

Foyle Women's Aid

Trustees' Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

The Trustees are pleased to present their annual directors' report together with the consolidated financial statements of the Charity and its subsidiary for the year ending 31 March 2024 which are also prepared to meet the requirements for a Directors' report and accounts for Companies Act purposes.

The financial statements comply with the Charities Act (NI) 2008, the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations (NI) 2015, Companies Act 2006, the Memorandum and Articles of Association, and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS102) (effective 1 January 2019.)

Structure, Governance and Management:

Foyle Women's Aid is a registered charity with Northern Ireland Charity Commission, NIC 103223, and a company limited by guarantee, registered in Northern Ireland, NI23041. The organisation was founded in 1975 and in 1989 was established under Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the Charitable Company and is governed under its Articles of Association. We are also members of the Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland (WAFNI) and a representative from our management committee is invited to sit on the WAFNI board. This promotes effective communication across the organisation and ensures a regional commitment and joined up approach to managing the strategic direction for Women's Aid in Northern Ireland.

Directors and trustees

The Directors of the company, as at the year-end are listed at the front of this report, are also charity trustees for the purpose of charity law and under the Company's Articles are known as members of the Management Committee. The Board comprises of six members who meet every month and are responsible for the strategic direction and policy of the charity. Under the requirements of the Memorandum and Articles of Association the Directors are elected to serve for a period of 3 years, after which they must be re-elected at the following AGM. The Director's liability is limited by guarantee. The chair and Vice Chair are appointed from within the board and can remain in office for 3 years although they are reappointed annually at the AGM.

The trustees during the year and at the 31 March 2024 were as follows:

Ms Eileen Webster
Ms Jacinta McCool
Ms Suzie McAneney
Ms Karen Breslin

Ms Catherine McMinn (Resigned 01 June 2024)
Ms Karen O'Leary
Ms Amanda Biega

Objects and Activities

The Charity's objects are specifically restricted to the following:

- a) To relieve distress and suffering by the provision of safe temporary accommodation for women and their children, young people and vulnerable adult dependents who are, or have been, experiencing domestic, sexual or gender based violence or abuse;
- b) To relieve distress and suffering experienced by women and their children, young people and vulnerable adult dependents by providing and/or promoting a range of support services such as information, advice centres, confidential services, counselling, outreach, court support, training and advocacy;
- c) To relieve those in need by the provision of information and advice for those affected by domestic, sexual or gender based violence or abuse and referral to relevant support agencies;

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d) to advance education on violence against women and girls, including trafficking and exploitation, and its effects, and to relieve those in need by promoting its prevention and the protection of those affected;

e) To advance education on domestic, sexual and gender based violence and abuse and their effects, and to advocate for and to relieve those in need by promoting their prevention and the protection of those affected;

f) to advance women's and children's human rights and gender equality to relieve suffering and distress caused by violence emanating from the violation, impairment or nullification of enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Foyle Women's Aid Activities - core services and activities:

Foyle Women's Aid provide a range of accommodation and support services to women and children who have experienced, or are at risk of domestic abuse. Our core services are:

Support:

- Emergency, secure, temporary housing;
- Community based Floating Support Services;
- Practical and emotional support;
- Dedicated childcare unit and specialist provision for children from birth to 18 years old;
- Support for victims of men undergoing domestic violence perpetrator programmes.

Prevention:

- Specialist and generic education & training programmes for sexual & domestic violence survivors of all ages.
- The oversight of the Family Justice Centre, which will house a wide range of expert agencies providing information support and services to all sexual and domestic violence survivors.
- Collaboration with others to deliver and monitor the impact of the perpetrator programme.
- Collaboration with other partners locally, regionally, and internationally, and participate in initiatives to address needs, improve outcomes, and improve safety of all victims.
- We will continue to work with probation, supporting victims whilst they challenge and treat perpetrators of domestic violence in the area.

