



The Consumer Council

**The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
Annual Report and Accounts
For the year ended 31 March 2015**

The Accounting Officer authorised these
Annual Report and Financial Statements for issue
on
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Foreword

The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (Consumer Council) is pleased to present its Annual Report and Accounts for 2014–15.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Consumer Council. While we have achieved much for consumers and changed a good deal as an organisation since 1985, arguably 2014–15 has been our most eventful year to date.

At the start of the year we took over the consumer representation role for postal services, which we launched at an event in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, at Stormont in April 2014. The key aspects of this role have been protecting the Universal Service Obligation that ensures Northern Ireland consumers enjoy the same minimum levels of postal services as those in Great Britain; and representing consumers to ensure they suffer no detriment as the network of post offices is transformed into new operating models. Most importantly, our new responsibility has enabled us to work more closely with the banking sector and post offices to help alleviate the impact of bank branch closures. We have highlighted the role post offices can play in providing financial services to those consumers who rely on face to face transactions.

In June 2014 the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, announced the outcome of the review of the Consumer Council, which was commissioned in 2012. The review concluded that the Consumer Council has been responsive to consumers and effective as an organisation and that we should continue in our present form. However, important lessons and direction for the future came out of the review and these are shaping our thinking as we develop a long term strategy for the Consumer Council. Some of the key themes guiding the organisation as we move forward are: reforming and streamlining our role; increasing our accessibility and visibility; and ensuring greater collaboration and partnership among advice and consumer representation bodies in Northern Ireland.

An illustration of how we are changing is our increased engagement with business representatives. A roundtable event, opened by the then Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister, Arlene Foster, in September 2014, enabled us to highlight the importance customer responsiveness plays in increasing the competitiveness of businesses and the local economy. It also illustrated the help we can provide to businesses as consumers to ensure they receive a fair deal from service providers.

The need to reduce public sector expenditure has been a key feature in 2014–15 and this will continue to dominate our work for the foreseeable future. The Consumer Council is working with key public service providers such as Translink and NI Water to consider the impact of budget reductions and to ensure any impact on consumers is kept to a minimum.

The Consumer Council has risen to the challenge of reductions in our own budget too. In 2014 we decided to relocate from our base of the last 30 years to more cost effective premises. We have also taken a critical look at how we can increase our efficiency in other areas of expenditure.

In-year budget reductions meant that we had to revise our Business Plan for 2014–15. While we were not able to deliver everything we wanted to you will see from the achievements documented in this Annual Report, we still had a very successful year working for consumers.

Through our complaint handling work in 2014-15 we secured £630k in financial redress for consumers, beating the previous year's record by almost 30 per cent. We also helped shape key strategies in respect of energy, public transport and water, which will have an impact on consumers in the longer term. Our outreach work – engaging directly with consumers across Northern Ireland – has continued to increase, in line with the expectations coming out of the review of the Consumer Council.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the work of Rick Hill MBE and Mandy Patrick MBE, whose appointments as Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson respectively, ended on 31 March 2015, and that of

Aodhan O'Donnell, the former interim Chief Executive, in leading the Consumer Council to the success it has achieved.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S.M.' followed by a stylized flourish.

Sheila McClelland
Chairperson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Leeson' with a long, sweeping underline.

Don Leeson
Accounting Officer

Chairperson and Chief Executive

The Chair of the Consumer Council throughout 2014–15 was **Richard Hill MBE**. The Chief Executive and Accounting Officer was **Aodhan O'Donnell** between 1 April 2014 and 16 February 2015 and **Don Leeson** between 16 February 2015 and 31 March 2015. Both covered the post on an interim basis, pending the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive and Accounting Officer.

Following a public appointment process, Sheila McClelland was appointed Chair of the Consumer Council on 1 April 2015. The recruitment process to select a Chief Executive on a substantive basis resulted in the appointment of John French. This appointment takes effect from 1 July 2015.

Further information on the structure of the Consumer Council and governance arrangements are set out on pages 58 to 69.

Management Commentary

Strategic Report

About the Consumer Council

The Consumer Council is a non departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). It was established under the *General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984*. The legislation confers a statutory obligation on the Consumer Council to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland, with additional responsibilities in relation to energy, food, postal services, transport and water.

The Consumer Council's functions include:

- Representing the views of consumers on consumer matters;

- Giving consumers the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to make informed decisions and to speak up when they purchase faulty goods or receive poor service;
- Making proposals or providing advice and information about consumer matters;
- Obtaining and keeping under review information about consumer issues and the views of consumers on these matters;
- Achieving redress for consumers by investigating complaints to secure the best possible outcome; and
- Publishing information in the consumer interest.

In addition to the 1984 Order, the other main legislative provisions underpinning the work of the Consumer Council in specific markets are contained within: the *Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992*; the *Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996*; the *Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003*; the *Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006*; and the *Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011*.

With effect from 1 April 2014, following the enactment of the *Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Consumer Council and Transfer of the Office of Fair Trading's Functions in relation to Estate Agents etc) Order 2014*, responsibility for consumer representation for postal services in Northern Ireland moved from Consumer Futures to the Consumer Council.

The Consumer Council functions in relation to food are undertaken recognising the role of the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The FSA has responsibility for the development of food policy and for the provision of advice, information and assistance, in respect to food safety or other interests of consumers in relation to food. Therefore, to ensure good value and use of public money, the Consumer Council and FSA have a memorandum of understanding and the Council's strategic focus on food is primarily in relation to food prices and customer experience.

The Consumer Council is also a designated body for the purposes of supercomplaints. This means that it can refer any consumer affairs goods and services issue to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), or the Payment Systems Regulator (PSR) as appropriate where we feel that a market may be harming consumers' best interests.

Vision, Mission and Values

The overarching reason for the Consumer Council's being as an organisation and the **vision** we aspire to achieve is:

A society of informed and responsible consumers in which everyone is treated fairly, obtains value for money and is able to exercise their rights.

In striving towards this vision, our **mission** is:

Making the consumer voice heard and making it count.

In seeking to achieve our vision and mission, the following core **values** underpin the way in which we work:

Integrity – We are committed to doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right reasons.

Responsibility – As an organisation and individually we take responsibility for our work, demonstrating clear direction, leadership and autonomy.

Courage – We speak for consumers without apology, fear or favour. We are an independent voice for consumers, challenging and responding to benefit all, and delivering in fair and equitable ways.

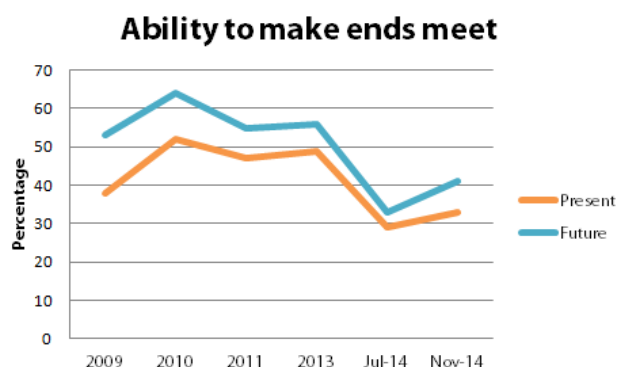
Innovation – We are innovative in our work and partnerships to achieve our goals and deliver value for money.

Current consumer context

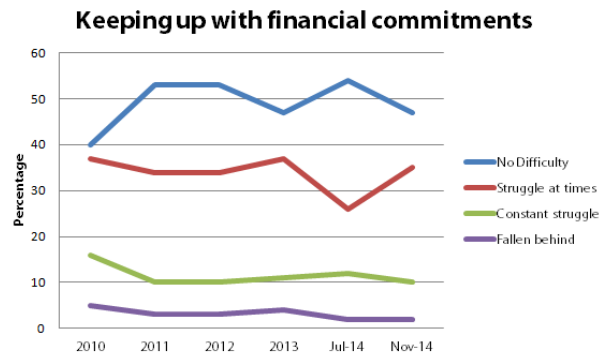
While the economy is showing some signs of recovery the Consumer Council's Consumer Outlook Index, which tracks consumer confidence every six months, shows that consumers remain cautious. Many household budgets are still stretched, suggesting there is a lag in how quickly household budgets are recovering compared to the general economy.

Our research shows that an overwhelming 70 per cent of consumers across Northern Ireland (NI) are not feeling any evidence of economic recovery in their pockets. Only 13 per cent of people surveyed agreed they could feel the 'green shoots' of recovery in the economy. Younger consumers, those with children under five and home owners are those most likely to be seeing increased disposable income. Consumers least likely to be seeing any improvements in their household budgets are those not working, those retired on a state pension and people living in rented accommodation.

The Consumer Council found that the number of consumers who are worried about their ability to make ends meet both now and in the future is increasing.



We also found that when asked about keeping up with financial commitments, less than half of respondents (47 per cent) said they are keeping up without difficulty. Furthermore, a significant proportion of consumers (35 per cent) have reported they struggle to keep up with bills and financial commitments and over 10 per cent find it is a constant struggle or have fallen behind with some bills.



While inflation and interest rates are low, it is likely that any increase in these will have a particularly detrimental effect on NI consumers.

The plight of consumers on low incomes is a particular concern. Fuel poverty in NI is over 40 per cent, the highest in the UK, and a research report (*Energy and Money Affairs Research*) published by the Consumer Council in March 2015 shows that around 10 per cent of electricity pre-payment meter customers have self-disconnected because of a lack of affordability. Despite this, switching levels are decreasing – addressing this issue has been a priority for the Consumer Council in 2014–15 and it will continue to be a focus in 2015–16 as we seek to raise awareness of the benefits of switching and the ease of doing this.

Access to affordable financial services continues to be problematic for consumers, for example, there has been a significant increase in the number of consumers seeking advice about payday loans, over 10 per cent of consumers here do not have a current account (compared to four per cent in the UK) and bank branches will have reduced by over 25 per cent by the end of 2014. The level of consumer proficiency will continue to be a key issue and the Consumer Council’s four-yearly consumer proficiency research is due to be conducted in 2015–16.

The growth in online shopping sales here continues to raise issues. For example, we are seeing an increasing reliance on parcel delivery where over a third of consumers have experienced delivery issues, including surcharging. Online banking and payments will be an important issue, particularly with the level of bank branch closures. This brings issues of accessibility for vulnerable consumers and levels of computer proficiency to the fore.

Two major legislative developments progressed in 2014–15 for implementation in 2015–16. The Alternative Dispute Resolution Directive, which seeks to provide easier means of redress for consumers, has to be implemented by July 2015. The provisions of the Consumer Rights Act, which aims to simplify and clarify rights will be in place from October 2015. Going forward, these will require major awareness raising programmes for consumers and businesses alike, as well as a review of the Consumer Council’s publications to ensure they are up-to-date.

The public sector here has experienced significant financial pressures in 2014–15. The Consumer Council was not immune from this and experienced an in-year reduction of over 10 per cent in its core funding from DETI. This necessitated a revision to our planned activities and targets for the year. Furthermore, substantial change is expected to continue in the public sector in 2015–16 and subsequent years. This is likely to impact on NI Water and Translink whose services we monitor on behalf of consumers, as well as ourselves.

Lastly, the new local government structure of 11 councils became operational from April 2015 and we are working to ensure consumers’ views are taken into account as part of the new community planning processes.

Achievement of Aims and Objectives in 2014–15

The Consumer Council’s Corporate Plan for 2011–15 identifies four core aims against which annual objectives and targets are set. The objectives and targets for 2014–15 were revised in the autumn to reflect a decrease of £163k (12 per cent) in the Consumer Council’s core funding from DETI, following the outcome of June Monitoring.

Our achievement of the revised objectives and targets for 2014–15 and particular highlights are summarised under each core aim below.

Overall, the Consumer Council achieved 40 out of the 47 targets set (85 per cent). Of those seven missed targets, four were delayed and will be achieved in 2015–16.

Championing and Protecting Consumers

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>1. Consumer service and redress: <i>to hold service providers to account to ensure a fair deal for consumers by delivering and promoting effective and timely consumer service and redress.</i></p>	<p>a) Achievement of a customer satisfaction rate of 97% in complaints handling, based on a response rate of at least 50%, for 2014–15 (annual averages: 97% satisfaction and 46% response rates).</p>	<p>Achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customer satisfaction rate = 98% ▪ Response rate = 57%
<p>2. Flooding: <i>To provide a consumer perspective to government departments and agencies and insurers to improve flood planning and management.</i></p>	<p>a) Feedback and advice provided on draft flood risk plans to government departments and agencies by the end of December 2014 to ensure that they reflect the needs of consumers.</p>	<p>Achieved:</p> <p>Advice on community engagement was provided to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for its consultation on Flood Risk Management Plans, which was launched in December 2014. The consultation exercise closes in June 2015.</p>
	<p>b) Feedback and advice provided to government departments and agencies on the implementation of an individual flood protection policy within the timetable agreed by the then Minister to ensure that it reflects the needs of consumers.</p>	<p>Achieved:</p> <p>The Consumer Council advocated that a grant scheme for individual household flood protection is established. A scheme to be administered by Rivers Agency has now been approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel, to be launched later in 2015.</p>
	<p>c) Consumers in ten pilot areas benefit from new community resilience flood plans, with lessons learned for a wider roll out to other NI communities.</p>	<p>Achieved:</p> <p>Pilots in 10 communities throughout NI have concluded. The outcome of the pilot is being assessed and will be known in 2015–16.</p>
<p>3. Private supply pipes and sewerage infrastructure: <i>To provide a consumer perspective to government departments and agencies in respect of the long term development of private water and sewerage infrastructure.</i></p>	<p>a) Feedback and advice to inform the development of government strategy for private supply pipes and sewerage pipes provided to the Department for Regional Development by the end of August 2014 to ensure that it meets the needs of consumers.</p>	<p>Achieved:</p> <p>Research was undertaken and feedback and advice, based on this, was provided to DRD in August 2014 to inform the government strategy for private supply pipes and sewerage pipes. This strategy and legislative proposals are in line with the Consumer Council's advice and are awaiting NI Executive approval.</p>

