

infocus

CONSUMER FOCUS SCOTLAND'S NEWSLETTER

Summer 2010

Biggest ever postal survey finds high customer satisfaction

The most comprehensive independent survey ever conducted into the views and experiences of postal service users in Scotland has revealed that mail services and post offices are meeting their needs on many different levels. *Scottish Postal Services: Consumer Survey 2010*, was conducted with a representative sample of adults across Scotland. The results highlight the continuing strong interest in, and loyalty to, both

mail services and post offices that consumers have.

Over three-quarters of consumers rated the overall reliability of the mail delivery service as very or quite good. Four in five consumers visit a post office at least once a month, while a similar number believe that the post office plays an important role in their local community.

However, the survey also identifies areas for improvement. Those sending and receiving mail report experiencing a range of different problems, with 37% having had mail addressed to them delivered to another house, 34% delays in receiving mail and 24% having problems getting mail after it could not be delivered. Foremost among the concerns highlighted by consumers of post office services are long queues, with over 70% saying

that reduced queuing times would improve their experience of visiting a post office.

Marieke Dwarshuis, Director of Consumer Focus Scotland, says that while the overall survey results are clearly positive, there remains room for improvement: 'Problems with lost, damaged or delayed mail, or mail which is delivered to the wrong address, can cause considerable inconvenience or distress, while queuing time remains a frustration for many post office users.'

Ian Mckay, Director of Scottish Affairs at Royal Mail Group, said: 'Royal Mail welcomes this report and it again underlines the importance of postal services in Scotland and the value that many people, particularly in rural areas, place on the services that our businesses provide.'



Consistency needed in trading standards

The report of a major review of trading standards services in Scotland highlights a complete lack of consistency in the services offered to consumers and businesses.

Up to Standard?: a review of trading standards services in Scotland argues that consumers and businesses should be able to access a consistent service to protect and enforce their rights irrespective of where they live, work or operate. It proposes that trading standards services should be required to deliver a set of key outcomes, underpinned by performance indicators to measure their effectiveness across Scotland's 32 councils.

Commenting on the report, Douglas Sinclair, Consumer Focus Scotland's Chair, who also chaired the review group, said: 'The public in Scotland naturally look to their local council to ensure they are protected and if trading standards is further reduced the enforcement of consumer protection legislation will be put at risk. Our message to Scottish Government and local authorities is that they need to work together to develop a consistent system of consumer protection by focusing on the areas where consumers are at greatest risk.'

Ron Gainsford, Chief Executive of the Trading Standards Institute, added: 'The report may not show consumer detriment from the lack of consistency in trading standards delivery in Scotland but consumers and businesses alike will soon start feeling the impact if Scottish local government does not start investing in the service's future now.'

Up to Standard?: a review of trading standards services in Scotland and two other complementary reports can be downloaded from www.consumerfocus-scotland.org.uk



Better parcel deliveries

More direct communication between parcel operators and consumers and increased use of alternative delivery points, are key to improving consumers' experience of parcel deliveries, Consumer Focus Scotland argues in a new report.

Parcel Deliveries: Current Practice and Possible Solutions examines existing parcel delivery practices, the problems consumers face receiving parcels and best practice in innovative parcel delivery solutions from the UK and beyond. It recommends that retailers provide clearer information on the cost of parcel delivery at the point of sale and also calls for consumers to be offered a choice of how to receive their parcel and which operator to use. This is especially important for consumers in the Highlands and Islands and other remote and rural areas, where prices are often higher.

Speaking about Consumer Focus Scotland's vision for the development of convenient and reliable parcel delivery services, Douglas White, post and communications policy specialist, said: 'This report points the way to more consumer-friendly parcel delivery services, with effective communication and more choice of delivery points central to improving the consumer experience. We will now raise our recommendations with parcel operators and retailers to explore how the innovative delivery solutions we have set out can be developed.'

