



Title: Utility Regulator Draft Forward Work Programme 2019/2020

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Our (PID) reference number: PD20010-3023

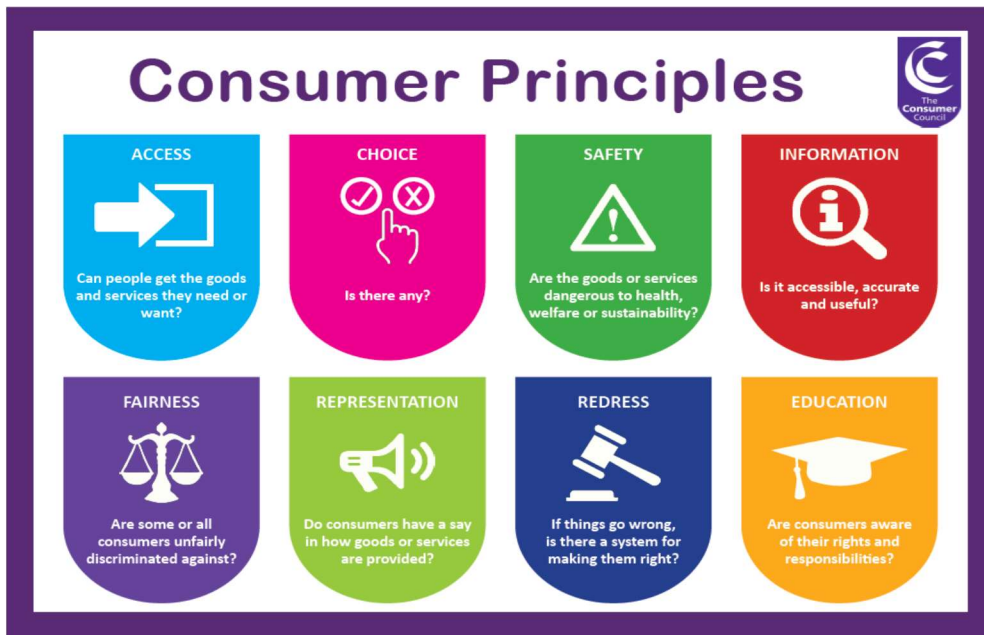
Date: 26 February 2019

1. Introduction

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 The Consumer Council has specific statutory duties in relation to energy, postal services, transport, and water and sewerage. These include considering consumer complaints and enquiries, carrying out research, and educating and informing consumers.

2. General Comments

- 2.1 The Consumer Council is pleased to be able to offer comment on the Utility Regulator's (UR) Draft Forward Work Programme 2019/20 (DFWP).
- 2.2 As the statutory consumer body for electricity, gas and water consumers we look forward to working with UR across the full remit of its work. The DFWP builds on the partnership UR and The Consumer Council have built and provides a strong platform to develop this further.
- 2.3 We use eight consumer principles to set a consumer-focused framework within which we work; see below.



2.4 We believe these eight principles improve consumer outcomes and would encourage UR to use them during its 2019/20 work programme.

2.5 We reiterate our support for the overall approach that UR is proposing in its consumer-centred approach to the draft Corporate Strategy and welcome the UR focus, through the Consumer Protection Programme, on practical initiatives to support vulnerable customers.

2.6 Below we make comment on some specific areas of work outlined in the DFWP.

Objective 1 – Promoting markets that deliver effective competition, informed choice and fair outcomes

2.7 As the statutory representative for energy and water consumers we look forward to gaining further insight into supplier performance in the retail energy market.

- 2.8 We have been supporters of the Retail Energy Market Monitoring work and are keen to work with UR to ensure that the published analysis can be used by consumers to help their decision making process when switching supplier.
- 2.9 We support the UR Consumer Protection Programme and are committed to continue working with UR to deliver positive outcomes for consumers. Our work with UR on network companies' Care Registers and the Consumer Vulnerability Working Group is a good example of the two organisations working together to improve consumer protection.
- 2.10 We welcome the steps outlined by UR to develop a robust and comprehensive monitoring framework and reporting mechanism for SEM which should result in increased trust in the market.

Objective 2 – Enabling 21st Century Networks

- 2.11 A key element of the regulation of monopoly utilities in Northern Ireland is UR's price control determinations. In the essential services of energy and water it is crucial to the economy and society as a whole.

Objective 3 – Ensuring security of supply and a low carbon future

- 2.12 The Consumer Council will continue to work with UR on the review of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme to ensure that consumer views are represented as part of that review.
- 2.13 We would welcome early discussions on the implementation of the Clean Energy Package and the potential impacts on consumers in Northern Ireland.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Overall, The Consumer Council welcomes the UR DFWP and the projects it sets out. We stress our commitment to continue working in partnership with UR for the benefit of consumers. We would welcome the opportunity to explore further areas of collaboration during 2019/20
- 3.2 If you would like to discuss any of the above, or have any questions, please contact Sinead Dynan, Director of Regulated Industries, at The Consumer Council. Sinead.dynan@consumercouncil.org.uk telephone 028 9025 1636.

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