

Title: CEO Report
Date of meeting: 11 November 2011
Author: Mike O'Connor
Attachments: Directorate Reports

It has been a comparatively short period (five weeks) since the last Board meeting. We have been busy across the organisation as the attached report shows.

Although no final decisions have been taken on our future, planning for transition is becoming a larger part of our life. We have met with Which? on a number of occasions to brief them about our work in the light of the proposed partnership with Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland with Which? taking on the work we have outlined for the Regulated Industries Unit and on which we published our prospectus in October.

We also circulated our response to the BIS Consultation on the future landscape which set out ten tests which would need to be met if new arrangements were to benefit consumers. This has been well received as a constructive contribution to a difficult debate.

Energy issues have dominated across Consumer Focus but I would like to draw Board Members' attention to the work we produced over the last month on public services such as the Public Services Satisfaction Index (page 11) and the Care Leavers Report (page 11). These reports are part of our growing Consumer Empowerment work and there will be more outputs in November. This and related work on public services in Scotland and Wales tends not to attract as much media attention but is nonetheless important in terms of how people live their daily lives. I was heartened to see the nomination of the HealthyLiving Award for a major UK award for improving public health. (page 17). The work on Park Homes led by CFW and CFI is gathering pace.

After the record media coverage in September we are looking forward to continuing to receive public recognition for the quality and the relevance of our work. As ever I am grateful to colleagues for continuing to deliver for consumers in difficult times.

CONSUMER FOCUS AND CONSUMER FOCUS POST POLICY ADVOCACY

Director of External Relations: Adam Scorer

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

1.1 Consumer Focus-wide Successes in the Media

- 1.1.1 We have doubled our media profile over the last year. September saw our highest ever amount of media coverage, with more than triple the average number of monthly mentions. We had 1,392 media hits, outstripping our previous monthly press record of 1,063 media mentions and interviews in July. Our exceptional coverage was largely due to articles and interviews around our travel money super-complaint and continued strong coverage on energy issues including price rises, complaints figures and doorstep sales. Higher than average postal media coverage also boosted our figures with issues such as access to current accounts through post offices, Royal Mail performance and proposals to leave mail with neighbours. Our response to financial reforms, complaints and wider issues were also well-covered in the media in this period.
- 1.1.2 In the last six months (April – September) we generated 4,287 media hits, more than double the 2,066 mentions and interviews in the same period last year. Compared to our previous record in July, national broadcast and regional media have seen big increases. We had just under 700 pieces of regional print and broadcast coverage, a 56% increase over our coverage in July. There was also a noticeable rise in online coverage also while we saw a slightly lower, but still substantial, amount of national newspaper hits. In September we had an average 32.5 hits in national broadcast per week – over 4.5 per day (including *Welsh and Scottish national broadcast*)
- 1.1.3 In both Scotland and Wales, energy was a major media issue. In advance of the first of the Scottish energy summits with the Secretary of State for Scotland, Consumer Focus Scotland called for energy companies to do more to lower bills ahead of winter and reiterated the UK-wide messages to consumers around switching and saving. In Wales, a range of interviews were given around the UK government's energy summit as well as on energy price rises and heating oil.
- 1.1.4 The Healthyliving Award programme was in a large number of local papers across Scotland and the programme also received a nomination for improving public health at the national food industry awards ceremony in London. Two substantial reports were launched – the digital report called for 'social' broadband tariffs and pay as you go broadband packages for poorer households in Scotland. The Life After Work report called for more help and support for over-50s to plan for retirement. Both reports received widespread media coverage.

1.2 Energy

Energy Summit

- 1.2.1 Mike O'Connor and Adam Scorer attended the Energy Summit chaired by Secretary of State for Energy, Chris Huhne and Prime Minister, David Cameron. At the summit energy companies, charities and consumer groups "signed up" to the Check, Switch and Insulate to Save. The campaign is aimed to inform consumers on how to get the

best deal on their energy supply. Consumer Focus played a leading role in the weeks leading up to the summit to produce a workable set of agreed measures and messages.

- 1.2.2 We managed to get the suppliers to agree to several concessions including providing a tariff check to customers calling up about CERT measures, many of the sites have also agreed to provide additional support
- 1.2.3 While the summit did not produce any significant movement on issues other than coordinated winter messages, it may lead to subsequent quarterly meetings to take forward some of the issues raised. This may include what can be done by the energy companies to regain a degree of trust from consumers in the market as a whole. There is no detail on these follow-up actions at present.
- 1.2.4 Mike O'Connor and Adam Scorer met with the shadow Energy Secretary (Caroline Flint MP) on 1st November.

Energy Bill and Green Deal

- 1.2.5 Consumer Focus briefed MP's on the Report Stage of the Energy Bill resulting in four of our key issues being tabled as amendments to the Bill. The Minister committed to addressing issues raised in 3 of the policy areas in secondary legislation. We are currently working with the Prime Minister's Office and others to promote the fourth issue - data matching - to assist the delivery of support for vulnerable consumers.
- 1.2.6 We presented an outline of the Green Deal to frontline fuel poverty advisers in the East Midlands and North-West. Advisers are now sharing case studies with us to help illustrate issues that we are raising in the run-up to the upcoming Green Deal consultations. We also spoke at the BRE annual conference on monitoring and enforcement of standards.

Smart metering

In home displays

- 1.2.7 Consumer Focus presented at the European Smart Metering Conference in Amsterdam on 4 October to promote our research and recommendations on usability of in home displays and inclusivity by design. This is the main 'smart' event of the year with more than 5,000 attendees including all the major appliance manufacturers. The aim is to help ensure that all customers, including those with special needs, are able to use technology.

Consumer issues

- 1.2.8 Mike O'Connor, Audrey Gallacher and Zoe McLeod met with the Energy Minister Charles Hendry MP on October 24th to discuss consumer issues on smart metering. He committed to write to the suppliers to understand why some customers are not getting accurate bills, and to consider areas of dispute within the Installation Code of Practice. This was a constructive hour-long meeting which reinforced the need to focus the smarter metering programme on the potential benefits to consumers.

Costs and benefits

- 1.2.9 Christine Farnish gave evidence to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on 31 October about the NAO's progress report on the rollout of smart metering. We were

able to raise fundamental issues about the extent to which the programme is focused in achieving consumer benefits and raised key concerns on the impact of smart metering on low income and vulnerable consumers. At the hearing, DECC publically committed to a distributional analysis in Spring 2011 to look **at the impact on** different social groups.

Data access/privacy and security

- 1.2.10 EDF, E.ON and British Gas have signed up to our privacy commitments, agreeing not to collect real-time energy information or appliance level information. We will follow up with the other suppliers over the coming weeks. We presented at the Kema Privacy and Security conference in Amsterdam on October 3rd to push for our proposals on data access and use ahead of the finalisation of new EU recommendations.

Demand response

- 1.2.11 Consumer Focus gave a presentation on demand response at the Citizen's Energy Forum. This was to press for new protections and amendments to the latest Energy Efficiency Directive and changes to the draft guidance to European Regulators.

Interoperability

- 1.2.12 We responded to Ofgem's consultation on smart metering interoperability and were the sole consumer representative at their related workshop. The signs are that we are starting to gain some significant traction on the key issues that we have raised.

