

NEWS UPDATE FROM THE NATIONAL CONSUMER FEDERATION JANUARY 2008

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The FSA Chair, Deirdre Hutton has appointed Tim Smith, the former chief executive of Arla Foods UK plc as the new Chief Executive of the Agency. He takes up his post on March 28th, taking over from John Harwood who has been Chief Executive since March 2006.

So what sort of business is Arla Foods? It is the largest fresh milk supplier to UK supermarkets and holds in its portfolio such household brands as Anchor, Lurpack and Cravendale, though I wonder if Cravendale is a household name. Arla Foods is now part of Arla Foods amba, Europe's largest dairy manufacturer.

Deirdre Hutton said about the appointment "Tim's food industry background complements the experience already embedded in the senior leadership team".

HONOUR FOR DEBBIE REYNOLDS

Among the names in the New Year Honours List is that of Debbie Reynolds, the former Chief Vet. She is now a Companion of the Bath.

ROYAL MAIL PRICE CHANGES

Royal Mail has announced a number of price changes that will effect practically every form of postal activity. **They come into effect on 7th April.**

The prices are all contained in a 33-page booklet but most will only be of interest to business posters. The tariff for ordinary post will, however, be of interest to everyone.

Letters up to 100gms will require a 36p stamp for first and 27p for second class delivery. Large Letters up to 100gms will be 52p and 42p while heavier ones up to 250gms will cost 78p and 66p. Those weighing up to 500gms will cost 108p and 90p with the final Large Letter weight, up to 750gms costing 157p and 131p.

If your postal object does not go through the slot it becomes a package and costs quite a lot more to post. For instance a package up to 100gms will cost

114p first class and 95p second class. If it weighs more than 100gms but less than 250gms then the prices are 145p and 124p and so it goes on. Items heavier than 1000gms may not be sent second class.

CROSSRAIL PROJECT

What promises to be one of the biggest engineering enterprises in Europe moved along on its progress through Parliament on December 13th. On that day the Crossrail Bill completed its Report/ Third Reading stage in the House of Commons and was introduced into the House of Lords the next day.

This has triggered a fresh period of petitioning. Those directly affected by the Crossrail proposals and consider them detrimental in some way may now petition against them. The petitioning period set by the House of Lords starts on January 8th and continues until January 30th. Information and advice on petitioning in the House of Lords can be obtained from the Private Bill Office in the Lords:

Lords Crossrail Bill Team
Private Bill Office
House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW
Tel: 020 7219 5961
Fax: 020 7219 2571
Email: prbohol@parliament.uk

So what is Crossrail? According to the official website Crossrail is an exciting and visionary new railway proposal for London and the South East. It will deliver a world-class, affordable railway, with a high frequency, convenient and accessible train service across the capital from 2017.

The route goes from Maidenhead and Heathrow in the west right across the capital into Essex and Kent in the east. It travels underground through the city centre between Paddington and east London.

Crossrail will make travelling in the area easier and quicker and reduce crowding on London's transport network. It will operate with main line size trains, carrying more than 1500 passengers in each train.

With the current experiences of railway construction overruns one wonders how realistic is the suggestion that services will commence in 2017.

OFCOM'S PAY TV MARKET INVESTIGATION

Ofcom recently published the further [submission](#) made by Virgin Media, Setanta Sports, Top-Up TV and BT in connection with the operation of the pay TV market in the UK. The parties consider that this

market operates against consumer choice and competition, leads to diminished innovation in the offerings available and high prices for consumers. In their view the evidence of market failure is overwhelming, and there is a clear-cut need for intervention.

Ofcom data indicates that, on average, UK Pay TV subscribers pay more than their European counterparts and other analysis suggests this is on average 36% higher. This situation has arisen because of the flawed UK market structure. BSkyB is the leading player and has, not surprisingly, also filed a submission with Ofcom. This seeks to rebut the arguments advanced by the first document.

BSkyB has a market leading position particularly in sports, movies and premium channels which, in turn, enables it to consolidate and expand its leadership in Pay TV. As it has the largest subscriber base, BSkyB is able to outbid competitors for premium content. The contest for content is most likely to be won by channel providers with larger downstream customer bases, thereby reinforcing a 'vicious circle' in which a company with access to superior content can build a customer base advantage, buy premium content and achieve a leading position with consumers. This prevents new entrants accessing key content, and this makes them less attractive to consumers.

Previous attempts to address UK Pay TV competition issues and to regulate elements of BSkyB's conduct have failed to address this market failure. Ofcom opened the market investigation in March and has also just published its initial consultation on emerging thinking. This is a very detailed study of the market and raises a number of issues for further consideration, reflecting the concerns raised by BT's initial submission. Consultation responses are due by 26 February 2008.

One should bear in mind that this piece, slightly edited, comes from the online BT Newsletter – for which many thanks – and only presents one view of the market situation.

RIP PPIFs

The Government White Paper "Our Health, Our Care, Our Say" set out a commitment to create services centred on the needs of the individuals and local communities. People, it said, who use services should have more choice and a louder voice.

Now every local authority with responsibility for social services is required to set up a Local Involvement Network or **LINK** within its area. These LINKs will be a

new grouping of organisations and individuals that will build on existing community networks and replace and build on the work of the Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPIF's) that themselves were evolved from earlier patient representative bodies. This seems to me to be a never-ending process of evolution that must be most unsettling for those involved and initially confusing for those at the receiving end of social services.

In Kent LINK will be launched in April and the County Council is seeking tenders from appropriate organisations who want to host and support the scheme. The successful tenderer will receive funding from the Department of Health via Kent County Council.

CORRECT USAGE

"The FSA Chair, Deirdre Hutton..." is how the first paragraph of this newsletter opens. I really do not like referring to the Chairman of a body as "The Chair". It reads and sounds all wrong. However, as Deirdre Hutton is a very elegant lady, referring to her as "The FSA Chairman" seems equally incorrect.

The solution is, perhaps, to say "The FSA Chairperson" but that seems very awkward. Its very awkwardness may be the reason why the title is nowadays abbreviated to "The Chair", but that makes me think of a piece of furniture. I need help. Any suggestions?

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED BY THE
NATIONAL CONSUMER FEDERATION -
REGISTERED CHARITY NO.1101414,
REGISTERED OFFICE, 180 HIGH ST., WEST
MOLESEY, SURREY. KT82LX - IN
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AND INFORM CONSUMERS.

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SECRETARY STELLA NICHOLAS
secretary@ncf.info or phone 020 8941 2513.

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