



# Privacy Policy and Notice

**Consumer Council for Northern Ireland**

**April 2024**

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# 1.0 Introduction and Policy Context

This Privacy Policy sets out how the Consumer Council handles personal data. It applies to all Consumer Council staff who must read, understand and comply with this policy. The policy should also be read in conjunction with the Consumer Council's Data Protection Policy.

This Privacy Policy is a controlled document and is held centrally by the Director of Corporate Services. Compliance with this policy is mandatory. Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action and in serious cases, it could result in the termination of employment.

Any queries about how to handle personal data or about the operation of this Privacy Policy should be directed to:

- The Data Protection Officer
- The Departmental Information Manager or
- Senior Information Risk Officer.

Please also get in touch if you have any concerns that this policy is not being or has not been followed.

## 1.1 Policy Scope

This privacy policy outlines how the Consumer Council processes information at the Consumer Council. It has been written in accordance with the [UK General Data Protection Regulations](#) and [Data Protection Act](#). It also outlines the consumer's rights under the regulation.

## 1.2 Legislative Commitment

An organisation that processes personal data has to have a legal reason for doing so. This might be due to consent or a legal obligation. At the Consumer Council, we process data as part of a 'public task.' This is because the Consumer Council is a public body with a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the interests of consumers and stakeholders.

If a consumer approaches the Consumer Council with a complaint about a service provider, or just requests information about consumer rights, it is the Consumer Council's 'public task' to act on behalf of the consumer. To do this the Consumer Council need to process personal data. Equally, if a complaint is received regarding any aspect of the Consumer Council's service, personal data may need to be obtained to address it. Please also see the Complaints Handling Policy and Internal Complaints Policy.

## 2.0 Consumer Privacy Policy

### 2.1 How we use your information

It should always be made very clear what data we collect and how we use it, and you should have meaningful control over both. We want to empower you to make the best decisions about the information that you share with us. This privacy policy describes how and when we collect, use, and share your information. When this policy mentions “we,” “our” or “us,” it refers to the controller of information under this policy, which is the Consumer Council of Northern Ireland.

### 2.2 Controller

The Consumer Council is the data controller responsible for your personal data and we are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office with reference number Z927294X. The Information Commissioner's Office is the UK supervisory authority for data protection issues.

### 2.3 Data Protection Officer

The Consumer Council has a designated Data Protection Officer whose responsibilities include:

- Monitoring the Consumer Council's compliance with the UK [General Data Protection Act](#) and other data protection laws;
- Raising awareness of data protection issues, training the Consumer Council staff and conducting internal audits
- Cooperating with supervisory authorities such as the Information Commissioner's Office on our behalf.

If you have any questions about this privacy policy, including any requests to exercise your legal rights, please refer to the contact us section of this document.

### 2.4 Complaints

You have the right to make a complaint at any time to the Information Commissioner's Office. Before contacting the Commissioner, we would appreciate the chance to deal with your concerns. Please contact us first to see how we can help.

## 2.5 Information we collect about you

We will collect and process the following data about you:

### Submitted Information

This is information you give us about you by filling in forms on our website, or by corresponding with us (for example, by e-mail or via the telephone). It includes information you provide when you subscribe to any of our services, social media functions, enter a competition, promotion or survey and when you report a problem with our services, or the website. If you contact us, we will keep a record of that correspondence. The information you give us may include your name, address, date of birth, e-mail address, phone number and photograph. All calls to our customer support team are recorded for training and quality purposes. Call recordings are used to assess call handling standards and each recording is disposed of in line with our retention schedule.

### Submitted Information (Special Category Data)

Information you may give us could also include sensitive personal information about you, such as any medical conditions which may be relevant to the nature of your contact with us. In such cases we will only process this information for specific purposes, for example to arrange special assistance for attendance at one of our events or in the resolution of a complaint.