Monitoring

- 1.2.13 We published our second report on domestic and non-domestic calls to Consumer Direct on smart metering. This is to help provide early warning of any customer concerns. These were shared with the Energy Minister, DECC officials and Ofgem. Our next action will be to identify any supplier-specific reports that are appropriate given the customers issues raised..

Remote disconnection, switching and load limiting

- 1.2.14 Our advocacy helped to bring about new licence condition changes which came into effect on October 1st. They include measures to ensure that suppliers take action where they become aware that a pre payment meter is no longer safe or practicable for customers. The changes included an amendment to require suppliers to provide information to customers relating to the operation of PPMs.

Engagement

- 1.2.15 We continue our ongoing engagement with the DECC and Ofgem sponsored groups including the Implementation Coordination Group (ICG), Consumer Rollout and Engagement Group (CERG), Consumer Advisory Group, Overview and Design Group (ODAG) and associated sub groups and workshops. This is in addition to wider stakeholder engagement.

Smart metering Installation Code of Practice (SMICOP)

- 1.2.16 DECC's proposed new licence conditions on the supplier installation code of practice specifically name Consumer Focus as the consumer organisation to be consulted as part of development of the Code and any future review and revisions. The next step is

to push for us to raise compliance issues.

1.2.17 We have achieved a number of changes to the Code following ongoing discussions over the last year. These include:

- **Improved training for installers** - all installers will have to receive formal accreditation and registration with a National Skills Academy for smart metering installers and will be trained to provide energy efficiency guidance, know about data privacy legislation, and should be able to offer guidance tailored to the needs of priority services customers.
- **Greater coordination** - where suppliers are fitting smart meters in sheltered housing, they will seek approval from the warden. Where suppliers are planning to install a significant number of smart meters in one area, they will notify local bodies, such as local authorities, housing associations, advice agencies, community-based groups and voluntary organisations.
- **Energy efficiency information** - Information about smart metering and energy efficiency will be made available to customers via different media (eg. leaflet, website etc), in formats that are appropriate for consumers with special needs.
- **Help-line** - suppliers will provide a non-premium helpline number post-installation – this is a step in the right direction but there is more to be done.
- **In home display** - the IHD will be installed, set up and working properly when the installer leaves the property – not left in the box as we had feared. It will also have to be put in a convenient position for consumers that have ‘special needs’, eg. mobility problems.
- **Data access and use** - suppliers will provide (or make customers aware) of their privacy charter.

Microgeneration

1.2.18 We appeared on regional radio and Watchdog to promote consumer protection schemes in the microgeneration sector. We have now completed a survey of microgeneration consumers with 2,600 responses achieved through a mix of social networking and mail-outs from energy companies. We are currently producing a report on consumer attitudes and experience of microgeneration in partnership with EST. Our efforts have been welcomed by DECC and there is enthusiasm for this work to be published in the public domain.

Fuel Poverty

1.2.19 Consumer Focus spoke at an Inside Government conference on the need for public expenditure on fuel poverty programmes, arguing that reliance on fuel company schemes alone was inadequate given the scale of the problem.

1.2.20 We have met with John Hills on a number of occasions and attended the launch of the Interim report of the Hills fuel poverty review. The report proposes to revise the definition of fuel poverty and will inform the next stage of the review. The proposed new definition incorporates a number of our recommendations. John Hills presented and discussed main findings of the report at the Fuel Poverty Methodology Group of which Consumer Focus is a member.

1.2.21 We submitted our research report on fuel expenditure and fuel poverty to the Hills review team. The report identifies household types that have low consumption relative to need and thus suffer cold homes, and other household types that have high expenditure relative to income suffer fuel debt or forego other essential needs.

Off gas

- 1.2.22 We recently published our research on housing and household characteristics of off-gas consumers, much of the findings are quoted in the recently launched OFT market study.

Sales and Marketing

- 1.2.23 Following Consumer Focus' call in the End of the Road report, ScottishPower and Npower have agreed to end cold calling doorstep sales, while British Gas announced that its moratorium was now permanent. This leaves E.ON as the only Big Six supplier which has not agreed to end this practice. We continue to apply pressure to E.on to commit to this change.

Billing and Tariffs

- 1.2.24 Our response to Ofgem's proposals for the reform of the retail energy market review In October generated widespread media interest, including some 120 broadcast hits, articles in the Sun, Times, Independent, Daily Mail and Scotsman, Western Mail and Daily Record. Mike O'Connor, Adam Scorer and Audrey Gallacher met Tim Yeo MP, Chair of the Energy and Climate Change Select Committee, to discuss reform of the energy retail market and energy tariff complexity.
- 1.2.25 We wrote to suppliers and requested further information about their refund policy for customers who have wrongly been charged termination fees following a price rise. We have issued a Time of Use challenge to suppliers requesting improvements to information provided to customers We are also writing to suppliers still levying an Independent Gas Transporter surcharge with request for explanation as to the cost reflectivity.
- 1.2.26 Following the RMR, the ERA has developed a new Key Facts document for energy tariffs. ERA has responded positively to and incorporated all our suggestions, which include documents having an individual price quote. Suppliers will now add a signpost to their bills and send out letters to consumers before Christmas.
- 1.2.27 Consumer Focus brokered a productive meeting between suppliers switching sites, BIS, and the Cabinet Office about the Midata No Bill switch initiative ahead of the Consumer Energy Summit. Suppliers have committed to releasing data directly to customers early next year.

Support for vulnerable consumers

- 1.2.28 Following a referral by Consumer Focus, Ofgem has announced its decision on British Gas debt repayment rates. They have discontinued their investigation on administrative priority grounds but wrote a strongly worded letter to British Gas and the rest of industry about the need to take customers' circumstances into account. This work, and the outcomes for consumers highlights how the Energy team and the EHU work together to achieve real changes to the way that a big supplier treats its customers. We are making real changes to the way that industry interacts with its customers. There is no doubting the impact that high debt repayment agreements have on some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society – our work has fundamentally changed the way that the industry interacts with consumers, and we should all be proud of that.

Debt and disconnection

- 1.2.29 Consumer Focus participated in bi-yearly meetings with Ofgem and each of the Big Six about their debt and disconnection policies. A number of the suppliers have now implemented many of the improvements suggested by Ofgem and ourselves. Consumer Focus has also managed to convince Ofgem and Citizens Advice to participate in the Plug the Debt campaign and commissioned omnibus research in support of this.
- 1.2.30 We published the new report 'On the Record', which is about the use of credit referencing by the energy industry and a new briefing on Warm Home Discount, which is aimed at advisers and consumers. We chaired a session at the Credit Today 2nd Annual Utilities Conference on the Best practice on debt management for vulnerable customers, and attended the Citizens Advice Annual Conference to promote the information/advice services.

