



CONSUMER COUNCIL

ANNUAL

REPORT

2023



Begin





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Foreword

2023 has been another year of cash in the headlines. People are rightly interested in the rapid shift we are seeing in cash usage and determined to protect cash on the high street.

I'm therefore proud to present this report which highlights the Council's areas of focus and the effectiveness of LINK's measures to ensure that those who need it can still get cash for free, conveniently.

The Consumer Council has for over 17 years brought the voice of consumers into LINK's decision making. LINK remains committed to supporting cash access for those who need it the most. Its work has also shaped and influenced the Protected ATM scheme which was deemed to be working effectively by the Payment Systems Regulator this year.

The Council has supported LINK's work to promote cash access through an ongoing digital awareness campaign targeting social media channels in different areas of the country, and is currently championing the development of grassroots pilots to support digital inclusion in cash focused communities as well. We know that millions of people who rely on cash are also digitally excluded. Giving them access to basic online services will be crucial to ensure no one is left behind as most people move away from cash.

I'm particularly proud to report that cash access in deprived areas has continued to improve, thanks to LINK's Financial Inclusion Programme. I'd like to thank the Council's members for their continued commitment to access to cash, and would encourage anyone reading this report to get in touch with LINK if they believe cash access in their area could be improved.

Tracey Graham
Chair, LINK Consumer Council

Financial Inclusion in Numbers

£1,500

average amount withdrawn
by a UK adult in a year

3,450

ATMs receive a financial
inclusion subsidy

99.8%

of high streets have
cash access within 1km

89.6%

