



Life Centre Stourbridge

Annual Report & Accounts

1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

"Helping people 'do' life"



Churches Together in
Stourbridge

cma

Freedom from debt
Hope for the future

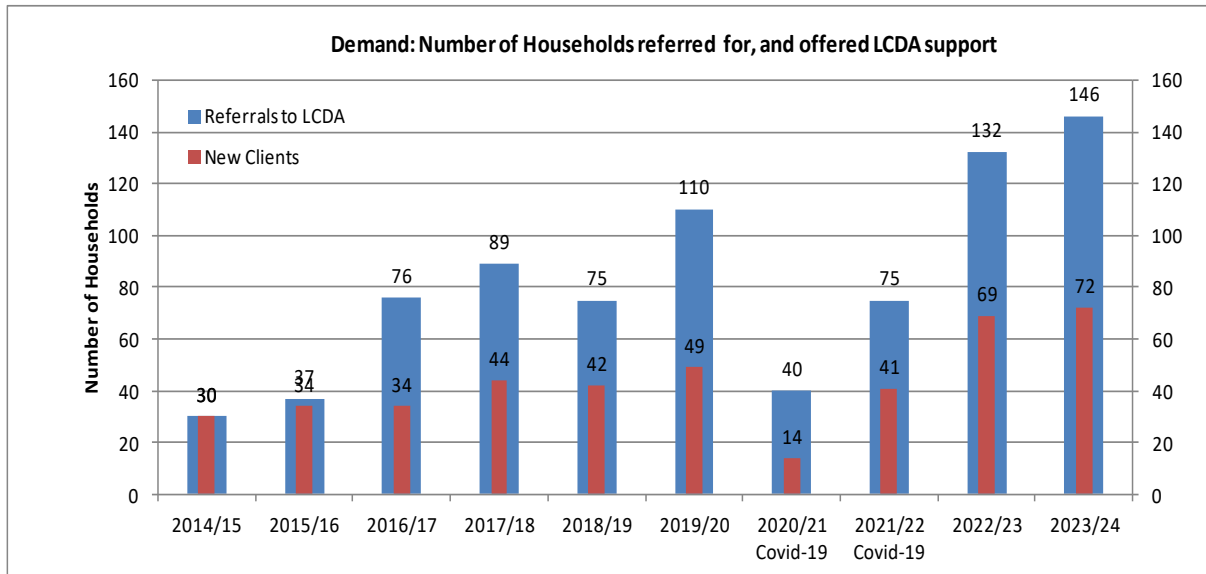


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Trends

- Demand for LCDA services (indicated by referral rates) continues on an upward trajectory and has risen steadily each year since 2017 by 10-15% per year (and is ~35% higher than that of pre-Covid-19 levels).



- 146 new households were referred to LCDA, up 15% on last year. This growth rate is managed by employing low levels of marketing, as well as providing our referral partners with clear criteria and updates on the waiting list status.
- Most referrals come via our network of local churches and foodbanks, through word of mouth; another 30% come through public sector agencies inc. Local Authority departments, Job Centres, Health & Social Care Services; 20% come via LCDA and CMA advertising/marketing.
- 72 new client households were added to our caseload.
- Current caseload of engaged clients [as at 31st March 2024] is 69.- increased over the year, as we have been able to take on more clients with enhanced capacity made possible following recruitment & training of two new staff team members to cover HR and admin.

Operational Summary 2023/24

ACTIVITY	Numbers	Comments
Open cases - households received advice & support	169	Comprising 260 individuals inc children
New referrals received	146	over 12 months – up by 15%
New referrals taken up as active clients	72	Target of 50% of referrals taken on is constrained by capacity of debt advisers/complexity of the cases
Open cases that took part in at least 1 advice appointment	84	50% of 169 open cases
Current case load of active clients as at 31 March 2024	69	
Referrals in triage/waiting for a 1 st Appt as at 31 March 2024	47	Households with debts waiting to be taken on as active clients (of which 30 are assigned to HTOH)
New referrals signposted to other agencies after triage; e.g. Welfare	16	Money management/debt issues more appropriately handled by another agency or due to a lack of capacity within LCDA

