

Retreat House Chester

Trustees' Annual Report & Accounts

for the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

registered charity number 1163330
(Charitable Incorporated Organisation)

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Charity Information

registered charity name

Retreat House Chester

registered charity number

1163330

registered address

Retreat House Chester
9 Abbey Square
Chester
CH1 2HU

contact information

email: admin@retreathousechester.co.uk

website: www.retreathousechester.co.uk

trustees (at 31 March 2024)

Rev Robert Croft (Chair from 12 October 2023)

appointed Nov 2022 for three years

Rev Preb Paul Towner (Chair to 11 October 2023)

appointed Feb 2018 for two years;
reappointed Feb 2020 for two years;
reappointed Feb 2022 for two years.

Paul also took on the role of treasurer from November 2023.

Mrs Carol Bayliss

appointed May 2019 for three years;
reappointed May 2022 for two years.

Dr Claire Egan

appointed Oct 2020 for three years;
reappointed Oct 2023 for one year.

Rev Colin Mansley

appointed Nov 2022 for three years.

Charity structure, governance and management

We are a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), governed by Constitution. Trustees are appointed by serving trustees. We hold a risk register and comprehensive policies. Our attention to regulatory requirements and good practice is thorough.

Charity objectives and activities

‘The object of the CIO is to advance the Christian religion for the benefit of the public mainly, but not exclusively, through the provision of facilities, education, training and personal support to enable the exploration and experience of spirituality.’

In our planning of events and activities through the year, as trustees we have in mind the Charity Commission’s guidance on public benefit. The main activities of 2023-24 have been retreat days, conversation groups, creative workshops, walks in and around the city of Chester, one-to-one spiritual accompaniment, meditation, book clubs, and church retreats.

During the course of the year, we have shifted from ‘on-site’ events in our own leased premises to ‘off-site’ events in either public spaces or bookable public facilities. This shift reflects a more outward looking approach to our work, and will likely result in more ‘partnership events’, often with churches or through our Reflective Chester community project.

At its simplest we say that Retreat House Chester is a grassroots not-for-profit community venture inspired and driven by local people and working to offer retreat as an essential part of living for everyone. We promote retreat in everyday living for all. This was the need we saw at our foundation in 2015, and it continues to be our motivation today.

Our roots are in Christian spiritual tradition and our ecumenical character in line with that of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland. We are a member organisation of the Retreat Association and of Cheshire West Voluntary Action. We are glad of the networks this provides, enabling us to work with other retreat providers and other local charities. An ongoing connection to – and participation in – both our faith community and wider community is essential to our work.

We work with the general public, as individuals, as faith groups, as marginal groups and at outside events. In the main, our work has been with people who come from ‘within’ churches. Increasingly, we have been working with people who come from ‘beyond’ church settings.

We believe the work of retreat nurtures resilience in individuals and, importantly, in communities, through improved well-being, improved relationships, engaging conversation, and re-imagining our leaned perspectives.

Charity achievements and performance – our year

The 2022-23 report noted that, having created a 3-year Plan by the summer of 2022, the start of 2023 brought the challenge of a changing environment for Retreat House Chester (RHC) – as for other charities – with rising costs, rising needs, and reduced resources and funds. It also noted a coming watershed moment, namely the expiring of the lease on our rooms in Abbey Square in November 2023.

As 2023-24 unfolded it became increasingly apparent that our income would not sustain our leasing of rooms and paying of two part-time staff. The 2022-23 'Time to Grow' appeal had been disappointing and continued so in 2023-24.

Unfortunately, the expiry of our rooms' lease coincided with a period of significant change for Chester Cathedral, from whom the rooms were leased. We explored alternative provisions with the cathedral but felt too much uncertainty, not least because of the timing and scale of their own proposed changes in accommodation, running through to 2028.

In July 2023 the trustees decided to give formal notice in August to end the lease agreement for Abbey Square on 16 November 2023. Further, our excellent coordinator announced her decision to give in her notice for November.

So, 2023-24 proved to be a year of very significant transition, from having two rooms in Abbey Square, to having no fixed premises, and from having a highly regarded, experienced coordinator and an administrator, to having no paid staff.

Our coordinator, Clare Black, enabled a well organised, well communicated leave-taking of the rooms in 9 Abbey Square, and a professional hand-over to the trustees of files, resources and responsibilities, for which we are enormously grateful. Clare completed her wonderful work in November 2023. Our administrator was retained for three hours a week until mid-January 2024.

