

# Making the difference for consumers in Scotland

Annual Review 2010/11



# About Consumer Focus Scotland

Consumer Focus Scotland is the independent consumer champion for Scotland. We are rooted in over 30 years of work promoting the interests of consumers, particularly those who experience disadvantage in society.

Part of Consumer Focus, our structure reflects the devolved nature of the UK. Consumer Focus Scotland works on issues that affect consumers in Scotland, while at the same time feeding into and drawing on work done at a GB, UK and European level.

We work to secure a fair deal for consumers in different aspects of their lives by promoting fairer markets, greater value for money, improved customer service and more responsive public services. We represent consumers of all kinds: tenants, householders, patients, parents, energy users, solicitors' clients, postal service users or shoppers.

We aim to influence change and shape policy to reflect the needs of consumers. We do this in an informed way based on the evidence we gather through research and our unique knowledge of consumer issues.

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# A message from the Chair

Cuts in public spending mean tougher times ahead for consumers in both public services and private markets. Those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged are the most dependent on public services and most in need of help and protection.

Consumer Focus Scotland has continued to advocate effectively on behalf of consumers in Scotland to improve energy, post and digital communications and many other public and private sector services which are essential to consumers. This year, despite facing challenging times ourselves, we have delivered huge wins for today's and tomorrow's consumers.

The UK Government announced in October that it intends to abolish Consumer Focus as part of its reform of the consumer landscape. The proposals for reform are currently being consulted on through the *Empowering and protecting consumers* consultation – a wide-ranging review which is considering how consumer information, advice, education, advocacy and enforcement are delivered across the UK.

Consumer Focus Scotland supports the need for a stronger voice for consumers and that is why we believe it is vital that any reforms must benefit consumers while making best use of public money.

And, as the UK Government has set out, it is important to ensure reforms are right for Scotland and look at whether there needs to be a distinct solution for the delivery of consumer information, advice, advocacy, education and enforcement in Scotland.

We will be contributing fully to the UK Government's consultation on how we believe this can best be achieved in Scotland. The implementation of the reforms will be dependent on any final decisions that are taken on the future of our current functions.

We are determined to continue to deliver effective advocacy on behalf of consumers in Scotland while decisions are being made. We believe the work we do delivers a very good rate of return on public and industry levy funds. It is strongly in the public interest that the kind of consumer advocacy work that we have the powers to undertake in relation to complex markets and essential services is continued in the new consumer landscape, regardless of how and by whom this is taken forward.



**Douglas Sinclair**  
Chair

# A message from the Senior Director

We have much to be proud of at Consumer Focus Scotland.

It has been an incredibly busy year and we have achieved many important wins for Scotland's consumers.

Our work has led to 325 advisors across Scotland in Citizens Advice Scotland, Money Advice Scotland, housing associations, the energy sector and non-governmental organisation (NGOs) being trained on how to help consumers cut their fuel bills – leading to thousands of consumers receiving vital support to battle soaring energy prices.

Through the Extra Help Unit, we have provided help and expertise to resolve complex and often distressing energy and post problems and complaints, helping to recover over £800,000 for vulnerable consumers across Great Britain.

Our healthyliving award is making it easier for people to choose a healthy option when they eat out, with over 1,380 food outlets now holding the healthyliving award. Around 200,000 people a day in Scotland are now eating in establishments with the award.

However, our work is not just about putting money back in people's pockets and delivering projects which benefit consumers directly now, it is also about making the big arguments on behalf of consumers to shape services for tomorrow.

This year we have taken huge strides in bringing the principles of consumer engagement, user focus and consumer-centric provision to the very heart of how public services are conceived and delivered. This is of great importance as we see essential services being redesigned and the impacts of public spending austerity being felt.

We are also looking forward to making an impact in our new statutory role taking on advocacy services for water consumers in Scotland. We will bring in our experience and skills in applying key principles of good practice in consumer advocacy across different utility sectors and public services. Strengthening and streamlining consumer advocacy in water can only bring benefits for consumers in this important area.

Our important work to enhance the Post Office network in Scotland will continue and we are pleased that our efforts this year have helped to secure another £1 million from the Scottish Government to continue the Post Office Diversification Fund which is doing just that.

Consumers in Scotland are facing huge challenges with the high and rising cost of energy use. That is why we have been making strong representations to the UK and Scottish Governments on how best to put consumer needs at the heart of plans to improve the energy efficiency of our housing and the development of renewable energy sources. In particular, we have put the spotlight on the unique needs of consumers in Scotland and the importance of new energy efficiency initiatives having the capacity both to improve flats and tenements in Scotland's cities and to deliver benefits in rural areas for older houses without access to mains gas.

Our efforts on supporting tenants have paid off this year with the introduction of new rights for private tenants through the Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act and the announcement by the Scottish Government of a tenancy deposit scheme to ensure rental deposits are not withheld unfairly.

