

**Charity Registration No. NIC104639**

**Company Registration No. NI034595 (Northern Ireland)**

**ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**  
**GROUP ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

# ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

## LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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<b>Trustees</b>	Ms N Collins Mr C Neill Mr M Mullan Mr S Pollard Mr G Roberts Ms K Murphy	(Appointed 19 May 2022)
<b>Secretary</b>	Mrs Ciara Rea	
<b>Charity number</b>	NIC104639	
<b>Company number</b>	NI034595	
<b>Registered office</b>	Ashton Centre 5 Churchill Street Belfast BT15 2BP	
<b>Auditor</b>	GMcG BELFAST Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditor Alfred House 19 Alfred Street Belfast BT2 8EQ	
<b>Bankers</b>	AIB 11-15 Donegall Square North Belfast BT1 5GB	
<b>Solicitors</b>	Worthingtons 24-38 Gordon Street Belfast BT1 2LG	

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# ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

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# ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the group for year ended 31 March 2023.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's Memorandum and Articles of Association the Companies Act 2006 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 (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019)".

### **Objectives and activities**

Ashton Community Trust's objects are, by associating with statutory authorities, voluntary and community organisations and the inhabitants of North Belfast, to:

- advance community development by providing facilities and amenities for and support and assistance to community and voluntary groups and organisations;
- advance health and wellbeing;
- relieve poverty;
- advance education;
- relieve those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage;
- advance the arts, culture and heritage;
- provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and other leisure time occupations with the object of improving the conditions of life for the residents; and
- promote religious and racial harmony, equality and diversity.

The trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

#### **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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#### **Achievements and performance**

The following highlights some of the achievements of the 2022-2023 financial year.

#### **Training and Employment Services**

During the year Ashton Training and Employment Services department delivered the Lemis+ Project in conjunction with our 4 'Belfast Works' partner organisations (East Belfast Mission, GEMS NI, Impact Training and Upper Springfield Development Trust) and the CORE Project, both of which were funded through the European Social Fund.

Given this source of funding was to cease on 31 March 2023 and with no replacement funding in place, Training and Employment staff performed admirably throughout the year, successfully engaging with 4,350 participants, 2,048 of whom entered training and 1,300 gained employment.

This was due to following a holistic approach that focused on the overall health, wellbeing and, indeed, lifestyle of each individual client.

Consequently, Training and Employment Services was able to identify and develop new opportunities for those clients that improved not only their employability and educational outcomes but also their general quality of life.

Through funding from the Department of Communities an 'Essential Skills' (English, Maths and ICT) programme was also able to be provided to local individuals by dedicated tutors.

#### **Childcare and Family Support Services**

##### ***Kinderkids Daycare***

The year 2022-2023 was a busy year for the childcare provision in many aspects. Kinderkids Daycare re-opened the Cliftonville Road branch of the childcare provision, whilst consolidating the childcare offering at the McSweeney Centre, Henry Place site.

During the year one of the main areas focused on by management was ensuring that all staff were trained in 'Adverse Childhood Experiences', ensuring that the childcare offering provided was one of a trauma-focused approach. Additionally staff also embarked on training within the 'Solihull Approach Framework' to enhance the childcare offering.

As society emerged from the effects of a global pandemic, Kinderkids' main focus in the year was to provide a high-quality, child and family centred approach. In the past year 315 children attended Kinderkids daycare, enabling 243 parents to enter or remain in employment, while 60 children 'deemed at risk' were offered childcare places to support them and their families. Looking ahead Kinderkids Cliftonville Road will open their Afterschool provision in September 2023.

Kinderkids Daycare is now proud to be Ulster University's childcare provider of choice.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

#### **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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##### ***Family Support Hub***

The Lower North Belfast Family Support Hub continued to provide early intervention services for families and young people requiring support. The Hub brings together organisations that deliver early intervention services to children and young people from 0-18 years old and their parents or carers. The Hub includes community, statutory and voluntary family support services.

During the year the Family Support Hub was able to operate normally in processing referrals and all service providers are now interacting with families face-to-face.

The Hub membership stands at 69 individual members who are able to provide early intervention services to any Tier 2 families that have been referred.

The main source of referral was community referrals, closely followed by self-referrals. During the year the Hub processed 294 referrals, over twice the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust contracted amount of 144. The most requested service during this time was one-to-one family support at home, particularly for primary-school children displaying emotional, social or behavioural challenges.

During this time there was also an increasing demand for financial support and the Belfast Hub network was able to secure £3,900 of supermarket vouchers which were then distributed to 52 families who were most in need.

The Family Support Hub also strengthened their links with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) including facilitating 'Dealing with Big Feelings' training which was offered to all Hub providers and attended by over 30 members.

##### ***Community Family Support Programme***

Similar to the Lemis+ and CORE projects within Training and Employment Services, the Community Family Support Programme was also funded by a European Social Fund grant, and hence its funding ended on 31 March 2023.

During the year the programme still met all of its targets including 49 enrolments, 10 clients entering employment, 8 entering training and 7 clients completing their OCN in Community Development. During the year all of the team accompanied 40 adults and children to the Armagh Planetarium for a family day event.

This programme was a great way to have a positive impact on the hardest to reach families so is a loss to the suite of services offered by Ashton's Family Support team.

##### ***Early Intervention Family Support Project***

Ashton has now completed year 3 of this project where Belfast Charitable Society funded two Family Support Workers to provide one-to-one home visiting support to approximately 60 families referred through the North Belfast Family Support Hubs.

