

Consumer Network Terms of Reference

Background

1. Consumer Scotland will take a strategic, co-ordinating role in the areas of consumer advice and advocacy. However, this does not represent even the largest part of consumer protection work. For a number of years, stakeholders have expressed a desire for a mechanism to bring strategic co-ordination to the landscape by building stronger and more coherent relationships across the landscape.

Current Position

2. The UK Consumer Protection Partnership, chaired by BEIS, enables consumer bodies to work together to address areas of greatest consumer detriment. In considering a new consumer network, it is recognised that there will be much to learn from it. However, Scotland's smaller size and differing priorities may result in modifications to this approach – for example, a wider range of attendees and a simpler structure.
3. The challenges around COVID-19 have reinforced the need to develop a network in Scotland to ensure the best response to tackling consumer harm, as part of wider Scottish Government work on economic recovery. This requires the establishment of the network to happen sooner than originally planned, and prior to the establishment of Consumer Scotland, so as to be most effective in responding to the current situation.

Purpose

4. The network would bring together key partners in the Scottish consumer landscape on a regular basis with the aim of:
 - sharing information on current examples of consumer detriment
 - identifying areas where there is greatest harm caused to consumers in Scotland
 - sharing information on consumer protection activities
 - prioritising areas to be tackled collectively
 - agreeing any coordinated actions
 - considering future key issues
 - focussing on outcomes
 - achieving maximum impact with minimum duplication
5. In order for the network to be as effective as possible, there will need to be a clear commitment from attendees to engage in a way that takes forward the above aims.
6. The network would provide a forum for discussion and a framework for coordinating consumer protection activities in Scotland, but would not be a decision making body. It

would not be expected to produce reports or agree on recommendations. Individual organisations will decide what further action to take in light of discussions.

7. The success of the network will be measured on whether it can add value to the existing consumer protection work in Scotland by better identifying and tackling consumer harm in Scotland through meaningful action and resource commitment.
8. Consumer Scotland, once established, will be able to provide attendees at the network with support for their consumer activities. Consumer Scotland will also be able to use information from the network in its engagement with the UK Consumer Protection Partnership

Structure

9. The network would initially be chaired by Scottish Government officials who would also provide the Secretariat. Minutes would be published on the Scottish Government website. Once Consumer Scotland is established it will take over these roles, but the network would remain separate from Consumer Scotland.
10. Organisations attending would be wider than the UK CCP, which is restricted to Government-funded consumer services. It will be drawn up to ensure representation from key areas (e.g. consumer advocacy and advice bodies, enforcement bodies) along with a wider range of organisations that have an interest in particular consumer issues in Scotland. Scottish Government would remain as an attendee once Consumer Scotland is established. Going forward, the network itself would be responsible for deciding who should become involved.
11. Meetings of the full network would be held on a regular basis (frequency to be agreed). The ability to take part remotely will be provided. If required, working groups will be established to look at specific issues on a short term or on-going basis. Working groups may be chaired and organised by Scottish Government (and eventually Consumer Scotland) or a relevant stakeholder.