

Annual Report and Accounts 2013–2014



The Consumer Council





The Consumer Council

The General Consumer Council for
Northern Ireland
Annual Report and Accounts
For the year ended 31 March 2014

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

The Consumer Council is pleased to present its Annual Report and Accounts for 2013–14, which has been one of our busiest and most successful years to date. Our achievements are all the more remarkable when set against a difficult background for consumers who continue to be concerned about their ability to cope. As you will see from the achievements documented in this Annual Report, we have continued to focus on consumer needs and outperformed on many of our objectives.

Reflecting on the past year it is hard not to feel consumers could be left a little confused. Despite commentary regarding the ‘green shoots’ of economic recovery it is clear many consumers are not yet feeling this with consumer confidence continuing to lag somewhat behind.

Consumers welcome a more positive view of the economy but believe it will be some time before this is translated to their pocket, household budget or to prices on the high street. Almost half of consumers continue to be worried about their ability to make ends meet and even more (56 per cent) are worried about their ability to make ends meet in the future.

Therefore it is no surprise that the cost of living and supporting consumers to become better informed of their rights and responsibilities are two key pillars that underpinned all of our work in the last year. Confident and optimistic consumers knowledgeable about their rights are essential to driving Northern Ireland forward as a region and competitive economy. As consumer spending accounts for 60 per cent of GDP it is essential consumers and businesses are confident of their rights, know how to express them and who to turn to for help.

An increasing number of consumers have turned to the Consumer Council for help. We have achieved considerable successes for individual consumers, as well as

small and large businesses. This has ranged from an explanation and apology when things have gone wrong, remedial work, policy changes and financial redress. In the last year we assisted almost 5,000 consumers, including dealing with around 3,500 enquiries and complaints. In doing so, we achieved a total financial redress of almost £½ million – the highest in our 30 year history. Dealing with consumer issues, enquiries and complaints provides a powerful source of intelligence to spot trends and issues for consumers. It also supports our work with businesses to help them learn and improve how they meet customer expectations which helps their performance and competitiveness.

Staying close to consumers means we are able to identify and respond to emerging issues and trends. Over the past year we have undertaken over 150 consumer panels and outreach events across all areas of Northern Ireland. The focus of all our work is based on conversations and engagement with consumers and involving them in our everyday work. This gives us the direction, intelligence and evidence to make the consumer voice heard and make it count.

In the last year we have placed a stronger emphasis on partnership working and engaging with business, with a strong recognition that businesses are consumers too. Many of the 'big wins' we achieved for consumers in the last year were actually for business consumers themselves. We hope to build on the successes we achieved in 2013–14 to secure even greater levels of redress and through this further increase levels of consumer and business awareness of their rights.

Whether it is being the only consumer organisation to present to the Competition Commission enquiry into the NIE Price Control, working in partnership with the Utility Regulator to protect and empower consumers through the European Directive of IME3 or securing improvements to Translinks Passenger Charter, representing consumers across a range of interests continues to be our key priority. We continued to identify gaps in daily banking services; as a result we updated our Personal Current Account Manifesto to recommend improvements to banking products and services.

We ensured consumers' priorities were included in NI Water's plans for 2015-2021 as well as securing our biggest ever complaint result on behalf of Altnagelvin Hospital, a result with benefits for all hospitals in Northern Ireland.


In the year ahead there is still much to be done to protect and strengthen the rights of consumers, particularly the most vulnerable in our society. Keeping the concerns and needs of consumers at the centre of all we do will remain our focus – this has always been the case and will remain so as we continue to work through the current Ministerial Review into consumer representation arrangements in Northern Ireland.

We look forward to further developing our new role to represent consumers in postal services. Additionally this year will be a key time to influence and shape a number of important changes to consumer legislation especially in terms of the Consumer Rights Bill and Alternative Dispute Resolution.

There is much to do within the current economic climate to support both individual and business consumers. Our Business Plan for 2014-15 presents an ambitious work programme to support all consumers but it cannot be delivered in isolation. The Consumer Council commits itself to building engagement and partnership across all sectors to support consumers and increase its outreach to further build relationships with consumers and stakeholders. As ever the Consumer Council will remain focused on our statutory remit to represent and safeguard all consumers, making the consumer voice heard and making it count.



Richard Hill
Chairman



Aodhan O'Donnell
Accounting Officer

Chairperson and Chief Executive

The Chair of the Consumer Council throughout 2013–14 was Richard Hill MBE. The Chief Executive and Accounting Officer post has been filled on an interim basis since August 2013 by Aodhan O'Donnell, pending the outcome of an organisational review of the Consumer Council by the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). Prior to this, Antoinette McKeown was the Chief Executive.

Further information on the structure of the Consumer Council and governance arrangements are set out on pages 56 to 67.



Richard Hill
Chairman



Aodhan O'Donnell
Accounting Officer

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. 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, water, transport, food and, from April 2014, postal services.

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 main other legislation underpinning the work of the Consumer Council in specific markets are: the *Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996*, which gives new responsibilities to represent consumers of natural gas; the *Energy*

(Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which gives additional powers and representation responsibilities for electricity consumers; 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 super-complaints, which means that it can refer any consumer affairs goods and services issue to the Competition and Markets Authority (formerly the Office of Fair Trading), where we feel that the market may be harming consumers' best interests. In December 2013 the Consumer Council was awarded 'super-complainant' status for financial services, and now has additional powers to bring super-complaints on financial matters to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).



Aodhan O'Donnell,
Interim CEO and
Kellin McCloskey,
Head of Postal Services
with Chris Lyttle MLA



Vision, Mission and Values

The overarching reason for 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.

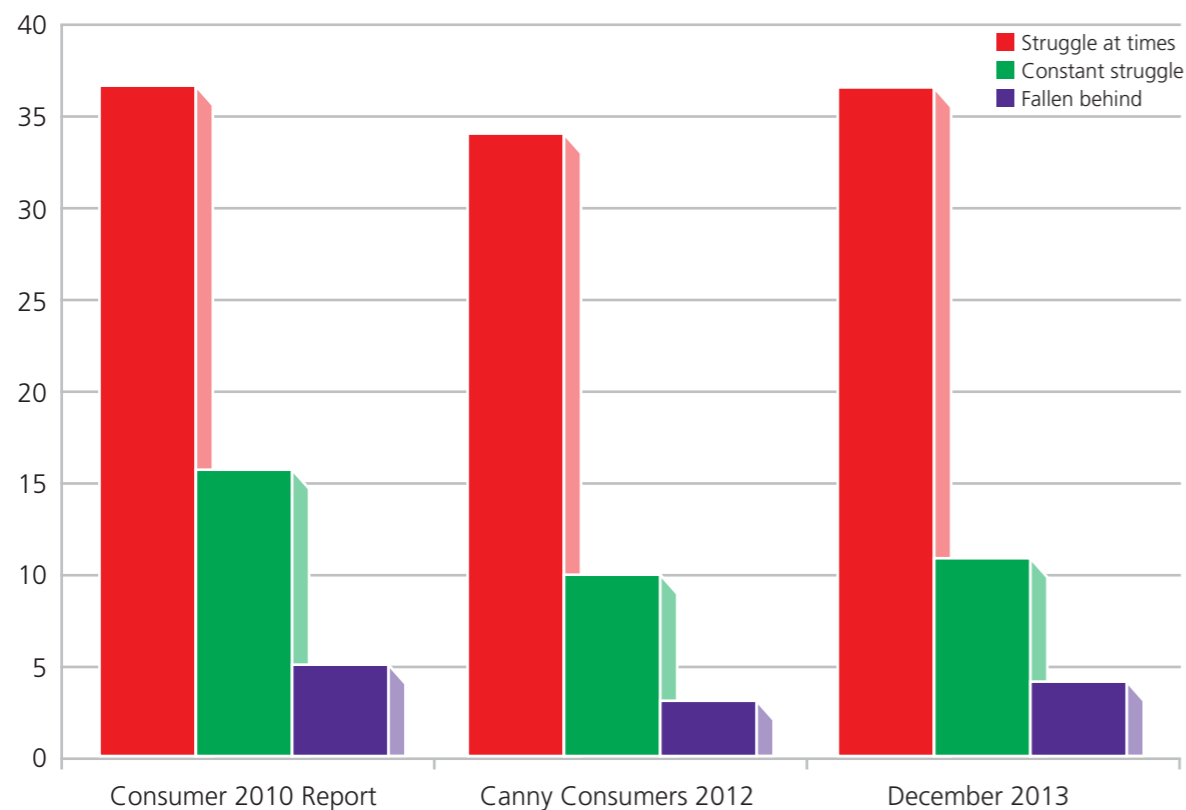
In seeking to achieve our vision and mission, the following core values underpin the way in which we work:

- 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

The consumer context in Northern Ireland remains difficult. With the economic outlook becoming more positive the Consumer Council undertook research in December 2013 to gain an insight into consumers' views. Although the Northern Ireland economy is set to grow at its fastest rate since 2007 households continue to struggle. While benefits may be being felt in the general economy there is a lag before consumers see this translated to their pocket, household budget or to prices on the high street. Poorer households have been hardest hit by the higher food and energy prices and in Northern Ireland are £1,000 worse off a year than they were 10 years ago (Economic Outlook, published by PwC in March 2014).

The Consumer Council found that half of consumers surveyed are worried about making ends meet now and more are worried about the future. Furthermore, this has been the trend over the last few years as the graph below shows.



Overall consumers' biggest worry is energy costs, with over 80 per cent expressing concern. This is not surprising considering since 2009 the costs of heating oil and electricity have both risen by over 60 per cent, and the cost of natural gas by almost 40 per cent. The average overall annual household energy bill in Northern Ireland is around £2,300, compared to around £1,445 in Great Britain. This difference is largely explained by the reliance of around 70 per cent of Northern Ireland homes on home heating oil, whereas in Great Britain most homes use the comparatively cheaper natural gas.

Food prices rose by a third between 2007 and 2013, so it is perhaps unsurprising that food costs are the second biggest spending concern among consumers.

