

**REPORT TO: PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE 6th
APRIL 2010**

SUBJECT: CONSUMER DIRECT SCOTLAND – LETTER OF SUPPORT

BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on possible developments relating to Consumer Direct Scotland (CDS) currently provided by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.
- 1.2 To provide the opportunity for Members to support Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in their bid to be involved in the future provision of the Service.
- 1.3 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section F (10) of the Council's Administrative Scheme to deal with all matters relating to Trading Standards.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Members are invited to:-

a) reaffirm their support to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and their current provision of the Consumer Direct Scotland service; and

b) confirm their written support for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in their bid to be involved in the future delivery of the Consumer Direct service (a template letter has been provided for use if necessary – see Appendix 1).

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Consumer Direct Scotland provides first tier basic consumer advice to Scottish consumers by telephone and online. The service was launched in 2004 and became one of an 11 strong network of regional/national centres in Great Britain funded by the Office of Fair Trading(OFT) using the Consumer Direct brand. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has been successfully delivering the Consumer Direct Scotland contact centre in partnership with local council Trading Standards services, and currently employs 30 staff. The remaining 10 centres were based in England (9) and Wales (1).
- 3.2 The Moray Council's Trading Standards Service works positively with the centre to coordinate advice to consumers. Initial calls for advice are diverted to the Centre and they are then provided with easy to follow step by step advice on how to resolve their problem Where the complaint may involve criminal breaches of consumer law, or where the consumer requires further

assistance and intervention, then the complaint is passed to the relevant Trading Standards Service.

- 3.3 The original contracts operated by the Office of Fair Trading were due to expire in March 2010 but the OFT have asked for interim bids to continue the service until new arrangements are made. Consumer Direct Scotland were successful in their bid and will now continue until approximately April 2011. Two English centres were unsuccessful in their bids and their call volumes will be transferred to the remaining 9 centres.
- 3.4 Against the background of Treasury required efficiencies, OFT is considering a reduction from 9 centres to three or two centres covering the UK, with estimated total savings of £1.5m to £2m. A European wide tender to supply these centres from April 2011 to March 2018 has now been published and proposals requested, and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is currently involved in two of these bids. The support of Local Authorities in Scotland is a vital part of this bidding process.
- 3.5 There is currently a close relationship between The Moray Council's Trading Standards service and Consumer Direct Scotland provided by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and this could be significantly undermined if the service leaves Scotland, particularly given the differences in Scotland relating to consumer legislation compared to the rest of the UK. A Scottish based centre is vital in order to ensure consumers in Scotland continue to receive an excellent service.
- 3.6 Members are therefore invited to reaffirm their support for the Consumer Direct Service and to express their support to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in their efforts to successfully secure their proposed bid for the future. For this purpose a suggested form of words in the form of a letter to Malcolm Burr, Chief Executive, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Stornoway has been provided as an appendix to this report – See Appendix 1.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Single Outcome Agreement/Service Improvement Plan

The report details ongoing partnership activities between The Moray Council's Trading Standards Service and Consumer Direct Scotland provided by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar which provides an efficient, high quality consumer advice package to Moray's residents whilst ensuring efficiencies to both organisations. As such these contribute to Scottish National Outcomes relating to better educated citizens, living longer and tackling inequalities as well as ensuring our public services are efficient and responsive. There is also contribution to Moray Community Plan outcomes relating to economic development and improved public efficiencies.

(b) Policy and Legal

None.

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

None.

(d) Consultations

None.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Members are invited to show their support to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for their continuing provision of the excellent services provided by Consumer Direct Scotland to Moray residents and the citizens of Scotland. To enable Moray and Scottish consumer needs to be adequately preserved in any future provision, members are asked to formally write to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar expressing support for their involvement in any formal bids.

Author of Report: David Owen, Trading Standards Manager

Background Papers: None

Ref: SH/DAO