

Board to check on fundraisers



CHARITIES

A body to handle complaints about aggressive or misleading charity fundraising has been launched so consumers can give with greater confidence.

Some charities have come under fire for using hard-sell tactics, such as street collectors known as chuggers.

The aim of the Fundraising Standards Board (FSB) is to reassure the public that its members won't pressurise people for donations and will have complaints procedures in place. Members so far include NSPCC, WWF, Unicef and Sense, which will all display the FSB tick.

The FSB is led by a board including Which?'s Chief Executive Peter Vicary-Smith (pictured). He said: 'Research shows people are more likely to give to charities that have signed up to the Fundraising Standards Board. The problem is not chugging itself but aggressive chuggers. If you don't give to them, charities will stop raising money that way.'

Which? council member Robert Pickard takes on the top job

New chairman for Which?

WHICH?

'I want us to give consumers an opportunity to stand up against government or big companies and help them extract their rights.' That's the message from the new chairman of Which?.

Professor Robert Pickard was elected to lead the Which? Council, our body of trustees, at the beginning of last month.

Robert, who has been a council member for three years, is also Director-General of the British Nutrition Foundation, a scientific charity that promotes nutritional wellbeing.

So he's a strong advocate of our drive to get manufacturers using a health signpost food-labelling system. He says: 'It's a campaign for giving people the sort of label that they can easily identify so they don't have to read too much information to understand whether or not a product can fit into a balanced diet.'

He also predicts Which? will have to do increasingly more to stop people being duped into buying useless products and gizmos to improve their health because, he says, 'we've got some serious health problems in the UK'.

Robert adds: 'Consumer interest should be the same as public interest, so I would like to see us taking every opportunity to promote public health and best practice in industry.'



But, as chairman of Which? Council, he will of course champion the range of consumer rights and push forward the mission of Which? for all.

And he likes to lead by example, by testing our research. He says: 'I do take Which?'s advice and have been pleased with the results. The last car I bought was a Which? Best Buy, a Honda Jazz, and I'm very happy with it.'

As Which? approaches its 50th birthday, Robert explains how the organisation will become even more relevant in the coming years. 'I think there's going to be an even greater need to champion consumer interests because the globalisation process is really going to make it harder for any one individual to stand up against any particular injustice.'

Robert succeeds Brian Yates, who was chairman for 12 years and will remain as a member of the council.

TAKE ACTION!

Find out how Which? works

■ To learn more about our mission and those who lead Which? go to www.which.co.uk/aboutus/whowere/structure

Prof Robert Pickard is our new chairman

A consumer calls... 118 118 Free

What price a call to a free directory enquiries service? We discovered that if you're willing to be bombarded with advertising, the automated service 118 118 Free has got our number

118 118 FREE: Welcome to 118 118 Free, the advertiser-sponsored directory-assistance service. Calls are free from BT and most other landlines. Calls from mobiles will vary...

118 118: Your call today is sponsored by Interflora – the flower experts. For those moments when you need a

special gift for a birthday, anniversary or just because, contact Interflora – the flower experts...

118 118: Are you looking for a business or residential listing? **Which?:** Business.

118 118: OK, what's their full name? **Which?:** It's Which?.

118 118: OK, what's the address you have for them? **Which?:** Hertford.

118 118: Your search will now begin, thanks. Your search today is sponsored by Interflora, please hold...

118 118: We have found your number, please stay on the line for more details from Interflora...



118 118: The number is 0845 307 4000...

118 118: When you want a gift that's truly special for any occasion, order today and we'll deliver next day for free.

Don't use 118 118 Free if you're in a hurry. Our call to the automated service went on for more than two minutes, while the paid-for service took 30 seconds but cost 40p.

BT and TalkTalk disagree over broadband line ownership

Broadband confusion

BROADBAND

Each month more than 1,000 new broadband customers can't get connected because of tags on their line placed by previous providers or BT.

Telecoms watchdog Ofcom says tags – virtual markers that suggest lines are in use – are the biggest barrier to people starting new broadband packages.

Fed-up customers can be trapped in limbo between companies for months.

Ann Nightingale tried unsuccessfully for seven months to use TalkTalk's services. It blamed BT for the delay, but BT assured her TalkTalk hadn't applied to take over her line.

Ann complained about TalkTalk to Otelo, its arbitration service, but was later told that when two telecoms companies are involved you must make separate complaints, regardless of who you think is at fault.

She said: 'Otelo just took TalkTalk's version of events and didn't even speak to BT to find out whether TalkTalk had applied for the line. What is worse is I turned down £100 compensation from TalkTalk as my case was being dealt with by Otelo.'

After speaking to TalkTalk only, Otelo



Ann Nightingale waited seven months to get connected

You must make complaints about both companies

ruled it should pay £20 compensation.

A spokesperson for Otelo said: 'Mrs Nightingale complained to Otelo about only TalkTalk and we had no justification or authority to enquire about BT's actions'

TAKE ACTION!

■ If you're affected, try BT on 0800 169 9576. To complain, follow your company's procedure. If that fails, try the arbitration service responsible for them, either Otelo, at www.otelo.org.uk, or Cisas, at www.arbitrators.org/cisas.

Broker recommended unsuitable shares

Investment warning

STOCKBROKERS

A pensioner has been awarded more than £3,000 in compensation after buying high-risk shares.

Gerald Bearman, 76, from Middlesex, was encouraged to invest thousands in three small companies by his new broker, Wills & Co Stockbrokers Ltd, which is based in London, EC4.

Shares in small companies not listed on the FTSE All-Share index are considered a risky investment. The UK's financial watchdog – the Financial Services Authority – says

brokers should check how cautious an investor you are and warn of potential pitfalls before recommending an investment. Failure to do so is mis-selling.

When Gerald realised his investment was unsuitable he complained to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS).

He told us: 'I've never considered high-risk investments where a good return is unlikely.'

Wills & Co defended its actions, saying Gerald's savings counter balanced the high-risk investments.



Gerald Bearman tackled his deal

But the FOS upheld Gerald's complaint and he was awarded his original investment plus the return it would have made had he bought stocks in the FTSE All-Share index, totalling £10,458.

The FOS wrote: 'The high-risk stocks that you were recommended by the firm were unsuitable for your medium attitude to risk.'

Principal news journalist Simon Spruce challenges British Gas

Which? sorts out utility bill mix-up



Soaring energy costs have resulted in millions of us switching power suppliers.

But when Steve and Valerie

Carpenter tried to switch their electricity supplier from Powergen to British Gas, they experienced months of frustration and worry.

British Gas persuaded them they'd save money if they switched and said the process would be easy, but switching wasn't easy.

The couple started to receive bills from Powergen and British Gas. After six months the couple contacted Central Networks, which distributes electricity throughout the Midlands. It confirmed Powergen was still the supplier.

The meter number on the British Gas bills belonged to someone else with a similar address, so the company agreed to a refund for bills to date. But then British Gas proceeded to take over as supplier, although the Carpenters were unaware this had happened. The confused couple continued to receive British Gas bills, reminders, disconnection notices and, last month, a threat of legal action, without knowing the company had actually become its supplier.

Our phone calls to British Gas revealed the communication breakdown and that it had taken over as supplier last summer.

It said the supply was now being transferred back to Powergen and it would knock money off the final bill.

Steve told us: 'I'm just relieved it's getting sorted now. We had months of lengthy and frustrating calls to British Gas and felt we were getting nowhere. We felt completely powerless.'

If you have a problem for the news team to tackle, let us know at news@which.co.uk