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>4. Fuel poverty: <i>To contribute to government policy proposals and practical initiatives designed to eradicate fuel poverty and improve the affordability of energy for consumers.</i></p>	<p>a) Recommendations made to the Northern Ireland Oil Federation to increase consumer protection within the Customer Charter for households using home heating oil by end March 2015.</p>	<p>Not achieved: Staff shortages meant that the Consumer Council was unable to progress work in this area during 2014–15 and this has been carried forward into the Business Plan for 2015–16.</p>
	<p>b) Undertake a campaign in October 2014 to raise awareness of energy efficiency and ‘switching’ to increase the affordability of energy for consumers.</p>	<p>Achieved: The Consumer Council organised a ‘Switching Week’ with the Utility Regulator in October 2014. This included two major ‘Switch & Save’ events, which were held in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. To coincide with this, two <i>Switch On</i> booklets on electricity and gas and home heating oil were published with shopping around and switching featuring prominently in these. Feedback from the events was positive and there was strong media interest in them.</p>
<p>5. Household efficiency: <i>To understand and reflect consumers’ concerns regarding household expenditure to government and businesses.</i></p>	<p>a) Data and trend analysis of consumer views on household expenditure conducted in June and December 2014, and subsequent reporting and use to reflect the concerns of consumers to government and businesses to seek improvements in the cost of living.</p>	<p>Achieved: The Consumer Outlook Index was successfully established through a twice yearly survey of consumers’ views and confidence in respect of household expenditure issues. The findings were presented to the business community, elected representatives and media commentators.</p>
	<p>b) Agreement of an action plan with stakeholders to address the concerns of consumers arising from the audit of ‘special offers’ by the end of March 2015.</p>	<p>Achieved: Stakeholders have agreed an action plan to address consumers’ concerns about food promotions by supermarkets. Work to implement the action plan and the audit findings is planned in 2015–16.</p>

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>6. Financial inclusion and services: <i>To work with stakeholders to secure improvements for consumers in their financial capability and access to financial services and value for money</i></p>	<p>a) Feedback and advice provided to all banks and building societies operating in Northern Ireland, the Irish League of Credit Unions and Ulster Federation of Credit Unions, on the implementation of the recommendations in the Personal Current Account Manifesto by the end of March 2015.</p>	<p>Partly achieved: The Consumer Council met with First Trust, Ulster Bank and Danske Bank to promote the recommendations in the Personal Current Account Manifesto and discuss a range of topics, including bank branch closures, basic bank accounts for ex offenders and online systems. Resource constraints experienced during the year meant that we were unable to engage with every financial institution.</p>
	<p>b) Submission of consumer views and evidence to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) by the end of September 2014 to reduce the costs for consumers of motor insurance.</p>	<p>Achieved: The CMA published the final report into the motor insurance market in September 2014, which covered all the issues raised by the Consumer Council in evidence to it.</p>
	<p>c) Publication of research, with recommendations, on the current and potential role post offices play in addressing financial inclusion in Northern Ireland by the end of March 2015.</p>	<p>Not achieved: Procurement delays meant that the fieldwork for the quantitative element of the research did not start until January 2015. The report and recommendations will be published in 2015–16.</p>
	<p>d) Identification and delivery of two joint Financial Capability Partnership outreach initiatives in 2014–15 to secure improvements for consumers in their financial capability.</p>	<p>Achieved: The outreach initiatives were events targeting students at the Freshers’ Weeks at the universities in September and October; and as part of ‘Switching Week’ in October 2014.</p>
<p>7. Promotion of Passenger Rights: <i>To promote and improve awareness of passenger rights among passengers and service providers.</i></p>	<p>a) Increased awareness of passenger rights results in the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10% increase in contacts from Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM) received by the Consumer Council (annual average: 20). 	<p>Achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PRM contacts = 23 (15% increase) ▪ DBC contacts = 449 <p>PRM assistance requests = 58,745</p>

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>Promotion of Passenger Rights – <i>continued.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintenance of current high levels of Denied Boarding and Cancellation (DBC) contacts received by the Consumer Council (annual average: 240). ▪ Maintenance of current high levels in PRM assistance requests at airports (annual average: 50,000 requests). 	
	<p>b) Provision of recommendations for improvements, following accessibility audits, made to all Northern Ireland airports by the end of March 2015.</p>	<p>Partly achieved: Audits were carried out at Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport and recommendations made at these. Given recent changes at the City of Derry Airport, we agreed to postpone this audit until 2015–16 at their request.</p>
<p>8. Post Office Network Transformation Programme: <i>To monitor the ongoing Network Transformation Programme to ensure each post office conversion proposal meets the needs of the community it serves, and to identify any emerging detriment or opportunities within the wider programme.</i></p>	<p>a) Publication of a joint annual ‘State of the Network’ Report (produced with Citizens Advice in Great Britain) by the end of March 2015 to identify to government any detriment or opportunities to enhance services for consumers emerging from the ongoing Post Office Network Transformation Programme.</p>	<p>Not achieved: Publication of the annual ‘State of the Network’ Report is being held in abeyance during the General Election period and will be published as soon as possible after this.</p>
<p>9. Parcel Deliveries: <i>To seek to ensure fair treatment of Northern Ireland consumers when they are purchasing items for delivery to Northern Ireland.</i></p>	<p>a) Publication of a report on the experiences of Northern Ireland consumers, with recommendations for any improvements in parcel delivery by the end of November 2014.</p>	<p>Not achieved: Procurement issues delayed the fieldwork for this project, which was completed in March 2015. Publication of the research report and recommendations is being held in abeyance during the General Election period. It is expected to be published in June 2015.</p>

The **Consumer Support Service** experienced its most successful year to date, securing £630,000 in redress for consumers, an increase of almost 30 per cent on the previous year. We received almost 5,000 contacts from consumers and dealt with 3,500 enquiries and complaints – a small increase in the level of activity experienced in 2013–14. We also exceeded our target in respect of customer satisfaction with our Consumer Support Service.

We achieved our goals in respect of protecting consumers in terms of **flooding** and **water and sewerage infrastructure**, where our advice has been adopted. This should ultimately mean greater protection for people at risk of flooding and that the NI Executive's strategy in terms of upgrading water pipes takes account of the views and needs of consumers.

In terms of seeking to address **fuel poverty** issues, post-event evaluation of 'Switching Week' showed positive feedback from participants and strong media interest. Switching Week was organised in partnership with the Utility Regulator and the Financial Capability Partnership. It included events and promotional activities to raise awareness of the benefits and savings of switching between different forms of energy and suppliers.

The new Consumer Outlook Index developed by the Consumer Council tracks consumer optimism about the local economy. It brings the perspective of the 'kitchen table' economy in terms of managing **household expenditure** and what matters most to consumers to the attention of businesses, political representatives and economic commentators. The findings were discussed by the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in February 2015 and have been used extensively in our policy analysis and advocacy work.

Financial inclusion issues featured prominently during the year, where we focused particularly on bank branch closures and highlighted the role post offices can play in mitigating the impact on consumers. The Consumer Council briefed the Committee for Finance and Personnel on this issue in November 2014. Research we conducted on the role post offices can play in supporting financial inclusion will be published in

2015–16 and this matter will continue to be a prominent feature of our work in the year ahead.

The Consumer Council welcomed the results of the CMA investigation into the private motor insurance market here when they were announced in September. This was an issue we had raised on behalf of consumers, having previously referred the matter to the Office of Fair Trading. We were pleased to note that our evidence to the CMA had been taken into account, especially the need to examine specifically the NI private motor insurance market.

We helped increase awareness of **passengers' rights** about air travel, with significant increases in contacts concerning the support provided by airlines and airports to passengers with reduced mobility and compensation for delayed and cancelled flights. The Consumer Council was active in alerting passengers to the implications of landmark decisions by the Supreme Court in November 2014, which clarified the law in respect of rights to compensation. We also undertook extensive work to highlight accessibility issues at airports, including a high profile event at Belfast City Airport with disabled consumers and the Junior Ministers from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. This work contributed to an increase in assistance requests at airports.

2014–15 saw a significant increase in activity in the **Post Office Network Transformation Programme**, which transferred to the Consumer Council from Consumer Futures in April 2014. The Consumer Council scrutinised proposals to change the operating model of over 70 post offices across NI and reviewed around 2,300 pieces of consumer feedback in respect of these, all within agreed timeframes. We achieved a number of notable improvements to some of the proposals where we identified detriment to consumers.

Informing and Empowering Consumers

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>10. Outreach Strategy: <i>To implement the final year of the Outreach Strategy (2012–15) to ensure that the Consumer Council connects effectively with consumers across Northern Ireland so that they understand how we can support them and we understand their needs.</i></p>	<p>a) Implementation of the Outreach Strategy results in the following outcomes in 2014–15:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 25% increase in contacts in priority locations (2013–14: 23%). ▪ 30% increase in followers on social media (2013–14: 30%). ▪ 40 activities with priority and harder to reach groups (2013–14: 36). ▪ 400 education resource downloads and requests (2013–14: 387). ▪ 50 direct consumer contact events (information stands in public places, such as agricultural shows, transport hubs, shopping centres, etc) (2013–14: 40). 	<p>Partly achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in contacts in priority locations (Ballymoney, Cookstown, Moyle, Limavady and Strabane) = 4% ▪ Increase in followers on social media= 22% (26% increase in Twitter followers and 17% increase in Facebook friends) ▪ Activities with priority and harder to reach groups = 58 ▪ Education resource downloads and requests = 38,820 ▪ Direct consumer contact events = 86
<p>11. Consumer and business proficiency: <i>To empower consumers to exercise their rights and support service providers to be more responsive to the requirements of consumers.</i></p>	<p>a) Delivery of five Power to the Pocket events to those working with the following types of consumer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Younger people; ▪ Older people; ▪ Disabled people; ▪ People living on a low income; and ▪ ‘Under–confident’ internet users. 	<p>Achieved: Due to high demand, 13 <i>Power to the Pocket</i> events were delivered, attended by 113 consumers from the range of target groups.</p>
	<p>b) Evaluation indicators from the event participants demonstrate an increased understanding of key issues to enable them to raise the awareness of the rights of consumers within these groups by the end of March 2015.</p>	<p>Achieved: Evaluation indicators demonstrate increased awareness among participants, with the majority showing a substantial increase in understanding of their rights.</p>

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>Consumer and business proficiency – continued</p>	<p>c) Delivery of a campaign to increase the awareness of rights under the Consumer Rights Directive by the end of June 2014.</p>	<p>Achieved: 5,000 copies of the Consumer Council’s updated <i>Guide to Shopping Safely Online</i> were distributed to consumers through the advice, voluntary and community sector and via the local library network. We also developed factsheets for consumers and businesses, the latter of which was circulated extensively across the business community.</p>
	<p>d) Delivery of a pre-Christmas campaign to promote safe and effective online shopping and the avoidance of postal surcharges.</p>	<p>Achieved: The centrepiece of the campaign was an interactive advert calendar that presented daily key messages using multimedia formats on the Consumer Council’s website during December 2014. We also hosted an online ‘surgery’ for consumers on postal delivery issues.</p>
	<p>e) Agreement of an action plan with stakeholders to improve access by businesses to support and information on consumer rights by the end of September 2014.</p>	<p>Not achieved: This project evolved following successful engagement with business stakeholders at a seminar hosted by the Consumer Council and attended by the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on 24 September 2014. Rather than an action plan, new relationships with business representatives has led to the effective dissemination of information to raise businesses’ awareness of consumer law and the Consumer Council’s role.</p>
<p>12. Water efficiency: To promote water efficiency and measures to reduce water bills, improve bill accuracy and raise awareness of allowances.</p>	<p>a) Appointment of 20 Water Champions during 2014–15 (2013–14: 16).</p>	<p>Achieved: 20 Water Champions were appointed.</p>

Objective	Measure	Outcome
Water efficiency – continued	b) Feedback and advice provided to NI Water on its self-service billing facility to increase accuracy/clarity of billing information for consumers, in accordance with the timetable agreed with NI Water.	Achieved: The Consumer Council provided advice to NI Water at each stage of the development of its Self Serve portal, which became operational in February 2015.
	c) Completion of a review of NI Water’s Scheme of Charges and associated documents, and Codes of Practice, with feedback and advice provided by end March 2015 to increase protection for consumers.	Achieved: The Scheme of Charges was correctly reviewed and published on the due date. Three draft Codes of Practice provided by NI Water were reviewed with feedback provided on how they might be further developed. NI Water’s response to this is awaited.
13.Launch of Postal Services: To raise awareness among stakeholders and consumers of the Consumer Council’s new postal services representation role and responsibility.	a) Delivery of a public awareness raising campaign on the change in consumer representation responsibilities for postal services in April 2014.	Achieved: The public launch of the Consumer Council’s new responsibilities for postal services took place in April 2014 at Stormont. This was followed by various awareness raising activities, including the development of a series of consumer guides (<i>Stamp and Deliver</i>) on various aspects of postal services.

The Consumer Council was particularly active during 2014–15 in informing consumers and businesses about their rights and helping build confidence and knowledge to protect these. We increased our **outreach** work through direct contact with consumers, for example, at agricultural shows, shopping centres and transport hubs, and online through social media and our new website, which was launched in April 2014.

Our *Power to the Pocket* programme directly helped over 100 vulnerable consumers increase knowledge of their rights and their confidence to shop around and save money.

Engagement with businesses was a key priority. We hosted a roundtable event for business representatives, attended by the then

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, in September 2014. Building effective partnerships enabled us to make information available to over 60,000 business contacts on their rights as consumers and changes in consumer legislation that came into effect in June 2014.

We used an innovative approach in a pre-Christmas campaign to raise awareness of shoppers' rights. Our online 'Countdown to Christmas' interactive advent calendar presented daily messages using multimedia formats such as videos, powtoons and infographics on the website. The inventiveness of the campaign was commended by Citizens Advice UK. Consumer Council staff also hosted an online 'surgery' for consumers on postal delivery issues and participated in Belfast City Council's Christmas Safety and Crime Prevention event in December 2014.

Twenty **Water Champions** were appointed. These included: multinational manufacturing and retail businesses Bombardier, IKEA, and Sainsburys, and well known local brands such as Moy Park, Tayto and Mash Direct.

The Consumer Council successfully managed the transfer of the consumer representation role in respect of **postal services** from Consumer Futures when it was abolished. We have been actively promoting this new role during the year, following a launch event at Stormont in April 2014.