Advice and Redress

- 1.2.31 We have published the 'Making the Connection' report which explores the current and future advice, complaint handling and redress needs of energy consumers. The report has been shared widely with DECC, BIS, Ofgem and other stakeholders. We may seek to host a roundtable about the issues raised by the report and in relation to further work on complaint handling standards across other sectors which is due to be published in November. We have published the 2009/10 Guaranteed Standards of Performance for Electricity Distribution report as well as the latest quarterly energy supplier performance league table.
- 1.2.32 On Monday 31 October Ofgem announced that it was fining a £2million fine on npower for its failure to handle customer complaints properly. In our response we argued that the way a company deals with complaints is the best indicator of how much they value their customers. We also used the opportunity to push for greater scope and profile for the Ombudsman to include issues around Smart Meters and the Green Deal. We also advised that its public profile must be enhanced greatly if it is to fulfil its role for energy consumers.

European and International Advocacy – Energy

- 1.2.33 We met with DECC to exchange thoughts on progress within European Parliament and Council, this gave an indication of where we are likely to agree/disagree and formed the basis for working relationships going forward. We met with WWF - worked through areas of common agreement and we participated in a conference organised by the European social housing federation where we identified possible areas for collaboration.
- 1.2.34 Together with BEUC secretariat representatives, we met with secretariat of ACER (new Agency for cooperation between energy regulators) to input into draft indicators ACER will use its new retail market monitoring role to identify useful consumer indicators and build better working relationships.
- 1.2.35 Consumer Focus responded to the consultation on draft guidance on switching and billing and inputted into BEUC position. We also participated in a conference examining the next policy steps for the future of the energy market.
- 1.2.36 On 26 October, we held a consumer event in the margins of the Citizens Energy Forum. The event was attended by Minister Charles Hendry and representatives of

consumer organisations and advisors, industry, regulators, ministries and other associations from GB and Europe. The event served to: develop our relations with key contacts, to drive forward our efforts to improve the voice of consumers in the Citizens Energy Forum, and to highlight policies which are of greatest concern to consumers

- 1.2.37 We hosted a breakfast meeting for the Commission and national consumer organisations prior to Citizens Energy Forum. Represented Consumer Focus within European Citizens Energy Forum. We also participated in panel discussions on energy demand management at Eurelectic (European electricity industry association) conference on 21 October.
- 1.2.38 We also attended a Chatham House meeting with Commissioner Oettinger and key players in the energy market. The meeting was hosted by Charles Hendry MP.

1.3 Post and Post Offices

Mail Market Transformation

- 1.3.1 Ofcom has begun a consultation process on their final proposals for the price control of the majority of Royal Mail products. The thrust is to de-regulate all but standard Second Class letters, leaving no safety net for larger or Second Class packets. There has been strong media coverage on this proposal with comments in the Sun and Daily Mirror, and interviews on BBC Radio 2's Jeremy Vine Show and Radio 4's You and Yours programme. Consumer Focus has procured the services of economic expertise to inform and assist with our response to these proposals.
- 1.3.2 Research into consumer behavioural change as a result of these proposals is being planned along with a industry workshop including Ofcom, BIS, consumer groups, bulk mailers, business representatives and postal operators to be held on 15th November. The consultation closes on 5th January 2012.

Royal Mail modernisation plans

- 1.3.3 We visited the Birmingham Mail centre, Aston and West Bromwich delivery offices and completed a variety of delivery walks with postmen to see, first-hand, how automated sorting and revisions to delivery routes are impacting upon mail deliveries. Intelligence suggests that changes brought about by modernisation being implemented are having a negative impact on the consumer experience and that lessons may not have been learned from earlier transitions. First quarter Q of S figures point to ongoing poor performance and anecdotal evidence shows problems persisting (eg in Crewe and Guildford) as well as new areas (eg Watford). We have written to Ofcom to ensure that it remains high on their compliance agenda and are conducting research to provide further evidence.
- 1.3.4 Royal Mail gave us a helpful presentation on their modernisation process and the outputs to date. As a result we have refined our section 24 request on the detail of the roll out of the plan and submitted this to Royal Mail. Analysis of past activity and performance will be undertaken once the core data is received.

Universal Postal Services

- 1.3.5 Consumer Focus has now completed further analysis of USO data from our joint research with Postcomm. This report provided further analysis of the main findings by key demographic groups including age, social grade, rurality and business size. This gave a valuable insight into the communication patterns and needs of vulnerable

consumers, particularly around the impact of e-substitution and potential changes to the universal postal service.

- 1.3.6 We have written to Royal Mail and Ofcom to request greater Q of S transparency in the light of their press releases on the 2010-11 Annual results and the Quarter1 figures for 2011-12.
- 1.3.7 We met with Royal Mail to discuss its Delivery to Neighbours trial proposals and made a number of suggestions in respect of their communications strategy, KPIs and other monitoring/assessing proposals. They have included some of our suggestions in their formal submission. The trial will commence on 28 November for 3 months and we are planning consumer research both before and after Christmas to measure consumer response.

Monitoring and influencing post office network change

- 1.3.8 We have now completed our mystery shopping on the availability of parcel services through PO Locals. The findings demonstrate that 50% of branches are not offering the full range of universal mail products. We have passed the results to Post Office Limited, Ed Davey and Ofcom.
- 1.3.9 Consumer Focus has secured early influence on proposed governance arrangements, to ensure the any mutual body should act in the public benefit and that steps are taken to require primacy of financial viability over profit redistribution. We have also provided evidence to the Bridgwater Council scrutiny committee and we are undertaking ongoing Code of Practice activities, including intervention to restore post office services in Bridgwater and Somerset, where the main town centre branch has been closed for three weeks.
- 1.3.10 We secured early influence on Government's proposals to mutualise the Post Office with commitments that the mutual structure will restrict operator interests from gaining majority control. We have also secured a Government commitment that profits should only be redistributed to subpostmasters once operating and modernisation costs have been met.
- 1.3.11 Information packs on Consumer Focus' Code of Practice functions have been issued to all MPs, and a briefing event was held for Plaid Cymru. We held meetings with stakeholders to inform the forthcoming area pilots for PO Locals including the Rural Shops Alliance, Post Office Ltd, and Devon County Council.
- 1.3.12 Consumer Focus met with the British Bankers Association to discuss post office counter access and we are working with them to develop a briefing for members on increasing awareness of post office account access. We also presentations to POAG on our 'front office' and post office banking research.

Post Office Current Accounts

- 1.3.13 We recently issued our Post Office Current Account report with follow-up stakeholder and media activity. Our research was referenced in Ed Davey's conference speech. Following continued pressure from Consumer Focus, RBS is now allowing its customers to have access to current accounts over the post office counter.

Post and Post Offices – Northern Ireland

- 1.3.14 Consumer Focus met with the Minister for the Department of Agricultural and Rural Development, and Chris Lyttle MLA to discuss the post office development fund and the future shape of the post office network. We also met with POL representatives to present our Consumer Friendly report and to discuss access, service and environment issues at Northern Ireland post offices prior to publication later in December. We also issued FOI requests to all NI Executive Departments to determine their use of the post office network.
- 1.3.15 Presentations were made to Councillors at Antrim, Omagh, Down, Armagh and Newtownabbey Council and we met with the National Federation of Subpostmasters to discuss the front office for government report, and the future roll out of PO Local. Mike Granville and NI POL representatives also attended Consumer Focus Post Board Meeting for further discussion.