Within this overall context, there are some important demographic differences. For example, consumers in the North West are most concerned about their ability to make ends meet. Consumers aged 35–54 are particularly worried about their ability to make ends meet now, in the future and are more worried about the cost of food compared to any other age grouping. This has shifted since 2010 when the Consumer Council conducted similar research, which found consumers aged 25–34 years were the most concerned about making ends meet. Older people cited energy bills as their number one concern (over two thirds) and energy bills were more of a top concern for rural consumers than for those living in urban areas.

Despite these concerns about rising prices and their ability to make ends meet, there is action that consumers can take themselves to secure the best value for their money. This is important not only for individual consumers, but for the key role that consumers play in helping to strengthen the economy and build growth. At a European level consumer spending accounts for 56 per cent of EU Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is therefore essential that consumer rights are not only protected, but that consumers are informed, confident and supported to make the best choices.

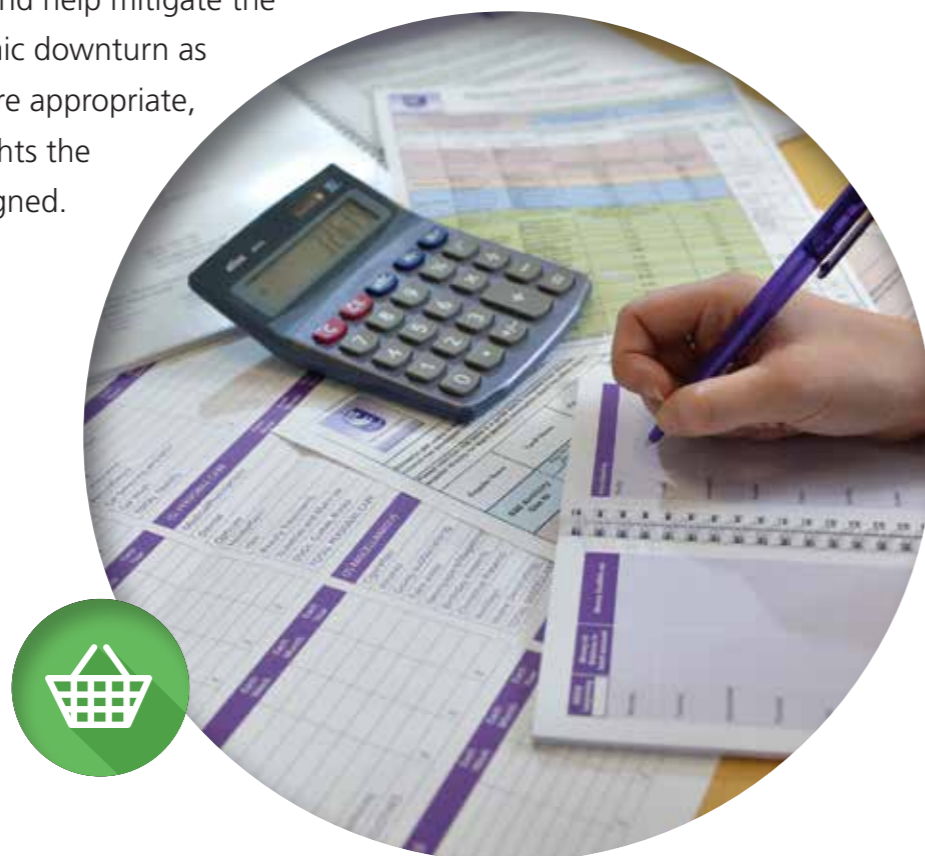
About two thirds of consumers have changed their purchasing behaviour as a result of the economic downturn with the vast majority of these (9 in 10) saying they now make a greater effort to compare prices before they buy. However, with consumers being so price driven, it appears other pre-purchase activities, that have the potential to save consumers money if things go wrong, are being overlooked. For example,

very few consumers check previous customer feedback, returns/refund policies or the terms and conditions (11 per cent and six per cent respectively).

Significant consumer legislation, emanating from Europe, is expected to be implemented in the next two years. The Consumer Rights Directive, when enacted will simplify and clarify rights and responsibilities, which hopefully will aid consumer confidence and make it easier for consumers to understand and assert their rights. The Alternative Dispute Resolution Directive aims to provide easier means of redress for consumers.

Achievement of Aims and Objectives in 2013–14

The Consumer Council's Corporate Plan for 2011–15 identifies four core aims, against which annual objectives and targets are set. Aligned to the core aims of our Corporate Plan, two key pillars focusing on the **Cost of Living** and **Consumer proficiency/rights** have been developed to strengthen, inform and prioritise our work for consumers and help mitigate the impact of the economic downturn as outlined above. Where appropriate, each objective highlights the pillar to which it is aligned.



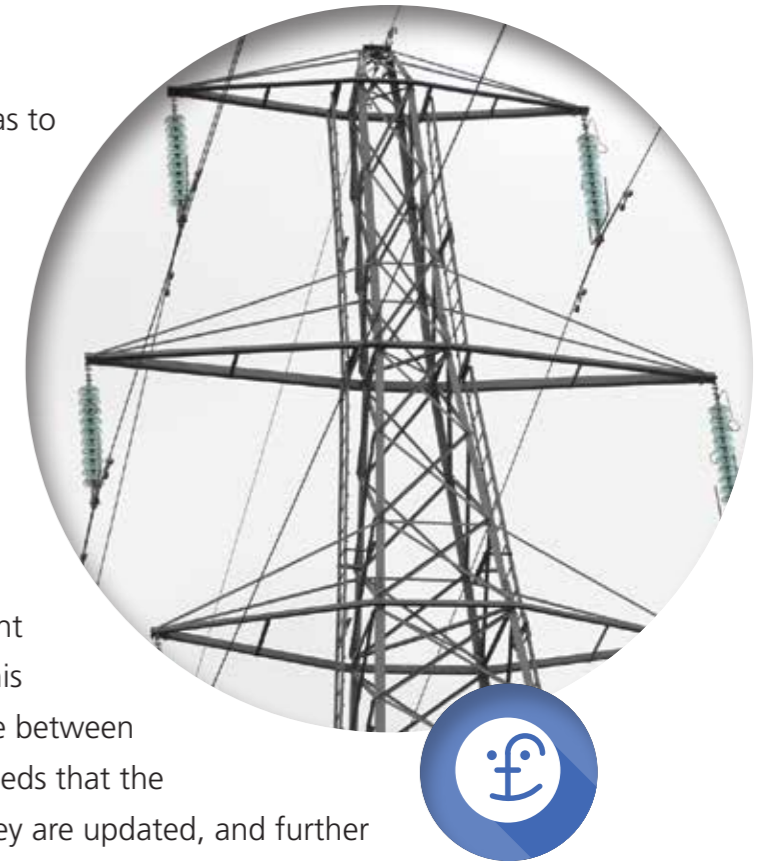
The Consumer Council's achievement of corporate performance indicators is summarised under each core aim below.

Championing & Protecting Consumers		
Objective	Measures	Outcome
1. Consumer Service and Redress – to deliver and promote effective and timely consumer service and redress. Consumer Proficiency / Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased consumer satisfaction level when compared to 2012–13 (97.7 per cent). 10 per cent increase in Customer/Critical Care Register uptake. Increased contacts from areas in our Outreach Strategy as being below average. 	Partly achieved <i>The customer satisfaction level remained at over 97 per cent</i> Achieved Achieved
2. Fuel Poverty and Energy Dependence – delivering a positive impact on the number of consumers in fuel poverty. Cost of Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three key consumer recommendations implemented from Energy Efficiency Report by March 2014. Three key strategic objectives from Lord Whitty Report addressed / implemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home Heating Oil Affordability and FP Energy Efficiency. 	Partly achieved <i>Two recommendations implemented – work on a third recommendation has been delayed by external factors</i> Achieved
3. Insurance – to influence and support the delivery of affordable insurance for all consumers. Cost of Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of positive policy/practice changes from Government Departments and insurance industry. Identification of opportunities to support consumers in the management of flood risk. 	Achieved Achieved

Objective	Measures	Outcome
<p>4. Water issues for business, farms and communities – to identify water “hot spots”, support accurate billing and increase efficiency.</p> <p><i>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 Water Champions identified by March 2014. • Identification of three localised water issues with recommendations. • Provide localised briefings to five District Councils by March 2014. 	<p>Partly achieved <i>16 Water Champions identified</i></p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p>
<p>5. Energy and Money Affairs Consumer Research – to undertake research to inform policy development on a range of consumer issues.</p> <p><i>Cost of Living</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote consumer views with government, regulators and industry to deliver changes in the car insurance. • Present consumer research to Regulators and Government on key policy areas including Gas to the West and renewable energy. • Identify the extent and financial impact of self-disconnection on consumers. 	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Partly achieved <i>Research on renewable energy completed, although analysis and use has been delayed until 2014-15</i></p> <p>Partly achieved <i>Research on self-disconnection completed, although analysis has been delayed until 2014-15</i></p>

The **Consumer Support Service** experienced its busiest year to date, dealing with almost 3,500 enquiries and complaints by consumers in respect of energy, transport and water services (an increase of 25 per cent on 2012-13). Furthermore we secured almost £1½ million in redress for consumers, up almost 60 per cent on the previous year. We also maintained, but were unable to improve on, last year’s high levels of customer satisfaction with our service, at over 97 per cent.

A key focus of activity during the year was to work with energy and water suppliers to promote awareness among consumers of Customer and Critical Care Registers. These registers help ensure that enhanced services can be targeted by suppliers for vulnerable consumers who are most in need of additional support. The registers for five of the eight energy and water suppliers increased, with the average increase being around 20 per cent of the size of their registers. However, this work identified inconsistencies in practice between suppliers in terms of the nature of the needs that the registers cater for and how frequently they are updated, and further work in this area will be undertaken during 2014-15.



