



**Consumer Council Response to the
Newry, Mourne and Down Community Plan 2030
19 January 2017**

1. Introduction

1.1. 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.

1.2. Our main statutory functions are to:

- Consider any complaint made to it relating to consumer affairs and, where it appears to the Council to be appropriate having regard to any other remedy which may be available to the complainant, investigate the complaint and take such further action in relation thereto as the Council may determine;
- Carry out, or assist in the carrying out of, inquiries and research into matters relating to consumer affairs;
- Promote discussion of, and the dissemination of information relating to, consumer affairs; and
- Report to a Northern Ireland department on any matter relating to consumer affairs which is referred to the Council by that department.

1.3. The Consumer Council has specific statutory duties in relation to energy, postal services, transport, and water and sewerage. In these areas, we are to have particular regard to consumers:

- Who are disabled or chronically sick;
- Of pensionable age;
- With low incomes; or
- Who reside in rural areas.

1.4. The Consumer Council is a designated consumer body under the Enterprise Act 2002 and the Financial Services and Markets Act Order 2013. Designated consumer bodies can raise a super-complaint to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), in the case of goods and services, and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) or the Payment Systems Regulator (PSR) as appropriate, in the case of financial services if a market in the UK is, or appears to be, significantly harming the interests of consumers.

2. Newry, Mourne and Down Community Plan 2030

- 2.1. The Consumer Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We are supportive of Newry, Mourne and Down's outcome based approach and its commitment to partnership working.
- 2.2. The Consumer Council Forward Work Programme for 2017/18 seeks to develop advice partnerships with the 11 new Councils and Libraries in NI to provide joined up consumer information and advice services across NI.
- 2.3. The Consumer Council sees its role as being a supportive one to Newry, Mourne and Down Council in achieving the vision and the outcomes of the plan. Our statutory role is to safeguard and protect the interests of consumers and in doing this we believe we can assist the local community of Newry, Mourne and Down.

How the Consumer Council can help Newry, Mourne and Down

Council deliver its plan

Research

- 2.4. The Consumer Council conducts research with consumers across Northern Ireland on a wide range of topics. Much of this research can be analysed by Council area and could identify any areas of concern for Newry, Mourne and Down Council residents.

Empowerment and Redress

- 2.5. We empower consumers by providing information and training to voluntary and community groups on the rights of consumers. We also provide assistance in resolving individual complaints for consumers in relation to public transport, air and sea travel, energy supply, water and sewerage and postal services¹.
- 2.6. Our website provides a range of information guides and price comparison tools to help consumers find out more about their rights and make informed decisions. Our online interactive price comparison tool enables consumers to compare their gas and electricity prices with other suppliers to get the best deal.

Local Businesses

- 2.7. The Consumer Council supports local businesses by providing advice and guidance on billing disputes and supply issues as well as dealing directly with utility providers on behalf of businesses with unresolved complaints. We also provide information and support to ensure businesses receive all the relevant rebates they are entitled to.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1. The Consumer Council welcomes the development of the Newry, Mourne and Down Council draft Community Plan and is committed to being a supportive delivery partner.

¹ Only postal complaints specifically on behalf of vulnerable consumers.

3.2. To discuss this response or for further information please contact Scott Kennerley, Head of Transport at scott.kennerley@consumercouncil.org.uk or on 028 9025 1600.



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