

EastSide Arts

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report)

Year ended 31 March 2025

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2025.

Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name	EastSide Arts
Charity registration number	107782
Company registration number	NI628773
Principal office and registered office	Avalon House 278-280 Newtonards Road Belfast BT4 1HE Antrim

The trustees

F Bell	(Resigned 19 August 2025)
R Davison	
M Turtle	(Resigned 16 April 2024)
E McCracken	(Resigned 17 October 2025)
J McGrath	
M Neill	
J Sialianskaia	
C Lydon	(Appointed 30 October 2024)
J Millar	

Company secretary Tony Wilson

Auditor Finegan Gibson Ltd
Chartered accountants & statutory auditor
Causeway Tower
9 James Street South
Belfast
BT2 8DN

Solicitors Hewitt and Gilpin
8 High Street
Holywood
Co. Down
BT18 9AZ

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Structure, governance and management

Governing Document

EastSide Arts is a company limited by guarantee and is a charity recognised by the Charity Commission for NI. It is a not for profit organisation.

The company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the company and is governed under its Articles of Association.

Appointment of trustees

The Chairperson and the trustees recommend new trustees as needed. New trustees are recruited on the relevance of their skills, and their potential to be able to make a helpful contribution to the governance of the charity. As part of this process they are made aware of a trustee's legal obligations under charity and company law, the content of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the decision-making processes, the business plan and recent financial performance of the charity.

Once the potential new trustee has agreed to be considered for appointment they can be co-opted by the directors until formal voting by members occurs at the next Annual General Meeting.

Trustee induction and training

A trustee induction process is in place for all group companies.

Organisation structure and how charity makes decisions

EastSide Arts is governed by the board of directors. The company is managed on a day to day basis by a senior management team.

The board of directors meets quarterly, and is appointed by the members at the AGM.

A senior management team manages the day to day activities of the company, and reports on company performance to all board meetings.

Arrangements for setting pay and remuneration of key management personnel

The directors consider the board of directors, who are the charity's trustees, and the senior management team comprise the key management personnel of the charity in charge of directing and controlling, running and operating the charity on a day to day basis. All directors give of their time freely and no director received remuneration in the year. Details of directors' expenses and related party transactions are disclosed in note 14 to the accounts.

The pay of the senior staff is set by reference to external guidance and utilisation of pay scales. In view of the nature of the charity, the directors benchmark against pay levels in other similar size charities run on a voluntary basis when appointing new members of key management

Relationships with related parties

None of our trustees receive remuneration or other benefit from their work with the charity.

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Risk management

The company aims to mitigate the major risks it faces by implementation of the following procedures:-

- Significant external risks to funding have led to the development of a strategic plan which clearly identifies funding requirements going forward; and
- Internal control risks are minimised by the implementation of procedures for authorisation of all transactions with a financial implication.

Directors

The directors serving during the year were as follows:-

F Bell
R Davison
E McCracken
J McGrath
M Neill
J Sialianskaia
M Turtle

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Objectives and activities

EastSide Arts seeks to create an east Belfast that is a thriving cultural hub; where the arts are valued, creativity is for everyone and people are connected with each other and the wider world.

EastSide Arts is one of the 5 specific projects identified by EastSide Partnership, a regeneration charity, to be delivered via subsidiary companies or project committees. EastSide Arts works within this context to challenge barriers to participation and demonstrate that the arts and creativity are for everyone, bringing regeneration to the east of the city through creative engagement.

In terms of external strategic context, the company works within the strategic service delivery and funding context of the Programme for Government and Belfast Agenda. We are a key partner in delivering the strategic objectives of our core funders, the Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI) who is our principal funder; Belfast City Council, specifically the Belfast Agenda and 10-year Cultural Strategy, *A City Imagining*; and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation with whom we have 4-year funding to deliver the Creative Citizens project (2023-2026).

Within the overall Programme for Government, EastSide Arts is most strategically aligned with Outcome 5: We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential; and Outcome 9: We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity.

Within Belfast City Council's Belfast Agenda we are most strategically aligned with Outcome 5: Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable city; and Outcome 2: Belfast is a welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive city for all.

EastSide Arts is proud to be part of the cultural landscape of Belfast, contributing to the growth and development of the Arts Sector in Northern Ireland.

The company employed 3 full time members of staff during the course of the year.

Charitable Purpose

The purpose of EastSide Arts, as expressed in its objects is to: advance education, to promote the arts, heritage and culture and to promote the benefit of the people of East Belfast and its environs of Greater Belfast without distinction of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnic identity, political or religious opinion, by associating the statutory authorities, community and voluntary organisations and the inhabitants and in particular:

- a) to encourage appreciation for and active participation in community based visual and performing arts including music, visual art, comedy, theatre, film and literature
- b) to encourage appreciation of the arts and stimulate the artistic creativity of people in the area of benefit and to produce performances and exhibitions of works of cultural and educational value including entertainments and exhibitions
- c) to advance any other exclusively charitable purpose as the directors may, from time to time, decide in accordance with the law of charity.

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Strategic report

The following sections for achievements and performance and financial review form the strategic report of the charity.

Achievements and performance

Public benefit report

The 2024-2025 year has been one of both consolidation and evolution for EastSide Arts. Building on the momentum of previous years, the organisation has continued to deliver a diverse and inclusive programme of arts and cultural activity across east Belfast. This year's work has been shaped by strategic research, community engagement, and a commitment to supporting artists and audiences alike.

Programme Delivery and Impact

The EastSide Arts Festival 2024 was a central highlight of the year, running from 25 July to 4 August. The festival featured 73 unique events and 61 shows across 32 venues, showcasing the work of over 200 artists. With an audience of over 10,000 and more than 1,300 participants, the festival demonstrated strong engagement and continued growth. Notably, the festival introduced British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation for the first time, enhancing accessibility and inclusion. This included a dedicated strand of programming for deaf audiences, developed in collaboration with deaf artist and activist Paula Clarke.