Ensuring Public Policy Reflects the Needs of Today's and Tomorrow's Consumer

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>14. Water services: <i>To provide a consumer perspective for the PC15 price control for NI Water, covering the six-year period from 2015 to 2021, and the Long Term Water Strategy for Northern Ireland.</i></p>	<p>a) Feedback and advice provided to the Utility Regulator on its draft determination on NI Water's PC15 business plan by the end of December 2014 to ensure that it meets the needs of consumers.</p>	<p>Achieved: The Consumer Council's response to the Regulator's draft determination was made in October 2014. It is clear from the final determination, published in December 2014, that consumers' views have formed a central part of the Regulator's considerations in making its determination.</p>
	<p>b) Feedback and advice to inform the development of the draft Long Term Water Strategy (LTWS) provided to DRD by the end of August 2014 to ensure that it meets the needs of consumers.</p>	<p>Achieved: The Consumer Council engaged extensively with DRD on the draft LTWS. Our formal response to the consultation on this was submitted in October 2014 (DRD's timetable was delayed). The final LTWS is awaiting NI Executive approval.</p>
	<p>c) The results of a 'tracker' survey of consumer satisfaction analysed and reported to the Department for Regional Development by the end of June 2014 to inform improvements in water services for consumers.</p>	<p>Achieved: The tracker questions were agreed through the Consumer Engagement Oversight Group (CEOG), of which the Consumer Council is an active member. The survey results have been received, analysed and presented to DRD for consideration.</p>
	<p>d) New measure of consumer satisfaction of water services designed for piloting from March 2015.</p>	<p>Achieved: New consumer measures have been agreed and are being piloted.</p>
	<p>e) Education programme and delivery plans to support the implementation of PC15 in place by the end of March 2015.</p>	<p>Achieved: NI Water education programmes are in place and are being delivered from April 2015.</p>
	<p>f) Annual written complaint assessment conducted and recommendations for improvements made by the end of March 2015.</p>	<p>Achieved: The written complaint assessment was completed and three thematic recommendations were made for improvement. These were accepted by NI Water. Two of the recommendations have been implemented and the third is due for completion in early 2015-16.</p>

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>15. Public Transport Reform: To work with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and Translink to monitor improvements in public transport provision.</p>	<p>a) Lobby DRD and Translink to ensure that their contracting arrangement has specific indicators that demonstrate a focus on customer service by the end of July 2014.</p>	<p>Achieved: The draft contract between DRD and Translink includes customer focused performance targets that the Consumer Council has been advocating. The contract is expected to be finalised in 2015–16.</p>
	<p>b) Ensure, as a member of the Steering Group, that the outputs of Translink’s ticketing project encompass the needs of passengers as identified in the ticket research project by the end of December 2014.</p>	<p>Achieved: The Translink ticketing report has been finalised. The proposed functionality of the new ticketing system reflects the views of passengers. The Consumer Council is working with Translink to promote awareness of best value ticketing options, in response to the report’s finding that many passengers are unaware of the best value ticket options currently available to them.</p>
	<p>c) Data and trend analysis of Passenger Charter results on customer satisfaction every six months to identify the concerns of passengers and agree with Translink how these are to be addressed.</p>	<p>Achieved: The Spring and Autumn 2014 results show progress in punctuality, which was an issue raised by the Consumer Council in response to previous reviews. We are working with Translink to progress concerns in respect of customer satisfaction issues identified in the Autumn 2014 monitor (reported in April 2015).</p>
	<p>d) Feedback and advice provided to the Department for Regional Development on key consumer travel needs, with recommendations, within timeframes agreed with the Department.</p>	<p>Achieved: The research report was submitted to DRD within the agreed timescale.</p>

Objective	Measure	Outcome
<p>16. Energy policy: <i>To assess the impact on consumers of government energy projects.</i></p>	<p>a) Feedback and advice provided to DETI on the views of consumers of policy proposals within the timetable agreed by DETI to ensure that these are taken into account in key decisions regarding energy.</p>	<p>Achieved: Research into consumer issues in respect of natural gas, home heating oil, renewables, and self-disconnection was shared with DETI and other stakeholders and published.</p> <p>Research examining consumers' views in respect of a range of other energy issues, including consumers' energy priorities, trust in energy suppliers, switching behaviour, compensation in instances of power outages and smart meters, was carried out in February 2015 and will be disseminated in 2015–16.</p>
<p>17. Postal services monitoring: <i>To monitor how the Universal Service Obligation serves communities across Northern Ireland.</i></p>	<p>a) Data and trend analysis of Royal Mail's quality of service results, with significant areas of concern in respect of the Universal Service Obligation, where identified, raised with Royal Mail each quarter.</p>	<p>Achieved: Royal Mail's Quality of Service performance statistics were reviewed quarterly. Feedback on these and a range of other issues was provided throughout the year.</p>
<p>18. Post Office Diversification Fund: <i>To assist the Northern Ireland Assembly in recognising the importance of the post office network through the provision of a Post Office Diversification Fund.</i></p>	<p>a) Proposals made in respect of Post Office Diversification Fund for Northern Ireland by the end of June 2014.</p>	<p>Achieved: A motion on the contribution made by the Post Office Network was debated in the NI Assembly on 24 November 2014 and received cross party support. The motion also called for NI Executive action to establish a Post Office Diversification Fund. The Consumer Council provided a briefing to all MLAs and further support for those who discussed the motion.</p>

Providing the consumer perspective on NI Water's PC15 price control and the Long Term Water Strategy (LTWS), which will set the strategic framework for sustainable water management in NI until 2039, was a key focus of the Consumer Council's work in 2014–15 in respect of **water services**. We were successful in helping ensure that consumers' views are at the heart of the Utility Regulator's final determination for PC15 and we await the outcome of the NI Executive's deliberations on the draft LTWS.

We have worked closely with DRD and Translink to bring about improvements for **bus and rail** passengers. This included helping ensure customer focused performance targets are included in their new contracting arrangement. The Consumer Council is also working with Translink to help promote passenger awareness of best value ticketing options.

Much of the focus of our **energy**-related activities in the early part of 2014–15 was working with the Utility Regulator in its development of and consultation on new Energy Supplier Codes of Practice. We also published research on a range of consumer issues, including self-disconnection. Research on other energy matters was also conducted, which will be published in 2015–16.

The Consumer Council represented NI consumer interests in respect of the **Universal Service Obligation** through monitoring Royal Mail's Quality of Service performance statistics and responding to consultation exercises.

The Consumer Council has worked closely with Royal Mail and other UK consumer advocacy bodies to develop a robust and consumer-orientated postbox removal and relocations notification process.

The Consumer Council played a pivotal role in supporting an Assembly motion to press for a **Post Office Diversification Fund** for NI. This was passed with cross party support in November 2014. Further work with the All Party Working Group on Postal Issues is planned in 2015–16 to continue to promote this issue.

Ensuring the Consumer Council is Fit for Purpose and Delivering Value for Money

Objective	Measure	Outcome
19. Human Resource Management Strategy: <i>To implement the final year of the HR Strategy (2011–15) to support the effective and efficient delivery of the consumer focused corporate objectives.</i>	a) Staff sickness absence below NICS Target of 4% .	Achieved: Staff sickness absence = 3%
	b) 1% staff time investment in learning and development.	Achieved: Staff time investment in learning and development = 2%
	c) Increase in employee engagement based on the Staff Survey 2013 (62%).	Not achieved: Employee Engagement Index = 61%
20. Governance and accountability: <i>To deliver value for money and probity in the management of the Consumer Council's resources in line with the requirements placed on public bodies.</i>	a) Achievement of at least a 98% Resource and 97% Capital budget annual outturn for 2014–15.	Partially achieved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource budget outturn = 99.85% ▪ Capital budget outturn = 94%
	b) Annual Report and Accounts for 2013–14 submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General in June 2014 and certified without qualification, and published by end September 2014 .	Achieved: Annual Report and Accounts for 2013–14: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Certified without qualification on 13 June 2014 ▪ Published on 18 September 2014
	c) At least 90% of creditors paid within 10 working days.	Not achieved: Creditors paid within 10 working days = 87%.
	d) A minimum overall internal audit assurance rating of ' <i>satisfactory</i> ' for 2014–15.	Achieved: Satisfactory internal audit assurance awarded.

The Consumer Council maintained a focus on effective **human resource management** during 2015–16, developing and implementing an Organisational Development Action Plan. Further information on this is set out later in this Annual Report and Accounts. However, the

prevailing financial climate and decisions that flowed from this, has impacted on staff morale and resulted in a slight decrease in the Employee Engagement Index.

This is based on results from the annual Staff Survey conducted in February 2015. An action plan is being developed to address staff concerns.

As documented in other parts of this Annual Report and Accounts, the Consumer Council continued to operate robust and effective **governance and accountability** arrangements. Unfortunately, a halt had to be placed on bank transactions pending an investigation of an attempted fraud through a computer virus in April 2014. Given this occurred at a time in the financial year when the volume in invoices was at its peak, it meant that we fell short of the target to pay 90 per cent of creditors within 10 working days.

Financial accountability and funding

The Principal Accounting Officer (the Permanent Secretary) of DETI designates the Chief Executive as the Accounting Officer for the Consumer Council. The Consumer Council operates under a Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) agreed with DETI – a revised version of this document was agreed in August 2013.

The Consumer Council's financial statements for 2014–15 (pages 73-99) have been prepared in accordance with paragraph 12(4) of Schedule 1 to the *General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984*, in a form directed by DETI, with the approval of the Department of Finance and Personnel (see page 100).

These financial statements demonstrate the resources we have used to deliver the Consumer Council's objectives and have been prepared in accordance with the guidance set out in the Government Financial Reporting Manual for 2014–15 (available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/government-financial-reporting-manual-frem>

The Consumer Council's operational expenditure for the financial year was £2,718,240 (2013–14: £2,765,096).

Significant reductions in expenditure were in the following areas:

- £48,917 reduction in work programme expenditure. Due to reduced income in 2014-15 work programme expenditure was managed in a more integrated way across all Consumer Council statutory remits in 2014-15.
- £72,764 reduction in staff costs due to a recruitment moratorium in place since July 2014.
- £3,621 reduction in external and internal audit fees.
- £8,533 reduction in office administration costs.
- £25,187 reduction in staff training and development to meet budget cuts imposed during 2014-15.
- £15,068 reduction in internal consultancy. There was no expenditure on internal consultancy in 2014-15.

Significant increases in expenditure were in the following areas:

- £179,705 increase in salaries due to the transfer of postal services staff from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) with effect from 1 April 2014; maternity leave payments; increase in Chair and Members fees applicable from 1 August 2013 and 1 August 2014 and the extension of temporary promotions due to the delay in appointing a substantive Chief Executive.
- £8,939 increase in operating leases – rent and service charge.
- £14,734 increase in legal and professional fees on costs associated with premises relocation.
- £13,753 increase in recruitment costs in recruiting a new Chief Executive, Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.

- £4,913 increase in repairs, maintenance and cleaning.

Government financing for the year was £2,389,772 (2013–14: £2,273,231). This comprised:

- £1,276,000 from DETI for ‘core’ activities (2013–14: £1,392,000).
- £387,638 from DETI for a proportion of its energy responsibilities by way of an industry levy (2013–14: £403,614).
- £408,134 from DRD for its responsibilities in respect of water and sewerage services (2013–14: £415,541).
- £255,000 from the BIS for responsibilities in respect of postal services (2013-14: £nil).
- £63,000 from DRD for work in respect of public transport (2013–14: £62,076).

Income for the year was £35,300 (2013-14: £107,670). This comprised:

- £35,300 from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) for work in respect of air travel (2013–14: £58,000).

Going concern

In common with other NDPBs, the Consumer Council operates as a going concern. Its liabilities will be met by future Grant-in-Aid, received from and approved annually by DETI, DRD and BIS. All funding has been approved for 2015–16. Planned activities for 2015–16 have been formulated in light of the funding available to the Consumer Council.

Staffing

The staff of the Consumer Council as at 31 March 2015, analysed by Northern Ireland Civil Service grade and gender, was as follows (comparative figures for 31 March 2014 are shown in brackets):

Grade	Male	Female	Total
Grade 5	2 (1)	0 (0)	2(1)
Grade 7	0 (1)	1 (1)	1 (2)
Deputy Principal	3 (2)	8 (6)	11(8)
Staff Officer	6 (5)	7 (8)	13 (13)
Executive Officer 1	3 (3)	4 (5)	7 (8)
Executive Officer 2	1 (1)	5 (5)	6 (6)
Admin Officer	1 (1)	2 (3)	3 (4)
Admin Assistant	0 (0)	2 (2)	2 (2)
Total	16 (14)	29 (30)	45 (44)

Note that grades 5, 7 and Deputy Principal constitute the Senior Management Team. Grades 5 and 7 constitute the Executive Team.

Staff development and involvement

The Consumer Council is committed to the development and involvement of employees in decision making processes. Staff are consulted and involved in proposals for change and views are sought as part of planning processes, such as corporate planning and annual business planning. Staff are encouraged to participate in working groups for work programme or corporate projects. In 2014–15 staff working groups have helped review and update the Consumer Council website; worked to develop Consumer Council vision and values; and put in place a Consumer Council intranet.

The Consumer Council's Human Resource Strategy for 2011–15 clearly sets out the Consumer Council's commitment to the ongoing professional and personal development of our employees. Staff benefit from access to a range of policies including flexible working arrangements, training, further education opportunities and work life

balance. Staff are developed and trained to build competence in areas that are directly linked to the performance of the organisation, for example, customer focus, strategic thinking and team working. Individual objectives are set to develop and stretch individual competence and performance, as well as deliver overall section and corporate objectives.

In 2014–15 an Organisational Development Plan was developed to improve organisational effectiveness by aligning and integrating people and organisational strategies and business processes within the Consumer Council. The Organisational Development Plan was set with a clear focus to improve how the Consumer Council plans and delivers business objectives. Staff working groups led on a number of the key aspects in delivering the Plan in 2014-15, such as defining measures of success and establishing an integrated business and people performance management process.

The Consumer Council's recognised union is the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA). Employment relations are managed through a Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC), which met five times in 2014–15.

Days lost due to absence

Unfortunately employees may get ill from time to time and may need time off work to recover. The Consumer Council recognises the need for an understanding and supportive approach in managing sickness absence. The Consumer Council also recognises the significant impact of ill health and sickness absence on the cost and quality of service delivery and wishes to encourage a culture of good attendance. Our Sickness Absence policy therefore aims to provide an appropriate balance between the needs of the Consumer Council and the needs of individuals when dealing with sickness absence.

