Life Centre Stourbridge

Annual Report & Accounts

1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026

"Helping people 'do' life"

Churches Together in Stourbridge

cma
Freedom from debt
Hope for the future

Charity registration number: 1156191

Contents

Summary from the Chair 3
Executive Summary 4
Context & Challenges 4
The LCDA Service Offering 4
LCDA Team & Resources 5
Venues 5
Key Service Metrics (2025/26) 5
Enquiries & Caseload 5
Client Outcomes 5
Crisis Support 5
Service Delivery & Capacity 5
Referral Sources 6
Client Profile & Vulnerabilities 6
Feedback 6
From Clients 6
From Partners 7
From Team members 7
Life Centre Stourbridge Strategic Direction & Goals 7
Future priorities 7
Financial Review 8
Statement of Receipts and Payments Accounts – all funds 8
Receipts 9
Payments 10
Reserves 10
Independent Examination 10
Governance 11
Trustees 11
Charity Details 11
Charity objectives 12
Independent Examiner's Report 13

Summary from the Chair

My first task is to thank Alan Taylor who has retired as chair of the trustees, for his many years of dedicated service to Life Centre Stourbridge (LCS). He was a trustee from the start in 2014 & chair since June 2022.

The past year has been a challenging one and the team have risen to that challenge admirably. Financial support for the Charity sector has dropped in the last couple of years for the first time in many years and we have not been immune. The team have shown great flexibility and willingness to adapt with changes to working hours affected. On behalf of the Trustees, I pass on our gratitude.

Despite various challenges, Life Centre Debt Advice (LCDA) has continued to support those in our community who seek help with financial difficulties, some of which are complex and we have had some tremendous feedback of the transforming effect this has had on people's lives. Our team of paid and volunteer staff have gained further experience, and an increased number are now qualified to give debt advice.

I would also like to thank our prayer partners, supporters and Trustees for their continued commitment and passion. We look forward in faith to the coming year asking for wisdom, provision of support and continued commitment so that we can provide the help and support to those that we are able to.

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 as we would welcome the opportunity to speak to you.

Chris Heslop – Chair from June 2025

Signed on behalf of the Board: Date: 3rd June 2026

Executive Summary

In 2025–26, LCDA delivered high-impact, person-centred budgeting, money management and debt advice to households across the Black Country during a year marked by rising demand, heightened instances of client vulnerability, and reduced staffing capacity. Despite these pressures, the service supported a total of 228 households including 54 new to LCDA during the year who presented a record £1.24 million of debt. Of the 228 households supported, 73 were concluded having improved their finances by an average of £135.50 per month.

The team delivered support to over 500 adults and children enabling them to move toward a more secure future, having greater financial stability and mental wellbeing.

During the year the team delivered 370 advice appointments and these prevented evictions, bailiff actions and continued to provide trusted, compassionate support to households facing acute financial and wellbeing crises.

However, the year also exposed significant structural pressures. Case complexity increased sharply, waiting times lengthened, and—after a 36% reduction in advisor hours—LCDA was forced to close to new enquiries for the first time in 12 years. Even so, service availability improved to 182 days, and strong partnerships with advice agencies, public bodies, and health professionals continued to drive incoming referrals.

LCDA is affiliated to the national money and debt advice charity Community Money Advice (CMA) and is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

Context & Challenges

- The West Midlands continues to experience **high deprivation**, low financial resilience, and rising household debt.
- The **cost-of-living crisis** is creating more severe and complex cases.
- Nationally as well as locally, levels of priority debt are rising (rent & mortgage arrears, utility debts, Council Tax arrears)
- Demand for LCDA services (indicated by enquiries & referral rates) continues on an upward trajectory
- Demand for senior Debt Advice has risen, especially following StepChange's decision to discontinue providing a Debt Relief Order advice service.
- Clients have experienced significantly longer waiting times for a first appointment; hence during the year we had to inform our referral partners of the waiting list status and temporarily close the list on account of our limited capacity.
- Many client cases are taking longer to resolve on account of client vulnerability, difficulty gathering financial data, and the need for long-term support and behavioural change
- LCDA's team continues to serve with "amazing commitment," often at personal sacrifice.

The LCDA Service Offering

LCDA offers confidential, free, face-to-face support for individuals and families facing money and debt problems. We help with:

- Benefit checks
- Income enhancement and savings
- Budgeting support
- Debt advice and implementing debt repayment arrangements
- Creditor contact and dealing with bailiffs
- Practical help with household essentials
- Befriending and emotional support

LCDA Team & Resources

- **5 salaried part-time staff**
- **9 volunteers**
- **4,275 total labour hours** (down 4%)
- 79% salaried, 21% volunteer hours
- Ongoing training and case redistribution to manage complexity.

