

South Belfast Sure Start

Report of the Trustees **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

The trustees who are also directors of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006, present their report with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2025. The trustees have adopted the provisions of Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019).

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Objectives and Activities

Values

South Belfast Sure Start is an organisation that seeks to treat everybody with fairness and equality. We strive to be open, honest and respectful to all. We endeavour to involve and empower, communities, families, children and staff to grow and develop. As an organisation we will actively listen, act with integrity and hold ourselves accountable.

Principle activities

The principal activities of the company are the provision of activities for the benefit of children aged 0-3 years and their families living in the South Belfast Sure Start catchment area.

Significant activities

South Belfast Sure Start was established in 2001 with 4 aims:

- (1) To Improve Health
- (2) To Improve the Ability to Learn
- (3) To Improve Social and Emotional Well-Being
- (4) To Strengthen Families and Communities

The programme is core funded by the Department of Education (through the SPPG/DoH) and managed by a Board of Directors that is a partnership of community, voluntary and statutory agencies that work together to improve outcomes for young children and their families in the catchment area.

SBSS has worked with the SPPG at the Department of Health to develop the core Sure Start services within an Outcomes Framework. All activities and services that are commissioned through the core DE funding are recorded on a Sure Start Programmes information system. In addition, SBSS as a Limited Company has obtained funding for programmes and activities that add value or are complementary to the core DE funded services and respond to needs that could not be met within the restrictions of the core annual budget. These accounts provide a clear record of the funding received, expenditure and activities that derive from the core DE funding and other funding sources.

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OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Significant activities

Budget Context

2024 opened with the same difficult baseline budget as the previous year and it was challenging to even implement the Minimum Wage rise from April 2024. There had been significant lobbying prior to the start of the financial year and beyond as to this being unsustainable for the Sure Start NI programme. In May the Minister for Education, Paul Girvan, announced a 10% rise (highest ever increase) for Sure Start programmes, however this was not confirmed until September 24 leaving half the financial year to manage the additional budget.

The majority of the new funding went towards staff salary rises which was vital as they had fallen far behind similar posts elsewhere and in the context of cost-of-living increases, we were losing experienced staff to other employers. In addition, we were able to raise the employers pension contribution from 4 to 6%. With the employees contributing 4% the total monthly pension investment is now 10%. While this has had a positive effect on morale around pension savings and all staff are now enrolled, we are very aware that it is still insufficient and far below that of statutory sector employees. The Board will therefore be looking for any opportunities to increase the amount going into staff pensions.

Two other programmes - STEP and the Roma Hope project did receive continuation funding, one with a slight decrease and the other with a slight increase meaning that we were able to continue these services over the year.

Services and programmes across the year

The services that SBSS delivered were agreed with SPPG at the outset of the year through 67 different targets covering a range of areas including antenatal, postnatal, family support, play programmes, Developmental Programmes for 2-3 Year Olds, parenting programmes, physical activity, health and wellbeing, ethnic minority services, additional needs and speech/language/communication support.

By the end of the year all but two of the 67 targets were fully met and frequently exceeded, with the two exceptions being by just one person in each case. In addition to the core funded activities there was a range of complementary services, specific targets and extra capacity delivered through the Roma Hope/Speranza and the STEP projects. Given the wealth of activities, programmes and services it is only possible to highlight some of the key areas of delivery over 2024/25 as follows:

1. 150 pregnant women registered with 76% of these using one or more services such as antenatal workshops, Real Birth, Hypnobirthing, Antenatal Yoga, Aqua Yoga and 1:1 support
2. 171 new Mums and Dads attended one or more of the 8 Baby Cafes held weekly in 8 different settings. As well as the staff and peer support Baby Cafes offer, they were the main mechanism for delivering programmes such as Baby Massage, Weaning/Introduction to Solids, Baby Sensory and Song and Rhyme Time in the postnatal period.
3. 270 parents/carers with 294 children attended one or more of the 10 parent and toddler groups run weekly across 8 different venues.
4. 170 children aged 2-3 years attended yearlong DPf2-3YO's, Child Development or Loving Learning programmes each week for either 3 or 4 sessions. A further 80 children aged 1-2 years attended one of 10 Play and Development programmes over 6-8 weeks.