Through rigorous campaigning we contributed to securing a national digital strategy for Scotland to help ensure everyone in Scotland has better access to digital technologies.

With the publication of the report of the Civil Justice Advisory Group and the passage of the Legal Services (Scotland) Act much has also been achieved to make legal services work better for the people of Scotland and improve access to justice.

More detail on all our work is on the pages to follow and you will also find details of our priorities for the coming year. We look forward to engaging with our partners and with consumers to carry out important work in the year ahead and meet the challenges of the reform of the consumer landscape.



**Marieke Dwarshuis**  
Senior Director

# Our work

## Shaping consumer policy

Consumer Focus Scotland has influenced policy and helped to shape, improve and transform many vital services for consumers in Scotland in 2010/11. We have made a positive difference to consumers of:

- energy
- post offices and postal services
- public services
- legal services
- housing services
- digital communications services
- food services



## Highlights of where our work has benefited consumers include:

### Supporting consumers of energy

#### Energy Best Deal Scotland campaign

Our previous research showed that people in Scotland are less likely to switch energy suppliers than customers elsewhere in the UK. With the support of Ofgem, we ran a major campaign to help consumers reduce their energy bills by switching tariff or supplier. Our 'Energy Best Deal Scotland' campaign has provided training and materials for the advice agencies Citizens Advice Scotland and Money Advice Scotland as well as housing associations, the energy sector and NGOs. This has enabled them to provide much-needed advice and support for vulnerable households to obtain a better deal on their gas and electricity.

Across Scotland 325 advisors were trained as a result of the campaign, leading to thousands of consumers receiving vital and expert advice about how to switch their energy deal and cut their fuel bills.

### Tackling fuel poverty

In August we also published our report *Turning up the heat: Benchmarking fuel poverty in Scotland*. This report highlights the need for a more integrated and strategic approach to addressing fuel poverty across all relevant Scottish Government departments. This helped inform our contribution to Scotland's independent Fuel Poverty Forum, advising the Scottish Government on how best to protect the most vulnerable people in society from fuel poverty.

### **Energy supply in rented properties**

We know that many tenants experience difficulties with their energy supply when moving into a new property. In November, we published *Sort your supply* and *Smooth supply* – two new advice leaflets for tenants and landlords. These have given tenants and landlords all the information they need to ensure that the gas and electricity supplies for their property are properly organised and set up at the start of a new tenancy. We have made these information sources available through tenant and landlord organisations across Scotland.

### **Area-based energy-efficiency programmes**

Innovative energy-efficiency schemes, covering whole communities in Scotland, have the potential to play a key role in helping people in Scotland make their homes more energy efficient. We published *Energising communities: Learning from area-based energy efficiency projects in Scotland* – a key report which examined the impact that existing area-based projects in Scotland have had, looks at the challenges facing this type of approach, and provides recommendations to help ensure future projects deliver the maximum possible benefit for consumers. Many of our recommendations were used by the Scottish Government as it developed its Universal Home Insulation Scheme in March.

### **Green Deal seminar**

In February, we co-hosted an event with Energy Action Scotland to examine the UK Government's forthcoming energy-efficiency programmes. The seminar brought together 50 Scottish stakeholders with the Department of Energy and Climate Change. This provided a platform to highlight the key issues which will need to be addressed to ensure that major new initiatives, such as the Green Deal, deliver benefits for consumers in Scotland. The initiatives should reflect Scottish housing by delivering energy-efficiency measures that are right for tenement flats and hard-to-treat houses in areas without access to mains gas.

### **Energy efficiency regulation in housing**

In February, we published our report *Energy efficiency in private sector housing in Scotland: Regulation and the consumer interest*. The discussion paper focused on the case for regulation to help improve the least energy-efficient houses – whose residents are most at risk of fuel poverty – and identified a number of issues which must be addressed if this regulation is to benefit consumers. The report was timed to provide a strong voice for consumers in the Scottish Government's *Regulation of Energy efficiency in housing* report, which was published in March. This report took account of the consumer issues we raised through our research.

## The role of microgeneration

Many households in Scotland are not connected to mains gas services and are faced with sharply rising heating bills. In November we published *Power at home: Improving consumer access to the benefits of microgeneration*. The report examines the barriers to consumers generating power at home using renewable energy sources and sets out how removing these barriers could play an important role in helping consumers to access more affordable and sustainable energy in the future. We are also representing consumers in a working group set up by the Construction Licensing Executive, which aims to widen choice and improve standards for consumers interested in these technologies.