of population live within
1km of free cash access

£16m

invested in interchange
premiums

£120M

withdrawn from directly
commissioned ATMs in 2023

2,351

deprived areas with
good cash access

3,440

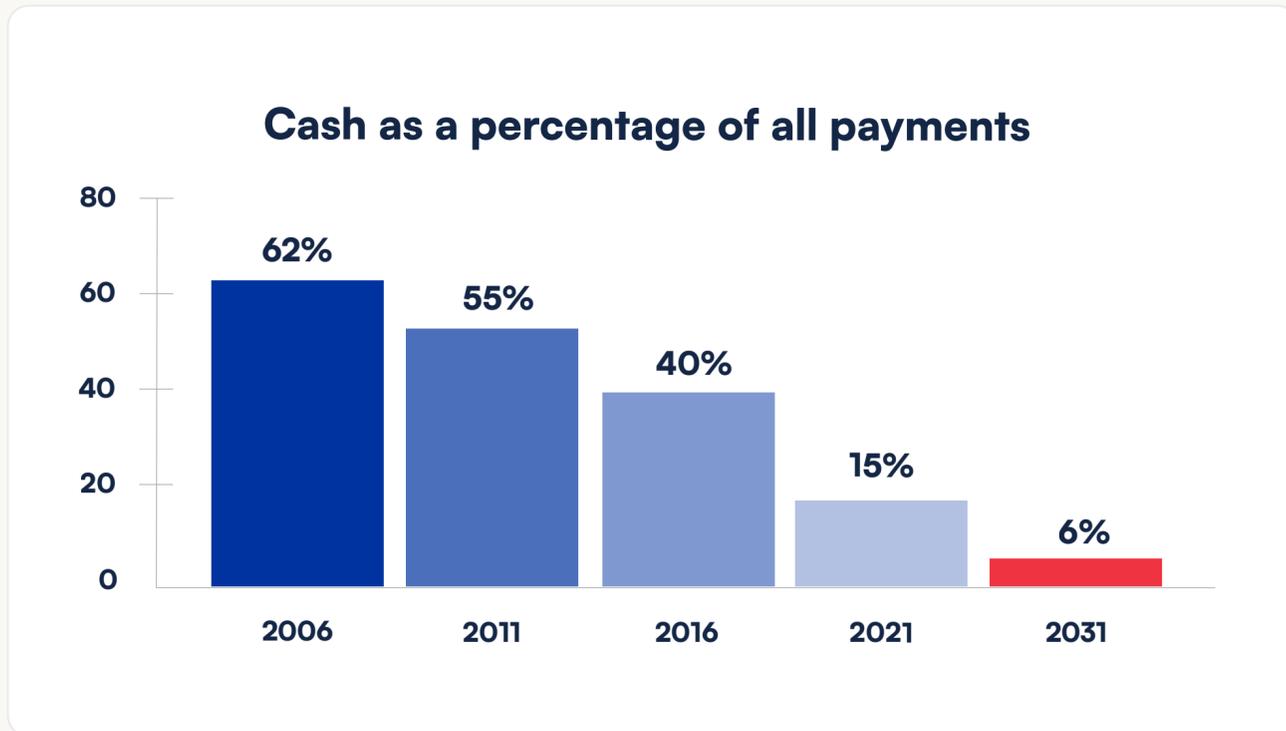
protected ATMs

110

community request
ATMs installed

£1.6BN

withdrawn from
LINK ATMs per week



Reference: [UK Finance, UK Payments Market 2023](#)



Access to Cash protected in law

LINK’s work with the industry to protect access to cash has been done on a voluntary basis since the formation of the Financial Inclusion Programme in 2006.

The funding has been provided by LINK members in recognition of the importance of free cash access, and it has **supported thousands of communities** as a result.

The Consumer Council has led the development of that work and helped it grow from focusing on a sub set of deprived areas to a suite of policies guaranteeing good coverage for communities across the UK.

But in a world where cash use is reducing rapidly, it was vital that the voluntary foundations for cash access were underpinned with Government support. LINK was therefore pleased to see the passage of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023, which requires **the industry to protect free access to cash for consumers**, and empowers the FCA to oversee that work.

LINK reported several times to the Consumer Council on the work being done to ensure MPs, Government and the Opposition were well briefed on how important the legislation would be, and held **hundreds of meetings to ensure MPs were knowledgeable about the subject** and able to debate the Bill effectively. With the Act now in place, the future is bright for free cash access.

Protected ATMs: five years on

LINK has worked to protect the geographic footprint of free cash access.

If there was a free cash machine somewhere in 2018, people should still be able to access their cash through a free cash machine or Post Office today.

