



**Equality Scheme for The Consumer Council
Drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the
Northern Ireland Act 1998**

The publication is available in the following formats on request:

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Approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on:

Foreword

- 1.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act¹.
- 1.2 In our equality scheme we set out how The Consumer Council proposes to fulfil the Section 75 statutory duties.
- 1.3 The Consumer Council will commit the necessary resources in terms of people, time and money to make sure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that the equality scheme is implemented effectively, and on time.
- 1.4 We commit to having effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring our effective compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing our progress.
- 1.5 We will develop and deliver a programme of communication and training with the aim of ensuring that all our staff and board members are made fully aware of our equality scheme and understand the commitments and obligations within it. We are committed to raising awareness on the Section 75 statutory duties in our equality scheme among consultees.
- 1.6 The Consumer Council is fully committed to effectively fulfilling our Section 75 statutory duties across all our functions (including service provision, employment and procurement) through the effective implementation of our equality scheme.
- 1.7 We realise the important role that the community and voluntary sector and the general public have to play to ensure the Section 75 statutory duties are effectively implemented. Our equality scheme demonstrates how determined we are to ensure there are opportunities, for people affected by our work, to positively

¹ See section 1.1 of our Equality Scheme.

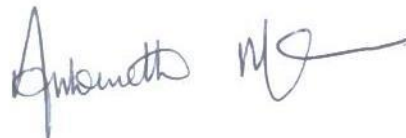
influence how we carry out our functions in line with our Section 75 statutory duties. It also offers the means whereby persons directly affected by what they consider to be a failure, on our part, to comply with our equality scheme, can make complaints.

- 1.8 On behalf of The Consumer Council and our staff we are pleased to support and endorse this equality scheme which has been drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Commission guidelines.

Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Commission guidelines.




RICK HILL
Chairman



ANTOINETTE McKEOWN
Chief Executive

24 March 2011

Review schedule

Date	Action
March 2011	This document was first created and signed by The Consumer Council. At that time, the Chief Executive was Antoinette McKeown and Chair person was Rick Hill.
November 2011	The original Equality Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission on 18 November 2011.
April 2019	The Equality Scheme was updated by The Consumer Council under the guidance of John French- Chief Executive.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

1.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires The Consumer Council to comply with two statutory duties:

- Section 75 (1)
In carrying out our functions relating to Northern Ireland we are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:
 - Persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
 - Men and women generally;
 - Persons with a disability and persons without; and
 - Persons with dependants and persons without.

- Section 75 (2)
In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland we are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

“Functions” include the “powers and duties” of a public authority². This includes our employment and procurement functions.

How we propose to fulfil the Section 75 duties in relation to the relevant functions of The Consumer Council.

1.2 Schedule 9 4. (1) of the Act requires The Consumer Council as a designated public authority, to set out in an equality scheme how it proposes to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75 in relation to its relevant functions. This equality scheme is intended to fulfil that statutory requirement. It is both a statement of our arrangements for fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties and our plan for their implementation.

² Section 98 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

- 1.3 The Consumer Council is committed to the discharge of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our organisation and we will commit the necessary available resources in terms of people, time and money to ensure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that our equality scheme can be implemented effectively.

Who we are and what we do

- 1.4 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.

- 1.5 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.

- 1.6 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.

1.7 In common with other public bodies, The Consumer Council is also designated under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which gives it a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity and good relations across a range of other equality categories.

1.8 The Consumer Council is a designated consumer body under the Enterprise Act 2002 and the Financial Services and Markets Act Order 2013. If a market in the UK is, or appears to be, significantly harming the interests of consumers, designated consumer bodies can raise a super-complaint to the following UK and Northern Ireland regulators:

- Civil Aviation Authority (CAA);
- Financial Conduct Authority (FCA);
- Payment Systems Regulator (PSR);
- Office of Rail and Road (ORR);
- The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA);
- The Office of Communications (Ofcom);
- The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem);
- The Utility Regulator (UR);
- Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat); and
- The Department for Infrastructure (DfI).

1.9 Once a super-complaint has been lodged the regulator is required to investigate the issue, and publish a response within 90 days.

1.10 In addition, under the Gas and Electricity Licence Modification and Appeals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, The Consumer Council can make an appeal to the CMA if we believe a modification by UR to a gas or electricity company's licence is detrimental to the interests of consumers.

Chapter 2 Our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the section 75 duties

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (a))

- 2.1 Some of our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties are outlined in other relevant parts of this equality scheme, for example, Sections 2.8, 4.6 and 5.3). In addition we have the following arrangements in place for assessing our compliance:

Responsibilities and reporting

- 2.2 We are committed to the fulfilment of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our work.
- 2.3 Responsibility for the effective implementation of our equality scheme lies with the Chief Executive of The Consumer Council. This includes the development, implementation, maintenance and review of the equality scheme in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, including any good practice or guidance that has been or may be issued by the Equality Commission.
- 2.4 The Chief Executive arranges for staff to support him in implementing and monitoring the Equality Scheme. The Chief Executive is supported by the Quality Assurance and Performance Planner.
- 2.5 If you have any questions or comments regarding The Consumer Council's equality scheme, please contact in the first instance Maeve Holly at the address given below and we will respond to you as soon as possible:

The Consumer Council
Floor 3
Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast
BT2 8EN

Tele/Textphone: 028 9025 1600

Fax: 028 9025 1663

E-mail: maeve.holly@consumercouncil.org.uk

2.6 This Equality Scheme, its objectives and targets form an integral element of our core business and is a tool by which we mainstream equality and good relations into our strategic and operational planning³. Progress on the delivery of Section 75 statutory duties will be reported in the organisational annual report.

2.7 Employees' job descriptions and performance plans reflect their contributions to the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the equality scheme, where relevant. The personal performance plans are subject to appraisal in the annual performance review. Despite The Consumer Council's has continued to invest in staff training to ensure compliance with statutory Section 75 duties. There is no dedicated equality unit as equality is mainstreamed throughout all staff responsibilities.

2.8 The Consumer Council prepares an annual report on the progress we have made on implementing the arrangements set out in this equality scheme to discharge our Section 75 statutory duties (Section 75 annual progress report). This annual report will be aligned with The Consumer Council's overall Annual Report and Accounts. The Section 75 annual progress report will be sent to the Equality Commission by 31 August each year and will follow any guidance on annual reporting issued by the Equality Commission.

2.9 The latest Section 75 annual progress report is available on our website

www.consumercouncil.org.uk

or by contacting:

The Consumer Council
Floor 3

³ See Appendix 4 'Timetable for measures proposed' and section 2.11 of this equality scheme.

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- 2.10 The Consumer Council liaise closely with the Equality Commission to ensure that progress on the implementation of our equality scheme is maintained.
- 2.11 **Action plan/action measures**
The Consumer Council developed an action plan to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. This action plan is set out in Appendix 5.
- 2.12 The action measures that will make up our action plan are directly relevant to our functions. They have been developed and prioritised on the basis of a survey identifying what consumers want us to do on their behalf. Details can be found in Appendix 5. The audit of inequalities will gather and analyse information across the Section 75 categories⁴ to identify the inequalities that exist for our service users and those affected by our policies⁵.
- 2.13 Action measures will be specific, measurable, linked to achievable outcomes, realistic and time bound. Action measures will include performance indicators and timescales for their achievement.
- 2.14 We will develop any action plans for the period of our corporate and business planning cycles. Implementation of the action measures will be incorporated into our business planning process.
- 2.15 We will seek input from our stakeholders and consult on our action plan before we send it to the Equality Commission and thereafter when reviewing the plan as per 2.16 below.

⁴ See section 1.1 of this equality scheme for a list of these categories.

