

Belfast South Network Company

Trustees' Report

The trustees, who are directors for the purposes of company law, present the annual report together with the financial statements of the charitable company for the year ended 31 December 2023.

Trustees and officers

The trustees and officers serving during the year and since the year end were as follows:

Trustees:	Ms E M Sillery
	Dr I R Taylor
	Mr S Alford
	Mr I Moffitt
	Reverend E Hyland
	Mrs S Kerr
	Mr A Kerr

Chairperson:	Reverend E Hyland
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Secretary:	Mr I Moffitt
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Treasurer:	Dr I R Taylor
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Structure, governance and management

Nature of governing document

The company is governed by the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

Organisational structure

The charity was incorporated on 3 June 2010 under the Companies Act 2006, being a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital.

The company is recognised as a charity with HM Revenue & Customs under registration number XT29315 and with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland under registration number NIC101506.

The company is managed by a Board of Directors. Three of the Directors are elected as Honorary Office Bearers, these being Chairperson, Secretary and Honorary Treasurer.

The role of the trustees is to ensure that Belfast South Network Company is effectively governed; to ensure that the charity complies with all relevant legislation, its own Memorandum and Articles of Association and the requirements of good practice; and to ensure that the charity works to agreed strategic and operational plans.

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Objectives and activities

Objects and aims

The Agape Centre is operated by the Belfast South Network Company. The Centre's mission is to –

- Create opportunities for partners and the local community to work together to foster greater understanding and interaction between different cultural, ethnic, religious and social groups;
- Provide opportunities for cross-community partnership networking to enable collaboration and resource sharing among the statutory, voluntary and community sectors; and
- Provide accommodation and services to a multiplicity of users, including ethnic minorities, parents, young people and children, the elderly and disadvantaged groups.

The intention is to build on emerging relationships and to foster new ones, with the idea of increasing social cohesion.

The charity's main asset is its three-storey premises – the Agape Centre which is situated in a densely populated area on the Lisburn Road, Belfast and which is used for a mixture of activities which seek to achieve the charity's objectives.

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Objectives, strategies and activities

Objective 1: To provide and maintain buildings to be used for places of worship or for carrying out or furthering the other objectives of the company

The primary benefit which flows from this purpose is the advancement of religion, namely Christianity and particularly Methodism, within the South Belfast area. This benefit is shown through the regular attendance of people at a Sunday service of worship. This service has also been available online via Youtube to members of the congregation, the wider circuit of Methodist Churches and further afield. Pastoral clusters continue to offer support to all members of the congregation whether they are able to attend weekly services or not. This is one of many ways the congregation seeks to provide outreach. There is an annual "Living With Loss" service for those who have been recently bereaved. The varied programme of activities, which are widely advertised and open to both members and non-members of the congregation, includes a weekly drop-in session, a very active ladies' group, Bible Study, Public Theology seminars/lectures/workshops, book club and Friday evening meal.

Other Christian Groups such as the Telugu Christian Community, Women's World Day of Prayer and Spectrum also used the worship centre.

An interdenominational Centering prayer group meets weekly.

Our "Thinking Aloud" series of online discussions on theology and ethics in the public square continued with an online joint series with the congregation from Dun Laoghaire Methodist church. A series on "Faith Seeking Understanding" ran on Sunday evenings.

We join with other south Belfast churches, in a small number of shared events, particularly in the period of Lent. The Methodist Church in Ireland used the Agape Centre for various meetings throughout the year.

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Objective 2: To advance education, promote health and well-being and to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and leisure-time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life of the community.

The Agape Centre hosts statutory and community bodies providing public services including Belfast Heath & Social Care Trust Community Mental Health Team, the AA and South Belfast Youth Football League (SBYFL) who are all based at the Centre.

With more proactive use of social media, including the development of the Centre's website, usage of the Agape Centre by community, voluntary and commercial groups with a wide variety of interests continues to grow. A number of Housing Management Groups and Residents' Associations use our premises for regular and annual meetings while local businesses and charitable organisations such as the Stroke Association, Alzheimer's, Women's Aid, Adoption UK, Carers Support Services and family mediation make use of our facilities for off-site meetings and training courses.

Both through Centre activities and the associated church, we contributed extensively to both local and wider development projects. We collected regularly for Storehouse, assisting those in Belfast requiring emergency food and acting as a referral point. We also contributed to the annual Christian Aid collection. Support for global development was also provided through substantial church contributions. Of particular note is the "Save A Heart" charity (established by a member of the congregation) which has been delivering and supporting heart surgery in Nigeria.

The Centre is used by various groups impacted by Breast Cancer, to meet socially and to partake in activities such as Pilates and is used by various agencies as a safe place for contact groups (i.e. supervised meetings between parents and children who live apart).

Forward South Partnership hosted a Community Health Day for local residents. The church continues to offer a free meal on a Friday evening designed to assist those who are struggling financially but also to provide a meeting place for those who live alone.

In response to the rising cost of living crises the church continued to run a weekly warm space.

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Objective 3: To encourage, promote and foster greater mutual understanding and better community relations by interaction between different racial, ethnic, cultural and social groups.

BSNC has an Open-Door policy, welcoming anyone in for friendship, a chat and refreshments. The Centre is a venue for events organised by the Church and other agencies such as Belfast Four Corners Cross-Community Festival, fostering the advancement of human rights, reconciliation, the promotion of religious and racial harmony, equality and diversity.