A standout production was "Three Pay Days" by Alice Malseed, a play exploring poverty in east Belfast, which was commissioned in 2023 and fully produced by Kabosh Theatre Company in 2024. The production reached hundreds of audience members and participants, and exemplified the festival's commitment to authentic storytelling and legacy-building.

Operationally, the recruitment of six freelance Front of House Managers, each a creative practitioner, proved invaluable. Their presence allowed core staff to focus on broader festival logistics while ensuring a welcoming and professional experience for attendees. The festival launch at Templemore Baths, attended by sector leaders and the Lord Mayor, generated strong media engagement and set the tone for a successful season.

Beyond the festival, EastSide Arts delivered its year-round Creative Citizens programme, which encompasses three key strands: Artist Support Programme (ASP), More for More, and Creative

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Communities. The ASP launched in April with 24 participating artists-affectionately known as "Good Eggs." The programme offered training in creative facilitation through ENHANCE and UNDERSTAND sessions, covering topics such as LGBTQIA+ awareness, neurodiversity, and trauma-informed practice. Monthly SHARE sessions provided networking and skill-sharing opportunities, though attendance varied, prompting reflection on the potential for online alternatives.

The More for More strand included initiatives like the EastSide Choir and FunKademy, which provided creative activities for summer schemes. One notable change was the discontinuation of the Big Kids' Society monthly events. While popular, these events did not align with the programme's goal of engaging working-class communities and non-traditional audiences. This decision reflects EastSide Arts' commitment to strategic alignment and meaningful impact.

Creative Communities, the third strand, is still in its early stages. Collaborations with EastSide Learning (ESL) have begun to shape pilot programmes in early years creative engagement and creative careers. Workshops with early learning practitioners revealed a strong interest in integrating creativity into child development, particularly in speech and language therapy. Plans are underway to roll out a pilot programme in four early learning centres, with academic involvement to ensure robust evaluation. Similarly, the Creative Careers initiative aims to address the lack of awareness about creative industry opportunities among young people, with a presentation planned for Careers Week in March 2025.

Strategic Development and Governance

This year marked significant progress in organisational transformation. The EastSide Arts board adopted new objectives mid-year, focusing on artist support, diverse creative opportunities, activation of non-traditional spaces, and strong governance. These objectives align with the broader EastSide Partnership strategy for 2024-2030, ensuring coherence across the organisation's work. Governance developments included the resignation of both the Creative Engagement Officer and the Manager during the final quarter. The board responded by reviewing and updating job descriptions, with recruitment underway in March 2025. Interviews are scheduled for April, and it is anticipated that both posts will be filled early in the next financial year. Despite these transitions, the board remained actively engaged, contributing to strategic planning and supporting the development of the 2025/26 Business Plan, which was approved in February.

Learning and Reflection

One of the most valuable insights from this year has been the strong demand for artists trained through the ASP. Local organisations frequently request referrals, validating the programme's goal of embedding artists within the community. This demand has encouraged EastSide Arts to consider creating a public database of ASP alumni, which will enhance visibility and access to creative talent. The organisation also learned from the varied attendance at SHARE sessions, prompting consideration of more flexible delivery formats. Additionally, the decision to discontinue the Big Kids' Society events highlighted the importance of aligning programming with strategic priorities and target audiences. Evaluation has been a key focus, with the implementation of a framework developed by Smith & Kent. This has enabled EastSide Arts to measure impact more effectively and refine its approach based on data and feedback. The research conducted by Smith & Kent also informed the development of the Creative Citizens programme, helping to identify key areas of engagement and guiding the organisation's outreach efforts.

Looking Ahead

EastSide Arts is preparing for another exciting year, with the 2025 EastSide Arts Festival scheduled for 24 July to 2 August. Recruitment for the second cohort of Good Eggs is complete, and the Future

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Parade programme with Macnas will begin in Q1 of 2025/26, engaging young people from east and west Belfast in a collaborative design process. Through staffing transitions, EastSide Arts remains committed to its mission of increasing engagement in the arts and contributing to a more inclusive and accessible cultural sector in east Belfast. The year ahead promises continued growth, innovation, and meaningful connection with artists and audiences alike.

Financial review

The results for the year are set out in detail on pages 15 & 16. The company returned a surplus for the year of £15,861 (2024:£50,327).

At 31 March 2025, the total funds of the charity amounted to £217,478 (2024: £201,617), comprising restricted funds of £134,815 (2024: £125,867) and unrestricted funds of £82,663 (2024: £75,750).

The unrestricted funds are essential to provide sufficient funds to cover any unforeseen costs which may arise and fulfil the legal obligations of the charity in the event that current levels of income are not maintained.

Reserves policy and going concern

A policy has been implemented by the company in order to recognise the charity's requirements for reserves in light of the main risks to the organisation. It has established a policy whereby the unrestricted funds not committed should equate to between 25% and 50% of annual administration overheads. The aim is to provide sufficient funds to cover any unforeseen costs which may arise, as well as allowing for the payment of any liabilities which would arise should the company cease to operate. The company recognises that such targets may remain aspirational.

Trustees' responsibilities statement

The trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

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

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In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the applicable Charities SORP;
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Auditor

Each of the persons who is a trustee at the date of approval of this report confirms that:

- so far as they are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditor is unaware; and
- they have taken all steps that they ought to have taken as a trustee to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditor is aware of that information.

The trustees' annual report and the strategic report were approved on 11 December 2025 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:



Tony Wilson
Charity Secretary