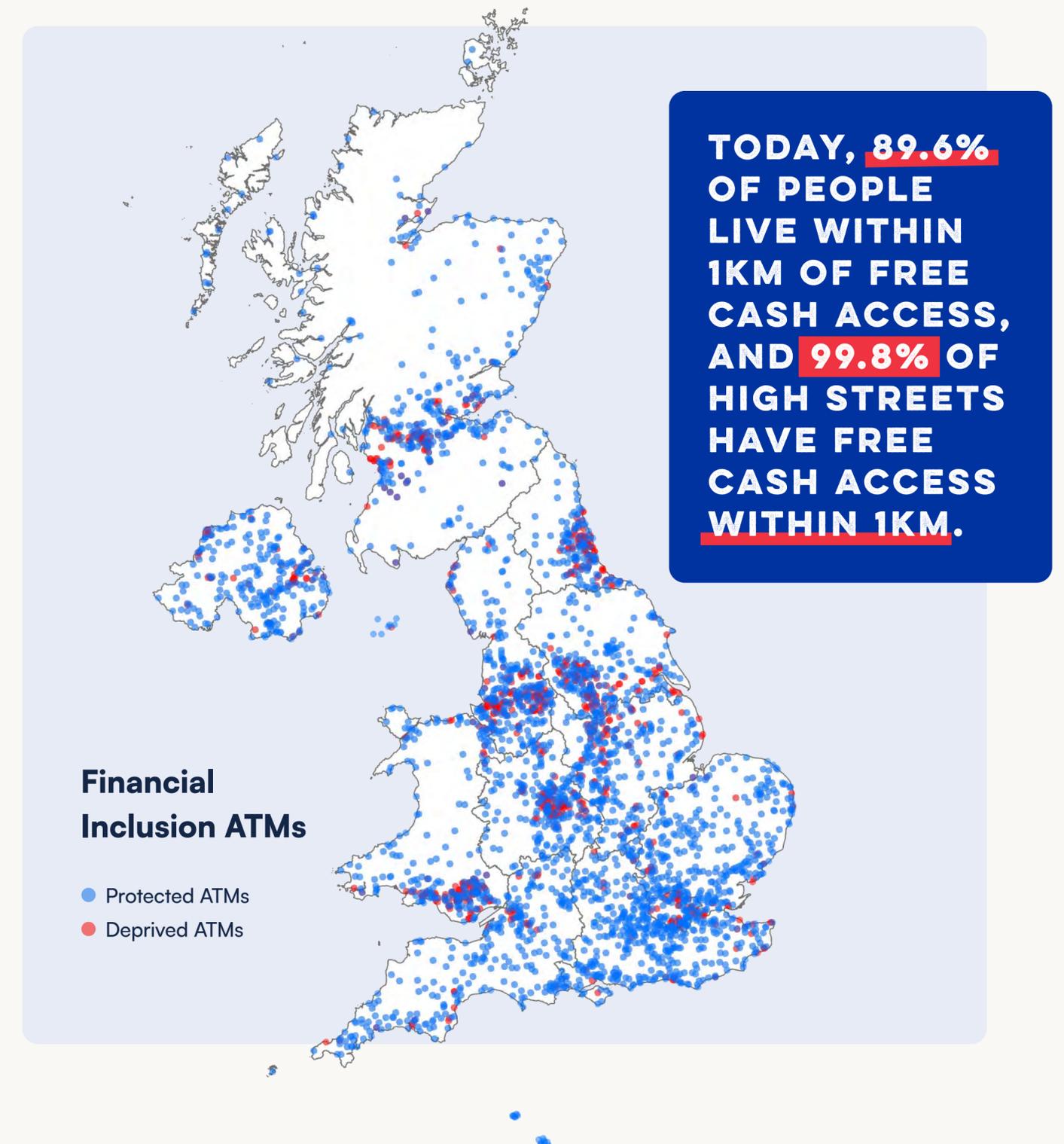
Five years of that work, with over 50 reports submitted to the Payment Systems Regulator and **1,000 extra ATMs** brought into protection has made sure that thousands of people can still access cash in their community.

As well as **subsidising over 3,000 ATMs**, **LINK has directly commissioned 52 free ATMs** in communities which have lost cash

access. The Payment Systems Regulator reviewed LINK's policies and concluded they "are working well to ensure a broad geographic spread of cash".

In fact, in 2018 when LINK started protecting ATMs, 89.5% of people lived within 1km of free cash access via either a cash machine or a Post Office. Today, **89.6% of people live within 1km of free cash access**, and **99.8% of high streets have free cash access within 1km**.

In the same time period, **cash withdrawals have dropped by over 40%**, and the **free ATM network has shrunk by 31% as well**. The fact that people can still access cash, free of charge, locally is testament to the work done by the Financial Inclusion Programme to protect cash access.



Cash Access can be easy, free and near!

How do you get your cash out? Most people use a free ATM, but it's clear that many people don't know that they could use their local Post Office, or Cash at the Till.

Some people also don't know that they have a free-to-use ATM close to them.

In 2023, LINK set out to improve awareness of ways to access cash, with digital adverts targeting specific areas describing easy, free and near options to access cash.

Over 3.5m people have seen the ads, which feature high street vox-pops with

cash users to explain all the options for accessing cash, promoting the LINK Cash Locator. Work will continue to promote the cash locator and ensure people know how they can access cash.

LINK's Cash Locator will be further updated in the near future for consumers to find Bank Hubs.



12:23

LINK Sponsored

Find the best way for you to take your cash out. Use Cash Locator to find your nearest LINK ATM, Post Office or participating cash at the till retailer. <https://shorturl.at/dlwLP>

CASH LOCATOR.

I'VE FOUND THE BEST WAY FOR ME TO TAKE MY CASH OUT

Use Cash Locator to find your nearest LINK ATM, Post Offices and participating cash at the till retailers. Some ATMs may charge for use. No purchase necessary to get cash at the till, but subject to availability and max. £50 withdrawal.