### Device Information

Each time you visit our website we will automatically collect the following:

#### Technical information

Including the internet protocol (IP) address used to connect your computer to the Internet, browser type and version, time zone setting, browser plug-in types and versions, operating system and platform, device information and the type of mobile device you use, mobile network information, your mobile operating system, the type of mobile browser you use, time zone setting; and

#### Information about your visit

Including the full Uniform Resource Locators (URL's), clickstream to, through and from our site (including date and time), services you viewed or searched for, page response times, download errors, length of visits to certain pages, page interaction information (such as scrolling, clicks, and mouse-overs), methods used to browse away from the page, and device information.

## 3.0 Cookies

We use a system of classifying the different types of cookies which we use on our website, or which may be used by third parties through our website. The classification was developed by the International Chamber of Commerce UK and explains more about which cookies we use, why we use them, and the functionality you will lose if you decide you don't want to have them on your device.

### 3.1 What is a cookie?

Cookies are text files containing small amounts of information which are downloaded to your personal computer, mobile or other device when you visit a website. Cookies are then sent back to the originating website on each subsequent visit, or to another website that recognises that cookie. Cookies are useful because they allow a website to recognise a user's device.

### 3.2 How long are cookies stored for?

Persistent cookies - these cookies remain on a user's device for the period of time specified in the cookie. They are activated each time that the user visits the website that created that particular cookie.

Session cookies - these cookies allow website operators to link the actions of a user during a browser session. A browser session starts when a user opens the browser window and finishes when they close the browser window. Session cookies are created temporarily. Once you close the browser, all session cookies are deleted. Cookies do lots of different jobs, like letting you navigate between pages efficiently, remembering your preferences, and generally improve the user experience.

### 3.3 Cookies used on our website

A list of all the cookies used on our website by category is set out below.

### 3.4 Strictly necessary cookies

These cookies enable services you have specifically asked for. These cookies are essential in order to enable you to move around the website and use its features.

### 3.5 Performance cookies

These cookies collect anonymous information on the pages visited. By using the website, you agree that we can place these types of cookies on your device. These cookies collect information about how visitors use the website, for instance which pages visitors go to most often, and if they get error messages from web pages. These cookies don't collect information that identifies a visitor. All information these cookies collect is aggregated and therefore anonymous. It is only used to improve how the website works.

## 3.6 Functionality cookies

These cookies remember choices you make to improve your experience. By using the website, you agree that we can place these types of cookies on your device. These cookies allow the website to remember choices you make and provide enhanced, more personal features. The information these cookies collect may be anonymised and they cannot track your browsing activity on other websites.

## 3.7 Third party cookies

These cookies allow third parties to track the success of their application or customise the application for you. Because of how cookies work we cannot access these cookies, nor can the third parties access the data in cookies used on our site. For example, if you choose to 'share' content through Twitter or other social networks you might be sent cookies from those websites. We don't control the setting of these cookies, so please check those websites for more information about their cookies and how to manage them.



## 4.0 How We Use the Information

### 4.1 Summary

Below is a summary of the key types of data that we make use of as part of the Consumer Council services. We use information held about you in the following ways:

#### Submitted Information and Special Category Information (where appropriate).

We will use this information:

- To carry out our statutory duty to act on your behalf regarding complaints about transport, water, postal services and energy.
- To influence policy change through consumer-based research.
- To provide you with the latest copy of our e-Zine newsletter.
- To comply with our regulatory obligations.
- To coordinate competitions run by the Consumer Council.
- To signpost you to other bodies that may be better placed to assist you with your query.
- To deal with any contacts from you relating to an area not stated above but for which the Consumer Council is well placed to provide assistance.
- Providing information to the NI Public Health Agency Track and Trace service and other relevant authorities relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as contact details of those who visit our premises, including members of our staff, consumers or stakeholders.
- Using CCTV systems.

#### Device Information

We will use this information:

- To administer our website for internal operations, including troubleshooting, data analysis, testing, research, statistical and survey purposes
- To improve our website to ensure that content is presented in the most effective manner for you and for your computer
- To allow you to participate in interactive features of our service, when you choose to do so
- As part of our efforts to keep our website safe and secure.