The percentage of available working days lost due to sickness absence for the financial year 2014–15 was 3.1 per cent (2013–14: 2.7 per cent). This figure reduces to 1.5 per cent when adjusted for staff on long term sickness absence over 19 days (2013–14: 1.8 per cent). This compares to

the overall 2013–14 benchmark of 4.6 per cent for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (the figures for 2014–15 are not yet available).

Health and safety

The Consumer Council recognises and accepts its legal responsibilities in relation to the health, safety and welfare of our staff and for all people using our premises. We comply with the *Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978* and all other appropriate legislation. The JNCC with NIPSA, which normally meets quarterly, also functions as the Consumer Council's Health and Safety Management Committee. Health and safety matters are a standing item on JNCC agendas.

Two members of staff have been trained in first aid. Consumer Council staff (and close family members) are covered by an Employee Assistance Programme that provides 24-hour access to counselling and support services for staff.

Risk management

Procedures for verifying risk management and internal controls are in place and are regularly reviewed and reported on. Risk management is continually incorporated into the business planning and decision-making processes of the Consumer Council.

In 2014–15 the Consumer Council developed a combined Risk Management strategy and policy which sets out the risk management framework as well as the process of risk assessment and assurance, both internally and to DETI.

Key corporate risks identified and managed in 2014–15 were:

- Inadequate or weak internal controls/governance framework result in a breach of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM).

- Year end overspend/underspend and/or qualification result from ineffective use and management of financial resources, or from external factors.
- Infrastructure changes disrupt the delivery of key corporate objectives and fail to deliver efficiency savings required for 2015–16.
- Failure to recruit and/or retain appropriately skilled staff results in the Consumer Council not being able to deliver key corporate objectives and impacting on the reputation of the organisation.
- Concerns about organisational changes and job security impact on staff morale and commitment to deliver the Consumer Council’s aims and objectives.
- Provision of poor information or advice results in failure to achieve the Consumer Council’s policy positions and/or cause reputational damage.
- External influences/factors damage the reputation of the Consumer Council and result in the Consumer Council not being able to deliver its 2011-15 Corporate Plan objectives.

A risk relating to budget reductions preventing delivery of a number of objectives in the Business Plan for 2014–15 was identified after June Monitoring. This was realised in the autumn and the Business Plan was consequently revised to reflect the reduced budget.

The Consumer Council’s governance arrangements are described in more detail in the Governance Statement on pages 58 to 69.

Sustainability Report

Environmental issues

The Consumer Council believes in the need to embed the role of the consumer in all sustainability issues and encourage consumers to change their behaviour to benefit them today and tomorrow.

We represent consumers in relation to transport, water, energy and food, all of which have a prominent focus in the sustainability agenda. We educate consumers about their rights and responsibilities and inform them how they can make more responsible consumption choices.

Consumers in NI have identified responsible consumerism and sustainable development as important issues for them. Our aim is to ensure consumers are provided with information, choice and value for money and that the negative environmental impacts of the production and consumption of goods and services are minimised.

The Consumer Council also has a duty as a public body and a consumer representative to contribute to and promote the achievement of sustainable development, which – if done correctly – will not incur additional costs.

Through our consumer skills work, the Consumer Council encourages consumers to exercise their rights and their responsibilities. The economic downturn has meant that consumers are making fewer impulse buys, are more likely to reuse and repair where possible and are also keen to look at ways to save energy in order to reduce their household bills. Our *Power to the Pocket* workshops included a host of simple money saving tips that will not only benefit budgets but will lead to using water and energy more wisely. These workshops also encouraged greater use of public transport over private cars.

The Consumer Council's Shop Around website (www.shoparound.org.uk) for teachers, essential skills tutors and voluntary and community group leaders contains a section on 'Sustainability' providing a fun and

informative way to learn about cutting waste, reducing your carbon footprint and caring for the environment.

The EcoWorld website (www.ecoworld.org.uk), developed in partnership with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), is an interactive computer game for young people covering the management of natural resources, environmental responsibility and sustainable consumerism. The six topics – Energy, Water, Transport, Food, Our Planet and Waste – are being reviewed and refreshed to keep them up to date and the game will be updated to make best use of new gaming technology.

The Consumer Council has also developed a number of lesson plans, presentations, games and activities to support consumer awareness aspects of the A level and GCSE Home Economics curriculum, including ethical buying decisions.

The Consumer Council is working with the FSA on a joint research project to look at the balance between healthy and less healthy special offers and the ways in which these are promoted. The findings from this research will be used to engage further with food sector representatives and retailers to encourage a greater emphasis on single item discounts as opposed to often wasteful multi-buy offers.

In 2014–15 the Consumer Council continued to highlight that a debate is needed on the future of our water and sewerage services to ensure that we have a water and sewerage service that is socially, environmentally, politically and financially sustainable.

The Consumer Council again supported Waterwise and the Environment Agency's UK Water Efficiency Awards to encourage public, private and third sector organisations in NI to enter.

Research continues to demonstrate consumers' desire for water efficiency advice. Throughout the year we continued to provide consumers with information to enable them to make responsible choices about their water and sewerage services including ways to use water wisely, prepare for winter and guidance about flooding.

In partnership with NI Water and Invest NI the Consumer Council continued to promote the 'Water Champions' Award. The Award recognises businesses and farms that have taken steps to reduce their water consumption and ultimately lower their water and sewerage bills. 'Water Champions' forms part of a wider campaign that promotes and provides water efficiency and billing information to non-domestic consumers throughout NI.

We have continued to work with energy companies, the Utility Regulator and other stakeholders to ensure that targets included in the Strategic Energy Framework and the NI Sustainable Development Strategy are met, while minimising the financial impact to consumers, particularly those in fuel poverty.

The Consumer Council supports the Department for Regional Development (DRD) in its aim of providing a public transport system that provides an attractive alternative to the private car. Modern, sustainable transport solutions that are tailored to the travel needs of consumers are essential if real modal shift is to be achieved which will have the ultimate benefit of reducing transport related carbon emissions.

We also support the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in its work to ensure airlines provide passengers with information that enables them to take into consideration the environmental impact of their travel choices.

Given the Consumer Council's prominent role in influencing the wider sustainability agenda, we aim to lead by example, maximising the conservation and efficiency of our own energy and resource use thereby reducing environmental impact and unnecessary costs and maximising value for money. The Consumer Council is committed to improving its environmental performance in respect of staff travel, procurement, energy use and waste management to reduce its ecological footprint.

We dispose of computer related and other electrical equipment responsibly. We have also adopted a waste and printer cartridge recycling scheme and staff manage the recycling of office and kitchen waste. In 2014–15 we recycled 4,900 kg of waste paper (4,550 kg in 2013–14). Consumer Council staff are encouraged to think before they

print and printers are set as default to print black and white only. If there is a requirement to print documents, double sided printing should be used. All documents are previewed and tracked changes are used to electronically exchange suggested amendments rather than printing hard copy documents and physically writing on these. All internal communications, including newspaper clippings, are distributed via email.

Furthermore, staff are encouraged to car share or use public transport to attend external meetings and presentations.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The Consumer Council is committed to, and active in, its corporate social responsibility. Throughout 2014–15 we supported a local primary school in a deprived area of Belfast, and donated through fund raising and voluntary work by staff within the school. Some staff also help students read.

Equality issues

The Consumer Council is committed to equality of opportunity and promoting good relations. The commitments contained in our Equality Scheme, prepared in compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and Disability Action Plan. These are aligned to the Corporate Plan, which helps ensure consistency and to embed equality considerations into our priorities and activities. The Consumer Council's equality commitments extend beyond its role as an employer and service provider, to our work as a consumer advocate seeking to influence the policies of other organisations.

The Consumer Council has a particular focus on the rights of vulnerable consumers whose requirements are a particularly priority for us. Some examples of the Consumer Council's work on equality issues are set out below.

Our *Power to the Pocket* programme directly helped over 100 vulnerable consumers increase knowledge of their rights and their confidence to shop around and save money. These workshops targeted older and disabled consumers.

The Consumer Council continued to work to promote the needs of consumers with a disability. As part of our role to represent the interest of passengers travelling to, from and within NI the Consumer Council worked closely with a range of organisations including Disability Action, the Inclusive Mobility Transport Advisory Committee and the Royal National Institute of Blind people (RNIB) to promote awareness of passenger rights. Our work with representative organisations also informs our knowledge of the issues passengers with a disability or reduced mobility face when accessing services.

In addition, the Consumer Council continued to be the complaint handling body for Regulation (EC) 1107 and Regulation (EU) 1177, which gives passengers rights to special assistance when travelling by air (1107) or by ferry (1177).

Lastly, the Consumer Council's website was redeveloped and the new version was launched in April 2015. Accessibility of the website was improved for visually impaired consumers and those whose first language is not English.

Further information on the Consumer Council's equality work in 2014–15 will be set out in its Annual Progress Report on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order 2006 to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, which will be published on our website in summer 2015.

Future development

In consultation with DETI, the Consumer Council decided in 2014 to extend the current Corporate Plan, which has been in place since 2011, by one year to cover 2015–16. This was to keep Consumer Council's strategic planning timeframe aligned with that of the NI Executive's

Programme for Government and spending rounds, and that of its sponsoring department. A new Corporate Plan will be developed and consulted on during the year ahead to be in place with effect from April 2016.

The Consumer Council's funding streams have reduced significantly as a result of public sector cuts. In overall terms the income position at April 2015 is approximately 20 per cent lower than at April 2014. In this context the Consumer Council is looking at every opportunity to make budget savings to minimise the impact on the services provided for consumers. A significant efficiency will be realised when the Consumer Council moves its office base in June 2015. The lease on Elizabeth House – the Consumer Council's base since 1985 – ended in March 2015, which provided an opportunity to realise savings in respect of accommodation costs and help offset the impact of future budget reductions.

Despite the reduced budget the Consumer Council will continue to represent the interests of consumers and identify strategic areas of action in line with the delivery of its current Corporate Plan. As many of these consumer issues cut across different markets, and to reflect the integrated way in which the Consumer Council operates, priorities for 2015–16 have been aligned under five strategic objectives as follows:

- **To improve the consumer experience, both within the Consumer Council and with external service providers** – the Consumer Council seeks to encourage those we work with to ensure consumers are the focus of their service delivery. In developing, measuring and monitoring key performance indicators and other customer measures, and through the resolution of complaints, there will be actionable data to promote continuous improvement. By looking at synergies and comparables we aim to facilitate learning between the service providers we work with.
- **To understand and represent the views of consumers to government, regulators and businesses** – the Consumer Council has a pivotal role to identify, through research, issues of strategic importance and/or significant detriment to consumers and represent these to the institutions and bodies that can address them.

- **To give consumers the confidence, tools and skills to get the best deal** – the Consumer Council seeks to support consumers to improve their ability to make informed choices, shop/choose wisely, drive and change markets by switching, and know and exercise their consumer rights and responsibilities. By helping businesses to understand and comply with consumer law we help drive competitiveness by preventing reputational risk, avoiding protracted complaints and delivering customer service excellence.
- **To improve the access of consumers to the services they need** – by working in partnership with service providers experiencing significant change, the Consumer Council aims to help them devise innovative solutions to continue to meet all consumers' needs.
- **To ensure the Consumer Council works even better for consumers** – we have to ensure that we use the resources provided to us as efficiently and effectively as possible to perform our statutory role.

Further details on the Consumers Council's planned activities under each of these strategic objectives are set out in our Business Plan for 2015–16, which is available on the Consumer Council website.



Don Leeson
Accounting Officer
10 June 2015

Directors' Report

Organisational structure and governance

Board Membership

The overall strategic direction and governance arrangements of the Consumer Council are set and overseen by a Board (the 'Council'). During 2014–15, the following served as Council Members:

Rick Hill (Chairperson)
David Beattie
Kit Chivers
Deirdre Fitzpatrick
David Galloway
Jill Gillespie
Mandy Patrick (Deputy Chairperson)
Sam Snodden
Margaret Ward
Lee Wilson

The Governance Statement on pages 58 to 69 sets out details of the Consumer Council's governance arrangements. In addition to its responsibilities for corporate governance, the Board oversees the delivery of the Consumer Council's functions in relation to energy and water as set out in the *Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003* and the *Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006* respectively, and in relation to food and transport as set out in the *General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984*.

Executive Team

The day-to-day management of the Consumer Council is undertaken by an Executive Team comprising the Interim Chief Executive and two Directors covering operations and policy respectively.

Details of Council Members' and the Executive Team's remuneration, is set out in the Remuneration Report on pages 46 to 55.

Pension liabilities

Details of pension schemes are set out in Note 3.3 to the financial statements and also in the Remuneration Report on pages 46 to 55.

Creditor payment, policy and performance

The Consumer Council is committed to the prompt payment of bills for goods and services received, in accordance with the Government's Better Payments Practice Payment Code. Unless otherwise stated in the contract, payment is due within 30 days of the receipt of the goods or services, or presentation of a valid invoice or similar demand, whichever is later. In 2014–15, 95 per cent of invoices were paid within 30 days (2013-14: 100 per cent).

In December 2008 the Finance Minister announced that departments had been set a target of ensuring that invoices are paid within 10 working days, in order to help local businesses. During 2014-15 the Consumer Council paid 87 per cent of invoices (2013–14: 95 per cent) within the 10 working day target. Unfortunately, a halt had to be placed on bank transactions pending an investigation of an attempted fraud through a computer virus in April 2014. Given that this occurred at a time in the financial year when the volume of invoices was at its peak, it meant that we fell just short of the target to pay 90 per cent of creditors within 10 working days.

Charitable donations

There were no charitable donations made during 2014–15 (2013–14: £nil).

Personal data related incidents

The Consumer Council incurred no personal data breaches in 2014–15 (2013–14: nil).

Complaints Procedure

One of the Consumer Council's main roles is to handle complaints about service providers in respect of buses, trains, planes, ferries, natural gas, electricity, coal or water. Given this, it is important that we handle complaints about the Consumer Council in an exemplary manner and our complaints procedures – both about service providers and about us – are publicised extensively.

No complaints about the Consumer Council were received in 2014–15 and no matters about us were referred to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman for investigation.

Auditor

The financial statements are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland (C&AG) in accordance with the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984. The C&AG is head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office, which is wholly independent of the Consumer Council and its findings are reported to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

As Accounting Officer, I can confirm that there is no relevant audit information of which the auditor is unaware. I have taken all the steps that I ought to have taken to make myself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is informed of it.

During the year the Consumer Council participated in the National Fraud Initiative and there were no issues identified as part of this exercise. The non-audit work in relation to this was carried out by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The fee was £1,232.

