



The Consumer Council

**Combined Energy, Water and Transport Draft
Forward Work Programme
1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014**

December 2012

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1. Responding to the Draft Forward Work Programme

Copies of this consultation are also available on request in writing, by tele/textphone, or by e-mail and will be made available on request in a range of alternative formats.

The consultation exercise will close at **5.00 pm on Friday 15 March 2013**, and your views should reach us by then.

Enquiries about consultation arrangements and responses to this document can be made in writing, by tele/textphone, fax or e-mail to:

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Responses are invited on all aspects of the Consumer Council's proposed work programme. It would be helpful when replying if you could provide your name, who your organisation represents (if appropriate) and who, if anyone, you have consulted about the paper before submitting your response.

The Consumer Council welcomes the opportunity to receive responses by meeting representatives of any of the groups identified as relevant to the Section 75 categories if they so prefer.

2. Introduction

The Consumer Council is pleased to present our integrated Forward Work Programme for the three work areas of Water, Energy and Transport for 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and welcome all comments in relation to it.

The Consumer Council has a statutory duty to develop and consult on a Forward Work Programme for Water, Energy and Transport under the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006, the Energy Order 2003 and the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 respectively.

The Consumer Council is an independent consumer organisation, working to bring about change to benefit Northern Ireland (NI) consumers. Our aim is to make the consumer voice heard and make it count.

We have a statutory remit to *promote and safeguard the interests* of consumers

in NI and we have specific functions in relation to energy, water, transport and food¹. These include:

- Representing the views of consumers on consumer matters
- Making proposals or providing advice and information about consumer matters
- Obtaining and keeping under review information about consumer issues and the views of consumers on these matters
- Achieving redress for consumers by investigating complaints to secure the best possible outcome
- Publishing information in the consumer interest

The Consumer Council is also a designated body for the purposes of supercomplaints², which means that we can refer any consumer affairs goods and services issue to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT)³, where we feel that the market may be harming consumers' best interests.

In taking forward our broad statutory remit we are informed by and representative of consumers in NI. We work to bring about change to benefit consumers by making their voice heard and making it count. To represent consumers in the best way we can, we listen to them and produce robust evidence to put their priorities at the heart of all we do.

3. Our Approach

The Forward Work Programme has been developed in line with our Corporate Plan for 2011/2015 which was developed following a programme of consumer research and stakeholder engagement.

We consulted with Consumer Council partners and stakeholders across government and the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and it was agreed that the Consumer Council's mission statement "*Making the Consumer Voice Heard and Making it Count*"; and our values "Integrity, Responsibility, Courage and Innovation"; remain relevant to the needs of today's consumers.

This combined Energy, Water and Transport Forward Work Programme has been developed to contribute to our core aims for 2011/15 which are:

1. Championing and protecting the interests of consumers;
2. Informing and empowering consumers;

¹ The Consumer Council undertakes its specific functions in relation to food recognising the role of the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The FSA has responsibility for the development of food policy and for the provision of advice, information and assistance, in respect to food safety or other interests of consumers in relation to food. Therefore, to ensure good value and use of public money, the Consumer Council and FSA have a memorandum of understanding and the Council's strategic focus on food is primarily in relation to food prices and customer experience.

² The Enterprise Act 2002 (Part 9 Restrictions on Disclosure of Information) (Amendment and Specification) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2003/1400/schedules/made>

³ The OFT is the UK's consumer and competition authority. Its mission is to make markets work well for consumers. It is a non-ministerial government department established by statute in 1973 <http://oft.gov.uk/about-the-oft/>

3. Ensuring public policy reflects the needs of today's and tomorrow's consumer; and
4. Ensuring the Consumer Council is fit for purpose and delivers value for money.

The Forward Work Programme will form part of the Consumer Council's Operating Plan for 2013/14 and will be a key contributor to progressing our core aims.

4. The Context of the 2013/14 Forward Work Programme

This Forward Work Programme covers the third year of the Consumer Council's Corporate Plan for 2011/15 with a specific focus on water, energy, and transport. It has been developed based on the issues that consumers have raised as part of our ongoing engagement programme.

Consumers continue to struggle with the Cost of Living with just over half (53%) stating that they are currently keeping up with all bills and credit commitments without any difficulty.