⁵ See section 4.1 of this equality scheme for a definition of policies.

- 2.16 We will monitor our progress on the delivery of our action measures annually and update the action plan as necessary to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to our functions and work.
- 2.17 The Inequalities Action Plan is a living document and as such will be the subject to change as actions are completed and new actions added. As new research themes and inequalities emerge within The Consumer Council's published research and consumer panels, The Consumer Council continues to gather evidence on newly identified inequalities. It will be monitored on an annual basis and amended as appropriate.
- 2.18 The Consumer Council will inform the Commission of any changes or amendments to our action plan and will also include this information in our Section 75 annual progress report to the Commission. Our Section 75 annual progress report will incorporate information on progress we have made in implementing our action plans/action measures.
- 2.19 Once finalised, our action plan will be available:

www.consumercouncil.org.uk

or by contacting:

The Consumer Council

Floor 3

Seatem House

28-32 Alfred Street

Belfast

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If you require it in an alternative format please contact us on the details provided

Chapter 3 Our arrangements for consulting

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (a)) - on matters to which a duty (S75 (1) or (2)) is likely to be relevant (including details of the persons to be consulted).

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b)) on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by us on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

- 3.1 The Consumer Council recognises the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of our statutory equality duties. The Consumer Council will consult on our equality scheme, action measures, equality impact assessments (EQIA) and other matters relevant to the Section 75 statutory duties.
- 3.2 The Consumer Council is committed to carrying out consultation in accordance with the following principles (as contained in the Equality Commission's guidance 'Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)'):
- 3.3 Consultations will seek the views of those directly affected by the matter/policy, the Equality Commission, representative groups of Section 75 categories, other public authorities, voluntary and community groups, our staff and their trade unions and such other groups who have a legitimate interest in the matter, whether or not they have a direct economic or personal interest.
- 3.4 Initially all consultees (see Appendix 3), as a matter of course, will be notified (by email or post) of the matter/policy being consulted upon to ensure they are aware of all consultations. Thereafter, to ensure the most effective use of our, and our consultees' resources, The Consumer Council will take a targeted approach to consultation for those consultees that may have a particular interest in the matter/policy being consulted upon, and to whom the matter/policy is of particular relevance. This may include for example regional or local consultations, sectoral or thematic consultation etc.

3.5 Consultation with all stakeholders will begin as early as possible. The Consumer Council will engage with affected individuals and representative groups to identify how best to consult or engage with them. The Consumer Council will ask our consultees what their preferred consultation methods are and will give consideration to these. Methods of consultation could include:

- Face-to-face meetings;
- Open meetings;
- Focus groups/consumer panels;
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing;
- Questionnaires;
- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/opt out of the consultation;
- Internet discussions; or
- Telephone consultations.

This list is not exhaustive and we may develop other additional methods of consultation more appropriate to key stakeholders and the matter being consulted upon – for example through digital media.

3.6 The Consumer Council will consider the accessibility and format of every method of consultation we use in order to remove barriers to the consultation process. Specific consideration will be given as to how best to communicate with children and young people, people with disabilities (in particular people with learning disabilities) and minority ethnic communities. The Consumer Council will take account of existing and developing good practice.

3.7 The Consumer Council will consider working with children and young people, disability and minority ethnic community specialist groups to reach audiences when doing research on topics relevant to their needs. The Consumer Council has a track record of direct consultation with a range of S75 groups and individuals.

3.8 Information will be made available, on request, in alternative formats, in a timely manner. The Consumer Council will ensure that such consultees have ample time to respond.

- 3.9 Specific training is provided to those facilitating consultations to ensure that they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees. The Consumer Council has a high level of staff trained in facilitation with consumers and citizens from a diverse range of groups.
- 3.10 The consultation period lasts for a minimum of twelve weeks to allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view. However, in exceptional circumstances when this timescale is not feasible (for example implementing UK wide legislation, meeting Health and Safety requirements, addressing urgent public health matters or complying with Court judgements), we may shorten timescales to eight weeks or less before the policy is implemented. The Consumer Council may continue consultation thereafter and will review the policy as part of our monitoring commitments.
- 3.11 Where, under these exceptional circumstances, The Consumer Council must implement a policy immediately, as it is beyond our control, we may consult after implementation of the policy, in order to ensure that any impacts of the policy are considered and mitigating measures introduced.
- 3.12 If a consultation exercise is to take place over a period when consultees are less able to respond, for example, over the summer or Christmas break, or if the policy under consideration is particularly complex, The Consumer Council will give consideration to the feasibility of allowing a longer period for the consultation.
- 3.13 The Consumer Council is conscious of the fact that affected individuals and representative groups may have different needs. We will take appropriate measures to ensure full participation in any meetings that are held. The Consumer Council will consider for example the time of day, the appropriateness of the venue, in particular whether it can be accessed by those with disabilities, how the meeting is to be conducted, the use of appropriate language, whether a signer and/or interpreter is necessary, and whether the provision of childcare and support for other carers is required.

- 3.14 The Consumer Council will make all relevant information available to consultees in appropriate formats to ensure meaningful consultation. This includes detailed information on the policy proposal being consulted upon and any relevant quantitative and qualitative data.
- 3.15 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, The Consumer Council will take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy.
- 3.16 The Consumer Council provides feedback to consultees in a timely manner. A feedback report is prepared which includes summary information on the policy consulted upon, a summary of consultees' comments and a summary of our consideration of and response to consultees' input. The feedback is provided in formats suitable to consultees.
- 3.17 A list of consultees is included in this equality scheme at Appendix Three. It can also be obtained from our website at

www.consumerCouncil.org.uk

or by contacting
The Consumer Council
Floor 3
Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast
BT2 8EN

Tele/Textphone: 028 9025 1600

Fax: 028 9025 1663

E-mail: contact@consumerCouncil.org.uk

- 3.18 The Consumer Council's consultation list is not exhaustive and is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant to our functions and policies.

- 3.19 The Consumer Council welcomes enquiries from any person/s or organisations wishing to be added to the list of consultees. Please contact Debbie Newberry to provide your contact details and have your areas of interest noted or have your name/details removed or amended. Please also inform us at this stage if you would like information sent to you in a particular format or language.
- 3.20 The Consumer Council has developed robust links with the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland to target relevant information where it matters most – in the heart of communities. The Consumer Council publicises its statutory remit as the representative consumer voice in Northern Ireland by participating in exhibitions and events organised to target older people; younger people, carers, people with disabilities, migrant workers and families.
- 3.21 A database of community and voluntary sector organisations helps The Consumer Council to disseminate resources and publicise the organisation's work among the community and voluntary sector. It assists the organisation to consult with consumers on aspects of our Corporate Plan and resulting Forward Work Programmes.

Chapter 4 Our arrangements for assessing, monitoring and publishing the impact of policies

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b); Schedule 9 4. (2) (c); Schedule 9 4. (2) (d); Schedule 9 9. (1); Schedule 9 9.(2))

Our arrangements for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted on the promotion of equality of opportunity

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b))

- 4.1 In the context of Section 75, 'policy' is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which The Consumer Council undertakes its statutory and regulatory functions. In respect of this equality scheme, the term policy is used for any (proposed/amended/existing) strategy, policy initiative or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten and irrespective of the label given to it, eg, 'draft', 'pilot', 'high level' or 'sectoral'.
- 4.2 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy, as required by Schedule 9 9. (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- 4.3 The Consumer Council uses the tools of **screening** and **equality impact assessment** to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. In carrying out these assessments we will related them to the intended outcomes of the policy in question and we will also follow guidance from the Equality Commission.

