



***The Consumer Council's manifesto
Westminster election 2010***



1. Who we are

The Consumer Council is an independent consumer organisation working to protect the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland. Our mission is to make the consumer voice heard and to make it count.

2. The 2010 Westminster election comes at a critical time for consumers:

The years following the last Westminster election in 2005 have been difficult for consumers. The credit crunch, plunging property prices, rocketing energy costs, the demise of global and local banks and high street names have hit consumers extremely hard.

Government has an essential role to ensure consumer needs are at the heart of policy and practice. A clear emphasis, focus and strong action are vital to securing recovery and support for consumers.

The Consumer Council has identified a range of priorities which need to be addressed:

3. Top 10 Priorities for Action

- Recognise that fuel poverty levels in Northern Ireland are unacceptably high and recommit to eliminating fuel poverty by the agreed target of 2016, ensuring funds allocated under the Barnett formula for fuel poverty are ring-fenced.
- Adjust the Warm Homes Scheme to the model adopted by Kirklees Council, West Yorkshire which for the same budget as the NI Warm Homes Scheme offers free loft and cavity wall insulation to every suitable household in the Kirklees area.
- Ensure home heating oil consumers pay a fair price. Examine whether regulation of the home heating oil industry could provide consumers with the necessary levels of support and price safeguards that will help those who are in fuel poverty.



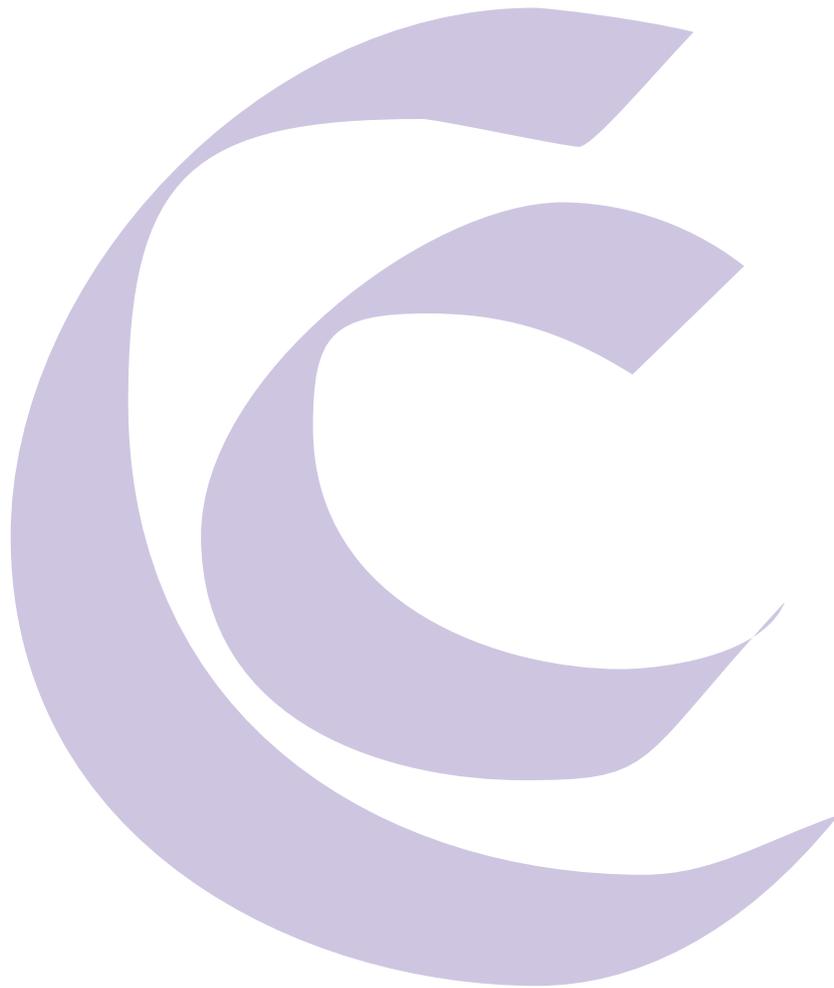
- Ensure people with a disability and reduced mobility have full access to transport services across road, rail, air and sea services.
- Develop a locally focused aviation strategy for Northern Ireland to guide the future development and direction of the industry and economy here.
- Hold an open, public debate to examine the options and implications in relation to the future funding of Northern Ireland Water, be that through Executive funding or the introduction of domestic charging.
- Ensure that financial inclusion and financial capability are key priorities within the Lifetime Opportunity Strategy for all consumers and place consumer education firmly on the Skills Strategy agenda.
- Introduce legislation to protect consumers from paying unfair bank charges for slipping into the red.
- Undertake an urgent investigation into the cost of insurance in Northern Ireland and provide recommendations to lower the cost for all consumers.
- Ensure business is supported by developing its understanding of consumer law and best practice in customer care.

4. What can the Consumer Council do to help elected representatives?

- Provide briefings, information and research on the issues facing consumers.
- Engage with a wide range of consumers to identify their needs.
- Provide support to programmes and policies aimed at tackling the issues which consumers face.
- Consult and provide evidence based opinion on policy proposals.



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