## Supporting consumers of post offices and postal services

### The Postal Services Bill

Many issues with regard to postal services in Scotland are decided by the UK Government and we have worked to ensure that consumer concerns in Scotland are taken account of in the UK Government's new Postal Services Bill. We worked with our colleagues across the UK to provide evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee's inquiry into postal services in Scotland, conducted in parallel to the parliamentary debates on the Bill. Many of the issues highlighted in the Committee's final report reflect the issues we raised. In particular, these include the Committee's recommendations on the parcel delivery market: the need for rural representatives to be fully involved in any future changes to the Universal Service Obligation; and the need for the UK Government to work with policy-makers in Scotland on the delivery of government services through the Post Office network.

### Holding Royal Mail to account

We held Royal Mail to account for the performance of postal services in Scotland. Areas where we have done this are quality of service statistics, complaints figures and the number of properties in Scotland designated as exceptions to the Universal Service Obligation. We also raised the difficulties experienced by consumers in particular postcode areas at certain times during the year.



### **Post Office Diversification Fund for Scotland**

We know people in Scotland value their post offices and we lobbied for funding to enhance the services provided by post offices. In 2010/11 the Scottish Government announced a fund would be put in place. 49 post offices received monies through the first round of the fund. We lobbied the Scottish Government to ensure this funding would continue into 2011/12. In February, the Scottish Government announced as part of the budget agreement, that it would provide £1 million to continue the Post Office Diversification Fund for Scotland for a second year. This will bring significant benefits for consumers, who will enjoy improved and enhanced services at their local post office.

### **More local government services through the post office**

We carried out a major piece of research to analyse the potential for more local government services in Scotland to be delivered through the post office. Such a development could improve consumers' access to these important services and help to improve the sustainability of the Post Office network. We have been working closely with Royal Mail, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the Improvement Service and the Scottish Government on this project, and our report was published recently.

## **Supporting consumers of public services**

### **Consumer engagement in decision making**

It is important to highlight examples of where there has been 'best in class' practice in engaging with consumers. In January we published our report *Consumer engagement in decision making: Best practice from Scottish public services* which did just that. Eight examples of best practice from across the public sector were highlighted and leaflets with key messages were sent to stakeholders across the public sector. We also presented our findings to a wide range of public bodies at the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's annual conference.

### **Measuring customer satisfaction**

Following a previous Consumer Focus Scotland report on measuring customer satisfaction in local government, we worked jointly with the Improvement Service to create the 'Customer Satisfaction Measurement Tool' – an innovative service that will help local authorities to better measure customer satisfaction.

### **User focus in scrutiny**

On 1 October, a new duty on public sector scrutiny bodies to promote continuous improvement in user focus under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act came into force. This follows many years of strong advocacy by Consumer Focus Scotland for improvements in the user focus of scrutiny bodies.

### **SPSO complaints-handling principles**

In February, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman published principles and procedures for dealing with complaints. Research carried out with our Consumer Network (see page 17) ensured issues that were important to consumers, such as timeliness and accessibility when resolving complaints, were emphasised in the new principles and procedures.

### **Best Value Judgements**

During the course of the year Audit Scotland agreed to alter the wording of its Best Value Judgements to make them more consumer friendly, following our research with consumers which indicated a number of areas for improvement.

### **Advocacy service for parents**

In October, the Scottish Government launched a new national advocacy service for parents whose children have additional support needs. Our predecessor organisation, the Scottish Consumer Council, had repeatedly highlighted the need for such a service, and we were represented on the panel that assessed the tenders for delivering the new service.

### **Patient Rights (Scotland) Act**

The Patient Rights (Scotland) Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament in March. Consumer Focus Scotland contributed evidence to the Parliament during its consideration of the Bill. Following the passage of the Act, Health Rights Information Scotland – a Scottish Government funded project based at Consumer Focus Scotland – will be working closely with the Government to ensure that there is clear information for members of the public about what the Act means for them.

### **No Fault Compensation Review Group**

As part of the No Fault Compensation Review Group, set up by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Consumer Focus Scotland contributed to the development of a framework for assessing the options for compensating patients for injuries sustained while under the care of the NHS. The Scottish Government welcomed the report which was published in November and has announced its intention to investigate thoroughly how such a scheme would work in practice, both for the benefit of individual patients and for the good of the health service as a whole.



## Supporting consumers of legal services

### Civil Justice Advisory Group

We continue to do all we can to ensure the civil justice system works for the people of Scotland. Following the publication of our *Making civil justice work for consumers* paper in March, we re-convened the Civil Justice Advisory Group to examine the recommendations made in Lord Gill's civil courts review. We published the final report in January. The Scottish Government's formal response to the report was supportive of the majority of its recommendations. We will continue to work with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders to achieve further progress on these issues in the year ahead.

### McKenzie Friends

New rules on McKenzie Friends in the Sheriff Court were introduced on 1 January. Consumer Focus Scotland raised concerns via the Public Petitions process that the rules proposed for the Court of Session would be disproportionate in the Sheriff Court. We are pleased that as a result, the rules introduced by the Sheriff Court Rules Council are more proportionate and accessible for court users than the Court of Session rules.

