



Life Centre Stourbridge

Annual Report, Review & Accounts 2020

"Helping people 'do' life"



Churches Together in
Stourbridge

cma

Freedom from debt
Hope for the future

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Summary from the Chair

Rereading the annual summary for last year – 2019 – underlines what a very different year this has been for so many. We have experienced a pandemic the like of which has not been seen for over a century. Initially in the first lockdown, face to face meetings and just about everything else at the Centre had to cease. The only thing that remained were the Monday morning Zoom fellowship meetings our Centre Manager, Martin Frize, initiated and which have become a great way to keep the Volunteer team together, build fellowship and offer support.

Although for much of 2020 we have not been seeing many clients we have none the less been very busy. We have moved our accommodation from the Upper Room at Café 105 to the top floor - The Ark - in Bellmark House on the corner of Market Street and Bell Street. This was a major undertaking involving not just removals but telephone and computer issues, files, office equipment, notifications, insurances and so on – all in the midst of social distancing. This was a real team building exercise! We are very grateful to Alan Taylor, a trustee of the Life Centre and also of the Ark for agreeing to our sharing accommodation with them. Thanks also go to Malcolm Moss, another trustee, for sorting much of the Trust's computer records and resources.

Two volunteers Andy Burton and Jane Sutherland, have spent much time constructing, recording and presenting a "Moneywise" course on budgeting. This has been presented both in person and via Zoom and is a very useful resource. During Summer and Autumn, we have been seeing some clients, both in the Covid secure environment of our office and via Zoom. It is difficult but better than nothing.

The cessation of much of the debt collection enforcement has given our clients and potential clients some respite but we know that there will be many more needing help as the realities of their financial situations catches up with them. We must be ready to help meet that need and that will be our challenge for 2021 and beyond.

So well done everybody in unprecedented circumstances for all you have achieved. We look forward to going from strength-to-strength next year.

Our Purpose, our impact

Our impact in 2020

We set ourselves two main goals for 2020 but both have been significantly affected and disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. These goals were to: -

- Continue to provide high quality debt advice
- Expand the range of services LCS offer by rolling out Money Management Workshops

Continue to provide high quality debt advice

The major consequence of the pandemic has been a substantial reduction in both the number of referrals and client interviews. Both were down to a third of the pre-pandemic levels. The increase in benefits was another reason for the drop in referrals.

Engaging with clients was also hampered by the restrictions on face-to-face meetings and holding client interviews remotely. Engagement flows from the relationship that is built up between the client & the debt advice team & this is difficult under normal circumstances.

Expand the range of services LCS offer by rolling out Money Management Workshops

We did run 2 Money Management Workshops face-to-face. The team re-worked the material so that it can be used online & they successfully ran a trial session. Although this course has been scheduled & advertised several times, there was a lack of response during 2020.

Our Organisational impact in 2020

We had the following aspirations for our organisation for 2020 and we can report progress against each of these goals: -

- Employ a part-time assistant debt advice manager
 - We did not do this because the workload did not require it
 - Furthermore, our centre manager's hours reduced from 5 days a week to 3 days a week from mid-April onwards due to reduced workload.
 - From September he started working for 2 days a week for CMA as an Operational Support Manager.
 - These two developments may look like a step backwards but we do not see it like that.
 - We are benefiting from Martin's experience at other debt advice centres
 - This preserves our resources to employ a part-time assistant debt advice manager at some point soon
 - We expect the need for our services to rise beyond the pre-pandemic levels over the next few years
- Consolidate our ability to operate from several locations across the borough
 - We are about to sign an agreement with Holy Trinity at Old Hill
 - The Brierley Hill Project is on-hold at present due to the pandemic.
 - Hope House in Lower Gornal will open as an autonomous CMA debt advice centre in February 2021
 - Baxter Church Kidderminster is on-hold at present due to the pandemic.
 - The following Churches have expressed an interest in becoming a clinic for debt advice: -
 - Christ Church, Lye
 - Life Central Church, Halesowen
 - We are also moving towards using mobile technology to allow us to work at locations where there is no phone or internet connection that we can securely use
- Review our accommodation in Stourbridge
 - We have moved out of the Upper Room above Café 105 on the High Street & our Stourbridge town centre base is now in Bellmark House, 18A Market Street which we share with Riverside Christian Fellowship
 - We had to make both our Stourbridge bases 'Covid-19 safe' and we must thank Martin for his work in establishing and implementing the new procedures to keep everybody as safe as possible.
 - By the time the pandemic restrictions ease, we will be working from laptops rather than desktops so that we can leave the space clear for other users at the end of each LCDA session
- Recruit more volunteers
 - We did not recruit any more volunteers & Dave Davies, our former centre manager, retired. Thank you, Dave for your dedication & organisation.
- Recruit more trustees
 - Alex French joined us but Ken Baker resigned after many years of service. Thank you, Ken for all that you did.
- Raise the required funds from trusts, churches & individuals
 - We applied for grants from: -
 - Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council: -
 - Connecting People fund: £3200 with £1,600 received in 2020.
 - Money Secret Workshop: £450
 - Co-operative Community fund: £1,243
 - Yorkshire Building Society: £680