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ACTIVITY	Numbers	Comments
Rights, DWP, CAB, Step Change, Thrive, alternative CMA Centre		
New referrals failed to engage	17	did not respond after several attempts at contact/did not attend appointment offered
SERVICE PERFORMANCE		
Number of appointments offered	296	Dependent on availability of qualified Debt Advisers
Number of appointments taken up	236	80% taken up, a consistent level over recent years
Appointments delivered face-to-face	64%	Telephone (27%), email (6%), Zoom (1%)
New referrals deemed in 'crisis' had their first appointment within 9 calendar days	100%	A key metric achievement for our service
New referrals identified as in debt had their first appointment within 30 calendar days	100%	We aim to see non-crisis debt clients within one month of referral, but some have had to wait longer given our limited capacity
Average advice appointment length (face-to-face, phone, email)	80 minutes	Initial assessment appointments take 2-3 hours
Length of client engagement	6 months – 2 years	Dependent on complexity of debts and client capacity to maintain repayment arrangements
DEBT RESOLUTION OUTCOMES		
Amount of debt absolved	£229,487	Representing ~18% of total debt presented; already 50% higher than LCDA's best ever performance (2023) with 4 weeks still to complete the year.
Total no of cases closed	92	Average debt per case = £2,494
Average amount of debt per open client	£12,274	£2,074,306 over 169 open clients
Average amount of debt per new client	£12,004	£828,278 /69
Case files closed – successful or stable debt resolution in place	45	No longer in problem debt/debts absolved. Average debt reduction is £5,098 per case.
Case files closed – short term engagement	27	Includes those signposted to other services, those who wanted/ needed short term support/advice e.g. household budgeting
Number receiving Financial Statements	169	All open clients receive a (draft) Financial Statement after first appointment
New Debt Repayment Plans/Debt Relief Orders	~45	This will be a similar number to the cases closed.
Number of people helped to increase benefit entitlements &/or improve income	17	For example, claiming pension credit.

Additional 'Soft outcomes'

More detailed personal information is recorded for households in receipt of active debt/money advice (n.169):

OUTCOMES	Numbers	Comments
Households with employability solvency improvements	44%	Unemployed clients supported to improve financial stability with oncome & expenditure reviews and debt management plans
Households in work with improved budget outcomes	23%	Households in employment have improved income, and expenditure reduction and debt support to ease their financial circumstances
Households seeing health stress improvements	20%	Households with sick, disabled or retired people were supported through financial difficulties to ease health stresses
Households subject to enforcement activities	24	Households supported to avert seizure of goods by bailiffs
Households in crisis	21	Households at risk of homelessness under notice or threat of eviction, and/or severe mental health stress/suicide risk, or victims of domestic violence
Mental health improvements	12	Clients reporting that their mental health had improved since being supported (stress reduction, less anxious/depressed) inc. suicide risk/ideation averted
Social inclusion improvements	16	Clients reporting improved social contacts, more active in the community, new friendships etc
Relationship improvements	23	Clients reporting improved family dynamics, reduced family tensions
Practical/emergency support provided	72	Individuals/households receiving support with essential supplies – food, fuel vouchers, clothing

Delivery Outreach

- Majority of open cases were from the Dudley and Sandwell postcodes (80% from the DY9, B63, DY2, DY8, B64, DY5, DY1 postcodes)
- Satellite Centre activity at Holy Trinity Old Hill (Sandwell Borough) resumed with partnership terms & funding renewed to 2025: Team size 3 volunteers, including 1 Debt Advisor
- St Martin's Bradley Wolverhampton: New Satellite opened 1st March 2024
- Christ Church, Lye: Clinic on Fridays
- Brockmoor & Pensnett Community Centre: Clinic attended and client activity started
- Halesowen College: information day for college leavers on managing personal finances attended by 200 students
- Awareness -raising visits to 16 churches in Dudley Borough, also Tipton.