Other events such as the withdrawal of bmibaby from Northern Ireland and the temporary collapse of Ulster Bank IT systems demonstrates that the Consumer Council's role as an advocate for consumers, challenging unfair practices and championing a fair deal for consumers is essential.

Energy

Consumers have seen a welcome respite from the seemingly relentless rise in energy prices of recent years with decreases to both natural gas and electricity prices. Competition has continued to develop in both of these markets and has helped ensure that reductions to the regulated tariff are reflected across other suppliers' tariffs.

It is welcome that the number of consumers switching their supplier in both electricity and gas has increased, however alongside the increase in switching the Consumer Council has witnessed an increase in the number of complaints about the electricity supply industry.

It was therefore timely that consumer protection arrangements were strengthened by new European Regulations during 2012. The Consumer Council played an important role in supporting the implementation of the new provisions which came into effect on 13 December 2012. Throughout 2013, we will continue to work with the Regulator to implement, monitor and enforce the new and existing consumer protection measures. We will also continue to identify and highlight areas where consumers still lack sufficient protection.

Despite some easing on energy prices, the figures released in November 2012 show that fuel poverty remains a serious problem, affecting 42 per cent of households in NI⁴. The Consumer Council will continue to help the Fuel Poverty

⁴Home Energy Conservation Authority, 16th Annual Progress Report, 2012.

Coalition as it develops practical measures such as the Energy Brokering Scheme and lobbies the NI Government to take action to tackle fuel poverty.

Northern Ireland's continuing reliance on home heating oil as a source of domestic heating continues to be the main reason why the NI fuel poverty figure remains the highest in the UK. Despite being volatile, the price of home heating oil is roughly the same as this time last year but remains significantly higher than natural gas⁵. The Consumer Council has continued to call for the NI Assembly to examine whether there are aspects of the industry that would benefit from Government intervention. During 2012, the Consumer Council continued to give a voice to consumers on important strategic energy issues that will have a significant impact on consumers for many years. We gave evidence on the Phoenix Natural Gas Price Control, the NIE Price Control and DETI's proposals to extend the natural gas network. The regulation of the energy industry and the development of infrastructure projects such as the North- South Interconnector and Gas Storage will continue to be high on the agenda in 2013 and we will continue to analyse the evidence and speak up for both current and future consumers.

2013 will see the NI Assembly consider the new Energy Bill, which has the potential to make a real difference to consumers. The Bill proposes a range of measures but at its heart is a proposal for an obligation on suppliers to provide energy efficiency measures. Whilst this has the potential to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty, the overall financial impact on all consumers needs to be carefully considered to inform the approach for implementation.

Water

Given the ongoing harsh economic climate the continued deferral of domestic water charges until 2016 is welcome news for consumers. Whether or not direct charges are introduced post 2016 it remains that consumers want and deserve high quality water and sewerage services delivered efficiently by a responsive consumer focused organisation.

2012-13 is the final year of NI Water's first Price Control, PC10. Indications are that NI Water will outperform many of the targets set for it by the Utility Regulator for PC10.

On 1 April 2013 the two year PC13 will begin. For PC10 we conducted extensive consumer views research. Stakeholders agreed that this research remained valid and relevant for use in PC13. The PC13 Final Determination has been made and we wait to see if NI Water will accept the Utility Regulator's decision.

We have started working on PC15 – NI Water's six year Price Control covering 2015-2021. To ensure consumers are central, a Consumer Engagement Group has been established. This group will evidence consumers' views and priorities in the services provided by NI Water. This evidence will be used to inform the Ministerial Social and Environmental Guidance (S&EG), NI Water's Business Plan and the Utility Regulator's PC15 Determination.

⁵ Sutherland Tables October 2012

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) has begun work on the NI Executive's 24 year Long Term Water Strategy. The Consumer Council conducted research with domestic and business consumers to inform this strategy at the early stages of development. An important finding was consumers' desire for a variety of methods to be employed to obtain their views, important in all our work and especially as we plan our work on PC15.

The June 2012 flooding again caused many consumers misery, disruption, upheaval and upset. The seemingly increasing incidence of flooding and the misery it causes emphasises the need for increased strategic focus on flooding and flood risk management. The Flooding Stakeholder Group recommends that an "overview role for surface water flood risk must be established within government" and the "issue of lead department for flood emergency situations needs to be clarified, not only for surface water events but for all flooding." The recently published PEDU review into the response to the June flooding reinforced this view.