Our focus for 2021

As you would expect, our goals are very similar to last year's: -

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- Continue to provide high quality debt advice
- Expand the range of services LCS offer by rolling out Money Management Workshops
 - We have already completed the online version of the course for 6 people.
- Employ a part-time assistant debt advice manager
- Improve our ability to operate from our base in Stourbridge, other several locations across the borough & enable mobile working
- Expand the team
- Raise the required funds from trusts, churches & individuals
 - Our main source of grant funding will stop in March 2022 & in 2020 this accounted for 37% of our income
- Review our IT infrastructure to support the move to mobile working & working in the Ark where we do not have a dedicated office space so we'll have to use laptops rather than desktop computers & operate a 'clear desk' policy.

Future direction

We have no hesitation in repeating what was written last year as it is still as relevant now as it was then: -

The charity's practical money-orientated ministry will continue to focus not just on matters pertaining to handling money, but will also seek to bring people into the freedom of being good stewards of what God has given, working holistically with people to bring restoration across a broad spectrum of related elements of "Life events". In as much as money management may be a "starting point" for client engagement, the journey to freedom is not just about money alone, it's about its impacting affects and often the character issues that have contributed to things getting out of hand in the first place.

Our future ministry is about encouraging and supporting an increasing number of churches building a bridge to encounter people in the community, at their point of need. We believe there is a very powerful, faith building parallel between the journey out of poverty and debt, and the journey to faith. Our future direction therefore seeks to: -

- Alleviate poverty - ensuring clients have an acceptable, proportional level of living, whilst working toward their responsible repayment of indebtedness.
- Liberate clients - from oppression and isolation, caused by debt, being chased and harassed by Creditors, giving rise to guilt and shame, a loss of self-esteem, a sense of personal failure, depression and insignificance.
- Create Spiritual awakenings – in parallel to practical help and support, opportunities for teaching and discipleship on stewardship and God's provision will be explored.
- "Help people 'do' life".

Our people

We are people who are trying to follow Jesus. As he had compassion for the poor, the marginalised & the oppressed, we are trying to emulate his example. At the end of 2020, the team consisted of 12 people actively engaged in the following roles with others waiting to re-engage once they feel able to do so: -

- 1 part-time employee: The Centre Manager & debt advisor
- 5 Trustees
- 3 Active Debt advisors
- 1 Active Support worker
- 3 Prayer supporters
- 4 Inductees

Financial Review

The increase in our bank balance of £11,233 indicates that LCDA is in a financially strong position however this overstates the real position slightly for the following reasons: -

1. This year we have not only received tax relief on donations for all of 2019 but also for the first 11 months of 2020.
2. Expenses incurred by the manager in 2020 have not been claimed for yet.
3. We have yet to pay some of the premise-related costs arising from moving to Bellmark House.

The combined effect inflates the year-end bank balance by approximately £2,390.

