

Engage with Age

Company Limited by Guarantee

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

Year ended 31 March 2024

Structure, governance and management

Background to Engage with Age:

Engage with Age (EWA) was established as a charity and a company limited by guarantee in November 2000. EWA is a community development organisation working to empower and support older people.

Engage with Age seeks to enable sustainable benefits for older people and the community. It operates multi-agency partnerships to ensure joined-up and collaborative working. Partnerships are active from a governance level down to operational and daily activities.

Governance and Management:

Engage with Age is governed by a Board of Trustees that meets quarterly. Trustees come from a range of older people's and community organisations, older people's forums, as well individuals from the business, public sector and individual older people. The Board is supported by a Finance and Operations Sub-Group that meets six times per year, and a Governance Committee that supports the role and responsibilities of Trustees and Director.

The management of Engage with Age formally reports to the Board and the Finance and Operations Committee, and has delegated responsibility for delivering the company's programme of work at an operational level. The staff team is composed of a Director, Operations Manager, and Development Officers that deliver the company's programmes. Engage with Age has sub-contracted an external accountancy company to undertake its finance administration and engages a number of other service providers.

Engage with Age

Company Limited by Guarantee

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

Year ended 31 March 2024

Objectives and activities

As described in the Articles and Memorandum of Association, Engage with Age's objects ('Objects') are to promote the health, wellbeing, interests and alleviate loneliness, isolation and exclusion of older people living in Northern Ireland (the area of benefit) without distinction of sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, caring responsibilities, race, or political, religious, or other opinions by associating together the said inhabitants, local authorities, public agencies and voluntary and other organisations in a common effort to relieve poverty, preserve and protect health, advance education with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said beneficiaries.

Strategic Planning 2023-26

In early 2023 Engage with Age held workshops with stake holders and older people to review its work, discuss its performance, and plan for the future. These workshops affirmed the value and importance of Engage with Age's existing activities. The charity also considered the unique character of some of its programmes and the gaps in provision that exist across the rest of Belfast. Throughout the 2023-26 period Engage with Age will review opportunities to reach out to more older people, and during the period will seek to expand its activities in a sustainable way and in partnership with other stakeholders and agencies.

Company Mission

Through the strategic planning process, Engage with Age refined its purpose confirming that the company's mission is "to empower older people to live happy, healthy, independent and connected lives".

Values

Our values guide us in our work and our relationships. They guide our behaviour, our attitudes, the decisions we make and what we expect from one another. Engage with Age values are based on community development principles. We put older people at the centre of all that we do, believing in self-determination and the right to make their own choices.

Our values, which were revised and renewed during the Strategic Planning process, are: Being older people-led; Empowering older people; Treating everyone with respect; Working closely with other organisations; Ensuring everyone has the right to take part in stimulating activities and have fun.

Engage with Age is committed to working in partnership, believing in the strength of the contribution of many agencies, of people and of volunteers working collaboratively to make a real difference.

Engage with Age

Company Limited by Guarantee

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

Year ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance

For the 2023-26 period, Engage with Age has revised its strategic aims, seeking to support the lives of older people and make communities stronger. Engage with Age's work builds from working with individuals through to affecting wider society.

The four main strategic aims for 2023-26 are:

1. To empower older people to reduce the impact of loneliness and isolation on peer individuals within their communities and neighbourhoods.
2. To empower older people to improve their own health and wellbeing.
3. To strengthen communities and neighbourhoods by supporting and empowering older people's groups and forums.
4. To empower older people so they can shape matters that affect their lives.

These strategic aims work towards a vision of society in which all older people are respected, valued and listened to in society, and actively involved in shaping the world.

Addressing the impact of Isolation and Loneliness on older people

Engage with Age seeks to empower older people to address the impact of loneliness and isolation on peer individuals within their communities and neighbourhoods. EWA has decades of experience addressing loneliness. The current programme supporting this aim is The PAL Project. The programme mixes activity groups and telephone befriending to support lonely older people. Older people take a leading role in volunteering, running groups, and providing telephone based befriending.

The programme had been delivered on a part-time basis and in March 2023 EWA successfully raised funds from the Lottery Community Fund for a three-year programme providing full-time staff for activity groups and befriending. A full-time activity groups Development Officer was appointed in October 2023, and part-time job share Development Officers for telephone befriending were appointed in November 2023.

This programme refined its connections for recruiting older people who have experienced loneliness within the Health and Age sectors. The operation and methods were also reviewed and refined. The PAL Programme continues to be delivered in partnership with a wide range of organisations. Every week activity groups meet and up to 60 telephone befriending calls are made by volunteers. A significant volunteering campaign took place in January 2024. By the end of the reporting period increased numbers of Befriendees were being supported by new Befrienders, and new activity groups were started. Existing activity groups were also strengthened and revitalised, and participant numbers increased significantly.

EWA also took a leading role in representing the needs of older people at sector level as a member of the Action Committee for the NI Assembly All Party Group on Loneliness and Isolation, and the Belfast City Council City-Wide Group on Loneliness and Isolation.

In this reporting period there were nearly 6,000 engagements at activity groups and over 1,500 telephone befriending phone calls made.

Promoting good physical and mental health

Engage with Age

Company Limited by Guarantee

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

Year ended 31 March 2024

Engage with Age seeks to empower older people to improve their own Health and Wellbeing.

EWA health promotion programmes in South and East Belfast all exceeded the targets set by the Public Health Agency and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. A significant range of physical health and mental health programmes operated throughout east and south Belfast. Particular emphasis was placed on encouraging older people to re-engage with their communities and EWA supported efforts to grow membership for local groups. EWA worked in partnership with local health agencies to identify gaps in provision, meaning that EWA resources were deployed in neighbourhoods experiencing health inequalities with poor access to services for older people. Partnerships with community centres and supported housing suppliers developed, offering a range of social engagement, creative activities, and increasing skills and knowledge of local health opportunities.

