

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 2024

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Trustees	Ms N Collins Mr M Mullan Mr S Pollard Ms K Murphy Mr J Loughran Mr J O'Hagan	(Appointed 25 April 2024) (Appointed 25 April 2024)
Secretary	Mrs C Rea	
Charity number	NIC104639	
Company number	NI034595	
Registered office	Ashton Centre 5 Churchill Street Belfast BT15 2BP	
Auditor	GMcG BELFAST Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditor Alfred House 19 Alfred Street Belfast BT2 8EQ	
Bankers	AIB 11-15 Donegall Square North Belfast BT1 5GB	
Solicitors	Worthingtons 24-38 Gordon Street Belfast BT1 2LG	

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

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ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the group for year ended 31 March 2024.

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 2024

Achievements and performance

The following highlights some of the achievements of the 2023-2024 financial year.

Training and Employment Services

During the year Ashton Training and Employment Services department delivered the Connect Project in conjunction with our 4 'Belfast Works' partner organisations (East Belfast Mission, GEMS NI, Impact Training and Upper Springfield Development Trust). Funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund this project supports people who are economically inactive. Many of those supported will have been inactive for a long time.

Belfast Works Connect offers a wide variety of training courses developed to appeal to those furthest removed from the labour market. The courses range from OCN Level 1 qualifications in Social Media, Approaches to Wellbeing & Fitness, to vocational training such as Counterbalance Forklift licences and Level 3 NFCE Classroom Assistant awards.

Our aim is to encourage, inspire & empower our clients to realise their potential through active participation in a person-centred, wrap-around support network.

In addition to the training courses, additional funding is available to cover such things as the costs of childcare while attending training, transportation costs, workwear and necessary equipment.

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 2023-2024 year was an extremely busy one for Kinderkids Daycare. Kinderkids expanded the out-of-school offering, opening an additional out-of-school provision at the Cliftonville Road location.

Throughout the year Kinderkids focused on developing a child-centered, play-based curriculum with an emphasis on promoting social and emotional development, communication, and language skills. Building on the work from the previous year related to the Solihull approach, staff training continued with all staff members now trained in the approach. Efforts are ongoing to integrate this approach into Kinderkids' daily practices. Kinderkids also follows a trauma-informed approach to practice, and staff training in this area has continued as well.

In the year, 373 children attended Kinderkids daycare, enabling 293 parents to enter or remain in employment. Additionally, 46 children deemed 'at risk' were offered childcare places to support them and their families.

Throughout the year Kinderkids remained an active member of the Department of Education's Stakeholder Engagement Forum.

The Childcare and Family Support Services department played an active role in the design of the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy and jointly established a Community Daycare Network. The Community Daycare Network is a collective of community-based daycare providers in Northern Ireland, operating on a not-for-profit basis. This Network has been and will continue to lobby for reform and investment in the Early Years sector across Northern Ireland, with a particular emphasis on supporting children and families living in disadvantage, ensuring that their needs are highlighted as part of the new Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

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

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

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.

The Hub membership stands at 71 individual members who are able to provide early intervention services to any Tier 2 families that have been referred.

During this period the main source of referral was community referrals, closely followed by schools and self-referrals. During the year the Hub processed 374 referrals, significantly above the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust contracted amount of 144. The most requested service during this time (excluding financial support) was one-to-one family support at home, particularly for primary-school children displaying emotional, social or behavioural challenges, with over one-third of referrals coming from these families.

Between January and March there was also an increasing demand for financial support and the Belfast Hub network was able to secure funding of £15,900 from Belfast City Council which then supported 164 families with supermarket vouchers.

During this time Belfast Health & Social Care Trust continued to provide free training to Hub members which included Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder through Virtual Reality, LGBTQ awareness training, Understanding Challenging Behaviour and Vape awareness training.

Early Intervention Family Support Service

This Belfast Charitable Society funded project has now completed its fourth year. Two Family Support Workers have been employed to provide one-to-one home visiting support to approximately 60 families who have been referred through the North Belfast Family Support Hubs.

During the past financial year 66 families benefited from 1-1 family support, comprising 79 parents and 121 children.