There was no other non audit work carried out by the Northern Ireland Audit Office or its subcontractors during 2014-15

Events after the reporting period

There have been no significant events since the year end that affect the accounts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Leeson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Don Leeson
Accounting Officer
10 June 2015

Remuneration Report

Chairperson and Council

The Council consists of a part-time Chairperson and 9 other Members (including the Deputy Chairperson).

The Chairperson and Council Members are appointed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) in accordance with the Code of Practice of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland. The Chairperson and Council Members are appointed for a fixed period of up to three years. Thereafter they may be re-appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice.

The remuneration of the Chairperson and Council Members is set by DETI. There are no arrangements in place for the payment of a bonus.

Neither the Chairperson nor any Council Members receive pension contributions from the Consumer Council or DETI. The Consumer Council reimburses the Chairperson and Council Members for any incidental expenses incurred for carrying out their duties relevant to the organisation. Council Members' expenses amounting to £862 (2013-14: £1,004) have been paid during the year and are reflected under other expenditure in note 5 to the accounts.

The remuneration of the Chairperson and Council Members (including the Deputy Chairperson) is as follows (the information in the table below has been subject to audit):

Council	2014-15			2013-14		
	Salary £'000	Bonus £'000	Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)	Salary £'000	Bonus £'000	Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)
Mr Richard Hill	20-25	-	-	20-25	-	-
Other Council Members 2014-15: 9 (2013-2014: 11) as set out on page 59 of the accounts. Figure includes Members appointed and those who left during the year.	5-10	-	-	5-10	-	-

Chief Executive and Executive Team

Remuneration Policy

The Remuneration of senior civil servants is set by the then Minister for Finance and Personnel. The then Minister approved a restructured SCS pay settlement broadly in line with the Senior Salaries Review Board report which he commissioned in 2010. The commitment to a Pay and Grading Review for SCS was the second phase of the equal pay settlement approved by the Executive.

Service Contracts

Consumer Council appointments are made in accordance with the Consumer Council Recruitment and Selection policy, which requires appointment to be on merit on the basis of fair and open competition but also includes the circumstances when appointments may otherwise be made.

Unless otherwise stated below, the officials covered by this report hold appointment, which are open-ended. Policy relating to notice periods and termination payments is contained in the Consumer Council staff contracts.

Members of the Senior Management Team are paid in line with Northern Ireland Civil Service Salary Bands. Increases in remuneration are in line with Northern Ireland Civil Service pay awards and are not performance related. A pay award was agreed and applies from August 2014.

Salary and pension entitlements

The following section provides details of the remuneration and pension interests of the most senior management of the Consumer Council (the information in the table below has been subject to audit):

Senior Management	2014-15					2013-14				
	Salary £'000	Bonus Payments £'000	Benefits in Kind (to nearest £100)	Pension Benefits (to nearest £1,000)*	Total (to nearest £1'000)	Salary £'000	Bonus Payments £'000	Benefits in Kind (to nearest £100)	Pension Benefits (to nearest £1,000)**	Total (to nearest £1'000)
Mr Don Leeson <i>Interim Chief Executive</i> (from 16 February 2015. Director up until 15 February 2015 included)*	45-50 (60-65 full year equivalent)	-	-	18,000	65-70	30-35 (45-50 full year equivalent)	-	-	13,000	45-50
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell <i>Interim Chief Executive</i> (to 16 February 2015)*	60-65	-	-	41,000	105-110	40-45 (60-65 full year equivalent)	-	-	51,000	90-95
Ms Antoinette McKeown <i>Chief Executive</i> (until 31 August 2013)*	-	-	-	-	-	25-30 (65-70 full year equivalent)	-	-	2,000	25-30
Mrs Kathy Graham <i>Interim Director</i> (from 3 September 2013)	45-50	-	-	20,000	65-70	25-30 (45-50 full year equivalent)	-	-	6,000	30-35
Ms Elaine Topping <i>Director</i> (until 31 May 2013)	-	-	-	-	-	5-10 (45-50 full year equivalent)	-	-	(5,000)	0-5
Band of Highest Paid Director's Total Remuneration	60-65					60-65				
Median Total Remuneration (excluding highest paid Director)	29,027					28,500				
Ratio	2.15					2.19				

*The interim Chief Executive and Accounting Officer was **Aodhan O'Donnell** between 1 April 2014 and 16 February 2015 and **Don Leeson** between 16 February 2015 and 31 March 2015. Both covered the post on an interim basis, pending the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive and Accounting Officer.

**The value of pension benefits accrued during the year is calculated as (the real increase in pension multiplied by 20) plus (the real increase in any lump sum) less (the contributions made by the individual). The real increases include increases due to inflation and any increase or decrease due to a transfer of pension rights.

Salary

'Salary' includes gross salary; overtime; and any other allowance to the extent that it is subject to UK taxation. It does not include amounts which are a reimbursement of expenses directly incurred in the performance of an individual's duties. This report is based on payments made by the Consumer Council and thus recorded in these accounts.

Benefits in kind

The monetary value of benefits in kind covers any benefits provided by the employer and treated by HM Revenue and Customs as a taxable emolument. There were no benefits in kind paid to Senior Management during the year (2013-14: £Nil).

Bonuses

There were no bonuses paid during 2014-15 (2013-14: £Nil).

Pension Entitlements

The following section provides details of the pension interests of the most senior management of the Consumer Council (the information in the table below has been subject to audit):

Senior Management	Accrued pension at pension age as at 31/03/15 and related lump sum £'000	Real increase in pension and related lump sum at pension age £'000	CETV at 31/03/15 £'000	CETV at 31/03/14 £'000	Real increase in CETV £'000	Employer contribution to partnership pension account Nearest £100
Mr Don Leeson <i>Interim Chief Executive</i> (from 16 February 2015. Director up until 15 February 2015 included)*	2.5-5	0-2.5	45	29	10	-
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell <i>Interim Chief Executive</i> (to 16 February)	15-20	0-2.5	127	104	12	-
Ms Antoinette McKeown <i>Chief Executive</i> (until 31 August 2013)	-	-	-	223	-	-
Mrs Kathy Graham <i>Interim Director</i> (from 3 September 2013)	5-10	0-2.5	78	61	10	-
Ms Elaine Topping <i>Director</i> (until 31 May 2013)	-	-	-	227	-	-

Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Pension arrangements

Pension benefits are provided through the Northern Ireland Civil Service pension arrangements which are administered by Civil Service Pensions (NICS pension). Staff in post prior to 30 July 2007 may be in one of three statutory based 'final salary' defined benefit arrangements (classic, premium, and classic plus). These arrangements are unfunded with the cost of benefits met by monies voted by the Assembly each year. From April 2011 pensions payable under classic, premium, and classic plus are increased annually in line with changes in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). Prior to 2011, pensions were increased in line with changes in the Retail Prices Index (RPI). New entrants joining on or after 1 October 2002 and before 30 July 2007 could choose between membership of premium or joining a good quality 'money purchase' stakeholder arrangement with a significant employer contribution (partnership pension account). New entrants joining on or after 30 July 2007 are eligible for membership of the nuvos arrangement or they can opt for a partnership pension account. Nuvos is a 'Career Average Revalued Earnings' (CARE) arrangement in which members accrue pension benefits at a percentage rate of annual pensionable earnings throughout the period of scheme membership. The current rate is 2.3%. CARE pension benefits are increased annually in line with increases in the CPI.

A new pension scheme, alpha, will be introduced for new entrants from 1 April 2015. The majority of existing members of the NICS pension arrangements will move to alpha from that date. Members who on 1 April 2012 were within 10 years of their normal pension age will not move to alpha and those who were within 13.5 years and 10 years of their normal pension age were given a choice between moving to alpha on 1 April 2015 or at a later date determined by their age. Alpha is also a 'Career Average Revalued Earnings' (CARE) arrangement in which members accrue pension benefits at a percentage rate of annual pensionable earnings throughout the period of scheme membership. The rate will be 2.32%. CARE pension benefits are increased annually in line with increases in CPI.

For 2015, public service pensions will be increased by 1.2% for pensions which began before 6 April 2014. Pensions which began after 6 April 2014 will be increased proportionately.

Employee contribution rates for all members for the period covering 1st April 2015 – 31st March 2016 are as follows:

Scheme Year 1st April 2015 – 31st March 2016

Pay band – assessed each pay period		Contribution rates - Classic members	Contribution rates - Classic plus, premium, nuvos and alpha members
From	To	From 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016	From 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016
£0	£15,000.99	3.0%	4.6%
£15,001.00	£21,000.99	4.6%	4.6%
£21,001.00	£47,000.99	5.45%	5.45%
£47,001.00	£150,000.99	7.35%	7.35%
£150,001.00 and above		8.05%	8.05%

Benefits in classic accrue at the rate of 1/80th of pensionable salary for each year of service. In addition, a lump sum equivalent to three years' pension is payable on retirement. For premium, benefits accrue at the rate of 1/60th of final pensionable earnings for each year of service. Unlike classic, there is no automatic lump sum (but members may give up (commute) some of their pension to provide a lump sum). Classic plus is essentially a variation of premium, but with benefits in respect of service before 1 October 2002 calculated broadly as per classic.

The partnership pension account is a stakeholder pension arrangement. The employer makes a basic contribution of between 3% and 12.5% (depending on the age of the member) into a stakeholder pension product chosen by the employee. The employee does not have to contribute but where they do make contributions, the employer will match these up to a limit of 3% of pensionable salary (in addition to the employer's basic contribution). Employers also contribute a further 0.8% of pensionable salary to cover the cost of centrally-provided risk benefit cover (death in service and ill health retirement).

The accrued pension quoted is the pension the member is entitled to receive when they reach pension age, or immediately on ceasing to be

an active member of the scheme if they are at or over pension age. Pension age is 60 for members of **classic**, **premium**, and **classic plus** and 65 for members of **nuvos**. The normal pension age in alpha will be linked to the member's State Pension Age but cannot be before age 65. Further details about the CSP arrangements can be found at the website www.dfpni.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni .

Cash Equivalent Transfer Values

A Cash Equivalent Transfer Value (CETV) is the actuarially assessed capitalised value of the pension scheme benefits accrued by a member at a particular point in time. The benefits valued are the member's accrued benefits and any contingent spouse's pension payable from the scheme. A CETV is a payment made by a pension scheme or arrangement to secure pension benefits in another pension scheme or arrangement when the member leaves a scheme and chooses to transfer the benefits accrued in their former scheme. The pension figures shown relate to the benefits that the individual has accrued as a consequence of their total membership of the pension scheme, not just their service in a senior capacity to which disclosure applies. The CETV figures, and from 2003-04 the other pension details, include the value of any pension benefit in another scheme or arrangement which the individual has transferred to the CSP arrangements. They also include any additional pension benefit accrued to the member as a result of their purchasing additional years of pension service in the scheme at their own cost. CETVs are calculated in accordance with The Occupational Pension Schemes (Transfer Values) (Amendment) Regulations and do not take account of any actual or potential benefits resulting from Lifetime Allowance Tax which may be due when pension benefits are taken.

Real increase in CETV

This reflects the increase in CETV effectively funded by the employer. It does not include the increase in accrued pension due to inflation, contributions paid by the employee (including the value of any benefits

transferred from another pension scheme or arrangement) and uses common market valuation factors for the start and end of the period.

Compensation for loss of office

No awards or compensation payments have been made to former Senior Managers during 2014-15 (2013-14: £Nil).

Ill-health retirement

No individuals retired early on ill-health grounds (2013-14: £Nil).

Third Parties

No payments have been made to third parties for services as a Senior Manager.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Leeson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Don Leeson
Accounting Officer
10 June 2015

Statement of Council's and Chief Executive's responsibilities

Under paragraph 12(4) of Schedule 1 to the General Consumer Council (NI) Order 1984, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has directed the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland to prepare for each financial year a statement of accounts in the form and on the basis set out in the Accounts Direction. The accounts are prepared on an accruals basis and must give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and of its income and expenditure, changes in taxpayers' equity and cash flows for the financial year.

In preparing the accounts, the interim Chief Executive as Accounting Officer is required to comply with the requirements of the *Government Financial Reporting Manual* and in particular to:

- observe the Accounts Direction issued by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, including the relevant accounting and disclosure requirements, and apply suitable accounting policies on a consistent basis;
- make judgements and estimates on a reasonable basis;
- state whether applicable accounting standards as set out in the *Government Financial Reporting Manual* have been followed, and disclose and explain any material departures in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis.

The Accounting Officer for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has designated the Chief Executive as the Accounting Officer for the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland. The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer, including responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which the Accounting Officer is answerable, for keeping proper records and for safeguarding the Consumer Council's assets, are set out in the Managing Public

Money (NI) (MPM (NI)), published by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

By order of the Board



Sheila McClelland
Chair
10 June 2015



Don Leeson
Accounting Officer
10 June 2015

Governance Statement

Introduction

This Governance Statement is intended to give a clear understanding of the dynamics and control structure of the Consumer Council by reflecting the organisation's governance, risk management and internal control arrangements during the 2014-15 financial year.

As Accounting Officer I have responsibility for ensuring there are sound systems of governance, risk management and internal control to support the achievement of the Consumer Council's policies, aims and objectives. I am also required to ensure that the Consumer Council's business is conducted in accordance with Managing Public Money (NI) to ensure public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

I act in accordance with the Consumer Council's Management Statement and Financial Memorandum as agreed with DETI and other instructions and guidance issued from time to time by DETI and DFP.

I am designated as the Consumer Council's Accounting Officer by the Departmental Accounting Officer and I am personally responsible for safeguarding the public funds for which I have charge; for ensuring propriety and regularity in the handling of those public funds; and for the day-to-day operations and management of the Consumer Council.

The governance structure which supports the delivery of sound systems of corporate governance is the Consumer Council Board and its Committees, and the Senior Management Team.