Screening

- 4.4 This is based on best practice guides provided by the Equality Commission. Screening is embedded in policy analysis training. The purpose of screening is to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations.
- 4.5 Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process and on an ongoing basis. Policies which we propose to adopt will be subject to screening prior to

implementation. For more detailed strategies or policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages, The Consumer Council will screen at various stages during implementation.

4.6 The lead role in the screening of a policy is taken by the policy decision maker who has the authority to make changes to that policy. However, screening will also involve other relevant team members, those who implement the policy, and staff members from other relevant work areas. We will seek to include key stakeholders in the screening process.

4.7 The following questions are applied to the policies of The Consumer Council as part of the screening process:

- What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? (minor/major/none)
- Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations for people within the Section 75 equality categories?
- To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (minor/major/none)
- Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

4.8 In order to answer the screening questions, The Consumer Council gathers all relevant information and data, both qualitative and quantitative. In taking this evidence into account we consider the different needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 equality categories. Any screening decision will be informed by this evidence.

4.9 Completion of screening, taking into account our consideration of the answers to all four screening questions set out in 4.7 above, will lead to one of the following three outcomes:

1. The policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment.
 2. The policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation⁶ or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
 3. The policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
- 4.10 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'minor' in respect of one or more of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, The Consumer Council may on occasion decide to proceed with an equality impact assessment depending on the policy. If an EQIA is not to be conducted we will nonetheless consider measures that might mitigate the policy impact as well as alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and/or good relations. Where we mitigate, we will outline in our screening template the reasons to support this decision together with the proposed changes, amendments or alternative policy. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead within The Consumer Council.
- 4.11 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'major' in respect of one or more of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we will normally subject the policy to an equality impact assessment. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead within The Consumer Council.
- 4.12 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'none', in respect of all of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, we will give details of the reasons for the decision taken. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead within The Consumer Council.

⁶ Mitigation – Where an assessment (screening in this case) reveals that a particular policy has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations, a public authority must consider ways of delivering the policy outcomes which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Section 75 categories.

4.13 As soon as possible following the completion of the screening process, the screening template, signed off and approved by the senior manager responsible for the policy, will be made available on The Consumer Council's website: www.consumercouncil.org.uk

or by contacting:

The Consumer Council
Floor 3
Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast
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Tele/Textphone: 028 9025 1600

Fax: 028 9025 1663

E-mail: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

4.14 If a consultee, including the Equality Commission, raises a concern about a screening decision based on supporting evidence, The Consumer Council will review the screening decision.

4.15 The Consumer Council's screening reports are published yearly.

Equality impact assessment

4.16 An equality impact assessment is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy, whether that policy is formal or informal, and irrespective of the scope of that policy. The primary function of an EQIA is to determine the extent of any impact of a policy upon the Section 75 categories and to determine if the impact is an adverse one. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the likely positive outcomes of a policy and to seek ways to more effectively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

4.17 Once a policy is screened and screening has identified that an equality impact assessment is necessary, The Consumer Council will carry out the EQIA in accordance with Equality Commission guidance. The equality impact assessment will be carried out as

part of the policy development process, before the policy is implemented.

4.18 Any equality impact assessment will be subject to consultation at the appropriate stage(s). (For details see above Chapter 3 “Our Arrangements for Consulting”).

Our arrangements for publishing the results of the assessments of the likely impact of policies we have adopted or propose to adopt on the promotion of equality of opportunity

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (d); Schedule 9 9. (1))

4.19 The Consumer Council makes publicly available the results of our assessments (screening and EQIA) of the likely impact of our policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.

What we publish

4.20 Screening reports

These are published yearly.

Screening reports detail:

- All policies screened by The Consumer Council over the period;
- A statement of the aim(s) of the policy/policies to which the assessment relates;
- Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact; and
- Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.

4.21 Screening decisions:

- Whether the policy has been ‘screened in’ for equality impact assessment;
- Whether the policy has been ‘screened out’ with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted;

- Whether the policy has been ‘screened out’ without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted;
- Where applicable, a timetable for conducting equality impact assessments; and
- A link to the completed screening template(s) on our website.

4.22 Screening templates

For details on the availability of The Consumer Council’s screening templates please refer to 4.13.

4.23 Equality impact assessments

EQIA reports are published once the impact assessment has been completed. These reports include:

- A statement of the aim of the policy assessed;
- Information and data collected;
- Details of the assessment of impact(s);
- Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact;
- Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity;
- Consultation responses;
- The decision taken; and
- Future monitoring plans.

4.24 **How we publish the information** - All information that The Consumer Council publishes is accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please see 6.3 below.

4.25 **Where we publish the information** The results of The Consumer Council’s assessments (screening reports and completed templates, and the results of equality impact assessments) are available on The Consumer Council’s website

www.consumercouncil.org.uk

or by contacting:

The Consumer Council

Floor 3
Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast
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Tele/Textphone: 028 9025 1600

Fax: 028 9025 1663

E-mail: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

- 4.26 In addition to the above, screening reports (electronic link or hard copy on request if more suitable for recipients) which include all policies screened are also sent directly to all consultees on a yearly basis.
- 4.27 The Consumer Council will inform the general public about the availability of this material through communications such as press releases where appropriate.

Our arrangements for monitoring any adverse impact of policies we have adopted on equality of opportunity

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (c))

- 4.28 Monitoring can assist The Consumer Council to deliver better public services and continuous improvements. Monitoring Section 75 information involves the processing of sensitive personal data (data relating to the racial or ethnic origin of individuals, sexual orientation, political opinion, religious belief, etc). In order to carry out monitoring in a confidential and effective manner, The Consumer Council follows guidance from the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Equality Commission.
- 4.29 The Consumer Council monitors any adverse impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity of policies we have adopted. The Consumer Council is committed to monitoring more broadly to identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Equality Commission guidance.

4.30 The systems we have established to monitor the impact of policies and identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations are:

- The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant primary quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis;
- The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant secondary sources of quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis;
- An audit of existing information systems within one year of approval of this equality scheme, to identify the extent of current monitoring and take action to address any gaps in order to have the necessary information on which to base decisions; and
- Undertaking or commissioning new data if necessary.

4.31 If over a two year period monitoring and evaluation show that a policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, The Consumer Council will ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for relevant equality groups.

4.32 The Consumer Council reviews its EQIA monitoring information on an annual basis. Other monitoring information is reviewed:

- In relation to our statutory remit and responsibilities, The Consumer Council produces ongoing research to assess consumer opinion and need. This information was used to carry out a gap analysis to accompany this scheme.
- Processes are in place to review all data collected at point of use.

- The Annual report to the Equality Commission includes an update on monitoring actions undertaken and results.
- Results from monitoring will be taken into account in reviewing progress of the action plan.

4.33 The Consumer Council has a Complaints Handling policy in place. This sets out how we handle complaints from individual consumers within our statutory remit.

4.34 The Consumer Council recognises the need to comply with the Data Protection Act and the upcoming General Data Protection Regulation as this provides a framework for the collecting and processing of data. In handling consumer complaints from individual consumers, The Consumer Council monitors complainant data and assesses inequality gaps without being intrusive to consumers. The need to identify inequalities in service delivery is recognised. Statistical data is collected at source and complainants can give information voluntarily so as not to be intrusive and to respect consumers' privacy. Analysis is completed on a yearly basis although monitoring is ongoing, the objective of which is to highlight possible inequalities and why these might be occurring.

Our arrangements for publishing the results of our monitoring

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (d))

4.35 Schedule 9 4. (2) (d) requires The Consumer Council to publish the results of the monitoring of adverse impacts of policies we have adopted. However, The Consumer Council is committed to monitoring more broadly and the results of our policy monitoring are published as follows:

- EQIA monitoring information is published as part of The Consumer Council's Section 75 annual progress report [see 2.7]

- All information published is accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please see 6.3 for details.