There was also funding of £7,000 available for supermarket vouchers which allowed approximately 100 families in need across all of North Belfast to be supported.

During the last financial year 54 families benefitted from receiving supermarket vouchers, while 78 families, comprising 93 parents and 136 children, were supported by home visits.

The two-fold approach was aimed at improving family relations, enhancing family functionality and increasing family resilience. The team also continued to advocate on behalf of families as necessary, with schools and the Education Authority being two examples.

This Family Support Service has enhanced the work of the Family Support Hubs in North Belfast who had previously identified that home visitation family support was a gap in its offering of services to families.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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#### ***Health and Wellbeing Services (Bridge Of Hope)***

During the year the Health & Wellbeing department worked hard to both consolidate and develop the services delivered to those in need of support.

In July 2022 the team relocated from McSweeney Centre back to Bridge of Hope's roots in the Ashton Centre. This turned out to be a truly positive experience and has had a great impact on both our service delivery and the team itself. This move has offered many new opportunities, including the development of a Child & Family Therapy Room, a new enhanced training room, access to smaller meeting rooms for one-to-one meetings with clients and a ground floor unit which is there to welcome people who can drop in as they walk past.

The new location also allowed the Health and Wellbeing team the opportunity to develop closer working relationships with colleagues across the rest of Ashton. The team have been able to work collaboratively on cross-departmental initiatives to help support those most in need and provide a holistic wrap around service to those individuals walking through the door.

As the beginning of the year the Health and Wellbeing department continued to deliver the Community Navigator 'Pink T-Shirt' pilot in the Royal Victoria Hospital's Accident & Emergency Department. In partnership with Start 360 and Belfast Health & Social Care Trust themselves, this pilot continued to provide support to patients in emotional and situational crisis.

Due to the pilot's obvious success, and at the request of the Trust's Mental Health Team, it then expanded into the delivery of Observation support. This service then saw Community Navigators providing one-to-one observation support for patients, psychosocially supporting them through observations while awaiting admission to a mental health in-patient bed.

Often these observations could last for quite some time, and so the Community Navigators were innovative in their engagement with the patients, including completing jigsaws, drawing and playing cards and taking the time to engage with them. Both schemes have been extremely successful in supporting patients but also in building relationships with the medical and Mental Health Liaison Teams within the Royal's A&E Department. Subject to the funding pressures within the Health Service generally, the department look forward to building on this work in the 2024-2024 financial year.

During the year, the team continued to provide the highest quality of health and well-being support to individuals impacted by suicide and self-harm, by poor mental health and emotional well-being and those impacted by the conflict.

Throughout the year personal development funding allowed the department to support 766 victims and survivors, giving them the opportunity to engage in a wide range of 74 programmes. These proved to be both popular, and on the basis of feedback received, were hugely successful.

During the year the department further supported 1,048 individuals through the delivery of 4,860 complementary therapy sessions.

In addition, 987 service users engaged in our BACP- accredited counselling service, delivered both face-to-face and via telephone, receiving 4,449 sessions of one-to-one support. This blended approach to service delivery allowed hard-to-reach individuals engage with the services offered.

Throughout the year the Pension Welfare Officers witnessed an increase in referrals from victims and survivors for support in completing and submitting their applications to the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme. The team supported 159 victims and survivors this year in the submission of their applications.

The Health and Wellbeing Caseworkers continued to work hard supporting victims and survivors, offering wellbeing support to 288 individuals and supporting them accessing services to help improve their health and wellbeing.

Thanks to funding from the Victims & Survivors Service the department were able to offer additional services to those within the local community who were socially isolated. These included lunches for local pensioners, day trips, family outings, visits to local attractions for young people as well as training in areas such as candle making, wreath making, and attendance at Health & Wellbeing residentials. Over 450 individuals engaged in these events, allowing socially isolated individuals to make friends and form relationships which have continued after the events.

## ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

#### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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#### Youth & Arts Programmes

##### *New Lodge Youth Centre*

The Youth Centre facilitates needs-based youth provision for young people aged 5-18 every Monday to Saturday night. On average over 75 young people attend the Youth Centre each night.

In addition, a wide-range of programmes were run throughout the year, some of which are described below:

- **SPARK** - 10 young people who were identified as at risk of involvement in bonfire involvement were engaged on a 5-month long project. This project focused on decision-making, personal & social development and increased positive participation in their community. As part of the project the young people completed many social action projects such as community clean ups.
- **Engage** – This project works with between 80-100 young people on a weekly basis in the New Lodge and Ardoyne areas, challenging and supporting young people who are engaging in risk-taking behaviours. This project has been vital in supporting young people involved in the youth justice system, social services and those who are not attending formal education. The past five moderation visits from Education Authority have resulted in an 'Outstanding' grade for this project. Key aspects of this work are facilitated in New Lodge and Ardoyne Youth Clubs, schools and on an outreach/detached basis.
- **Social Action Work** – During the year young people completed 12 social action projects in the New Lodge community. These included community clean ups, online campaigns, Christmas events for both young people with disabilities and pensioners, a Christmas Appeal drive as well as in-centre events.
- **Qualifications & Accreditations** - During the year 5 courses were provided for young people. Young people participated in OCN Level 2 courses including youth leadership, mentoring and peer mentoring.
- **Outreach / Detached Work** - Throughout the year young people were supported with signposting, by the delivery of detached projects in partnership with neighbouring youth organisations, by running detached initiatives during contentious periods such as 12th July and 8th of August.
- **Mentoring** – 40 young people were supported in a one-to-one capacity, which included developing resilience, how to deal with issues, signposting and upskilling.
- **Romania Project** - In September 2022 and March 2023 28 young people (in total) travelled to Baraolt in Romania in partnership with Ardoyne Youth Club. The young people explored various issues such as leadership, volunteering, culture and raising aspirations. Each project entailed young people volunteering prior and during their trip working with young people with disabilities, elderly, living in poverty as well as young people of similar ages.
- **Schools Work** – During the year the Youth Centre team facilitated schools projects in partnership with St. Patrick's Primary School, Blessed Trinity College and Edmund Rice College. They supported 120 young people through the schools work in group- work programmes including leadership and social activity.
- **T:BUC Project** – Our T:BUC project with Mountcollyer Youth Centre included 20 young people from New Lodge and Tiger's Bay participating on a group work programme finishing with a residential in Newcastle. The project was moderated by a T:BUC representative and received an 'Outstanding' moderation score.

## ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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#### ***New Lodge Arts***

New Lodge Arts continued to make a positive impact on young people, supporting their personal and social development, creativity and building aspirations.

The **Arts Academy** is at the core of New Lodge Arts' work. During the year 14 weekly classes were delivered to 139 young people and four classes to over 25 adults. The programme content expanded to include guitar lessons for children, young people and adults following requests from across the community. The array of weekly classes continued to stimulate creativity, build self-esteem and develop the confidence of participants.

The **Stepping Stones** after-schools programme for children with emotional, social and behavioural challenges continued with 25 children participating in the weekly classes from September 2022 to February 2023.

New Lodge Arts' commitment to the promotion of Good Relations was evident through the **Community Pride Programme** which was delivered throughout the year. This programme allowed cross-community working with schools and groups across North Belfast.

**Youth development** continued to provide progression opportunities for participants through leadership programmes, volunteering at events and social action initiatives.

New Lodge Arts led on several activities during the summer 2022, which were included in the **New Lodge Festival** programme. Activities included, to name a few:

- The Dam Proud Cultural Event at Ligoneil Dam in partnership with the council to encourage better use of the park
- The Family Fun Day element of Gloves off at Girdwood, a youth boxing event that took place at Girdwood Community Hub.
- Two North Belfast Bike Raves with over 50 people taking part in a 5 mile cycle route across North Belfast.
- 'See Me Not My Label', a short film produced in partnership with the 174 Trust youth disability group.
- Tiny's Arts Academy presented 'Shrek' with 20 children aged 6-8 years old. 60 people made up of friends and family attended the final performance in Girdwood Hub.
- 'Bugsy' was performed in North Queen Street Community Centre involving 22 young people aged 8-11 years.
  - The Senior Arts Academy presented 'Matilda' to audiences of over 1000 people in the MAC through three sold-out audiences. 24 young people participated in the programme aged 11-17 years.

**Partnership interventions** continued through work with various partners including:

- New Lodge Youth Centre through the delivery of several intervention initiatives over the summer aimed at supporting young people at risk of engaging in risk-taking behaviour.
- ArtEz University of the Arts, Netherlands, were based with New Lodge Arts from April to June 2023. The artists in residence were studying at Masters degree level and exploring the role of socially engaged practice and artistic research that puts art to work in the name of equality and social justice.

The **Spring Family Fun Day** took place on Saturday 25th March in Alexandra Park and was attended by over 300 people. Our young leaders designed and programmed the event, created the interactive art work for the gymkhana game, facilitated the planting of hanging baskets and pots, facilitated an Easter Egg treasure hunt and undertook various other volunteering activities.

The **Arts and Older People Programme**, 'A Night on the Tiles', engaged older New Lodge residents through weekly sessions delivered in New Lodge Arts' Studio, and weekly sessions with residents in Clifton House Nursing Home, Carlisle Day Centre, Families Beyond Conflict and Newington Day Centre.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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#### **Community Development**

The Community Development department continued to build upon the existing areas of high-quality work. Key themes this year were:

- Greater New Lodge Community Empowerment Partnership (GNLCEP)
- Community Information and Communications Systems
- Annual Greater New Lodge Community Festival
- Ulster University Neighbourhood Forum
- Garden Grid Strategy
- York Street Interchange

#### ***GNLCEP and Communications Systems***

The GNLCEP met regularly, exchanged information and collaborated on a wide range of issues including the New Lodge Festival, housing, community safety, the Communities in Transition programme, Youth Development, the Garden Grid Strategy, the GNL Community Magazine and general communications, local anti-poverty programmes, the York Street Interchange, Ulster University, unwanted bonfire management and the Seven Hills Project.

These processes enabled local residents and groups to get to meet and share ideas, information and resources, access services, interact with each other and participate in decision-making, mediation and negotiation, community activity and hold community and statutory agencies to account.

Meetings, social interconnection both in-person and using social media, email and phone networks were maintained on a daily basis ensuring regular exchange of information and updates. The regular production of the community magazine was also maintained with door-to-door delivery of each edition.

#### ***Community Festival***

This year's Festival programme included over 45 events delivered to total audiences of over 4,000 people. The Festival took place over a 14 day period in August and there really was something for everyone to enjoy. Various meetings of the Festival steering group took place and a Festival Programme brochure was publicised and distributed to the local community in both hard copy and electronic form.

#### ***Ulster University Neighbourhood Forum***

Throughout the period regular engagement has been maintained with and between residents, community groups, UU, building contractors, student accommodation providers, Belfast City Council and other statutory agencies through the Neighbourhood Forum mechanism.

