

Consumer Focus Board

Paper 6

Title: Annual Plan 2011/12

Purpose: For decision

Date of meeting: 30 March 2011

Responsible officer: Adam Scorer

Prepared by: Adam Scorer

Attachments: Annex A - GB Annual Plan 2011/12
Annex B - Summary of stakeholder responses
Annex C - Rationale for decisions on projects
Annex D - Citizens Advice response to consultation document

1 Overview

- 1.1 A draft Annual Plan for the GB work programme 2011/12 is submitted for Board approval.
- 1.2 The projects which underpin the GB Annual Plan have been agreed with the Board sub group and the rationale for those decisions are attached at Annex C.
- 1.3 The process for finalising projects in Scotland and Wales will complete in April.
- 1.4 We are required to publish an Annual Plan before the start of the financial year. The timetable of national work planning will require a phased publication of the work programme for Consumer Focus as a whole.

2 Action for the Board

- 2.1 The Board is asked to AGREE the GB programme Annual Plan document for 2011/12.

3 The key issues

- 3.1 The CEAR Act requires Consumer Focus to publish an Annual Plan which outlines the areas of work, objectives and appropriate resource allocation. The relevant provisions of the Act are provided below.

(1) The Council must before each financial year publish a document (the "forward work programme") containing—

- (a) a statement of any priorities of the Council for the year in relation to designated consumers generally or any description of designated consumers;

- (b) a general description of the main activities (including any projects) which it plans to undertake during the year in relation to designated consumers generally or any description of designated consumers;
 - (c) a statement of any other priorities of the Council for the year;
 - (d) a general description of any other projects which it plans to undertake during the year (other than those comprising routine activities in the exercise of its functions).
- (2) The description of a project under subsection (1)(b) or (d) must include the objectives of the project.
- (3) The forward work programme for any year must also include—
- (a) an estimate of the overall expenditure which the Council expects to incur during the year in the exercise of its functions, and
 - (b) an estimate of the expenditure (if any) which the Council expects to incur during the year in the exercise of its functions in relation to designated consumers.
- (4) An estimate under subsection (3)(b) must identify the expenditure (if any) which the Council expects to incur in the exercise of its functions in relation to each of the following—
- (a) consumers in relation to gas conveyed through pipes or electricity conveyed by distribution systems or transmission systems;
 - (b) consumers in relation to relevant postal services;
 - (c) consumers who are designated consumers by virtue of an order under section 4(2)(a).
- (5) Before publishing the forward work programme for any year, the Council must publish a notice—
- (a) containing a draft of the forward work programme, and
 - (b) specifying the period within which representations about the proposals contained in it may be made, and must consider any representations which are duly made and not withdrawn.
- (6) The notice under subsection (5) must be published by the Council in such manner as it considers appropriate for the purpose of bringing the matters contained in the notice to the attention of persons likely to have an interest in them.
- (7) The Council must send a copy of any notice given by it under subsection (5) to—
- a) the Secretary of State,
 - (b) the Scottish Ministers,
 - (c) the Welsh Ministers,
 - (d) the Office of Fair Trading, and
 - (e) any regulatory body which the Council considers might have an interest in the content of the notice.

- 3.2 This year Consumer Focus needs to agree an Annual Plan which takes account of:
- 3.2.1 reduced funding on non-energy and post areas and therefore a greater regard to projects which are demonstrable priorities;
 - 3.2.2 the prospect of abolition and transfer of functions in 2013;
 - 3.2.3 the intention that functions should be taken over by Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland and the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland;
- 3.3 In developing the work proposals contained within the draft Annual Plan we have paid attention to:
- 3.3.1 those areas of work where Consumer Focus is either the pre-eminent voice or where we judge our intervention will significantly increase the welfare of consumer;
 - 3.3.2 those areas of work where we are able to build on existing expertise, evidence and research materials;
 - 3.3.3 those areas of work in which are most likely to empower consumer action in markets and services;
 - 3.3.4 the views of stakeholders who submitted responses to our consultation documents, including the views of Citizens Advice, Government and market participants in our designated markets;
 - 3.3.5 the opportunities to work closely and in partnership with Citizens Advice (projects marked in red in Annex C).

4 Proposal

- 4.1 That the Board should agree the draft Annual Plan.
- 4.2 That the Board should consider the timetable for publication of all the work programmes across Consumer Focus.

5 Next steps

- 5.1 The Annual Plan will be amended where necessary, published on the Consumer Focus website and distributed to stakeholders.
- 5.2 A breakdown of project objectives, milestones and resources will be provided to the May Board meeting.