Chapter 5 Staff training

(Schedule 9 4.(2) (e))

Commitment to staff training

- 5.1 The Consumer Council recognises that awareness raising and training play a crucial role in the effective implementation of our Section 75 duties. The Chief Executive wishes to positively communicate the commitment of The Consumer Council to the Section 75 statutory duties, both internally and externally.
- 5.2 To this end, The Consumer Council has introduced an effective communication and training programme for all staff and will ensure that our commitment to the Section 75 statutory duties is made clear in all relevant publications.

Training objectives

- 5.3 The Consumer Council has mainstreamed equality and good relations training into the training plan for staff which aims to achieve the following objectives:
- To raise awareness of the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, our equality scheme commitments and the particular issues likely to affect people across the range of Section 75 categories, to ensure that our staff fully understand their role in implementing the scheme;
 - To provide those staff involved in the assessment of policies (screening and EQIA) with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively;
 - To provide those staff who deal with advice, policy and complaints in relation to compliance with our equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to investigate and monitor complaints effectively;
 - To provide those staff involved in consultation processes with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively;
 - To provide those staff involved in the implementation and monitoring of The Consumer Council's equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively; and

- To maintain a training plan for staff of The Consumer Council, including compliance with the Data Protection Act.

Awareness raising and training arrangements

5.4 The following arrangements are in place to ensure The Consumer Council's staff and board members are aware of and understand our equality obligations.

- The Consumer Council will ensure this equality scheme is available to all staff on the staff Intranet;
- Staff in The Consumer Council will receive a briefing on the final equality scheme with immediate effect.
- The Section 75 statutory duties form part of induction training for new staff.
- Focused specialist training is provided for key staff within The Consumer Council who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of our equality scheme commitments (for example those involved in research and data collection, policy development, service design, conducting equality impact assessments, consultation, monitoring and evaluation).
- Where appropriate, training will be provided to ensure staff are aware of the issues experienced by the range of Section 75 groups.
- When appropriate and on an ongoing basis, arrangements will be made to ensure staff are kept up to date with Section 75 developments.
- We will provide access to copies of the full equality scheme for all staff; ensure that any queries or questions of clarification from staff are addressed.

5.5 Training and awareness raising programmes will, where relevant, be developed in association with the appropriate Section 75 groups and our staff.

In order to share resources and expertise, The Consumer Council will, where possible, work closely with other bodies and agencies in the development and delivery of training.

Monitoring and evaluation

5.6 The Consumer Council's training programme is subject to the following monitoring and evaluation arrangements:

- The Consumer Council will evaluate the extent to which all participants in this training programme have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve each of the above objectives; and
- The extent to which training objectives have been met will be reported on as part of The Consumer Council's Section 75 annual progress report, which will be sent to the Equality Commission.

Chapter 6 Our arrangements for ensuring and assessing public access to information and services we provide
(Schedule 9 4. (2) (f))

6.1 The Consumer Council is committed to ensuring that the information we disseminate and the services we provide are fully accessible to all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. We keep our arrangements under review to ensure that this remains the case.

6.2 The Consumer Council is aware that some groups will not have the same access to information as others. In particular:

- People with sensory, learning, communication and mobility disabilities may require printed information in other formats;
- Members of ethnic minority groups, whose first language is not English, may have difficulties with information provided only in English; and
- Children and young people may not be able to fully access or understand information.

Access to information

6.3 To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, The Consumer Council will provide information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. Where the exact request cannot be met The Consumer Council will ensure a reasonable alternative is provided.

6.4 Alternative formats may include Easy Read, Braille, audio formats, large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

6.5 The Consumer Council liaises with representatives of young people and disability and minority ethnic organisations and takes account of existing and developing good practice. The Consumer Council will respond to requests for information in alternative formats in a timely manner, keeping consumers informed of our timelines.

- 6.6 The Consumer Council's Communications strategy and Communications Guide for our Diverse Audiences helps staff of The Consumer Council to meet the needs of our diverse audiences.
- 6.7 The Consumer Council is committed to achieving effective communication with the public. There are a growing range of communications channels needed to reach various audiences. The Consumer Council will take cognisance of various communications channels to enable wide access to information to mitigate the risk.

Access to services

- 6.8 The Consumer Council is committed to ensuring that our services are fully accessible to everyone in the community across the Section 75 categories. The Consumer Council also adheres to the relevant provisions of current anti-discrimination legislation.
- 6.8 The Consumer Council has specific arrangement in place for ensuring the public has access to our services. For example, this includes a loop system at reception and in meeting rooms and a text number to our complaints line.
- 6.9 The Consumer Council monitors yearly across all functions, in relation to access to information and services, to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.
- 6.10 The Consumer Council's arrangements are as follows:
- Talks and exhibitions delivered to consumers via outreach- Section 75 users monitored and data transferred to maps to ensure fair access geographically across NI, in line with statutory remit;
 - Information in alternative formats – monitoring of consumer requests and information produced in different formats;
 - Complaints handling in relation to public transport and utilities – annual consumer panel and survey held with complainants to gauge feedback, monitor consumers' access to information and services to improve service delivery, publication of complaints

report, geographical mapping of complainants to assess information/policy gaps;

- Communications media monitoring- measuring uptake of The Consumer Council stories in Section 75 specialist publications.

Chapter 7 Timetable for measures we propose in this equality scheme (Schedule 9 4. (3) (b))

- 7.1 Appendix 4 outlines The Consumer Council's timetable for all measures proposed within this equality scheme. The measures outlined in this timetable will be incorporated into our business planning processes.
- 7.2 This timetable is different from and in addition to The Consumer Council's commitment to developing action plans/action measures to specifically address inequalities and further promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The Consumer Council has included in our equality scheme a commitment to develop an action plan. Accordingly, this commitment is listed in the timetable of measures at Appendix 4.

Chapter 8 Our complaints procedure

(Schedule 9 10.)

- 8.1 The Consumer Council is responsive to the views of members of the public. The Consumer Council will endeavour to resolve all complaints made to us.
- 8.2 Schedule 9 paragraph 10 of the Act refers to complaints. A person can make a complaint to a public authority if the complainant believes he or she may have been directly affected by an alleged failure of the authority to comply with its approved equality scheme. If the complaint has not been resolved within a reasonable timescale, the complaint can be brought to the Equality Commission.
- 8.3 A person wishing to make a complaint that The Consumer Council has failed to comply with its approved equality scheme should contact:

The Consumer Council
Floor 3
Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast
BT2 8EN

Tele/Textphone: 028 9025 1600

Fax: 028 9025 1663

E-mail: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

- 8.4 The Consumer Council will in the first instance acknowledge receipt of each complaint within three days.
- 8.5 The Consumer Council will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and will respond substantively to the complainant within one (1) month of the date of receiving the letter of complaint. Under certain circumstances, if the complexity of the matter requires a longer period, the period for response to the complainant may be extended to two (2) months. In those

circumstances, the complainant will be advised of the extended period within one month of making the complaint.

- 8.6 During this process the complainant will be kept fully informed of the progress of the investigation into the complaint and of any outcomes.
- 8.7 In any subsequent investigation by the Equality Commission, The Consumer Council will co-operate fully, providing access in a timely manner to any relevant documentation that the Equality Commission may require. Similarly, The Consumer Council will co-operate fully with any investigation by the Equality Commission under sub-paragraph 11 (1) (b) of Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- 8.8 The Consumer Council will make all efforts to implement promptly and in full any recommendations arising out of any Commission investigation.