Although these engagements have often been challenging they have also been very useful in empowering residents to address various issues resulting from the Ulster University relocation process. Ongoing demolition and construction processes continued to bring issues of excessive noise, pollution, night-time working, rodent infestation, traffic and parking issues, cleansing and maintenance issues as well as a host of other problems. The arrival of thousands of students, staff and visitors presents evolving challenges that will require continuous attention by the forum.

#### ***Garden Grid***

The Garden Grid strategy has continued to develop. The main focus continued to be on projects at Henry Place and Upper Meadow Street. The space at Henry Place has undergone significant transformation with the ultimate intention of establishing a central operational hub there to help roll out the overall Garden Grid strategy.

A container has been put in place to be used for meeting and storage purposes. With the help of Groundwork NI and a number of local volunteers this site has been cleared of dense bramble and dead vegetation in preparation for a planting area. Work is ongoing with volunteer strategy being developed alongside.

Work to the space at Upper Meadow Street has been well advanced. Local young people have been at the heart of this process with over 100 of them taking part in the planning and design process. The ideas of the young people are gradually being converted into reality, turning this once derelict space into an activity and garden space.

## ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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#### ***York Street Interchange***

The team continue to respond and represent the local community in relation to plans to construct the new Interchange. This has included responding to the Department for Infrastructure's Placemaking and Active Travel Review report.

There has been engagement and face to face meetings with DFI officials, AECOM and members of the Place Making and Active Travel Review Panel. These processes are in progress including continuing deliberations with DFI about an alternative plan and engineering reports, created in partnership with Alan Baxter Ltd (London).

We continue to promote a community vision of placemaking that is based on authentic lived experience and perspective. This vision includes effectively reconnecting North Belfast to the river and city centre in order to create a better living environment and a new and more successful neighbourhood for everyone.

We are also suggesting that significant public lands could be saved by a more efficient design and these could be invested into a 'Land Trust'. The values of such a Land Trust would include a low-carbon future, an inherent flood barrier, good urban design and place, vibrant living streets, active people and connections, green space links, co-operatives and social value.

#### **Projects**

##### ***Communities In Transition – Health & Wellbeing***

The programme fostered collaboration and connection across the two CIT areas of New Lodge and Ardoyne, where people co-planned, co-designed and co-produced various activities, events and training programmes to improve their health and wellbeing.

This year's programme was made possible by our 46 Champions and Befrienders, as well as the professionalism and expertise of Ashton staff and our community partners,

Training was provided to various groups of people in the local community, such as young people, residents, volunteers and staff of different organisations. The training helped them to develop their skills and knowledge in health and wellbeing, and to support others in their area. The training covered topics such as:

- First Aid delivered by St John Ambulance
- (PHA Accredited) Mental Health First Aid
- Children's First Aid
- Beekeeping
- OCN Level 1 and 2 in Personal Development, Mental Health Awareness and Peer Mentoring

Three health and wellbeing interventions were also delivered that were based on the needs and interests of the community. The first intervention, 'Youth engagement', was for young adults who were not involved in community activities and were at risk of antisocial, criminal and coercive behaviour. They participated in an 8-week programme that focused on their emotional, physical, and health & wellbeing. The programme was a partnership between two local Gaelic Athletic Association clubs, CLG Ard Eoin in Ardoyne and CLG Pádraig Pearse in New Lodge.

The second intervention, 'Anti-Poverty-Cost of living Crisis', was designed to help the most vulnerable residents by giving them practical items and skills to cope with the cost-of-living-crisis. The programme was intended to alleviate the need for residents to resort to moneylenders or engage in petty criminal activities as a means to sustain themselves and their families during the lead-up to Christmas. Residents received items such as energy saving light bulbs, blankets, slow cookers, air fryers, hot water bottles and attended health and wellbeing events during the winter months.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

#### **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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The third intervention, 'Ashton Community Trust Volunteer Pathway Centre', was established to make Ashton Community Trust the main volunteer centre for North Belfast. It was a pilot programme that offered residents the opportunity to become volunteers in one of the five pathways that were created. The pathways were:

- Social Volunteers
- Pathway to Training and Employment
- Pathway to Health and Wellbeing
- Pathway to Social Inclusion
- Pathway to Rehabilitation

Five health and wellbeing activities were also organised in the local area in partnership with various community partners. The activities included:

- Winter Health is your Wealth
- Music for the Mind
- Fun in the Sun Tai Chi outdoor classes
- Anti-poverty School Uniform pop-up shop and
- Health and Wellbeing for asylum seekers

#### ***Women's Group***

This Department for Communities funded programme had six key objectives:

- to identify and recruit women who would benefit most from the support and guidance provided
- to provide training and support to women empowering them with skills, knowledge and confidence
- to increase the number of women involved in decision-making roles within their communities
- to increase community capacity building
- to improve mental health and emotional wellbeing
- to support families and strengthen the family unit.

During the period of the programme the women took on the following projects:

- Their second 'Women's Health Day', which was held in Girdwood Community Hub. There were over 15 information stalls from organisations such as Women's Aid, Breast Cancer Screening, The Heart Project, Newington Housing Association, The Parent Rooms, Cancer Lifeline and Smile Surestart. There was also private space to relax and unwind with art, yoga, Reiki, reflexology and acupuncture on offer.
- Took part in a photography courses as part of their personal development. The participants captured images and stories from local women living in Belfast, shared experiences which gave way to empowering the women to venture into places of the city to which they have never been.
- Christmas Toy Appeal, this project concentrated on families who may struggle during the Christmas period. Staff, contractors and suppliers of Ashton donated both pre-loved toys and new toys to this appeal. A Christmas grotto was created in Mc Sweeney for parents to attend and pick toys for their children. It supported 70 families (127 children) across the Neighbourhood Renewal areas. The project also received funds from Department for Communities Freshstart Programme.