This visitation service is aimed at improving family relations, enhancing family functionality and increasing family resilience. The team also continued to advocate on behalf of families with schools and the Education Authority, as well as health professionals. During this time there has been a marked increase in the number of families asking for support in completing parental requests for both educational psychology assessments and ASD assessments. Both team members are experienced in this field and so were able to support families to get the most of their child's journey through education.

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

Health and Wellbeing Services (Bridge Of Hope)

As the beginning of the year approached, the department lobbied various stakeholders to ensure the continued delivery of the Community Navigator 'Pink T-Shirt' project 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 exceptional work undertaken by our Community Navigators we were able to secure the ongoing delivery of the pilot and build on the successes of the previous 16 months, allowing us to provide Community Navigation support to 2,188 unique individuals, 3,058 times in the financial year. As well as this, our Community Navigators also supported the Trust's Mental Health team with 1,793 hours of observation for patients needing this level of help.

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 social support funding allowed the department to support 511 victims and survivors, giving them the opportunity to engage in a wide range of 49 programmes. These proved to be both popular, and on the basis of feedback received, hugely successful.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Health and Wellbeing Services (Bridge Of Hope) (continued)

We also saw 24 victims and survivors engage in our VTCT accredited training programmes in Thermal Auricular Therapy, Swedish Body Massage and Reflexology.

During the year the department further supported 1,268 individuals through the delivery of 5,405 complementary therapy sessions.

In addition, 1,551 service users engaged in our BACP accredited counselling service, delivered both face-to-face and via telephone, receiving 4,078 sessions of one-to-one support. This blended approach to service delivery allowed hard-to-reach individuals to engage with the services offered.

In January 2024 the Victims' Payments Board carried out a marketing campaign for the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme, delivering a leaflet to every house across the North. This impacted greatly with the Pension Welfare Officers seeing a huge increase in demand for support from victims and survivors to complete and submit their applications to the Scheme. The team supported 619 individuals this year in the submission of their applications.

The Health and Wellbeing Caseworkers continued their work supporting victims and survivors by offering wellbeing support to 418 individuals and enabling them to access services to help improve their health and wellbeing.

During the year the department continued to work in partnership with both statutory and community partners as part of the Regional Trauma Network. This network allows us to make onward referrals for victims and survivors requiring longer term psychological therapy.

As part of our commitment to ensure the highest quality service to individuals seeking support we successfully renewed our Cyber Security Plus Certification and our accreditation for our BACP Counselling Service in the year and will continue to ensure these quality certifications are secured going forward.

Youth & Arts Programmes

The Youth Centre facilitates needs-based youth provision for young people aged 5-18 every Monday to Saturday night.

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

- **Champions for Change** – Our C4C project began in April 2023 and during the year worked with over 100 young people in different settings including international work, group work, 1-1 mentoring, events and social action work. This project has championed young people as young leaders within their community. The project is working in partnership with schools, 174 Disability Project and Mountcollyer Youth Club.
- **Engage** – This project works with between 60-70 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. All 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. 1-1 support has been a great success in assisting young people to overcome many barriers to bettering themselves.
- **Social Action Work** – During this period, young people completed 15 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. During the summer period, prior to the senior summer scheme, senior members participated in a weeklong volunteer week giving back to the community.
- **Qualifications & Accreditations** - During the year four courses were provided for young people. Young people participated in OCN Level 2 courses including youth leadership, mentoring and peer mentoring.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Youth & Arts Programmes (Continued)