Bank Balances

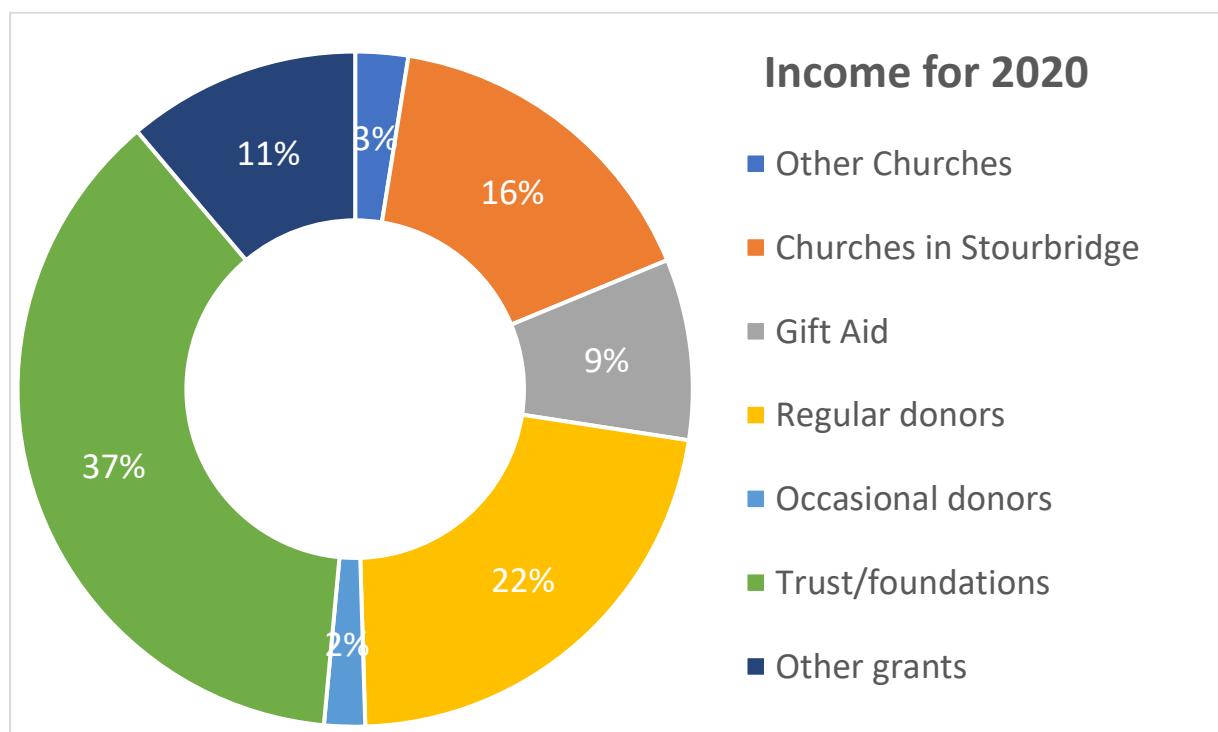
	Current account	Deposit account	Total
Opening balance	£2,951	£7,023	£9,974
Closing balance	£4,170	£17,037	£21,207
Net change	£1,219	£ 10,014	£11,233

Deposit Account

We transferred a further £10,000 into the deposit account from the current account & this has earned interest of £14.01.