Universal Service obligation (USO) in Northern Ireland

- 1.3.16 Consumer Focus issued an information request to Royal Mail on performance of mail services provided within Northern Ireland under the USO. This response and the current roll-out of Royal Mail's modernisation plan were discussed at length by Consumer Focus Post Board Members at the September meeting. Board Members agreed to postpone this research until 2012/13.
- 1.3.17 We attended Ofcom NI Communication Market Review seminar to develop further insight into the growing digital Communication Market against postal communication. The Chairman and Head of Postal Policy (NI) met with Senior Officials in Ofcom NI to discuss their consultation on the proposals for the future framework for economic regulation.

1.4 Financial Services

Financial Service Regulation

- 1.4.1 Consumer Focus responded to a Joint Committee on the Financial Services Bill consultation document, we have also submitted our Blueprint for Reform and FCA approach. Christine Farnish was invited to give oral evidence on this and feedback from the committee was very favourable. Christine Farnish wrote to the Joint Committee with further points following the evidence session, we are currently awaiting their response. Christine Farnish has also given evidence to the Treasury Select Committee on the setting up of the Financial Conduct Authority.

Consumer empowerment

- 1.4.2 The Financial Omnibus Service (FOS) complaint data has now been analysed with good media response. This should keep the pressure up for greater transparency in financial service reporting. We attended the FOS Consumer and User Forum. Consumer Focus continues to put pressure on industry and regulator to ensure consumers are treated fairly in banking services.

Banking

- 1.4.3 Consumer Focus responded to the Independent Commission on Banking final report, keeping the focus on the need for effective competition and Christine Farnish provided oral evidence on this topic to the Treasury Select Committee in November. Our work on Switching was referenced by John Vickers in the final report. We met with Barclays

and exchanged correspondence with FSA on the issue of packaged bank accounts. We have been active in the media with mentions in the Financial Times article on transfers to NEST. We have met with the FSA to discuss the Payment Services Directive and its impact on retail banking. Christine Farnish gave evidence to the Treasury Select Committee.

Tackling the poverty premium

- 1.4.4 Our synthesis research on poverty premium 'Making Ends Meet' is now on our website. The main purpose of the report is a resource for our advocacy around the experiences and choices made by low-income consumers. We have met with LINK to discuss our concerns on interlink access to cash for Basic Bank Account customers and have written to the BBA to ask them to use their influence to persuade RBS and Lloyds to reverse their decision and impose a moratorium on further change in this area pending research into the impact on the LINK system.

1.5 Consumer Empowerment Programme

Care leavers report

- 1.5.1 On 2 November, Consumer Focus published its report on young care leavers and their access to public services. The report was published at the end of National Careleavers Week. It was an innovative piece of work where a panel of careleavers interviewed other careleavers on their experiences and expectations of public services. The targets for the work are service providers in local authorities and officials across government. We will be working in partnership with NCAS, our partners in the research project, to raise the issues in the report and will update board on its impact in the January CEO report.

Public Services Satisfaction Index (PSSI)

- 1.5.2 Our PSSI consumer research, including the full Ipsos-Mori report for Consumer Focus, has now been published. The findings have been edited to form individual briefings, which have formed the basis of targeted briefings for the nine government departments with lead responsibility for specific groups of services such as health, local government, courts and education. The briefings are also being shared with a targeted range of stakeholders.
- 1.5.3 The project rated service users' satisfaction across twenty three public services, including some local government services. The resultant scores allow comparisons to be made between a wide range of services, their relative strengths and weaknesses and where improvements need to be made. The Consumer Focus methodology provides a template that government departments can easily repeat. We are calling for each department to adopt the approach to regularly assess user satisfaction and drive service improvement. A similar methodology is used in Canada to monitor and compare consumer satisfaction and improve service quality.

Opening up public data

- 1.5.4 Members of the Consumer Empowerment Programme and CF Labs convened a workshop on October 21st with stakeholders who have an interest in opening up rail performance data. The purpose of the workshop was identify the various efforts being made by different bodies to open up and access this data, to share experiences of the resistance they have met and to better understand the ways in which this data might be used to benefit passengers. This builds on the work undertaken by CF Labs over

the last year. There was an expectation from some attendees that Network Rail may announce an initiative to open up data in the coming weeks. If this does not materialise we will consider ways in which we can support the work of parties who are active in this area to create some momentum to this.

Mydata

- 1.5.5 Mydata has been rebranded as Midata. BIS have responded to consumer concerns raised in a joint CF & Which? document by convening a group to give proper consideration to the issues we have raised and develop proposals on ways to deal with these for the initiative's Steering Board. Ongoing consumer and governance issues will now be considered through the Midata Interoperability Board. This should mean the consumer interest now receives due consideration as Midata develops. Deliberative research on consumer appetite for Midata initiative that CF is contributing commences in November.

Collective switching

- 1.5.6 Consumer Focus discussed potential application of the concept in telecommunication markets with Ofcom. We have held further meeting with Cabinet Office officials and participated in small workshop where representative from Choice, Australia discussed their experiences in looking to facilitate collective mortgage switching.

Online public services

- 1.5.7 We discussed our forthcoming Consumer Manifesto for online public services and aired the accompanying video at a meeting of the Local Government Delivery Council on 20 October. This presented the opportunity to share an agenda item with Mike Bracken, Executive Director for Digital, Cabinet Office, who was outlining the government's current plans for putting the public first in delivering digital public services. Our work was well received at the meeting, with several members asking if they could show the video and Manifesto at CEO and/or Board meetings. The LGDC is a forum that focuses on driving forward local service transformation in England, with its membership consisting of senior local government officers, officials from key central government departments and national local government bodies, such as the LGA.

1.6 Communications/digital

Access to Broadband

- 1.6.1 Consumer Focus has done further collaborative work with the Broadband Stakeholders Group on the implementation of its code of practise on traffic management; we also provided feedback on consumer issues associated with the development of managed services. We undertook survey to test consumer experiences of broadband services under the Consumers International project. "Taking broadband providers to account", and attended the Parliament and Internet conference - 13 October.

UK Copyright

- 1.6.2 Consumer Focus wrote to Ofcom and DCMS on its decision to impose a £20 fee on subscribers appealing the Digital Economy Act. We also submitted a joint response with Citizens Advice to the European Commission on the draft cost SI. We have finalised our legal opinion on Standard of Evidence in relation to online consumer infringement of copyright. We have also finalised our legal opinion on website blocking, freedom of expression and the public/private internet intermediaries.

- 1.6.3 Following ongoing debates, the Court of Appeal recently granted BT/TalkTalk permission to appeal part of the judicial review ruling. Consumer Focus attended a meeting with John Alty, chief executive of the IPO on copyright reform and Saskia Walzel spoke on website blocking at the Westminster e-Forum event. Mike O'Conner also attended the Vaizey working group forum in September on website blocking.

EU copyright

- 1.6.4 We met the new international director of IPO in October and arranged follow-up meetings with officials for November. We participated in the IPO trade and development expert advisory group in October, and circulated briefing on minimum standards for collecting societies to influence forthcoming EC proposal on collective rights management.

Data protection/privacy

- 1.6.5 On 14 October Consumer Focus attended the DCMS stakeholder meeting on the implementation of the cookie consent under the e-privacy directive.

