

## **PROTOCOL DOCUMENT RELATING TO HOW THE CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND EXERCISES ITS INDEPENDENCE RESPONSIBLY**

The Consumer Council is a Non-Departmental Public Body set up in legislation to safeguard the interests of all consumers, and particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers. The Consumer Council is an independent/autonomous public body which operates to promote and protect the consumer interest with the Minister, the Northern Ireland Assembly and others including government departments, regulators and service providers.

The Consumer Council believes that its independence and statutory powers puts it in a strong position as a consumer advocate and champion. The Consumer Council values the support provided by the Minister and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in upholding and protecting its independence. With such freedom comes a responsibility to exercise its statutory remit effectively and interdependently with all its partners.

The purpose of this paper is to openly and transparently articulate how the Consumer Council strives to responsibly perform its statutory role as the NI consumer champion within the context of a devolved Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

### **Mission**

The Consumer Council's mission is to make the consumer voice heard, and to make it count. This requires the Consumer Council to present the consumer view to business, government, the public and the media in an evidence-based, timely and relevant way and to influence and lobby to deliver change which takes full account of the consumer interest. It also requires that the consumer interest is established as a key part of the social, economic and environment framework and is reflected within the Assembly's Programme for Government.

### **How Do We Achieve Our Mission?**

The principles set out below are applied openly and transparently. The Consumer Council will always strive to practice these principles in our daily work in pursuing the consumer interest. In exercising these principles the Consumer Council will pay due regard to the issues for which it has statutory powers whether devolved or reserved at Westminster but will at all times work to deliver change to benefit consumers in all markets where there is or may be potential for consumer detriment.

*The Consumer Council:*

### **Corporate Governance**

- ❖ Demonstrates and ensures that high standards of corporate governance are maintained at all times;
- ❖ Ensures that any statutory or administrative requirements for the use of public funds are complied with and that there is propriety and regularity in the handling of funds;
- ❖ Promotes the efficient, economic and effective use of staff and other resources.

### **Statutory Authority/Duties**

- ❖ Drives change to benefit consumers in all markets where there is or may be potential for consumer detriment paying due regard to the issues for which it has relative statutory powers whether devolved or reserved at Westminster;
- ❖ Exercises its duties in such ways as it feels appropriate as an advocate, a watchdog, and/or a thought leader developing and influencing consumer-focused policy and practices and innovation;
- ❖ Carries out its statutory duties in a responsible way and in line with its corporate mission, values and principles and in support of the wider strategic direction of the NI administration, where appropriate;
- ❖ Is evidence-based and centres its work on the excellence of its research, analysis and intelligence base;
- ❖ Works within formal, statutory and ad hoc partnerships.

### **Operational Activities**

- ❖ Commissions and conducts research, develops and promotes policy, influences, lobbies and campaigns on behalf of consumers, and also deals with individual customers' complaints in energy, transport and water;
- ❖ Meaningfully engages with, listens to and takes account of the views of consumers, their representatives and partners within the private, public, community and voluntary sectors in its work of promoting the consumer interest;
- ❖ Seeks to influence politicians across all parties, committees, departments

and ministers through lobbying, briefing and presentations on Consumer Council policy and consumer issues. In particular, when offering comment on government policies or proposals, the Council will do so on the understanding that these will be copied to DETI in advance where possible, or where not possible, copied simultaneously to DETI.

- ❖ Responds to queries and briefing requests from politicians, parties, committees and ministers as deemed appropriate to the work of the Consumer Council and interests of consumers;
- ❖ Keeps the sponsor Department and the Departmental Minister informed of key issues and, as a general rule where possible, copies in advance to the Department written briefings, evidence, information etc. going to Assembly Committees;
- ❖ Lobbies and briefs across all politicians, parties, committee members, clerks and ministers as deemed appropriate to the work of the Consumer Council and interests of consumers;
- ❖ Responds to media requests and issues press releases as deemed appropriate to the work of the Consumer Council and interests of consumers.

### **Monitoring/Feedback**

- ❖ Measures the impact of its work in terms of Reputation and Connectivity, Consumer Impact and Value for Money;
- ❖ Seeks formal and informal stakeholder feedback on the work it does and the way in which it is done on behalf of consumers on an ongoing basis;
- ❖ Will review these arrangements with DETI after 6 months to assess their effectiveness.