Everything you need to know about the Citizens Advice consumer service codes implementation project

About consumer service codes

Consumer service codes are used by consumer service advisers to record and categorise the issues, problems and complaints being reported by the consumers they are talking to. This intelligence is shared with stakeholders and used to analyse consumer trends and detriment, develop policy, challenge bad practice and enforce regulation.

Why the consumer service codes are being updated

In March 2014, the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (formerly the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills - BIS) asked Citizens Advice to carry out a fundamental review of consumer service codes. The codes had remained unchanged for a decade and did not accurately reflect the cases that consumer service advisers were seeing.

Between March and June 2015, Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland organised a consultation with numerous stakeholders, particularly Trading Standards Services, regulators and representatives from the energy and post industries.

The consultation showed that stakeholders were strongly in favour of changing the consumer service codes. As a result, a project was launched in November 2015 by the Citizens Advice consumer service operations team to develop and implement a new coding framework.

The new coding system will allow increased intelligence reporting, including new and updated reports within the partner portal. We believe that the new coding framework will increase the value of consumer service data for our partners.
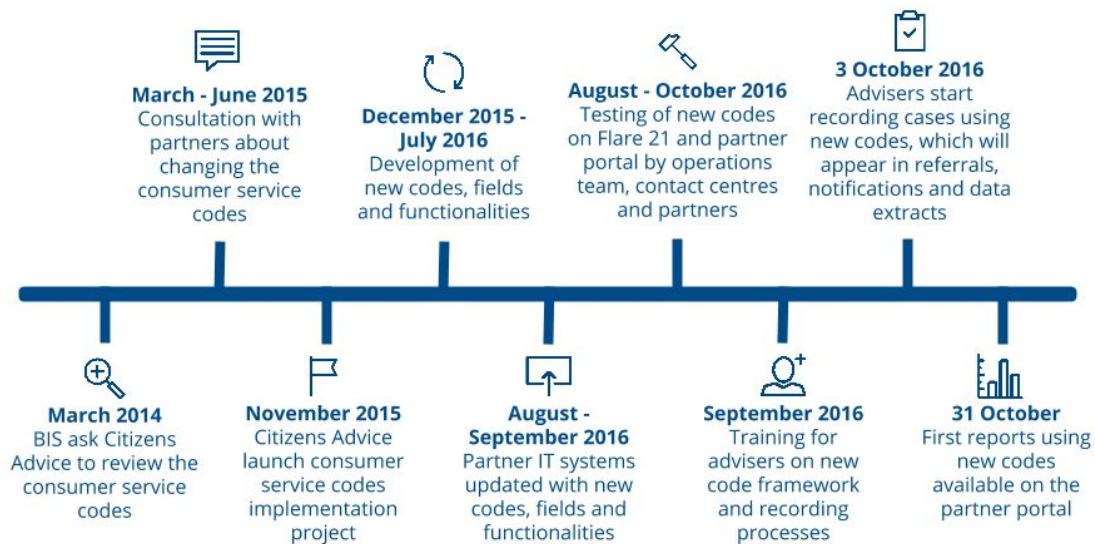
Summary of key changes

The project has involved introducing various new codes, fields and functionalities:

Change	Benefit
New, updated or amended goods and services codes	The codes will accurately reflect the goods and services that consumers are contacting us about. For example, we've added codes for teeth whitening products, airport parking, change of tenancy and online energy account issues and have separated out the codes for lost/delayed/misdelivered mail.
New, updated or amended purchase method codes	The codes will accurately reflect current methods by which consumers purchase and experience issues with goods and services. For example we've deleted fax as a method of sale and added SMS.
A new 'scams' field	A new field that will allow reporting of potential scam cases in General Consumer cases.
2 new 'detriment' fields - a 'detriment type' field and a 'detriment value' field	Advisers will be able to record the type/s of detrimental impact a client has suffered (such as consequential losses or time off work) and to capture a monetary value related to this.
The ability to record multiple 'complaint type' and 'issue type' codes	Advisers will be able to record up to 2 'complaint type' codes - one 'main' and one 'additional' - on General Consumer cases and up to 2 'issue type' codes on Energy and Post cases. This means that cases with more than one aspect can be more accurately coded.
The ability to record multiple traders on referrals	We will be able to record up to 2 trader records on a General Consumer case. For example, a finance company in addition to the trader that the client purchased from.

All the changes will be updated on the consumer service systems, including our case management system Flare21, our webforms and the Consumer Data Warehouse.

Project overview

The consumer service codes implementation is being run as a project, with appropriate project management methodology. The timelines are as follows:

March - June 2015
Consultation with partners about changing the consumer service codes

December 2015 - July 2016
Development of new codes, fields and functionalities

August - October 2016
Testing of new codes on Flare 21 and partner portal by operations team, contact centres and partners

3 October 2016
Advisers start recording cases using new codes, which will appear in referrals, notifications and data extracts

March 2014
BIS ask Citizens Advice to review the consumer service codes

November 2015
Citizens Advice launch consumer service codes implementation project

August - September 2016
Partner IT systems updated with new codes, fields and functionalities

September 2016
Training for advisers on new code framework and recording processes

31 October
First reports using new codes available on the partner portal

We fully understand the value of the intelligence we collect and share with our partners, and are closely managing the project timelines and activities to ensure this is uninterrupted.

Frequently asked questions

Will my IT department/system suppliers need to be involved around changes being made?
We approached all partners and identified the 4 most commonly used IT system suppliers; Civica, Idox, Northgate and Tascomi. We have been engaging with them about the changes taking place and they will contact you to schedule any necessary work. If you are changing system supplier before the changes take place it should not make any difference. We are aiming for all work to be completed before the code changes take effect on 3 October. If you use a system supplied by a company not listed above, please contact us using the details below.

How will double counting be avoided with multiple coding?
Where there are multiple 'detriment type' codes for a client, the detriments will not be counted separately - they'll just be listed in one field, separated by commas. Main and additional 'complaint type' codes appear as separate fields. To avoid duplication, advisers won't be able to select the same code for both main and additional fields.

When are the changes being made to your system and when will changes need to be made on our case management system and connectors to allow for this?
We are planning to introduce the new codes on 3 October which means you will start to receive referrals and notifications containing the updated codes if your connector has been updated. Changes to your connector will be made before this so you can continue to use your prefered referral model without interruption.

Will there be any interruption to intelligence being provided to partners?
Contingency plans are in place to ensure the transfer of intelligence data to partners through referrals and notifications will not be prevented. We are therefore confident this will not be interrupted.

What new reports will be available once the new codes 'go live'?
The new codes 'go live' on 3 October. We are working to complete the activation of additional reports by 31 October. Additional information on reports will be circulated presently and be hosted on the portal by 31 October.

Will there be separate reports for data before/after the codes are implemented?
No. All reports affected by the code changes will be updated to report on both new and existing (including deleted, merged and split) codes. The way the codes are searched remains unchanged. Existing codes that have been deleted, merged and split will appear at the end of the new list of codes in hierarchical order. For example, Caravan rental (FD02) (not in current use), Disco hire (FH05) (not in current use).

Will we still be able to access historic data in reports via the portal?
Yes. Historic data will still be available via the portal.

Contact us
If you have any additional questions or concerns, please email the consumer service operations team
operations@citizensadvice.org.uk