Consumer law and redress

- 1.6.6 Consumer Focus met with Which? to discuss the strategy on EU consumer law and redress agenda. We participated in BEUC consumer contracts experts meeting to agree advocacy strategy particularly on the "optional instrument" for contract law. We met with BIS regarding the forthcoming UK/EU ADR/ODR proposals and liaised with BIS about the UK consumer law reform. Consumer Focus participated in BEUC Digital experts meeting to input into its advocacy strategy on digital telecommunications.
- 1.6.7 The Consumer Rights Directive was formally adopted on 10 October with proposals for an optional Common European Sales Law published on 11 October. Consumer Focus participated in the Ministry of Justice stakeholder meeting on the European Sales Law on 18 October and we met with the BIS Consumer Rights Bill team on the 20th.

CONSUMER FOCUS FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Director Finance and Operations: Graham Clark

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

1.1 Finance

- Mid year forecast produced
- Monthly management accounting and forecast process carried out to committed deadlines
- Engagement and agreement reached with HMRC over the long term outstanding Corporation Tax liability inherited from NCC, this should now be paid in November and at or below the provision level.

1.2 HR

- Commenced consultation in relation to the transfer process of the Scottish projects including a series of workshops over three days.
- Commenced consultation in relation to the closure process of the NSMC.
- Recruitment of 13 new individuals into the organisation with a further 2 due to start during November. We now have 5 outstanding vacancies that we are in the process of filling.
- Conducted our annual equality and diversity review and carried out analysis which demonstrated we have exceeded the targets set for us to complete by 2012 as part of the Single Equality Scheme.
- Carried out an Equal Pay review.
- Conducted a review and analysis into absence across the organisation the results of which were positive.
- Conducted a review and analysis into exit interviews across the organisation
- Completed appraisal process including moderation.
- Developed, negotiated and introduced a training recovery agreement to recover costs when courses are protracted or expensive should an employee fail to complete.
- Reviewed, revised, consulted and implemented policy changes in relation to eyesight testing, paternity leave, bike mileage allowance and grievance.

1.3 IT

- 99.96% System availability during operational hours in September
- Completed IT service requests Sep (517)
- Internal IT audit completed with substantial assurance
- Servers patched and security updates applied

1.4 Legal, Procurement & Property

- Remaining Legacy properties.
 - Successfully negotiated a rent uplift at Unit 1, Bristol

- NSMC Closure
 - First plan to Board sub committee.
 - Paper on IPR value and possible transfer being finalised.
 - HR and Comms plans and Risk Register being prepared by 4 Nov
- Procurement
 - Interpretation and training given on transparency rules.
 - Transparency page up and rated a success by internal and external customers.
 - Actively have 1:2:1s with staff to speed up procurement of existing and new projects.

2 CHALLENGES RUNNING UP TO NEXT BOARD MEETING

2.1 Finance

- Open Accounts system software version to be brought up to date so that helpdesk support can be efficiently maintained (requiring support from IT)
- Head of Finance resigned and will leave organisation on 9th December 2011
- The new Clear Line of Sight (CLOS) process is causing problems, the deadline communicated for next year allows 10 days for production of completed statutory accounts despite discussions at various CLOS events to warn of difficulties. This has been challenged by various BIS partner organisations and is being reviewed, we hope for a more sensible timetable soon.

2.2 HR

- Review organisation structure in line with annual budgets.
- Integrate and up skill new employee
- Consider and manage the possibility of a move to stage two of the reduction programme
- Preparation, management and attendance at Employment Tribunal in relation to unfair dismissal and race discrimination
- Review and revision of HR Policies in line with the October legislative changes
- Management of the HR elements of the Scottish transfers
- Management of the HR elements of the NSMC closure
- Staff retention and integration of new employees
- Develop framework in anticipation of due diligence in relation to TUPEs

2.3 IT

- 167 pending service requests
- Assisting Finance to update software version for Open Accounts software
- Implementing revised call routing algorithms for EHU
- Implementing call recording solution for EHU

2.4 Legal, Procurement & Property

- Remaining Legacy properties.

- Negotiations are underway to surrender the lease back to the landlord. This has only a slim chance of success but is being aggressively pursued.
- NSMC Closure
 - Not part of this exercise but impacting on it is the NSMC's proposed design freeze on the proposed structure and creation of a CIC by late November.
- Procurement
 - New BIS guidance expected.

CONSUMER FOCUS SCOTLAND

Senior Director: Marieke Dwarshuis

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

1.1 Change/impact achieved

Policy

- The Scottish Government published *A Sustainable Future for Legal Aid* on 5th October. It sets out how the Scottish Government will reform and continue to deliver legal aid in the context of the Scottish spending review. It sets out the Scottish Government's intention to take forward several of the recommendations made by the Civil Justice Advisory Group (CJAG), established by Consumer Focus Scotland under the chairmanship of the Right Honourable Lord Coulsfield. The report also refers to 'the important work currently being taken forward by Consumer Focus Scotland, working closely with the Government, with a view to creating "legally empowered citizens", which it says the Government will reflect and build on.
- The response of the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Enterprise and Tourism Committee to the UK government on the final report of the Independent Commission on Banking was published on 11 October. The committee made a number of points which we raised in our recent written evidence, including the need for greater competition and diversity in the market in Scotland; the need to remove barriers to entry and support the growth of co-operatives, mutuals, credit unions and post office banking; the need to restore public trust in banks; and the needs of vulnerable consumers.

Healthyliving award

- The Healthyliving Award scheme was nominated for a major UK Award. 22 awards were made in the period 17 September – 31 October 2011: 4 first term awards, 16 renewals and 2 healthyliving award plus. (Total number of current awards stands at 675; servicing 216,000 customers).

Extra Help Unit

- Work levels are steady and the Unit dealt with 440 cases (352 complaints & 88 enquires). 'Ask the Adviser' Service dealt with 46 contacts from advice agencies. Answers on the Knowledge Base were viewed 12,500 times and 49 questions were answered.

Consumer Network

- Membership of the Consumer Network has now reached 500 and we have at least 5 members in each of the 32 local authority areas.

Communications

- We have continued to be the Scottish media's 'go to' organisation on a number of high profile energy developments resulting in widespread media coverage for Consumer Focus Scotland across broadcast and press platforms. We have also launched a Consumer Focus Scotland Twitter account and we are already using

this new platform to communicate, engage and raise our profile more widely with key audiences.

1.2 Significant activity

Policy

- CFS submitted a consultation responses and provided evidence to:
 - The Ministry of Justice consultation on reforms proposed in the Public Bodies Bill on 10 October.
 - The Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee as part of its scrutiny of the Scottish Government's ***Draft Budget 2012-13 and Spending Review 2011 on 21 October.***
 - To the Scottish Government's Draft National Strategy for Housing for Older People on 5 October.
 - The Health and Sport Committee on the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2012-13 and Spending Review 2011 on 18 October.
 - The Scottish Government's Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 consultation on Secondary Legislation on 20 October.
 - To the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's examination of the draft Scottish Government budget, concentrating on fuel poverty and energy efficiency (oral evidence).
 - To the Local Government and Regeneration Committee of the Scottish Parliament, again on the draft budget (oral evidence).