We have concerns that both flood risk management planning and flood response are not optimal and performing as best as they can for consumers and that consumers get stuck in the 'gaps' between the various flood organisations. The Consumer Council believes it is necessary for the NI Executive to form a single strategic flood overview and lead response agency so that consumers benefit from an organised flood plan and response from local to regional level.

In 2009 a Statement of Principles was agreed between the NI Executive and the insurance industry represented by the Association of British Insurers (ABI). The agreement expires at the end of June 2013. Availability and affordability of flood insurance are the two key issues facing consumers living in flood risk areas. There are ongoing discussions between Government and the insurance industry to establish a successor agreement whereby insurance bills remain affordable without placing unsustainable costs on wider policyholders and the taxpayer.

The winter of 2012/13 was unexpectedly mild, but we must not be complacent. The Consumer Council has continued to engage with NI Water and others to make sure consumer needs and priorities were at the fore when developing improved co-ordinated response and information in crisis situations.

Transport

Transport NI (the new Roads and Public Transport organisation within DRD) will be operational from April 2013. This new departmental division will be responsible for some of the functions consulted upon as part of the Public Transport Reform process.

These functions will include the agreement of service permits and the introduction of contracting with service providers. This will see the development of a contract between Transport NI and Translink, as the main provider of public

transport services in Northern Ireland by April 2014, which will contain key performance indicators and it is essential that these indicators reflect the needs and priorities of passengers.

The introduction of EU Regulation 1177/2010 in December 2012 gives ferry passengers improved rights in relation to travelling with a disability or reduced mobility as well as when services are disrupted by delays and cancellations. The Consumer Council has been designated the complaint handling body for the Regulation in Northern Ireland and will continue to work with ferry operators and the Department for Transport to ensure passengers are aware of their rights and service providers are aware of their obligations.

In addition to our ferry services, Northern Ireland consumers continue to be heavily reliant on our aviation links, particularly to other UK airports. Although Northern Ireland's population represents only 2.9 per cent of the UK population, flights taken by Northern Ireland passengers account for 14 per cent of all UK domestic flights. Our dependence on aviation is central to economic and social wellbeing and the Consumer Council will continue to seek positive outcomes for consumers on issues such as air passenger duty and access to Heathrow.

The Consumer Council has called for clarity and action to address the higher costs which Northern Ireland consumers face for road fuel costs. In response to the OFT call for information on the UK petrol and diesel sector, the Consumer Council called for the OFT to investigate why Northern Ireland consumers consistently pay more for their petrol and diesel compared to other UK regions, why supermarket fuel retailers continue to engage in regional pricing and to consider the full supply chain in relation to fuel. As part of our response, the Consumer Council launched a fuel survey which allowed over 1700 consumers have their views included in the response.

5. Key Achievements to date from the 2012/13 Forward Work Programme

Complaints and Enquiries

Nature of Complaint	Enquiry	Stage 1 Investigation	Stage 1 Referral	Stage 2 Complaint	Total
Air	223	10	3	13	249
Bus	21	4	6	17	48
CCNI	153	0	0	0	153
Electricity	810	55	29	90	984
Ferry	14	1	0	0	15
Natural Gas	141	5	3	9	158
Other Energy	23	0	1	0	24
Rail	10	1	2	6	19
Water	148	35	7	25	215
Grand Total	1543	111	51	160	1865

The table above shows the number of contacts and complaints dealt with by the Consumer Council for the period **1 April 2012 to 1 December 2012**.

CCNI accounts for 153 contacts received during this period. This relates to requests from consumers seeking copies of our literature or advice relating to energy, transport and water.

As a direct result of our complaint work from 1 April 2012 to 1 December 2012, **£253,300.76** has been returned to energy, transport and water consumers. Financial recompense is only one aspect of the outcomes and benefits secured for consumers. The complaint handling process also delivered apologies, explanations, remedial work, and policy, procedural or operational changes.