Organisational achievements

- 5 Debt advisors are active (4 this time in 2023), +2 in supported training
- Three new staff members employed during the year – an Assistant Centre Manager/Debt Adviser, and HR/Admin job share
- 83 Training days completed during 2023/24: AW has completed CMA Level 4 training; CMA refresher training Parts 1 to 3 underway. Heather Keats, CEO and Founder of CMA delivered CMA Part 1 training for 11 staff/volunteers.
- Team of 20 volunteers, supported through monthly meetings

- LCDA 10-year celebration & CD launch 27th January 2024 was well received generating £360 of donations before Gift Aid
- Lottery Awards for All funded a 12-month project ending 29th Feb 2024
- Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund grant (£34,919) awarded October 2023, completed end of March 2024
- Dudley Building Society – award of £5,000 received after customer vote
- New FCA Regulatory requirements (Duty of Care) were introduced on 31st July 2023. IPSOS survey completed.

Client/referral agency feedback:

- *"I feel like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders."*
- *"I feel perfect! Ever since you started helping me things have just been going great thanks. My son is going on a school trip and normally I get stressed about being able to afford it, but I have the money and was able to pay for it, so I was so pleased"*
- Dudley Building Society: *"Our customers have nominated LCDA for funding support, and you have been shortlisted for a possible grant. We've been told that LCDA is making an impact on the lives of people in our community"*
- ...from someone facing eviction: *"I wanted to thank you specifically for your valuable time, your patience and Information on my situation. I can tell you care deeply about your clients' issues and I pray you continue your good work. God bless you."*
- ...comment from a referral partner: *"Life Centre Debt Advice is the first place I'd call if one of my households has a need for debt advice."*

Challenges

Going forward, LCDA faces a number of challenges to sustain our growth in capacity:

- Scheduling staff time to meet targets for assessing the needs of new referral clients and being able to allocate them the appropriate level of support
- Increasing availability of qualified Debt Advisers for frontline advice through reallocation of administration and staff oversight/training
- Continuous professional development for staff and volunteers to improve the effectiveness of the service and bring about speedier debt resolutions
- Fulfilling additional reporting requirements – FCA Duty of Care implementation
- Improving client engagement rates by working more closely with referral agencies and partners to ensure a better fit with client need, priorities and willingness/readiness to engage
- Completing an urgent IT Audit and implementing recommendations to improve efficiency and security
- Securing longer term funding to retain key qualified and gifted staff
- Recruiting and training new volunteers.

Opportunities

- Building partnerships with local churches and community groups to grow a network of neighbourhood level debt & money advice delivery across deprived areas of the Black Country
- Expanding our delivery model to include access to centralised debt advice via the 'Integrated Hub' service through our national umbrella organisation Community Money Advice
- Work more closely with local authority and public agencies to influence policy and practice around debt advice and poverty alleviation.

Summary from the Chair

The focus for our service has always been 'how can we effectively help those who come to us in need of advice and support'.

It is so encouraging to receive feedback from clients expressing their experiences of a service that has given them: -

- compassionate face to face support
- excellent regulated advice
- help that has gone beyond their expectations
- hope for the future
- support for the long term

This has been achieved through an excellent, committed and hard-working team of volunteers, staff, supporters and trustees. I take this opportunity to thank everyone involved with LCDA for all that they do and particularly those things that go un-noticed, but are just as vital to the effective running and provision of our service, whether it be practical, prayerful or through financial support.

My hope and prayer is that we can continue to fund, equip and sustain our service to be here for many years to come, meeting the needs of those who decide to make that first big step to ask for our help.

If, having read this report you feel you would love to be part of this work, please do not hesitate to contact one of the team, we would welcome the opportunity to speak to you.

Alan Taylor

Chair

Financial Review

LCDA is in a financially strong position. The reasons are:

1. We received grants totalling £39,858 from the Cost Of Living Fund which we had to spend by 31st March 24
2. We received a grant from the Dudley Building Society of £5,000 late in March which we have yet to spend

During the next financial year, we anticipate these changes to our expenditure:

1. An upgrade to our IT infrastructure – approx. £5,000
2. We recruit another staff member for 16 hours/week – approx. £10,000
3. A reduction in employment costs as Martin Frize reduces his hours from 32/week to 8/week from w/c June 17th onwards – approx. £10,000

Annual Report, Review & Accounts for Life Centre Stourbridge
Statement of Receipts and Payments Accounts – all funds

This statement is for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 for all funds. The comparative figures for 2022/23 are for the 15 months from 1st January 2022 to 31st March 2023.