Area-based approach key to energy efficiency success

A new Consumer Focus Scotland report, *Energising Communities: Learning from Area-Based Energy Efficiency Projects in Scotland*, highlights the key role that area-based projects can play in improving consumer take-up of energy efficiency services. The report sets out the context in which current energy efficiency activity in Scotland is taking place and concludes that area-based approaches can deliver important social and environmental benefits, especially in areas with higher concentrations of people living in fuel poverty.

Andrew Faulk, energy policy specialist at Consumer Focus Scotland, said:

'Government, the energy industry and consumers all need to raise their game on energy efficiency. Area-based projects allow for services to be delivered through organisations already trusted at a local level and to be integrated with all appropriate support mechanisms and resources.'



Older people eating well

The next 30 years will see a substantial increase in the number of older people living in Scottish communities. By 2031 the number of people aged over 50 is projected to rise by 28% and the number aged over 75 by 75%. Older people living in the community are one vulnerable group highlighted in the national food policy *Recipe for Success* and in the *Healthy Eating Active Living Action Plan*.

Earlier this year Consumer Focus Scotland and Community Food and Health Scotland (CFHS) hosted a round-table meeting to focus on food services for older people in the community. It brought together different agencies to discuss older people's access to affordable healthy food of their choice and barriers that currently exist. This was followed up by a networking meeting for Community Food Initiatives that are working to support older people in the community. Current good practice was reviewed and possible areas for development discussed. The next step will be to map the services available in each local authority area. Private provision will be studied by a series of case studies and by using focus groups. An Advisory Group will be set up to oversee this work.

If you would like further details about it please contact Mary Lawton mary.lawton@consumerfocus.org.uk or Sue Rawcliffe sue.rawcliffe@consumerfocus.org.uk.



Celebrating healthy living award success

130 caterers were presented with their certificates at an award ceremony on 9th June. Caterers, colleagues and stakeholders gathered at the Beardmore Conference Centre in Clydebank to celebrate the success of our latest award winners. The award winners came from all over Scotland - with many receiving a renewal certificate following the successful completion of their first two-year term as award holders.

A wide range of establishments was represented at the ceremony. These included everything from a mobile soup kitchen, a juice bar and a farmhouse guest house to large workplace restaurants, hospitals, colleges and universities. The awards were presented by Yvonne Traynor, Acting Project Manager for the healthy living award, who said: 'The level of commitment shown by these award winners in producing healthy food is exemplary and they have set an industry benchmark which all organisations should strive to attain.'

'They are helping their customers to make informed choices by making healthier options widely available and are playing their part in improving the diet of people across Scotland.'

For a full list of award holding establishments see the Award Winners section of our website at www.healthylivingaward.co.uk

Energy companies quizzed on vulnerable customers

Consumer Focus Scotland has hosted a series of meetings with senior representatives of the 'big six' energy companies over the last few months. The meetings are intended to help build relationships with suppliers, enabling them to find out more about the work that our Extra Help Unit (EHU) does with vulnerable energy customers while also providing important opportunities for us to highlight consumer concerns.

Those who have met with the EHU include Ian Marchant, Chief Executive of Scottish and Southern Energy (pictured meeting EHU staff), Phil Bentley, Chief Executive of British Gas, Martin Lawrence, Managing Director of Energy Sourcing and Customer Supply at EDF Energy, Jim MacDonald, E.ON's Commercial Director, Julie Jaglowski, Customer Services Director, and Chris Johnson, Managing Director of Retail Operations, both of Npower, and Raymond Jack, Director of Energy Retail at ScottishPower.

The main points discussed at these meetings included how the suppliers identify their customers as vulnerable, their approach with vulnerable consumers in debt, defining vulnerability, their social spend such as trust fund and social tariffs, approaches to micro businesses in debt or who have been disconnected, their approach to meter tampering cases, debt collection processes and sharing best practice. The meetings have also enabled the EHU to gather best practice from each of the suppliers on supporting vulnerable customers to share with others in the industry.