Protection & Justice:

- Supporting women who engage with the Criminal Justice System, including Court, meeting with Solicitors, PSNI, MARAC and agreed initiative related to domestic violence.
- Offering information and support to victims and their families and signposting them to other partner support services on site and off site of the Family Justice Centre.

During the year ended 31 March 2024 Foyle Women's Aid continued to provide a range of services including: Residential Services, Resettlement, Floating Support Service, Safety Planning, Specialised Group Work, Criminal Justice Support, Children's Services, Training, Information, Policy Development, Court Support, Dress For Success and Volunteer Management.

Achievements and Performance:

Foyle Women's Aid once again continued in the delivery of exceeded targets despite all ongoing challenges, whilst the very committed staff team achieved these targets it was a struggle, and we continue to have waiting lists for support services. We experienced a twelve percent turnover of staff whilst this is not a high figure by any means but any staff shortages at all are an added pressure when demand for services is so high. We have remained committed to a high-quality provision and we continue to raise the need for additional funding resources with Supporting people and WHSST. The adult and children's services also continue to plan for inspections and Quality Assurance Frameworks for both the WHSST and Supporting People we are look forward to demonstrating the detail volume and quality of the work carried out in the Foyle Group.

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We experienced a continuing upward trend in referrals, in total, 932 referrals were received, 801 women were supported during the year, 7924 support sessions took place, 90 Women completed the Journey to Freedom programme, 246 women were supported by other agencies and 24 high-risk cases were referred to MARAC.

The board and managers continue to place the families we work with of high importance and ensure that it is clearly reflected across the crucial support services provided. We are experiencing increasing demand and complexity of the work has increased whilst we are seeing other statutory services contracting. We are confident that the development of the Family Justice Centre and the achievements to date have contributed to our pledge to increase need and improve the delivery of joined up services for all service users. We will continue to advocate lobby and campaign to address the many gaps and barriers that hinder access to justice right to life protected and equality for high-risk victims of crime.

We were very proud to finally launch the research on strangulation in the University of Ulster Magee campus. This research commissioned by the Foyle group and the Department of Justice has provided the first factual insight of the position in NI and provided us with solid evidence and recommendations to move forward. We are very grateful to Alyson Kilpatrick, Human Rights Commissioner, who carried out the work, and we would also like to thank Judge Barney McElholm, the Patron of the Family Justice Centre, who worked with our task team and within the judiciary to raise awareness of support training for the judiciary and the first strangulation training to be delivered across a range of disciplines in NI.

It is also important to acknowledge the staff who give their all in a range of high demand positions so we as management took steps to increase staff support and enhance their wellbeing and recognise and acknowledge their ongoing commitment to the organisation.

We continue to raise this issue of inequality of financial recourses for the extended services delivered at our yearly Supporting People at the yearly contract meetings and the WHSST.

As always much of our campaigning work involves working with media and highlighting key topics that impact on women's lives. This year was no exception as we raised on need for action on the consistently high levels of homicide of women. The homelessness crisis and its impact on women experiencing domestic abuse. We worked with the BBC's Mandy McCauley to raise awareness of high numbers of women suffering abuse who have suicidal ideology or took their own lives. We would like to thank all the women who came forward to share their lived experiences in the hope that those in positions of power learn and use their positions in power take appropriate action so that others coming behind them don't experience the same human rights violations or inequalities.

Review of Activities in the past year

Cafe Central

We were delighted to begin our new financial year with the very successful launch of the Café Central. Not long after we opened, we had a review of the café in the Irish news that praised the food, decor and friendly service. The café less than a year on has transitioned into a lovely welcoming hub on the street and has already become a key space that we can utilise after hours for client activities as it was designed to do. We were delighted to welcome and serve our local community who have always been so supportive and generous to the services. John and staff are already adept at welcoming giving direction and support to tourists and of course we have even welcomed a few celebrities that have delighted our Facebook followers.

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Children and Young People's Services

2023-24 was a busy year for all the services within the Creche and POD15.