EWA delivered a Cost of Living Crisis programme composed of information sharing and engagement with advice agencies. Over 80 keep warm packs were distributed by EWA to vulnerable older people across South and East Belfast. Opportunities for older people and health messages were promoted directly through our East and South Belfast Programmes with over 50 health initiatives publicised throughout the year.

In 2023-24, 4,500 people benefitted from health improvement initiatives, participating in over 300 activities.

Supporting Older People's Groups and Forums

Engage with Age aims to strengthen communities and neighbourhoods by supporting and empowering older people's groups and forums.

The Covid-19 Pandemic caused serious damage to the health of older people's groups. In 2021 EWA surveyed 90 groups in South and East Belfast and found that a third of the groups were experiencing difficulties and a further third were in crisis. All of this was directly related to the impact of not going out due to Covid-19 and its associated health risks. Two years later, in this reporting period, we undertook surveys again and found that groups have experienced significant improvements, with fewer groups reporting difficulties and very few in crisis.

Improvements to the health of groups was the result of a mentoring style of capacity building support provided by EWA. This approach emphasised encouraging participation and making groups more interesting and attractive to members. EWA took over 70 sessions that offered new programme ideas, developed leaders, and empowered groups to manage their affairs effectively. Several "Group MOT" sessions took place in East and South Belfast, and there was regular inter-group activity to build confidence and inter-community links. Engagement levels were double the target number required by our funder Belfast City Council.

EWA's support of Older People's Forums continued with member numbers at the East and South Belfast Forums increasing. All forums undertook training to improve their operation, and throughout the year over 30 different public agencies learned of the needs of older people.

Supporting the voice of older people to influence matters that affect them

Engage with Age seeks to empower older people so they can shape matters that affect their lives. This aim was delivered in a range of ways throughout the year.

EWA supported the Greater Belfast Seniors Forum (G6) to represent the views of the forums and older people it supports across Belfast. The G6 delivered an annual Action Plan campaigning on Fuel

Engage with Age

Company Limited by Guarantee

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

Year ended 31 March 2024

Poverty, Access to Transport, and Access to Health Services. In 2023-24, G6 actively promoted services and represented the views of older people to 37 organisations including the PSNI, Department of Health, and Belfast Trust. EWA lead G6 members in very active opposition to plans to change the 60+ SmartPass, contributing over 200 consultation responses, issuing media statements and taking part in interviews, participating in protests and engaging directly with transport officials.

EWA continued to promote the needs and views of older people through ongoing consultations and responses to decisions affecting older people. EWA was active as a member of the Older People's All Party Reference Group at Stormont, and by contributing to action networks such as the Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership. The Dementia Friendly Artist in Residence programme continued engaging over 100 people affected by dementia with art exhibitions to audiences of over 20,000 people. Every month the PAL Gazette newspaper highlighted the views and creativity of older people to over 3,500 readers, and EWA produced the monthly Dementia Friendly East Belfast What's On Guide, promoting over 50 events and information articles every month.

Developing the Governance and Operation of Engage with Age

The ongoing business of governance and management of Engage with Age continued successfully throughout the reporting period. Every contract and funding agreement was fulfilled. Finances were managed effectively with income secured from a range of sources, some of which were new. In this period the charity secured £0.5 million of three-year funding from the Community Lottery Fund and Belfast City Council, providing significant stability for its work. Communications promoting our services increased significantly. The work of the Board of Trustees governing the corporate development of Engage with Age was furthered through the Governance and the Finance and Operations sub-committees. This activity included the initiation of a company-wide Governance Health Check, regular board meetings, and ongoing contact with staff. Within this period three new trustees were recruited to Engage with Age.

Summary

In this year there were 15,000+ attendances/ engagements with older people at Engage with Age activities, plus a further estimated 20,000 attendances at exhibitions and 10,000 online. This is a significant increase on previous years and a firm basis from which the charity can continue to grow.

Engage with Age

Company Limited by Guarantee

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

Year ended 31 March 2024

Financial review

Engage with Age maintained support from key funders and raised income from new funders in 2023-2024. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, the Public Health Agency, and Belfast City Council maintained their support of Engage with age. Correspondingly, Engage with Age maintained strong control over expenditure. At the end of the financial year 31 March 2024 Engage with Age had reserves of £118,347 which is composed of an unrestricted reserve of £66,438 and a restricted reserve of £51,909.

Reserves policy and going concern

Reserves are needed to bridge the timing gap between spending and receiving of income and to cover unplanned temporary shortfalls in income should they arise. Holding adequate reserves safeguards the provision of our services in the event of unexpected significant financial pressures. Historically, Engage with Age had also built up its own unrestricted funds. The trustees have decided to allocate a fund of £11,737 to cover the sustainability gap between income and expenditure for the 2024-2025 financial year budget (Designated Sustainability Fund), and hold unrestricted reserves for winding up and running costs to the value of £54,701 (General Reserve Fund).

The trustees consider that the ideal level of reserves would be the winding up costs of the charity plus between three and six months expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2024 which would be between £76,262 and £152,524. Unrestricted reserves are freely available to spend, therefore excluding fixed assets and restricted reserves amounted to £63,506.

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.

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;
- 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.

Engage with Age

Company Limited by Guarantee

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

Year ended 31 March 2024

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.

Small company provisions

This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies entitled to the small companies exemption.

The trustees' annual report was approved on 28 November 2024 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:



M Skelcher
Trustee