### 4.2 E-Zine newsletter

We use a third-party provider, Mailchimp, to deliver our monthly e-zine newsletters. We gather statistics around email opening and clicks to help us monitor and improve our e-zine newsletter. For more information, please see the Privacy Notice on the INTUIT Mail Chimp website.

## 4.3 People who contact us via social media

We use a third-party provider, Hootsuite to manage our social media interactions on Twitter. If you send us a private or direct message via social media, the message will be stored by Hootsuite for three months. More information can be found in [Hootsuite's Privacy Notice](#).

Our communications team also manages social media interactions on Facebook and Twitter directly; messages received through these platforms are disposed of in line with our retention and disposal schedule. For more information, please read the privacy notices of these organisations.

## 4.4 People who email us

We use encryption methods to protect email traffic containing personal information. If your email service does not support these methods, you should be aware that any emails we send or receive may not be protected in transit. We will also monitor any emails sent to us, including file attachments, for viruses or malicious software. Please be aware that you have a responsibility to ensure that any email you send is within the bounds of the law.

## 4.5 People who telephone us

We use the services of NI Direct as a third party to handle all calls to the Consumer Council in the first instance. NI Direct is responsible for evaluating the nature of the call and deciding if it is a matter for investigation under the statutory role of the Consumer Council. If it is deemed to fall under this statutory remit the details will be transferred directly to the Consumer Council, and it will handle the complaint. If the call is not a matter for the Consumer Council, NI Direct will help by providing the relevant assistance.

NI Direct will ask all callers if they will voluntarily provide a postcode, house number and email address (to send a survey on performance). The Consumer Council will ask for further information from the consumer where cases are referred to us because they fall under our statutory remit.

For more information on how NI Direct processes personal information and its compliance with the UK GDPR please see the [NI Direct Privacy Notice](#).

## 4.6 People who contact us via our website

When contact is made through the Consumer Council website, consumers are directed to complete an online form which is sent to us via email to our mailbox:

[contact@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:contact@consumercouncil.org.uk).

This account is processed by the Consumer Protection Team upon receipt and consumers will receive an automated acknowledgement email. The purpose of the acknowledgement is to confirm that the consumer's form has been received. It is also to advise that a member of our team will be in touch with them in due course (normally 3 working days).

## 4.7 People who contact us to make an enquiry or complaint

When we receive a request to handle an enquiry or complaint on behalf of a consumer, we create a record containing specific details on our Customer Relationship Management database. Details normally include the name and contact details of the person and any other individuals involved in the case.

This data is held in a secure environment and access is restricted to consumer council staff. It may also be accessed by IT support staff and used to compile reports for statistical, analytical and policy development purposes.

## 4.8 Limitations

We will only use the personal information we collect to process the enquiry or complaint and to check on the level of service we provide. We compile and publish statistics showing information on the number of contacts we receive, but not in a form which identifies anyone.

We usually have to disclose the subject's identity to whomever the contact is about. This is necessary in order to progress the enquiry or complaint. If you do not want information identifying you to be disclosed, we will respect that. However, it may restrict our ability in trying to achieve a positive outcome on your behalf.

We may also share your personal data with relevant third parties such as, but not limited to, an industry regulator or complaint handling body/advice agency. This will only be with a view to resolving your complaint but if you do not wish for your information to be shared in this way, please let us know.

Any personal information contained in complaint files on our Customer Relationship Management database is held in line with our data retention policy.

The table below shows how data is processed.