During the year the following projects were managed by the Childcare and Family Support team.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

#### **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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##### ***'The Pantry' Social Supermarket***

The Pantry social supermarket commenced in April 2022 and has been a great success and asset to the Family Support offering available at the Ashton Centre. A start up grant was secured from Belfast Charitable Society, enabling the shop fit-out and purchase of the initial stock. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive provided two year funding to cover the Co-Ordinators salary. Other funding has come from Belfast City Council, community partners, as well as private companies.

In its first year 81 families engaged with The Pantry. This consisted of 316 individuals provided with food weekly for a period of 12 weeks. Of the 81 families, 53 received income maximisation advice and 38 received debt advice. Additionally 28 families engaged within Training and Employment programmes with a further 13 individuals entering into volunteering.

##### ***Community Fridge***

Funding to start-up the community fridge was received from Hubbub, with the fridge opening at the Ashton Centre in August 2022. The fridge opens Tuesday to Thursday from 9am to 3pm, however the peak time is 9am when many people arrive at the Ashton Centre to access the free food and speak to other Ashton staff on issues they require advice or support with.

The concept behind the community fridge is to prevent food items going to landfill when they can be re-used by people requiring food support. Ashton has worked closely with Lidl, who donate food a few times a week to the community fridge.

Since its inception in August 2022 1,874 kg of food has been re-distributed and there have been 779 visitors to the fridge between August 2022 and March 2023.

##### ***Anti-Poverty Projects***

A pop-up uniform shop took place in August 2022 when new, nearly new and pre-loved items were distributed to over 330 families.

In October 2022 a warm clothes pop-up shop was developed and this ran until March 2023 with many people receiving free warm clothes. On the first day alone in excess of 100 people attended this pop-up shop.

A major piece of work which took place this year was the co-ordination and delivery of the Fuel Hardship Scheme on behalf of Belfast City Council. Vouchers to the value of £82,000 were distributed to families experiencing fuel hardship.

Additionally partnership working with the McDonald Centre saw £2,000 of fuel vouchers distributed to people over 50 years residing in the New Lodge area.

In partnership with North Belfast Advice Partnership, a benefits clinic is also available weekly at the Ashton Centre. Here support and advice is offered on benefit issues, housing and accurate completion of forms.

## ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

#### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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##### Financial review

Overall net expenditure for the year was £145,076 (2022 - £125,187). Unrestricted funds increased by £10,174 and restricted funds fell by £155,250.

As will be explained below, the end of European Social Fund programmes unfortunately led to a number of staff posts, mainly within the Training & Employment Services department but also Family Support, being made redundant at a cost of £114,274.

Following a review of fixed assets, looking at both usage and condition, the decision was taken to write-off all office equipment and furniture and fittings purchased prior to April 2017. This resulted in a loss on disposal in the 2022-2023 year of £37,854.

If it were not for these two items, net income for the year would have been £7,052.

Income from charitable activities was £5,506,626, 96% of the total income of £5,708,321. Of this total £2,180,108 (40%) came from unrestricted sources with £3,326,518 coming from restricted sources.

Training & Employment Services contributed c. 25% of the income from charitable activities. The majority of this funding related to the Lemis+ and CORE programmes. These received funding from the European Social Fund (administered in Northern Ireland by the Department for the Economy) with match funding from the Department of Economy. Following Brexit, 2022-2023 was the final year of the ESF funding. The Lemis+ programme was delivered in partnership with East Belfast Mission, GEMS, Impact Training and the lead partner Upper Springfield Development Trust. Both the Lemis+ and CORE programmes provided guidance, support and training throughout the year and continued to develop and adapt their service delivery model. Funding was also received from the Department for Communities for Essential Skills training (English, Maths and ICT).

Childcare & Family Support Services contributed c. 26% of the income from charitable activities. Of this 78% relates to the Kinderkids Daycare. Kinderkids aims to provide affordable day care provision which breaks- even from a financial perspective. This is only possible each year due to two grants received by Kinderkids, one from the Department for Communities (c. £114k) and one from the Pathway Fund (£30k).

The Lower North Belfast Family Support Hub is managed by Ashton (with funding received from Belfast Health & Social Care Trust), who also delivered a Community Family Support Programme (with ESF funding administered by Upper Springfield Development Trust). Similar to the two Training & Employment Services schemes the latter has now ended due to the end of the funding.

During the year funding continued to be received from Belfast Charitable Society allowing the Early Intervention Family Support Programme to continue. This programme funds two part-time staff to support families and also contributes towards the costs of school uniforms and allows vouchers to be distributed to families in need.

Victims and Mental Health Services contribute c. 30% of the income from charitable activities. Approximately 52% of this funding is received from the Victims and Survivors Service. This is a multi-year grant which includes an element of Peace IV funding covering the staff costs of two caseworkers. During the year the pilot 'Pink T-Shirt' project continued and expanded, providing Navigation and Observation support services to Belfast Health & Social Care Trust in the A&E Department of the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Income in relation to Youth & Arts Programmes exceeded £700k during 2022-2023 This was mainly for the New Lodge Youth Club which received numerous grants from the Education Authority, along with additional funding from Belfast City Council and Newington Housing Association.