Energy

Consumer Protection - We continued to work closely with the Utility Regulator and the energy industry to implement the new EU consumer protection framework (IME3). This included developing Codes of Practice covering complaints, customer information and marketing which have increased the levels of consumer protection for energy customers;

Home Heating Oil - We developed a Code of Practice with the Northern Ireland Oil Federation that will provide increased protection for consumers and includes a role for the Consumer Council to investigate complaints against oil suppliers (who are members of the NI Oil Federation);

Fuel Poverty - We developed partnership arrangements with The Housing Executive, Bryson Charitable Group and National Energy Action (NEA) to pilot

an energy brokering scheme which will bring more affordable energy to groups of consumers in the North West.

We maintained our role as a key member of the Fuel Poverty Coalition which provided a critical channel for maintaining the consumer voice on fuel poverty issues amongst politicians and Government Departments.

Price Controls - We provided evidence to the Competition Commission inquiry into the Phoenix Natural Gas price control which resulted in a reduction in the increase to consumers' bills requested by Phoenix (albeit an increase to the Utility Regulator determination).

We joined with the Utility Regulator in holding a stakeholder event to encourage engagement from the 3rd sector in the Regulator's consultation on the NIE RP5 Price Control. Consequently the Regulator received 16 responses from the 3rd sector to this consultation resulting in an increased consumer focus in many aspects of the Regulator's final Price Control;

Policy - We responded to the DETI consultation proposals for a new Energy Bill to ensure that the key energy issues for consumers such as price, availability of energy and security of supply are inherent in the Department's final proposals;

Consumer Research - We undertook a series of consumer panels and survey work to gauge the attitude, behaviour and experience of consumers towards competition and switching in home heating oil, natural gas and electricity. The research findings will be used to inform our responses to the Regulator, the Department and energy companies to ensure consumer needs and priorities are included in future pricing and policy proposals.

Water

Price Controls – With stakeholders we monitored NI Water's progress towards PC10 targets. We scrutinised NI Water's PC13 business plan against consumers' priorities and responded to the Utility Regulator's Draft Determination. We agreed the approach to PC15 and are leading on the research element of NI Water's consumer engagement to ensure consumers are placed at the centre of NI Water's future delivery of water, sewerage and customer services.

Business Connect - We set up a new partnership with Invest NI and NI Water to deliver water efficiency publications and tools directly targeted to businesses and farms. The resulting "Every Drop Counts" was launched by the Minister for Regional Development in October 2012. This will help businesses and farms find the right information to improve their water efficiency and save money on their bills. The Consumer Council produced an online tool to help businesses and farms monitor their water usage.

Water Champions - An award for businesses and farms that have demonstrated how they have saved water and money. The first Water

Champion was awarded in December 2012. The Water Champions campaign works in partnership with Invest NI's existing program "Boosting Business" which supports Northern Ireland businesses to help improve their competitiveness, productivity and sustainability by delivering a range of activities to identify and achieve cost savings in the consumption of water, energy and raw materials.

Flooding - We have provided information to the NI Executive about consumers' views on flood risk, flooding response, resistance and resilience. We updated our three flooding information leaflets for consumers. Recognising the issues of flood insurance availability, affordability and the possible implications of the expiration of the ABI agreement the Consumer Council is currently conducting research which we will provide to Government to help influence future plans.

Long Term Water Strategy - The Consumer Council conducted extensive consumer and business research to inform our advocacy position in developing the LTWS for Northern Ireland. The findings have been given to DRD to enable the Department to ensure the consumer perspective is included within the strategy. DRD will be consulting on the draft LTWS during 2013/14.

Local Issues - Building on previous success in identifying and resolving local issues the Consumer Council has been spreading the word that we are here to help not just individual complaints but also communities that may be affected by a water or sewerage service issue.

Transport

bmibaby - When bmibaby announced its withdrawal from Northern Ireland the Consumer Council informed the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) that we believed the airline was failing in its obligations to passengers under Regulation (EU) No 261/2004. As a result bmibaby committed to refund any difference between the fares passengers had originally booked with bmibaby and the cost of alternative flights passengers had to book with other low cost airlines.

Evidence to Office of Fair Trading on UK Petrol and Diesel Sector - In September 2012, the OFT issued a call for information on the UK petrol and diesel sector. The Consumer Council launched its Fuel Survey to identify the key issues for consumers. As a result of this, over 1,700 consumers were able to have their views included in the considerations by OFT, which are still ongoing.

