

Dear partners,

We wanted to take this opportunity to update you on the future delivery of the Citizens Advice consumer service in England and Wales.

Following a review of the consumer landscape¹, in 2012 responsibility for the delivery of the consumer service passed from the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland. The review recognised that these new arrangements would:

- strengthen frontline consumer protection by forging a stronger link between the activities of the Citizens Advice service and provision of information and advice
- move the delivery of advice to a service with a brand that is much better known to consumers than the Consumer Direct service delivered by the OFT
- reduce the complexity of the consumer landscape

At the end of March 2017, after what will have been 5 years of successful delivery, the contract we have with our current contact centre supplier, for services across England and Wales, will come to an end.

Since the transfer of the service from the Office of Fair Trading, it has always been the long-term goal of Citizens Advice to integrate the consumer service into our wider network and we have been considering how we can best achieve this as we move forward.

There are a number of benefits to progressing this integrated approach including:

- the ability to seamlessly link clients to advice and support in other areas they may require, for example debt advice
- an increased potential for greater regional engagement with you and other stakeholders
- integrating the knowledge and expertise of the wider Citizens Advice network into the consumer service and building stronger relationships
- greater opportunities for shared ownership of the service by delivery partners, who are part of our service, meaning that the provision of a good quality service to clients and partners will continue to be a priority

We have, therefore, taken the decision that from April 2017 the consumer service will be delivered by a small number of Citizens Advice providers.

Our priority in making this transition will be to maintain service levels and quality (in line with existing Key Performance Indicators) and to maintain the confidence of clients and stakeholders.

¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills - Empowering and Protecting Consumers, consumer landscape review

Our overarching approach will be to make as few changes as possible to the current delivery model and systems to ensure a smooth transition. We do, however, want to continue to improve and develop the service and these improvements will be made in discussion with you and phased in over time.

In practical terms, this means we will:

- retain the existing technical infrastructure
- continue to collect the current data set (and improve on this over time)
- prioritise the continuation of all the existing referral protocols and data sharing obligations

We will run a robust process to select a small number (fewer than 10) of Citizens Advice providers and we will manage them tightly in terms of performance, quality, client and partner satisfaction. The service will continue to be provided by dedicated staff who will receive the same level of training and continual professional development as existing staff.

We have recent and significant experience of transitions of a similar scale on other services and are confident we can manage this transition effectively and in much the same way as the transfer from the Office of Fair Trading in 2012.

The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) support our approach and have clear expectations that the service will be delivered to at least the same scope and operational standards, dependent on funding.

Between now and April 2017, we'll work closely with you and our current suppliers to ensure that we offer a consistent service for clients and partners, including referrals and the provision of data.

Finally, whilst we await further detail on the practical implications of the implementation of the Scotland Act for consumer advice in Scotland, we continue to operate on the assumption that the delivery model for the GB service will remain broadly the same. We will make appropriate adjustments to our plans if necessary as further detail becomes available.

We look forward to continuing our dialogue with you over the coming months but in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact us at consumer.transition@citizensadvice.org.uk if you have any immediate questions.

Best wishes,
Michele

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