The Consumer Council Board (“the Council”)

The persons serving during the year ended 31 March 2015 were:

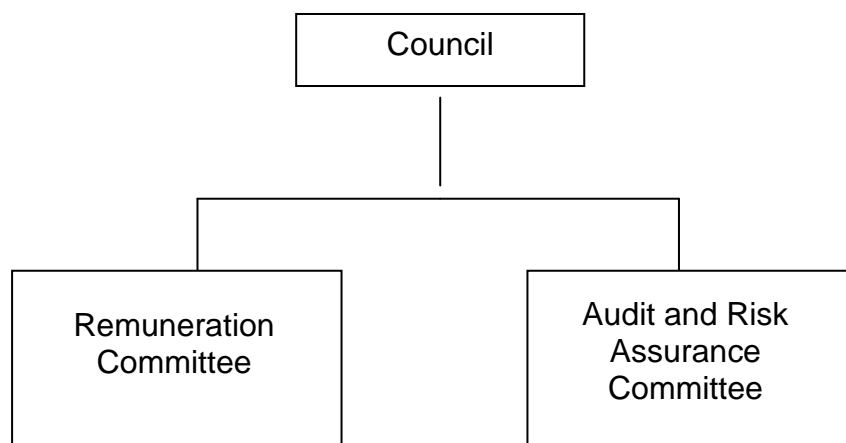
Name	Position	First Appointed	
Mr Richard Hill	Chairperson	1 Jan 2008 (appointed Council Member)	1 Jan 2009* (appointed Chair). Appointment ended on 31 March 2015
Mrs Mandy Patrick	Deputy Chairperson	1 Jan 2012	Appointment ended on 31 March 2015
Mr Kit Chivers	Council Member	1 Jan 2009*	Second term extended to 31 December 2015
Mrs Deirdre Fitzpatrick	Council Member	1 August 2009*	Second term extended to 31 December 2015
Mrs Jill Gillespie	Council Member	1 August 2009*	Second term extended to 31 December 2015
Dr Margaret Ward	Council Member	1 August 2009*	Second term extended to 31 December 2015
Mr Lee Wilson	Council Member	1 August 2009*	Second term extended to 31 December 2015
Mr David Beattie	Council Member	1 Jan 2012*	
Mr David Galloway	Council Member	1 Jan 2012*	
Mr Sam Snodden	Council Member	1 Jan 2012*	

* Members second term

Sheila McClelland and Judena Goldring were appointed as Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson respectively, with effect from 1 April 2015.

The Council has corporate responsibility for ensuring that the Consumer Council fulfils the aims and objectives set by the Department and approved by the then Minister, and for promoting the efficient, economic and effective use of staff and other resources by the Consumer Council.

The Consumer Council operates a Committee Governance Structure as follows:



The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee deals with a range of issues relating to governance, internal control, accountability and risk management and provides recommendations to the Council for approval. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is an advisory committee with no executive powers other than those delegated by the Council.

The Remuneration Committee meets to consider the Chief Executive's remuneration and receives assurance from the Chief Executive, as Accounting Officer, that remuneration of staff is in line with NICS

guidelines. It also agrees the objectives and reviews Chief Executive's performance against these guidelines. Like the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, the Remuneration Committee is an advisory committee with no executive powers other than those delegated by the Council. It may make recommendations on matters of significance for consideration by the Council.

In 2014-15 the Council met twelve times, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee met four times and the Remuneration Committee met three times.

The Chairperson and Council Members (including the Deputy Chairperson) are required to register all interests, direct or indirect, which members of the public might reasonably think could influence their judgement. The register of interest is available for public inspection by contacting the Consumer Council, Floor 3, Seatem House 28-32 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8EN.

Declaration of conflict of interest is a standing agenda item at every Council meeting where the Chairperson and Council Members are required to declare any conflict of interest at the start of each meeting. Any potential conflicts are appropriately managed.

The senior management team

The Senior Management Team comprises the Chief Executive, two Directors and seven Section Heads. The Executive Team (Chief Executive and two Directors) meets weekly to discuss ongoing operational issues, progress against business plan targets and governance. On a regular basis the Executive Team has a focussed discussion on finances and risk. The Senior Management Team meets monthly to discuss emerging strategic issues, review business plan performance and feed into the Executive Team agenda. As supported and advised by this team I have responsibility for ensuring that effective systems of internal control are maintained and operated.

Board performance and effectiveness

The Council and its Committees provide scrutiny and oversight of the work and effectiveness of the organisation. The Council is provided with strategic updates, reviews key policy and strategy activities and reviews risk and the organisation's financial position.

The performance of each member is assessed by the Chairperson and each member receives a formal performance review annually. All new members receive an induction into the operation of the Council, its responsibilities and the strategic issues the Council needs to consider. The attendance records of all members during the reporting period are shown below.

Name	Council (12 meetings)	Audit and Risk Assurance (4 meetings)	Remuneration (3 meetings)
Mr Richard Hill	11		3
Mrs Mandy Patrick	8		2
Mr Kit Chivers	10	4	
Mrs Deirdre Fitzpatrick	9	4	
Mrs Jill Gillespie	11		3
Dr Margaret Ward	8		
Mr Lee Wilson	8	1	
Mr David Beattie	9		2
Mr David Galloway	8		
Mr Sam Snodden	12	4	

The Council is guided by the Corporate Governance in Central Government Departments: Code of Good Practice 2013 and as a Non Departmental Public Body is broadly compliant with all of its principles. The Code sets out the responsibilities of the Board to support, guide and challenge the executive team and to provide leadership under the five main areas of responsibility within the Code –

- Strategic Clarity
- Commercial Sense

- Talented People
- Results Focus
- Management Information

The Council undertakes an annual self assessment considering:

- Council policies and procedures;
- Quality and relevance of information received and discussed by the Council;
- The effectiveness of Council decision making;
- Duration and frequency of meetings; and
- Learning and development.

Overall the assessment indicates that the Council is content with its effectiveness and performance. The tenure of a number of board members will expire during 2015-16, having completed their second term of three years as a Council member. After recruitment of new board members it is planned to undertake a knowledge/skills audit of the entire board membership to establish the collective level knowledge and skills and ensure appropriate ongoing learning and development.

The Council has also assessed that it is content with the quality of information it receives. Council members can directly question staff and seek clarification or further information as they present on key issues for discussion at Council. Council members are also assured in respect of the volume and detail of information provided to them in relation to issues for discussion and consideration at Council meetings.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee undertook a self assessment in April 2015 to inform the Annual Report from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to the Council. The assessment also identified actions regarding skills requirements and ongoing learning and development for the Audit Committee.

Key governance issues considered in 2014-15

By the Council:

Council meetings are scheduled and structured to ensure that the following key governance issues are reviewed and discussed quarterly:

- Progress of the annual Business Plan as presented in the quarterly performance report;
- Corporate risk register and the Chief Executive's bi-annual assurance report; and
- Quarterly management accounts.

Other key governance issues discussed by the Council during 2014-15:

- Annual Business Plan and Budget allocation against operational priorities for 2014-15;
- Annual Report and Accounts;
- Management's responses to the findings and recommendations contained in the Report to Those Charged with Governance issued by the external auditor;
- Business case for premises relocation;
- Transfer of ICT services from in-house provision to IT Assist (the shared service provider for the NICS and other public bodies)
- Outcome of the then Ministerial Review of the Consumer Council;
- Draft Business Plan for 2015-16; and
- Revised Code of Conduct for Board Members.

The Council also discussed a range of key policy issues in 2014-15 as follows:

- Complaints Report 2013-14 and 2014-15 quarterly updates;
- Research into various energy-related issues;
- Implementation of Alternative Dispute Resolution Directive;
- Outreach Strategy Progress Report;
- Credit Union modernisation and Post Office Diversification Funds;
- Joint Memorandum of Understanding Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation/Consumer Council;
- Consumer Manifesto;
- Travel Supercomplaint; and
- Various policy position papers.

By the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee:

The work of the Council is supported and advised by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. From 1 April to 31 December 2014 the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee was chaired by Kit Chivers. Sam Snodden assumed the role of Chair of the Committee from 29 January 2015.

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee considered the following key elements of the risk and control framework in 2014-15:

- External Auditor's Report to those charged with Governance (RTTCWG);
- Quarterly risk registers and bi-annual assurance report and checklist;

- Corporate risk appetite;
- Consumer Council Risk Management Strategy/Policy;
- 2014-2017 Strategic Internal Audit Plan; and
- Reports for all internal audits undertaken in 2014-15.

The risk register is considered in detail by both the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Council at the end of each quarter. In June 2014 a new risk was added to the register in response to a requirement to make in-year reductions to the Consumer Council's budget in the context of 2014-15 budgetary pressures across the NI public sector. A number of actions were put in place to manage this risk and a budget reduction plan was developed and implemented. Aside from this new risk there have been no changes in the overall risk definitions for each corporate risk in the year but residual assessments have changed regularly as external factors have impacted, new controls have been introduced or actions have been implemented.

In 2014-15 the Consumer Council developed and introduced a Risk Management Strategy/Policy. The combined strategy and policy sets out the context of risk management in the Consumer Council in terms of the control environment, describing the risk management framework in terms of individual roles and responsibilities to cover all operational, project and corporate risks. The policy also describes the process of risk assessment and assurance both internally, and to DETI, as well as stating how risk appetite is considered for each corporate risk.

Internal audit

ASM carried out the Internal Audit function for the Consumer Council for the year ended 31 March 2015 having been reappointed as Internal Auditors after a public procurement exercise in March 2014. The Internal Audit programme operated to requirements defined in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The work of ASM is informed by an analysis of the risk to which the Consumer Council is exposed, and annual internal audit plans are based on this analysis.

In 2014-15 four internal audits were carried out by ASM in the following areas:

- Sage payroll;
- Postal Services;
- Payroll and pensions; and
- Business continuity planning.

ASM also undertook a review of the implementation of prior year's internal audit recommendations.

The reviews of Sage payroll and business continuity planning provided recommendations for improvement rather than assurance ratings. The Sage payroll review was undertaken in response to an historic payroll issue. It noted only a small number of recommendations and also that most of these were already underway at the time of the review. The business continuity planning review took the form of an advisory report to help the Consumer Council formulate an approach to business continuity planning in the context of the Consumer Council's pending relocation to new premises and information technology infrastructure and technology support being moved to IT Assist in 2015-16.

Satisfactory assurance was achieved in the Postal Services review and substantial assurance was achieved in the payroll and pensions review.

The Annual Internal Audit Assurance report for 2014-15 provides satisfactory assurance that the Consumer Council's systems in relation to risk management, control and governance provide for effective and efficient achievement of the Consumer Council's objectives.

DETI Internal Audit undertook an external quality assessment of the Consumer Council's internal audit service in December 2014. It concluded that the internal audit service generally conforms with the PSIAS and relevant statements of good practice.

External audit

The external audit is undertaken by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. As Accounting Officer I can confirm that there were no recommendations included within the RTTCWG.

Ministerial Direction

There were no Ministerial Directions received in 2014-15.

Data Security

In relation to managing information risk, the Consumer Council recognises the importance of managing our information effectively. We have put in place controls and measures around encryption of data, removable media, laptops and data transfer. We have a dedicated Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) and continue to link in to all central (Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) or DETI) plans and reviews in relation to information and data security. There were no personal data related incidents in the year.

Governance issues identified in 2014-15

No governance issues were identified in 2014-15.

Conclusion

As Accounting Officer, I have responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control. This review is informed by the work of the internal and external auditors and their comments and recommendations. It is also informed by the managers within the Consumer Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework. I am aware of the importance of my ongoing review of the effectiveness of the systems of governance and internal controls within the Consumer Council and I will

continue to review these systems and processes to ensure continuous improvement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Leeson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Don Leeson
Accounting Officer
10 June 2015

GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

THE CERTIFICATE AND REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

I certify that I have audited the financial statements of the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland for the year ended 31 March 2015 under the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984. These comprise the Statements of Comprehensive Net Expenditure, Financial Position, Cash Flows, Changes in Taxpayers' Equity and the related notes. These financial statements have been prepared under the accounting policies set out within them. I have also audited the information in the Remuneration Report that is described in that report as having been audited.

Respective responsibilities of the Council, Chief Executive and auditor

As explained more fully in the Statement of Council and Chief Executive's Responsibilities, the Council and Chief Executive are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view. My responsibility is to audit, certify and report on the financial statements in accordance with the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984. I conducted my audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland). Those standards require me and my staff to comply with the Auditing Practices Board's Ethical Standards for Auditors.

Scope of the audit of the financial statements

An audit involves obtaining evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error. This includes an assessment of: whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland's circumstances and have been consistently applied and adequately disclosed; the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland; and the overall presentation of the financial statements. In addition I read all the financial and non-financial information in the Annual Report

to identify material inconsistencies with the audited financial statements and to identify any information that is apparently materially incorrect based on, or materially inconsistent with, the knowledge acquired by me in the course of performing the audit. If I become aware of any apparent material misstatements or inconsistencies I consider the implications for my certificate.

I am required to obtain evidence sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the expenditure and income recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by the Assembly and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

Opinion on regularity

In my opinion, in all material respects the expenditure and income recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by the Assembly and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

Opinion on financial statements

In my opinion:

- the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland's affairs as at 31 March 2015 and of the net expenditure, cash flows and changes in taxpayers' equity for the year then ended; and
- the financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment directions issued thereunder.

Opinion on other matters

In my opinion:

- the part of the Remuneration Report to be audited has been properly prepared in accordance with Department of

Enterprise, Trade and Investment directions made under the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984; and

- the information given in the Management Commentary for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements.

Matters on which I report by exception

I have nothing to report in respect of the following matters which I report to you if, in my opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept; or
- the financial statements and the part of the Remuneration Report to be audited are not in agreement with the accounting records; or
- I have not received all of the information and explanations I require for my audit; or
- the Governance Statement does not reflect compliance with Department of Finance and Personnel's guidance.

Report

I have no observations to make on these financial statements.



*KJ Donnelly
Comptroller and Auditor General
Northern Ireland Audit Office
106 University Street
Belfast
BT7 1EU*

29 June 2015

Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2015

	Note	2014-15 £	2013-14 £
Expenditure			
Staff costs	3	1,716,346	1,609,405
Work programme	4	247,227	296,144
Depreciation and amortisation	5	312,716	397,963
Other expenditures	5	441,951	461,584
		2,718,240	2,765,096
Income			
Income from activities	6	35,300	58,000
Other income	6	-	49,670
		35,300	107,670
Net Expenditure		(2,682,940)	(2,657,426)

Other Comprehensive Net Expenditure

	2014-15 £	2013-14 £
Items that will not subsequently be reclassified to net operating costs:		
Net gain on valuation of leasehold alterations	-	298,915
Total Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2015	(2,682,940)	(2,358,511)

The notes on pages 77-99 form part of the financial statements.

Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2015

		2015		2014	
	Note	£	£	£	£
Non-current assets:					
Property, plant and equipment	7	71,547		358,932	
Intangible assets	8	55,807		68,229	
Total non-current assets		127,354		427,161	
Current assets:					
Trade and other receivables	10	29,937		40,786	
Cash and cash equivalents	12	8,716		3,981	
Total current assets		38,653		44,767	
Total assets		166,007		471,928	
Current liabilities:					
Trade and other payables	13	(139,906)		(152,659)	
Total current liabilities		(139,906)		(152,659)	
Assets less liabilities		26,101		319,269	
Taxpayers' equity					
Revaluation reserve		642,103		642,103	
General reserve		(616,002)		(322,834)	
		26,101		319,269	

The financial statements on pages 73-99 were approved by the Board on 10 June 2015 and were signed on its behalf by:



Don Leeson
Accounting Officer
 10 June 2015

The notes on pages 77-99 form part of the financial statements.

Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 31 March 2015

	Note	2014-15 £	2013-14 £
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net expenditure		(2,682,940)	(2,657,426)
Adjustments for non-cash transactions:			
Depreciation	5	302,211	387,230
Amortisation	5	10,505	10,733
Loss on disposal	5	1,340	-
Decrease in trade and other receivables		10,849	4,413
Decrease in trade payables		(13,512)	(29,064)
Net cash outflow from operating activities		(2,371,547)	(2,284,114)
Cash flows from investing activities			
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	7	(13,490)	(14,882)
Purchase of intangible assets	8	(0)	(2,623)
Net cash outflow from investing activities		(13,490)	(17,505)
Cash flows from financing activities			
Government Financing (DETI, DRD and BIS)		2,389,772	2,273,231
Net financing		2,389,772	2,273,231
Net (decrease)/increase in cash and cash equivalents in the period	12	4,735	(28,388)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the period	12	3,981	32,369
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period	12	8,716	3,981

The notes on pages 77-99 form part of the financial statements.

Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity as at the year ended 31 March 2015

	General Reserve £	Revaluation Reserve £	Total Reserves £
Balance at 1 April 2013	61,361	343,188	404,549
Changes in taxpayers' equity 2013-2014			
Comprehensive expenditure for financial year	(2,657,426)	298,915	(2,358,511)
Government Financing (DETI and DRD)	2,273,231	-	2,273,231
Balance at 31 March 2014	(322,834)	642,103	319,269
Balance at 1 April 2014	(322,834)	642,103	319,269
Changes in taxpayers' equity 2014-15			
Comprehensive expenditure for financial year	(2,682,940)	-	(2,682,940)
Government Financing (DETI, DRD and BIS)	2,389,772	-	2,389,772
Balance at 31 March 2015	(616,002)	642,103	26,101

The note on pages 77-99 form part of the financial statements.

Notes forming part of the financial statements For the year ended 31 March 2015

1. Statement of accounting policies

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance the 2014-15 Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) issued by DFP. The accounting policies contained in the FReM apply International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as adapted or interpreted for the public sector context. Where the FReM permits a choice of accounting policy, the accounting policy which is judged to be most appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Consumer Council for the purpose of giving a true and fair view has been selected. The particular policies adopted by the Consumer Council are described below. They have been applied consistently in dealing with items that are considered material to the accounts.

1.1 Changes to accounting policy and disclosure

The following additional or revised accounting standards and new (or amendments to) interpretations are contained within the Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) 2014-15.

- Consolidated Financial Statements (IFRS 10)
- Joint Arrangements (IFRS 11)
- Disclosure of Interests in Other Entities (IFRS 12)
- Separate Financial Statements (IAS 27)
- Investments in Associates and Joint Ventures (IAS 28)

The Consumer Council considers that these changes are not relevant to its operations.

Accounting standards, interpretations and amendments to published standards not yet effective

The Consumer Council has reviewed the following additional or revised accounting standards and new (or amendments to) interpretations contained within the Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) 2015-16.

- Fair Value Measurement (IFRS 13)
- Defined Benefits Plan: Employee contributions (Amendments to ISA 19)
- Annual Improvement 2010-12 Cycle (IFRS 2, 3, 8, 13 and IAS 16, 38, 24)
- Annual Improvement 2011-13 Cycle (IFRS 1, 3, 13 and IAS 40)

These changes will be mandatory for accounting periods beginning on or after 1 April 2015 or later periods, but which the Consumer Council has not adopted early. The Consumer Council considers that these changes are not relevant to or will have minimal impact on its operations.

In addition, certain new standards, interpretations and amendments to existing standards have been drafted but not yet issued and will come into effect in accounting periods beginning on or after 1 April 2015. It is not practicable to provide a reasonable estimate of the effect of these standards until a detailed review has been completed.

1.2 Accounting convention

These accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention modified to account for the revaluation of leasehold alterations (prior years).

1.3 Property, plant and equipment

The Consumer Council's property, plant and equipment comprise office equipment, furniture and fittings and leasehold alterations. The assets of the Consumer Council are carried at fair value. Except for leasehold alterations, depreciated historical cost is used as a proxy for fair value for the organisation's tangible assets given their low values and short useful lives. All assets except leasehold alterations are therefore stated at cost less accumulated depreciation and any impairment losses.

The minimum level for capitalisation of an item of property, plant and equipment is £250.

Historically a valuation of the leasehold alterations was completed at 31 March and included in the accounts. However in March 2015 the lease on the current premises expired and the Consumer Council will be relocating to Seatem House, Alfred Street, Belfast. The valuations completed in previous years were based on continuing use which is no longer appropriate as occupancy will cease at the end of May. The leasehold alterations have therefore not been revalued and will be depreciated over their remaining useful life up until the end of May 2015, to leave a valuation of £nil at that date.

1.4 Intangible asset

The Consumer Council's intangible assets comprise software and software licences. The assets are carried at fair value, with depreciated historical cost being used as a proxy for fair value given the low values and short useful lives of the intangible assets. Where computer software is not an integral part of a related item of computer hardware, the software licence is treated as an intangible asset.

The minimum level for capitalisation of an item of intangible asset is £250.

1.5 Depreciation and amortisation

Depreciation is calculated to write off the original cost or revalued amount of property, plant and equipment to their expected residual values by equal annual instalments over their estimated useful lives as follows:

Alterations	over the remaining period of lease
Furniture and fittings	20% straight line
Office equipment	33 ¹ / ₃ % straight line

Amortisation is calculated to write off the original cost of intangible assets to their expected residual values by equal annual instalments over their useful lives at a rate of 10% on a straight line basis.

Depreciation and amortisation are provided from the month of addition.

1.6 Impairment review

The Consumer Council carries out an impairment review of its tangible and intangible assets when a change in circumstances or situation indicates that those assets may have suffered an impairment loss. Impairment is measured by comparing the carrying amount of an asset with the 'recoverable amount', that is the higher of its fair value less costs to sell and its 'value in use'. 'Value in use' is assumed to equal the cost of replacing the service potential provided by the asset, unless there has been a reduction in service potential. Impairments are debited to the revaluation reserve to the extent that they reverse previously recognised upward revaluations with any remaining impairment recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure.

1.7 Financial instruments

Recognition

- Financial assets and financial liabilities are recognised on the Consumer Council's Statement of Financial Position when the Consumer Council becomes party to the contractual provisions of the instrument on a trade date basis.

Financial assets

- Financial assets are classified into the following specified categories: at fair value through profit or loss ("FVTPL"); held-to-maturity investments, "available-for-sale" ("AFS") financial assets and "loans and receivables". The classification depends on the nature and purpose of the financial assets and is determined at the time of initial recognition. The Consumer Council's financial assets comprise trade and other receivables and cash and cash equivalents, and are held at cost, which approximates to fair value because of their short maturities.

Financial liabilities

- Financial liabilities of the Consumer Council, including trade and other payables, are measured at cost which approximates to fair value because of their short maturities.

1.8 Pensions

Past and present employees are covered by the provisions of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS). Employer contributions are determined following a scheme valuation carried out every four years by the Government Actuary.

Pension costs are included within staff costs in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure. For more information refer to the Remuneration Report pages 46-55 and note 3 below.

Early departure costs

The practice adopted by the Consumer Council is to provide for the full cost of early departure of employees in the year in which the early departure decision is made.

1.9 Financing from DETI, DRD and BIS

Financing represents grant-in-aid received from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI), Department for Regional Development (DRD) and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and is credited to the General Reserve.

1.10 Income from activities

Funding received from Civil Aviation Authority to contribute towards specific staff salaries.

1.11 Operating leases

Leases are classified as operating leases whenever the terms of the lease do not transfer substantially all the risks and benefits to the lessee. Rentals payable under operating leases are expensed to the net expenditure account on a straight-line basis over the lease term.

1.12 Value added tax (VAT)

The Consumer Council is not registered for VAT.

1.13 Staff costs

Under IAS 19 Employee Benefits legislation, all staff costs must be recorded as an expense as soon as the organisation is obligated to pay them. This includes the cost of any untaken leave at the year end. The cost of untaken leave has been determined using data from leave records.

1.14 Accounting estimates

No material accounting estimates or judgements were made by the Consumer Council in preparing these accounts.

1.15 Segmental reporting

FRS 8 *Operating Segments* requires disclosure of information about the Consumer Council's operating segments. Information is based on internal management reports, both in the identification of operating segments and measurement of disclosed segment information.

1.16 Going concern

In common with other NDPBs, the Consumer Council operates as a going concern. Its liabilities will be met by future Grant-in-Aid, received from and approved annually by DETI, DRD and BIS. All funding has been approved for 2015–16. Planned activities for 2015–16 have been formulated in light of the funding available to the Consumer Council.

2. Statement of Operating Costs by Operating Segment

2.1 Analysis of net expenditure by segment

2014-15

	Energy £	Water £	Postal Services £	Other Sections £	Administration incorporating Corporate Services £	Total £
Gross expenditure	553,894	408,966	255,044	556,230	944,106	2,718,240
Income*	-	-	-	35,300	-	35,300
Net expenditure	(553,894)	(408,966)	(255,044)	(520,930)	(944,106)	(2,682,940)
Total assets	-	-	-	-	166,007	166,007
Total liabilities	-	-	-	-	(139,906)	(139,906)
Net assets	-	-	-	-	26,101	26,101

2013-14

	Energy £	Water £	Other Sections £	Administration incorporating Corporate Services £	Total £
Gross expenditure	546,893	417,123	865,086	935,994	2,765,096
Income*	-	-	58,000	49,670	107,670
Net expenditure	(546,893)	(417,123)	(807,086)	(886,324)	(2,657,426)
Total assets	-	-	-	471,928	471,928
Total liabilities	-	-	-	(152,659)	(152,659)
Net assets	-	-	-	319,269	319,269

* Funding from DETI, DRD and BIS is not included within income, it is categorised as funding within the accounts.

2. Statement of Operating Costs by Operating Segment

The Consumer Council has three separate reportable sections: Energy, Water and Postal Services. Energy and Water funding is received to enable the Consumer Council to perform its legal responsibility to represent the interests of Energy and Water Consumers in Northern Ireland under the Energy (NI) Order 2003 and the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order.

With effect from 1 April 2014, following the enactment of the *Public Bodies (Abolition of the National Consumer Council and Transfer of the Office of Fair Trading's Functions in relation to Estate Agents etc) Order 2014*, responsibility for consumer representation for postal services in Northern Ireland transferred from Consumer Futures to the Consumer Council.

The other sections are made up of Money Affairs, Consumer Skills, Consumer Support, Transport and Communications. These sections are funded primarily by DETI with specific funding received from Civil Aviation Authority and deal with all other consumer issues within the Consumer Council remit.

The Consumer Council has disclosed all income and expenses in line with the Business Cases as presented to the relevant funder and the Board. The net assets of the Consumer Council are not separately identifiable on a segmental basis and have therefore been disclosed in total under the administration heading. All activities of the Consumer Council and assets held by the Consumer Council are within the UK.

The shared service allocation represents the contribution that the Energy funding makes towards the Consumer Support section and that which Energy, Water and Postal Services funding make towards all associated administration costs.

3. Staff numbers and related costs

3.1 Staff costs (including Members) comprise:

	Council Members	2014-15 Total	2013-14 Total
	£	£	£
Council Members'			
Chairperson's salary – gross	22,498	22,498	21,983
Social security costs	2,005	2,005	1,971
Members' fees	8,245	8,245	7,231
	32,748	32,748	31,185

	Permanently employed staff	Others	2014-15 Total	2013-14 Total
	£	£	£	£
Staff salaries				
Wages and salaries	1,245,878	89,996	1,335,874	1,259,701
Social security costs	95,959	6,665	102,624	97,277
Other pension costs	253,666	9,802	263,468	232,159
Intern	-	-	-	3,000
Sub Total	1,595,503	106,463	1,701,966	1,592,137
Less recoveries in respect of outward secondments	(18,368)	-	(18,368)	(13,917)
Total net costs	1,577,135	106,463	1,716,346	1,609,405

3.2 Average numbers of persons employed:

The average number of whole-time equivalent persons employed (including senior management) during the period, excluding Council Members, was as follows:

	Permanently employed staff	Fixed Term Positions	2014-15 Total	2013-14 Total
Directly employed	43	3	46	43
Contract staff	-	-	-	-
Students	-	2	2	3
Total	43	5	48	46

3.3 Pension scheme details:

The Northern Ireland Civil Service pension arrangements are unfunded multi-employer defined benefit schemes but the Consumer Council is unable to identify its share of the underlying assets and liabilities. The most up to date actuarial valuation was carried out as at 31 March 2012. This valuation is then reviewed by the Scheme Actuary and updated to reflect current conditions and rolled forward to the reporting date of the DFP Superannuation and Other Allowances Resource Accounts as at 31 March 2015.

For 2014-15, employers' contributions of £261,737 were payable to the NICS pension arrangements (2013-14: £228,811) at one of four rates in the range 18% to 25% of pensionable pay, based on salary bands. The scheme's Actuary reviews employer contributions every four years following a full scheme valuation. A new scheme funding valuation based on data as at 31 March 2012 was completed by the Actuary during 2014-15. This valuation was used to determine employer contribution rates for the introduction of a new career average earning scheme from April 2015. From 2015-16, the new rates will range from 20.8% to 26.3%. The contribution rates are set to meet the cost of the benefits accruing during 2014-15 to be paid when the member retires, and not the benefits paid during this period to existing pensioners.