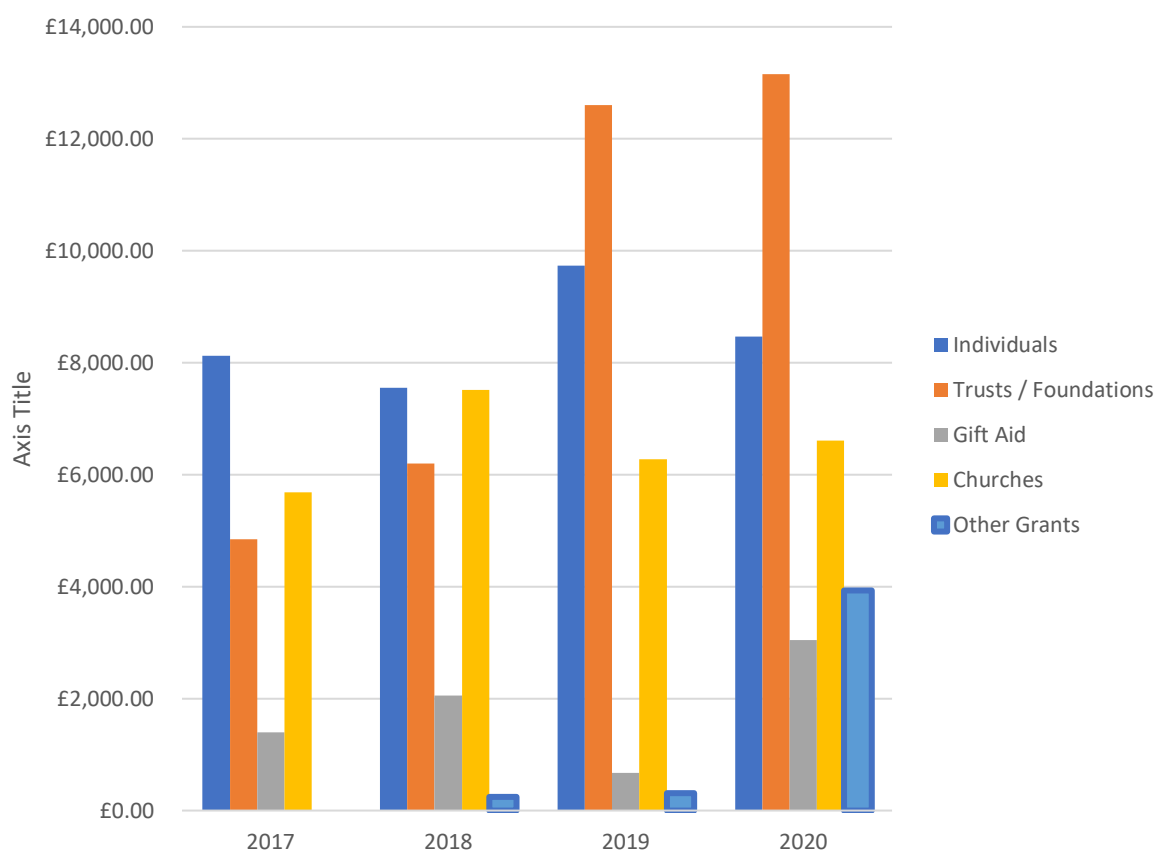
Income

Our overall income grew by £5,612.27 or 19% to £35,222.86 and this chart shows the breakdown of our income streams: -



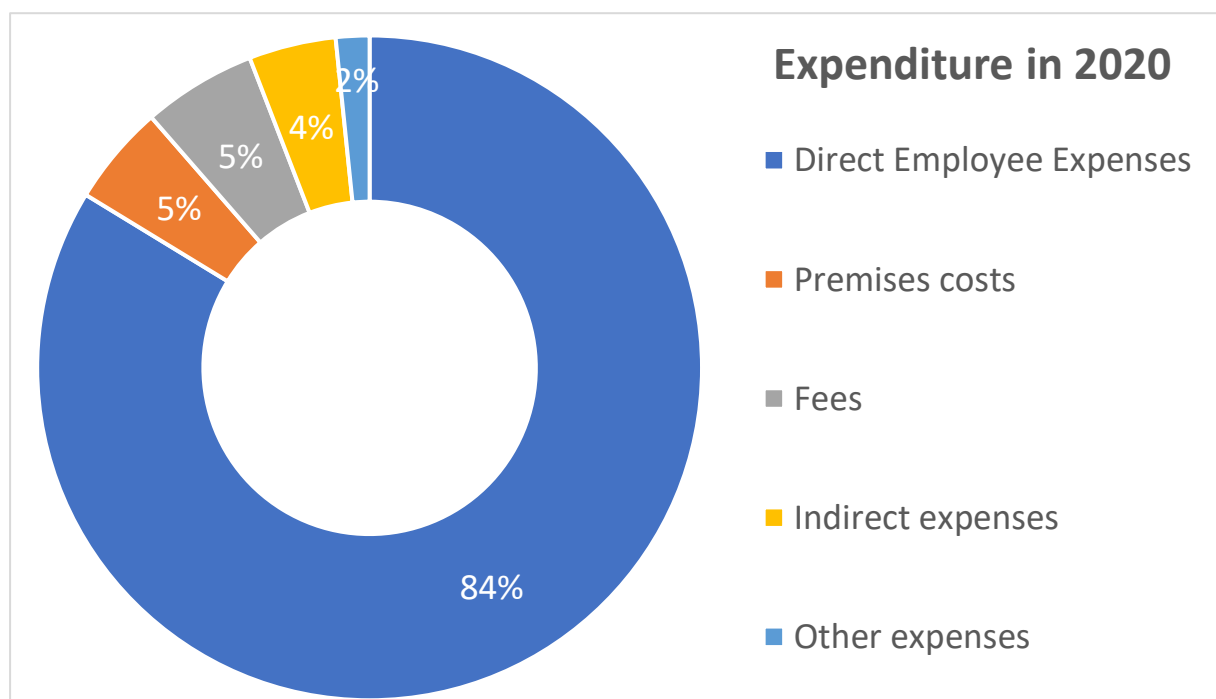
The regular support from churches & individuals grew by 8.2% & 3.1% respectively this year but the major growth in our income has come from the trusts (The Earthen Vessel) & grants (Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council & The Co-Op) as depicted by the chart below.