### Legal Services (Scotland) Act

Consumer Focus Scotland called repeatedly for greater choice and protection for people who use legal services to increase everyone's access to justice. The Legal Services (Scotland) Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament in October. By opening up the legal services market in Scotland through removing restrictions on ownership of legal firms, the Act will do what we called for and will pave the way for the development of a legal services market which better meets the needs of the public.

### New Scottish Tribunals Service

On 1 December, the Scottish Government announced the establishment of a Scottish Tribunals Service, bringing together the administrative support for five tribunals in Scotland. This announcement represents a move towards some of the options for tribunal reform identified in the first report of the Administrative Justice Steering Group, published by the Scottish Consumer Council, our predecessor organisation.

### New rules on complaints about the judiciary

The Complaints about the Judiciary (Scotland) Rules 2011 came into force in February. We made significant comments on the proposed rules and accompanying guidance. A number of our recommendations have been incorporated into the new rules.

## Supporting consumers of housing services

### New rights for private tenants

Consumer Focus Scotland was a member of the Scottish Private Rented Sector Strategy Group, which played an important role in identifying and agreeing the measures to be included in the Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act which was passed by the Scottish Government in March. We played a key role in helping to shape the content of the Act to ensure that its provisions were in the consumer interest. These included provisions to supply better information to tenants and prospective tenants about landlords and their properties and to improve regulation of the sector.

### Greater protection for consumers of property management services

Our research found difficulties experienced by consumers with property management services including lack of information, concerns about poor value for money, poor service and poor complaints handling. In March, the Property Factors (Scotland) Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament. This is an important step in improving the rights of homeowners who use property management or 'factoring' services. The Act will improve consumer protection by creating a level playing field where all providers have to meet the standards set out in a statutory code of conduct. It will also provide a much-needed source of external review of complaints, through the proposed homeowner housing panel and committees.



### Housing (Scotland) Act

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 was passed by the Scottish Parliament in October. The Act strengthens tenants' role in the regulation of social housing, following Consumer Focus Scotland's involvement in the Ministerial Sounding Board set up by the Scottish Government to develop the Act.

### Tenancy deposits

Consumer Focus Scotland has repeatedly called for a tenancy deposit scheme to be introduced in Scotland, in order to protect tenants and ensure that their deposits are not unfairly withheld. As a member of the Scottish Government stakeholder working group which examined the full range of options for protecting deposits in Scotland, we argued that a deposit scheme should be set up. In our 2009 joint paper with Shelter Scotland, *Improving the private rented sector for the benefits of consumers*, we recommended the development of a deposit scheme. We are pleased that the Scottish Government passed regulations for a tenancy deposit scheme in Scotland in the Scottish Parliament in March.

## Supporting consumers of digital communications services

### A digital future for Scotland

We have continued to campaign for an improvement in the digital services available to consumers across Scotland and a national strategy which the Scottish Government published in March. This includes a number of the key issues we have raised for consumers in Scotland including broadband availability and digital participation. We will also publish shortly a policy paper setting out the issues faced by digital consumers.

### Digital TV switchover

To help support vulnerable people to make the switch to digital TV, we produced *Supporting the digital switchover: Get your clients on the right wavelength*. This leaflet was made available to local authorities and voluntary and community organisations to help these organisations to support their clients to make the switch. It provided answers to some of the key questions people had about the digital switchover and signposted support workers and consumers to further sources of help and advice.

### Using spectrum for rural consumers

Consumer Focus Scotland has argued consistently that valuable spectrum resources should be used to improve broadband coverage in rural and remote Scotland. In March, Ofcom published its proposals for the auction and release of 800MHz and 2.6GHz spectrum in the UK. The proposals include a provision that one of the new licences for using this spectrum will include an obligation on the provider to deliver a mobile telecommunications service to at least 95 per cent of the UK population by 2017, including a requirement to cover rural areas. This will be the first time that any broadband coverage obligation of this nature has been placed upon a provider in the UK.



## Supporting older consumers

### Food services for older people

Together with our colleagues in Community Food and Health (Scotland), we carried out research into the availability of food services for older people living in the community. The work was overseen by an advisory group of key stakeholders, and we will publish the final report in the summer of 2011.

### Care preferences

We carried out innovative research into the preferences of people currently in their 50s and 60s as to the kind of care and support they would like to be available to them if or when they are no longer able to live independently. We expect to publish this research shortly. It will provide an evidence base which will influence policy and service provision in this important area in the future.