The Consumer Council was active in seeking to address fuel **poverty** during the year. We published a research report on Energy Efficiency in January 2014, with an action plan and undertook an extensive education programme to promote awareness of energy efficiency and ‘switching’ suppliers to save money. However, planned research on the Energy Efficiency Obligation was delayed pending the publication of the draft Energy Order by DETI, which is not now expected until late 2014.

While a significant number of the recommendations contained in Lord Whitty’s *Energising Northern Ireland* report, published in 2012, were specific to energy companies and government departments, the Consumer Council has maintained its role in continuing to progress many of the actions outlined in the report through its own Forward Work Programmes and partnership arrangements with external stakeholders.

Work continued throughout the year to influence and support the delivery of affordable car, travel and flood insurance for all consumers. Promoting consumer views to government, regulators and the industry in respect of motor insurance

continued to be a key focus in 2013–14. The Consumer Council’s fact sheet on cross border travel insurance was updated in the latest edition of *Plane Facts*. The Consumer Council has also become a member of the Regional Community Resilience Group to develop community level flood resilience measures, which will be piloted across 10 communities in 2014–15.



William Hay MLA Accepts The Consumer Council Water Champion Award From Aodhan O'Donnell Interim CEO



Good progress was made in taking forward work in dealing with **water** issues for businesses, farms and communities. The Consumer Council helped resolve local issues with five Health and Social Care Trusts. We also engaged extensively across the local government on a number of issues including providing briefing on the Consumer Council’s role in respect of water and key issues to most district councils.

‘Water Champion’ is a recognition awarded to businesses, farms and schools for their activities to improve water efficiency and save money on bills. At the year end 16 Water Champions had been recognised, compared to five at the start of the year, although this fell just short of our ambitious target.

Research conducted by the Consumer Council in Dungannon regarding prospective gas uptake and awareness informed our response to the Utility Regulator’s ‘Gas to the West’ consultation, which was submitted in May 2013. The Consumer Council also completed research in 2013–14 to understand the views of consumers in respect of renewable energy and identify the extent of self-disconnection by consumers. However, delays in commissioning this research meant that the analysis and use of it to inform key consumer policy debates has been delayed until 2014–15.

Informing and Empowering Consumers

Objective	Measures	Outcome
6. Financial Capability – to work in partnership to deliver a financial capability strategy which delivers for consumers. Cost of Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions arising from Financial Capability Strategy - shaped and agreed by March 2014. • FCP Action Plan developed by June 2013. • Secured further commitments and improvements from banks through the Personal Current Account Manifesto. 	Achieved Achieved Achieved
7. Household Efficiency – to better support households in getting the best deal. Cost of Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of Living information accessed in 2013/14 by a greater number of consumers when base lined against 2012/13 figures. • Implementation of two key recommendations from 2012 food research project, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pricing Policy and Promotions • Special Offers • Deliver five Train the Trainer events to cascade information and resources to frontline workers which help consumers make household efficiencies and become more aware of the Consumer Council’s complaints role. 	Achieved Partly achieved <i>One recommendation implemented – work on the other recommendation (special offers) has progressed, although research in respect of this has been delayed until 2014-15</i> Achieved

Objective	Measures	Outcome
<p>8. Outreach Strategy – to reach out to consumers who need the Consumer Council support, with a focus on hard to reach consumers.</p> <p>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased contacts from those areas in which the Outreach Strategy has focused activity – aim for five per cent increase in contacts per area targeted. Increased numbers of followers on Twitter / Facebook – aim for 10 per cent increases. To baseline levels of outreach with priority and harder to reach groups. Increased level of education resource requests when compared to 2012/13 (baseline of 173 requests in 2012/13, aiming for 5 per cent increase). 	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p>
<p>9. Postal Service Representation – To ensure a streamlined transfer of functions and powers from CFPNI to the Consumer Council to deliver and best represent NI consumers.</p> <p>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NI Consumers having (as a minimum) access to equitable level of representation with effect from 1 April 2014 or when legislation requires it. 	<p>Achieved</p>



Money Week 'Penny for your Thoughts' event



The Consumer Council continued to lead the consortium of stakeholders involved in the Financial Capability Partnership and work with DETI to help shape the **Financial Capability Strategy for Northern Ireland**,

which is due to be finalised by the Department later in 2014. A forward work

programme was agreed with the Financial Capability

Partnership, which included the delivery of 'Money Week' held in

Newry and Mourne in November 2013. The Consumer Council also

published an updated Personal Current Account Manifesto, which was

circulated to all local banks. We also gave evidence to the Northern Ireland

Affairs Committee Inquiry into banking in September 2013.

The Consumer Council undertook a range of activities to support households get the best deal in a number of important markets. We developed a programme called 'Power to the Pocket' to train advice workers and others to cascade information and resources to consumers on matters such as 'switching' and energy and water efficiency. Five well attended workshops were delivered across Northern Ireland and evaluation of these showed that they were very positively received.

As a result of these workshops and extensive outreach work during the year, interest in **cost of living** information published on the Consumer Council's website increased by almost 60 per cent. Interest in energy price information, which we know is a key concern of consumers, quadrupled during the year.

Work on two key recommendations from the Consumer Council's Hard to Stomach report, published in 2012-13, on food prices were progressed during the year. We assessed the impact of food prices on consumers through cost of living research and work is progressing with the Food Standards Agency on the second recommendation in respect of research on the balance of special offers in local

supermarkets. While initial briefing meetings have been held with retailers, delays in commissioning the research means that it will not now take place until later in 2014.

2013–14 saw increased emphasis on the Consumer Council’s outreach work. As part of our **Outreach Strategy** we focus outreach activity in areas where contacts from consumers to the Consumer Council are lowest. This included almost 40 activities with groups of vulnerable consumers and over 40 other direct contact events with consumers (for example, hosting information stands in shopping centres, transport hubs and agricultural shows). The objective of securing a five per cent increase in contacts in each of the five targeted areas was achieved. We increased the Consumer Council’s social media followers by 30 per cent and more than doubled the number of downloads/requests for our educational resources.



On 1 April 2014 responsibility for consumer representation in respect of **postal services** transferred from Consumer Futures to the Consumer Council. As part of this the Consumer Council worked extensively with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Consumer Futures, and Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland to support the transition of this important function for Northern Ireland consumers, including advising on the legislation, facilitating the transfer of staff and resources and developing and consulting on a forward work plan for postal services’ work for the year ahead.

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

Objective	Measures	Outcome
<p>10. Public Transport Reform – to ensure that consumer needs are best represented in the changing environment of public transport.</p> <p><i>Cost of Living</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased focus on customer service targets from 2012–13 position. Three key consumer recommendations from the Consumer Council research implemented to improve service delivery. 	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p>
<p>11. Regulation Working for Consumers – to ensure that regulation represents consumer interests.</p> <p><i>Cost of Living</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence base of where regulation is supporting / failing consumers. Delivery of priority actions identified by the Regulation Working for Consumers research. Consumer protection increased across the 68 per cent of NI Households who use Home Heating Oil. 	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Partly achieved</p> <p><i>The research published in January 2014, later than anticipated, has delayed implementation of key actions until 2014–15</i></p> <p>Achieved</p>
<p>12. Regulation and Cost of Energy – influence regulatory and provider practice, controls and policy to protect all consumers.</p> <p><i>Cost of Living</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased levels of protection for consumers in gas and electricity IME3 Codes of Practice as a result of the Consumer Council contribution to the development of the Codes. 	<p>Achieved</p>

Objective	Measures	Outcome
<p>13. Water Strategy and Regulation – to place the consumer at the centre of the development of the Long Term Water Strategy (LTWS) and Price Control 15.</p> <p><i>Cost of Living</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A final NI Water business plan clearly informed by consumer views. • Benchmark data on consumer needs regarding water, sewerage and customer services by March 2014. • Consumer priorities included in draft LTWS. 	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p>
<p>14. EU Impacts – influence EU policy development to better represent the interests of NI consumers across 2013/14 and beyond.</p> <p><i>Consumer Proficiency / Rights</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure specific NI consumer issues are represented in the development / review of at least three key EU Regulations / Directives, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Slots Allocation • IME3 • Consumer Rights Directive. • Co-ordinate with other EU consumer bodies to influence the EU and relevant UK member state bodies on at least three key consumer issues, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative Dispute Resolution / Online Dispute Resolution • EU 261 • Payment Services Directive. 	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p>

The Consumer Council worked extensively with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and Translink during the year on a range of activities to ensure that consumer needs are represented in the changing environment of **public transport**. The text for Translink’s Passenger Charter was agreed and

is due to be published later in 2014 in plain language. Furthermore, a number of recommendations made by the Consumer Council following research into passengers’ needs to improve service delivery have been accepted in a number of areas and are being progressed, including passenger information provision,



assessing consumers’ travel needs and monitoring punctuality.

Publication of a report on research commissioned by the Consumer Council into **‘Regulation Working for Consumers’**, which provides the evidence base of where regulation is supporting or failing consumers, was published in early 2014. However, this was later than we had planned as discussions were

needed with stakeholders on some aspects of the findings. The delay in publishing the report has impacted on the implementation of the report’s key recommendations, which will now be progressed in 2014–15.

A new enhanced joint Consumer Council and Northern Ireland Oil Federation Customer Charter, which increases protection for consumers, was published in December 2013. The Consumer Council also conducted research into consumers’ views, needs and experiences of **home heating oil**. The research examines satisfaction levels with customer service, complaints, pricing, affordability, payment methods, servicing, boiler safety and efficiency. The findings are due to be published later in 2014.

The Consumer Council represented consumers extensively in price controls for regulated **gas** and **electricity** completed with full input from the Consumer Council.

We also provided oral and written evidence to the Competition Commission to inform its provisional determination on the RP5 price control in respect of Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) with significant successes for consumers. Furthermore, the Consumer Council worked closely with the Utility Regulator to contribute significantly to develop Codes of Practice to support the implementation of Regulations in respect of the opening up of the domestic electricity market, known as IME3.

