term projects, despite the pressure to quickly demonstrate short and medium term results
- Develop stakeholder measurement and consumer surveys as a proxy to demonstrating evidence of our impact
- Invest both time and resource in developing effective impact measurement

Disadvantage, vulnerability and sustainability

Cross-cutting themes are an important part of our work. These are currently

- **Disadvantage and vulnerability**
- **Sustainability**

These are an integral part of our work and will be reflected in our annual plans.

Pride in Performance

Managing the organisation

In order to achieve the priorities set out in this plan we need to make sure Consumer Focus is managed efficiently and effectively to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Developing Organisational Capacity

Consumer Focus recognizes the challenge and importance of maintaining and building the organisational capacity to respond to the changing consumer landscape. Our organisational capacity means having the right resources, people, finances, information, technology, processes and tools to deliver a fair deal for consumers.

Maintaining high levels of corporate governance

Our corporate governance exists to ensure Consumer Focus achieves its overall purpose and outcomes in an ethical, effective and efficient way. Three elements make up our framework:

- Organisation structures and processes including Board(s) oversight
- Stakeholder engagement
- Standards of behaviour

A key part of our organisational processes is our approach to corporate planning, performance management and annual reporting. The performance management framework ensures the effective delivery of the organisation's goals and to ensure the whole organisation is aligned around the same aims and objectives. This is achieved through a linkage and rolling down from strategic objectives to individual objectives.

Managing employees

Consumer Focus aims to attract, develop, and retain our employees to ensure a competent and committed workforce that delivers a fair deal for consumers.

We will develop a culture of personal development within Consumer Focus to ensure a diverse, professional and effective workforce. We will develop our approach to diversity to ensure we reflect the diversity of consumers across the UK and are able to draw on a wide range of skills, interest and abilities.

Managing resources and delivering continuous improvement

We continue to build on our excellent start in ensuring that Consumer Focus is as efficient and effective as possible. In response to the Government’s service transformation agenda we will continue to monitor opportunities to share services and work more efficiently with other bodies.

Within this agenda we will also be maintaining, monitoring and reporting on risk as a key element within our internal audit processes.

Reporting and monitoring

We use a balanced scorecard approach to measuring and reporting on our work. We break the scope of our work into four distinct categories, measuring our success against a number of strategic objectives within each of those categories, as shown below.

We will use key performance indicators (KPIs) to track our progress against each objective for the year in question. The KPIs will be kept under review to ensure they truly reflect the key drivers of our work and provide appropriate information with which to manage the organisation.

Balanced scorecard

<p>Customers and Stakeholders <i>“Achieving positive outcomes for consumers”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deliver the programmes set out in the Annual Plan • To provide high quality customer service to support vulnerable people with complaints about energy and postal services, via the Extra Help Unit • To be seen by stakeholders as being influential and to have an impact 	<p>Learning and Development <i>“Sustaining our ability to change and improve”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure the continuous development of employee skills and expertise • To promote high staff performance by ensuring that staff feel valued and motivated
<p>Process and Innovation <i>“Having efficient operations and internal processes”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deliver high priority and effective corporate services activities 	<p>Financial Management <i>“Achieving results in an efficient manner that minimises costs”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide realistic financial forecasts and monitor expenditure against budget, using property efficiently and effectively • To ensure value for money and promote cost savings