What We Use Your Information for	Type of Information	Our Lawful Basis for Processing
<p>To carry out our statutory duty to safeguard and promote the interests of Northern Ireland consumers. This includes (but is not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dealing with your enquiries or complaints about service providers</li> <li>conducting research into consumer issues</li> <li>liaising with stakeholders to improve services for consumers.</li> </ul>	Submitted Information	Public Task: Processing the information is necessary for the performance of these tasks carried out in the public interest and in the exercise of our official authority, as set down in the relevant legislation that gives the Consumer Council its powers.
<p>We may process personal sensitive information that you have provided such as any medical conditions. This may be in relation to accessing our services or seeking resolution to an enquiry or complaint. We will only use this information where it is relevant.</p>	Submitted Information (Special Category Data)	Public Task: Processing the information is necessary for the performance of these tasks carried out in the public interest and in the exercise of our official authority, as set down in the relevant legislation that gives the Consumer Council its powers.
<p>To provide you with our e-Zine newsletter, entry to competitions and photographs for promotional purposes from events.</p> <p>To facilitate Consumer Council events such as the Consumer Parliament, access audits and outreach events.</p>	Submitted Information	Consent: You will have provided your explicit and clear consent to receive information from us, to provide us with information or to take part in a Consumer Council facilitated event.
<p>To give you access to our website and otherwise administer the website.</p>	Device Information	Public Task: Processing the information is necessary for the performance of these tasks carried out in the public interest and in the exercise of our official authority, as set down in the relevant legislation that gives the Consumer Council its powers.

## 4.9 People who make a complaint about us

If you have used our services and are dissatisfied with the service we have provided you can raise a complaint. Information on how to raise a complaint can be found on the [Consumer Council Website](#).

If you choose to make a complaint about us, you may escalate it to the Public Service Ombudsman. If this is the case, we will share full details of your complaint with the Public Service Ombudsman.

## 5.0 Disclosure of Your Information

### 5.1 Sharing your Information

In seeking to resolve your enquiry or complaint we will share the information that you give us with relevant third parties.

This could include, but may not be limited to, the company or service that you have contacted us about, an industry regulator or other relevant complaint handling bodies/advice agencies.

We will only do this for the purposes of seeking to resolve your complaint or to improve services in general. If you do not wish for your information to be shared in this way please let us know, however it may restrict our ability to achieve a positive outcome on your behalf.

More information on your rights is contained in the Consumer Council Privacy Policy.

### 5.2 Data Sharing Agreements

We have sought data sharing agreements with third parties that we share personal information with. These agreements dictate what personal information the third parties have access to, what they can do with the information and what they must do with the information after it is no longer required or if our contract with them ends.

These agreements are maintained by our Departmental Information Manager and as the data controller we have the right to carry out audits on third parties to ensure your personal data is being processed in line with the agreement.

### 5.3 Privacy by Design

Under the UK GDPR, we have a general obligation to implement technical and organisational measures to show that we have considered and integrated data protection into our processing activities. Data Protection Impacts Assessments (DIAs) are a mandatory requirement to be completed by us for:

- All new projects / policy / legislation that involve the processing of personal or sensitive personal data and for any changes to current policies / procedures / processes / legislation that similarly involve the processing of personal or sensitive personal data; and
- All new software systems or any departmental or inter-departmental re-structuring project that involves the processing of personal or sensitive personal data.

These assessments are required to consider the level of risk to individuals and are reviewed by our Data Protection Officer.

We also anonymise personal information that we have received from a consumer in line with the retention period after the complaint has been completed. This ensures that all personal information has been removed from the complaint.

## 5.4 Who is the information shared with?

We sometimes need to share the personal information we process with the individuals themselves and also with other organisations. Where this is necessary, we are required to comply with all aspects of the DPA.

We may share information with other organisations for the reasons included in Section 5 - How we use information. Some examples of the organisations we may have to share your information with include:

- Suppliers, service providers, legal representatives
- Auditors and audit bodies
- Financial organisations
- Professional advisers and consultants
- Central and local government
- UK government bodies / Northern Ireland non-governmental organisations
- Voluntary and charitable organisations
- Police forces
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)

We may need to share information for more than one reason and not all of your personal information may need to be shared each time. We aim to ensure that the personal information shared and the instances of sharing are limited to what is needed for the specific purpose and in line with the Data Protection Act.

## 5.5 Data processing partners

We will disclose the data we collect from you to certain third parties who use personal data in delivering their services to us. They use data securely and confidentially and under strict contractual controls in accordance with data protection laws and enforced by the Consumer Council.

