

President's report October 2018- September 2019

It has always seemed a bit strange to me that I have to deliver a report on a year that had ended 6 months earlier so it's even stranger to be delivering this one nine and a half months after the event. However, I'm sure you can all understand the unique situation we have found ourselves in and I will say something about that later.

In October we welcomed a new part-time member of staff, Tracy Cornwall, to assist Dawn in the office. This has taken an enormous amount of pressure off Dawn. Tracy has made a significant difference to our operations thanks to her skills with spreadsheets, etc..

In January we received our first formal complaint in nearly 20 years of operation. I won't go into any details here but it involved a lot of time and effort digging out evidence to support our defence. Ultimately the ombudsman ruled in our favour so there was a satisfactory outcome.

In March we moved out of our rather cramped inaccessible and insecure office in Cambridge Gardens into Jackson Hall. The increase in rent has been more than repaid by the access not only to modern facilities but also to the support and expertise of our landlords, Hastings Voluntary Action. Sharing the building with numerous organisations which share our ethos and work so well together has been wonderful. All HVA's staff have been very welcoming and happy to share their knowledge, experience and expertise.

The move to Jackson Hall also forced us to take a look at our data security which did not really meet the requirements of current legislation. We have moved our paper archives into a secure unit and are in the process of digitising them which will, of course, save on costs while making them more accessible should we need to consult them. We also upgraded our IT systems with enormous support from Laton Technical whose advice and support made it possible if not painless. They also designed our new website which launched in May.

At last year's AGM, we welcomed Julie Eason to the Board. Her experience in fundraising has been invaluable and will enable us to become a much more effective and efficient organisation which can only benefit our members.

Also at last year's AGM, you delegated to the Board of Directors the task of appointing a new firm of auditors following the inadequate work of the previous firm. In June, after considering 3 firms, we appointed local firm AshdownHurrey and that appointment has been a revelation of how auditors should operate throughout the year and not just sit on files for several months before submitting a report a few days before the AGM. They have offered a lot of very helpful advice and support to Dawn. Their fees are significantly higher than before as you will see in the accounts but, if you want quality, you have to pay for it.

Our work with Hastings Borough Council's Housing Department has continued and increased our income over the year. Discussions with Rother District Council to do similar work continued during the year and concluded satisfactorily in the following year though the actual work has been delayed by the pandemic.

In May we had a training day with the providers of our present IT system which, we found, is capable of more than we had known before, but remains rather antiquated and in need of replacement. Hopefully, this will happen before our next AGM.

In June we celebrated our 20th birthday with a delicious cake cut by our first member, former MP, Michael Foster, with a group of former and present workers and volunteers.

I can't finish without saying a massive thank you to our wonderful staff: Tracy and Dawn who have both gone above and beyond the call of duty throughout the year. Also our office volunteers David, Robert and Elena without whom we could not have provided the vital services we have to so many local residents. I would also like to thank my fellow directors who have each contributed significantly of both their time and experience to enable Hastings & Rother Credit Union to keep improving and expanding the services we provide.

Richard Street