



Campaigns

O

estate agents formally reprimanded in the last two years for breaching the estate agents' code

OMBUDSMAN FOR ESTATE AGENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2006

We present our campaigning wish list to top decision makers

Key players tune in to our aims

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

Our campaigns team took its call for action on a range of consumer issues to the very top decision makers in the UK and the EU recently, when Which? hosted two major events in our annual campaigning calendar.

Pressure on peers and more

The first of these was our annual parliamentary reception, which was held this year in the House of Lords. Which? Chief Executive Peter Vicary-Smith told an audience of ministers and shadow secretaries of state, along with MPs and peers from all main political parties as well as regulators, civil servants and other important groups, how they can back consumer-friendly policies over the coming year. This includes:

- all political parties continuing to support legislation that puts

consumer interests at the heart of the future low-cost personal accounts pensions scheme, by backing consumer representation on the body that will oversee it

- MPs backing competition in legal services plus a new independent body to oversee complaints about barristers and solicitors, as outlined in the current Legal Services Bill
- MPs calling for proper regulation on cosmetic treatments such as Botox, as recommended by a high-level report by the government's Chief Medical Officer.

Over the last year, politicians have lent their weight to our fight to force all estate agencies to join an ombudsman scheme. In addition, our spotlight on the many ways in which foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt are marketed to children, and our research into the benefits to consumers of adopting a nutrition labelling

system based on traffic lights, have also been picked up in parliamentary debates and used to put pressure on industry to change their practices. We hope that our latest campaigns will once again receive this all-important support.

Making waves overseas

Our campaigning activities are not confined to the UK. With an increasing amount of legislation from the European Union affecting our everyday lives, we also take our campaigns to decision makers in Europe. Over the last year, we've successfully campaigned for EU-wide legislation to tighten controls over foods presented as healthy, to make sure that consumers are not wasting their money on products that either mislead or don't deliver the benefits they claim. We've also pushed the European Commission to act over iTunes' unfair charges for UK consumers (see last month's 'Campaigns', p79).

So we were delighted to welcome to London members from consumer organisations across Europe as well as the European Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Meglena Kuneva, for the second of our two key occasions. We were able to discuss at first hand how consumers' concerns and interests on several issues – from timeshare holidays to consumer credit and enforcing rights of redress – need to be addressed. Look out for our exclusive interview with Commissioner Kuneva in a future 'Question time'.

Log to to www.which.co.uk/campaigns to find out more about all our campaigning activities, both here in the UK and abroad – and how you can play your part.

CAMPAIGN NEWS



Estate agents update

Our campaign to get estate agencies better regulated has moved a small step forward. The government has agreed to consider making letting agents and new-build developers join a compulsory redress scheme similar to the one proposed for estate agents from next April. Sadly, though, it has rejected our call for better monitoring of estate agents' practices, including using mystery shopping. For news of home information packs, see p8.

Home and away

Our campaigns really do have a wide impact. Radio 4's *You and Yours* programme is to run a mini series over the summer based on our cosmetic surgery campaign. Further afield, in what we hope will be the first of other such international take-ups, a Norwegian version of our food shopping card is to appear on the campaigns brochure of the Norwegian Heart and Lung Patient Organisation, at the request of its staff. Find out more about the card on p35.

And finally...

We've been nominated as Campaigning Charity of the Year at the Public Affairs News Awards, in recognition of the positive impact we've had on people's daily lives on various topics from pensions, bank charges and legal services to food labelling. The winner will be announced later this month.



Discussing consumer needs at first hand: Which? Campaigns Director Nick Stace and European Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva

PHOTOGRAPHY ALASTAIR FYFE, ALAMY