Development of Maritime Passenger Rights - The Consumer Council has worked in partnership with the Department for Transport to ensure the Department's guidelines for the interpretation of Regulation (EU) No 1177/2010 fully reflect the content of the Regulation. The subsequent outcome is that passengers now benefit from similar rights in instances of disrupted travel when travelling by ferry as they have when travelling by air. Passengers with a disability now also benefit from a right to assistance when travelling by ferry.

Barriers to Complaining - The Consumer Council published research on the barriers to complaining faced by passengers. Translink, as the main provider of public transport services in Northern Ireland has reviewed the recommendations of the report and agreed to display the contact details of the Consumer Council on 50% of all Metro and Ulsterbus vehicles in Northern Ireland. The poster displayed on the buses will promote the Consumer Council's role in handling complaints from passengers about public transport.

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Report on Northern Ireland Air Transport Strategy - The Consumer Council has continuously called for action to be taken to reduce or remove the burden of Air Passenger Duty (APD) on Northern Ireland passengers and to secure our access to Heathrow due to our reliance on the hub airport for economic and social development. We gave evidence to the Committee and in November 2012 the Committee issued its report calling for APD to be reduced or abolished on all flights to and from Northern Ireland; for the current level of Northern Ireland's air links to Heathrow to be maintained; and for the road and rail links to all three of NI's airports to be improved.

EU Airport Slot Allocation - The Consumer Council has engaged with Members of the European Parliament to ensure the draft Regulation on common rules for the allocation of slots at EU airports will provide protection for services operating between regional and hub airports.

Introduction of the Translink 'yLink' Card - As a result of research which the Consumer Council carried out with young people across Northern Ireland in collaboration with YouthAction NI, Translink has introduced the 'YLink' card which offers discounts on the cost of travel on Metro, Ulsterbus and NI Railways services to all young people aged 16-23.

6. Expenditure on Energy, Water and Transport

The indicative cost requirements across each section are not provided as final budgets have not yet been determined. But for information the total budget for each section last year (2012/13) was as follows:

Water was £466k

Energy was £542k

Transport was £388k

7. Combined Forward Work Programme for Energy, Water and Transport - 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014

The Consumer Council's Energy, Water and Transport work programme for 2013 to 2014 is set out below.

In our 2011/12 Forward Work Programme, the Consumer Council recognised the need to take account of the pressures consumers were facing due to the continued economic downturn. Aligned to the core aims of our Corporate Plan two key pillars focusing on the **Cost of Living** and **Consumer Rights/Proficiency** have been developed to strengthen, inform and prioritise our work for consumers and help mitigate the impact of the economic downturn.

Our financial capability research published in 2012 found that 47 per cent of consumers agreed or strongly agreed that they are concerned about their ability to make ends meet.

This research, together with the body of evidence we gather through our complaint handling role, outreach activities, stakeholder engagement and programme of research, shows that as a consumer advocate organisation it is essential that all of our activities are targeted towards addressing the issues consumers face in relation to their rights and the cost of living.

In addition to the specific deliverables for water, transport and energy our two core statutory functions relating to consumer engagement (outreach) and complaint handling are also presented.

Work Programme	Action by the Consumer Council will include	Outcome	<u>Theme</u>
1. Promotion of Passenger Rights	<p>Complaint handling and awareness raising for passengers under:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation (EU) 1177/2010 (Maritime) • Regulation (EC) 1107/2006 (Access to Air Travel) • Regulation (EC) 261/2004 (Denied Boarding, Cancellations) • Complaint handling and awareness raising for passengers travelling by public transport 	<p>Consumers who are entitled to receive appropriate redress will be given support in resolving complaints</p> <p>Transport providers will amend negative practices</p> <p>Improved services for passengers</p>	Consumer Proficiency/ Rights
2. Efficient and effective complaints handling service	<p>Review of complaints handling policy and Consumer Support Strategy</p> <p>Development of positive relationships with all service providers to ensure that complaints and enquiries are dealt with in a timely and consistent manner</p> <p>Improved analysis of complaints data and identifying trends</p> <p>Introduce a CCNI Code of Confidence</p> <p>Improve consumer awareness and uptake of Critical Care Registers</p>	<p>Redress system working for all consumers</p> <p>Increase contact from areas defined in Outreach Strategy</p> <p>Introduce a minimum standard for online customer service amongst energy providers in NI</p> <p>Increase uptake on Critical Care Registers by 10 per cent</p>	Consumer Proficiency/ Rights