We send personal data and / or data about our services to a number of data processors in order to perform the Consumer Council operations and to improve our services. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Endeavor Information Services – provides support for the database that we use to store information relating to enquiries and complaints
- Customer Service Excellence Standard – data relating to the level of service we provide to consumers is reviewed to ensure we meet best practice. The review does not include personal data
- BT48 – This organisation hosts and supports our website
- Acorn IT Solutions – Sage support partner
- Mailchimp – E-mail distribution service / mailing provider
- Google Analytics – Website statistics
- NI Direct – Call triage service
- British Standards Institute - example call recordings for quality accreditation
- AbilityNet - reviews our website content for Accessibility in line with legislation.

## 5.6 Cloud storage providers

We use Platform.sh as our cloud storage provider. Platform.sh's GDPR Supervisory Authority is the [Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés](#).

Platform.sh takes all reasonable measures to:

- Protect your personal data and information, and to protect its sites from unauthorized access to, or unauthorized alteration, disclosure or destruction of, information it maintains
- Ensure that it is in compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation regardless of where your personal data may be stored and processed.

## 6.0 Information Security

To protect your information, the Consumer Council has policies and procedures in place to make sure that only authorised personnel can access the information, that information is handled and stored in a secure and sensible manner, and all systems that can access the information have proportionate and reasonable security measures in place.

All information you provide to us is stored by our IT Service provider, The Northern Ireland Civil Service provider IT Assist, on secure servers. These servers are regularly updated to ensure your personal data is secure as possible. Any paper information is stored within locked cabinets in a secure building environment which requires a staff pass in order to gain access.

### 6.1 Transfers of your information out of the UK

We may from time to time need to transfer your personal information to service providers which are located outside the United Kingdom. This will be for the purpose of seeking to resolve the enquiry/complaint we have raised on your behalf in line with our statutory duty as a public authority, and for delivering our monthly e-mail newsletter through our mailing provider, Mailchimp.

We will only do this if it meets the requirements for [international transfers](#) as set by the Information Commissioners Office.

### 6.2 Retaining your information

The Consumer Council has agreed a retention and disposal schedule with the [Public Records Office Northern Ireland](#) to ensure that we do not hold your information for any longer than is necessary under the retention and disposal schedule.

The Consumer Council has an anonymisation process in place with Integrity to remove all personal information after the retention period has ended, which is five years after the case has closed.

### 6.3 Your legal rights

You have rights under data protection laws in relation to your personal data. Request access to your personal data (commonly known as a "data subject access request"). This enables you to receive a copy of the personal data we hold about you within one month free of charge (unless the request is unfounded, excessive or repetitive).

#### No fee usually required

You will not have to pay a fee to access your personal data (or to exercise any of the other rights). However, we may charge a reasonable fee if your request is clearly unfounded, repetitive or excessive. We may also charge a reasonable fee to comply with requests for further copies of the same information. The fee will be based on the administrative costs of providing the information.



## What we may need from you

We may need to request specific information from you to help us confirm your identity and ensure your right to access your personal data (or to exercise any of your other rights). This is a security measure to ensure that personal data is not disclosed to any person who has no right to receive it.

## Time limit to respond

In accordance with General Data Protection Regulations we will respond within one month.

## 6.4 Request correction of the personal data that we hold about you.

This enables you to have any incomplete or inaccurate data we hold about you corrected, though we may need to verify the accuracy of the new data you provide to us.

## 6.5 Request erasure of your personal data.

This enables you to ask us to delete or remove personal data where there is no good reason for us continuing to process it.

You also have the right to ask us to delete or remove your personal data where you have successfully exercised your right to object to processing, where we may have processed your information unlawfully or where we are required to erase your personal data to comply with the law.

Note, however, that we may not always be able to comply with your request of erasure for specific legal reasons which will be notified to you, if applicable, at the time of your request. Please also note that retention requirements supersede any right to erasure requests under applicable data protection laws.

