



Life Centre Stourbridge

Annual Report, Review & Accounts 2021

“Helping people ‘do’ life”



Churches Together in
Stourbridge

cma

Freedom from debt
Hope for the future

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Summary from the Chair

As I re-read the report for 2020 it reminded me how very different a year it was. We all imagined then that somehow 2021 would revert to normal. Yes, it is more normal – but a new normal. We were still in new accommodation, in which not everyone yet felt at home. We were moving to completely a computerised office and clear desk policy. This was a struggle for the computer savvy among us – for the rest, a real challenge! I have to say, though, all our volunteers have addressed it with great good humour and acceptance.

Much as IT and such is challenging for many of us, it is important also to record our gratitude to Malcolm, one of the Trustees, and Martin our manager who both can grapple with these things and keep us on the right track. In fact, the whole process of Debt Advice and its recording and monitoring is now so much more complex than when we started. From GDPR to the FCA requirement of the name of a “responsible person” to answer to them for our casework underline how much more challenging it has become. My thanks do go both to CMA and to Martin for getting to grips with it, mastering it, and then telling us what we need to do to comply in plain English.

We have largely returned to seeing clients face to face. Zoom and Teams were very good but however we were getting on, many of our clients did not have the IT ability, or the system downloaded on their phones, or battery power, or the Data available in their package or the right number and so on.

Fortunately, The Ark is so much better for ventilation. One would have had much less confidence where we were previously.

In one sense the numbers of those we have seen do not look as impressive in 2021, but Martin our manager, is triaging potential new clients, usually by phone, to ensure they really do want the support we can offer.

In many other settings some of the potential clients have only got in touch to please someone else – the job centre etc. Sadly many of those will not actually attend an appointment or do what they are asked and stay the course.

That is a pity, as it takes up time someone else might have used better and it is a disappointment for the debt adviser volunteers and support workers.

An unexpected but very exciting development in 2021 has been the “tie up” with Holy Trinity Church in Old Hill.

We have a structure, built over a number of years and robust, and we have experience. Linking in with that has allowed them to set up a Debt Advice Centre at their church under our “umbrella” - formally a Satellite - so much more quickly than had they “gone it alone”. They now have 3 trained Debt Advisers based there, seeing clients and going “from strength to strength”.

As I see what they are doing and achieving, I feel all the pride of a parent – albeit rather a strange one!

So it has been a year of transition and we have “got there”! Well done everyone!

Our Purpose, our impact

Our impact in 2021

We set ourselves these goals for 2021:

1. Continue to provide high quality debt advice
2. Expand the range of services LCS offer by rolling out Money Management Workshop programme.
3. Employ a part-time assistant debt advice manager
4. Improve our ability to operate from our base in Stourbridge, other locations across the borough & enable mobile working
5. Expand the team
6. Raise the required funds from trusts, churches & individuals
7. 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 desk-top computers & operate a 'clear desk' policy. This also allows us to work from different locations.

Continue to provide high quality debt advice.

We are required to comply with the requirements of an increasing number of organisations and regulatory bodies: -

Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)

Life Centre Debt Advice (LCDA) is Authorised and Regulated by the FCA (Reference No. 618789) and we make annual returns to them. This has been compulsory for some years and brought in since we opened in 2014. Initially we were brought in as a free debt advice centre, part of CMA (see below) but an inspection of our "operation" will undoubtedly take place at some stage. Without this we would be unable to provide Debt Advice.

Community Money Advice (CMA)

Life Centre Debt Advice (LCDA) is affiliated with CMA. They support around 150 independent centres, providing support, input and advice as well as updating new requirements including when we were brought within the FCA "umbrella".

They inspect a sample of our work annually and this year described us as a *"a well-run and established centre."*

Information Commissioners Office (ICO) Registration - (GDPR)

The Data Protection (Charges and Information) Regulations 2018 requires every organisation, including us, that processes personal information to register and to pay an annual fee to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Customer Feedback

We are required to solicit feedback and keep the results. In 2021, client questionnaire responses showed a 92% satisfaction level.

Less formally expressed client statements include *"You are my guardian angel, and I couldn't have done this without you"* Client No. 208 Sept 2021.

No complaints received, ever, either by us or the FOS (Financial Ombudsman Service).

Number of clients

In 2021, the number of clients we were able to take on was significantly reduced by the Covid-19 pandemic due to lockdown restrictions and shielding etc.