- **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. Our youth workers engage with young people on at least 3 nights per week.
- **Mentoring** – 60 young people were supported in a one-to-one capacity, which included developing resilience, how to deal with issues, signposting and upskilling.
- **Manchester Project** – Our Manchester project entailed 12 young women from the community participating in a project focusing on choices and consequences. This project concluded with a visit to Manchester where the young people visited youth and health and wellbeing organisations.
- **Berlin Project** – 14 young people from the centre participated in a year-long project focusing on stereotypes, leadership and community which finished with a visit to Berlin.
- **Romania Project** – In March 2024, 14 young people from New Lodge YC and Ardoyne YC travelled to Romania after year-long preparation on the Romania Project. The young people worked with groups in Belfast such as disability projects, homeless projects and within their organisations to prepare for their visit. Whilst in Romania the young people worked with young people in care, local students, family homes and a disability project.
- **Schools Work** – During the year the Youth Centre team facilitated schools projects in partnership with St. Patrick's Primary School, Blessed Trinity College, Edmund Rice College and Glenveagh School. This project focused on the personal and social development of all 100+ young people involved.
- **T:BUC Project** – Our T:BUC project with Mountcollyer Youth Centre included 20 young people from New Lodge and Tigers Bay participating on a group work programme finishing with a residential in Newcastle. This continued the ongoing Good Relations work of the centre.
- **UU Celebration** – Our young people celebrated in a night of awards in Ulster University with the Children's Commissioner, local representatives and Ulster University lecturers in attendance along with family members.
- **Drop-in** – Our drop-in service is open 6 nights per week engaging with over 100 young people on a weekly basis. This service provides young people with safety, activities, role models and food which is now a massive need.

New Lodge Arts

New Lodge Arts continued to strengthen and develop their annual arts programme, offering a diverse range of initiatives for people across north Belfast. These programmes continue to enrich the lives of participants, helping them to grow and develop, to reduce isolation and encourages them to become active citizens within their community.

Some of the programmes that took place during the year included:

Arts Academy

In the past year 19 weekly classes were delivered to a total of to 250 participants. The programme included a range of creative activities including guitar lessons, craft classes, drawing classes, drama, hip hop, ballet, visual arts and youth theatre. The Arts Academy also provides performance opportunities throughout the year, giving participants an opportunity to share what they have learned.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

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

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Build Positive Change

Funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, young people from New Lodge Arts and YWIC participated in several workshops to design and build a portable pod that will be used to record local peoples' experiences.

Summer Programme

Catering to 3 different age groups – Tinys, Junior, and Senior – the Summer Drama Camps welcomed over 50 children, each bringing their unique talents and passion for the performing arts. From budding actors to future Broadway stars, these camps have nurtured young talent and provided an exceptional platform for creativity and self-expression.

The Tinys Camp, in partnership with C21 Theatre Company, was a fantastic showcase of young talent with the theme of Backwards Fairytales, showcased in a memorable performance at Girdwood Community Hub. The Junior Camp delivered a heart-warming and memorable production of the beloved musical 'Annie' at the North Queen Street Community Centre while the Senior Camp dazzled audiences with three sold-out shows of 'The Little Mermaid' at The MAC.

The Agency

This project, in partnership with Battersea Arts Centre (London), Contact Theatre (Manchester), Storyhouse (Chester) and Energize Me (Southampton) supports young people aged 15-25 as social entrepreneurs, becoming creative leaders and catalysts for change in their communities.

North Belfast Lantern Festival

The North Belfast Lantern Festival's family fun day successfully unfolded amidst challenging weather conditions, attracting approximately 500 people. Held in Alexandra Park, the event featured a diverse array of activities, including arts and crafts, games, music, dancing, and live performances, creating a vibrant and engaging atmosphere for attendees of all ages. The festival also showcased its commitment to community engagement through an outreach programme that involved over 20 local groups and schools, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration.

New Lodge Arts Christmas Panto

This year, New Lodge Arts presented a fabulous production of "Snow White and the Black Forest Gateau," a delightful twist on the classic fairy tale, written by Maire Campbell and adapted by the talented Debra Hill. From the 12th to the 14th of December at Boys Model School, this Panto provided a magical experience filled with laughter and joy.

Community Development

The Belfast City Council **Capacity Building** Grant has allowed us to continue to develop the community capacity (skills, knowledge and confidence) of local individuals and groups through the development of volunteer support services, the Community Empowerment Partnership, the community magazine and a range of engagement opportunities. The work undertaken in 2023-2024 has expanded to recognise the increased diversity within the Greater New Lodge community.

Neighbourhood Renewal as a government policy is currently undergoing a review. During the past year Ashton, as chair of the **Inner North Neighbourhood Renewal** partnership, has undertaken a significant role in shaping the review being undertaken by the Department of Communities to ensure anti-poverty resources continue to be targeted to areas of most need. Ashton have worked with the groups contracted to deliver services in the Inner North Neighbourhood Renewal area to ensure their excellent work is maintained and sustained as we go forward.