Income 2017 to 2020



Expenditure

In 2020 our expenditure dropped by £6,094 (13%) to £23,990 mainly due to the reduction the manager's hours from 5 to 3 days a week from June onwards saving £3,822. There was also a delay in paying some indirect expenses & premises costs and the value of these outstanding items is about £960.



Reserves

Our minimum running costs for a quarter are approximately £5,000 & this is considerably less than our current balance. Furthermore, the prospect of losing all sources of income at the same time are remote.

Independent Examination

The accounts have been examined independently & deemed a true record. The report appears after the Financial Statement.

Governance

The Trustees and Centre Manager work together to govern the operation of the charity to the relevant standards. The Manager is primarily responsible for the quality of the Debt Advice and our compliance with the regulations and requirements of the two bodies that accredit our work, the Financial Conduct Authority and the Community Money Advice (CMA) organisation. The quality of the debt advice is externally audited annually by the CMA organisation.

In 2020 the Management Team met ten times to guide the work, agree new approaches, approve new volunteers and any other relevant leadership decisions.

Trustees are appointed or confirmed at Trustee Meetings and may serve for a maximum of 3 years before formal re-election if appropriate, and it is recommended that they serve no more than 7 years.

The charity has an informal accountability to the Churches Together in Stourbridge (CTiS) network.

Trustees

Name	Primary role	End of term
Julia Savage	Chair	19/04/21
Alan Taylor	Assistant Treasurer	15/03/22
David Watts	Fund Raising	28/06/23
Malcolm Moss	Scribe & Treasurer	01/04/22
Alex French	Trustee	15/02/21 Resigned
Ken Baker	Trustee	01/04/20 Resigned

Charity Details

Charity number	115691
Charity status	Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) Registered 13 th March 2014.
Registered Office	The Upper Room Bellmark House 18a Market Street Stourbridge West Midlands DY8 1AD
Telephone	01384 739757
Email	info@lifecentredebtadvice.org.uk
Chair	Julia.savage@lifecentredebtadvice.org.uk
Independent Examiner	Peter Brazier 93 Hyperion Stourbridge West Midlands DY9 6SJ
Bankers	Unity Trust Bank plc Nine Brindley Place Birmingham B1 2HB

Charity objectives

The objects of the charity as set out in the constitution are: -

1. To relieve poverty by providing ethical debt and money management advice, free of charge.
2. To promote social inclusion for the public benefit by preventing people from becoming socially excluded, relieving the needs of those people who are socially excluded (for the purpose of this clause 'socially excluded' means being excluded from society, or parts of society, as a result of financial hardship) and assisting them to integrate into society in particular but not exclusively by; -
 - a. providing advocacy services for people who are unable to advocate for themselves because of fear or lack of knowledge or lack of confidence
 - b. providing training and guidance to develop people's financial capability
 - c. helping those who have been isolated from, or who are out of touch with, society to re-adjust and re-integrate by befriending them and re-building their confidence in their local community.
3. The advancement of the Christian faith by evangelistic mission that is carried out on an entirely non-coercive and invitational basis, and in accordance with the Faithworks charter given as [Appendix 1](#) of the constitution.