Though we have left 9 Abbey Square, we were able to continue using that as our registered address, with the agreement of Chester Cathedral.

Notwithstanding the transition through which we've had to go, we continued to deliver retreat days, conversation groups, creative workshops, walks in and around the city of Chester, one-to-one spiritual accompaniment, and church retreats through 2023-24.

In January 2024 we started a new initiative with 'Still' – an evening on-line meditation and conversation, with a different theme each month.

Throughout the period April 2023 to March 2024, we held and administered regular trustee meetings – seven in all. By the end of March 2024, we had convened a 'Next Steps' group of volunteers to co-create a new programme of events.

This group served as the beginnings of a more comprehensive programme for 2024-25 which came to fruition from August 2024.

Charity financial review

The steps we have taken over the course of 2023 are enabling us to bring our income into a healthy balance with expenditure. We have faced the challenges that we saw as 2023 unfolded and we continue to explore and learn how to reduce the organisational and financial demands of running our small charity while also concentrating on expanding our work of 'retreat as part of everyday living'.

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Income	£9,026	£26,558	£25,802	£21,619	£8,283
Donations +Gift Aid	£4,365	£10,985	£18,576 *	£11,526	£5,809
Grants	£1,500	£13,095	£5,770	£6,000	£0
Programme	£3,096	£2,478	£1,456	£4,083 **	£1,852
Room hire	£65	£0	£0	£10	£0
Other	£0	£0	£0	£0	£622

* includes a single donation of £10,000 (2021-22)

**refers to ticket sales only; donations which came via programme events total £1194.70 and are included in donations figure

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Expenditure	£20,737	£19,004	£20,142	£27,083	£20,485
Premises	£ 6,594	£ 5,961	£ 6,197	£ 6,470	£3,421
Marketing+Fundraising	£804	£616	£735	£1,774	£736
Programme	£13,133	£12,427	£13,210	£18,838	£14,877
Assets incl. refurb	£206	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other	£0	£0	£0	£0	£1,452

SUMMARY OF FUNDS	31/03/24	31/03/23
unrestricted – general	£7,041	£13,494
restricted	£0	£5,750
<i>National Lottery Community Fund</i>	<i>£0</i>	<i>£3,750</i>
<i>Marjory Boddy Trust</i>	<i>£0</i>	<i>£2,000</i>

Conclusion

We know from our own extensive surveys and from other research that the work we do makes a difference in people's lives. We want to further develop the ways to reach people so that they deepen their lives in ways that are authentic and rooted.

The challenge of 2024-25 is to re-establish our rhythms in delivering events and to broaden their range of appeal so that we are increasingly inclusive, both within and beyond the church.

Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature

full name Robert Croft, Chair of Trustees
date 31 January 2025

signature

full name Paul Towner, Treasurer
date 31 January 2025

signed copy held by the Chair of Trustees



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Retreat House Chester

1163330

Receipts and payments accounts

CC16a

For the period
from

Period start date
4/1/2023

To

Period end date
3/31/2024

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Voluntary donations	4,945	-	-	4,945	7,866
Gift Aid claimed on donations	864	-	-	864	3,660
Programme income	1,852	-	-	1,852	4,083
grant funding	-	-	-	-	6,000
room hire	-	-	-	-	10
other	622	-	-	622	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	8,283	-	-	8,283	21,619
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	8,283	-	-	8,283	21,619
A3 Payments					
Marketing and fundraising	-	-	-	-	372
licenses and subscriptions	235	-	-	235	269
information technology	501	-	-	501	1,133
accommodation / premises	2,722	-	-	2,722	5,314
insurance	644	-	-	644	764
office costs	55	-	-	55	393
programme costs	205	-	-	205	1,341
programme delivery: staff	8,922	5,750	-	14,672	17,497
other	1,452	-	-	1,452	-
Sub total	14,735	5,750	-	20,485	27,083
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	14,735	5,750	-	20,485	27,083
Net of receipts/(payments)	- 6,453	- 5,750	-	- 12,203	- 5,464
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	13,494	5,750	-	19,244	24,708
Cash funds this year end	7,041	-	-	7,041	19,244

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	coop & hsbc	6,667	-	-
	cash	40	-	-
	due in	334	-	-
	Total cash funds	7,041	-	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK
B2 Other monetary assets	Details	to nearest £	to nearest £	to nearest £
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
B3 Investment assets	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B5 Liabilities	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name	Date of approval	