LINK.CO.UK/LOCATOR

Find the best way for you to take your cash out. [Learn More](#)

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NEED TO FIND LOCAL FREE CASH ACCESS?

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT.

CASH LOCATOR.

How are we using cash in 2023?

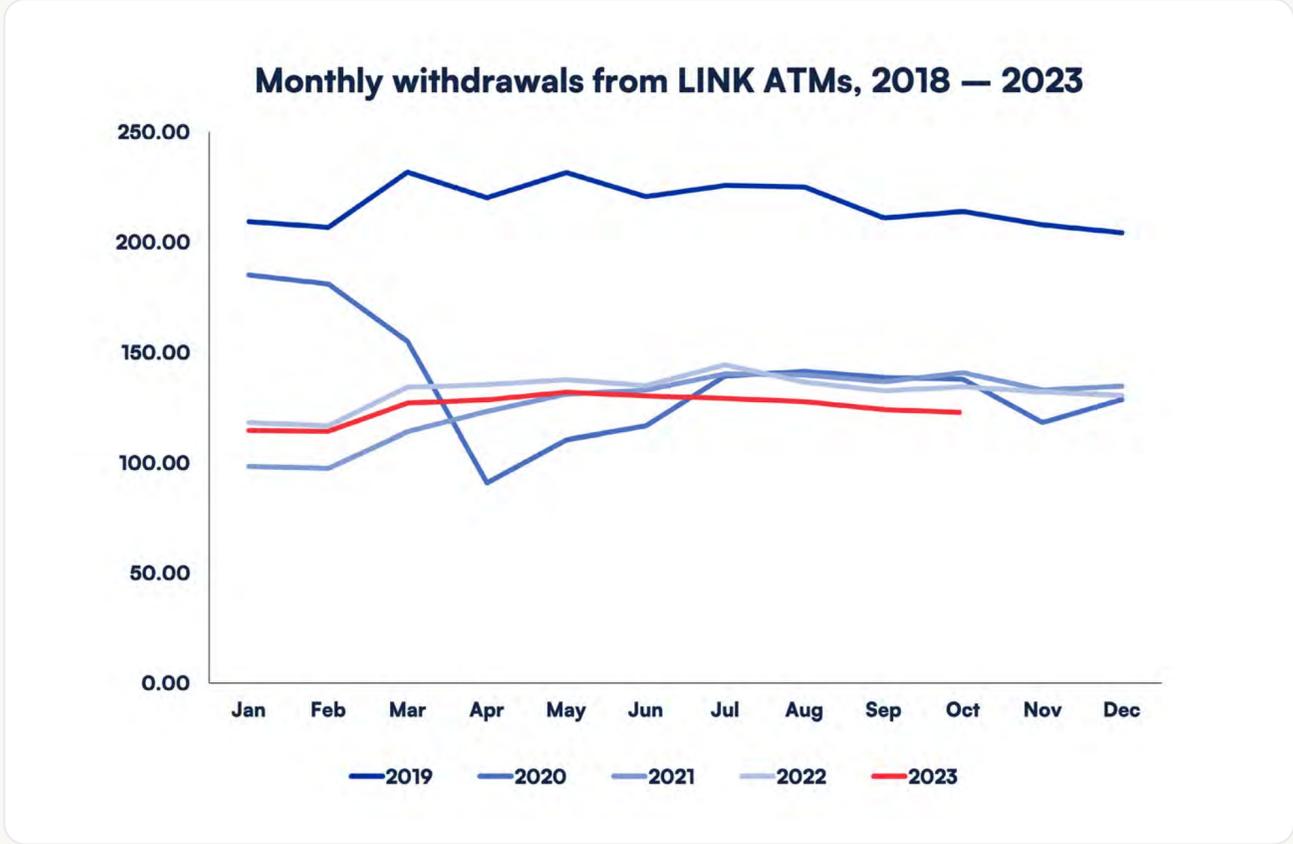
According to UK Finance, for the first time in 2023, half of all payments are via debit card.

