

Birchwood Youth & Community Centre

Annual Report for 2022-2023

At the time of our last annual report, we stated that our key objective for the year was to try to stabilise our financial position so that our reserves were no longer reducing, and it is pleasing that this objective was very well achieved. During the year we started to build our own internal activities in the centre which have grown from strength to strength thanks to the help and support of a number of new volunteers and trustees. As well as this, we had a very successful year in terms of bids to help support our activities. It is very satisfying to be now in a healthy financial situation which is allowing us make purchases where necessary. What is more, the activities we run are allowing residents to participate in our activities at very low or zero cost.

Financial situation

Overall, our cash balance in the bank started the year at £6612, but we finished the year at £15174, an increase of 129%. Our basic operating costs include insurance, standing charges for gas and electricity, telephone/internet costs, TV licence and our water bills. Other costs include the servicing of the fire extinguishers and fire alarm system and the annual check on our gas boiler with issue of a gas certificate, both of which are statutory requirements. We continued to manage without bin collections during the financial year, but we started up the WBC bin service again immediately after the end of this year as it was becoming difficult to deal with as individuals. For the 12 months our total income was £18542, £5450 of which came from hall hire, £11,804 in the form of a series of grants and £400 as a donation from a trustee. A significant proportion of the grants received were for the purchase of specific items or to pay for the operational costs of our in-house operated groups. The replacement of all our fluorescent lights with LED lights led to a halving of our electricity costs. We also had a rebate of £448.38 from CEF for lighting units which had been sent and invoiced but not required. Total expenditure for the year was £9979. The charity has a policy of maintaining reserves of at least 6 months expenditure to ensure financial stability, a policy which was vitally important during the Covid pandemic.

Buildings, Facilities and improvements

The original strategic plan focused on several main areas as follows: –

1. ensuring that the buildings were safe, protected and renovated
2. Clearing old materials no longer needed
3. Improving the financial viability by reducing operating costs and increasing income
4. Making the centre work more effectively for the community
5. Widening the number of trustees and volunteers involved

As required, the fire alarm and extinguishers were serviced/checked and a fault on one of the emergency fire buttons fixed. We continued to carry out optimisation of our storage to improve safety and to make way for the new groups started in the centre.

Following the award of grants mentioned previously we were able to purchase a range of new equipment for the centre which has made a real difference to our activities. We were able to buy the following new items:

A freezer which has enabled us to keep a range of bread, crumpets, cakes and other items to cover a reasonable period of use. We were also able to receive donations of these kind of items from a local company.

A new under counter fridge which was getting quite old and not up to the standard needed.

A new large screen TV, which not only allows us to put on TV programmes, but also show YouTube videos for learning purposes including for arts and crafts as well as chair exercises for seniors.

A new cooker as our original one was very old and had a faulty oven door. It was also an old-fashioned electric model with solid iron rings which was very difficult to control.

A new microwave oven – our previous one was many years old and getting near end-of-life.

Last year we reported that in the latter part of the year, our gas boiler failed due to an issue with the printed circuit board. The boiler is now 20 years old and parts are not easy to obtain any longer. It is also not especially efficient, and a modern condensing boiler would be more economical. We have some spare parts which were obtained from Birchwood Town Council's identical boiler when it was replaced, but this only covers a part of the boiler. During the coming year, we will look to replace the

boiler, preferably through an application for a grant. This may be with a new condensing gas boiler or using air conditioning units, or possibly both.

Cost reduction

An application is to be submitted to Warrington Community Energy to install the lowered ceiling and electrical heating as mentioned in the section above. Calculations suggest that we can save around 35% of our current heating costs as well as making the hall much better from an acoustics point of view. It would also be much quicker to heat up as the current system struggles in very cold weather. In the winter months it can take as long as 8 hours to heat the hall up to temperature. We hope that this can be resolved before the end of the 2023-24 financial year. An alternative source of grant money was also identified and a request for a new gas boiler will also be submitted.

Activities

The financial year saw a significant increase in activities at the centre mainly as a result of funding obtained through bids submitted. We believe a large part of this success lies in the excellent relationship built up with Warrington Voluntary Action by trustee Jackie Whitby. They have been able to see how effectively we have been able to use the funds received and have full confidence in the way we operate.

