

COOKSTOWN AND WESTERN SHORES AREA NETWORK TRUSTEE'S REPORT (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JANUARY 2024

Background

Cookstown and Western Area Shores Network (CWSAN) is a community umbrella organisation which was formed in 1996 to represent and support the interests of community groups within the rural areas of Cookstown and Magherafelt District Council areas and along the Western Shores of Lough Neagh. The network operates from a central location in Stewartstown serving the needs of groups in this rural area stretching from Swatragh to the north, the Washingbay and the River Blackwater to the south and westwards to Broughderg and into the Sperrins foothills. CWSAN is one of 7 Rural Support Networks (RSN's) forming a Local RSN infrastructure. Its core project, the Rural Community Development Support Service is funded by the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme through the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). Since 1997 the Network has expanded from a few groups based along the Lough Shore to the present membership of 80 (serving over 500 groups in terms of advice, policy and networking). These include community and development associations, youth, farmer's groups, women's groups, welfare rights, ethnic minorities, playgroups, historical and cultural groups and a number of issue based partnerships. "Sustaining rural communities" continues to be CWSAN's strapline in this our 28th year.

Structure, governance and management

The organisation is a charitable company limited by guarantee. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the charitable company and is governed under its Articles of Association. Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network has a cross-community focus and is managed by a voluntary committee which is elected annually. The appointment of trustees is in accordance with the charity's Articles of Association, whereby each member is entitled to nominate one person only in writing not less than seven days before the date of the Annual General Meeting. If the number of nominations for the office of trustee is less than any agreed number of vacancies at the Annual General Meeting further oral nominations, with the approval of all voting members, may be invited from members attending and voting at the said meeting. Retiring directors are eligible for re-election.

Principal activities

Objectives and activities

The objects of the charity are: To carry on activities which benefit the community of Cookstown, the Western Shores of Lough Neagh, Magherafelt and Dungannon (aka Mid Ulster) and its environs and in particular (without limitation) to: a) support the development of community and charitable organisations; b) facilitate community capacity building through support, mentoring and advice; c) provide education, training, personal and group development and related consultancy services; d) manage, promote, implement and be involved in furthering rural development, community development, rural/ urban development, Anti-Poverty, health and welfare, projects and activities; e) lease and manage property, for the benefit of clubs, charities, community and voluntary sector organisations; f) co-ordinate, facilitate and deliver accredited and non-accredited qualifications, skills training and lifelong learning projects and/or programmes; g) develop, manage and implement projects

and programmes in advancement of human rights, conflict resolution, reconciliation, the promotion of religious or racial harmony, equality and diversity; h) develop, manage and implement projects and programmes for any other purposes recognised as charitable; i) advance community development, in particular but not exclusively through the creation of training and employment opportunities for the unemployed by the provision of workspace, buildings and/or land for use on favourable terms; j) promote such other charitable purposes as may from time to time be determined.

Achievements and performance

Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network's charitable activities remain to support the development of community development and charitable organisations through facilitating capacity building, support and advice, providing education and training to improve the efficiency of the administration of local rural charities in direct pursuit of their objectives. CWSAN is in its 28th year of supporting groups principally in the Mid Ulster area.

CWSAN continues to manage, promote, implement and be involved in furthering Rural development, community development, rural/urban development, anti- poverty, health, welfare, projects and activities through its bases in Mid- Ulster. Maintaining this developmental support as a core function and the delivery of a series of local interventions, projects and programmes were central to the 23/24 year's function. CWSAN continued to partner with DAERA to provide this service on the ground to many local groups.

From January 2023 to January 2024, a number of key milestones included receiving 310 local community group responses to an impact survey as part of 1000 responses across all of NI. This survey indicated exceedingly high levels of satisfaction from our members and associate groups.

After a 2022/23 successful Rural Capital Micro grants programme delivery to almost 200 groups in Mid- Ulster and 7 years of regional delivery, DAERA have initiated a departmental value for money exercise and it is expected that the programme may be funded under Ministerial budget decision making later in 2024. In 2023, CWSAN supported DAERA regionally on the final programme monitoring of the NI Rural Development Programme just as we had done with the Mid Ulster Local Action Group's £11million programme last year.

The Network continued to deliver the NICHI and SPD projects for the PHA and have begun to develop OBA reporting matrices for both. CWSAN continued to engage successfully local community groups and provided funding to 29 local model groups in improving community Mental health and we concluded our Local community Fund delivery in the Draperstown area 22/23 with the final delivery of small grants from the legacy programme. We partnered with Bryson charity and our local foodbanks and were able to assist many local individuals who were in need of cost of living assistance to include food vouchers, electricity payments and oil fills. We continued to assist and co-ordinate local community responses to warm and welcoming community spaces during the winter period of 2023.

The network continued to be representative on the Mid Ulster Community Planning, the MU Community Wealth Building, MU Peace Partnership and other local development forums representing the sector and providing ongoing support to larger organisations such as Agewell, MUSN, the Lough Neagh Partnership and Mid Ulster Disability Forum. The development of the membership base across Mid Ulster for the network and in partnership with neighbouring network COSTA on the 2023/24

delivery of the Marginalised Minority communities programme along the border counties provided some excellent networking opportunities and sharing of experiences such as through the Journey towards Sustainability event.

In 2023, CWSAN was engaged by the Dept for Communities People and Places and C & V infrastructure review teams to assist review their funding programmes particularly in rural areas and we are confident that the community sector will benefit enormously from this exercise in the coming years.

CWSAN continued to engage many local community organisations through our training provision, networking opportunities, representation, policy consultation, partnership project and small grants delivery and in assisting develop relevant and appropriate solutions to local needs particularly in the area of charitable governance and annual accounting.

In this year, our database was revisited and updated with over 500 groups having accessed assistance and support from CWSAN at one time or another. CWSAN held its membership level to 80 groups and worked directly with 227 local groups with staff and board attending in excess of 390 meetings. Support for Community planning, isolated rural people and the sustainability of rural villages accounted for a direct target beneficiary audience of over 5000 people throughout Mid Ulster's rural communities.

Financial Review

The trustees conduct annual reviews of the appropriate level of unrestricted reserves. The purpose of this reserve is to provide stability for the charity to ensure that it is able to honour existing contractual obligations, to cover unforeseen events beyond the organisation's control and to be able to continue its operations in the unlikely event of a significant fluctuation in expenditure and income.

It is the policy of the charity to have general reserves amounting to two to three months of support and governance costs. Based on next year's budget this amounts to between £25,000 and £35,000. CWSAN have designated 3 months core operating funding of £33,850 to meet this good governance requirement as well as strategy, best practice and consultancy support. The organisation have also ensured that all future contracted obligations including redundancy reserves for core staff are considered within its reserve policy and to this effect £46,000 has been set aside for this purpose.

Included as part of the restricted reserves, are all future contracted obligations including redundancy reserves for project staff. The present level of reserves available to the charity is considered more than satisfactory.

Trustees

The trustees who held office during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were as follows: Rosaleen Hanna Eileen McGovern Perry McCrory Sean Donnelly May Devlin Geraldine McAdam Ann McVey Robert Cochrane

Auditor

The auditor, David Lyttle + Co Ltd, is deemed to be reappointed under section 487(2) of the Companies Act 2006.

Statement of disclosure to auditor

So far as each person who was a director at the date of approving this report is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware. Additionally, the directors individually have taken all the necessary steps that they ought to have taken as directors in order to make themselves aware of all relevant audit information and to establish that the company's auditor is aware of that information.

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

On behalf of the Trustees**Rosaleen Hanna****Director****22 May 2024**