Consumer research in respect of the PC15 price control for **NI Water**, covering the six year period from 2015 to 2021, informed the Ministerial Social and Environmental Guidance and NI Water’s business plan. A summary report was published by the Consumer Council in April 2014.

Public consultation on DRD’s **Long Term Water Strategy** has been delayed, which in turn impacted on the Consumer Council’s planned work with consumers to inform this consultation. However, early drafts of the strategy indicate that it has been influenced by the Consumer Council’s research and will contain consumer priorities.

Recognising the important role that the **European Union** plays in many areas impacting on consumers in Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council works extensively to seek to influence policy development at the EU level. Our work during 2013–14 included, continuing to monitor the EU legislative observatory in anticipation of the next stage of the process in relation to EU slot allocation, representing consumer views at every stage of the IME3 implementation process, and maintaining a watching brief on legislation to implement the Consumer Rights Directive as it passes through Westminster. We also briefed Northern Ireland Assembly Members and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the Consumer Rights Bill prior to the legislative consent motion being approved by the Assembly. The legislation is due to be enacted by June 2014.

The Consumer Council continued to work with the North/South Consumer Organisations’ Working Group to share information and develop positions on financial services and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Directive. The Consumer Council briefing on review of EU Regulations 261/2004, which deals with flight

delays and cancellations, was sent to all TRAN Committee (Committee on Transport and Tourism) members ahead of a vote on 17 December 2013. Early indications are that a significant amendment to reduced proposed timescales for entitlement to compensation has been accepted at this stage of the proceedings.

Ensuring the Consumer Council is Fit for Purpose and Delivering Value for Money		
Objective	Measures	Outcome
15. HR Strategy – to implement the HR Strategy 2011-15 to support the effective and efficient delivery of the consumer focused corporate objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Sickness Absence below NICS Target four per cent. Two per cent staff time investment in learning and development. Increase in staff satisfaction survey based on 2013 survey. Achievement of liP Gold status by March 2014. 	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Not achieved <i>Investors in People Silver and Health and Wellbeing Awards retained</i></p>
16. Governance and accountability – continue to measure and deliver value for money and probity across all work activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual budget spend to agreed target and as a maximum not exceeding one per cent underspend. A minimum of satisfactory assurance ratings in all internal audits in 2013–14. Annual report and accounts laid by first week in July 2013. At least 90 per cent of creditors paid within 10 working days. 	<p>Achieved Excluding the non cash budget</p> <p>Achieved</p> <p>Partly achieved <i>Annual report and accounts certified without qualification and laid in November 2013</i></p> <p>Achieved</p>

In light of the ongoing review of the Consumer Council, a particular priority was placed during the year on **human resource management** issues to ensure that staff were supported effectively during a time of considerable uncertainty. This included the development and implementation of an action plan to address issues that arose from the Staff Survey, which was carried out in early 2013. A range of key indicators showed that this was successful, including maintained low levels of absence, investment in learning and development and retaining the Investors in People Silver award, following assessment in February 2014. A quarterly survey to inform an 'employee engagement index' was developed towards the end of 2013. This uses questions from the Staff Survey 2013 to seek views on key issues affecting staff morale – two quarterly surveys have been conducted to date and have confirmed a 10 per cent increase in the index since January 2013.

In terms of **finance and governance**, the Consumer Council spent 100 per cent of its agreed budget and 95 per cent of creditors were paid within 10 working days. We also achieved an overall internal audit assurance rating of 'satisfactory'. Furthermore information on our performance in these areas is described in the relevant sections below. Unfortunately in relation to the laying of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2012–13, while submitted to DETI on time, they were then delayed because of matters outside of the Consumer Council's control.

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 agreed with DETI – a revised version of this document was agreed in August 2013.

The Consumer Council's financial statements for 2013–14 (pages 74 -101) 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 102).

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 2013–14 (available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-financial-reporting-manual-2013-to-2014>).

The Consumer Council's operational expenditure for the financial year was £2,765,096 (2012–13: £2,644,089).

Significant reductions in expenditure were in the following areas:

- £57,005 reduction in salaries due to the net movement in staff joining and leaving.
- £11,517 reduction in premises service charge.



Significant increases in expenditure were in the following areas:

- £15,068 spent on internal consultancy. £11,100 in relation to our lease renewal and £3,968 for staff development.
- £9,117 increase in staff and members training and development due to additional courses completed during the year in relation to regulatory affairs and payroll.
- £5,456 increase in legal and professional fees due mainly to liP assessment and increase in legal fees in the year.
- £5,448 increase in external audit fees for 2012-13 accounts due to additional work carried out in relation to leasehold alterations, going concern and re-certification.

Government financing for the year was £2,273,231 (2012-13: £2,479,328). This comprised:

- £1,392,000 from DETI for 'core' activities (2012-13: £1,577,000).
- £403,614 from DETI for a proportion of its energy responsibilities by way of an industry levy (2012-13: £369,622).
- £415,541 from Department for Regional Development (DRD) for its responsibilities in respect of water and sewerage services (2012-13: £470,630).
- £62,076 from DRD for work in respect of public transport (2012-13: £62,076).

Income for the year was £107,670 (2012-13: £141,924). This comprised:

- £58,000 from the Civil Aviation Authority for work in respect of air travel (2012-13: £96,589).
- £46,670 from Consumer Futures in rental income (2012-13: £42,809).
- £3,000 refund due to negotiation and renewal of franking machine contract.

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 and DRD. All funding, with the exception of DETI Energy, has been approved for 2014-15. Half of the Energy funding is to be received in June and the remainder will be received in due course upon approval of the business case.

A review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Consumer Council, which had been commissioned by DETI in 2012, was completed in mid-2013. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, having considered the review, took the view that a public consultation should be undertaken to inform the final decision-making on this matter. This consultation took place between October and January 2014. The Minister announced on 9 June 2014, following the public consultation exercise that the Consumer Council would be retained as a non-departmental public body within DETI.

Staffing

The staff of the Consumer Council as at 31 March 2014, analysed by Northern Ireland Civil Service grade and gender, was as follows (comparative figures for 31 March 2013 are shown in brackets):

Grade	Male	Female	Total
Grade 5	1 (0)	0 (1)	1 (1)
Grade 6	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Grade 7	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (2)
Deputy Principal	2 (2)	6 (8)	8 (10)
Staff Officer	5 (6)	8 (8)	13 (14)
Executive Officer 1	3 (2)	5 (4)	8 (6)
Executive Officer 2	1 (1)	5 (6)	6 (7)
Admin Officer	1 (1)	3 (2)	4 (3)
Admin Assistant	0 (0)	2 (2)	2 (2)
Total	14 (13)	30 (32)	44 (45)

Staff development and involvement

The Consumer Council is committed to the development and involvement of employees in decision making processes. Staff opinions and views are sought as part of planning processes, such as corporate planning and annual business planning and staff are encouraged to participate in working groups for work programme or corporate projects.

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 deliver overall section and corporate objectives.

The Consumer Council meets the Investors in People Silver Standard and holds the Investors in People Health and Wellbeing Good Practice Award, both of which were re-confirmed following assessment in February 2014.

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 was established during 2013–14.

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 2013–14 was 2.7 per cent (2012–13: 1.9 per cent). This figure reduces to 1.8 per cent when adjusted for staff on long term sickness absence over 19 days (2012–13: 1.4 per cent). This compares to the overall 2012-13 benchmark of 4.9 per cent for the Northern Ireland Civil Service, 2013-14 figures 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 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.

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

Key corporate risks identified and managed in 2013–14 related to:

- Inadequate or weak internal controls/governance framework resulting in a breach of the Council's Management Statement and Financial Memorandum with DETI.
- Year end overspend/underspend and/or qualification resulting from ineffective use and management of financial resources, or from external factors.
- Inability to secure funding (at the appropriate level) resulting in the Consumer Council not being able to deliver its business objectives.
- Failure to recruit and/or retain appropriately skilled staff resulting in the Consumer Council not being able to deliver its business objectives and impacting on the reputation of the organisation.
- Provision of poor information or advice resulting in failure to achieve the Consumer Council's policy positions and/or causing reputational damage.
- External influences/factors damaging the reputation of the Consumer Council and resulting in the Council not being able to deliver its business objectives.

The Consumer Council's governance arrangements are described in more detail in the Governance Statement on pages 60 to 70.

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.

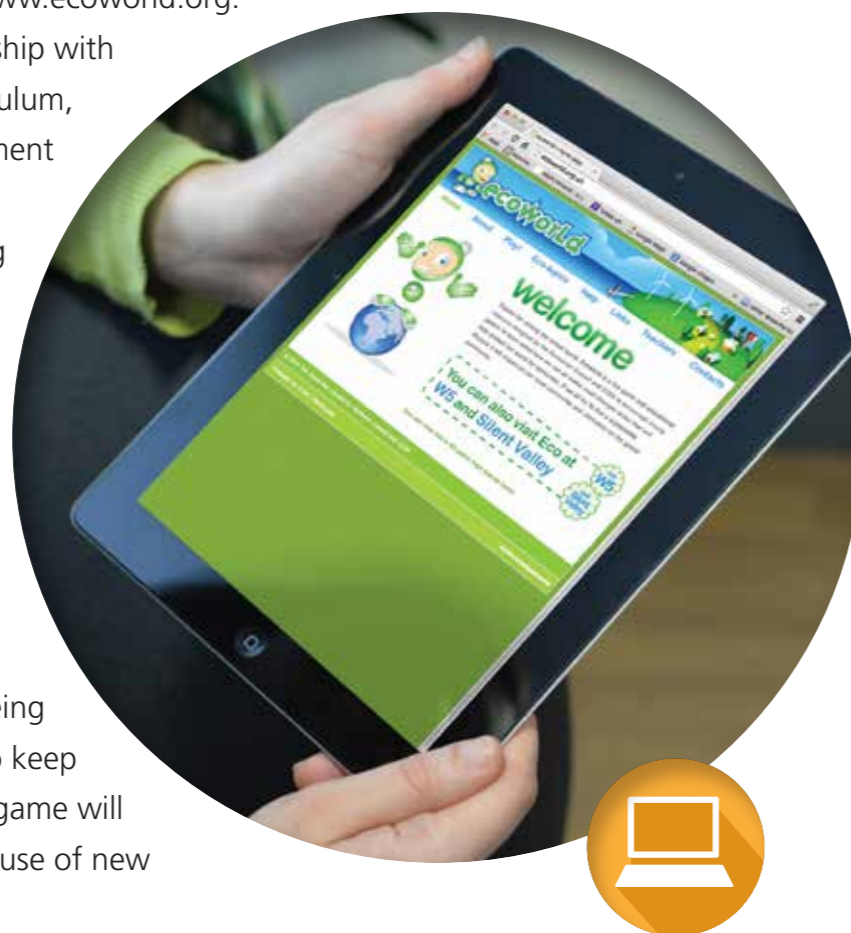
Consumers in Northern Ireland have identified responsible consumerism and sustainable development as important issues for them. Our aim is to ensure consumers are provided with information, choice and value for money and that the negative environmental impacts of the production and consumption of goods 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 less 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 Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland 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 2013–14 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 Northern Ireland 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 'Business Connect' campaign that promotes and provides water efficiency information to non-domestic consumers throughout Northern Ireland.