We conducted many Zoom meetings but some clients did not find this "user friendly" or lacked mobile phone or IT facilities and skills. Also creditors were less active in debt recovery. Pre-Covid LCDA reported an average of 260 transactions (debt-advice interactions) per year to the FCA (2018-2020) with an average of 46 new clients per year or 5.6 transactions per client.

In 2021 LCDA supported 34 new Households, at least £154,000 of household debt. A further 33 existing clients continued to receive our ongoing support, and a still further 33 clients remain active cases although became “dormant” (some clients have gone to ground during the pandemic). A total of 127 transactions were reported by LCDA Debt Advisers in 2021 (4.8 per client).

The total Debt being supported across all these clients in 2021 was some £900,000.

Before the first appointment we try to ensure, by an informal telephone triage, that we will be able to help clients and that they are willing to engage with us. This has reduced the number of “no shows” and thus volunteer time wasted considerably.

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

In early 2020 LCDA got a grant of £450 from DMBC to create and offer appropriate clients Money Management Workshops. Three workshops were delivered prior to the Covid-19 outbreak.

It was re-formatted for presentation via Zoom but with less success. The training materials and content remains useful with individual clients and we hope to resume the workshops in 2022.

Employ a part-time assistant debt advice manager.

A salaried part time assistant manager would provide more capacity, more resilience into the future and more support for our volunteers as debt advice delivery becomes more complex and demanding. The work and need is there.

A job description, person specification and vacancy advert had been prepared just prior to the Covid outbreak but it was felt that the time was not yet right to proceed with the recruitment. Hopefully this can be restarted in 2022.

Expand the team

LCDA has welcomed six new team members in the twelve months to Jan 2022 – despite the rigours of the pandemic. They have all undertaken the CMA training required to work as a Debt Advisor. This takes the number of people in the team able to offer advice to twelve.

Meet the Team

As 2021 ended, LCDA comprised twenty-one active, part time, team members:

- Trustees: 4 volunteers
- Centre Manager: 1 Part time salaried (24hrs/week)
- Debt Advisers: 7 volunteers
- Support Workers: 4 volunteers
- Admin Support: 1 volunteer
- Prayer Team partners: 3 volunteers

Raise the required funds from trusts, churches & individuals

Our funding breakdown, and financial examiner’s report, come later in this report. Our finances are currently healthy and have improved as we did not go ahead and take on an assistant manager during the pandemic.

We have had the benefit of considerable support from one local charity, as well as many local churches and individuals for which we are most grateful. The trustees are aware of the need to continue to make this a priority especially if suitable projects that fit in with our hopes for the future can be identified for other charity grant applications.

Review our IT resources to support remote working and clear desk policy requirement at the Ark, which is shared with other users.

The Ark.

We have continued to settle in to the Ark, on the second floor at Bellmark House at the corner of Market Street and Bell Street in Stourbridge - installed new telephones, office mobile, laptop computers in place of the desktops, Zoom, What's App, removal and disposal of remaining paper-based files, replaced by the CMA created Catalyst system – and generally got used to all the changes in environment and working practices. This has extended to our Trust documentation and P&Ps too. There do remain some IT issues to resolve as one might expect with such a change.

Remote working.

Holy Trinity Church, Old Hill.

The PCC at HTOH obtained a grant from Sandwell MBC and a local charity to open a debt advice centre attached to their church.

They had no previous experience and we agreed to support them using all the knowledge and experience we have accrued. Three of them joined us as volunteers. They have completed the CMA training and sat in with our debt advisors with our clients to learn. One of our volunteers has seen clients local to Old Hill at their church premises.

They have contributed to our funding and have formally become a Satellite to us and part of our structure, as we help them to benefit from our experience.

Their volunteers live in Old Hill and want to work as debt advisors their own community. They probably would not have become part of a Centre working in Stourbridge and this way we can further our concern to help any in debt through our friends in Old Hill.

Other options.

We have a debt advisor volunteer who has also worked at the Brierley Hill project. She is able to see clients from the project, at Brierley Hill as our volunteer – within our system and in accordance with our rules.

Another debt advisor lives in Kidderminster, and has on occasion seen clients in Kidderminster – still as part of our Centre. There are some individuals in the church community who would love to build on that link.

CMA recognises both of these situations as Clinics under the auspices of LCDA.

