

## **Change to Consumer Charter.**

In Flintshire the functions of the Trading Standards service are delivered within the Planning and Environment Department. Officers of the Compliance team have the main responsibility for assisting Flintshire based consumers with the resolution of non criminal consumer complaints.

For many years first line consumer advice has been provided by The Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CitA/ CACS) or its predecessor Consumer Direct via a network of regional call centres. They provide initial advice and template letters. The Flintshire consumers who are unable to resolve their issues after completion of this stage are then introduced to the Trading Standards Consumer Mediation service for further assistance and mediation. In a minority of cases officers also provide assistance with completion of documentation for Small Claims Court.

The Consumer Charter is a document written for service users. It explains the Consumer Advice Service and the level of support we are able to provide for consumers and businesses in Flintshire. The document was last reviewed in 2011. The Consumer Charter is a framework which explains the activity of the consumer mediation service and sets out what we can and can't do. It is invaluable in managing the expectations of our service users whilst providing relevant information to them. It is provided on the FCC website and copies are provided to service users who have any query about what we do. Officers are able to deviate from the framework by offering an improved service to vulnerable service users and in cases which are particularly serious.

The charter lists the parameters of the service which include a lower financial limit for complaint mediation. The limit has been set at £20 for many years. We have found that a small number of consumer complaints relating to low value goods have been taking up a disproportionate amount of officer time which means that we have had less time for other important duties. To rebalance this we have recently increased the trigger point for complaint mediation to a minimum financial level of £50. Consumers who have issues relating to goods and services below this level will still be able to access first line advice and template letters from the Citizen's Advice Consumer Service.

Increasing the lower financial limit to trigger our involvement in mediation for civil complaints means we will be able to concentrate our resources more effectively. The change will not prevent officers from assisting vulnerable or financially stretched service users whose complaints relate to smaller amounts.