Funding of £100k was received from the Community Relations Council in relation to the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations programme.

Community Development received £142k income during the year. Although a relatively-modest amount, this work is central to the ethos of Ashton Community Trust. Funding was received this year from the National Lottery Community Fund for the 'City Neighbourhood' project, the Department for the Communities for the Inner North Neighbourhood Renewal project and Belfast City Council for the Capacity Building project.

## ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

#### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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Ashton Community Trust also manages a number projects, some of which may be short-term in nature. During the year Ashton opened a social supermarket, 'The Pantry', which attracted grant income from NI Housing Executive to fund the Project Co-ordinator, Belfast Charitable Society for set-up costs and additional amounts from Trusts & Foundations as well as individual donations from the public, for which we are particularly appreciative.

Over £130k was received from the Executive Office in relation to the Communities In Transition Health & Wellbeing programme. In addition £90k was received from Belfast City Council to manage Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund monies within North Belfast.

The associated total expenditure on charitable activities was £5,714,313. Approximately 61% of these costs relate to staff costs (in line with many similar charitable organisations).

Service delivery within Victims and Mental Health Services is reliant on a group of dedicated self-employed counsellors and therapists. A tender exercise for the provision of these services is carried out each year to maintain quality, ensuring that all those delivering services continue to meet required standards.

Capital expenditure this year was modest, amounting to c. £25k, £11k on IT and £14k on office equipment and furniture.

The financial results are set out in detail on pages 27 to 49.

#### **Restricted funds**

Restricted funds are subject to specific trusts, ordinarily stipulated by the donor. Grant funding tends to be restricted in nature.

The total of restricted funds carried forward at the balance sheet date is £254,219.

#### **Designated funds**

Designated funds are those unrestricted reserves that have been allocated for a particular purpose by the trustees. The fixed asset reserve, amounting to £513,947, equates to the net book value of the charity's tangible fixed assets which are used on an on-going basis to deliver the charity's aims.

Ashton Community Trust have over many years loaned funds to Ashton Centre Development Limited. These are treated as a Programme-related (or social) investment. These investments were made directly in pursuit of the organisation's charitable purposes.

At 31 March 2023 the level of designated funds was £1,531,176.

#### **General funds**

General funds are those unrestricted funds which have not been designated for specific purposes by the Board.

At 31 March 2023 the level of general funds or 'free reserves' was £691,644.

#### **Going concern**

The trustees confirm that, in their opinion, the organisation is a going concern. Although three projects ended on 31 March 2023 due to the finish of the Northern Ireland-wide European Social Fund Programme, additional funding was granted by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the Belfast Works 'Connect' project which lasts until March 2025. Staff have been recruited for this project on fixed-term contracts. The trustees are also satisfied that, should it be necessary, the organisation can be duly right-sized to enable it to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future.

## ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

#### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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##### **Principal risks and uncertainties**

The risks to which the charity is exposed are assessed by the Audit and Risk Committee throughout the year. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee then presents the principal risks to the Board for discussion and agreement on what the response to those risks should be.

Depending on the circumstance the Board may decide to:

- avoid the activity altogether, if they judge the risks to be too high;
- transfer the risk by taking out insurance cover;
- develop a response plan to mitigate the effects of an external risk;
- put controls in place to manage some risk but ultimately accept a residual risk.

Risks are assessed on both the potential impact to the charity as well as the likelihood that the risk might happen.

Given the nature of many of Ashton's activities, safeguarding is deemed a significant risk area. Failure to adequately protect children, young people and vulnerable adults would have a serious impact on Ashton's reputation and service-delivery viability. To mitigate this risk training is provided at all levels, Board, staff and volunteers. In addition, there are nominated Safeguarding Officers, Access NI checks are carried out and all government advice and guidance is followed.

There remains a risk around funding under the current business model to ensure long-term sustainability given the impact of factors outside the organisation's control such as increases in the National Living Wage and the significant increases in utility costs. Where possible costs are minimised, and Ashton continues to liaise with funders over re-profiling budgets to cover these unprecedented increases.

The scale and funding of the business is being negatively impacted by the continuing political instability, primarily at regional level. This has created a risk of reduced funding opportunities and delays in the emergence of new funding opportunities such as Peace Plus. Ashton continues to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to enable existing services to continue running and to develop work-arounds where necessary.

Ashton maintains insurance cover consistent with other providers in the sector in which it works and sufficient to meet the stipulations of funding bodies. Ashton also purchases professional indemnity insurance on behalf of its directors and officers.

The trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to the major risks.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

#### **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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##### **Plans for future periods**

Ashton continues to develop partnerships that will benefit the North Belfast community. With regard to service delivery our plans are as follows:

##### ***Training and Employment Services***

In the final days of March 2023 Ashton were informed that the Belfast Works consortium bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the 'Connect' project had been successful. This project, which will run until March 2025, allowed a number of staff who had previously been made redundant to be re-employed.

Although there was no budget certainty given the lack of a functioning Executive, the Department for Communities funded 'ICT Employment & Skills' project was planned to run for another year.

The department plan to offer a range of services to meet the needs of those economically inactive, such as:

- A wellbeing, employment and mentoring service;
- Training based on gaps in the labour market;
- Training designed to encourage self-employment;
- One-to-one employment support;
- Delivering training in community venues;
- Providing links to local gyms; and
- Providing links to local food banks and Ashton's own social supermarket.