We have received our report from The Early year's inspection that took place on the 22nd of February, we are delighted to share that we have received no requirement for compliance or recommendations for improved in this inspected area of Quality of the physical environment and monitoring and evaluations. We are also inspected every year on safeguarding and child protection.

On the 26th of October POD15 held our very first Christmas toy pop-up shop in Pump Street. This was a great success; we managed to support 47 families with a total of 70 children a great head start on Christmas and avoid women getting into debt.

We hosted a magical Christmas experience for all services users to attend at Ashleywood we lit up the tree of Hope and had a night of fun and celebrations.

Completion of our annual WHSCT audit took place with no recommendations for improvement.

We have had an area in our outdoor play space resurfaced to allow for a more child friendly safe space for all to enjoy. Crèche continued five days per week at POD15, we also offered a city side crèche for 12 weeks every Friday at the Foyle Family Contact Centre to support women's attending the Journey to Freedom program.

132 new referrals were received and actioned for children and young people with 101 children and young people supported. 342 sessions took place between April and March and a total of 873 hours of direct work delivered. We delivered 78 KidsOut toy packs to both residential and community families at Christmas and 24 children who lived in residential services during the Christmas period received Christmas eve packs. 9 women and 11 children attended our Christmas Eve breakfast at POD15, each service user including children left with a gift. Derry City & Strabane District Council leisure centres donated many easter eggs at Easter which we then distributed to both community and residential clients. 25 children completed the Helping Hands Program at POD15 and we facilitated 9 Stay and Play session with Mums including Well baby clinics with linked health visitor.

Accommodation

2023/2024 was a busy year for our Accommodation and Community Support Services with increased referrals and multiple pressures on families coming forward for help. The impact of increased cost of living was evident with many women not having enough money to cover even the basics such as food and clothes. Financial abuse, delays in awarding benefits and higher food and fuel costs left many families facing poverty. Support staff were able to access over 40 food bank parcels for clients during the year and support women and children due to generous donations from the public and corporate funders.

This year also saw an increase in clients with mental ill health, including anxiety, depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Figures show that 67% of women coming into service suffered with mental health ill-health and 25% had a drugs or alcohol addiction. Foyle Women's Aid continued to work with other agencies to raise awareness of the links between domestic violence and mental health and to support in place for women who need a multi-agency involvement in their recovery.

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The further criminalization of patterns of abusive behaviour with the introduction of two pieces of legislation, the Domestic Abuse & Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021, which came into force in February 2022 and the introduction of a new offence of Non-Fatal Strangulation on June 26, 2023, has increased the legal redress available to victims. Increased awareness that coercive control and Non-Fatal Strangulation are now crimes that attract substantial sentences has led to an increase in women coming forward reporting that they have experienced this type of abuse. Non-Fatal Strangulation, which is now internationally recognised as a red flag for escalating violence in intimate partner relationships, and a possible indicator for future risk of murder or attempted murder was very prevalent among our client group this year. A lot of work was carried out by staff highlighting the risk of non-fatal strangulation and supporting women to report these crimes which could see attackers jailed for up to 14 years.

Despite new challenges and pressure, the support team have worked hard to keep over 800 women safe and supported this year as they recover from trauma and rebuild their lives. Many of these women are now living safe and independent lives in the community.

Southall Black Sisters Partnership

Foyle Women's Aid continued to meet its target in Year 2 of the Home Office pilot project to provide practical and emotional support to migrant victims of domestic abuse, in conjunction with Southall Black Sisters. This year has seen an increase in referrals from across Northern Ireland, evidence of our work in promoting the scheme and engaging with our colleagues in the other Women's Aid Groups.

