

President's Report to AGM for the year 1st October 2019 - 30th September 2020

Last year's AGM was delayed, you will recall, by the national lockdown imposed to deal with the COVID-19 virus. Today I'm reporting to you during the third national lockdown on a year that has been dominated by this deadly virus.

In October we agreed to raise the limit on share accounts from £10,000 to £15,000. The main reason for this is that we have a number of corporate accounts which receive a grant which often exceeds the previous limit when received.

In November, Dawn and I had a meeting with one of Hastings Council's directors, Simon Hubbard, which included a lot of very interesting and promising ideas which we could co-operate on. The following month we met Cllr Chowney, leader of the council, for another very productive meeting. Unfortunately the arrival of COVID and departure of Mr Hubbard from HBC and Cllr Chowney as Council leader mean that we haven't progressed very far on any of them. One of the ideas discussed was a proposal to establish a community bank working with other councils as has happened in the north of England.

After volunteering with us to help Dawn with the accounts, we were pleased to welcome Elena Dan onto our payroll in a part-time capacity.

When the lockdown began in March, we very quickly moved most of our services online with staff working from home where possible. We can't commend Dawn enough for the phenomenal effort she made to ensure this in a very short time. Unfortunately, our weekly Information Points at Renaissance House and the Community Contact Centre had to close.

From May we started holding Board of Directors' meeting via Zoom provided by our national body, ABCUL, which, although far from ideal, has enabled us to keep in touch and continue moving the Credit Union forward.

In May we took the decision to replace the outdated and inadequate IT system, ConAccess, with Incuto which is entirely online including providing the facility for members to access their accounts directly. All we need now is the funding to make this happen and Julie Eason has been making great efforts to apply for grants to achieve this. We have been granted half the cost and expect a decision on the other half very shortly from Magdalen & Lasher. Other credit unions which have adopted this system have found a big increase in membership and made many more loans.

In the summer, Big Local North-East Hastings invited us to make secured interest-free loans to residents in their area who had found themselves in difficulties as a result of COVID. The loans, including administration costs, are made from funding provided by BLN-EH so there is no risk to our members' savings. We're in discussions with the Heart of Sidley for a similar scheme.

Ken Maitland, our Vice-President, has been in discussions for us to join the Rye Hub on the Hill so we can increase our presence in that area though, as with everything else, progress on this has been delayed by COVID. We were also contacted by Cllr Carroll, Rother councillor for Sidley, who was very keen for us to have a presence in his area. Unfortunately this has not yet been progressed for the usual reason.

To conclude I would like to thank my fellow directors and volunteers who, in spite of the unprecedented times we're living, through have continued to support us and help us move the Credit Union forward and most especially Dawn, Elena and Tracy without whom none of this would have been possible.

Richard Street 7th January 2021