Chapter 9 Publication of our equality scheme

(Schedule 9 4. (3) (c))

- 9.1 The Consumer Council's equality scheme is available free of charge in print form and alternative formats from:

The Consumer Council
Floor 3
Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast
BT2 8EN

Tele/Textphone: 028 9025 1600

Fax: 028 9025 1663

E-mail: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

- 9.2 The Consumer Council's equality scheme is also available on our website at: www.consumercouncil.org.uk

- 9.3 The following arrangements are in place for the publication in a timely manner of The Consumer Council's equality scheme to ensure equality of access:

- The Consumer Council will make every effort to communicate widely the existence and content of our equality scheme. This may include press releases, prominent advertisements in the press, the internet and direct mail shots to groups representing the various categories in Section 75.
- The Consumer Council will email a link to our approved equality scheme to our consultees on our consultation lists. Other consultees without e-mail will be notified by letter that the scheme is available on request. The Consumer Council will respond to requests for the equality scheme in alternative formats in a timely manner.
- The Consumer Council equality scheme is available on request in alternative formats such as Easy Read, Braille, large print, audio

formats and in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.

- 9.4 For a list of The Consumer Council Section 75 stakeholders and consultees please see Appendix 3 of the equality scheme, visit The Consumer Council website at: www.consumerCouncil.org.uk

or contact
The Consumer Council
Floor 3
Seatem House
Belfast
BT2 8EN

Tele/Textphone: 028 9025 1600

Fax: 028 9025 1663

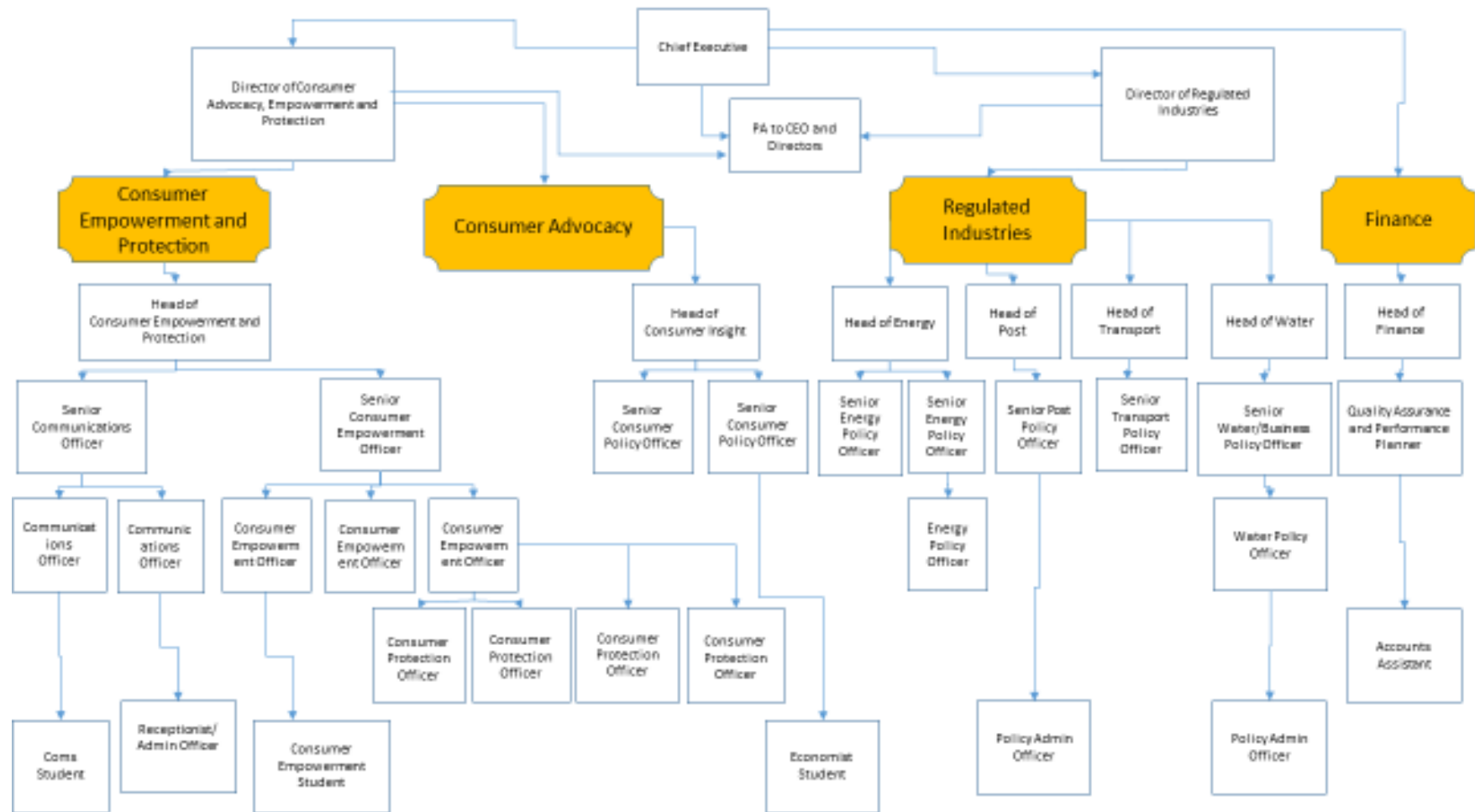
E-mail: contact@consumerCouncil.org.uk

Chapter 10 Review of our equality scheme

(Schedule 9 8. (3))

- 10.1 As required by Schedule 9 paragraph 8 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, The Consumer Council will conduct a thorough review of this equality scheme. This review will take place either within four years of submission of this equality scheme to the Equality Commission or within a shorter timescale to allow alignment with the review of other planning cycles. The review will evaluate the effectiveness of The Consumer Council's scheme in relation to the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties relevant to our functions in Northern Ireland.
- 10.2 In undertaking this review we will follow any guidance issued by the Equality Commission. A report of this review will be made public and sent to the Equality Commission.

Appendix 1 Organisational Chart



Appendix 2 Example groups relevant to the Section 75 categories for Northern Ireland purposes

Please note, this list is for illustration purposes only, it is not exhaustive.

Category	Example groups
Religious belief	Buddhist; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Muslims, people of no religious belief; Protestants; Sikh; other faiths. For the purposes of Section 75, the term “religious belief” is the same definition as that used in the <i>Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order</i> ⁷ . Therefore, “religious belief” also includes any <i>perceived</i> religious belief (or perceived lack of belief) and, in employment situations only, it also covers any “ <i>similar philosophical belief</i> ”.
Political opinion ⁸	Nationalist generally; Unionists generally; members/supporters of other political parties.
Racial group	Black people; Chinese; Indians; Pakistanis; people of mixed ethnic background; Polish; Roma; Travellers; White people.
Men and women generally	Men (including boys); Trans-gendered people; Transsexual people; women (including girls).
Marital status	Civil partners or people in civil partnerships; divorced people; married people; separated people; single people; widowed people.
Age	Children and young people; older people.
Persons with a disability	Persons with disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
Persons with dependants	Persons with personal responsibility for the care of a child; for the care of a person with a disability; or the care of a dependant older person.