	Increase awareness and promotion of complaints handling role		
3. Regulation working for consumers	<p>To undertake research analysis and assessment of the effectiveness of consumer involvement in regulatory processes</p> <p>To develop a clear and robust consumer evidence base to support CCNI input to all price controls, tariff reviews, policy proposals and consultations issued by Regulators.</p>	Report produced outlining findings and recommendations to ensure the consumer perspective has equal/sufficient consideration and weight when compared against all aspects of Regulation	Cost of Living
4. Consumer Protection	<p>To explore options to support a reduction on NI dependence on home heating oil and the feasibility of introducing a regulatory model to the Home Heating Oil sector</p> <p>To work with the Utility Regulator and energy companies to ensure a measureable increase in consumer protection provision is included in the Codes of Practice derived from IME3</p> <p>To continue to build on the Customer Charter with NIOF to improve protection and benefits to consumers agreed and</p>	<p>Research and analysis of regulatory options completed and recommendations published</p> <p>Level of protection for electricity and gas consumers increased specifically in the areas of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable Customers • Complaints Handling • Marketing and Sales • Dealing with Debt <p>Increased level of protection for Home Heating Oil Consumers</p>	

	published		
5. Fuel Poverty	<p>To promote Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty reduction measures to increase awareness among consumers</p> <p>Findings of the CCNI Energy Efficiency Report produced and published</p> <p>Production of a revised Energy Price Comparison Tool developed and published on CCNI website</p> <p>Communication Plan to target key consumer groups, such as vulnerable customers, developed and implemented</p> <p>Membership of the FPC maintained to continue to lobby policymakers to reduce fuel poverty</p> <p>To pilot and evaluate approaches for fuel brokering through area based approach</p>	<p>Consumers have appropriate information to make informed choices regarding energy bills</p> <p>Fuel Poverty issues inherent in the policy making of the Executive, Government Departments and Energy Companies</p> <p>To develop practical measures to support consumers to reduce energy costs</p>	<p>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</p> <p>and</p> <p>Cost of Living</p>
6. Insurance	<p>Produce a report based on insurance research to raise awareness of insurance market difficulties for households insuring flood risk properties</p> <p>Provide advice and information to</p>	<p>Influence NI Assembly policy position regarding flood insurance</p> <p>Identify further opportunities to support consumers in the management of flood risk</p>	<p>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</p> <p>and</p>

	<p>households in flood risk properties</p> <p>Build on the findings of the Consumer Council's 2012 research into travel insurance</p> <p>Work with industry and if applicable financial regulators to ensure policy recommendations are implemented</p>	<p>Support consumers who live in flood risk properties</p> <p>Ensure that consumers are well informed and are able to get the best insurance product for their needs</p>	<p>Cost of Living</p>
<p>7. Transport</p>	<p>Agree Memorandum of Understanding with DRD to replace the current Corporate Planning protocol</p> <p>Conduct research with public transport consumers likely to be users of the proposed routes for Rapid Transit to seek views of the services currently available</p> <p>Involvement in DRD pilot of Local Public Transport Plans</p> <p>Follow up on the recommendations emerging from the CCNI research on modal shift, passenger information, Community and Door to Door transport</p> <p>Monitor fuel costs across Northern Ireland and other regions, assess fuel taxation and impact on consumers</p>	<p>Ensure that the development of Key Performance Indicators under the new contracting regime for Public Transport include indicators that are related directly to the priorities of public transport consumers</p> <p>Ensure that any Passenger Charter reflects the needs of passengers</p> <p>Ensure that Transport NI delivers the changes anticipated under the process of Public Transport Reform</p> <p>Ensure consumers are empowered to access lower petrol and diesel prices; ensure the Consumer Council can lobby industry and Government to deliver price transparency for consumers</p>	<p>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</p> <p>and</p> <p>Cost of Living</p>

