

**CHANGE TO THE PROVISION OF  
CONSUMER ADVICE IN SCOTLAND**

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**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1** This Report advises Members of the changes to the provision of consumer advice which, as a result of UK government changes, has resulted in the consumer advice services being transferred from Consumer Direct's Hotline to the new Citizens Advice consumer service.
- 1.2** This service commenced on 22 February 2012, with all calls previously made to Consumer Direct now being answered either at one of two Call Centres – either at Citizens Advice Scotland's Centre in Glasgow or at the previous Consumer Direct centre near Stornaway - which has been retained under the new arrangements. The full transfer and rebranding as Citizens Advice Direct (CAD) took place on 2 April 2012.
- 1.3** As Argyll and Bute Council previously agreed to utilise the services of Consumer Direct, any consumer advice request will now be responded to by the new service.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1** That Members note the changes to the provision of consumer advice, and affirm the decision made to enter into the new data sharing arrangements with Citizens Advice nationally. These are required to facilitate an effective service to consumers within Argyll and Bute who will still be able to access the service unchanged.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1** The Consumer Direct Hotline has operated since 2004 and has provided consumer advice across Scotland, including consumers in Argyll and Bute. This service has been operated and managed by Comhairle nan Eilean Sair.
- 3.2** /....

- 3.2** Argyll and Bute Council benefits from the consumer advice hotline, with all front-line consumer protection enquiries being directed to Consumer Direct. Effective liaison arrangements are in place to monitor usage levels and response times.
- 3.3** The more complex cases are referred to the Council's Trading Standards team for further investigation and more detailed advice and action. In 2010/2011 a total of 255 complex cases were forwarded to the Council by Consumer Direct out of a total of 1,526 enquiries relating to Argyll and Bute
- 3.4** The new arrangements, with Citizens Advice taking responsibility for the provision of consumer advice, was part of the proposals agreed by the UK Government Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) for the reform of the Office of Fair Trading. This was detailed to Members in the Paper submitted to the Planning, Protective Services & Licensing Committee on the Changing Consumer Landscape (19 October 2011).
- 3.5** To support the new service provided by Citizens Advice Direct (CAD), which is part of Citizens Advice Scotland, it is necessary to have effective data sharing arrangements in place between CAD and Local Authorities. Similar arrangements have worked well with Consumer Direct and, to enable a smooth transfer to the new service, Data Sharing Arrangements with Citizens Advice have been agreed by the Regulatory Services Manager on behalf of the Council.
- 3.6** From a consumer perspective, the transition to the new service is designed to be unchanged as they will access it via the existing consumer hotline number, 08454 04 05 06.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1** The provision of a front-line consumer advice service offers a response to all consumers and also redirects work previously undertaken by Councils' Trading Standards services, allowing them to focus on other priorities. It is important that these arrangements continue as the Council would not wish to redirect our Trading Standards resources to deal with such enquiries other than the more complex cases.
- 4.2** However, it is envisaged that, in the short term, Trading Standards will have to devote resources to increased monitoring of notifications and referrals received via this new arrangement as it is recognised that the new arrangements may take some time to bed in. This increased monitoring is unlikely to be required for more than 2 months.
- 4.3** Members should note these new arrangements.

#### **5. /....**

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

<b>Policy :</b>	None
<b>Finance :</b>	Funded by UK Government
<b>Legal :</b>	None
<b>Personnel :</b>	None
<b>Equal Opportunity :</b>	All consumers will receive access to the Service Advice Centre

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