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OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

5. 55 children were provided with 1 or 2 morning or afternoon respite childcare sessions a week for between 6 and 15 weeks to support families going through challenging times.

6. 27 children attended one of 5 'Play and Discover' programmes held across the year. These programmes are targeted to children and their parent where there are social communication or developmental concerns and are facilitated by the Special Needs Family Support Worker and Speech and Language Therapist.

7. 364 children and 349 parents went on trips or enjoyed a special holiday event organised in their locality such as farms, indoor play centres, petting farm visits and outdoor parks and beaches.

8. Over 2000 home or centre based 1:1 visits to for a wide range of purposes including initial registrations, generic family support, home based programmes such as SLC and behaviour management, support with accessing specialist services, discussion of children's progress in settings and emotional support/containment.

9. Over 500 families experiencing financial, and poverty related issues were supported with resources or helped to gain access to these through community partners, including food bank referrals, food and fuel vouchers, prams and baby equipment, children and adult clothes, books and toys.

10. 50 different programmes (in addition to ante and postnatal) and information sessions/workshops were delivered within the themes of health and well-being, personal development, parenting, physical activity and nutrition and cooking with over 260 parents attending at least one of these programmes or sessions.

11. Families were signposted to 25 other organisations or types of services with the greatest numbers to benefits advice, education services, charitable aid, family support hubs, foodbanks, GP's/Health Visitors and Speech and Language Therapy.

Addressing Access and Participation

SBSS continued to work throughout the year to improve the access to, and engagement of, all families and carers living in the catchment area. This includes:

I. Fathers/male carers - the number of fathers registered rose again this year to 550 with a third of this number actively using services. The increase is largely due to more fathers registering along with their partners antenatally and attending the workshops and programmes which are often held in the evenings or weekends to facilitate that. While some of these Dads continue to engage in services postnatally such as Baby Cafes when they can, active involvement does tend to fall off as the children get older.

II. Newcomer families - South Belfast is a very diverse community and a third of registered families are from another country and/or ethnic minorities. This included asylum seekers living in 'contingency accommodation' such as former hotels and B&B's although this started to fall off towards the end of the year as use of hotels in South Belfast began to end. SBSS continued delivering 2 targeted ethnic minority programmes for Chinese and Roma families.

III. Children with additional needs - only a minority of children with additional needs will have a formal diagnosis before they turn 4. As parents and their children often find it overwhelming to engage in busy drop-in services like parent and toddler groups, SBSS has continued to develop activities and programmes that cater specifically to the needs and development of these children. This has included the Play and Discover groups, small Child Development Programmes of 5-6 children, support in the home and promoting the use of contracted places with our partner agency Sólás (a special needs charity).

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OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Public benefit

The trustees confirm that they have complied with their duty under section 3 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 to have due regard to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

REVIEW OF YEAR

The company had net outgoing resources for the year of £10,213 (2024: net outgoing resources of £824), which reflected the completion of a number of projects during the year. Unrestricted funds increased by £13,906, while restricted funds decreased by £24,119.

The charity continues to work to secure income from sources in addition to its core DE funding to provide new or complementary programmes, services and venues that meet emerging local needs but cannot be funded through the core budget. These additional sources of funding are grants received from various bodies as disclosed in note 4 in the financial statements.

Reserves policy

Best Practice and statutory guidelines recommend that charities hold a justifiable level of reserves in order to remain economically viable in the event of any unforeseen circumstances. The unrestricted funds of South Belfast Sure Start are therefore expendable at the discretion of the Board of Trustees. However, a significant element of the reserves will continue to be held in reserve for a 'worst case scenario' of staff redundancies should the funding from government for SBSS Ltd end.