Our focus for 2022 and Future Direction

We hope to continue to meet the need of as many as we can of those in debt by whatever means are open to us. We realise the demand for what we can offer will grow. We therefore hope to expand our team both in volunteers, their ability and experience, and a second paid part time employee.

Some of our clients will only want a 'quick fix' for their current crisis – the bailiffs, rent arrears and such. Others will be ready to come on a journey with us that will help them to become financially stable for the rest of their lives.

We also hope to build on our work in money management workshops as there has been so little to help people learn to manage their finances in our complex modern world.

As a consequence, our goals remain largely unchanged.

Financial Review

Bank Balances

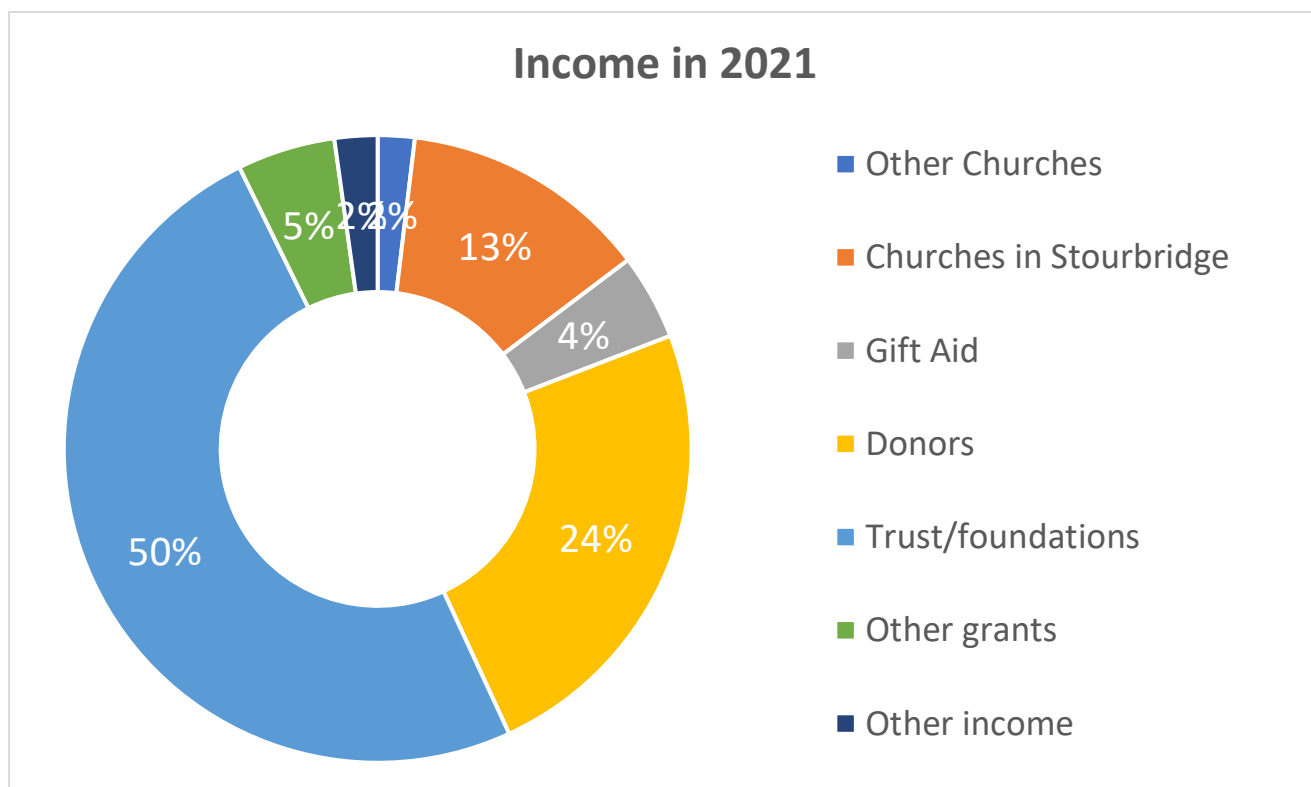
	Current account	Deposit account	Total
Opening balance	£4,170	£17,037	£21,207
Closing balance	£4,702	£29,039	£33,741
Net change	£532	£ 12,002	£12,534

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The increase in our bank balance shows that LCDA is in a financially strong position with no expenses outstanding. Although we transferred a further £12,000 into the deposit account from the current account, the interest earned was only £1.79!

