

Hastings & Rother Credit Union

President's Report for the year ending 30th September 2021

It will come as no surprise to any of you to learn that Covid has played a significant part in the year under consideration. At the beginning of the year, our staff were working from home but, as the situation improved and rules were relaxed, the return to the office began once they had been vaccinated. It was also important that numbers in the office allowed for proper social distancing. This was made a lot easier when we moved into to the larger next door in May. We also made use of the furlough scheme to ensure staff were properly covered.

I'm pleased to say that none of this impacted on the services provided to our members. There was a period when Information Points did not take place due to Covid rules but services were always available in the usual way apart from this.

The Council invited us to start an Information Point at Muriel Matters House on Friday afternoons and we thank Georgiana for staffing this regularly. In May, when Ore Community Library opened, we started a second Information Point there on Saturday mornings. Even if we don't meet a large number of people at these, it is important that we continue give people the opportunity to meet us face-to-face as well as a requirement of the Prudential Regulation Authority.

In December we were granted half the amount needed to move to a modern IT system by Sussex Community Foundation. Unfortunately it took another 6 months before Magdalen & Lasher granted us the remainder. The system we decided to go with is called Incuto and it offers a host of options and opportunities for us to improve and expand our services including online access for members to their accounts. A small group of directors has been working hard to make this a reality – Graeme, Alan and Ken alongside Dawn. This is due to go live in April.

We have received funding from Big Local North-East Hastings and Heart of Sidley to provide interest-free loans to their residents. This has not been entirely successful but I'll let Dawn talk more about that.

We have continued to work effectively with the housing departments of both Hastings and Rother councils to recoup loans they have made and other activities. In February we had a meeting with Cllr Colin Fitzgerald who was deputy leader of Hastings Council at the time. It seemed to be a very positive, wide-ranging discussion but unfortunately nothing came of it. We have had several such meetings in the past but they come to nought as the council's representative inevitably moves to other responsibilities soon after which is very frustrating as there is so much more we could do together for the benefit of local residents.

Unfortunately we have been operating without a Supervisory Committee throughout the year. This should provide the essential internal audit function to ensure that all processes and procedures are performed within the rules. It is vital that we recruit suitable people for this very soon. The difficulty is that they need to be experienced and qualified in this area of work and such people are few and far between as volunteers and very costly to employ.

In August, our long-standing director and leading light of the Credit Committee, Mike Richardson, decided to stand down. He has put in so much time and effort over so many years on behalf of our members for which we are very grateful. We wish him well in all his activities.

I would like to all my fellow directors who have made a significant contribution over the year. Graeme and Alan have shared their experience and expertise in IT and HR matters willingly and to everybody's benefit. Julie's help and support in fund-raising has been immeasurable. Georgiana, Ian, Peter and Ken have continued to be reliable and dependable in their own areas. We were very pleased to co-opt Jacky Everard, CEO of HARC during the year. Her vast experience is already of benefit to us. We have also co-opted David Drake, a retired HSBC expert in compliance among other things. His input has already started to fill a serious skills gap.

Finally, we could have done none of this without the dedication and hard work of Dawn, Tracy and Elena. I'm sure you will all support a massive vote of thanks to them.