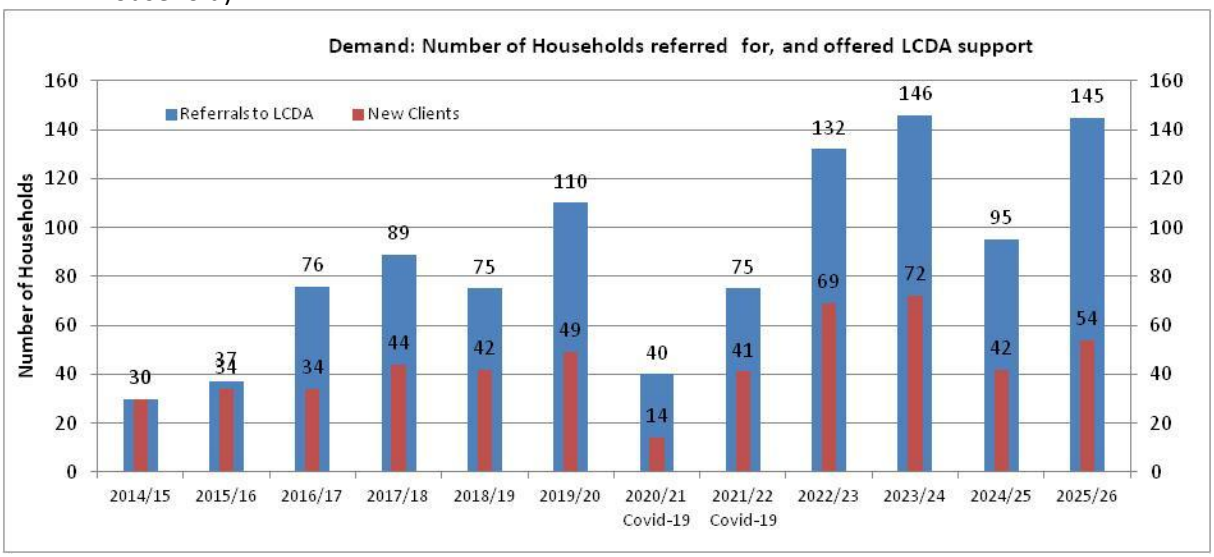
Venues

Main hub: **Bellmark House, Stourbridge, DY8 1AD.** Additional venues across Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton.

Key Service Metrics (2025/26)

Enquiries & Caseload

- **145 new enquiries** (+50% vs previous year).
  - 54 onboarded
  - 42 waiting room
  - 49 signposted elsewhere
- **130 cases closed** (significantly higher than new cases added).
- **54 new households** added to caseload with **£1.24m total debt** (highest ever; ~£23k per household).



Client Outcomes

Among the 73 supported cases concluded during the year:

- **£135.50/month improvement** in household finances.
  - Average shift from **£49 deficit → £86.50 surplus**.
- **£129,831 total debt reduced**
  - £84,440 priority debts
  - £45,391 non-priority debts
- **160 adults and children supported**.

Crisis Support

- 17 households facing eviction, self-harm risk, or domestic violence.
- 23 households facing bailiff enforcement (none had goods seized).

Service Delivery & Capacity

- 228 households received support, of which 145 were new referrals
- 103 open cases took part in at least one advice appointment
- 54 referrals became active clients

- 130 cases were closed, 28% with a full or partial debt resolution, 44% were signposted to another service, and 28% disengaged
- 473 appointments offered, 370 completed (78%)

Referral Sources

- 48% Advice agencies (CAB, CAP, StepChange, CMA centres, National Debtline)
- 28% Public bodies (DWP, GP Practices, Social Services); we are seeing Increasing referrals from health practitioners recognising the link between mental health and financial stress
- 16% LCDA marketing
- 8% Churches/Foodbanks

Client Profile & Vulnerabilities

The Financial Conduct Authority Duty of Care guidance requires the monitoring of potential client vulnerability and responses. This has enabled LCDA to better understand and respond to a range of client circumstances, and has helped us enhance the depth and quality of the service we offer that can lead to better and more sustainable client outcomes.
100% of new caseload households had at least one vulnerability:

- 50% identified with limited financial capability
- 37% declared a diagnosed mental health condition
- 30% declared a physical disability/health condition
- 30% had recently sustained a significant 'life event' (loss of employment, relationship breakdown, bereavement etc)
- 20% declared a long-term illness
- 19% had communication challenges, e.g. English not their first language
- 7% had accessibility issues
- 7% declared an addiction
- 6% were identified with a cognitive disorder
- 2% declared they had been subject to coercion

Feedback

From Clients

"I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. It's so helpful to see things written down, and to share things with others about my circumstances. I feel better now than when I arrived, I have hope, and feel it was good to be able to talk openly. Really good, thank you"

"I'd like to thank you from my heart for your help and care and for standing by me when many people left. It's been a very hard journey for me and my children. You have been here for us and that means a lot to us".