The **'Making a Successful City Neighbourhood – Created by Everyone'** project came to an end in November 2023. The community development work undertaken during this time-bound project which supported local residents in their engagement with the significant capital infrastructure developments of the Ulster University, York Road Railway Station and the York Street Interchange was considered an exceptional model of best practice by stakeholders, including the National Lottery Community Fund who funded the project.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Projects

Communities In Transition – Health & Wellbeing

Phase 2 Year 3 of the Communities in Transition (CIT) Health and Wellbeing programme for the North Belfast CIT area of New Lodge and Ardoyne delivered a range of activities from July 2023 to March 2024 aimed at addressing local health and wellbeing needs.

Led by Ashton Community Trust, the programme invested in 14 approved proposals across three broad areas: Activities to Address Local Needs; Area-based Health and Wellbeing Interventions; and Health and Wellbeing Training Initiatives.

The programme successfully recruited 691 participants across 128 delivered sessions / workshops as part of these 14 projects. Evaluation feedback was highly positive, with participants appreciating the relevant content, practical tools, supportive environment, and knowledgeable facilitators across the activities.

Key outcomes aligned with the broader CIT objectives which included increased community engagement and a willingness to access support, strengthened local networks and voice, enhanced skills among practitioners, stronger connections with wider support resources, and promotion of empowerment-focused attitudes to address dependency cycles.

New partnerships with regional organisations such as Women's Aid provided specialised expertise to help respond to rising rates of domestic violence whilst the appointment of local organisations like the Ardoyne Association helped to accelerate programme impact at the point of need.

The delivery model also drew on design and delivery input from individuals working in community-based organisations or existing projects located across both New Lodge and Ardoyne including: Ardoyne Association; New Lodge Youth Club; Ardoyne Youth Club; New Lodge Arts; Marrowbone; Duncairn Healthy Living Centre; Reach Out NI; Lower North Belfast Family Support Hub; Women's Aid; Parent NI and Bridge of Hope.

The use of a broad cross-section of local partners supported a programme of activities that were relevant and connected well with the needs, interests, and capabilities of recruited participants, especially targeted groups such as vulnerable women or young people with learning disabilities. This configuration, as with the previous work, helped to support a healthy attrition rate but also ensured that tacit knowledge and key skills were leveraged to address the different need areas across the CIT community.

The funded activities were shown to be highly relevant to the participants' needs, helping them reflect on personal issues, particularly dealing with past or ongoing trauma, as well as exploring ways to promote self-care or other relevant coping strategies for themselves or others.

Attending the programme was considered an effective and worthwhile use of time by most participants. The style, pace, content, delivery methods, and materials used by programme staff and facilitators were deemed appropriate and well-received by the participants, especially the welcoming and supportive atmosphere that was developed during the sessions.

Overall CIT participants from phase 2 year 3 were highly likely to recommend the programme to their friends and family, expressing gratitude and appreciation for the experience. The written evaluation responses demonstrate an impactful programme that has provided valuable insights, practical tools and a supportive environment to advance individual and community-based health and wellbeing outcomes.

Women's Group

Over the course of the year Ashton Women's Group engaged in various workshops, activities and engagements that were linked to their social, mental, emotional and physical health, building their confidence and empowering them to become strong leaders within their community.

Our recent evaluation of the previous cohort confirmed that when women are empowered they are more likely to invest in their families and communities, particularly in the education and wellbeing of children. This has a long-term positive impact on future generations, helping to reduce poverty and improve overall societal wellbeing.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Women's Group (Continued)

Although this area of work is no longer funded, Ashton was keen to continue to invest in this programme because of the benefits to the women, their families and their communities.

During the year the group completed the following courses and workshops.:

Women in Leadership Course which addressed subjects such as:

- Understanding what is meant by a feminist approach to leadership;
- Understanding key issues around gender equality and intersectionality;
- Models of behaviour change - positive reframe and intersectionality; and
- Goal setting and leadership

A series of workshops focusing on Mental / Physical / Emotional Wellbeing:

- Menopause Workshops – signs and symptoms of menopause and how to ask for help, advice and support services;
- Creativity Workshops such as Diamond Art, Lantern Making, Wreath Making, Jewellery Making and Painting with Water Colours; and
- Benefits Advice and Money Management

A series of workshops focusing on Mindfulness:

- Auricular acupuncture;
- Alternative therapies to reset, encourage deep sleep and positive minds;
- Tapping techniques and meditation;
- Managing stress;
- Relight Your Flame, personal confidence and self-esteem; and
- Love Yourself, Heal Your Life.