- Annie McGovern attended the Post Office Advisory Group in London to present findings from CFS's report examining the post office as a front office for consumer access to local government services.

- On water, we are drawing up a Consumer Engagement Strategy, working on the Homeserve project with the Consumer Network and putting together a project plan to evaluate Scottish Water's consultation processes.

- A total of 11 Energy Best Deal Scotland events were delivered in the current reporting period.

- Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) have advised us that they have received funding from the energy suppliers, via Citizens Advice, to roll out the Energy Best Deal (England and Wales) programme in Scotland in the current workplan year. This model delivers training directly to consumers. We have also been advised that Citizens Advice and CAS have submitted a joint bid to deliver the English/Welsh version of Energy Best Deal across the UK in 2012/13, using Warm Homes Discount funding. We are in discussion with CAS on the implications of their apparent decision to introduce a different version of Energy Best Deal in Scotland.

- We met with the Director of Customer Service and Head of Public Affairs (Scotland) from Scottish and Southern Energy to discuss their new proposals for building trust with customers. Among other things, SSE is going to establish a customer forum and we supplied them with a range of information on the Water Customer Forum.

- Trisha McAuley and Andrew Faulk attended the Secretary of State for Scotland's Energy Summit. There was a clear focus on holding the companies to account but, more importantly, discussing and finding potential solutions and ways forward, particularly in relation to specifically Scottish issues. We inputted into the agenda

for the meeting and sent (at his request) the Secretary of State a comprehensive briefing ahead of the Summit.

Water Customer Forum

- Following a competitive recruitment process, Peter Peacock CBE has been appointed as the Chair of the Customer Forum. Peter is a former member of the Scottish Parliament having been elected to the first Parliament in 1999 and retiring from the Parliament in 2011. He served as a Minister in the Scottish Executive from 1999 – 2006.

Health Rights Information Scotland

- Work on developing a Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities continues. The draft Charter is currently out for consultation with external stakeholders.

healthyliving award

- The healthyliving award's annual award presentation ceremony, took place on the 3rd October at the Scottish Police College, Tulliallan. The event was hosted by Stephen Jardine, Journalist and Broadcaster and included speeches from the Scottish Government. More than 220 people attended the event, where 169 awards were presented.

Community Food and Health (Scotland)

- 52 out of 157 applications were successful in this year's CFHS small grant scheme, investing in locally-informed activity addressing food poverty, ranging from an after-school food club in Elgin to loyalty vouchers for community cafes across Edinburgh.

Scottish Accessible Information Forum

- Staff and forum members are facilitating at 3 national seminars for the 'Inclusive Communication in Scotland' project to promote the Scottish Government's new 'Principles of Inclusive Communication' publication. These seminars are aimed at public sector Chief Executives and senior staff and will run in October and November.

Communications

- In conjunction with Consumer Focus Wales we developed a new campaign around helping people not on the gas grid to bring down their costs of heating oil this winter. Our 'Top Tips for Oil' campaign featured a Consumer Focus Scotland 'top tips' poster that was distributed to 193 libraries via councils in rural areas. Our local news releases were also picked up by local media in those areas.
- We continued to raise our profile as the new consumer advocacy body on water by adding a 'water' policy page to our website and by writing to Committee Convenors (jointly with SPSO) to highlight our new functions and have informed all stakeholders via an email from Douglas Sinclair.

Consumer Network

- Our 'Shelf Watch Campaign' research project with volunteers for the National Farmers Union Scotland has been ongoing (until Feb 2012). It is likely the Shelf Watch campaign will evolve over the coming months to look at other supermarket shelf related issues.

Transition work

- Chris Thirkettle has started as Transition Manager on 3rd October, and project plans for the transfer of HRIS, CFHS and SAIF have been drawn up. Scottish Government has indicated new host organisations for each of these projects and target transfer date for each is 31 March 2012.
- Early transfer of the extra help Unit remains on the agenda, and BIS appear keen for this to happen. A paper on the options, and the risks associated with these, will be presented to the next Board meeting.

2 CHALLENGES RUNNING UP TO NEXT BOARD MEETING

- The research element of our legal capability work will require to be commissioned early in November.
- We will commission research into Royal Mail's parcel delivery practices in Scotland.
- There are a number of significant consultations expected before the end of the year, covering a range of aspects of our legal services work.
- The Scottish Government Energy Summit is planned for 2 November, chaired by John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, and Alex Neil, Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment. We have been working on the agenda with Scottish Government officials.
- Alex Neil MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, would like to meet with the Water Customer Forum. This could provide an ideal opportunity to publicly launch the Customer Forum and highlight the new role that it will play in the Strategic review of [Water] Charges 2015-2020.
- Training and development of 4 new EHU Caseworkers starting on 31st October 2011.
- Potential for increase in EHU priority cases over winter period.
- We are continuing to explore the possibility of hosting parliamentary events at the Scottish Parliament and Dover House and are working with representatives from both to determine appropriate timings.
- Driving activity on part of Scottish Government to ensure the intended transfer of 3 Scottish Government projects by 31 March 2012 can be delivered.
- Clarifying intention on part of BIS in relation to early transfer of EHU, and obtaining detail of legal opinion (from BIS) on implications of delivery of CF statutory duty by another body.
- Delivery of business as usual by projects, EHU and policy team, in light of impending transfers or continuing lack of clarity about the future.



CONSUMER FOCUS WALES

Senior Director: Maria Battle

1. CONSUMER LANDSCAPE

- 1.1. We have been actively engaged in producing the Consumer Focus (CF) response to the consumer landscape proposal and the RIU paper. We have produced briefings for and attended meetings with AMs and MPs from all political parties, all of whom have taken a keen interest in what the UK Government's proposals might mean for consumers in Wales. The issue has been raised on two occasions in the Senedd by Assembly Members who are concerned to know what discussions have taken place between the Welsh Government and the UK Government regarding the proposals.
- 1.2. On 14 September 2011 a debate was held in Westminster Hall on the impact of the proposals for Welsh Consumers. It was led by the Liberal Democrat MP Mark Williams who was supported by Jonathan Evans MP, Conservative and former Consumer Minister, Labour MPs Nia Griffiths and Susan Elan Jones, Lib Dem MP Roger Williams and Plaid Cymru MP Jonathan Edwards. All made submissions to the Minister Ed Davey on the importance of the broad holistic work that Consumer Focus Wales (CFW) undertakes for Welsh Consumers.
- 1.3. Maria Battle took part in the TSI Consumer Landscape review event in Llandrindod Wells on 21 September. The event was an opportunity for the Trading Standards community in Wales to hear about, and discuss, the consultation exercise and potential future landscape for consumer empowerment and protection in Wales. Presentations were made by CFW, CitA Cymru and the OFT.
- 1.4. On the 18 October the Welsh Affairs Select Committee undertook a short inquiry into the proposed changes and their implications for Wales. Viv Sugar, Maria Battle and Liz Withers from CFW gave evidence to the Committee, along with Gillian Guy and Helene Hayes from Citizens Advice and Louise Hanson of Which? and the Minister, Ed Davey.
- 1.5. CFW has since provided further evidence and correction to the Committee and their report is expected shortly. A full, uncorrected, version of the transcript can be found here - <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmwelaf/uc1558-i/uc155801.htm>
- 1.6. The Report stage of the Public Bodies Bill took place on 25 October 2011 and two amendments were tabled, one by Alun Michael MP and one by Mark Williams MP and Jonathan Edwards MP to amend the Bill to enable a new consumer body to be created for Wales. These were not debated.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING (29th Sept – 31st Oct)

2. IMPACT

2.1. Shoppers' Rights Cards

2.1.1. Due to the enthusiasm of Trading Standards officers for our Shoppers Rights Cards, we've had to order a second print run to meet demand – particularly enthusiastic have been Monmouthshire, Merthyr and Llanelli. A number of AMs had their photographs taken with a giant shoppers' rights card and Maria Battle to inform their local campaigns.