We continue to host Spectrum, providing inter-denominational worship for the LGBT community, family and friends. The Peace Players use the premises to bring teenagers from diverse communities together to promote understanding. The Agape Centre actively seeks to organise events which will bring together representatives from as many different backgrounds as possible.

The local Muslim community used the Centre for meetings of the first Islamic scout troop in Northern Ireland including an evening meal during Ramadan.

Mermaids a support group for parents of children going through gender change also meets in the centre.

Translink used the centre to consult with the local community on changes to the local Adelaide train halt while Belfast City Council used the centre as the venue to consult with various agencies in South Belfast. The department of Communities also used the Centre as the venue for Focus Groups.

Objective 4: To help young people, especially but not exclusively through leisure time activities so as to develop their spiritual, physical and mental capacities that they may grow to full maturity as individuals and responsible members of society.

The centre is not only the headquarters of the SBYFL but also serves as a venue for Tae Kwon Do, Irish dance classes and similar events for children and young people. Programmes promoting education have included AQE tuition. The Suzuki method, assisting the development of young children, is promoted in a weekly event.

Objective 5: To provide and promote the provision of facilities for recreation and other leisure time occupations.

The Agape Centre hosts a variety of programmes, as illustrated under earlier objectives, that provide an opportunity for the public in South Belfast to develop their leisure time interests. We host Pilates classes, Slimming World groups, Irish Dancing and Tae Kwon Do. In conjunction with Age NI and Forward South Partnership the Church ran various activities on a Thursday morning for the elderly within the local community.

Objective 6: To preserve and safeguard the health of all persons who are or are in danger of becoming addicted to or dependent upon drugs of any description, alcohol, solvents or other addictive substances.

The promotion of health flows from this purpose and the Centre has provided a range of activities to meet this objective including Alcoholics Anonymous (currently using nine sessions per week), a fortnightly Aware meeting (a Depression self- help support group) and Making 2nds Count (a monthly secondary cancer group).

The Agape Centre is used by organisations, such the Stroke Association, Contact Group and Women's Aid, to provide meeting places for weekly or monthly groups, one-off events addressing relevant issues.

A programme for young men in danger of becoming involved in criminality was run by the department for early intervention and safeguarding BHSCT.

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Public benefit

The operation of the Agape Centre contributes to the attainment of the Belfast South Network Company's objectives as laid out above.

In terms of meeting each of the objectives listed above, the details included therein give a flavour of the activities which the public in south Belfast can participate in as a result of the development of the Agape Centre. Although the individual activities are only listed under one objective, many of them have overlapping results, addressing more than one area.

The trustees confirm that they have complied with the requirements of the Charities Act to have due regard to the public benefit guidance issued by the Charity Commission.

Financial review

The Statement of Financial Activities is set out on page 12 of the accounts.

Total income has increased from £63,619 in 2022 to £76,815 in 2023, but has not yet returned to the pre-Covid 2019 figure of £86,100. Total expenditure has also decreased from £131,046 in 2022 to £115,641 in 2023. The charity has therefore generated a negative financial outcome for the period with a net decrease in funds of £38,826, made up of an increase in unrestricted funds of £3,620 and a decrease in endowments of £42,446, with this latter figure accounting for annual depreciation on the property.

Policy on reserves

As at 31 December 2023 the charity held unrestricted current reserves which had not been designated for a particular purpose of £43,154, a decrease of £7,650 on 2022. This amount is in excess of six months running costs excluding depreciation. Expenditure on replacement LED light fittings in 2023 and solar panels in 2022 has reduced our unrestricted funds but put the building on a more sustainable footing in the light of increasing energy costs. The Board continues to work to maintain our target level of unrestricted reserves.

Financial instruments

Objectives and policies

The charity's activities expose it to a number of financial risks including credit risk, cash flow risk and liquidity risk. The use of financial derivatives is governed by the charity's policies approved by the board of trustees, which provide written principles on the use of financial derivatives to manage these risks. The charity does not use derivative financial instruments for speculative purposes.

Credit risk

The charity's principal financial assets are bank balances and cash, trade and other receivables, and investments. The charity's credit risk is primarily attributable to its trade receivables. The amounts presented in the balance sheet are net of allowances for doubtful receivables. An allowance for impairment is made where there is an identified loss event which, based on previous experience, is evidence of a reduction in the recoverability of the cash flows. The credit risk on liquid funds and derivative financial instruments is limited because the counterparties are banks with high credit-ratings assigned by international credit-rating agencies. The charity has no significant concentration of credit risk, with exposure spread over a large number of counterparties and customers.

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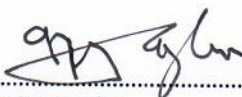
Liquidity risk

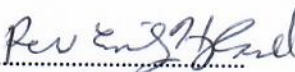
In order to maintain liquidity to ensure that sufficient funds are available for ongoing operations and future developments, the charity uses a mixture of long-term and short-term debt finance. Further details regarding liquidity risk can be found in the Statement of accounting policies in the financial statements.

Small companies provision statement

This report has been prepared in accordance with the small companies regime under the Companies Act 2006.

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on 26 September 2024 and signed on its behalf by:


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Dr I R Taylor
Treasurer and Trustee


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Reverend E Hyland
Chairperson and Trustee