⁷ See Section 98 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which states: “*In this Act... “political opinion” and “religious belief” shall be construed in accordance with Article 2(3) and (4) of the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998.*”

⁸ *ibid*

Sexual orientation	Bisexual people; heterosexual people; gay or lesbian people.
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Appendix 3 List of consultees (Schedule 9 4. (2) (a))

Access to Benefits
Action Ability
Action Mental Health
Action on Hearing Loss
Action Renewables
Adapt NI
Advice NI
Age NI
Age Sector Platform
The Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI)
An Munia Tober
An Post
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council
Ardmonagh Good Morning Network
Ards & North Down Borough Council
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council
Armagh Down and Antrim Network

The Bar of Northern Ireland
Barnardo's Northern Ireland
BEIS (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
Belfast City Airport
Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Belfast International Airport
Belfast Metropolitan College
British Deaf Association
Bryan Powercom Limited
Bryson Energy
BT Ireland
Budget Energy Limited

Calor Gas
Carers Northern Ireland
Causeway Coast & Glens District Council
CBI Northern Ireland
CC Water
CCEA
Cedar Foundation
Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
Charity for Civil Servants

Chinese Welfare Association
Christians Against Poverty
Coleraine Rural and Urban Network
Community Organisations of South Tyrone
Community Relations Council
Contact a Family
Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network
Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance
Citizen's Advice
Citizen's Advice Scotland
City of Derry Airport
Childcare Partnerships (4 regional)
Church Spokespersons (5 churches)
Civil Aviation Authority
Click Energy
Coleraine Urban & Rural Network
Collect Plus
Commission for Communications Regulation
Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland
Communication Workers' Union
Community Organisations of South Tyrone
Community Relations Council
Community Transport Association
Compass Advocacy Network
Competition and Markets Authority
Consumer Futures Unit
Consumers' Association of Ireland
Contact a Family
Cookstown & Western Shores Area Network
CSPA (Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance)

Dairy Council for Northern Ireland
Department for Communities
Department for Infrastructure
Department for the Economy
Department for Transport (DfT)
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Derry & Strabane District Council
Derry Youth and Community Workshop Ltd
Disability Action
Down Rural Community Network
Drinking Water Inspectorate

Early Years
East Down Rural Network
Eastern Health & Social Services Board
Education Authority
Equality Coalition
Equality Commission
Electric Ireland
Energia
Energy Saving Trust NI
Equality Coalition
Equality Commission
ESB Independent Energy
European Consumer Centre Ireland
The Executive Office

Fastway Couriers NI
The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC)
FDA
Federation of Passenger Transport
Federation of Small Businesses
Federation of Women's Institutes
Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Fermanagh Rural Community Network
Financial Conduct Authority
Firmus Energy
Foras na Gaeilge
Foyle Women's Information Network
Friends of the Earth

George Best Belfast City Airport
Gingerbread NI
GMB

HEReNI
Home Start
Housing Rights Service
Human Rights Commission
Home-Start UK

IMTAC
Include Youth

Institute of Directors
Institute of Public Health
Intec Centre
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Irish League of Credit Unions
Irish Passport Office
Irish Postmasters' Union
Isle of Man Steam Packet Company

Law Society
Lighthouse Communications
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
Livestock & Meat Commission for Northern Ireland
Livestock Auctioneers' Association Ltd
Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners
Loughs Agency
Lumen Financial Planning Limited

MacMillan Cancer Support
Manufacturing NI
Maritime and Coastguards Agency
Mencap NI
Men's Health Forum in Ireland
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
Mid Ulster District Council
Money Advice Service
Multicultural Resource Centre
Mutual Energy

National Beef Association
National Federation of SubPostmasters
National Union of Students
National Energy Action (NEA)
Newry, Mourne & Down District Council
Newtownabbey Senior Citizens' Forum
NI Chamber of Commerce & Industry
NI Chest, Heart and Stroke Association
NI Commission for Catholic Education
NI Federation of Housing Associations
NI Food & Drink Association
NI Housing Executive
NI Human Rights Commission

NI Meat Importers
NI Oil Federation
NIParcels.com
NIPSA
NI Retail Consortium
NI Rural Women's Network
NI Water
NI Women's Aid Federation
NIAPA (Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association)
NICCY
NICMA – the Childminding Association
NICVA
NIE Distribution Service Centre
NIEA (Northern Ireland Environment Agency)
NILGA (Northern Ireland Local Government Association)
North Antrim Community Network
North West Community Network
North Western Regional College
Northern Antrim Community Network
Northern Ireland Anti-poverty Network
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service
Northern Ireland Deaf Youth Association
Northern Ireland Drainage Council
Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition
Northern Ireland Prison Service
Northern Ireland Screen
Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
Northern Ireland Youth Forum
Northern Investing Health Partnership
Northern Regional College
NOW Project
NSPCC
NUS – USI (National Union of Students Northern Ireland)

Oakleaf Rural Community Network
Ofcom
Older People's Advocate
Omagh Forum for Rural Organisations
Omagh Independent Advice Services

P&O Ferries Ltd

Parenting NI
Parents Advice Centre
Parkinsons UK
Participation Network
Patrick Waterfield
Phoenix Energy Holdings Ltd
Phoenix Natural Gas
Playboard
Polish Welfare Association
Post Office Limited
Postal Group
Power NI
Presbyterian Women
Prosthetic User Forum
Prince's Trust
Public Health Agency
Public Prosecutions Service

Queen's University Belfast

Radius Housing
Rainbow Project
Retail NI
Rivers Agency
Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Royal Mail Group
Royal National Institute for the Blind
Royal National Institute for the Deaf
Royal Town Planning Institute
Royal Ulster Agricultural Society
Rural Community Network
Rural Development Council
Rural North West Community Network
Rural Support

Salvation Army
Save the Children Northern Ireland
Simon Community
Social Security Agency
Society of St Vincent De Paul
Solace NI
SONI

South Antrim Community Network
South Eastern Regional College
South Tyrone Empowerment Partnership
South West Regional College
Southern Childcare Partnership
Southern Regional College
SSE
Stena Line Irish Sea Ferries Ltd
STEP NI
StepChange Debt Charity
Stroke Association NI

TADA Rural Support Network
Tourism NI
Trading Standards Service
Translink

UCATT (The Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians)
UK European Consumer Centre
Ulster Bank
Ulster Farmers' Union
UNITE
University of Ulster
Utility Regulator

Voice of Young People in Care
Voluntary Service Belfast (VSB)
Volunteer Now

Warrenpoint Harbour Commissioners
Water UK
Waterside Women's Centre
Waterways Ireland
West Belfast Taxi Association
Western Health and Social Care Board
William Keown Trust
Women's Centre, Derry
Women's Centres Regional Partnership
Women's Information Group
Women's Resource and Development Agency
Women's Support Network

Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster
Youth Action Northern Ireland
Youth Council for NI
Youth Justice Agency NI
Youth Net

Appendix 4 Timetable for measures proposed

(Schedule 9 4.(3) (b))

Measure (example)	Lead responsibility (example)	Timetable (example)
Section 75 Annual Progress Report [2.7]	Chief Executive	Annually
Action plan		
Consultation on draft action plan	Chief Executive	Annually
Finalised action plan published [2.18]	Chief Executive	Annually
Arrangements for monitoring progress in place [2.16]	Chief Executive	Annually
Consultation list reviewed and updated [3.4]	Chief Executive	Annually
Screening timetable [4.4]		
Screening Reports [4.15] e-mailed to consultees annually	Senior Officer	Annually
EQIA timetable [4.16]		Ongoing
Monitoring		
Audit of information systems within one year of approval of equality scheme [4.29]	Senior Officer	Completed
Review of monitoring information [4.31]	Senior Officer	Annually

Publication of monitoring information [4.33; 4.34]	Senior Officer	Annually
<p>Training</p> <p>Development of summary scheme [5.4]</p> <p>Development of overall training programme [5.5]</p> <p>Focussed training [5.4]</p> <p>Update training [5.4]</p> <p>Evaluation of training [5.6]</p>		<p>Completed</p> <p>All staff receive training on their S75 responsibilities on joining The Consumer Council. The content of training is reviewed annually.</p>
Assessing access to information and services [6.9]		Annually
<p>Communication of equality scheme [9.3]</p> <p>Notification of consultees [9.3]</p>		All relevant material is published on the website
Review of equality scheme completed [10.1]	Director of Corporate Services	2015
Any other measures proposed in equality scheme		
Review of Equality Scheme	Chief Executive	April 2019

**Appendix 5 - Action plan/action measures based on gaps and inequalities.
Timescale 2016-2021**

- Results will be monitored and evaluated through The Consumer Council’s yearly work programme.
- Keyline information will be reported in annual returns to the Equality Commission and to stakeholders and Government in The Consumer Council’s Annual Report.
- Actions are linked to corporate performance indicators and reported in The Consumer Council’s Annual Report.