" Thank you to all the team for your help and support. I had a sense of being "out of control" and trying to deal with a "system" (dealing with my impersonal Eon Next Utility supplier) who didn't understand me. I'd been trying to resolve my disputed Utility bill for 2 years but no-one was listening. I'd received a huge amount of letters and bills from them saying I owed them over £12,000 - which was wrong.

Whenever I tried calling Eon Next I'd feel myself getting angry and frustrated as it involved speaking to computers (call options) and people who don't listen. Every time I'd call them - I'd speak to a different person and have to explain the story all over again. I was getting nowhere.

I called Age Concern who referred me to yourselves and when I came to the Life Centre we seemed to just hit it off. You listened to my story and got to work helping me. I couldn't do what you have done for me. You're able to take your time and get through to these people (Creditors) and they listen to you. You're able to be patient I guess.

Your help has been phenomenal that's all I can say, and I've been around the world I can tell you, this organisation is special. You're special. I can't thank you enough for what you've been able to achieve for me. I'm over the moon, your help has been excellent, even helping me "out of hours".

If I have another problem I'll be coming to you first."

From Partners

"Life Centre Debt Advice is the first place I'd call if one of my households has a need for debt advice."

From Team members

- *It's great to have the opportunity to serve, to be part of a TEAM*
- *I'm among friends, and enjoy the fellowship that comes with my involvement.*
- *We have learned much about a world that many in our churches do not see very often*

Life Centre Stourbridge Strategic Direction & Goals

Our goals remain to:

1. **Alleviate deprivation and poverty** in the Black Country.
2. **Promote social inclusion and engagement**.
3. **Enhance advocacy, training, coaching, and befriending**.

Future priorities

- Strengthen the capacity of existing staff and volunteers through ongoing hands-on training and professional development
- Expand venues and partnerships across the Black Country.
- Strengthen remote and face-to-face service options.
- Build sustainable, interconnected support networks for organisational collaboration and sharing good practice.

Financial Review

LCS ended the year in a financially stable position despite spending £16,100 (37%) more than we received but we have the resources to cover this deficit & we would rather maintain our capacity now because the needs are so great. However, we took steps to reduce our projected employment costs by £20,466 by releasing one member of staff & reducing the hours of 4 of the others.

The cost-of-living crisis affects the charity sector as well so we are having to work harder to win bids for funding from trusts. A huge thank you to Nicola Martin for leading us in this. This year we received grants totalling £18,844 (compared to last year's £25,550): -

- Unrestricted funds: The Stourbridge Rotary Club & Yorkshire Building Society.
- Restricted funds: The Naomi Simone Trust (aka LYEfLINE) , the Grimmitt Trust, the Albert Hunt Trust & the Wylde Memorial Trust.

Additional grant funding will be sought to reduce the need to draw on the organisation's funds and ensure we continue to be able to offer a timely quality service.