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

We also worked in conjunction with the Utility Regulator to develop and approve the electricity and gas suppliers' Codes of Practice on the efficient use of energy in line with the requirements of the EU directive IME3.

The Consumer Council supports the Department for Regional Development 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.

The Consumer Council worked with Translink to promote the money saving benefits of its Goldline bus services, which can save passengers money on petrol and parking.

We will also support the Civil Aviation Authority in their 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 2013–14 we recycled 4,550 kg of waste paper. Consumer Council staff are encouraged to think before they print and if they are required 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. We support a local primary school, in a deprived area of Belfast through fund raising and voluntary work by staff within the school. For example, we held a 'bring and buy' event to raise funds for the schools and left over goods were donated to charity shops. Some staff also give up their time to help students read. A group of staff also took part in the Business in the Community's 'Be a Saint Day' initiative, carrying out voluntary work in the community.

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 for 2011–15, 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.

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 Northern Ireland 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. Some of the direct actions taken during the year to inform our own awareness and improve services for passengers included:

- Working with Translink to inspect 15 separate Metro bus services, randomly chosen in Belfast City Centre to ensure that the ramp fitted to vehicles to allow wheelchair access was accessible and fully functioning – all 15 vehicles passed inspection.
- Working with Disability Action to support passengers to make the transition from using the 'Door 2 Door' transport service to the Disability Action Transport Service.
- Working with Stena to provide mobile hoists in accessible cabins on their overnight ferry crossing service to enable a passenger with a disability to access the cabin beds.

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).

The Consumer Council actively promoted utility companies' Customer and Critical Care Registers during the winter of 2013–14. These registers help ensure that

emergency resources and enhanced services can be targeted and prioritised for vulnerable consumers, particularly disabled and older consumers. Furthermore, a focus group with consumers on NI Water's Customer Care Register formed a specific element of the consumer research to inform PC15.

Lastly, the Consumer Council's website was redeveloped during 2013–14 to further improve its accessibility for visually impaired consumers and those whose first language is not English.

Further information on the Consumer Council's equality work in 2013–14 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 2014.

Future development

The review of the Consumer Council took place alongside significant changes to the consumer protection landscape in Great Britain. As part of this, responsibility for consumer representation in postal services in Northern Ireland moves to the Consumer Council with effect from April 2014.

Looking ahead, the Consumer Council is currently reviewing its premises requirements and options. The lease on Elizabeth House, the Consumer Council's base since 1985, ends in March 2015. This provides an opportunity to realise efficiency savings in respect of accommodation costs, which should help offset expected reductions in the Consumer Council's budget for 2015–16.

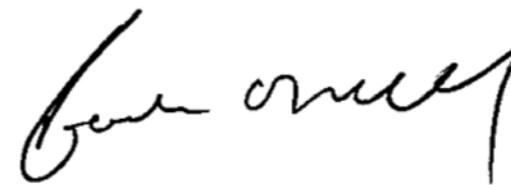
The Consumer Council has decided to extend its current Corporate Plan, which has been in place since 2011, by one year to cover 2015–16. This is so that it remains aligned with the timescale of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Programme for Government and spending rounds.

The Consumer Council will continue to represent the interests of consumers and identify strategic areas of action in line with the delivery of its Corporate Plan for 2011–15. Key priorities for 2014–15 are:

- Ensuring the effective transfer of postal responsibilities from Consumer Futures to the Consumer Council and raising awareness of this change among consumers and stakeholders.
- Carrying out research and making recommendations into the role that post offices can play in addressing financial inclusion.
- Increasing the affordability of energy by raising awareness of efficiency measures that consumers can take, encouraging 'switching' between types of energy and between suppliers, and establishing new cost reduction models for home heating oil.
- Raising awareness among consumers and businesses about important changes to consumer protection legislation being introduced in June 2014 with the European Consumer Rights Directive.
- Assessing consumers' concerns regarding household expenditure on a regular basis and highlighting these to government and businesses, while also helping consumers to switch supplier, shop around and make savings on their essential bills.

- Highlighting consumers' concerns in opinion pieces, media work and policy development. Supporting consumers and, particularly, businesses to address the barriers that prevent consumers from shopping around and protecting themselves effectively, which in turn will improve competitiveness.

Further details on the Consumers Council's planned activities are set out in its Business Plan for 2014–15, which is available on our website.



Aodhan O'Donnell
Accounting Officer
11 June 2014

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 2013–14, the following served as Council Members:

Rick Hill (Chairperson)
 David Beattie
 Colm Bradley (left 31/12/13)
 Kit Chivers
 Deirdre Fitzpatrick
 David Galloway
 Jill Gillespie
 Sarah Havlin (left 31/12/13)
 Mandy Patrick (Deputy Chairperson)
 Sam Snodden
 Margaret Ward
 Lee Wilson

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 48 to 57.

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 48 to 57.

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 2013–14, 100 per cent of invoices were paid within 30 days (2012-13: 100 per cent).

In December 2008 the Finance Minister announced that Northern Ireland Departments had been set a target of ensuring that invoices are paid within 10 working days, in order to help local businesses. During 2013-14 the Consumer Council paid 95 per cent of invoices (2012-13: 81 per cent) within the 10 working day target.

Charitable donations

There were no charitable donations made during 2013–14 (2012–13: £nil).

Personal data related incidents

The Consumer Council incurred no personal data breaches in 2013–14 (2012–13: 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 2013–14 and no matters about us were referred to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman for investigation.

Auditor

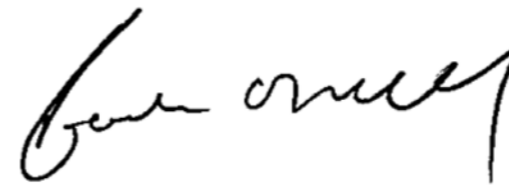
The financial statements are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland (C&AG) in accordance with the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984. The C&AG is head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office, which is wholly independent of the Consumer Council and their findings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

There was no other non audit work carried out by the Northern Ireland Audit Office or its subcontractors during 2013-14.

Events after the reporting period

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



Aodhan O'Donnell
Accounting Officer
11 June 2014

Remuneration Report

Chairperson and Council

The Council consists of a part-time Chairperson and 11 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 Chairman 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 £1,004 (2012-13: £1,467) 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	2013 - 2014			2012 - 2013		
	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 2013- 14: 11 (2012- 2013: 11) as set out on page 61 of the accounts. Figure includes Members appointed and those who left during the year.	5-10	-	-	0-5	-	-

No co-opted Committee Members have been called upon during 2013-14 (2012-13: 1).

Chief Executive and Executive Team

Remuneration Policy

The Remuneration of senior civil servants is set by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. The Minister approved a restructured SCS pay settlement broadly in line with the Senior Salaries Review Board report 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 two year pay award was agreed and applies to August 2012 and August 2013.

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	2013 - 2014					2012 - 2013				
	Salary £'000	Bonus Payments £'000	Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)	Pension Benefits **£'000	Total £'000	Salary £'000	Bonus Payments £'000	Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)	Pension Benefits **£'000	Total £'000
Ms Antoinette McKeown Chief Executive (until 31 August 2013)*	25-30 (65-70 full time equivalent)	-	-	2	25-30	60-65	-	-	9	70-75
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell Interim Chief Executive (from 1 August 2013 previously Director)*	40-45 (60-65 full time equivalent)	-	-	51	90-95	45-50	-	-	19	65-70
Mrs Kathy Graham Interim Director (from 3 September 2013)	25-30 (45-50 full time equivalent)	-	-	6	30-35	-	-	-	-	-
Mr Don Leeson Director (from 31 July 2013)	30-35 (45-50 full time equivalent)	-	-	13	45-50	-	-	-	-	-
Ms Elaine Topping Director (until 31 May 2013)	5-10 (45-50 full time equivalent)	-	-	(5)	0-5	45-50	-	-	17	60-65
Band of Highest Paid Director's Total Remuneration	60-65					60-65				
Median Total Remuneration (excluding highest paid Director)	28,500					29,031				
Ratio	2.19					2.23				

* On 31 August 2013 Ms Antoinette McKeown left the Consumer Council and from 1 August 2013, Mr Aodhan O'Donnell became the Interim Chief Executive and Acting Accounting Officer. The overlap in August was to manage an orderly transition.

**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 exclude increases due to inflation or any increase or decreases 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 (2012-13: £Nil).