	2022/23	2023/24
Brought Forward	£33,741.12	£55,190.23
Receipts		
Churches	£6,877.00	£6,169.58
Gift Aid	£1,652.75	£1,477.46
Individuals	£15,550.51	£7,914.05
Trusts / Foundations	£28,015.00	£46,828.00
Other Grants	£90.00	£5,150.00
Other Income	£451.83	£1,244.26
Satellite Income	£4,868.18	£5,311.52
Total Income	£57,505.27	£74,094.87
Payments		
Direct Employee Expenses	-£28,153.28	-£50,583.45
Fees	-£2,099.00	-£4,498.83
Indirect Employee/Volunteer Expenses	-£2,515.67	-£2,550.30
Marketing	£0.00	-£253.00
Other Expenses	-£544.23	-£736.84
Premises Costs	-£2,743.98	-£2,803.41
Payments for assets	£0.00	-£1,167.01
Total Expenditure	-£36,056.16	-£62,592.84
Carried Forward	£55,190.23	£66,692.26

Statement of Receipts and Payments Accounts – by fund

This statement is for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Brought Forward	£44,017.33	£1,897.90	£9,275.00	£0.00	£55,190.23
Funds	LCDA	HTOH	LAFA	COL	Totals
Receipts					
Churches	£6,169.58				£6,169.58
Gift Aid	£1,477.46				£1,477.46
Individuals	£7,914.05				£7,914.05
Trusts / Foundations	£20,046.37			£26,781.63	£46,828.00
Other Grants	£5,150.00				£5,150.00
Other Income	£1,244.26				£1,244.26
Satellite Income		£5,311.52			£5,311.52
Total Income	£42,001.72	£5,311.52	£0.00	£26,781.63	£74,094.87
Payments					
Direct Employee Expenses	-£15,494.20	-£6,028.80	-£7,568.50	-£21,491.95	-£50,583.45
Fees	-£2,474.83		-£350.00	-£1,674.00	-£4,498.83
Indirect Employee/Volunteer Expenses	-£770.96	-£240.31	-£226.26	-£1,312.77	-£2,550.30
Marketing				-£253.00	-£253.00
Other Expenses	-£736.84				-£736.84
Premises Costs	-£753.02			-£2,050.39	-£2,803.41
Payments for assets			-£1,167.01		-£1,167.01
Journals	-£37.25	£0.00	£36.77	£0.48	£0.00
Prior year adjustments	£626.19	-£626.19			£0.00
Total Expenditure	-£19,640.91	-£6,895.30	-£9,275.00	-£26,781.63	-£62,592.84
Carried Forward	£66,378.14	£314.12	£0.00	£0.00	£66,692.26