## Supporting consumers of food services

### Food hygiene on the agenda

The Food Standards Agency confirmed that it is planning to commission new research in 2011/12 on food hygiene behaviours in the home, to inform its future consumer education strategies on safe food handling. This follows work by Consumer Focus Scotland and Consumer Focus Wales which highlighted that messages to the consumer must be clear and that messages on food hygiene should be reinforced.

### New water cooler poster launched

Our research into hygiene in water coolers found that around one in four were failing to meet one or more safety and hygiene standards. The research highlighted that the cleanliness of water coolers had become a low priority for some organisations who have installed them, and identified the need to raise awareness of this issue among both organisations responsible for water coolers on their premises and those who use them. In February, working with the British Water Cooler Association, European Drinking Water Cooler Association and the Scottish Food Enforcement Liaison Committee, we launched a new poster providing advice to industry and consumers in Scotland on using water coolers safely. The new poster, which provides clear and easy-to-follow information and advice for those who install and use water coolers, is designed to assist them to do so more safely and hygienically.

## Extra Help Unit

In 2008, Consumer Focus established the Extra Help Unit (EHU) based within Consumer Focus Scotland. The service is there to help vulnerable consumers across Great Britain with their energy and postal complaints. The team use legal powers to investigate complaints, for example, where someone has been disconnected or is being threatened with disconnection. Vulnerable consumers can be referred to the Extra Help Unit by Consumer Direct, Ofgem, the Energy Ombudsman and their MP, MSP or AM.

In 2010/11, the EHU handled over 5,300 cases and achieved over £800,000 in financial redress for consumers. The vast majority of cases related to energy disputes with energy complaints from households and small businesses.

Many consumers that the EHU helps are distressed, on low incomes and in desperate need of representation. That's why our caseworkers are highly skilled in complaints investigation. They have undergone Samaritans training to help them deal with consumers who are emotionally vulnerable and facing a range of challenges in other aspects of life.

The EHU also identifies company failures causing disadvantage to vulnerable consumers and makes representations to Ofgem to ensure issues are addressed.

The EHU's Executive Liaison Team (ELT) responds to high-level correspondence and investigates referrals from MPs, MSPs and AMs. In 2010/11 it provided support to 72 elected representatives who have sought help on behalf of their constituents. The ELT also provides an 'Ask the Advisor' telephone-based service to advice agencies seeking assistance on how to progress their clients' complaint.

The freezing conditions last winter led to a range of problems with prepayment meters and an unprecedented level of priority cases, with EHU advisors working around the clock to help people in great need. The EHU reported concerns to the UK's six largest energy suppliers in *Lessons learnt from winter*. This brought together best practice and reinforced the need to target specific areas in preparation for winter 2011/12.

Since the establishment of the EHU in 2008, 18,170 cases have been handled and financial redress of £1.9 million has been secured for consumers.

A thank you comment from a consumer:  
*'Just wanted to say a very big thank you. Your efficiency has been second to none. Thank you so much for your support in what was a long, frustrating and stressful battle, until you took the lead for me. Keep up the good work and be assured that you are making a massive difference to the faceless individuals that need you. On paper issues like this can seem incidental whilst the implications to daily life are very real.'*

## Consumer Network

Our Consumer Network is a group of almost 500 volunteers who act as our 'eyes and ears' on the ground across the country. The network keeps us in touch with consumer concerns and helps us research and monitor how markets and services impact on consumers at a local level.

In the last year, we have worked with the network to inform our work across a wide range of issues. Our Energy Best Deal Scotland training materials were informed by discussions with network volunteers to find out their questions and concerns about the process of switching their energy supplier. We also held discussion groups to seek consumer views on possible regulation of energy efficiency in private sector housing, as potential homebuyers, sellers, landlords or tenants.

A survey of volunteers' views and experiences of broadband services was carried out to inform our work on digital issues.

Our Consumer Network has worked with other stakeholder organisations on a variety of projects. We gathered volunteers' views on the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's consultation on a statement of complaints-handling principles and guidance on a model complaints-handling procedure for public services via an online survey and two discussion groups. This evidence formed the basis of our response to the consultation. The network also helped the Scottish Information Commissioner to develop its website resulting in a revised homepage and a new 'Your Rights' section, and helped the Scottish Legal Aid Board to design its new 'Keeping Your Home' website.

Our work with the network has led to positive changes being made by other organisations with whom we work. During this year, Audit Scotland agreed to alter the wording of its Best Value judgements to make them more consumer friendly, following research with the network which indicated a number of areas for improvement. Through a survey of network volunteers, we highlighted to the Food Standards Agency the need to provide clear, targeted messages to consumers on food hygiene. The Agency now plans to commission research on food hygiene behaviours in the home to inform its future consumer education strategies on safe food handling.

## Scottish Government Funded Projects

### Health Rights Information Scotland

Health Rights Information Scotland produces nationally relevant information about patients' health rights and about the health services that are available from the NHS in Scotland.