Good working relationships with other organisation including NIHE, NI Migrant's forum, local women's groups, and community organisations has ensured continued information about funding and supports available to support BAME clients. Outcomes for clients this year have included access to safe accommodation, information and support to access healthcare, signposting to immigration and legal advice and ongoing one to one support. Challenges this year included resourcing issues related to limited access to solicitors that specialise in immigration law. New staff involved with overseeing the Southall Black Sisters programme this year, further developed the initiative, participated in specialised training, and continued to build networks and liaise with internal and external groups to promote both the services available and challenges face by migrant victim of abuse.

Promoting Positive Relationships Programme

Foyle Women's Aid support team continued to provide the Partner Support Service for the perpetrator programmes facilitated by the Probation Service of Northern Ireland in partnership with the Western Health and Social Care Trust. Nine women whose partners or ex partners were attending the programme were supported by Foyle Women's Aid.

Dress for Success

Dress for Success key highlights and successes throughout the year are detailed below.

In the summer we secured £10k funding from 'The Community Fund's Awards for All', to deliver Survive & Thrive, co-created with a focus group of Transit Forward participants from the first quarter of 2023. It is a 10-month programme which delivers one activity per month with a focus on socialising, empowerment, employability and financial wellbeing. It has been attended by a steady group of 8-10 women and wraps up in June with a celebratory lunch.

September to October was a busy month, we partnered with the Belfast Met to deliver a 'Women Returners' style session, the session included 'what to wear for interview' as well as being provided with a full interview outfit to get them started on their course work placements. We were also invited to deliver a series of sessions to Year 13 students in St Cecilia's College as part of their enrichment programme. Volunteer from Allstate NI, Garreth Harvey supported the delivery of the sessions discussing growth mindset and personal brand.

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In the New year, with the support of a student placement and volunteers we set up a Vinted Page selling clothes online, so far generating almost £400 in sales.

In February we partnered with Café Central and Derry City and Strabane District Council to develop a Hospitality Academy via the Labour Market Partnership. Craft NI won the tender to deliver the programme which provided seven women a safe space to train as they overcome barriers from lack of opportunity. Over 8 weeks they completed qualifications and work experience in hospitality to give them a start at a fulfilling career and guidance in building towards a positive future.

The Allstate Foundation have funded the development and delivery of a Financial Wellbeing Programme for women. Sarah has completed a City & Guilds accredited course, delivered by Map's, that supports the Foundation attributes of the Money Guidance Competency Framework. The programme covers knowledge required to deliver non-regulated, impartial guidance on money management and financial wellbeing. A series of Financial Wellbeing workshops will be delivered from May 2024.

We were delighted to work with Causeway and Mid Ulster Women's Aid to develop a bespoke employability programme as part of their Star Fish Programme. Weekly sessions were delivered over 6 weeks focusing on boosting confidence to return to work.

Financial Review:

To achieve its targets of assisting those in need the Trust must continue to maintain and strengthen its financial position. To this end the Trust can report that this year it has produced adequate resources.

Consolidated Accounts: Foyle Women's Aid (including its subsidiary company) have posted a net expenditure in funds of £109,621 for the year to 31 March 2024 (31 March 2023: net income £93,942). Total funds carried forward as at 31 March 2024 now stand at £2,522,429 (31 March 2023: £2,632,050).

Foyle Women's Aid (parent charity) have posted a net expenditure in funds of £108,053 for the year to 31 March 2024 (31 March 2023: net income £101,650). Total funds carried forward as at 31 March 2024 now stand at £2,568,355 (31 March 2023: £2,676,408).

Restricted funds (including restricted capital funds) for the group comprise £1,486,835 as at 31 March 2024 (31 March 2023: £1,550,361), with unrestricted funds comprising £1,035,594 as at 31 March 2024 (31 March 2023: £1,081,689).

Plans for future:

Going forward our key priorities for the incoming year will be the following:

- We will continue to successfully lead in the provision of a range of domestic and sexual abuse services to women and children and young people across the Foyle area including; Derry/Londonderry, Strabane and Limavady districts.
- We will continue to work with the Foyle Women's Aid board and our stakeholders to implement our strategy for the next four years.
- We will work with the Family Justice Centre Board and our interagency partners, to implement the targets of the first One Safe Place strategy.
- We will continue to develop our services in line with need and demand, and in partnership with all our service users, our funders and in line with our own and departmental strategies.