Fund Key

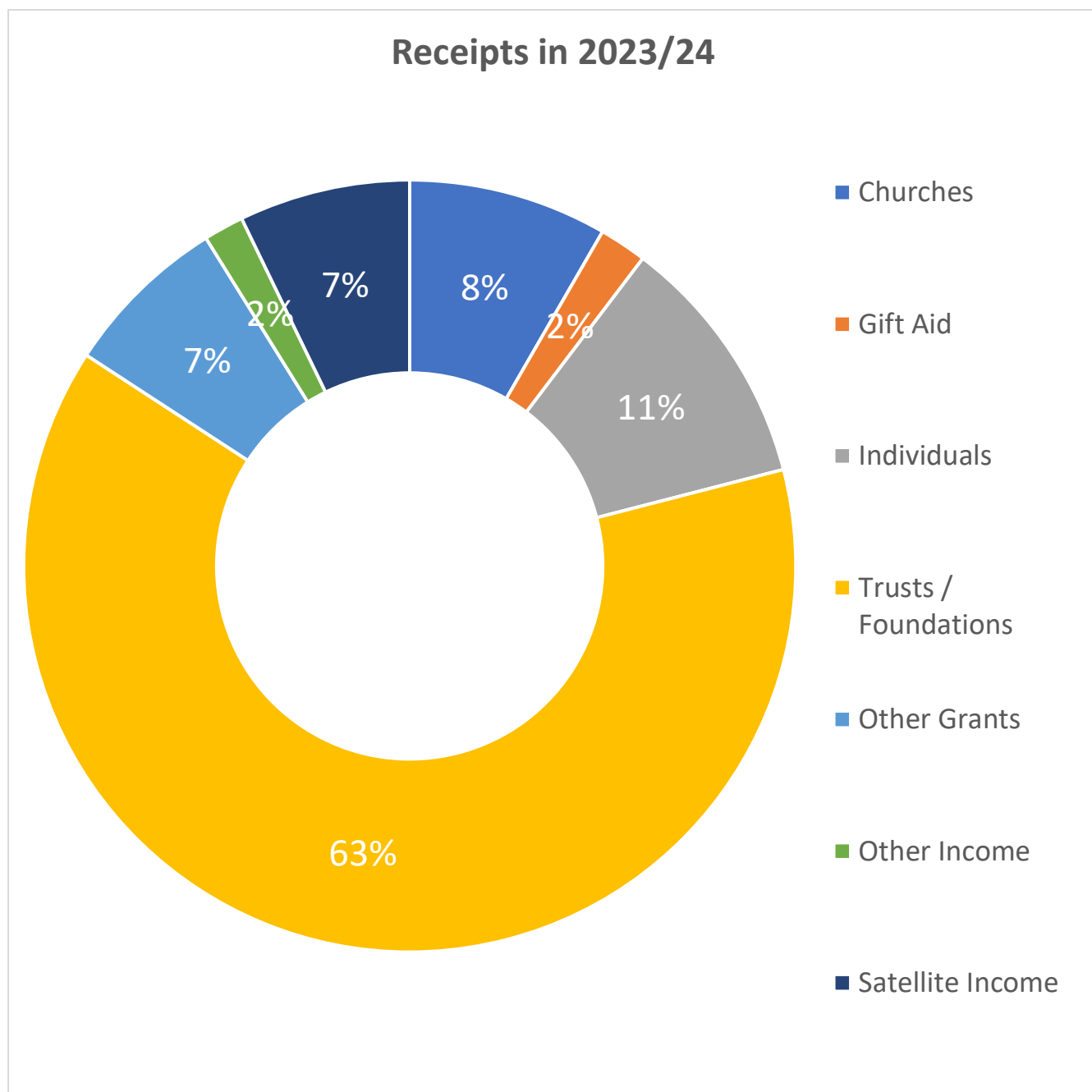
LCDA	Life Centre Debt Advice	General Fund
HTOH	Holy Trinity, Old Hill – a satellite centre	Designated fund
LAFA	Lottery Awards for All	Restricted fund
COL	Cost of Living	Restricted fund

Notes

1. Journals: Transfer of the expenditure above grant amount to LCDA General Fund
2. Prior year adjustment: Reallocation of expenditure in prior year to appropriate fund account as per agreement