During 2010/11 we developed a number of patient information resources in partnership with the Scottish Government.

Two resources were published to support new national policy on decisions about resuscitation. *Do you want to be resuscitated if your heart and breathing stop?* explains how decisions about CPR are made and *Is resuscitation right for my child?* is for families who need to make a decision about resuscitating their child.

Another leaflet, *New medicines in Scotland – who decides what the NHS can provide?* explains how decisions are made before medicines can be routinely prescribed. We have also produced new information on ehealth. Available as a leaflet, factsheet and a short animated film clip, this describes how the NHS is using new technology to improve healthcare. And we have worked closely with the Scottish Government's Primary Care team to produce new information on the Chronic Medication Service, and update information on dental registration and free eye examinations.

In September, our work was recognised by the BMA's Patient Information Awards. *Caring and consent* won first prize for carers' information, and the multilingual DVD *How to use the health service in Scotland* was highly commended.

Our main priority for the year ahead is the development of a Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities, as required by the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011. This will build on earlier work, including two large research studies commissioned to explore effective ways of promoting the health rights message at national and local level. We will also be working with NHS inform to develop a quality and accessibility framework for consumer health information.

[www.hris.org.uk](http://www.hris.org.uk)



## The healthyliving award

The healthyliving award was launched in 2006 to work with the food service sector in Scotland to make it easier for people to eat healthily when they eat out. Since its launch, more than 1,380 businesses and other food outlets have now achieved full award status, including large and small establishments from both the private and public sectors. Around 200,000 people a day now eat in establishments with the award.

The year 2010/11 saw the active promotion of the new higher level healthyliving award plus to all award holders. More than 60 businesses have now achieved plus status, demonstrating an even greater commitment to healthier catering. We have embarked on a large piece of work to promote the award to food providers in the community and voluntary sectors. This will continue in the coming year, with a sector-specific training toolkit being developed to actively engage with these businesses.

The Scottish Government's Obesity Route Map was published in 2011. The associated action plan highlights key milestones which will be monitored and updated on an ongoing basis as a means of determining progress in tackling obesity. Through the Action Plan the Scottish Government states its commitment to working with Consumer Focus Scotland to extend the healthyliving award to all caterers within public sector organisations, and also to have a stronger presence on the high street.

It also recognises that the healthyliving award plus offers an opportunity to increase the ratio of healthy options on menus from participating caterers. The healthyliving award is included in the list of indicators that have been chosen to monitor progress of the Action Plan. Over the coming year we will work to ensure that the actions identified in the route map are achieved.

We are currently working to redesign the healthyliving award criteria to ensure that the award continues to grow and be successful while working within the limitations of European legislation. This has involved some significant changes to the award and its criteria but the overarching principals of the award will remain; to work with caterers across Scotland to make it easier for consumers to eat healthily when eating out. The new award is planned for launch in October 2011.

The relaunch of the award will see a new marketing and promotion strategy, designed to raise awareness of the award among both caterers and consumers. In line with this new marketing and promotion strategy we will continue to engage with the wider catering industry to encourage participation in healthyliving award, increase exposure of the award brand and strengthen and develop links with existing and new stakeholders.

[www.healthylivingaward.co.uk](http://www.healthylivingaward.co.uk)



## **Community Food and Health (Scotland)**

Community Food and Health (Scotland), provides a national, strategic focus and practical support to low-income communities facing barriers to a healthy diet. The project also works on the ground to add value to the activities of low-income communities and those supporting them in tackling barriers.

We have been particularly active in both ensuring that the less-heard voices in our society are a valued part of wider national food policy as well as directly contributing to the development of policy at a national level.

In 2010/11, the project continued its focus on reaching out to vulnerable communities involving work around obesity, maternal and infant nutrition, care for older people and mental health.

The project has also continued to grant-fund and support a wide range of fantastic local food projects including community cafés, food co-ops, community gardens and lunch clubs.

Much of the training we have offered over the past year has reflected the economic pressures faced by many in the community and voluntary sector. It has focused on helping local projects build a sustainable future through a variety of business and enterprise advice at a time when local initiatives are more in demand than ever.

All of this has been reinforced through the careful application of our Small Grant Scheme, which continues to have an impact and influence beyond its limited resources.

The coming year will see the project continue to play an increasingly recognised role of supporting fantastic local food projects, helping them to become sustainable and helping to ensure that national priorities on food, health, nutrition, care and obesity are met.

[www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk](http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk)



## Scottish Accessible Information Forum

Scottish Accessible Information Forum works to combat social exclusion by ensuring that people who find it hardest to access information due to disability get the same access to information as others. The project provides a range of tools which enable public bodies and others to improve the accessibility of their information.

