

## Consumer Focus Board

Paper 4.5

**Title:** Proposed changes to the GB Forward Work Programme 2009/10

**Purpose:** For decision

**Date of meeting:** 7 May 2009

**Responsible officer:** Philip Cullum

**Prepared by:** Philip Cullum

**Attachments:** 0

**Decision:** **The Board APPROVED the proposed changes in the forward work programme 2009/10 (Paper 4.5) whilst recognising that a degree of flexibility was going to be necessary.**

### 1 Overview

- 1.1 The Forward Work Programme was developed in the summer of 2008, following extensive consultation, and it continues to provide the basis for our work. Paper 4.4 sets out our performance against the Forward Work Programme in the first six months of our existence. However, inevitably circumstances have changed since the Programme was agreed, most notably the severe economic downturn, and the Board has already decided that this necessitates some change of focus, with some new projects being created at the expense of some which were in the original Programme. A variety of external events have also meant that some projects are not longer pertinent or viable, while other areas of new or potential detriment have emerged.
- 1.2 The list of proposed changes to GB and England projects is set out in the Table below. Any changes to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland projects will be agreed with the relevant Board and reported to the main Board.
- 1.3 The new activities identified here are both those proposed to begin in phases 2 or 3 and also those which started in phase 1. Relevant Boards/Chairs are already aware of this latter group and they are listed in the annex to paper 4.4 but are captured here for completeness, so that all Programme changes can be seen together.

FWP no.	Activity	Phase	Proposed change	Reason for change
NEW	Consumer conditions survey	1-3	Additional major activity in Open	Board decision to reflect changed circumstances and

			Markets programme	take opportunity presented by BERR
NEW	Financial services think tank	2-3	Additional major activity in Open Markets programme	Board decision to reflect changed circumstances
NEW	Business as usual changes to Post Office network	1-3	Additional activity in Community Services programme	
NEW	Debt and disconnection	1-3	Additional major activity in the Customer Service programme	This results from intelligence gathered through the Extra Help Unit
NEW	Stakeholder event	2	Additional activity led by the Communications team	The Chair has asked us to deliver this stakeholder event, which is likely to be a breakfast meeting with a 'question time' format in central London in June
NEW	Financial services think tank	2-3	Additional major activity in Open Markets programme	Board decision to reflect changed circumstances
NEW	Food policy	1-3	Additional activity in Sustainability programme	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 already responded to BEUC and FSA consultations on nutrition profiling.
1.2	Develop and promote our understanding of the needs of vulnerable consumers, including	3	Downgrade – conduct continuing literature review and with regard to the Act a small	We have already commissioned a paper on the advice needs of vulnerable consumers. Work on the DDA could be a major undertaking

	<p>learning from work that has followed the Disability Discrimination Act Part 3 on duties in relation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. This could potentially lead to support for, or sponsorship of, a Publicly Available Specification from the British Standards Institute. This could facilitate the implementation of the Consumer Protection Regulations, which transposed the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive into UK law</p>		<p>seminar in phase 3. Then consider for further work in next FWP.</p>	<p>and may duplicate work done by others – we therefore propose using a seminar to help us scope any future work. We also need to explore further with BSI any benefits of a PAS.</p>
3.5	<p>Conduct a limited, initial exploration of the consumer experience of receiving unwanted addressed (direct) and unaddressed (door-to-door) mail. To draw connections with consumers' experience of other direct marketing channels, and touch on the experience and performance of consumer opt-out preference services and related self-regulatory codes.</p>	3	<p>Drop – consider for next FWP</p>	<p>This should be interesting but is not time sensitive. It should be considered for the next Forward Work Programme.</p>
4.4	<p>Develop a plan to take forward the National Consumer Council's</p>	3	<p>Upgrade – undertake research this year</p>	<p>There are indications that the impact of the recession may result in greater promotion of</p>

	(NCC) programme of mystery shopping in order to address the performance of supermarkets on key sustainability issues, such as health and resource use.		on healthy eating, rather than just plan it	unhealthy foods, making this work timely. We currently have the resource available to push on with this as we have a secondee from the Food Standards Agency until September.
5.3	Define and implement a rolling campaign for accessible services, 'Access for All', using a range of techniques including: lobbying of government and industry; raising awareness of alternative products and services via direct relationships with the media and other stakeholders; and web-based advocacy.	2-3	Drop and consider for next FWP	We are of course doing work on disadvantaged consumers as part of projects across the organisation, but this concerted and ongoing campaign would be a major undertaking which we do not have the resources to run given the new commitments to work on financial services and the consumer conditions survey.
5.11	Undertake a market study of the take-up and use of legal expenses insurance, to determine and promote its usefulness for consumers who do not have access to legal aid, but who want to pursue a complaint through the courts. The Financial Ombudsman Service has undertaken some research in this area on which this would build.	3	Scoping only – then consider for inclusion in next FWP	This would be a substantial piece of work, and given the financial services and consumer conditions projects (see below) we propose that the bulk of any work is done in the next FWP
7.2	Promote the need for, and inform, the development of a robust approach to	2-3	Downgrade – focus on scoping in this FWP	This topic has moved on and there is much less of a clear opening for us to make a valuable contribution on

	measuring customer experience and satisfaction with public services			detailed metrics. But there may be an opportunity for a different approach to this project, e.g. an experiment around a public services version of <a href="http://getsatisfaction.com">http://getsatisfaction.com</a> , perhaps in conjunction with CF Labs and a local authority.
7.3	Organise a cross-sectoral event to assess progress on citizens' redress in public services since the publication of work and recommendations by the London School of Economics and National Audit Office in early 2005, including lessons from the different devolved contexts on redress	3	Drop	The LSE is conducting a further project on this, covering England, so the project as originally envisaged is no longer timely. We have been invited to sit on the project's expert panel.

## 2 Action for the Board

2.1 To agree the proposed changes.