A TASTE FOR LEARNING

Over the years Community Food and Health (Scotland) (CFHS) has been collecting knowledge and learning from local communities that are addressing health inequalities through food and health activities. These range from practical resources, evaluations such as the final report from the Early Years Self-evaluation Collaborative and the recently commissioned study into economic evidence, to mapping of third sector food and health initiatives with minority ethnic communities in Scotland. CFHS has recently brought together all of this learning in one place, which is available to download from our website at www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk Bill Gray, CFHS National Officer said: 'In the coming years it will be more important than ever that initiatives are informed by the best available evidence, and much of that evidence and practical experience rests within communities themselves.'



COMMUNITY CAFES

Community Food and Health (Scotland) and the healthyliving award have been working with Edinburgh Food and Health Training Hub to deliver a capacity building programme to community cafes in Edinburgh. The programme, which included training sessions on the healthyliving award, basic nutrition, food hygiene, catering management and marketing, attracted staff and volunteers from 12 community cafes across the city. Initial feedback from participants has been very positive, and included comments about the difference that taking part in the programme is making to the cafes. A report about the impact of the programme will be available shortly. Please contact us on 0141 226 5261, www.healthylivingaward.co.uk or www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk if you know of any community cafes that would like to know more about our work.

ACCESSIBLE SOCIAL NETWORKING

You may just have come to terms with making your printed information accessible. Now you need to think about other media. What about social network sites? Technology is a rapidly changing world with each change likely to bring new accessibility issues. Work is ongoing to make sure these issues are addressed but the challenges of social networks



and accessibility remain. Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF) have written a brief paper to raise awareness of the accessibility issues around social networking sites. You can read it online or download it from our website at www.saifscotland.org.uk

NEW MEDICINES IN SCOTLAND

Health Rights Information Scotland (HRIS) have worked with the Scottish Government Health Directorates to produce information that explains the process medicines go through before NHS staff in Scotland can routinely prescribe them. Several organisations are involved in approving a medicine for use and the role of each is described in the new factsheet for the benefit of patients and the public. The factsheet is available as a pdf to download from the HRIS website at www.hris.org.uk

CFHS, HRIS, SAIF and healthyliving Award are Scottish Government funded projects managed by Consumer Focus Scotland.

Consumer food labels guide launched

The Scottish Government and Food Standards Agency in Scotland has launched a new consumer guide on country of origin information on food labels. The guide, which was tested by Consumer Focus Scotland's volunteer Consumer Network, gives consumers an easy to read background on the current rules on country of origin labelling and highlights foods where specific labelling rules apply. Welcoming the guide, Douglas Sinclair, Chair of Consumer Focus Scotland, said: 'We have long been concerned about the consumer confusion with country of origin labelling and this guide will provide much needed clarity for the public.' The guide can be downloaded at www.food.gov.uk



Accreditation scheme for property managers

Consumer Focus Scotland welcomed the launch, in May, of the Scottish Government's long awaited consultation on standards for an accreditation scheme for property managers. Speaking at the launch of the consultation Douglas Sinclair, Chair of Consumer Focus Scotland, said: 'We have campaigned for the establishment of an accreditation scheme for property managers for a number of years and welcome today's launch as a significant step forward. We believe that the accreditation scheme will assist owners in making informed choices about the

property managers that they use, driving up standards in the industry. The new independent redress process will also benefit owners who remain dissatisfied with the service they receive.'



Customer satisfaction tool welcomed

Consumer Focus Scotland welcomed the launch of a pioneering new national standard to improve the way local authorities evaluate the performance of the services they deliver. The Customer Satisfaction Measurement Tool, developed by the Improvement Service, allows councils to target resources more effectively and efficiently, and will provide consistent, robust and comparable data covering the whole of Scotland.

Chair Douglas Sinclair, says that Consumer Focus Scotland are pleased to be working with local government on this important new standard: 'More than five million people depend on services from Scotland's 32 local authorities, so ensuring these are delivered efficiently, professionally and on time is vital - particularly at a time of unprecedented spending restraint across the public sector.'

Get involved for the future of care in the community

Care users and their families across Scotland are being given the chance to join a unique group set up to drive up care standards across the country. The Care Commission is recruiting new members to join the next quarterly forum of its Involving People Group (IPG), which discusses how care services and standards can be improved across Scotland.