Statement of Receipts and Payments Accounts – all funds

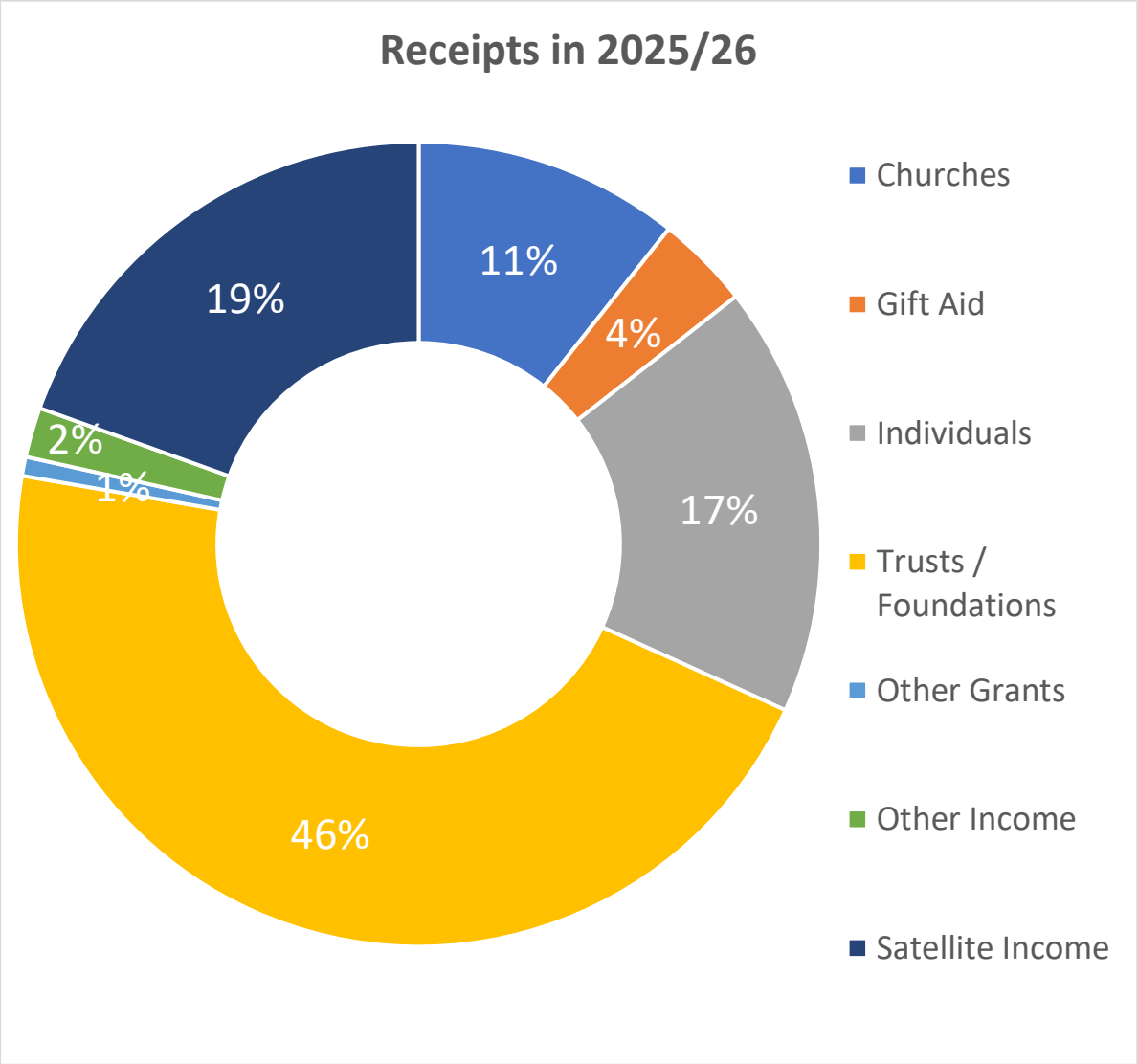
This statement is for the period 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026 for all funds.

Statement of Receipts & Payments		
	2024/25	**2025/26**
Brought Forward	**£66,692.26**	**£57,188.64**
Receipts		
Churches	£5,145.00	£4,610.00
Gift Aid	£1,396.30	£1,629.49
Individuals	£6,850.00	£7,482.07
Trusts / Foundations	£25,550.00	£19,844.00
Other Grants	£350.00	£330.00
Other Income	£1,485.50	£864.16
Satellite Income	£3,818.29	£8,428.00
Total Income	**£44,595.09**	**£43,187.72**
Payments		
Direct Employee Expenses	-£43,187.64	-£52,793.57
Regulatory & other Fees	-£3,609.40	-£3,789.29
Indirect Employee/Volunteer Expenses	-£1,638.67	-£636.00
Other Expenses	-£699.32	-£938.54
Premises Costs	-£1,454.76	-£1,130.39
Payments for assets	-£3,508.92	£0.00
Journals	£0.00	£0.00
Total Expenditure	**-£54,098.71**	**-£59,287.79**
Carried Forward	**£57,188.64**	**£41,088.57**

As at 31st March 2026, our bank balances stood at £41,088.57 of which £18,450.02 were restricted and £22,638.55 unrestricted. Restricted funds included funds remaining from grants.