Bonuses

There were no bonuses paid during 2013-14 (2012-13: £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 age 60 as at 31 March 2014 and related lump sum £'000	Real increase in pension and related lump sum at age 60 £'000	CETV at 31 March 2014 £'000	CETV at 31 March 2013 or start date £'000	Real increase in CETV £'000	Employer contribution to partnership pension account Nearest £100
Ms Antoinette McKeown <i>Chief Executive</i> (until 31 August 2013)	10-15 Plus lump sum of 40-45	0-2.5 Plus lump sum of 0-2.5	223	209	4	-
Mr Aodhan O'Donnell <i>Interim Chief Executive</i> (from 1 August 2013, previously Director)	10-15	2.5-5	104	78	17	-
Mrs Kathy Graham <i>Interim Director</i> (from 3 September 2013)	5-10	0-2.5	61	55	3	-
Mr Don Leeson <i>Director</i> (from 31 July 2013)	0-5	0-2.5	29	20	7	-
Ms Elaine Topping <i>Director</i> (until 31 May 2013)	15-20	0-2.5	227	224	1	-

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 (CSP). 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 Parliament 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 per cent. CARE pension benefits are increased annually in line with increases in the CPI. For 2014, public service pensions will be increased by 2.7 per cent for pensions which began before 8 April 2013. Pensions which began after 8 April 2013 will be increased proportionately.

Employee contributions are determined by the level of pensionable earnings. The employee contribution rates for the 2014 - 15 year are as follows:

Members of classic:	
Annual pensionable earnings (full-time equivalent basis)	2014 contribution rate before tax relief
Up to £15,000	1.50%
£15,001-£21,000	3.00%
£21,001-£30,000	4.48%
£30,001-£50,000	5.27%
£50,001-£60,000	6.06%
Over £60,000	6.85%

Members of premium, nuvos and classic plus:	
Annual pensionable earnings (full-time equivalent basis)	2014 contribution rate before tax relief
Up to £15,000	3.50%
£15,001-£21,000	5.00%
£21,001-£30,000	6.48%
£30,001-£50,000	7.27%
£50,001-£60,000	8.06%
Over £60,000	8.85%

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 per cent and 12.5 per cent (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 per cent of pensionable salary (in addition to the employer's basic contribution). Employers also contribute a further 0.8 per cent 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. Further details about the CSP arrangements can be found at the website www.dfpni.gov/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

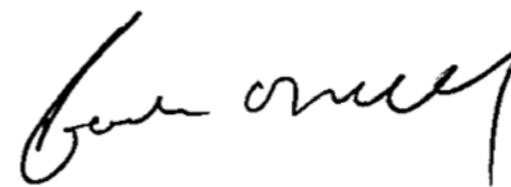
No awards or compensation payments have been made to former Senior Managers during 2013-14 (2012-13: £Nil).

Ill-health retirement

No individuals retired early on ill-health grounds (2012-13: £Nil).

Third Parties

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



Aodhan O'Donnell
Accounting Officer
11 June 2014

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 Chief Executive as Accounting Officer is required to comply with the requirements of the Government Financial Reporting Manual and in particular to:

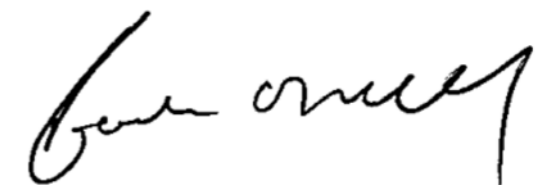
- Observe the Accounts Direction issued by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, including the relevant accounting and disclosure requirements, and apply suitable accounting policies on a consistent basis;
- Make judgements and estimates on a reasonable basis;
- State whether applicable 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



Richard Hill
Chairman
11 June 2014



Aodhan O'Donnell
Accounting Officer
11 June 2014

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 2013-14 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 2014 were:

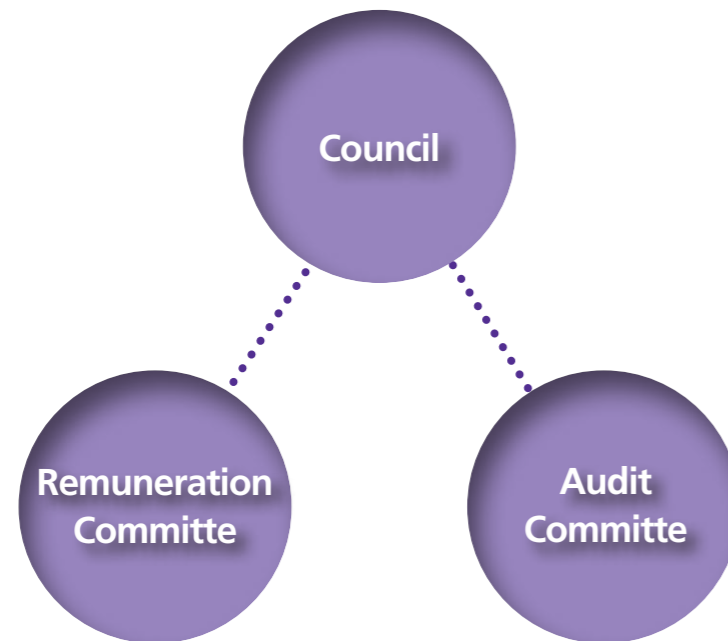
<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>First Appointed</i>	
Mr Richard Hill	Chairperson	1 January 2008 (appointed Council Member)	1 January 2009* (appointed Chair)
Mrs Mandy Patrick	Deputy Chairperson	1 January 2012	
Mr Colm Bradley	Council Member	1 January 2008	Left 31 December 2013**
Mr Kit Chivers	Council Member	1 January 2009*	
Mrs Deirdre Fitzpatrick	Council Member	1 August 2009*	
Mrs Jill Gillespie	Council Member	1 August 2009*	
Mrs Sarah Havlin	Council Member	1 January 2008	Left 31 December 2013**
Dr Margaret Ward	Council Member	1 August 2009*	
Mr Lee Wilson	Council Member	1 August 2009*	
Mr David Beattie	Council Member	1 January 2012	
Mr David Galloway	Council Member	1 January 2012	
Mr Sam Snodden	Council Member	1 January 2012	

*Members second term

**Recruitment for replacement not yet started

The Council has corporate responsibility for ensuring that the Consumer Council fulfils the aims and objectives set by the Department and approved by the 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 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 Committee is an advisory committee with no executive powers other than those delegated by the Council. With effect from 30 April 2014 the Audit Committee will be renamed the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

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 performance against these. Like the Audit 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 2013-14 the Council met nine times, the Audit Committee met six times and the Remuneration Committee met twice.

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, 116 Hollywood Road, Belfast BT4 1NY.

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. A conflict of interest arose during the year as a result of the Chairperson's position as Chair of Consumer Focus Post NI (CFPNI). The Chairperson declared this interest at the start of every Council meeting and informed Council Members that given his position as he would leave the meeting during any discussions in relation to the proposed transfer of CFPNI to the Consumer Council.

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) meet 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 Chair 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 (9 meetings)	Audit (6 meetings)	Remuneration (2 meetings)
Mr Richard Hill	9		2
Mrs Mandy Patrick	6		2
Mr Colm Bradley	6*		1
Mr Kit Chivers	8	6	
Mrs Deirdre Fitzpatrick	9	6	
Mrs Jill Gillespie	8		1
Mrs Sarah Havlin	5*		1
Dr Margaret Ward	7		
Mr Lee Wilson	9	3	
Mr David Beattie	8		1
Mr David Galloway	5		
Mr Sam Snodden	9	6	

* Council Member left on 31 December 2013

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 undertook a self assessment in March 2014. This assessment considered:

- 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.

Some actions around learning and development and Council attendance will be considered further but overall the assessment indicates that the Council is content with its effectiveness and performance.

The Council has 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 Committee undertook a self assessment in March 2014 to inform the Report from the Chair of the Audit Committee to the Council. The assessment has also identified actions regarding skills requirements and ongoing learning and development for the Audit Committee.

Key governance issues considered in 2013-14

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 operating plan as presented in the Performance Against Objectives 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 2013-14:

- Annual Operating Plan and Budget allocation against operational priorities for 2013-14;
- 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;
- New Management Statement and Financial Memorandum;
- Report on the progress of the action plan in relation to an error in relation to the reclaim of Statutory Maternity Pay; and
- The DETI Review of the Consumer Council.

The Council also discussed a range of key policy issues in 2013-14 as follows:

- Super – Complainant designation (Financial Conduct Authority);
- Quarterly Complaints (Consumer Support) Report;
- Outreach Strategy;
- Postal responsibilities integration and planning;
- Combined Work Programme; and
- Various Policy Position papers.

By the Audit Committee:

The work of the Council is supported and advised by the Audit Committee. In 2013-14 the Audit Committee was chaired by Kit Chivers.

The Audit Committee considered the following key elements of the risk and control framework in 2013-14:

- External Auditor's Report to those charged with Governance (RTTCWG);
- Quarterly risk registers and bi-annual assurance report and checklist;
- Corporate risk appetite;
- New Management Statement and Financial Memorandum; and
- 2013-14 internal audit plan and reports for all internal audits undertaken in 2013-14.

The approach to risk management has matured in 2013-14 with the introduction of consideration of risk approach and risk appetite against each risk on the Corporate Risk Register. 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. The risk register is considered in detail by both the Audit Committee and Council at the end of each quarter and there were no new risks identified in 2013-14.

In 2013-14 the Consumer Council continued to adopt DETI's risk management policy and risk management process manual. As a result of an internal audit recommendation and further to the Audit Committee's consideration of risk appetite in January 2014, we plan to put in place our own risk management strategy and policy in 2014-15. This will establish a policy that is tailored to the Consumer Council's specific risk processes.

Internal audit

ASM carried out the Internal Audit function for the Consumer Council for the year ended 31 March 2014. The programme operated to requirements defined in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. 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 2013-14 five internal audits were carried out by ASM in the following areas:

- Payroll;
- Purchasing and Procurement;
- Human Resource Management;
- Consumer Support; and
- Risk Management and Corporate Governance.

Substantial assurance ratings were achieved in Human Resource Management and Consumer Support and satisfactory assurances were achieved in the other three areas subject to review. In addition to the agreed internal audit plan for 2013-14 ASM also completed, at the request of management, further work in relation to the historic payroll issue. This work considered the impact of the implementation of "marked time" in relation to the 2013 pay award and quantified the payroll debtor at 31 March 2014. It should be noted that with effect from 1 August 2013 there is no longer a requirement for Consumer Council staff to work on the basis of "marked time".