Each of these elements of learning, training and engagement had a direct learning outcome for the group as well as individual learning outcomes.

The group have supported each other's journey of empowerment and have gained emotional support, friendships, shared experiences, practical advice, confidence and a sense of reconnecting with their community.

'The Pantry' Social Supermarket

'The Pantry', operating on the social supermarket concept, continued its work in the year 2023-24. In March 2024, the two-year Sustaining Tenancy Funding, supported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, came to an end, during which all project outcomes were achieved. The Pantry programme was highly successful and was an asset to the Family Support services offered at the Ashton Centre. Moreover, investment from Belfast City Council supported the purchase and restocking of the social supermarket until March 2024.

In the past year, 85 families engaged with The Pantry, consisting of 269 individuals who were provided with food weekly for a period of 12 weeks. Out of the 85 families, 70 additionally received income maximisation advice, and 18 received debt advice. Additionally, 38 families participated in Training and Employment programmes, with a further 15 individuals entering into volunteering.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

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

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Community Fridge

The Community Fridge at the Ashton Centre continued to operate throughout the year. It is open between Tuesday and Thursday, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. with the peak activity around 9 a.m. There were 2,125 individual visits to the Community fridge in total for the year.

As well as visiting to access free food, many also visit to seek advice and support from Ashton staff.

The Community Fridge aims to prevent food wastage by redistributing it to those in need. Ashton continues to collaborate with Lidl, who donate food several times a week. During the year 10,106 kg of food was repurposed, which is roughly equivalent to 24,000 meals.

Pensioners Friendship Group

In the year there were 19 meetings of the Pensioners Friendship Group. The majority of the meetings and activities were funded by Hubbub, which is linked to the Community Fridge. The group meets on a Tuesday afternoon at Ashton Centre and is comprised of women from North Belfast who come together to combat social isolation. In the past year, activities included the luncheon club, day trips, theatre shows, bingo sessions and creative workshops such as flower arranging and candle making.

Financial review

Overall net expenditure for the year was £302,913 after accounting for a provision of £127,457 in relation to a claim against the charity. Excluding this exceptional cost, the net expenditure for the year was £175,456 (2023 - £145,076). Unrestricted funds decreased by £254,799 and restricted funds fell by £48,114.

Income from charitable activities was £4,762,256, 97% of the total income of £4,906,097. Of this total £2,169,203 (44%) came from unrestricted sources with £2,736,894 coming from restricted sources.

Training & Employment Services contributed c.15% of the income from charitable activities. The majority of this funding related to the Connect project which received funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Connect project was delivered in partnership with East Belfast Mission, GEMS, Impact Training and the lead partner Upper Springfield Development Trust. Funding was also received from the Department for Communities for Essential Skills training (English, Maths and ICT).

Childcare & Family Support Services contributed c.30% of the income from charitable activities. Of this 92% 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. £113k) 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).

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.31% of the income from charitable activities. Approximately 46% 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 £650k during 2023-2024. 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 £90k was received from the Community Relations Council in relation to the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations programme.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

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

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Community Development received £128k 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 also manages a number projects, some of which may be short-term in nature. During the year Ashton ran 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 £150k was received from the Executive Office in relation to the Communities In Transition Health & Wellbeing programme.

The associated total expenditure on charitable activities was £5,081,551. 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. £25.5k, £20k on IT and £5.5k on office equipment and furniture.

The financial results are set out in detail on pages 24 to 46.

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 £206,105.

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 £483,087, 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 2024 the level of designated funds was £1,270,194.

General funds

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

At 31 March 2024 the level of general funds or 'free reserves' was £717,932.