2.2. Care Leavers

2.2.1. Ken Skates AM has won the first private members legislation ballot of the fourth Welsh Assembly and will be bringing forward a draft Continuity from Care into Adult Life Bill shortly. He has written to say that CFWs' report 'From Care to Where?' published earlier this year – which looked at the financial issues faced by young people leaving care – has helped to shape the proposals.

2.3. Food Safety

2.3.1. The FSA's response to our recommendations went to their UK Board on 7 September 2011, with almost all of our recommendations being accepted and details of action provided. Both the Chair and the CEO commended the work of CFW for holding them to account and making a difference across the UK.

2.3.2. Viv Sugar, Maria Battle and Liz Withers met with the First Minister on 5 October to discuss our recommendations to the Welsh Government. During this meeting, the First Minister reiterated the Welsh Government's commitment to prioritising food safety in Wales and discussed progress on the Food law review that he commissioned as a result of our work.

3. SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITY

3.1. Energy

3.1.1. Over half term, CFW mailed out copies of our poster 'Stay Warm This Winter' featuring tips from young people for young people to combat fuel poverty. All 2000 schools in Wales received copies of the posters, and a covering letter linking to the report and video which we produced – with Children in Wales – last year. The posters were officially launched on Thursday 3 November.

3.1.2. In partnership with NEA Cymru, on 5 October 2011 we organised the first official meeting (for this Assembly term) of the Cross Party Group on Fuel Poverty in the National Assembly for Wales. North Wales AM Mark Isherwood presided over the best attended meeting yet - highlighting the growing awareness of the problem in recent months. The meeting featured a presentation and discussion of the impact of the UK Government's Energy Bill on fuel poor consumers in Wales.

3.1.3. CFW will soon be publishing our report on energy switching in Wales which summarises the findings of Wales-wide consumer research commissioned during the summer.

3.1.4. Lindsey Kearton has also spoken at a number of events across Wales in recent weeks. This included addressing the NEA Cymru Fuel Poverty Forums in North and South Wales, highlighting the Fuel Poverty Coalition Cymru's latest calls for action to the Welsh Government to support severe fuel poor households in Wales ahead of the coming winter. She also gave a speech on 'How to combat financial exclusion in rural areas' at a large regional conference in West Wales on tackling child poverty.

- 3.1.5. We launched our 'Top Tips' campaign in mid September for heating oil consumers. The campaign – in partnership with EST and supported by Age Cymru, Care&Repair Cymru, and the Welsh Government – is designed to encourage households that rely on heating oil to get the best possible deal. It is part of CFWs' work to tackle fuel poverty, which now affects one in every four homes in Wales and over two-fifths of people living in off-gas properties. The campaign has been covered in 'Gwlad' - the Welsh Government's rural affairs magazine; and approx 2000 'top tips tea towels' have been distributed via partner organisations working in rural areas.
- 3.1.6. The Quarterly Energy Report was published on the 21 October featuring news about the UK energy summit and the OFT report on off gas, information on switching and insulation and tips for oil heating consumers and children in fuel poverty.

3.2. Post Offices

- 3.2.1. Rebecca Thomas, Maria Battle and CF colleagues met with Plaid Cymru MPs in Westminster to give them a presentation on our work on post offices, including casework examples in Wales and a summary of our upcoming work. Jonathan Edwards and Hywel Francis attended.
- 3.2.2. We have been monitoring the letters sent to elected representatives notifying them when a Local post office opens in their area. We feel the tone of the letter puts the onus on the customer for success of the post office. We have spoken with Janet Finch Saunders AM's office, Assembly Member for Aberconwy and agreed to work together to seek feedback from constituents on how they feel about this, as a Local has just opened in her area, following a long term temporary closure.
- 3.2.3. The Locals research in Wales has now been completed and the final report is being written. The report shows some similarities and some differences with the situation in England, notably that there were no reports of Locals capping any benefit or pension withdrawals. The report will be published in December 2011.
- 3.2.4. Research is ongoing into local authority services that are delivered through the post office. We are still awaiting responses from over half of the local authorities and are in the process of chasing these up. It is likely this work will be finalised in February or March 2012.
- 3.2.5. Rebecca Thomas attended a Post Office Diversification workshop in October 2011. It was hosted by the Welsh Government and attended by subpostmasters, POL representatives and ourselves to analyse the proposed criteria for the new fund. The new criteria includes a requirement for the applicant to consult with the local community on what the money will be used for. We have called for this change and are pleased to see it included and that it met with strong support from those attending the workshop. We also made suggestions for stronger business support and guidance to the Welsh Government which it is considering
- 3.2.6. Rebecca Thomas met with the Federation of Subpostmasters in October 2011 to discuss our work and the subpostmaster view of Locals; what they felt were the positive and negative aspects of the model. They support the model and have successfully negotiated solutions with POL for some of the teething problems CF research has highlighted.

3.3. Accessibility for people with sensory impairments in post offices

3.3.1. We are working closely with Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and RNIB to develop questionnaires for their volunteers who will be undertaking a mystery shopping exercise in 150 post offices in Wales. The project will involve visits to a range of post office settings from mobile outreaches; to sub postmasters; to newer Locals and Main branches. This will provide us with an opportunity to identify how well post office services are meeting the needs of people with sensory impairments. This a particularly good opportunity ahead of the Welsh Government's new Post Office Diversification Fund announcement to influence how funding is provided to post offices wishing to make disability accessibility adaptation's in future and also to inform how the new Locals pilots are meeting the needs of these consumers.

3.4. Royal Mail

3.4.1. Rebecca Thomas and Liz Withers met with Royal Mail to discuss quality of service targets, the modernisation programme and how Royal Mail was communicating with its customers. The Operations Manager explained some of the specific local problems that had affected their quarterly targets and we have agreed we will provide more updates on modernisation in specific postcode areas that affect Wales on our Wales Mail Report website.

3.4.2. Royal Mail recently announced it will be trialling the leaving of parcels with a neighbour. We had initial concerns over this proposal as it did not allow people the choice of whether or not they wanted mail and parcels left with a neighbour. The scheme now includes an opt-out option for customers. One of the areas chosen for the trial is the SA postcode area. It does not cover the whole area, but includes Ammanford, Gorseinon, Pontardawe, Llandeilo and Neath. We will be seeking feedback from people in these areas and are currently discussing with CF colleagues on how best to gather this intelligence.

3.5. Park homes

3.5.1. This is a joint project with CFI and CFW. All local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales have now received questionnaires asking about their views and experiences of park home sites in their local area. In England, these questionnaires are being passed to district councils as they have responsibility for licensing the sites.