## 6.6 Object to processing of your personal data.

This is in situations where we are performing our official function (e.g. dealing with a complaint on your behalf) and there is something about your particular situation which makes you want to object to processing on this ground as you feel it impacts on your fundamental rights and freedoms.

If you object to the processing of certain data, then we may not be able to provide the Consumer Council services or it may restrict our ability to achieve a positive outcome on your behalf.

## **6.7 Request restriction of processing of your personal data.**

This enables you to ask us to suspend the processing of your personal data in the following scenarios:

- (a) if you want us to establish the data's accuracy
- (b) where our use of the data is unlawful but you do not want us to erase it
- (c) you have objected to our use of your data but we need to verify whether we have overriding legitimate grounds to use it.

Please note that any requests in relation to the restriction of the processing of your data means that we may not be able to perform the services that you require from the Consumer Council.

## **6.8 Request the transfer of your personal data to you or to a third party.**

We will provide to you, your personal data in a structured, commonly used format, which you can then transfer to an applicable third party.

## **6.9 Withdraw consent at any time**

Where we are relying on consent to process your personal data. However, this will not affect the lawfulness of any processing carried out before you withdraw your consent. If you withdraw your consent, we may not be able to provide the Consumer Council services to you. We will advise you if this is the case at the time you withdraw your consent.

## 7.0 Changes to this Privacy Policy

If we change our Privacy Policy or our Privacy Notice we will tell you. This will be via our website and via the pre-recorded messages on our telephone systems.

### 7.1 Links to other websites

This privacy notice does not cover links to other websites. We encourage you to read the privacy statements on the other websites you visit.

### 7.2 Data Protection Officer Contact

All questions relating to data and your privacy are welcomed and should be addressed to our support team. If you have any questions, comments or requests regarding this privacy policy, please contact us through the following details:

- Email: [dpo@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:dpo@consumercouncil.org.uk)
- Telephone: 028 9025 1600
- Write to: Data Protection Officer, The Consumer Council, 3rd Floor, Seatem House, 28-32 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8EN

# Annex A Privacy Notice

## Your Personal Data

### What we need

The Consumer Council is the 'Controller' of the personal data that you provide to us. We collect basic personal data such as your name, address, email etc.

### Why we need it

We need to know your personal data in order to provide you with the services offered by The Consumer Council, such as dealing with complaints or enquiries on your behalf. We will not collect any personal data from you that we do not need in order to provide our services to you.

### What we do with it

The way we use your data will depend on the reason why it has been collected. For example, if you have contacted us regarding a complaint or enquiry about a service provider, we may share your information with the service provider or other relevant third parties when seeking to resolve your complaint.

If you have signed up to our mailing service or to attend one of our events we will use your information so we can stay in touch with you.

All personal data that we process is processed by our staff in the UK, however for the purposes of IT hosting and maintenance this information is located on servers with third parties. We have a Data Protection regime in place to oversee the effective and secure processing of your personal data.

### How long we keep it

We are required to keep your personal data (e.g., name, address, contact details etc.) for five years in line with our retention and disposal schedule which has been agreed with the Public Records Office for Northern Ireland. After this time, it will be automatically destroyed.

### What are your rights?

You may request to see the information we hold about you and have it corrected or deleted if necessary. If you wish to do this or to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer. The Data Protection Officer will investigate the matter on your behalf. Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at [dpo@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:dpo@consumercouncil.org.uk).

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office.

## Further Details

This notice is designed to give you basic information on what data we collect, how we use it and what your rights are.

For more detailed information see our Privacy Policy. You can also request that we send you a copy by contacting us:

Email	–	<a href="mailto:info@consumercouncil.org.uk">info@consumercouncil.org.uk</a>
Telephone	–	028 9025 1600
Mail	–	The Consumer Council, Floor 3, Seatem House, 28-32 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8EN

**Consumer Council for Northern Ireland**

Floor 3, Seatem House

28-32 Alfred Street

Belfast BT2 8EN

**Freephone:** 0800 121 6022

**Email:** [contact@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:contact@consumercouncil.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.consumercouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)

