



## **The Consumer Council response to the CMA Annual Plan Consultation 2021/22**

The Consumer Council is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) established through the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984. Our principal statutory duty is to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland. The Consumer Council has specific statutory duties in relation to energy, postal services, transport, and water and sewerage. These include considering consumer complaints and enquiries, carrying out research, and educating and informing consumers.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the CMA Annual Plan 2021/22 and look forward to working with the CMA over the next year.

The Consumer Council agree with the overall direction and themes of focus contained in the 21/22 draft Annual Plan.

The Consumer Council has a key role in representing consumers in Northern Ireland. As such we welcome the commitment by the CMA to extend its outreach to business and people across the regions of the UK and for targeted engagement to deepen understanding of sectors and geographies.

We wish to engage with the CMA at an early stage and at a strategic level. We want to use our strong evidence base and local knowledge to identify emerging issues in Northern Ireland before consumer detriment takes place and work with the CMA to protect consumers.

The commitment to engage with regional stakeholders is an important opportunity for the CMA to understand the consumer journey in Northern Ireland. This is particularly significant post EU Exit. The Northern Ireland protocol places the region's consumers and businesses in a unique position within the UK. We believe that it is important for the CMA to engage with a range of stakeholders in Northern Ireland, including The Consumer Council as the outworking of the protocol and the impact on consumers becomes more apparent and settled.

We welcome the commitment of the CMA to hold more stakeholder events in the devolved nations. We look forward to opportunities to both attend and work in partnership with the CMA on such events, building on the successful vulnerability roundtable of 2018 and the training event held in Belfast in 2019. We also would welcome the opportunity for deeper information exchange, joint research projects, and shared outreach and advocacy campaigns to promote consumer interests and raise awareness of consumer protections.

We would like to thank the CMA's Northern Ireland representative Robert Stewart, for his support and valuable engagement with The Consumer Council.

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