The group holds four meetings every year, and runs additional events and meetings throughout the country for members to have their say about the care services they use and the standard of care they receive.

The IPG is part of the Care Commission's wider Involving People Plan, which aims to gather the views and opinions of all care users and their families in order to drive up the standards at all care services in Scotland.

Karen Anderson, communications and involvement manager for the Care Commission, said: "It's so important for the Care Commission to involve people who use care services and carers in the work they do – and likewise for people and users to know they can make a major contribution to improving standards. The Involving People Group is vital for people across Scotland to voice what they think about care in our country – whether it's praise for a service or suggestions for improvement, the views come from those who know best. Our development days are held four times a year and they are really beneficial to everyone involved. I would encourage anyone who would like to express their views to join the group and help us improve care across the country."

The IPG is comprised of people who use care services and their families, as well as informal carers who voice opinions and give advice on policies and procedures to help influence the scrutiny of care services. The Care Commission is committed to using the feedback from the

IPG in its ongoing regulatory work in order to target failing services and improve standards for care users and their families. The list of group successes over the past four months range from offering advice to the Care Commission regarding inspection reports and grading, to representing the IPG at the Royal Garden Party at Holyrood Palace. Jacquie Roberts OBE, Chief Executive of the Care Commission, said: "People want to know they can have a say in the care they receive and have a voice which will be heard to help bring about improvement. They also want to know who can help when things are going wrong. There is absolutely no doubt that better quality care will come from better involving the people who receive it."

Anyone who uses care services - or has a relative who does - can get involved with IPG. To find out more call 0845 603 0890 or visit www.carecommission.com



CIVIL JUSTICE CONSULTATION AND EVENT

Lord Coulsfield's expert group on reforming Scotland's civil justice system has launched a consultation to debate some of the key proposals of the Scottish civil courts review to determine the best way forward. The Civil Justice Advisory Group, reconvened by Consumer Focus Scotland earlier this year, is also holding a consultation seminar on Monday 13th September 2010 in Edinburgh to support this work. Professor Dame Hazel Genn from University College London is the keynote speaker. The event will be interactive, with roundtable discussions and feedback sessions. For more details on both the consultation and the seminar visit www.consumerfocus-scotland.org.uk. The deadline for submissions to the consultation is 24th September 2010.

LEGAL SERVICES BILL UPDATE

Consumer Focus Scotland met with members of the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee and other key MSPs in advance of the Committee's consideration of the Legal Services (Scotland)

Bill at Stage Two. We emphasised our continuing support for the opening up of access to Scotland's legal services that we believe the legislation will bring about. To view the briefings that we have sent to MSPs on key aspects of the Bill please visit our website.

INSULATION SCHEME WELCOMED

Consumer Focus Scotland welcomed the Scottish Government's announcement of a new £10 million Universal Home Insulation scheme. Head of Services and Advocacy Trisha McAuley, said: 'Homeowners need support to make their homes more energy efficient in order to cut their energy bills and reduce carbon emissions and this scheme assists with both objectives. It is another important contribution to tackling both fuel poverty and climate change.'

POST OFFICE CHALLENGE FUND

The Scottish Government's consultation on the implementation of its new Post Office Challenge Fund ended on 9th July. The next stage will be the publication of a



final application form and guidance on how post offices can apply for funding from the new fund which are expected to be published in late July. Consumer Focus Scotland promoted the establishment of a fund of this kind earlier in the year.

ENGAGING CONSUMERS

Earlier this year Consumer Focus Scotland put out a call for submissions of best practice in engaging consumers in decision-making on public services. It elicited a strong range of responses from which the Expert Group overseeing this work chose six winning submissions. The winning organisations have been invited to attend a roundtable discussion exploring their experience and how to share it with others in the public sector. They will also feature in a publication and event with Holyrood Communications in October. For more details about the project, including the publication and event, please visit our website.

If you have any comment on this issue of In Focus or are interested in contributing to a future one please email ryan.norton@consumerfocus.org.uk or call 0141 227 1852.