FUTURE PLANS

As the year drew to an end the promise the 10% uplift gave of moving towards financial stability with energies able to be focussed on delivery and development of services for children and families, has been set back by the government announcement of increased Employers National Insurance contributions. This will add around £35,000 to payroll costs and plans to increase the hourly rates of the lowest paid bands of workers will have to be put on hold.

Likewise organisational priorities such as increasing support for perinatal and additional needs services will not be able to be progressed. We continue to press the Department and politicians on the impact of these cost pressures and hope that the situation might change as we move into the year.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Governing document

The charity is controlled by its governing document, a deed of trust, and constitutes a limited company, limited by guarantee, as defined by the Companies Act 2006.

Recruitment and appointment of new trustees

During the period under review the trustees met bi-monthly. Trustees are appointed by nominations made in writing by Partner Organisations. At the General Meeting nominated directors are appointed by election.

None of the directors have any beneficial interest in the company. All of the directors are members of the company and guarantee to contribute £1 in the event of a winding up.

The trustees delegate the day to day running of South Belfast Sure Start to that of the Chief Executive Officer/ Project Co-ordinator.

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STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Structure, governance and management

The Board of Directors employ the Project Co-ordinator to overview and manage the programme and report back to the Board on activities and developments.

The Project Co-ordinator leads and manages the Finance Director, Early Learning Co-ordinators (Job Share) and Family Support Co-ordinator, with regular supervision to review activities and to ensure they match with the ethos of the organisation and funder requirements. The Finance Director, Early Learning Co-ordinators and Family Support Co-ordinator overview and manage their departments and staff employed therein, with a view of daily activities and services delivered.

Related parties

There were no related party transactions for the year ended 31 March 2025.

Risk management

For ensuring that the principles of good governance are embedded within all aspects of South Belfast Sure Start's operations with management and staff being keenly aware of the Board's responsibility of ensuring that the organisation protects itself from financial exposure and reputational damage, A close working relationship is maintained between the Board and management to ensure that operationally staff are aware of the standards required of them by the Board and the Board are always in a position to provide guidance and support to management in the discharge of their duties. This two way relationship is the key feature of South Belfast Sure Start governance arrangements and is a key strength in the company.

A conscientious approach to ensuring that contractual project requirements are achieved has been maintained at all times both in the accounting period being reported on and since South Belfast Sure Starts establishment. Very tight financial controls on expenditure and all financial commitments are maintained at all times and project staff have been trained and have become experienced in budgetary controls. In both these areas ie Project delivery and financial controls management all staff have established close working relationships with funding organisations to ensure all mandatory standards are consistently achieved. Board representatives also actively engage with funding bodies.

The Board, management and staff are fully aware that the nature of the work in which South Belfast Sure Start is involved can bring with it a high level of scrutiny to ensure that all activities are fully compliant with funding requirements and, therefore, beyond reproach. The Board of South Belfast Sure Start is, therefore, greatly reassured of the company's compliance with the highest of standards of governance on the basis that all monitoring and evaluation of project delivery demonstrates achievement of all funders objectives and that funders' audits and vouching of financial expenditure and the statutory audit confirm compliance with both probity and regularity in the use of monies received.

EVENTS SINCE THE END OF THE YEAR

Information relating to events since the end of the year is given in the notes to the financial statements.

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees (who are also the directors of South Belfast Sure Start for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) including Financial Reporting Standard 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland".

Report of the Trustees
for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES - continued

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the trustees are aware:

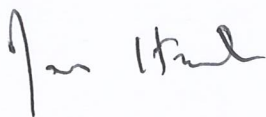
- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditors are unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditors are aware of that information.

AUDITORS

The auditors, Lynn Drake & Co Ltd, will be proposed for re-appointment at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 11 September 2025 and signed on its behalf by:



Joan Henderson - Trustee