Going concern

The trustees confirm that, in their opinion, the organisation is a going concern. The trustees are 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 2024

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 2024

Plans for future periods

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

Training and Employment Services

Ashton will continue to work with its Belfast Works partners on the Connect project which is currently funded until March 2025. It is hoped that this funding will be extended, given the levels of Economic Inactivity to be addressed.

The department will also continue to deliver its Essential Skills programme in line with Department for Communities requirements.

Childcare and Family Support Services

The Head of Childcare and Family Support will continue to be an active member on the Department of Education Stakeholder Engagement Forum and support the implementation of actions under the new Early Learning and Childcare Strategy. The project will lobby for additional resources to be allocated to The Pathway Fund further supporting the provision working with children living in disadvantage.

The department will work to secure additional funding from Belfast City Council and The Northern Ireland Housing Executive for the continuation of 'The Pantry' social supermarket including the salary of the Pantry Co-ordinator.

Funding will be sought and research commissioned into the benefits of investing in community-based childcare. When complete this will be shared with relevant Ministers and Department of Education officials with a view for funding to be targeted to children most in need.

The department will engage with the review of the Minimum Standards in Childminding in Daycare and will apply to be involved in the Stakeholder group.

The department will also be an active member in the roll out of the RED programme, strengthening links between schools and communities with a view to implementing measures in partnership, which will reduce educational disadvantage.

Health and Wellbeing Services

The department remains committed to providing the highest quality service to all individuals seeking our support.

The department are looking forward to extending our Troubles Permanent Disablement Payments Scheme provision by welcoming a new Pension Welfare Officer to support individuals living in the North West.

The department is also excited about future plans for the development of the Community Navigator Pink T-Shirt Project and are also eagerly awaiting the launch of the new PeacePlus funding stream, which is due to commence later in 2024 which will hopefully further the opportunity to expand and enhance the existing Health & Wellbeing Caseworker support.

Additionally the department will continue to represent the needs of victims & survivors at various cross sectoral forums.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Youth & Arts Programmes

During 2024 -2025 New Lodge Youth Centre plan to develop the following:

Drop-in services – the Youth Centre will continue to provide a safe environment for young people to personally and socially develop. Our drop-in will engage young people in meaningful activities to provide them with a space they can be proud and take ownership of.

Romania project - the project will recruit and engage 24 young leaders in year-long programmes focusing on youth voice, challenging stereotypes, community leadership and social action.

Youth awards - Our Champions for Change project will provide a North Belfast Youth Awards for young people to champion their achievements. This will take place in Ulster University.

Summer provision – New Lodge Youth Club will provide a 7 week summer provision for those aged 5-18. The summer provision will entail group work programmes, 1-1 support, outreach & detached work in the area, community events, volunteering, social action work and partnership working. This project will support young people in decision-making particularly over contentious periods.

Manchester project - Due to the success of previous years we are recruiting for a new group of young people for another Manchester Project. This project will take a similar format as previous years.

1-1 support - There is a growing need for young people to receive 1-1 mentoring due to their presenting needs such as mental health, educational under-achievement, risk-taking behaviours etc.

Group-work - Projects will continue in New Lodge Youth Club, schools and in partnership with Ardoyne, Holy Family and Mountcollyer Youth Clubs.

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.

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'

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

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

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 C Neill

(Resigned 11 December 2023)

Mr T O'Reilly

(Resigned 14 August 2023)

Mr M Mullan

Mr S Pollard

Mr G Roberts

(Resigned 11 April 2024)

Ms K Murphy

Mr J Loughran

(Appointed 25 April 2024)

Mr J O'Hagan

(Appointed 25 April 2024)

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 2024

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 are no longer trading and will be struck-off during the 2024-2025 financial year.

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 2023-2024 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 the year 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 2023-2024 were £254,100.

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 2024 the level of free reserves was £717,932.

ASHTON COMMUNITY TRUST

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

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.

It was decided that should the levels of cash held increase an alternative place to deposit some funds would be sought, meeting the requirement to generate additional income while also being sufficiently accessible should funds be needed in unforeseen circumstances.

After reviewing a number of options the decision has been taken to invest surplus funds in the Epworth CashPlus Fund for Charities. An initial transfer of funds took place in April 2024.

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 2024

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.



Mr M Mullan

Director

23 December 2024