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- We will continue to consolidate on the progress made in the Dress for Success project and expand the activities and training to support service users into employment and economic independence.
- We will continue to review and develop our policies and procedures in line with expansion into new services and good governance.
- We will work with our architect to oversee the refurbishment our current Pathways building to house the extended services planned.
- We will continue to work within the Family Justice Centre on further development of collaborative and progressive partnerships working to tackle the silo mentality and barriers to support high risk victims of
- We will continue to meet with our interagency stakeholders to successfully complete the comprehensive targets and plans for an integrated service.
- We continue to work with APEX and Supporting People to agree and implement the management agreement and internal structure to support the new accommodation provision and address homelessness.
- Having successfully achieved our target to have a successful opening Cafe Central. We will work with the staff and costumers to continue to deliver on good quality food and service. This project was created to increase opportunity to promote ethical giving and choice. We will continue to develop this social economy space to enhance incomes to victim services and we will carry out activities that will further support survivors of abuse.
- We will continue to work as a management partner with Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid and Men's Advisory Project to support and manage ASSIST NI and pursue development opportunities to increase our reach to all victims including children.
- We will launch the Camp Hope project in April 2025. We will work with our interagency partners to the implementation of the Camp plan Evaluation across all our projects.
- We will continue to grow and develop the Voices Forums for both women and young people to inform local and regional policy in Northern Ireland.
- We will continue to work regionally with other Women's Aid groups the executive Derry and Strabane council and other key partners to support and inform the EVAWAG and strengthen regional services for victims and advisors of abuse in Northern Ireland.
- We will strengthen relationships with the Southall Black Sisters project and work together and in tandem with the Executive Office and other key agencies under the (EVAWG) to deliver improved joined up services for BAME communities in Northern Ireland.

Reserves policy

Foyle Women's Aid aims to maintain 6 months reserves to enable us to manage financial risk and deliver on our commitments. Our reserves policy is to ensure that there is no disruption to our services at short notice, due to lack of funds, an unforeseen reduction in income or an increase in expenditure, while at the same time ensuring that reserves are no higher than necessary and not retained for longer than required. This gives time in the event of a drop in funding to seek alternative funds, restructure and cut costs whilst continuing to provide current services.

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The Trustees assess the risks Foyle Women's Aid could be exposed to, and the appropriate level of reserves that we should maintain. The current assessment of the target range of free reserves funds that are freely available to be used for our general charitable purposes - held by the charity should be between 3 and 6 months' expenditure. This decision is considered to reflect the organisational needs and has been determined by taking account of the strategic plan, operating budgets and known commitments and liabilities. The actual levels of reserves are reviewed regularly, and if the level looked likely to move significantly outside the target range, action would be taken to bring it back in line with the target.

The total unrestricted reserves of the group for 2023/2024 are £1,035,594 (2022/23: £1,081,689). In assessing our level of free reserves, we exclude the designated funds of £130,600 (2022/23: £130,600), held in unrestricted funds, which leaves free reserves of £904,994 (2022/23: £951,089).

The unrestricted reserves are further analysed in note 18 to these financial statements. This analysis note shows that a significant component of the free reserves are held as tangible fixed assets, such as property and equipment. The free reserves held as current assets, totalling £367,682 at 31st March 2024 consists of both bank balances and debtor balances. These free reserves of £367,682 are required to be held to cover other short-term liabilities and as an ongoing working capital facility for the organisation.

Given the ongoing uncertainties that our organisation faces, our future plans are to maintain our levels of general reserves to meet the working capital requirements of the organisation. The Trustees are confident that, at this level, there are sufficient reserves held at the year end to enable it to continue to further its aims and goals in the event of a significant drop in funding and they would be able to continue the current activities of the charity for the foreseeable future.