Although **cash transactions now make up just 14% of all payments**, cash remains the most reliable way to budget. It remains impervious to technological blackouts, and it doesn't need mobile signal to use it.

That's why **5 million people still use cash day in, day out**. Making sure those people can still access cash remains crucial.

LINK's cash machines remain 40% less busy than they were in 2019, before the pandemic, and all forecasts continue to suggest that cash use will continue to decline.

It remains clear that cash is more important for the most deprived communities, where people are more likely to be budgeting day to day. People on the tightest budgets are moving away from cash most slowly, and cash withdrawals are falling slowest in the most deprived areas as a result.



Reference: [LINK data](#)



WITH THE CONTINUED SHIFT TOWARDS A **CASHLESS SOCIETY**, WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LEAVE PEOPLE OUT OF THE **DIGITAL** OPTIONS THAT ARE OPEN TO THEM

Getting up to speed on digital

The way we use cash is changing rapidly. But each area of the UK has a different relationship with cash.

Underneath the headline reductions in cash usage, in Northern Ireland people tend to withdraw more cash than the rest of the country, while in Wales each cash machine is less busy than the national average.

Based on regional reports into cash usage considered by the Consumer Council, **LINK has this year commenced three digital pilots in different regions of the UK** to promote digital inclusion. Based on the principles of the Financial Inclusion Programme, the pilots are working with local communities which we know are reliant on cash to support people who

are most excluded from digital activity — whether that be simple access to emails and the internet, or online banking.

LINK is working with local partners in the Rhondda Valley and Northern Ireland and Devon **to help people gain confidence in online activity**. The pilots will support people with tailored guidance, workshops, and provide devices where that is a barrier for them.

Based on the pilots, we will consider what works and how LINK can support community led digital inclusion activity. None of this replaces our work to protect the cash access network. But with the continued shift towards a low cash society, we can't afford to leave people out of the digital options that are open to them.

Working with Communities

LINK's Community Request an ATM initiative has run since 2019, and thousands of people have spoken to LINK about local issues with cash access and priorities for their area.

Whenever someone raises a potential issue with the local cash access network, LINK visits and seeks to understand and fix the issue.

That has meant trips to Northern Scotland in the depths of winter, visits to the Cornish seaside in the height of summer, and everything in between.

As a result of communities' local knowledge and with support of LINK's members, **better cash access has now been secured in every corner of the UK.**

In 2023 alone, we've funded machines in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Man. Machines have now been installed everywhere from the Orkney Isles to the Isle of Wight.

These **machines are now dispensing over £10m a month, and being used every 15 seconds** to get someone free, reliable cash access in a community which didn't previously have it. The work will continue to be a crucial part of the Financial Inclusion Programme and support those communities for as long as it is needed.





Supporting deprived areas

Providing cash access to 2,805 deprived areas is a crucial component of the Financial Inclusion Programme.

In 2023, access has been improved in several of those areas through LINK's community request activity, and we've also learnt a lot about those communities.

The Consumer Council reviewed proposals by LINK to visit areas where there were concerns that data did not match the conditions on the ground. As a result, LINK has carried out **39 site visits** across

the country, and has been able to confirm more communities have good access to cash than the data alone suggested.

These visits also highlighted issues for LINK to resolve, including ATMs which weren't being refilled fast enough or where local residents were concerned about accessibility. Simon Rotherham, LINK's Senior Spatial Analyst, said: "We've made big strides in supporting cash access in deprived areas this year, but there's no substitute for local knowledge. We've now got a programme of site visits to make sure that we're offering the best possible cash network to some of the most deprived parts of the country."

Bios

Tracey Graham



Tracey is a portfolio Non-Executive Director, on the Boards of Close Brothers plc (Merchant Banking), discoverIE plc (Electronics) and Nationwide Building Society. Tracey has chaired the Consumer Council for eight years, championing free access to cash through initiatives such as the launch of the ATM Cash Locator, Cash at the Till, and the recent launch of digital inclusion pilots.