These objects are carried out currently by the provision of the Life Centre Debt Advice work by employing a Debt Advice Manager and training volunteer Debt Advisors and Support Workers who give debt advice and work with clients to achieve debt-free status.

As followers of Jesus, we believe that prayer is the foundation of this work.

Financial Statement

Current account	2019	2020
Brought forward	£10,437.85	£2,950.92
Income		
Other Churches	£990.00	£890.00
Churches in Stourbridge	£5,282.50	£5,715.25
Pension refund	£7.47	
Gift Aid	£675.66	£3,050.07
Regular donors	£7,545.00	£7,781.25
Occasional donors	£2,187.95	£689.00
Trust/foundations	£12,600.00	£13,150.00
Other grants	£308.00	£3,933.28
Total income	£29,596.58	£35,208.85
Expenditure		
Direct Employee Expenses	-£23,905.27	-£20,083.13
Payroll services	-£54.00	-£66.00
CMA fees	-£995.00	-£995.00
DBS fees	-£156.75	-£153.50
Other fees	-£35.00	-£40.00
Bank fees	-£72.00	-£72.00
Website fees		£0.00
Manager's expenses	-£2,383.33	-£709.54
Advisor expenses	-£29.99	-£76.19
Volunteer expenses		-£231.31
Training		£0.00
Marketing	-£261.32	£0.00
Insurance	-£392.00	-£392.00
Courses		£0.00
Rent	-£1,200.00	-£700.00
Landline	-£516.05	-£470.84
Office Maintenance	-£82.80	£0.00
Transfer to Deposit account	-£7,000.00	-£10,000.00
Total expenditure	-£37,083.51	-£33,989.51
Surplus/deficit	-£7,486.93	£1,219.34
Carried forward	£2,950.92	£4,170.26

Deposit account	2019	2020
Brought forward		£7,023.19
Income		
Transfer in	£7,000.00	£10,000.00
Interest	£23.19	£14.01
Total income	£7,023.19	£10,014.01
Surplus/deficit	£7,023.19	£10,014.01
Carried forward	£7,023.19	£17,037.20

Combined accounts	2019	2020
Current Brought forward	£10,437.85	£2,950.92
Deposit Brought forward	£0.00	£7,023.19
Total Brought Forward	£10,437.85	£9,974.11
Current account Income	£29,596.58	£35,208.85
Deposit account income	£7,023.19	£10,014.01
Total income	£36,619.77	£45,222.86
Current account Expenditure	-£37,083.51	-£33,989.51
Deposit account Expenditure	£0.00	£0.00
Total Expenditure	-£37,083.51	-£33,989.51
Surplus/deficit	-£463.74	£11,233.35
Carried forward	£9,974.11	£21,207.46

LIFE CENTRE STOURBRIDGE (CIO 1156191)

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S FULL REPORT

1.1.2020 to 31.12.2020

This final report for the financial year 2020 must be read in conjunction with my Interim report dated 19 October 2020 which covered the first six months of the financial year. I collected the file containing the monthly bank statements and supporting bills and invoices on 15 January 2021 having previously received emails with various computer printouts attached. On Wednesday 20 January I started my examination which I completed the following day on Thursday 21 January 2021.

My examination took the normal form – I checked the invoices provided and marked these off against the “Cash Book” and then traced these items through the bank statements. All payments had been made correctly and had been authorised by the appropriate signatories. At the conclusion of this report, I have listed certain matters which will need to be dealt with. As there were no papers relating to incoming funds it was necessary to mark off the donations/gifts/trust fund receipts direct from the bank statements and trace these into the “Cash Book”. It was not possible to do a normal Bank Reconciliation for the reasons which will become clear at the end of this report.