During the last year we produced three new publications, *Making information accessible*, *Making services accessible* and *Making websites accessible*. In addition, we published an online guide to social networks and accessibility. We also provided training to staff at the Scottish Information Commissioner's Office, the Margaret Blackwood Housing Association, and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. We also developed our first elearning module on raising awareness of accessible information for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde which will be used in 2011/12.

Key areas of work for 2011/12 include:

- developing our online training module
- publishing a review of accessibility toolbars
- publishing an update on social media and accessibility
- continuing to promote and improve accessible information for Scotland



# The year ahead

In common with other publicly funded organisations, Consumer Focus Scotland has to operate with fewer resources. We have therefore targeted our work for this year on those areas of detriment where we judge that we are in the best place to advocate on behalf of consumers, or where our particular involvement will help achieve the necessary benefits for consumers in Scotland. Many of these projects will further develop work we have done in previous years, and overall they add up to a significant programme for protecting and enhancing the consumer interest in Scotland, with a particular focus on those facing disadvantage.

Our priorities for the year ahead are set out below and these will sit alongside the important work of the Extra Help Unit and our four Scottish Government projects.

## **For consumers of energy**

Access to affordable energy for heating, lighting and household appliances is critical. That's why a vital part of our work is ensuring that consumers, especially vulnerable households, have access to the energy services they need. Equally, our priority is to ensure that there is the right balance of power in the market between producers and consumers. Critical work must be done now to ensure the interests of consumers are at the heart of energy-efficiency initiatives and the expanding role of renewables in Scotland.

- This year we will expand and broaden the reach of our Energy Best Deal Scotland Campaign offering 'know-how' on switching supplier and how to get the best deal in the market. This will include not only providing face-to-face training for advisors in frontline advice organisations, but also training volunteers in a wide range of local community groups. We will also be rolling out and promoting a new online training resource to further extend reach and availability. All this work will be complemented by our efforts to ensure that switching help is embedded in mainstream energy advice programmes in Scotland
- We will provide recommendations to both UK and Scottish Governments to safeguard the interests of consumers without access to mains gas. This will cover work to enhance consumer protection on supply and payment methods within heating oil and LPG markets and improving access to alternative sources of heating
- We will also continue to work with the Scottish Government and others on how best to introduce a new regulatory framework for energy efficiency in private housing to bring about the urgent improvements that are needed without imposing regressive cost burdens on tenants or homeowners

## **For consumers of postal services and post offices**

We will work to ensure that postal customers in Scotland get a fair deal, and to drive improvements to services.

- This year we will aim to help increase the range and availability of government services delivered through post offices, leading to improved access to services for consumers and a more sustainable post office network in Scotland
- We will continue to monitor and investigate issues in respect of the quality of service provided by Post Office Limited and by mail delivery providers in Scotland
- We will undertake further work on the enquiry office network in Scotland and consumers' experiences of collecting mail which they are not at home to receive, with the aim of improving consumers' access to better quality services

## **For consumers of digital communications services**

Technologies such as broadband and mobile phones are no longer a luxury but are a necessity for full participation in society.

- We will aim to influence the direction of future policy in this area to ensure that consumers throughout Scotland have improved access to digital technologies, together with the skills, confidence and capability to use those technologies to access the full range of public services and private markets

## **For consumers of public services**

One of the major issues for consumers of public services in 2011/12 will be ensuring that they are involved in decision-making by public authorities on service delivery.

- We will continue to advocate best practice in consumer engagement to public service providers
- We will continue to work with stakeholders and service providers to explore how well public services are meeting the needs of consumers, how well scrutiny bodies are adhering to their new statutory duties and to what extent complaints systems for public services are fit for purpose

## **For consumers of water**

On 15 August 2011, Waterwatch Scotland, the consumer advocacy body for water in Scotland was dissolved and its consumer advocacy functions transferred to Consumer Focus Scotland.

- We will deliver, at transfer, our new statutory functions
- We will embark on a new programme of research and policy development on the big consumer issues in the water industry

We are also in discussion with Scottish Water and the Water Industry Commission for Scotland on the establishment of a Customer Forum. This will be an independent body tasked with identifying and representing customers' views on investment, service priorities and on water charges. The positions adopted by the Forum will be informed by research and evidence. This will enable it to be a powerful, authoritative and expert advocate on behalf of all water customers in Scotland.

### **For consumers of legal services and housing**

Consumers enter situations which have legal implications every day. We aim to ensure that all consumers know their rights, have the confidence and skills to assert these, have access to appropriate legal and advice services, and are able to access justice if and when the need arises.

Buying or renting a home is also one of the most expensive and significant transactions most of us will enter into. It is therefore important that consumers' rights and interests in relation to housing are promoted and protected.

