



## Consumer Council factsheet

# Consumer Organisations

## What is a consumer organisation?

Consumer organisations provide support and information for consumers. Some assist consumers by producing guides and educating consumers about their rights, campaigning for a fair deal and/or advising consumers on what to do if they have a complaint whilst others are involved in enforcing consumer law.

## Brief descriptions and web links to some of the key Consumer Organisations:

### Citizens Advice Bureau

Citizens Advice is the largest charity in Northern Ireland working to meet the information and advice needs of over 200,000 consumers per year.

Citizens Advice aims to:

- Ensure individuals do not suffer through:
  - Lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities
  - Lack of knowledge of the services available to them
  - Inability to express their needs effectively

They also influence the development of social services both locally and nationally.

Citizens Advice offers free, confidential and impartial advice to consumers about a range of issues, including consumer and employment legislation, social security benefits, money, health, housing rights and legal matters.

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

### Independent Advice Centres

Advice NI is a membership organisation which exists to promote, support and develop the independent advice sector across Northern Ireland. Advice NI does not assist consumers directly but offers training and support for a wide range of independent organisations that do offer advice to consumers,

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including, for example, Disability Action and East Belfast Independent Advice Centre.

The individual centres give advice on a whole range of issues including:

- Social security;
- Housing;
- Consumer matters; and
- Debt problems.

[www.adviceni.net](http://www.adviceni.net)

### **Belfast Consumer Advice Centre**

The Consumer Advice Centre (CAC) is run by Belfast City Council's Health and Environmental Services Department. The service is only available to people who live in the Belfast City Council area or who have a complaint about goods or services either bought from a trader in that area or have their head office in Belfast.

The CAC advises consumers before they buy and helps to sort out problems with goods or services already bought. They also aim to settle disputes between consumers and traders and give advice and assistance on cases being taken to the Small Claims Court.

[www.belfastcity.gov.uk/consumeradvice](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/consumeradvice)

### **Consumer Focus – formerly National Consumer Council**

Consumer Focus is a statutory organisation which campaigns for a fair deal for consumers. It is a consumer advocacy organisation rather than an advice agency answering specific consumer queries.

Consumer Focus has its head office in London and regional offices in Wales and Scotland. In addition, Consumer Focus Post deals with postal service issues for consumers in Northern Ireland.

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

### **The Consumer Council**

The Consumer Council is a statutory body set up in 1985, funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). It campaigns for the

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best possible standards of service and protection for Northern Ireland consumers.

The Consumer Council runs information and education campaigns, undertakes research and lobbies government and decision makers to ensure consumers get a fair deal. It also has specific powers to investigate consumer complaints about electricity; natural gas; coal; public transport (buses, planes, ferries; trains) and water.

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

### **Trading Standards Service**

Trading Standards Service promote and maintain fair trading, protect consumers and enable reputable businesses to thrive within Northern Ireland. The service is responsible for enforcing a wide range of consumer protection laws, as well as providing advice and guidance to consumers and traders.

Trading Standards Service aims to:

- Empower consumers
- Ensure that businesses comply with consumer protection legislation
- Protect consumers and honest traders against unfair trading
- Work in partnership with the business community to maintain good practice.

<http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-consumer-index.htm>

### **Consumerline**

Consumerline is a website and telephone helpline which provides NI consumers with free, impartial advice and information aimed at making people aware of their consumer rights and how to avoid scams and dodgy deals.

It is a joint enterprise between the Consumer Council, which manages the website and Trading Standards Service who operate the telephone helpline.

[www.consumerline.org](http://www.consumerline.org)

Telephone: 0845 600 62 62

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### **Which?**

Which? Is the largest consumer body in the UK with over a million members. It promotes informed consumer choice in the purchase of goods and services and is known for testing household products like washing machines and digital cameras to establish the 'best buy'. They also campaign on important issues affecting consumers.

Which? has an online subscription website and publishes a monthly magazine featuring product testing, mystery shopping and best buy information on a range of products and services including computing, cars, food and health, holiday and leisure, photography and video, money, TV, music and legal rights.

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