Subject to the matters referred to shortly I have signed off the formal statement of the Independent Examiner to the Trustees using the approved declaration from the Charity Commission. I have also examined the latest Gift Aid tax reclaim and I am satisfied that this is accurate.

NOTES

1. The office manager's expenses claim whilst being clearly justified did not contain till receipts or supporting invoices. Some of the expenses related to legitimate courses - therefore I would have expected that documents etc would have been available. These need to be seen.
2. The BT telephone bill for £115.70 paid 15.12.2020 needs to be made available.
3. A credit of £250 being an amount paid in to the bank on 9.12.2020 (which I later discovered was from St Michaels) did not appear on the “Cash Book” sheet.
4. My report Interim report mentioned the Insurance fraud and that the Trust was expecting a refund of £392 to be made. This amount has not yet appeared in the accounts. However, the Trustees do need to be assured that the Trust is covered fully for Insurance and to that end the policy document and renewal premium receipt needs to be produced to confirm full coverage.
5. In my Interim report I made reference to the lack of a “Cash Book”. It is very important that there should be a Prime Document into which the Treasurer puts all items whether debit or credit which is issued or received at source. It is not acceptable to rely on the Bank Statement as that Prime Document – surprisingly enough even banks can make mistakes!! And if the Bank Statement is relied upon then the Independent Examiner is unable to reconcile the cleared bank balance - in effect this is agreeing the balance with itself!!

Once again Alan Taylor as Trust Treasurer has proved to be a very careful manager of the Financial affairs of the Trust. Having been your Independent Examiner since the inception of the Trust in 2014, I have decided that the time has come for me to hand on this duty to another person. Thank you for bearing with me and my fussy ways.

Peter E Brazier ACIB

Independent Examiner 21.1.2021

The Faithworks Charter



Principles for Churches and local Christian agencies committed to excellence in community work and service provision in the UK

Motivated by our Christian faith we, commit ourselves to serve others by aspiring to the following standards in all our community work.

We will provide an inclusive service to our community by:

1. Serving and respecting all people regardless of their gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, religion, age, sexual orientation or physical and mental capability.
2. Acknowledging the freedom of people of all faiths or none both to hold and to express their beliefs and convictions respectfully and freely, within the limits of the UK law.
3. Never imposing our Christian faith or belief on others.
4. Developing partnerships with other churches, voluntary groups, statutory agencies and local government wherever appropriate in order to create an effective, integrated service for our clients avoiding unnecessary duplication of resources.
5. Providing and publicising regular consultation and reporting forums to client groups and the wider community regarding the effective development and delivery of our work and our responsiveness to their actual needs.

We will value all individuals in a way that is consistent with our distinctive Christian ethos by:

1. Creating an environment where clients, volunteers and employees are encouraged and enabled to realise their potential.
2. Assisting our clients, volunteers and employees to take responsibility for their own learning and development, both through formal and informal training opportunities and ongoing assessment.
3. Developing an organisational culture in which individuals learn from any mistakes made and where excellence and innovation are encouraged and rewarded.
4. Promoting the value of a balanced, holistic lifestyle as part of each individual's overall personal development.
5. Abiding by the requirements of employment law in the UK and implementing best employment practices and procedures designed to maintain our distinctive ethos and values.

We will develop a professional approach to management, practice and funding by:

1. Implementing a management structure, which fosters and encourages participation by staff at all levels in order to facilitate the fulfilment of the project's goals and visions.
2. Setting and reviewing measurable and timed outcomes annually, and regularly to evaluate and monitor our management structure and output, recognising the need for ongoing organisational flexibility, development and good stewardship of resources.
3. Doing all we can to ensure that we are not over-dependent on any one source of funding.
4. Implementing best practice procedures in terms of Health and Safety and Child Protection in order to protect our staff, volunteers and clients.
5. Handling our funding in a transparent and accountable way and to give relevant people from outside our organisation/project reasonable access to our accounts.