Tim Allen



Tim is Director of Access to Banking and Branch Services at Barclays, responsible for delivering sustainable access to cash and physical banking services. He has 23 years' experience in financial services and has served as a director of the LINK ATM Scheme and Community Access to Cash Pilots Boards. He is currently on the board of Cash Access UK Ltd, overseeing the roll-out of Banking Hubs and new cash deposit solutions.

Martin Kearsley



Martin is Cash and Banking Director at the Post Office and has more than 40 years' experience in financial service IT businesses. The Post Office delivers a vital piece of the national access to cash infrastructure, and Martin manages all aspects of Post Office cash services in ATM, Banking Framework services and cash banking across the Post Office network.

He represented the Post Office on both the Community Access to Cash Pilots (CACP) programme and the Cash Action Group, and built on that work following the creation of Cash Access UK to deliver the roll out of Banking Hubs and enhanced banking options nationwide, and liaises with HM Treasury on Post Office cash strategy.

Iain Gibson



Iain is Head of ATMs at Sainsbury's Bank, with over 39 years' banking experience, previously holding several customer-facing roles at Bank of Scotland and Lloyds Banking Group. For the last 20 years, Iain has been responsible for all aspects of ATMs, including compliance, operations, security and customer service. He is a member of the LINK Network Member Advisory Group.

Christopher Brooks



Chris is Head of Policy at Age UK, the charity for older people, where he has worked for over a decade. He leads Age UK's policy team, whose work covers a range of issues, including consumer affairs, benefits, housing and equalities, and is himself a specialist in financial services and employment. Prior to this he worked at the awarding body City & Guilds, where he managed its Parliamentary and public policy activity, and before that at Lansons, a public affairs agency. He also sits on the Nest pension scheme's Members' Panel, representing the interest of its members.

Adam Bailey



Adam is Head of Access to Cash Services for NatWest Group. He has 22 years' experience in the cash and ATM marketplace and is accountable for the bank's ATM estate, branch cash automation and the support of operations of ATMs at Tesco stores.

Bios

Scott Kennerley



Scott is the Director of Consumer Empowerment at the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, the statutory body responsible for championing and representing the interests of its consumers and citizens.

Scott is responsible for the strategic leadership of his organisation's financial and postal services policy work. Prior to joining the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Scott managed the Debt Advice Service provided by Citizens Advice Northern Ireland. He has worked in the finance industry as both a mental health debt advice specialist and a financial advisor.

Nick Wiles



Nick Wiles is currently Chief Executive Officer of PayPoint PLC, having previously chaired the business in a non executive and then executive capacity between 2015 and 2020. Earlier in his career Nick was an investment banker for almost 30 years, with the majority of that time at Cazenove advising UK and overseas corporates on a range of issues including strategy, investor engagement and m&a execution. In addition Nick is currently the Chair of the Hurlingham Polo Association and has also served on the Boards of Picton Property Income Ltd, as a Non Executive director, Primary Health Properties PLC as the Senior Non Executive director, and Strutt & Parker LLP as a Non Executive director and Chairman of Remuneration, in addition to a number of unlisted businesses.

Sian Williams



Sian is CEO of Switchback, a charity that supports young men to find a way out of the justice system and build a stable, rewarding life they can be proud of. Prior to joining Switchback, Sian was Director of Innovation and Policy at Toynbee Hall in London's East End, where she led work to ensure people with lived experience of exclusion and hardship are involved in shaping policy and practice solutions.

She is also Chair of the new economy think tank Positive Money, Vice-Chair of the Financial Inclusion Commission and a Non-Executive Director of the Financial Inclusion Forum. Sian also represents the interests of people at risk of exclusion on the Pay, UK End User Council and the UK Finance Cash Action Group.

Paul Maynard MP



Paul is the Member of Parliament for Blackpool North & Cleveleys. He has served as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department for Transport and the Justice Minister, and Government Whip. Paul's constituency is the second most deprived Conservative held seat in the country. Paul campaigns for better financial resilience and in keeping access to cash.

Lady Margaret Bloom CBE



An economist and Honorary Professor at King's College London, Margaret's experience and expertise in financial consumer and small business issues particularly concerns access to cash, financial inclusion, regulation, lending standards and indebtedness.



Contact

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