This year saw the centre start up Birchwood Chats, a session designed to replace the independently run older people's groups which sadly closed their operations during the Covid pandemic. These sessions are run at zero cost and provide free hot drinks, cakes and once a month, a hot soup and sandwich. As well as this, the sessions offer a range of activities from crafts to bingo. Numbers attending this group have been gradually increasing, and we are also seeing employees from the local authority attend with help on energy reduction, benefits etc.

At the beginning of March 2023, we had a new third party group start up a sewing activity, which we were very pleased to be able to include in our programme. Back in 2019, we had carried out some survey work on local social media to try to understand if there could be an interest in a sewing group, as the only one we could locate in Warrington was very expensive. The response was overwhelmingly positive, so when this group – The Flying Pin Cushions - approached us, we were very keen for them to start. They run a continuous session on Mondays from 12pm to 9pm, and it has proved to be very successful, attracting many new members.

Our in-house activity, Birchwood Creates has continued to operate successful sessions run by trustee Julia Ellis, who has covered mainly linocut techniques and Gelli printing. A special workshop was also arranged on a weekend using an outside expert to do the teaching.

Repair Café successfully operated once again during the year. Visitor numbers which had been rather lower after Covid really started to increase quickly, mainly as a result of the extensive advertising campaign which was carried out on social media prior to each session. It is very satisfying to note that Repair Café has had as many as 40 items to look at and repair, with a success rate typically around 60-70% . It is also satisfying to note that there have been visitors from other areas in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire who have come to look at how we operate and as a result have set up operations in their areas.

On the only negative note, Headway finally decided to call it a day and close their activity in the centre as a result of a large drop in numbers following COVID. Their users were people with brain injuries, and in many cases, quite vulnerable, and COVID had a serious impact. This does, however, provide an opportunity to better use the available time in the centre and has enabled some useful rationalisation of our storage facilities.

We look forward to being able to welcome further community activities to expand the scope of what we offer in the coming year. Our next project will be to look at the possibility of running a Mums and Tots group.

Other

As we move forwards, we will continue to increase the activities which we run ourselves for the benefit of the community. These have the benefit of being more stable, although it is always dependent on having sufficient volunteers. Third party activities often cease to exist, putting pressure on the centre's finances.

I would like to thank all our trustees (both present and past) and volunteers who have made an important contribution to what we do for the community of Birchwood. I would like to give special thanks to our trustees who are involved with running and promoting our in-house community groups. We would also like to express our thanks to Birchwood Town Council who continue to provide support on a number of fronts, including general advice and in helping to maintain and improve the grounds on which the centre stands, both in terms of safety and appearance .

Dr David Ellis – Chair of Trustees

Birchwood Youth & Community Centre - Accounts 2022-2023

	2021-2022	2022-2023	Var. %
Expenses	£	£	
Buildings/Equipment/Consumables	2307.50	3949.65	71.2
Furniture etc.	0.00	0.00	
Fire alarm contract/repairs	266.40	266.40	0.0
Water	595.76	1226.06	105.8
Gas/electricity	684.00	3000.00	338.6
Central heating contract/repairs	107.50	135.00	25.6
Telephone/Internet	343.17	400.80	16.8
Cleaning/Caretaking	228.00	0.00	-100.0
TV Licence	159.00	159.36	0.2
Insurance	733.20	766.51	4.5
To petty cash	50.00	50.00	0.0
Waste removal	0.00	0.00	
PAT Testing	21.60	24.60	13.9
Ground Rent	0.00	1.00	
Total expenses	5496.13	9979.38	81.6
Income			
Rentals	3997.00	5450.00	36.4
BYCC Session Income	0.00	439.50	
Fundraising/Donations	0.00	400.00	
Refunds	0.00	448.38	
Grants	2073.00	11804.00	469.4
Total Income	6070.00	18541.88	205.5
Balance brought forward	573.87	8562.50	1392.1
Petty Cash	26.34	27.27	3.5
Cash funds in bank at year start	6038.22	6612.09	9.5
Cash funds in bank at year end	6612.09	15174.59	129.5
Savings accounts	6.83	6.83	0.0
Total funds carried forward	6645.26	15208.69	128.9