The Annual Internal Audit Assurance report for 2013-14 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.

External audit

The external audit is undertaken by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. As Accounting Officer I can confirm that all recommendations included within the RTTCWG have been accepted and are currently being progressed, or have been implemented.

Ministerial Direction

There were no Ministerial Directions received in 2013-14.

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 2013-14

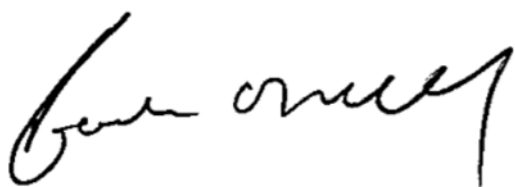
In March 2014 we were informed by Civil Service Pensions that a number of organisations had been incorrectly interpreting guidance on the calculation of employer pension contributions when staff are on reduced pay (e.g. when on maternity, paternity or long term sick leave). In these circumstances, the amount of employer pension contributions should have been calculated on the basis of 'assumed' pay (ie what staff would normally have been paid had they been in work) rather than what they actually received. We have received formal confirmation from Civil Service Pensions that there is no outstanding liability for the Consumer Council in this matter.

Following checks in light of the above, an error in the way employee pension contributions have been calculated was also identified as well an error in internal reports showing total pensionable pay. These errors are restricted to transactions occurring in 2013-14 financial year, are immaterial (less than £1k in total) and have arisen through software upgrades from our payroll software provider. We have corresponded with our payroll software provider in relation to this. The controls in this area will also be subject to internal audit and a report on the issue has been fully considered by the Audit Committee.

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.

Other than the specific issues set out above I can confirm that there have been no other governance issues identified during the year that are considered significant in relation to the Consumer Council's overall ability to achieve its objectives.



Aodhan O'Donnell
Accounting Officer
11 June 2014

The Certificate and Report of the Controller 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 2014 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 2014 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

13 June 2014

Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2014

		2013-14	2012-13
	Note	£	£
Expenditure			
Staff costs	3	1,609,405	1,666,410
Work programme	4	296,144	297,440
Depreciation and amortisation	5	397,963	235,907
Other expenditures	5	461,584	444,332
		2,765,096	2,644,089
Income			
Income from activities	6	58,000	99,115
Other income	6	49,670	42,809
		107,670	141,924
Net expenditure		(2,657,426)	(2,502,165)

Other Comprehensive Net Expenditure

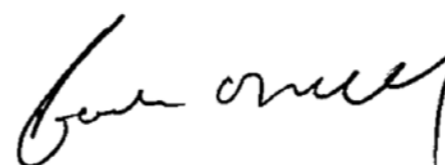
		2013-14	2012-13
		£	£
Items that will not subsequently be reclassified to net operating costs:			
Net gain on valuation of leasehold alterations		298,915	133,301
Total Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2014		(2,358,511)	(2,368,864)

The notes on pages 78-101 form part of the financial statements.

Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2014

		2014		2013	
	Note	£	£	£	£
Non-current assets:					
Property, plant and equipment	7	358,932		432,365	
Intangible assets	8	68,229		76,339	
Total non-current assets		427,161		508,704	
Current assets:					
Trade and other receivables	10	40,786		45,199	
Cash and cash equivalents	12	3,981		32,369	
Total current assets		44,767		77,568	
Total assets		471,928		586,272	
Current liabilities:					
Trade and other payables	13	(152,659)		(181,723)	
Total current liabilities		(152,659)		(181,723)	
Assets less liabilities		319,269		404,549	
Taxpayers' equity					
Revaluation reserve		642,103		343,188	
General reserve		(322,834)		61,361	
		319,269		404,549	

The financial statements on pages 74-101 were approved by the Board on 11 June 2014 and were signed on its behalf by:



Aodhan O'Donnell
Accounting Officer
11 June 2014

The notes on pages 78-101 form part of the financial statements.

Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 31 March 2014

		2013-14	2012-13
	Note	£	£
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net expenditure		(2,657,426)	(2,502,165)
Adjustments for non-cash transactions:			
Depreciation	5	387,230	225,446
Amortisation	5	10,733	10,461
Decrease/(Increase) in trade and other receivables		4,413	(2,969)
Decrease in trade payables		(29,064)	(172,172)
Net cash outflow from operating activities		(2,284,114)	(2,441,399)
Cash flows from investing activities			
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	7	(14,882)	(20,154)
Purchase of intangible assets	8	(2,623)	1,327
Net cash outflow from investing activities		(17,505)	(18,827)
Cash flows from financing activities			
Government Financing (DETI and DRD)		2,273,231	2,479,328
Net financing		2,273,231	2,479,328
Net (decrease)/increase in cash and cash equivalents in the period	12	(28,388)	19,102
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the period	12	32,369	13,267
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period	12	3,981	32,369

The notes on pages 78-101 form part of the financial statements.

Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity as at the year ended 31 March 2014

	General Reserve £	Revaluation Reserve £	Total Reserves £
Balance at 1 April 2012	84,198	209,887	294,085
Changes in taxpayers' equity 2012-2013			
Comprehensive expenditure for financial year	(2,502,165)	133,301	(2,368,864)
Government Financing (DETI and DRD)	2,479,328	-	2,479,328
Balance at 31 March 2013	61,361	343,188	404,549
Balance at 1 April 2013	61,361	343,188	404,549
Changes in taxpayers' equity 2013-14			
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

The note on pages 78-101 form part of the financial statements.

Notes forming part of the financial statements For the year ended 31 March 2014

1. Statement of accounting policies

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the 2013-14 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 in 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) 2013-14.

- Presentation of Financial Statements (IAS 1)
- Income Taxes (IAS 12)
- Property, Plant and Equipment (IAS 16)
- Post Employee Benefits (Pensions) (IAS 19)
- Financial Instruments Presentation (IAS 32)
- Interim Financial Reporting (IAS 34)

With the exception of the requirement in relation to the presentation of financial statements, 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) 2013-14.

- 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)
- Fair Value Measurement (IFRS 13)

These changes will be mandatory for accounting periods beginning on or after 1 April 2014 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 2014. 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.

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.

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

All assets except leasehold alterations are stated at cost less accumulated depreciation and any impairment losses. A valuation of the premises at Elizabeth House was undertaken at 31 March 2014 and this has been included in the financial accounts. The exercise was carried out by Land and Property Services, an executive Agency with the Department of Finance and Personnel. Upward revaluations are credited to the revaluation reserve unless they reverse previously recognised downward revaluations, in which case they are credited to the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure to the extent the downward revaluation has been recognised with the remainder credited to the revaluation reserve.

1.4 Intangible assets

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	33.33% 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 classified as Loans and Receivables 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 48-57 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

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

1.10 Income

Income from independent project activities:

- Funding receivable from other organisations for core programme expenditure and specific staff salaries.

Income from operating activities represents:

- Rent received from Consumer Focus Post who occupy office space within Consumer Council offices. The charge is calculated on a shared service cost allocation and includes rent, administration, IT support and training.

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

Other than the valuation of leasehold alterations, 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 and DRD. All funding, with the exception of DETI Energy, has been approved for 2014-15. Half of the Energy funding is to be received in June and the remainder will be received in due course upon approval of the business case.

A review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Consumer Council, which had been commissioned by DETI in 2012, was completed in mid-2013. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, having considered the review, took the view that a public consultation should be undertaken to inform the final decision-making on this matter. This consultation took place between October and January 2014. The Minister announced on 9 June 2014, following the public consultation exercise that the Consumer Council would be retained as a non-departmental public body within DETI.

2. Statement of Operating Costs by Operating Segment

2.1 Analysis of net expenditure by segment

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

2012-13	Energy	Water	Other Sections	Administration incorporating Corporate Services	Total
	£	£	£	£	£
Gross expenditure	557,179	459,320	882,853	744,737	2,644,089
Income*	-	-	99,115	42,809	141,924
Net Expenditure	(557,179)	(459,320)	(783,738)	(701,928)	(2,502,165)
Total Assets	-	-	-	586,272	586,272
Total Liabilities	-	-	-	(181,723)	(181,723)
Net Assets	-	-	-	404,549	404,549

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

The Consumer Council has two separate reportable sections: Energy and Water. 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. The other sections are made up of Money Affairs, Consumer Skills, Consumer Support, Transport and Communications. These sections are funded primarily by DETI with project specific funding received from Civil Aviation Authority and DRD Transport 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 and Water funding makes towards the Consumer Support section and all associated administration costs.

3. Staff numbers and related costs

3.1 Staff costs (including Members) comprise:

	Council Members	2013-14 Total	2012-13 Total
	£	£	£
Council Members'			
Chairperson's salary – gross	21,983	21,983	21,983
Social security costs	1,971	1,971	1,999
Members' fees	7,231	7,231	5,987
	31,185	31,185	29,969

	Permanently employed staff	Others	2013-14 Total	2012-13 Total
	£	£	£	£
Staff salaries				
Wages and salaries	1,151,278	108,423	1,259,701	1,290,506
Social security costs	88,507	8,770	97,277	102,026
Other pension costs	223,866	8,293	232,159	242,113
Intern	-	3,000	3,000	-
Contract staff	-	-	-	1,796
Subtotal	1,463,651	128,486	1,592,137	1,636,441
Less recoveries in respect of outward secondments	(13,917)	-	(13,917)	-
Total net costs	1,449,734	128,486	1,609,405	1,666,410

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	2013-14 Total	2012-13 Total
Directly employed	41	2	43	44
Contract staff	-	-	-	1
Students	-	3	3	2
Total	41	5	46	47

3.3 Pension scheme details:

The Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (NI) (PCSPS (NI)) is an unfunded multi-employer defined benefit scheme 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 2010. The pension scheme liability reported in the DFP Superannuation and Other Allowance Resource Accounts last year was as at 31 March 2010, however, work is ongoing to provide a report on an updated valuation as at 31 March 2012 for the basis of the actuarial valuation rolled forward to the reporting date of the DFP Superannuation and Other Resource Accounts for 2014.