	<p>Campaign for the removal of Air Passenger Duty (APD) on all flights to and from Northern Ireland</p> <p>Campaign to ensure continued access for air services between Northern Ireland's airports and Heathrow</p>	<p>Ensure Northern Ireland passengers are no longer disadvantaged by the high level of APD</p> <p>Ensure consumers continue to benefit from access to UK hub airport for domestic and international travel</p>	
8. Consumer engagement and outreach	<p>Increase awareness and understanding amongst consumers of their rights and responsibilities and how to exercise these effectively</p> <p>To increase the confidence and capability of consumers within the marketplace</p>	<p>Informed consumers will help drive improvements within the marketplace and ensure their rights are respected</p> <p>Improving consumer proficiency will ensure consumers make appropriate and informed purchasing decisions</p>	<p>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</p> <p>and</p> <p>Cost of Living</p>
9. Water Issues for business, farms and communities	<p>Provide water efficiency advice to businesses and farms</p> <p>Work with businesses and business bodies to ensure billing accuracy and making bills easier to understand</p> <p>Identify communities which experience issues with water and sewerage services and work with them and NI water to seek resolution</p>	<p>To establish businesses and farms as water champions</p> <p>Reduction in water and energy bills</p> <p>Improved bill understanding and accuracy</p> <p>Improvement in services delivered by NI Water in "hot spots"</p>	<p>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</p> <p>and</p> <p>Cost of Living</p>
10. Water Strategy & Regulation	<p>Assess the performance of NI Water at the end of PC10</p> <p>Monitor first year delivery of PC13</p>	<p>Ensuring the consumer perspective is reflected in the work of companies and the Utility Regulator</p>	<p>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</p> <p>and</p>

	<p>Work with NI Water, DRD, Utility Regulator to conduct research and engage with consumers on PC15</p> <p>Conduct consumer consultation on DRD's LTWS and continue to play a key role as a member of the WSSG</p> <p>Work in partnership with DRD, DWI and others to assess the need for consumer research regarding lead pipes</p>	<p>Consumers influence NI Water's investment strategy for the PC15 Business Plan</p> <p>Ensure consumers' views are reflected in the LTWS</p> <p>Agreed partnership approach to include the consumer view on any future work on lead</p>	<p>Cost of Living</p>
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Annex 1 Statutory Duties in Energy, Water and Transport

The Energy (NI) Order 2003 gave the Consumer Council extended powers and an expanded remit with responsibility for representing the interests of electricity consumers in Northern Ireland. The Consumer Council has the statutory duty to represent water and sewerage consumers under the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

The Consumer Council's statutory functions and duties are laid down in each of these Orders and include:

- The function of
 - making proposals or providing advice and information about consumer matters
 - representing the views of consumers on such matters
 - obtaining and keeping under review information about consumer issues and the views of consumers on those matters
- a duty to investigate and seek to resolve consumer complaints against companies about regulated matters
- the function of giving information to Ministers, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR), licence holders and any other body with a consumer interest, such as local authorities
- the ability to publish information about:
 - complaints made against energy suppliers, transporters, distributors and water and sewerage companies both directly to the Consumer Council and also to the relevant licensee
- a specific duty to “have regard” to the interests of
 - individuals who are disabled or chronically sick
 - individuals of pensionable age
 - individuals with low incomes
 - individuals residing in rural areas
- a wide power to investigate any matter which appears to be a matter relating to the interests of consumers in relation to gas conveyed through pipes or electricity conveyed through distribution systems or water and sewerage services
- powers to publish information where we think it would be in the consumer interest
- the requirement in each financial year to publish a forward work programme containing a general description of the projects that we plan to undertake the following year

The Consumer Council has an agreed combined Memorandum of Understanding with the Utility Regulator, which fosters an open, constructive and effective relationship between the two bodies, while respecting their different emphases.

The Energy Order and Water Order require the Consumer Council to publish a forward work programme for each financial year, but before doing so it must consult on a draft of the Programme to allow it to consider any representations and comments made.

The General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 sets out the functions of the Council in relation to transport:

5.—(1) The Council shall consider and, where it appears to it to be desirable, make recommendations with respect to any matter affecting road or railway passenger transport services and facilities in Northern Ireland and services and facilities provided for passengers travelling to and from Northern Ireland.

(2) The Transport Users' Committee established under section 1 of the M1 Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 is hereby abolished and the Council shall exercise the functions heretofore exercisable by the Transport Users' Committee under sections 6(2) and (3), 59(1) and (2) and 60(2) of that Act.