##### ***Childcare and Family Support Services***

During 2023-2024 the department plans to:

- Open afterschool provision at Cliftonville Kinderkids;
- Run a uniform pop-up shop;
- Support the provision of a minority / ethnic friendship group for families in North Belfast;
- Facilitate a disability support group for primary school children with the Ashton Centre;
- Secure funding allowing 'The Pantry' and other family services to continue;
- Actively engage in the development of the emerging Childcare strategy; and
- Further develop the Regional Community Daycare Network.

##### ***Health and Wellbeing Services***

During 2023-2024 the department's team of staff and sessional practitioners will continue to provide high-quality services to support as many individuals in need as possible.

Due to the impact of the Pink T-Shirt Community Navigator pilot during this year, the department will lobby for the extension and development of this project which supports individuals in situational and emotional crises.

New areas of funding will be sought to support the work of the department, for example PeacePlus funding which may be available from January 2024. Funding will also be sought to further develop the Regional Trauma Network.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

#### **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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##### ***Youth and Arts Programmes***

New Lodge Youth Centre plans to provide an inclusive provision that will cater for all young people's needs. This will entail a summer programme, which will involve a summer scheme for 5-18 year olds focusing on fun, relationship building and diversionary activities. Key dates in the summer will include the run up to 12th of July and 8th of August in which our provision will provide positive alternatives for young people to engage with rather than becoming involved in anti-social behaviour.

The team will continue our drop-in service for young people, which will engage 80-100 young people, aged 5-18, per week. This service provides a comfortable and safe space for young people to be themselves, to grow and educate themselves under the guidance of the youth work practitioners.

Group work programmes will continue with projects focusing on international work, good relations, anti-social behaviour, social actions, leadership and health and wellbeing. As part of our group work projects, we will run our international project to Romania where young people will take part in a voluntary trip working with multiple organisations in a deprived community in Baraolt. This work will involve the young people working with young people with a disability, young people in care and in local schools.

Through the Engage project, the team will continue to work with young people who are deemed vulnerable in multiple areas including anti-social behaviour, crime, sectarianism and other justice issues. Our project will continue to provide 1-1 mentoring, signposting, group work and outreach / detached support.

Social action work will take place throughout the year with young people taking the lead on initiatives such as Christmas appeals, community clean ups, campaigns and work with elderly people within the community.

Continuing to celebrate young people's achievements will be a focus within the Centre and it is intended to have a stakeholder event celebrating all our young people's achievements around the winter period.

The National Lottery Community Fund project, 'Champions for Change', will commence in April 2023, engaging young people in leadership projects, events and initiatives. This project will be facilitated in partnership with 174 Disability Project, Blessed Trinity College, St. Patrick's Primary School and Mountcoller Youth Centre.

The Youth Centre aims to provide a holistic approach to its provision and as such will continue to engage with key stakeholders such as social services, the Youth Justice Agency, community and youth and mental health organisations.

##### ***New Lodge Arts***

The Arts Academy will remain central to New Lodge Arts' work, as will the Community Pride Programme.

It is planned to develop the New Lodge Arts' Studio in the 2023-2024 year, to provide a shared space for the local community to access high quality arts provision including music and digital media. It will also enable creatives to explore and build upon their practice, expand their skills in digital sound recording, music production and digital media, work closely with other 'creatives' and potentially develop creative cluster.

New Lodge Arts are excited to be part of a collaboration with Battersea Arts Centre and Contact Theatre Manchester for The Agency project which will commence in September 2023. This project will support young people (aged 15-25) as social entrepreneurs, to make a difference and transform their local area, in a way that they think is best. The Agency project will be a progression opportunity for young people with a passion affecting social change in their communities.

## **ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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#### ***Community Development***

In addition to continuing the work of the Greater New Lodge Community Empowerment Partnership and the Community Festival, the department plans to:

- Develop discussions between the Ulster University Neighbourhood Forum and Belfast City Council about new physical designs planned for some sections of the local area. The department will work for co-design by local residents, gathering their thoughts and feelings, as well as considering their practical needs, issues and concerns.
- Develop the Garden Grid strategy further, develop existing sites and source funding for long-term sustainability.
- With regard to the York Street Interchange, continue to promote a vision of place-making that is based on lived experience and insight. The department will engage with key stakeholders, while also providing support and information to local residents.

#### ***Projects***

##### ***Communities In Transition (CIT)***

During 2023-2024 the programme plans to:

- Hold 4 programme information workshops in Ardoyne and the New Lodge
- Re-engage and recruit 20 'Champions' and 20 'Befrienders'
- Complete a Training Needs Analysis and provide training to the champions and befrienders
- Deliver 2 Outreach and Engagement Health & Wellbeing events
- Deliver 3 Health & Wellbeing interventions

#### **Structure, governance and management**

Ashton Community Trust was incorporated by company limited by guarantee on 5 August 1998. It is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association (as updated 25 July 2012). It has no share capital and the guarantee of each member is limited.

Ashton Community Trust is registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (charity reference NIC 104639) and is recognised as a charity by HMRC under reference XR26284.

#### **Vision**

Our vision is 'to create a safe, prosperous and caring community where residents have pride and a sense of ownership'

# ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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### **Mission**

Our mission (or overall purpose) is 'to promote positive change and improve the quality of life of the local communities'

### **Core values**

- Integrity
- Inclusion
- Empowerment

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Ms N Collins

Mr R Davison

(Resigned 19 May 2022)

Mr C Neill

Mr T O'Reilly

(Resigned 14 August 2023)

Mr M Mullan

Mr S Pollard

Mr G Roberts

Ms K Murphy

(Appointed 19 May 2022)

Mr T Evans

(Resigned 17 November 2022)

### **Organisational structure**

The charity is governed by trustees who are also directors for company law purposes. Unless otherwise determined by the company at a general meeting the number of directors shall not be less than 4 or more than 12. The directors are elected by its members on an annual basis.