Employees can opt to open a partnership pension account, a stakeholder pension with an employer contribution. Employers' contributions of £1,588 (2013-14: £2,825) were paid to one or more of the panel of three

appointed stakeholder pension providers. Employer contributions are age-related and range from 3% to 12.5% (2012-13: 3% to 12.5%) of pensionable pay. Employers also match employee contributions up to 3% of pensionable pay. In addition, employer contributions of £143, 0.8% (2013-14: £523, 0.8%) of pensionable pay, were payable to the PCSPS(NI) to cover the cost of the future provision of lump sum benefits on death in service and ill health retirement of these employees. Contributions due to the **partnership** pension providers at the reporting period date were £Nil. Contributions prepaid at that date were £Nil.

Ill-health retirement

No employees (2013-14: None) retired early on ill-health grounds; the total additional accrued pension liabilities in the year amounted to £Nil (2013-14: £Nil).

3.4 Reporting of compensation and exit packages for all staff 2014-15:

There were no compensation or exit packages made during 2014-15 (2013-14: none).

Redundancy and other departure costs are paid in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (Northern Ireland), a statutory scheme made under the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. Exit costs are accounted for in full in the year of departure. Where the Consumer Council has agreed early retirements, the additional costs are met by the Consumer Council and not by the Civil Service pension scheme. Ill-health retirement costs are met by the pension scheme.

3.5 Off-Payroll Payments

There were no off-payroll payments made during 2014-15 (2013-14: none).

4. Work programme

	2014-15	2013-14
	£	£
Core Costs	52,403	63,991
Water Services	30,020	-
Energy Regulation	20,230	-
Financial Capability and Initiatives	19,962	39,971
Household Efficiency	17,640	26,333
Launch of Postal Services	14,400	-
Mail and Parcel Deliveries	14,280	-
Post Office Network & Network Transformation Programme	11,968	-
Public Transport Reform	11,728	15,044
Increasing Consumer Skills and Confidence	11,352	-
Fuel Affordability	9,484	-
Improving Customer Care	9,249	11,925
Outreach Strategy	9,060	17,220
Water Efficiency & Billing	7,105	-
Online Shopping & Parcel Delivery	4,633	-
Passenger Rights	2,846	12,320
Flooding	867	-
Energy and Money Affairs Consumer Research	-	46,200
Website Development	-	25,860
Regulation Working Better	-	8,592
Water Issues for Business, Farms and Communities	-	7,105
Water Strategy and Regulation	-	6,520
Fuel Poverty and Energy Dependence	-	5,680
Regulation and the Cost of Energy	-	5,141
Research into the Cost of Flying	-	3,239
Insurance	-	1,003
	247,227	296,144

5. Other expenditure

	2014-15	2013-14
	£	£
Operating leases – rent and service charge	182,103	173,164
Rates	77,264	76,135
Office machinery – annual licences and maintenance	30,469	31,945
Legal and professional fees	25,223	10,489
Maintenance, repairs and cleaning	19,849	14,936
Recruitment and induction costs	15,173	1,420
Electricity	14,323	16,634
Telephone and postage	13,704	18,705
Staff and members training and development	13,599	38,786
Audit fees – internal audit	11,544	9,742
Audit fees – external audit	9,051	14,474
Print, design and stationery	7,084	10,616
Operating leases – office machinery	5,767	8,072
Project costs	4,463	6,315
Staff travel	3,973	8,242
Sundry expenses	1,495	1,280
Professional relationships and memberships	2,670	2,600
Loss on disposal	1,340	-
Library	1,267	1,052
Members' expenses	862	1,004
Hospitality, including catering	728	905
Internal consultancy	-	15,068
	441,951	461,584
Non-cash items		
Depreciation	302,211	387,230
Amortisation	10,505	10,733
	312,716	397,963
	754,667	859,547

6. Income

	2014-15	2013-14
	£	£
Income from activities		
Civil Aviation Authority	35,300	58,000
Other income		
Rent received – Consumer Futures	-	46,670
Refund – franking machine	-	3,000
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	-	49,670
Total Income	<u>35,300</u>	<u>107,670</u>

7. Property, plant and equipment

2014-15	Alterations	Furniture and fittings	Office equipment	Total
	£	£	£	£
Cost or valuation				
At 1 April 2014	1,025,977	145,452	221,797	1,393,226
Reclassification adjustment	-	-	1,265	1,265
Additions	-	407	14,852	15,259
Revaluation	-	-	-	-
Disposals	-	-	(58,525)	(58,525)
At 31 March 2015	1,025,977	145,859	179,389	1,351,225
Depreciation				
At 1 April 2014	691,299	144,038	198,957	1,034,294
Reclassification adjustment	-	-	358	358
Charged in year	286,872	660	14,679	302,211
Disposals	-	-	(57,185)	(57,185)
At 31 March 2015	978,171	144,698	156,809	1,279,678
Carrying amount				
At 31 March 2015	47,806	1,161	22,580	71,547
Carrying amount At 31 March 2014	334,678	1,414	22,840	358,932
Asset financing:				
Owned	47,806	1,161	22,580	71,547
Carrying amount at 31 March 2015	47,806	1,161	22,580	71,547

7. Property, plant and equipment (continued)

2013-14	Alterations	Furniture and fittings	Office equipment	Total
	£	£	£	£
Cost or valuation				
At 1 April 2013	727,062	145,171	207,196	1,079,429
Additions	-	281	14,601	14,882
Revaluation	298,915	-	-	298,915
Disposals	-	-	-	-
At 31 March 2014	1,025,977	145,452	221,797	1,393,226
Depreciation				
At 1 April 2013	327,768	138,583	180,713	647,064
Charged in year	363,531	5,455	18,244	387,230
Disposals	-	-	-	-
At 31 March 2014	691,299	144,038	198,957	1,034,294
Carrying amount at 31 March 2014	334,678	1,414	22,840	358,932
Carrying amount at 31 March 2013	399,294	6,588	26,483	432,365
Asset financing:				
Owned	334,678	1,414	22,840	335,932
Carrying amount at 31 March 2014	334,678	1,414	22,840	335,932

A valuation of the premises at Elizabeth House was undertaken as at 31 March 2014 and this has been included in the Accounts. The exercise was carried out by Land and Property Services (LPS), an executive Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel.

8. Intangible assets

Intangible assets comprise of software and software licences.

	Total £
Cost or valuation	
At 1 April 2014	108,949
Reclassification adjustment	(1,265)
Adjustment	(2,630)
Additions	1,620
At 31 March 2015	<u>106,674</u>
Amortisation	
At 1 April 2014	40,720
Reclassification adjustment	(358)
Charged in year	10,505
At 31 March 2015	<u>50,867</u>
Carrying amount at 31 March 2015	<u>55,807</u>
Carrying amount at 31 March 2014	<u>68,229</u>
Asset financing:	
Owned	55,807
Carrying amount at 31 March 2015	<u>55,807</u>
	Total £
Cost or valuation	
At 1 April 2013	106,326
Additions	2,623
At 31 March 2014	<u>108,949</u>
Amortisation	
At 1 April 2013	29,987
Charged in year	10,733
At 31 March 2014	<u>40,720</u>
Carrying amount at 31 March 2014	<u>68,229</u>
Carrying amount at 31 March 2013	<u>76,339</u>
Asset financing:	
Owned	68,229
Carrying amount at 31 March 2014	<u>68,229</u>

9. Financial instruments

Cash and cash equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents comprise cash at bank and in hand.

Trade and other receivables

Trade receivables do not carry any interest and are recognised and carried at the lower of their original invoiced value and recoverable amount. A bad debt provision is made when there is objective evidence that the recoverable amount is less than the original invoiced value. Balances are written off when the probability of recovery is assessed as being remote.

Trade and other payables

Trade payables are not interest bearing and are stated at their nominal value.

10. Trade receivables and other current assets

	2014-15 £	2013-14 £
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Prepayments	29,866	39,907
Sundry Receivables	71	879
	29,937	40,786

10.1 Intra-Government Balances

	2014-15 £	2013-14 £
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Balances with other central government bodies	-	-
Subtotal: intra-government balances	-	-
Balances with bodies external to government	29,937	40,786
Total receivables at 31 March 2013	29,937	40,786

11. Losses and Special Payments

11.1 Losses Statement

Write-off	2014-15	2013-14
Total number of cases	1	1
Total amount of cases	£33	£1,397

The case relates to non recoupment of employee pension contributions. The amount was paid by the Consumer Council but not reimbursed by the employee as they had since left the organisation.

12. Cash and cash equivalents

	2014-15	2013-14
	£	£
Balance at 1 April 2014	3,981	32,369
Net change in cash and cash equivalents balance	4,735	(28,388)
Balance at 31 March 2015	8,716	3,981

The entire cash and cash equivalents balance was held at a commercial bank and as cash in hand.

13. Trade payables and other current liabilities

	2014-15	2013-14
	£	£
Amounts falling due within one year		
Trade payables	27,375	1,637
Accruals and deferred income	112,531	151,022
	139,906	152,659

13.1 Intra-Government Balances

	2014-15	2013-14
	£	£
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Balances with other central government bodies	5,943	10,864
Subtotal: intra-government balances	5,943	10,864
Balances with bodies external to government	133,963	141,795
Total payables at 31 March 2015	139,906	152,659

14. Provision for liabilities and charges

There were no provisions for liabilities or charges as at the statement of financial position date (2013-14: None).

15. Capital commitments

There were no capital commitments as at the statement of financial position date (2013-14: None).

16. Commitments under leases

16.1 Operating leases

Total future minimum lease payments under operating leases are given in the table below for each of the following periods:

	2014-15	2013-14
	£	£
Obligations under operating leases comprise:		
Buildings:		
Not later than 1 year	-	181,756
Later than 1 year and not later than 5 years	-	-
Later than 5 years	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	-	181,756
Other:		
Not later than 1 year	2,099	7,321
Later than 1 year and not later than 5 years	7,127	15,650
Later than 5 years	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	9,226	22,971
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	9,226	204,727

The lease on the current premises (Elizabeth House) expired on 18 March 2015. The Consumer Council provided three months formal notice to leave these premises on 22 April 2015. The Consumer Council will be relocating to Seatem House, Alfred Street, Belfast on 1 June 2015.

16.2 Finance leases

The Consumer Council has no commitments under finance leases.

17. Contingent liability disclosed under IAS 37

Statutory Maternity

The statutory maternity pay liability in 2012-13 was calculated going back over a six year period. This was based on the Consumer Council's records retention and disposal schedule which requires maternity pay records to be retained for six years. The 2012-13 financial statements were restated to include the liability for the six year period. We wrote to HM Revenue and Customs regarding period of time for claw-back but have not received any

confirmation. On that basis no provision has been made for any liability in excess of six years.

Dilapidation charge

On 22 April 2015, three months notice of our intention to vacate the premises at Elizabeth House on 24th July 2015 was provided to the Landlord. On receipt, the Landlord is due to serve a schedule of dilapidations, usually provided one month before the vacating date. Once the schedule has been received the Consumer Council will enter negotiations to reach an agreement on the terms. As the schedule of dilapidations has not yet been received no provision has been made for any liability.

18. Related Party Transactions

The Consumer Council is a Non-Departmental Public Body funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). DETI also sponsor Invest NI, Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Health and Safety Executive.

DETI is regarded as a related party. During the year the Consumer Council had no material transactions with DETI other than the receipt of grants. During the year £2,389,772 of grant-in-aid was received via DETI, DRD and BIS (2013-14: DETI and DRD: £2,273,231).

In addition, the Consumer Council has had a small number of transactions with other government departments.

The Consumer Council works with many public and private sector organisations including companies in which Board Members of the Consumer Council have a beneficial interest. There were no transactions during the year with such companies.

19. Transfers

Postal Services to the Consumer Council 2014-15

The transfer of responsibility for consumer representation for postal services in Northern Ireland has been accounted for by absorption accounting in line with the International Financial Reporting Standards 3, Business Combinations, as outline in FReM.

Two Consumer Futures staff transferred to the Consumer Council on 1 April 2014. The Transfer Scheme (made by the Secretary of State under section 23 of the Public Bodies Act 2011) preserved the employment rights of the staff who transferred: they retained all the benefits of their contracts of employment as if those contracts had originally been made between them and the Consumer Council.

There were a small number of fixed assets transferred, all of which fell under the capitalisation threshold of the Consumer Council and have not been included in fixed assets. The items related to office equipment including IT equipment. The assets transferred at a zero net book value.

20. Events after the Reporting Period

There were no other events requiring disclosure between the statement of financial position date and the date the accounts were signed.

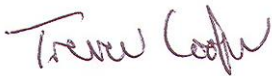
Date of authorisation for issue

The Accounting Officer authorised the issue of these financial statements on 29 June 2015.

GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

ACCOUNTS DIRECTION GIVEN BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT (DETI), WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL (DFP), IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARAGRAPH 12 (4) OF SCHEDULE 1 TO THE GENERAL CONSUMER COUNCIL (NI) ORDER 1984

- 1 This direction applies to the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (GCCNI).
- 2 GCCNI shall prepare accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2015 and subsequent financial years in compliance with the accounting principles and disclosure requirements of the edition of the Government Financial Reporting Manual issued by HM Treasury ("the FReM") which is in force for the financial year for which the accounts are being prepared, together with any additional disclosure or other requirements as agreed with the department.
- 3 The accounts shall be prepared so as to:
 - (a) give a true and fair view of the state of affairs at 31 March 2015 and subsequent financial year-ends, and of the income and expenditure, changes in tax payer's equity and cash flows for the financial year then ended; and
 - (b) provide disclosure of any material expenditure or income that has not been applied for the purposes intended by the Northern Ireland Assembly or material transactions that have not conformed to the authorities which govern them.
- 4 Compliance with the requirements of the FReM will, in all but exceptional circumstances, be necessary for the accounts to give a true and fair view. If, in these exceptional circumstances, compliance with the requirements of the FReM is inconsistent with the requirement to give a true and fair view, the requirements of the FReM should be departed from only to the extent necessary to give a true and fair view. In such cases, informed and unbiased judgement should be used to devise an appropriate alternative treatment which should be consistent with both the economic characteristics of the circumstances concerned and the spirit of the FReM. Any material departure from the FReM should be discussed with DETI and DFP.
- 5 This direction supersedes the direction dated issued on 19 February 2014.



TREVOR COOPER
Head of Finance Division
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

24 March 2015