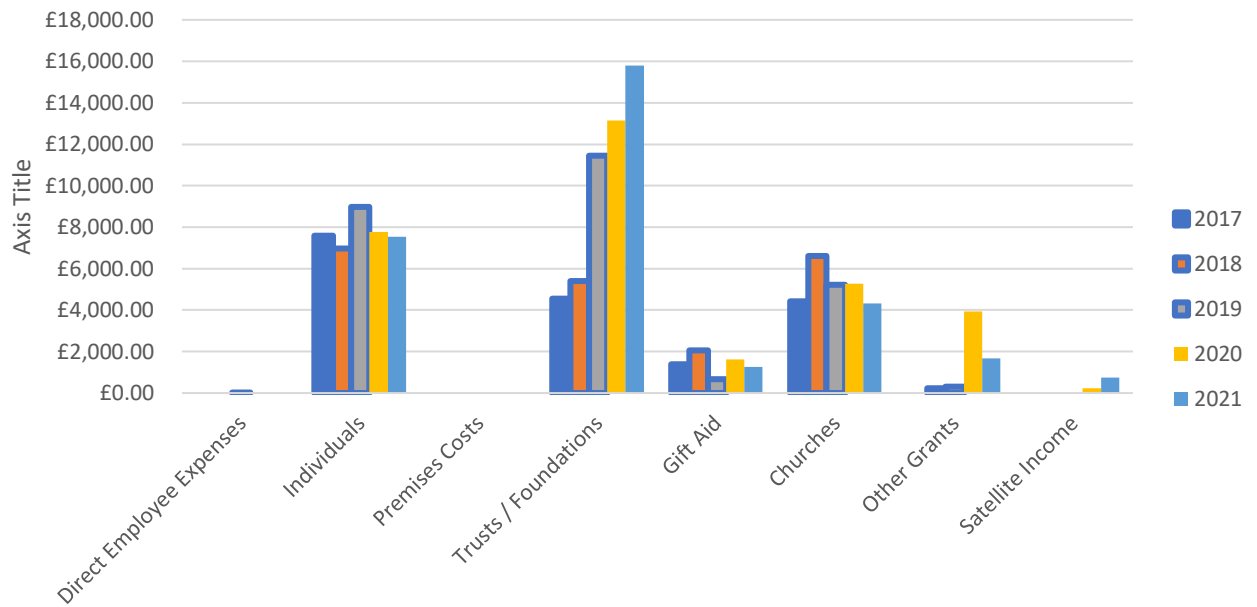
Income

Our overall income dropped by 3% or £1,066 to £34,156.58 and this chart shows the breakdown of our income streams: -



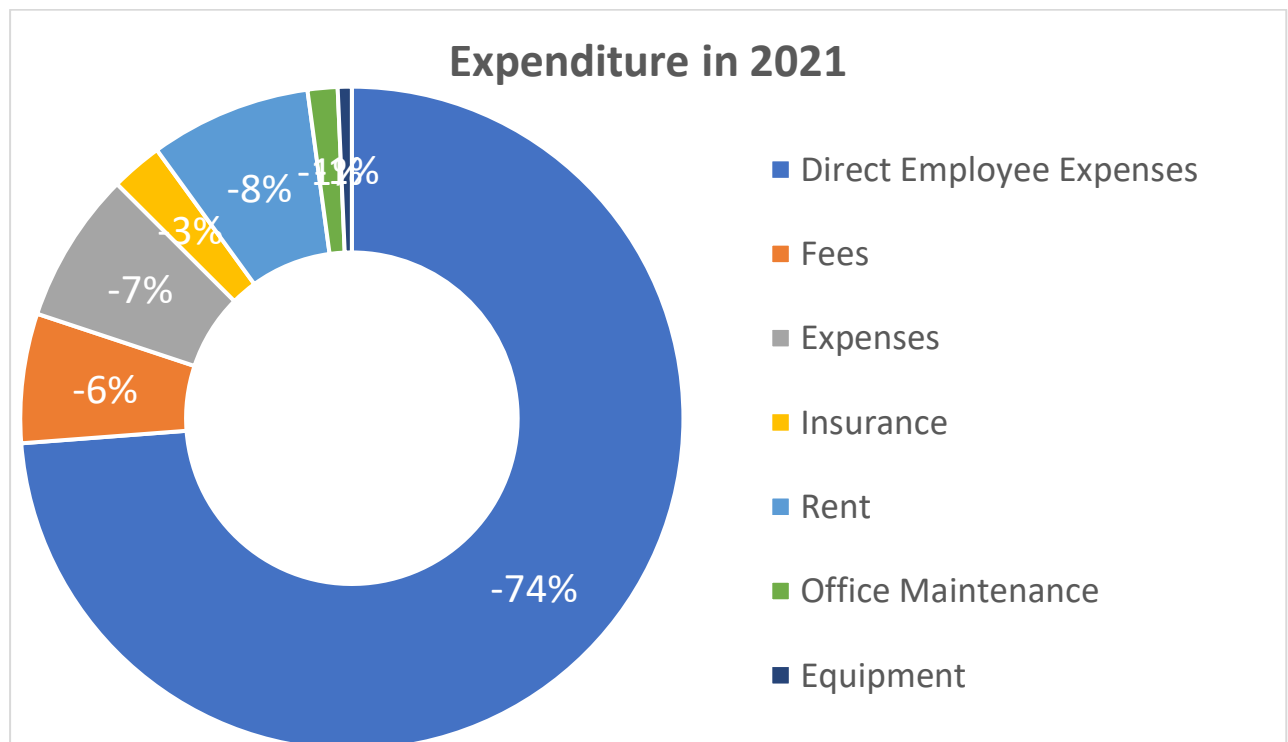
Our major source of income (50%) is from the Earthen Vessel Trust. The regular support from individuals was maintained throughout the year & this makes up 28% of our income once the gift aid is included. Support from the churches in Stourbridge dropped by 23.5% or £1,340. The chart below shows the trends for the last five years.