3.5.2. There have been a number of energy related issues identified. These include problems with low voltage on site meaning that electricity goes off, problems with access to electricity meters and, because residents do not have a direct relationship with energy suppliers (because they pay for their electricity to the site owner), the lack of transparency in billing and inability to engage with the market or access deals. We are also looking at issues around access to energy efficiency measures for residents living on these parks, as large numbers are likely to be in fuel poverty.

3.5.3. We met with OFGEM on 17 October to discuss some of the regulatory specific issues around the type of contracts on these sites (business rates) and to share our evidence.

3.5.4. A call for evidence has also gone out to elected representatives in Wales, England and Scotland to identify residents who are willing to be interviewed as part of the next stage of our research, and to ensure that elected representatives are aware of our work and have an opportunity to tell us about good practise in their local area. We

have also welcomed a new member of the policy team to CFW, Lowri Jackson, Policy Manager who will be working on this project.

3.6. Food Safety

3.6.1. On 27 September Liz Withers attended the FSA's first consultative group meeting on the UK review of official controls in food safety. This provided a useful opportunity to feed in the consumer angle to the group and provide a link between the work being undertaken in Wales and at UK level.

3.6.2. Liz Withers also attended the FSA's UK Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme steering group, again ensuring that the consumer perspective is fed into the scheme.

3.6.3. We have undertaken research with consumers in Wales on their views on the FHRS in Wales in order to feed into the development of the Food Hygiene Information Bill (Wales) which will be consulted on later this year. The research showed that our media work in Wales over the past few months has played a significant role in making consumers more aware of the Scheme and that consumers overwhelmingly support having more information about the reasons behind poor ratings.

3.6.4. On 19 October, Maria Battle and Liz Withers met with Tim Smith, CEO of the FSA and Steve Wearne (Wales Director) to discuss a range of food safety issues and agreed that it is important that FSA continue to engage with Consumer Focus Wales and CF Labs to support them to make their FHRS website more accessible to consumers.

3.7. CF Labs

3.7.1. CF Labs have delivered the updates to the CF website's 'Energy Help Finder' service. This is the most used and visited part of our site and Labs have been working with the Energy team in London on a series of improvements to the service.

3.7.2. CF Labs also completed an interactive website hosting the Empowered Consumers team's report on research into what consumers want from online public services and related materials. This is expected to be launched in January.

3.7.3. MoneySavingsExpert will be putting Right to Manage tool live on their website. This has been a joint project with CFI and CF Labs.

3.8. Consumer Focus Investigations

3.8.1. CFI's biggest piece of work over the last few months and going forward into Christmas and the New Year is the joint project with CFW examining the issues faced by residents who live in park homes. CFI is responsible for gathering evidence for England and Scotland and CFW is dealing with evidence concerning sites in Wales.

3.8.2. **England** – The team has now met with both the Consumer Council for Water in Wales (CCW) and Ofgem. Discussions with CCW included water meters, leakage, bill information and resale provisions. CFI has recently conducted a call to evidence to all Westminster MPs which has received a very positive response, with many MPs being happy to share their constituent's stories. Over the coming weeks CFI will be meeting with Nicky Morgan MP and Mark Hunter MP.

3.8.3. Gemma and Lisa attended the Park Homes road-show in Poole. The event was supported by Towergate Insurance and included many key stakeholders and Annette

Brook MP. It was a good opportunity to meet with other residents and share stories of their experiences. Our call for evidence among residents was circulated so that once the research company reaches the resident interview phase; they will have a bigger pool of resident's stories.

- 3.8.4. The team is also examining the effectiveness of the Residential Property Tribunal Service (RPTS) which has taken over jurisdiction for park home disputes as of May 2011. The team has established a good working relationship with the Chair of the RPTS and is looking at whether further work can be done to assess the user experience of the new service.
- 3.8.5. **Scotland** – CFI have made contact with officials at the Scottish government to make them aware of our work and to establish how we can most effectively influence any work that is currently underway or which will be taking place in the future. Officials have already informed CFI that the work we are carrying out will be a potentially valuable source of information, particularly when the Scottish Government starts examining the site licensing regime.
- 3.8.6. **Referrals** – Since mid-September 2011 the team has received 5 referrals on a variety of different topics. One referral which the team took forward was an examination of the way in which motor vehicle adaptations are carried out under the Motability scheme. The individual referrer was concerned that the problems she had encountered following a botched job might be indicative of wider reaching issues with the adaptation industry. At present CFIs' research has not supported this view but we will keep the situation under review.
- 3.8.7. **Estate agents consultation** – CFI is leading the CF response on the CPR/BPR Guidance for Estate Agents consultation which is due to be returned by 9 December 2011.
- 3.8.8. **Parking** – CFI has continued to work in conjunction with Citizens Advice and TSI in relation to the Protection of Freedoms Bill, in particular in relation to the development of a truly independent appeals service for the private parking industry.
- 3.8.9. **Right to Manage Tool (RTM)** – The RTM tool continues to receive a high number of 'hits' on the CF website. A joint article between CFI and MoneySavingExpert concerning different aspects of leasehold/freehold property issues is soon to be published on the MSE website. This article will also contain a widget to link readers to the CF RTM tool.
- 3.8.10. **Freedom of Information and Food Hygiene Inspection Reports** – CFI has made a number of s.24 requests to local authorities for the release of food hygiene inspection reports which relate to sub-standard schools. The Information Commissioner has also returned a decision in relation to Pembrokeshire County Council confirming that requests for food hygiene inspection reports should be considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 rather than the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. CFI will also assist with the preparation of a response to the ICO consultation on the proposed extension of its publication scheme.

4. FUTURE CHALLENGES

- 4.1. Managing workplanning output and morale in anticipation of the UK Government's decision about the future of the Consumer landscape

NATIONAL SOCIAL MARKETING CENTRE

Director: John Bromley

1 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING

1.1 Business Planning

1.1.2 Following the decision taken at the September Board to close the NSMC we have begun developing a closure plan to ensure the efficient and effective run down of NSMC activities before/or at the end of the present financial year.

1.1.3 The closure plan is being developed this includes the following elements

- Human Resources planning
- Communication/stakeholder strategy
- Valuation of IPR/assets of the NSMC
- Programme planning to ensure current workloads are completed satisfactorily
- Forward planning/evaluation of a possible new company that could take forward the work of the NSMC

1.2 New Projects

1.2.1 The NSMC held a joint work shop with the Chinese Center for Disease Control (CCDC) in Cambodia in September. The CCDC has subsequently asked the NSMC to develop a number of other workshops in China.

1.2.2 The NSMC has made a joint bid with Euro Health Net for a £3 million health project. We expect to hear the results of the first round in November.

1.2.3 The NSMC were awarded a contract by DFID to develop a number of training workshops in Vietnam. The work begins in mid November.

1.2.4 Health Scotland have advised the NSMC that they would like to continue working with us over the next financial year and to be involved in capacity building within the Scottish Health Boards

1.2.5 The NSMC will be holding a social marketing workshop in Helsinki for the Finnish Lottery Board and Finnish Public Health Organisation.