Receipts

This chart shows the breakdown of our income streams: -

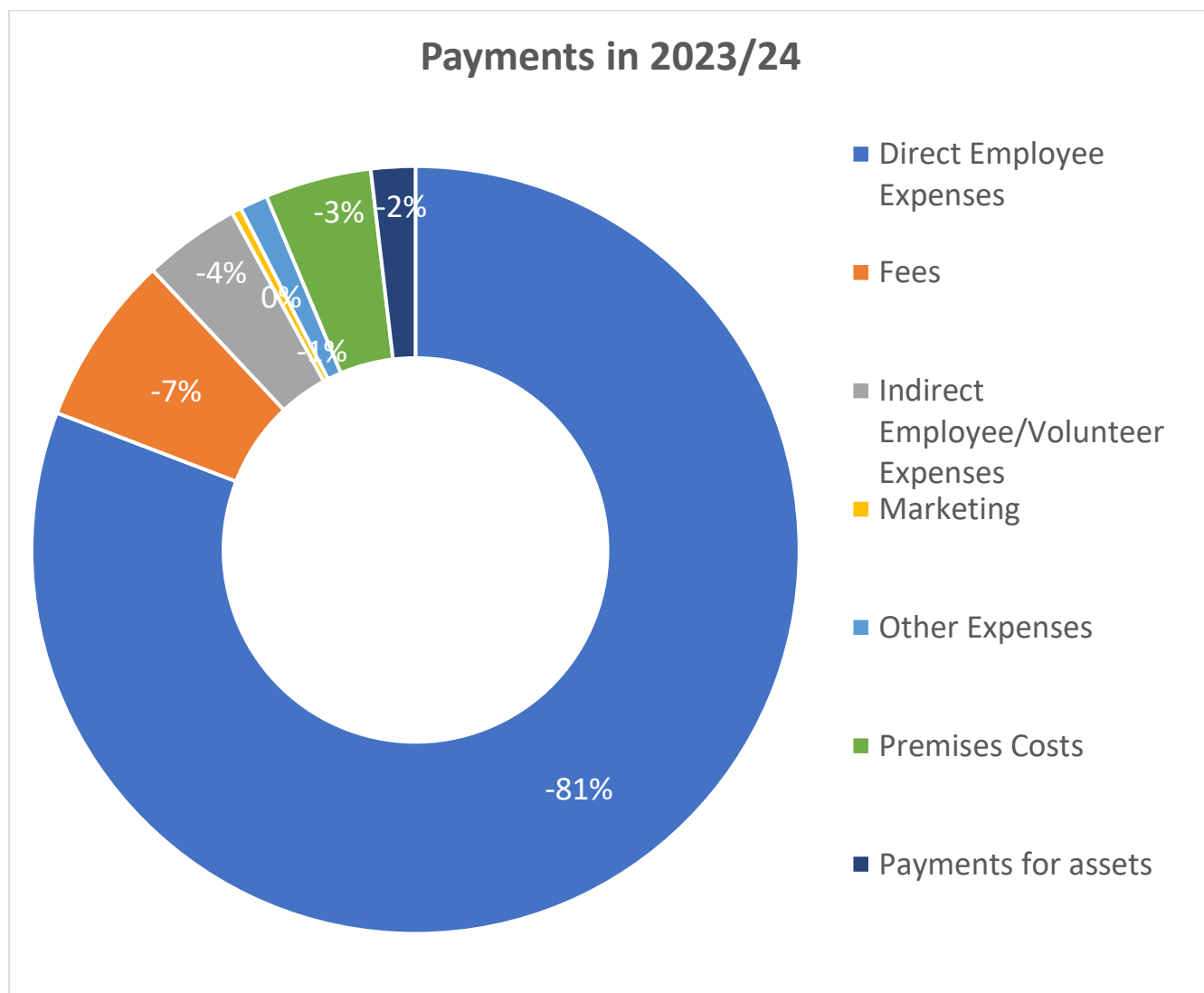


Our major source of income is from Trusts. The regular support from individuals has slightly reduced whereas the support from churches has increased slightly.

Payments

In 2023/24 our employment costs rose significantly because we employed two more staff members for 10 hours/week each & then increased the staff hours later in the year to deliver the outcomes that the Cost of Living fund enabled.

The breakdown for this year: -



Reserves

Our minimum running costs for a quarter are approximately £18,000 & this is considerably less than our current balance.

Independent Examination

The accounts have been examined independently.

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.

Annual Report, Review & Accounts for Life Centre Stourbridge

In 2023/24 the Management Team (Trustees and Centre Manager) met 10 times and the Trustees once 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
Alan Taylor	Chair	28/06/24
Julia Savage	Trustee	22/06/25
David Watts	Trustee	28/06/23 Retired
Malcolm Moss	Scribe & Treasurer	30/03/25
Nicola Martin	Fund Raising	02/02/25
Christopher Heslop	Trustee (from 24/01/24)	23/01/27

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	Alan.Taylor@lifecentredebtadvice.org.uk
Independent Examiner	Alastair Greeves
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

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.

Independent Examiner's Report

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 March 2024 as set out on pages 8 and 9 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 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: 12 July 2024

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.