

The Honorable Sophia Ward Charitable Trust: NIC Number 102976

Report for 2023.

This is a very small, extremely local charity that throughout its many years of existence has quietly and discreetly run, usually benefiting around 10 to 12 people in the approach to Christmas each year. The charity has been in existence since 1836, and under the terms of its establishment is, and always has been, restricted to deserving poor and needy residents of any denomination living in or very close to the Church of Ireland parish of Ballyculter, Co. Down. The parish includes the area immediately around Strangford and Kilclief villages and the Castleward estate.

Since 2008 the typical grant made by the trust to a recipient has been between £130 and £200. The latter figure was thought possibly a little too generous in previous years, and in 2017 it was decided to reduce all the grants being given to £150, which has been the standard figure given out since then. The three trustees reviewed the appropriate sum for grants in November 2022, and in view of the great leap in the cost of energy, heating oil and the still rising cost of food, it was agreed to make the normal grant £200 for 2022, and to review the scale of grants again in November 2023.

Since 1990 the number of recipients each year has varied between 6 and 16. Very occasionally, individual additional grants are made (within the same limited geographic area) when circumstances arise that merit the trustee's special consideration and assistance. This has occurred some years ago when a needy individual applied for support to pay educational fees for a dependant young person to study, and in another case, asked for help after a very damaging house fire.

In recent years the Trust was administered by two active trustees, Mr Leslie McCullough and Dr Ralph Forbes, both associated with Ballyculter Parish Church. As a courtesy, Viscount Bangor was named as a trustee. However, since he lives in London and only visits Castleward for a fortnight in August, he did not attend the church and played no active part in the running of the Trust. In 2019 Viscount Bangor indicated that he wished to resign and this was accepted. His place as a trustee was replaced by Mr John Crea, a local farmer and parishioner of Ballyculter church. In 2022 Mr Crea first participated in the decisions regarding the annual distribution of grants, and thus the Trust now has three active trustees all living within the locality.

The income of the Trust is *solely and entirely* met by the sum gifted by the Honorable Sophia Ward in her 1835 will. This is now invested in 3194 shares in the Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities administered by the NI Department of Social Development. At the January 2014 share price of 1161.69 this represents a capital of £371,043.78 belonging to the Honorable Sophia Ward Charitable Trust.

The income from the Honorable Sophia Ward Trust's capital is distributed by the Department for Communities twice a year in June and December. **The respective figures in 2023 were £638.80 and £766.56, making a total annual income for the**

year of £1,405.36. This is a reduction of £31.94 in total income received compared with both 2021 and 2022.

The Honorable Sophia Ward Charitable Trust has a Belfast Current Account with Danske Bank in Belfast into which investment income is directly paid. This account attracts a small amount of interest and modest bank charges. The balance in the Trust's Current Account as at 31 December 2023 after the annual Christmas payments made to clients was **£11,185.82**.

Clearly the trust's income has outstripped its outgoings for a considerable period allowing the current account to grow to the extent it has. The current trustees have borne this fact in mind in recent years when making decisions regarding the number and scale of the grants being paid. The circumstances of each potential recipient are carefully considered before any decision is taken, and up-to-date independent advice is taken from a respected member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul living in the district who has a wealth of local knowledge and experience from working with poorer people living in our parish.

On 1st December 2023, Dr Forbes, after consultation with Mr McCullough and Mr Crea contacted two Strangford area representatives of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society for advice regarding potential recipients of the annual Christmas grants. Consequently at a meeting the same day in Mr McCullough's house, the trustees of the Honorable Sophia Ward Charitable Trust decided to make grants to 11 individuals that varied from £100 to £200. **The total expenditure for the year 2023 was £1,750.** This total annual outlay is slightly above the Trust's annual investment income, which is the figure the trustees like to keep in mind as a guide. However, the Trust's funds remain very healthy, and the trustees are pleased that funds are available to allow help to be given where it is needed.

Dr Forbes wrote the letters to go out with the Christmas grants on 1st December 2023 and drew one cheque for the total grants made out to himself. The cash was brought to Mrs Mary Kearney of the St Vincent de Paul Society who distributed the grants to the 11 recipients.

In view of its recent registration with the NI Charity Commission, since 2018 the Hon. Treasurer of the Trust has written each year to the grant recipients requesting that they indicate on a return slip acknowledging the grant, the use they intended putting it towards. Returns were received from all eleven recipients. The uses declared included provision of heating, food, local rates and Christmas gifts for relatives.

The three trustees took no payment, and no expenses were incurred.

As far as the current trustees are aware, the Trust has never in its almost 200 years of existence kept minutes. There is no minute book, the trustees preferring to maintain a discreet silence about their deliberations and decisions.

Ralph S. Forbes, Hon. Treasurer

30 September 2024.