The Board ensures the good governance of the charity by setting its strategic objectives and policy direction through the creation of a strategic plan and monitoring progress against that plan on a regular basis.

Ashton's current strategic plan covers the period 2023 to 2026. Having assessed both the strategic context and the statistical context, having carried out an extensive stakeholder engagement process and having carried out SWOT and PESTLE analyses, Ashton's strategic priorities, both external and internal, were agreed and a delivery framework has been designed.

The Board meets (on average) 8 times per year.

A number of sub-committees support the work of the Board:

- The Audit and Risk Committee;
- The Finance and Personnel Committee; and
- The Nominations and Remunerations Committee.

New Board members receive induction training to brief them on their roles and responsibilities, their legal obligations under charity and company law, the decision making processes of the Board and the sub-committees, the current strategy and operational plan, the organisational structure and current matters being discussed.

## ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

#### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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#### **Related Parties**

Ashton Community Trust is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (charity number 104639) and recognised as a charity by HMRC (under reference XR 26284). It is registered as a company in Northern Ireland (company number NI034595). To help it fulfil its charitable objects, Ashton Community Trust has two fully-owned subsidiaries:

Ashton Services (NI) Ltd is a company registered in Northern Ireland (company number NI620447). Ashton Services (NI) Ltd had a contract with Belfast Health and Social Care Services for the supply of staff to support childcare provision within North Belfast up to 31 August 2022 when their staff transferred, under TUPE arrangements, to Ashton Community Trust. It is planned to dissolve this company after all necessary filings have taken place.

New Lodge Arts is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (charity number 100353). It is registered as a company in Northern Ireland (company number NI603904). New Lodge Arts provides educational arts based activities for young people within North Belfast.

The financial results of Ashton Services (NI) Ltd and New Lodge Arts have been included in these group financial statements.

#### **Management and staffing**

During the 2022-2023 year leadership was provided by CEO Joanne Kinnear who worked closely with the Board, developing short-term strategies to meet the ever-changing circumstances, while also managing the day-to-day operations of the charity. She was supported during 2022-2023 by Ciara Rea, Deputy CEO, Christine McKeown, Head of Childcare and Family Support and Irene Sherry, Head of Victims and Mental Health Services. Salary costs for the Senior Leadership Team for 2022-2023 were £243,597.

#### **Reserves policy**

The reserves policy has been designed in order to:

- Provide a sustainable and appropriate level of working capital;
- Allow for periods of unexpected drops in planned income;
- Cope with sudden short-term increases in planned expenditure;
- Provide an appropriate level of cover for other risks or unforeseen events that may arise.

An assessment of the likelihood of each income stream continuing has been carried out as well as assessment of the impact on the charity of each income stream ending or being significantly reduced.

An assessment has also been carried out on the level of committed expenditure, as well as gauging the impact on beneficiaries, volunteers and staff of reducing expenditure in particular areas.

An assessment was also made of the amount of working capital required. This recognised the amount of payroll costs and an assessment of the variability of payment receipts from funders.

After taking all these factors into account the Board have decided that a target range of free reserves of £1,200,000 to £1,500,000 would be appropriate.

It should be recognised that free reserves (or general unrestricted) reserves do not include restricted funds or designated funds.

Designated funds currently include:

- Fixed asset reserve equivalent to the net book value of the charity's fixed assets. These are used in the furtherance of the charity's activities and include buildings and equipment;
- Programme related investment in Ashton Centre Development Limited. Although this investment generates some financial return, its primary motivation is not financial but the actual furtherance of the charity's objects, given the commonality of many of the objectives of both charities;

At 31 March 2023 the level of free reserves was £691,644.

## ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

#### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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##### **Investment policy**

The need to hold reserves has been explained in the Reserves Policy above.

The Board have considered whether some or all of the reserves should be invested to obtain a financial return for the charity. In making the investment decision the Board considered when the reserves might be needed and the acceptable level of investment risk.

To meet the charity's working capital requirements there was a realisation that a significant amount of reserves may need to be accessed at short notice. It was also recognised that investing reserves in assets other than cash would involve a greater degree of investment risk.

The Board decided that a mixture of bank deposit accounts and, when funds allowed, holding an investment portfolio with the Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities were the best options to meet its requirements to generate income and provide capital growth in the context of the current economic climate.

During 2023-2024 should the levels of cash held increase an alternative place to deposit some funds will be sought, meeting the requirement to generate additional income while also being sufficiently accessible should funds be needed in unforeseen circumstances.

##### **Statement of trustees' responsibilities**

The trustees, who are also the directors of Ashton Community Trust for the purpose of company law, are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the group financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company Law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the group and parent charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the group for that year.

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 Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the group and parent charitable company will continue in operation.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group and parent charitable 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 group and parent charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

##### **Auditor**

In accordance with the company's articles, a resolution proposing that GMcG BELFAST be reappointed as auditor of the company will be put at a General Meeting.

**ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST**

**TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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**Disclosure of information to auditor**

Each of the trustees has confirmed that there is no information of which they are aware which is relevant to the audit, but of which the auditor is unaware. They have further confirmed that they have taken appropriate steps to identify such relevant information and to establish that the auditor is aware of such information.

The trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.



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Mr M Mullan

**Director**

Date: .11 January 2024