Receipts

This chart shows the breakdown of our income streams across all funds: -



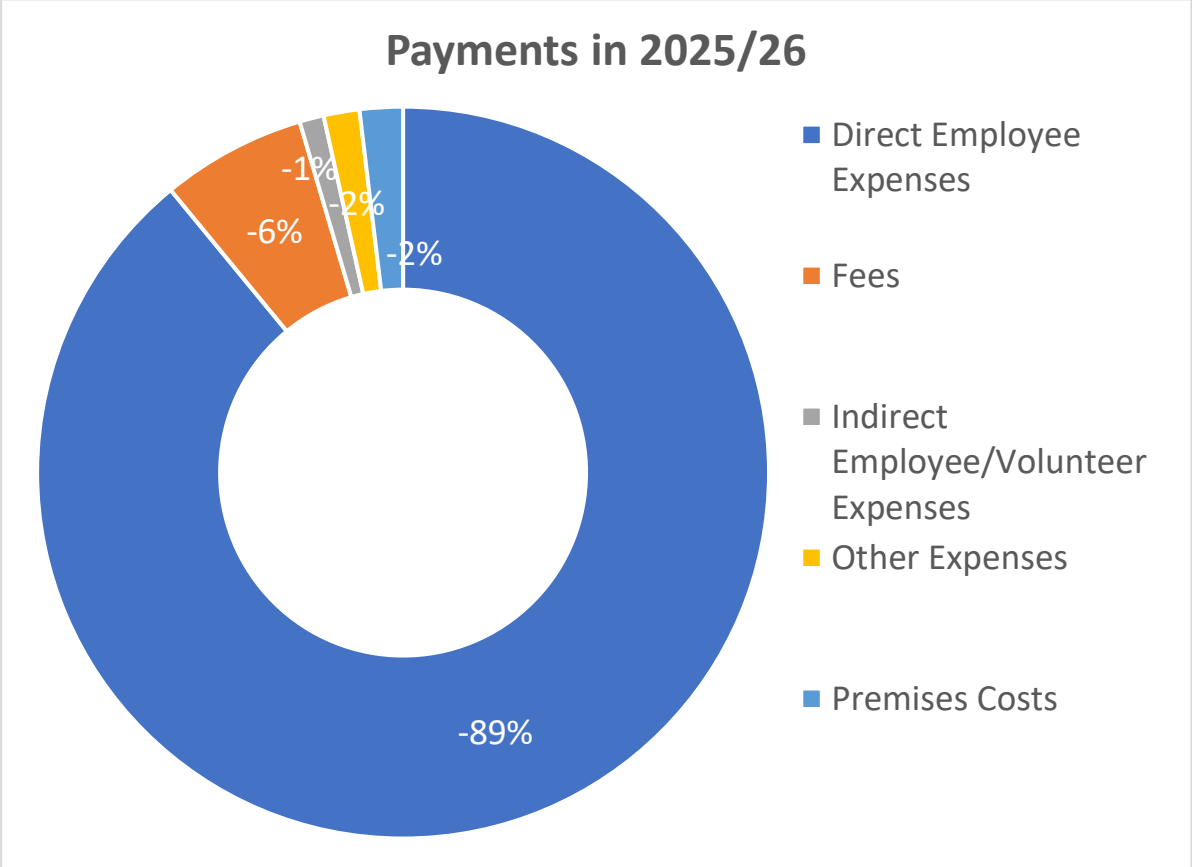
Note: The Satellite income includes funds from the closure of the satellite based at Holy Trinity Church, Old Hill. They had funds to support this operation but for various reasons, they had to close it. The original donor agreed that funds could be transferred to LCDA, who also took on their outstanding clients.

Payments

The significant changes in 2025/26 were: -

1. Our employment costs increased
2. Our other costs decreased because we did not go the CMA conference nor purchase any IT equipment

The breakdown for this year: -



Reserves

The Trustees have a policy to retain a level of reserves equivalent to 3 month's operating costs. Our minimum running costs for a quarter are currently approximately £14,825, comfortably within our funds.

Independent Examination

The accounts have been examined independently and the report is on page 13.[CHECK]

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 2025/26 the Management Team (Trustees and Centre Manager) met 6 times to guide the work, agree new approaches 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	Trustee	01/06/25 Retired
Malcolm Moss	Secretary & Treasurer	31/03/26
Nicola Martin	Trustee	31/03/26
Chris Helsop	Chair from 01/06/25	24/01/27

Charity Details

Charity number	115691
Charity status	Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) Registered 13th 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 from 01/04/25	Chris.Heslop@lifecentredebtadvice.org.uk
Independent Examiner	Arthur Baker
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. As followers of Jesus, we believe that prayer is the foundation of this work.

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees of Life Centre Stourbridge (Charity number 1156191) on accounts for the year ended 31st March 2026 as set out on pages 8 to 10.

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended **31/03/2026**.

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").

Responsibilities and basis of report: I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement: I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

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

Signed: *A Baker* **Date:** 03/06/26

Name: Arthur Baker

Relevant professional qualification(s) or body (if any): Not given

Address: 25b Chantry Road, Stourton, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY7 6SA