Income 2017 to 2021



Expenditure

In 2021 our expenditure dropped by £ 2,367 or 10% to £21,623 due to the unusual nature of the year.



Reserves

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

Independent Examination

The accounts have been examined independently & no exceptions were reported. 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 2021 the Management Team met 7 times and the Trustees 3 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	19/04/22
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
Nicola Martin	Trustee	02/02/25 Joined 3/2/22

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	Alastair Greaves 6 Clifton Street Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 3XR
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

This is the statement of receipts and payments for the period 1st January 2021 to 31st December 2021.

	2021	2020
Bank balances brought forward	£21,207	£9,974
	Revenue	
Other Churches	£650	£650
Churches in Stourbridge	£4,375	£5,715
Gift Aid	£1,509	£3,050
Regular donors	£7,782	£7,781
Occasional donors	£410	£689
Trust/foundations	£16,950	£13,150
Other grants	£1,725	£3,933
Other income: Satellite	£750	£240
Other income: Interest	£2	£14
Other income: Refund	£3	
Total Revenue	£34,157	£35,223
	Expenditure	
Direct Employee Expenses	-£15,956	-£20,083
Payroll services	-£78	-£66
CMA fees	-£1,050	-£995
DBS fees	-£129	-£154
Other fees	-£35	-£40
Bank fees	-£72	-£72
Manager's expenses	-£1,259	-£710
Advisor expenses	-£337	-£76
Volunteer expenses	£0	-£231
Insurance	-£544	-£392
Rent	-£1,700	-£700
Landline		-£471
Office Maintenance	-£315	
Equipment	-£148	
Total expenditure	-£21,623	-£23,990
Surplus/deficit	£12,534	£11,233
Bank balances carried forward	£33,741	£21,207

Notes:

1. Figures shown in the above Receipts and Payments Account have been rounded to the nearest pound for reporting purposes.
2. There are no restricted or endowment funds.
3. The organisation's policy for assets is that it will record assets with a value greater than £500 and list them in the annual report. As at 31st December 2021 there were no such assets.

Independent examiner's report to the trustees of Life Centre Stourbridge
UK Charity Number: 1156191

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the Life Centre Stourbridge ('the Trust') for the year ended 31 December 2021 as set out on page 11 of this Annual Report.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Trust you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

Having satisfied myself that the accounts of the Company are not required to be audited under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of your charity's accounts as carried out under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act').

In carrying out my examination I have followed the Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5) (b) of the 2011 Act. The procedures undertaken do not involve an examination of all the evidence that would be required in a full audit and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the accounts.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the Trust as required by section 130 of the 2011 Act; or,
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:



Name: Alastair L. Greeves,

Address: 6 Clifton St.,
Stourbridge,
DY8 3XR

Date: 18 February 2022

Appendix 1 – The Faithworks Charter

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

The Faithworks Charter



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.