Designated funds (unrestricted) for the group - are those unrestricted funds that have been allocated by the Trustees for particular purposes. The designated funds for Redundancy of which £50,000 (2022/23: £50,000) has been ring fenced to cover any/all potential redundancies should core funding cease.

Restricted funds for the group - These funds are tied to particular purposes, specific areas or activities, as specified by the donor, or as identified at the time of receiving the funds. At 31 March 2024, restricted funds were £1,486,835 (2023: £1,550,361).

The Trustees believe that there are sufficient reserves held at the year-end to successfully manage operational and financial risk. The Board therefore considers there is a reasonable expectation that the organisation has adequate resources to continue our core work for the foreseeable future. Whilst the current economic and public sector funding situation is expected to remain challenging for some time to come, Foyle Women's Aid has had a good track record over the years of being able to maintain income as we deliver valued and cost-effective services.

Risk management

The Directors have examined the major strategic, business and operational risks which the charity faces and confirm that systems have been established to enable regular reports to be produced, so that the necessary steps can be taken to lessen these risks. Committees, where appropriate, have been established to cover all risk areas and these committees report regularly to the Board of Directors.

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Principal Risks & Uncertainties:

Risk Policy and Internal Control Framework:

Foyle Women's Aid has established a risk management process, which will ensure that the organisation manages and mitigates risk in line with the agreed risk of the organisation. The Risk Analysis Matrix and the Risk Register are regularly reviewed and thoroughly assessed and takes account of uncertainty, the nature of that uncertainty and how it can be addressed. Having primary responsibility for risk management, the Board regularly consider the main strategic, business and operational risks facing the organisation. The Directors confirm effective controls and reporting systems are in place to lessen these risks.

Information Security and Continuity:

At all times Foyle Women's Aid strives to ensure that we operate a secure environment in relation to data security. We are dependent on IT and communication systems for processing and storing data. To prevent disruption to operations due to damage to systems or unauthorised access to data, Foyle Women's Aid has developed robust information security and data recovery measures.

Compliance and regulation:

Significant damage to Foyle Women's Aid's reputation could be caused due to non-compliance with laws, regulations or codes of best practice. Foyle Women's Aid implements well established policies and procedures and adheres to the sector's recommended codes of practice (such as the Statement of Recommended Practices -SORP) to ensure compliance with applicable regulatory and legal standards.

Environmental and External Risks:

Foyle Women's Aid monitors the external environment in order to anticipate political, social or economic risks, so that plans can be put in place to minimise any negative impact on organisational activities or the reputation of the organisation. We have robust procedures to assess and implement effective measures to reduce the likelihood and the potential impact of risks occurring.

We have confidence in the need for our support services, the effectiveness in our approach and the backing of our partners and we will endeavour to make every effort to continue to provide sustainable, responsive, high quality and effective services that meet the needs of women and children living with domestic violence. We will continue to negotiate with government departments to extend their commitment to ensure that our core work can effectively continue and secure the sustainability of all our projects.

Related Parties

Foyle Women's Aid has an investment in Avert Enterprises Limited (a trading organisation). They are related parties by virtue of the fact that Foyle Women's Aid is the sole shareholder in Avert Enterprises Limited.

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Statement of Trustees Responsibilities

The charity trustees (who are also the directors of Foyle Women's Aid for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing a trustees' annual report and financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the income and expenditure of the company for that year. In preparing these the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company 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 company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the directors are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information (information needed by the company's auditors in connection with preparing their report) of which the company's auditors are unaware, and
- the directors have taken all the steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the company's auditors are aware of that information.

Auditors

Fergus McAteer & Co. are deemed to be reappointed in accordance with Section 487(2) of the Companies Act 2006.

By Order of the Board

E. Webster

Ms Eileen Webster
Director
23 January 2025