To Empower Consumers	Action Measures
<p>The Consumer Council will encourage and assist consumers to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to make choices and to enable them to feel confident about taking independent action in pursuit of their rights.</p> <p><u>Inequality</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with a disability; • Age; • Persons with dependants; • Racial group; • Marital status; and • Men and women generally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing consumers with relevant information/advice/education so that they can make informed choices on how to shop safely and save money. • Working in partnership with the advice sector in NI to provide a joined up approach to advisor training on consumer issues. • Working with universities, higher education colleges, schools, and youth organisations to develop consumer education packages. • Working in partnership with the Consumer Protection Partnership, the North/South Consumer Organisations Working Group, the Consumer Rights Initiative and other organisations to ensure consumers receive the advice they need to assert their rights through clear signposting to information, consumer protection bodies and other support. • Working with energy, postal, transport and water service providers to ensure the information

	<p>they provide consumers is accurate, transparent and meets their needs, and highlight where consumer choice is inhibited by poor, misleading or unbalanced information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing partnerships with the 11 new councils and libraries in NI to provide a joined up consumer information/advice/education service. • Promoting and supporting consumer switching (utilities, transport, insurance, food and drink retailers, and banks) to encourage and develop competitive markets in NI.
To Represent Consumers	Action Measures
<p>The Consumer Council will speak out on behalf of consumers and ensure their interests are articulated and defended. The Consumer Council will seek to ensure that public policies are developed with their potential effect on people as consumers in mind and that their contribution to consumer well-being is recognised as an important policy goal.</p> <p><u>Inequality</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with a disability; • Age; • Persons with dependants; • Racial group; • Marital status; and • Men and women generally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to play a leadership role in NI consumer issues. • Developing consumer strategies for consumers who are disabled or chronically sick, of pensionable age, with low incomes, or reside in rural areas. • Exploring and understanding the regional differences of consumers in NI against their counterparts in GB and ROI, and highlighting areas where consumers are at a disadvantage. • Working with the CMA and FCA to ensure NI consumers are accurately and fairly reflected within their UK market reports.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with NI and UK regulators to ensure price control reviews and the Royal Mail’s Universal Service Obligation continues to reflect the needs of consumers, and that consumers’ bills fairly reflect service providers’ costs. • Understanding the impact of e-commerce/digitalization in NI on consumers. • Representing transport passengers, especially air and sea passengers who are disabled or have reduced mobility. • Ensuring consumers have convenient and reasonable access to Royal Mail’s universal postal service.
To Protect Consumers	Action Measures
<p>The Consumer Council will act as an advocate for individuals with cause for complaint, and seek to change for the better the conditions under which public and private sector goods and services are provided to consumers in NI.</p> <p><u>Inequality</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with a disability; • Age; • Persons with dependants; • Racial group; • Marital status; and • Men and women generally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a best in class consumer redress and dispute resolution service in energy, postal affairs, transport, and water and sewerage. • Working with stakeholders to ensure consumers in NI enjoy no less a standard of consumer protection than consumers in other parts of the UK. • Working with businesses/public service providers to ensure consumers receive a fair price and level of service. • Working to protect consumers through developing or enforcing statute or regulation. • Monitoring the cost of living.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working to increase consumer trust in the markets in NI so that consumers are more informed and involved.
To Understand the Needs of Future Consumers and Sustainable Consumption	Action Measures
<p>The Consumer Council will continue to work for a sustainable future for consumers in NI. We are committed to promoting responsible consumerism and encouraging consumers to change their behaviour to benefit them today and tomorrow. Our aim is to ensure consumers are provided with information, choice and value for money whilst the negative environmental impacts of the production and consumption of goods and services are minimised.</p> <p><u>Inequality</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons with a disability; Age; Persons with dependants; Racial group; Marital status; and Men and women generally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring and understanding future consumer trends and emerging areas of consumer detriment. Understanding the impact of consumers today on consumers of tomorrow. Developing sustainable communities/consumers in NI. Encouraging consumers to develop sustainable means of consumption. Working to ensure that the capability gap between the prosperous and less prosperous consumer does not increase. Working with DfE, DfI, the Utility Regulator and service providers to ensure NI's energy and water infrastructure fairly meets the needs of future consumers.

Appendix 6 - Action plan/action research. Timescale 2016-2021

In developing this plan The Consumer Council undertook an omnibus survey⁹ with 1,000 consumers. The survey was conducted by Millward Brown Ulster in May 2015. It tested consumers' awareness of The Consumer Council. Participants were first made aware of The Consumer Council's statutory role and then asked about the priorities we should be focusing on over the next three to five years and sought ideas on how we should be communicating with them.

This survey found that the main areas consumers felt The Consumer Council should be working on during this corporate plan are as follows:

- Providing consumers with information on how to save money on bills;
- Providing a consumer redress and dispute resolution service;
- Working to ensure businesses/public service providers give a fair price to consumers;
- Working to protect consumers through statute or regulation;
- Working with businesses and public service providers to improve customer service; and
- Working to promote competitive markets.

In November 2015, we undertook a further omnibus survey¹⁰ of 1,000 consumers and asked them the issues that The Consumer Council should be promoting, and safeguarding consumers on. This survey highlighted:

- The cost of living;
- Utility bills;

⁹ Annex 2.

¹⁰ IBID.

- Consumer education;
- Financial services/bank accounts; and
- The digital divide¹¹.

These survey results were further discussed with consumers who have used our complaints handling service. These interviews explored the key issues for consumers and asked for ideas on how we should communicate with consumers about the work that we do. In addition, we have engaged fully with our board and staff, and external stakeholders¹² throughout the plan’s development. These meetings were valuable in helping to review our current strategy and the consumer and stakeholder engagement helped us identify the priorities, which will form the basis of this plan.

A public consultation took place in March 2016. This followed a consultation event on 8 March, which was attended by 30 stakeholders, representing 23 different organisations¹³, who had the opportunity to give feedback and ask questions about our proposed strategic direction and programme of work.

Overall, 17 organisations provided written responses to the Plan.

Table 1: Respondents to the Public Consultation

	Corporate Plan
1	Commissioner For Older People
2	Tourism NI
3	NIE Networks
4	Ofcom
5	Phoenix Natural Gas Limited
6	National Energy Action (NEA)

¹¹ The digital divide is an economic and social inequality with regard to access to, use of, or impact of information and communication technologies (ICT).

¹² Annex 3.

¹³ Bank of Ireland, CAMRA, Citizens Advice NI, Firmus Energy, Manufacturing NI, NIE Networks, NI Retail Consortium, NI Water, Core Leadership, DfI (Water and Transport Branch), DfE (Energy Branch), Electric Ireland, OFCOM, Post Office, Royal Mail, Translink and Utility Regulator.

7	Institution of Civil Engineers
8	Utility Regulator
9	Financial Ombudsman Services
10	Citizens Advice (England and Wales)
11	Post Office Limited
12	Maritime and Coastguards Agency
13	Housing Rights Service
14	CAMRA
15	NI Water
16	Electric Ireland
17	NIPSA
18	EEO

All respondents supported the strategic aims of the Plan and there was overall encouragement for the partnership approach and the clarity around aims and objectives of The Consumer Council.