- We will develop a plan for delivering a public legal education strategy for Scotland, aimed at equipping consumers with the knowledge and skills they need to deal with their legal problems, and setting out possible practical options for taking this forward
- We will take forward the practical recommendations of the report of the Civil Justice Advisory Group, in anticipation of future civil justice reform legislation. This should ensure that consumers have access to appropriate, affordable and fair dispute resolution processes
- We will produce and distribute credit card-sized shoppers rights cards to consumers to raise their awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and empower them to act on these
- We will respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on improving choice and accountability for consumers of land maintenance services

## **For older consumers**

Older consumers do have particular needs and some may become vulnerable. They may, for example, have particular health, care or nutritional needs.

We will take forward the findings of our innovative research into the preferences of people currently in their 50s and 60s for the kind of care and support they would like to have available to them. This will help to ensure that a greater range of options and choices are available in the future for older people in need of support for independent living, based on evidence of what they want

We will take forward the findings of our research into the availability of food services for older people living in the community, which we expect to publish in summer 2011. We will work together with Community Food and Health (Scotland) and relevant stakeholders to consider ways of ensuring the availability of improved food services for older people in Scotland, focusing on their needs and preferences

# Consumer Focus Scotland Board



## **Douglas Sinclair, Chair**

Douglas was appointed the Chair of the Scottish Consumer Council in May 2006 and Chair of Consumer Focus Scotland in January 2008. Consumer

Focus Scotland was formed from a merger of Scottish Consumer Council, energywatch Scotland and Postwatch Scotland. Douglas has held posts as Chief Executive at Ross & Cromarty District Council, Central Region Council, COSLA and Fife Council. Douglas is also Deputy Chair of the Accounts Commission of Scotland.

*Political activity in the last five years: none.*



## **Liz Breckenridge**

Liz has been a Board Member of Consumer Focus Scotland since 2008. She was previously a Member of the Scottish Consumer Council and a Panel

Member of Waterwatch Scotland. Liz is currently Chair of the Food Standards Agency Committee on Customer Engagement and is a member of their External Advisory Group to the Review of Official Controls Delivery. She is a Public Interest Member for the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland. Liz was previously Marketing Director for Highland Spring Ltd and held senior posts in marketing for other global brands.

*Political activity in the last five years: none.*



## **Alan Hutton**

Alan has been a Member of Consumer Focus Scotland since 2008. Alan was previously a Board Member of the Scottish Consumer Council, a Member of

the Advisory Group of the National Consumer Council, and a Member of Energywatch Scotland. He is currently a Board Member of Energy Action Scotland. Having recently retired from his full-time position at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), Alan is now Visiting Professor of Political Economy at GCU and Senior Research Fellow at the Stirling Centre for Economic Methodology, University of Stirling.

*Political activity in the last five years: none.*



## **Coinneach Maclean**

Coinneach has been a Member of Consumer Focus Scotland since 2008. Coinneach was latterly the Deputy Chief Executive of the National Trust

of Scotland. Previously, he held posts in the public service in Scotland covering business, enterprise and housing.

*Political activity in the last five years: none.*



**Angela McCormack**

Angela has been a Member of Consumer Focus Scotland since 2008. Angela was a Member of Postwatch Scotland and worked in charity finance for Stepping

Stones for Families. Angela has a background in finance, working for The Royal Bank of Scotland. She has wide experience in the voluntary sector, largely working with young people and for a disability charity. Angela is a Trustee and Company Secretary of Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire.

*Political activity in the last five years: none.*



**Nicola Munro**

Nicola has been a Member of Consumer Focus Scotland since 2008. During her Scottish Government career, she led work on health, environment,

transport, housing, planning, third sector, equality and anti-poverty programmes. She is a Board Member of the Scottish Refugee Council and a Member of the Office of Rail Regulation's consumer advisory forum.

*Political activity in the last five years: none.*



**John Sawkins**

John has been a Member of Consumer Focus Scotland since 2008. John served as a Panel Member of Waterwatch Scotland and Chair of its national Charging

Committee until June 2011. He is a Professor of Economics, Head of the Department of Accountancy, Economics and Finance and Dean of Heriot-Watt University.

*Political activity in the last five years: none.*



**Alan Sinclair**

Alan has been a Member of Consumer Focus Scotland since 2008. Alan is a Fellow of the Centre for Confidence and Well-being. His aim is to stop us, as a

society, failing so many children. For five years he was at a national level, the Senior Director for Skills and Learning in Scottish Enterprise. He led youth and adult skill programmes, the formation of Career Scotland and Future Skill Scotland. Before Scottish Enterprise Alan started Heatwise and became the Chief Executive of the Wise Group that grew in scale and pioneered new ways of getting long-term unemployed people into jobs. Alan was a member of the Scottish New Deal Task Force and a member of the UK Advisory Group on the New Deal. He was awarded a CBE for training unemployed people.

*Political activity in the last five years: none.*

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