For 2013-14, employers' contributions of £228,811 were payable to the PCSPS (NI) (2012-13: £239,515) 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 valuation scheme based on data as at 31 March 2012 is currently being undertaken by the Actuary to review employer contribution rates for the introduction of a new career average earning scheme from April 2015. From 2014-15, the rates will remain in the range 18% to 25%. The contribution

rates are set to meet the cost of the benefits accruing during 2013-14 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 £2,825 (2012-13: £2,463) were paid to one or more of a 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 £523, 0.8 % of pensionable pay (2012-13: £135, 0.8%) 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 statement of financial position date were £Nil (2012-13: £Nil). Contributions prepaid at that date were £Nil (2012-13: £Nil).

No persons (2012-13: None) retired early on ill-health grounds; the total additional accrued pension liabilities, payable by CSP, in the year amounted to £Nil (2012-13: £Nil).

3.4 Reporting of compensation and exit packages for all staff 2013-14:

There were no compensation or exit packages made during 2013-14 (2012-13: 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.

4. Work programme

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Core Costs	63,991	51,200
Energy and Money Affairs Consumer Research	46,200	-
Financial Capability and Initiatives	39,971	27,885
Household Efficiency	26,333	57,102
Website Development	25,860	-
Outreach Strategy	17,220	22,079
Public Transport Reform	15,044	14,279
Passenger Rights	12,320	27,574
Improving Customer Care	11,925	34,652
Regulation Working Better	8,592	22,333
Water Issues for Business, Farms and Communities	7,105	-
Water Strategy and Regulation	6,520	-
Fuel Poverty and Energy Dependence	5,680	11,636
Regulation and the Cost of Energy	5,141	-
Research into the Cost of Flying	3,239	-
Insurance	1,003	28,700
	296,144	297,440

5. Other expenditure

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Operating leases – rent and service charge	173,164	184,681
Rates	76,135	75,032
Office machinery – annual licences and maintenance	31,945	36,681
Staff and members training and development	38,786	29,669
Telephone and postage	18,705	15,165
Electricity	16,634	16,184
Internal consultancy	15,068	-
Audit fees – external audit	14,474	9,026
Print, design and stationery	10,616	10,423
Legal and professional fees	10,489	5,033
Audit fees – internal audit	9,742	8,138
Staff travel	8,242	8,905
Operating leases – office machinery	8,072	7,679
Maintenance, repairs and cleaning	14,936	17,309
Project costs	6,315	7,800
Professional relationships and memberships	2,600	4,261
Recruitment and induction costs	1,420	3,780
Sundry expenses	1,280	1,056
Library	1,052	1,356
Members' expenses	1,004	1,467
Hospitality, including catering	905	687
	461,584	444,332
Non-cash items		
Depreciation	387,230	225,446
Amortisation	10,733	10,461
	397,963	235,907
	859,547	680,239

6. Income

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Income from activities		
Civil Aviation Authority	58,000	96,589
Atlantic Philanthropies	-	2,526
	58,000	99,115
Other income		
Rent received – Consumer Futures	46,670	42,809
Refund – franking machine	3,000	-
	49,670	42,809
Total Income	107,670	141,924

7. Property, plant and equipment

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 financial statements. The exercise was carried out by Land and Property Services (LPS), an executive Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel.

7. Property, plant and equipment (continued)

2012-13	Alterations £	Furniture and fittings £	Office equipment £	Total £
Cost or valuation				
At 1 April 2012	593,761	144,148	195,294	933,203
Additions	-	1,023	14,004	15,027
Revaluation	133,301	-	-	133,301
Disposals	-	-	(2,102)	(2,102)
At 31 March 2013	727,062	145,171	207,196	1,079,429
Depreciation				
At 1 April 2012	129,848	131,058	161,062	421,968
Charged in year	197,920	7,525	20,001	225,446
Disposals	-	-	(350)	(350)
At 31 March 2013	327,768	138,583	180,713	647,064
Carrying amount at 31 March 2013	399,294	6,588	26,483	432,365
Carrying amount at 31 March 2012	463,913	13,090	34,232	511,235
Asset financing:				
Owned	399,294	6,588	26,483	432,365
Carrying amount at 31 March 2013	399,294	6,588	26,483	432,365

8. Intangible assets

Intangible assets comprise of software and software licences.

	Total £
Cost or valuation	
At 1 April 2013	106,326
Additions	2,623
At 31 March 2014	108,949
Amortisation	
At 1 April 2013	29,987
Charged in year	10,733
At 31 March 2014	40,720
Carrying amount at 31 March 2014	68,229
Carrying amount at 31 March 2013	76,339
Asset financing	
Owned	68,229
Carrying amount at 31 March 2014	68,229

8. Intangible assets (continued)

	Total £
Cost or valuation	
At 1 April 2012	103,322
Additions	3,004
At 31 March 2013	106,326
Amortisation	
At 1 April 2012	19,526
Charged in year	10,461
At 31 March 2013	29,987
Carrying amount at 31 March 2013	76,339
Carrying amount at 31 March 2012	83,796
Asset financing	
Owned	76,339
Carrying amount at 31 March 2013	76,339

9. Financial instruments

IFRS 7 "Financial Instruments: Disclosures" requires disclosure that enables evaluation of the significance of financial instruments for the Consumer Council's financial position and performance, the nature and extent of risks arising from financial instruments to which the Consumer Council is exposed during the period and at the reporting date, and how the Board manages those risks.

As the cash requirements of the Consumer Council are met through Grant-in-Aid provided via DETI and DRD, financial instruments play a more limited role in creating and managing risk than would apply to a non-public sector body. The majority of financial instruments relate to contracts to buy non-financial items in line with the Consumer Council's expected purchase and usage requirements and the Consumer Council is therefore not exposed to the degree of financial risk faced by business entities.

Details of the significant accounting policies and methods adopted, including the criteria for recognition, the basis of measurement and the basis on which income and expenses are recognised, in respect of each class of financial asset and financial liability are disclosed in note 1 "Accounting Policies".

The Board's financial assets are classified as loans and receivables and comprise trade and other receivables (note 10) and cash and cash equivalents (note 12). The Board's financial liabilities comprise trade payables and other liabilities (note 13). These financial assets and liabilities are held at cost which approximates to fair value because of their short maturities.

Cash and cash equivalents comprises cash and demand deposits with banks. As at 31 March 2014, the carrying value of cash at bank approximates its fair value due to its short term nature.

10. Trade and other receivables

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Trade Receivables	-	1,349
Prepayments	39,907	43,850
Sundry Receivables	879	-
	40,786	45,199

10.1 Intra-Government Balances

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Balances with other central government bodies	-	-
Subtotal: intra-government balances	-	-
Balances with bodies external to government	40,786	45,199
Total receivables at 31 March 2014	40,786	45,199

11. Losses and Special Payments

11.1 Losses Statement

Write-off	2013-14	2012-13
Total number of cases	1	2
Total amount of cases	£1,397	£12,410

The case relates to the payroll debtor that arose as a result of non compliance with NICS payroll practices and relates to the gross cost from 1 April 2004. Between 1 April 2004 and 31 March 2013, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) have approved the write off of £284,832.

On 17 April 2014, approval was received from DFP to write-off an additional £1,397 for the period 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014.

It should be noted that with effect from 1 August 2013 there is no longer a requirement for Consumer Council staff to work on the basis of "marked time".

12. Cash and cash equivalents

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Balance at 1 April 2013	32,369	13,267
Net change in cash and cash equivalents balance	(28,388)	19,102
Balance at 31 March 2014	3,981	32,369

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

13. Trade and other payables

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Amounts falling due within one year		
Trade payables	1,637	-
Accruals and deferred income	151,022	181,723
	152,659	181,723

13.1 Intra-Government Balances

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Balances with other central government bodies	10,864	59,998
Subtotal: intra-government balances	10,864	59,998
Balances with bodies external to government	141,795	121,725
Total payables at 31 March 2014	152,659	181,723

14. Provision for liabilities and charges

There were no provisions for liabilities or charges as at the statement of financial position date (2012-13: None).

15. Capital commitments

There were no capital commitments as at the statement of financial position date (2012-13: 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:

	2013-14 £	2012-13 £
Obligations under operating leases comprise:		
<i>Buildings:</i>		
Not later than 1 year	181,756	186,937
Later than 1 year and not later than 5 years	-	186,937
Later than 5 years	-	-
	181,756	373,874
<i>Other:</i>		
Not later than 1 year	7,321	7,679
Later than 1 year and not later than 5 years	15,650	-
Later than 5 years	-	-
	22,971	7,679
	204,727	381,553

16.2 Finance leases

The Consumer Council has no commitments under finance leases.

17. Contingent liabilities 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.

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 £2,273,231 of grant-in-aid was received via DETI and DRD (2012-13: £2,479,328).

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. Transactions during the year with such companies, which were conducted at arms length and were subject to normal project and programme rules and tendering procedures, were appropriate, are listed below:

Richard Hill Chair

Chair NI Postal Services Committee and member of Consumer Futures - Consumer Futures paid £46,670 to the Consumer Council in rental income (including shared services) during 2013-14 (2012-13: £42,809).

19. Events after the Reporting Period

On 1 April 2014 responsibility for consumer representation in respect of postal services was transferred from Consumer Futures to the Consumer Council.

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

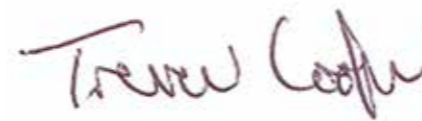
The Accounting Officer authorised the issue of these financial statements on 13 June 2014.

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 2014 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 2014 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 13 February 2013.



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

19 February 2014



The Consumer Council

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Consumer Council Northern Ireland



ConsumerCouncil