

Who we are and what we do

An overview of the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland.

We are the statutory consumer representative body of Northern Ireland.

Consumers are at the heart of everything we do and we are responsible for protecting, empowering, understanding and representing consumers.

Our purpose

Our core purpose is to champion and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland. We are their trusted, independent voice. We achieve this by:

- providing expert, confidential advice
- investigating and resolving consumer complaints
- conducting independent research on consumer issues
- delivering consumer campaigns, outreach and education programmes
- advocating on behalf of Northern Ireland consumers here, across the UK and in Europe
- collaborating to influence citizen-centric public policy and regulation
- advising government on consumer choice, rights and protection

Our role, set out in law through the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984, is to investigate complaints, carry out inquiries and research, promote and disseminate information, and make proposals to public authorities.

We have extensive statutory responsibilities in energy, transport, water and sewerage, post and food affordability and accessibility, drawn from various legislation, licences and memoranda of understanding. Our non-statutory responsibilities are to educate and empower consumers against unfair or discriminatory practices in any UK market, and deliver a range of projects including:

- access to cash and banking services
- financial exclusion and illegal money lending
- EU Exit, the Northern Ireland Protocol and the Windsor Framework
- home heating oil monitoring and service standards
- petrol and diesel price monitoring
- private parking charge notices
- online detriment
- food poverty

We have responsibilities under the Rural Needs Act 2016 and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Our aim is to ensure government policies recognise consumer needs in rural areas, and promote equality of opportunity and good relations across a range of equality categories.

We also can raise a super-complaint with a UK or Northern Ireland regulator if any feature, or features, of a UK market appears to be significantly harming

consumers. Under the Gas and Electricity Licence Modification and Appeals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, we can appeal to the Competition and Markets Authority if we believe a modification by the Utility Regulator to the licence of a gas or electricity provider is detrimental to the interests of consumers.

Our vision, mission and values

Our Vision is to protect and empower consumers in Northern Ireland.

Our mission is to be the trusted go-to organisation for consumers in Northern Ireland, and to work with governments and stakeholders to inform policy and decision making, using our research, insight and expertise to deliver positive outcomes for consumers.

In all of our work, we embody the following **values**:

- **Resolve** - We are committed to achieving outcomes that make a difference to consumers.
- **Excellence** - We will ensure our work and insights are robust, considered and evidence based.
- **Ambition** - We aim to deliver the best possible deal for consumers in Northern Ireland.
- **Courage** - We will take the steps needed to make a difference for consumers.
- **Honesty** - We act with integrity in an open and transparent way.

Alongside this, we use eight guiding principles to assess where the consumer interest lies and develop and communicate our policies, interventions and support.

- They are access, choice, safety, information, fairness, representation, redress, education.
- They provide an agreed framework through which we approach regulatory and policy work.
- They frame our approach to resolving consumer disputes, offering a straightforward checklist to analyse and validate outcomes, in particular amongst vulnerable groups.
- They set out the minimum standards we expect from markets when delivering products or services in Northern Ireland.

Our strategy

We are an agile and flexible organisation, able to respond quickly to the changing consumer environment.

Our 2021-2026 Corporate Plan identified four consumer priorities of the cost of living crisis, EU Exit, decarbonisation and digitalisation, following consultation with consumers and stakeholders.

For each priority, our work focuses on helping consumers mitigate any negative impacts on their lives and livelihoods, and building their resilience and confidence so they make the most of opportunities. This is underpinned by five strategic objectives. We:

- **Understand consumers** through best practice research to identify and quantify emerging risks to consumers and their perceptions, coupled with insight from our face-to-face consumer work.
- **Influence policy** by engaging with government, regulators and consumer bodies to influence public policy.
- **Represent consumers** by campaigning for market reform as an advocate for consumer choice and protection.
- **Protect consumers** through the investigation and resolution of complaints and provision of expert advice and confidential guidance under our statutory and non-statutory functions.
- **Empower consumers** by the information, advice and tools to build confidence and knowledge.

Our plans

- [2021-2026 Corporate Plan](#)
- [Draft 2024-2025 Forward Work Programme](#)

How we operate

The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland was established in April 1985 as a non-departmental public body under the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984. We operate under the Department for the Economy, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Our Board, appointed by the Economy Minister, oversees our strategic direction, organisational performance and corporate governance. They represent consumer

interests and bring a range of experience and insights from industry, academia, and the public and not-for-profit sectors.

Supporting them is our Senior Leadership Team, led by the Chief Executive, and our staff work in consumer policy, protection, insight and outreach, and in communications, finance, human resources and business transformation.

We are funded by the Department for the Economy and from levies collected against our statutory duties administered by the Department for Infrastructure and the Utility Regulator of Northern Ireland, as well as the Department of Business & Trade and HM Treasury.

Find out more about us

Our performance

What we have achieved for consumers in Northern Ireland.

Our legislation

The legal powers and duties we have that enable us to protect consumers.

Our leadership team

Meet our Chief Executive and leadership team.

Accreditations and awards

We're an award winning organisation and we are proud of what our people have achieved.