Appendix 7 - Action Plan - External Stakeholders Consulted

Name	Role	Organisation
Brian Ambrose	CEO	Belfast City Airport
Treasa Anderson	Segment Marketing Manager	Bank of Ireland
Nisha Arora	Director	CMA
Pat Austin	Director	NEA
Ivan Bell	Director	Phoenix Natural Gas
Alex Boyle	Principle Officer Road Safety Branch	DOE
Nigel Brady	Director	Bryson Energy
Oliver Butler	Regulation Manager	Royal Mail
Carolyn Brown	Northern Ireland Policy Manager	Federation of Small Businesses
Linda Brown	Director	IoD
Mary Buffee	Head of Consumer Affairs	LINK
Pól Callaghan	Operations Director	Citizens Advice
Brian Carlin	Director of Commercial Development	Belfast International Airport
Paul Carlisle	Committee Clerk	Regional Development Committee
David Cartmill	CEO	Chief Executives Forum
Trevor Clarke MLA	Chair	Regional Development Committee
Colin Clements	Senior Drinking Water Inspector	Drinking Water Inspectorate

Philippa Cook	Team Outreach	Financial Ombudsman Service
Aodhán Connolly	Director	NIRC
Chris Conway	Group Chief Executive	Translink
Martin Coppack	Head of Consumer Engagement	FCA
Rob Cope	Clerk	NI Affairs Committee
Fergus Cooper	Head of Country	Save the Children
Trevor Cooper	Head of Finance	DETI
Meabh Cormacain	Policy and Communications Co-ordinator	NIRIG
John Cunningham	Operations and Marketing Manager	Electric Ireland
Holly de Winne Webb	Billing Manager	Firmus Energy
Nicola Deaney	General Manager	Open Electric
Maureen Delaney	Customer Relations Manager	Power NI
Peter Dixon	Chairman	Phoenix Energy Holdings
Kevin Doherty	CEO	Disability Action
Sean Doolin	Regulation Manager	Electric Ireland
Richard Donnan	Managing Director	Ulster Bank
Ciaran Doran	Director of Operations for Transport	DRD
Anne Marie Duffy	Consumer Support Manager	Firmus Energy
Mark Ennis	Chairman of SSE (Ireland) and Chairman of Invest NI	SSE and InvestNI

Dr Sinead Furey	Lecturer in Consumer Studies	Ulster University
Mark Gibson	Senior Stakeholder Manager	Post Office Limited
Jenny Hall	Regulation Manager	Royal Mail
Fiona Hannon	Head of Regulation	SSE Airtricity
Alistair Hamilton	CEO	InvestNI
Andrew Hamilton	Permanent Secretary	DSD
Rod Haskins	Operations Director	Belfast International Airport
Roger Henderson	Director	NIE Networks
Jed Hodgson	Manager, Partnership and Intelligence Gathering	FCA
Maeve Hully	Chief Executive	Client and Patient Council
Janet Hunter	CEO	Housing Rights Association
Maria Jennings	Director	Food Standards Agency NI
Sean Johnson	Principle Officer Transport Projects	DRD
Glenn Jordan	Director	Law Centre NI
Stephen Kelly	CEO	Manufacturing NI
Graham Keddie	Managing Director	Belfast International Airport
Jackie Kerr	Director	DETI
David Keys	Customer Relations Manager	NIE

Professor Christine Liddell	Professor of Psychology and Distinguished Community Fellow	Ulster University
Paddy Larkin	Managing Director	Mutual Energy
Simon Little	Dansk Bank	Corporate Affairs Manager
David Livingstone	Head of Service	Northern Ireland Trading Standards Service
Trevor Lunn MLA	MLA	Alliance Party
Eddie Lynch	CEO	Age Sector Platform
Sean Lynch MLA	Deputy Chair	Regional Development Committee
Chris Lyttle MLA	Deputy OFMDFM Chair	Alliance Party
Linda MacHugh	Director, Water Policy and Sewerage	DRD
Sean McAleese	Customer Service Delivery Director	NI Water
Seamus McAleavey	CEO	NICVA
Eleanor McEvoy	Chief Executive	Budget Energy
Duncan McCombie	Director	EST
Andrew McCormick	Permanent Secretary	DETI
John McCormick	Communications Manager	CarersNI
Robin McCormick	Managing Director	SONI
Peter McClenaghan	Regulation Manager	Firmus Energy
Stephen McCully	Managing Director	Power NI
Oliver McHugh	Fuel Poverty Coordinator	DSD

Professor Neill Gibson	Director of the Economic Policy Centre	Ulster University
Dan McGinn	Corporate Affairs and Communications Manager NI	Ulster Bank
Pasty McGlone MLA	MLA and Chair of the ETI Committee	SDLP
Angela McGowan	Chief Economist	Danske Bank
John McGrath	Deputy	DRD
John McGrillen	CEO	Tourism Northern Ireland
Jonathan McKee	Director of Business Development	Rivers Agency
Heather McKee	Community Planning Manager	Down, Newry, Mourne Council
Pauline McKiernan	Sustainability and Community Affairs Manager	Ulster Bank
Michael McKinstry	Managing Director	Phoenix Natural Gas
John McMullan	CEO	Bryson Charitable Trust
Jannie Maher	Northern Ireland Manager	Money Advice Service
Stephen Martin	Head of Department	
Niall Martindale	Business Planning and Regulatory Affairs Manager	Phoenix Natural Gas
Peter May	Permanent Secretary	DRD
Ian Maxwell	Information Manager, Water Policy and Sewerage	DRD

John Mills	Head of Energy Division	DETI
Liz Mitchell	Director of Development and Capacity Building	Institute for Public Health in Ireland
Professor Wilfred Mitchell	Director	Federation of Small Businesses
Liam Mulholland	Head of Customer Services	NI Water
Andrew Murray	Head of Transport NI	DRD
Marc Norris	Director	Open Electric
Steven Nyquist	Service Delivery Manager, Account Services	NI Water
David O'Neill	Senior Drinking Water Inspector	Drinking Water Inspectorate
Roger Pollen	Head of External Affairs NI	Federation of Small Businesses
Jenny Pyper	CEO	Utility Regulator
Tom Reid	Director of Policy	DRD
Carol Rice	Consumer Protection Partnership	BIS
Glynn Roberts	Chief Executive	NIIRTA
Linda Robinson	Chief Executive	AgeNI
Richard Rodgers	Board Member	Utility Regulator
Ciaran Rogan	Marketing Executive	Translink
Eugene Rooney	Deputy Permanent Secretary	DETI

Jonathan Rose	Director	Ofcom
Paul Stapleton	General Manager	Electric Ireland
Michael Scott	Managing Director	Firmus Energy
Kevin Shiels	Director	Utility Regulator
John Simms	Principle Officer Air Access and Agri Foods	DETI
William Steel	Regulation Manager	Power NI
David Strachan	CEO	Translink
Bob Stronge	CEO	Advice NI
Nicholas Tarrant	CEO	NIE
Morag Turnbull	Deputy Director of Communications	Royal Mail
Patrick Thompson	Head of NI Energy Saving Trust	EST
Dr Daniel Vandenburg	Consumer Intelligence Analyst for the Consumer Protection Partnership	Citizens Advice
Sara Venning	CEO	Northern Ireland Water
Caroline Wayman	Chief Ombudsman & Chief Executive	Financial Ombudsman Service
Laura Whiskerd	Senior Associate	FCA
Sharleen Winning	Customer Manager	Firmus Energy
Suzanne Wylie	Chief Executive	Belfast City Council