

CNet Annual Report 2023-24

Bradford & District Community Empowerment Network Ltd



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Chairman's Report

As Chair, firstly I would like to thank all our CNet staff and our Chief Executive, Javed Khan for taking CNet to a level that one could be proud of despite the challenges all along this year and last year due to the restraint budget set for the activities. CNet aims is to empower communities across Bradford & District by supporting the community and this mission is based on the Quality and Professionalism CNet has shown and proven and to ensure to deliver their best all along.

I believe the greatest contribution to CNet development for future expansion and growth into an even better company, is not only the knowledge, abilities and experience of the members of the Board of Directors. It is also the ability to speak out and perform their duties from various perspectives, born out of diversity in terms of career background.

As the Chairman of the Board, I seek to ensure that members respect and listen carefully to one another and that all members are free to express their opinions without prejudice. I run meetings of the Board of Directors so that members can exchange questions and opinions. Looking back, CNet has a long-standing culture of encouraging free and open discussion among employees. I believe enabling each member to express a wide array of opinions and engage in lively discussion based on his or her own knowledge and experience is essential to the decision-making process at Board meetings.

As Chairman of the Board, I will work to cultivate even more lively deliberations so that the Company can swiftly make the best possible decisions and actively contribute to the long-term, sustainable enhancement of CNet. Having analysed and evaluated the responses, we confirmed that, generally the company's Board is functioning appropriately.

All projects under CNet for 2023 /4 has achieved its target and has been working endlessly towards the next year target and activities. Details of the projects is as per the annual financial report in place. CNet staff has worked diligently across the board to fulfil the obligation to support groups and individuals working for a better Bradford. We are very proud of our achievements and still looking for a more diversified roles and activities soon which has been decided by the board. Moving to our new office has given us the privilege to create more activities and generate more revenues that can be channeled to the community's wellbeing.

The Board members work with all members of staff, offering support when and where needed by listening to new ideas. We work as a team effectively and efficiently. We are open to ideas and is ready to take on whatever necessary to flourish and expand the successful role in this District, working with partner organisations for the benefit of all people and organisations who needed CNet help, support and expertise.

CNet is a forward thinking and determined organisations which aims to see all people living in Bradford and District being treated fairly, respected and supported wisely and justly. I am very proud to be their Chairman and to be able to work with such an outstanding staff and Board Members.

There will be more challenges moving forward but with proper planning and attitude CNet will achieve its goals. Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would again like to thank all of our amazing staff and people across the business for all of their commitment and hard work during the year and we will continue to work on further improvement going forward.

Hazlin Hasan (Chair)



CEO Report

It is with the greatest pleasure that we present this year's Annual Report for the Bradford and District Community Empowerment Network Limited. This has been a very difficult period with changes in commissioning and the challenging environment both in terms of the sector and the wider context; the state of the statutory organisations funding financial positions is of concern. We are now working with a much smaller staff team but this has not reduced our impact on the work we do. The staff and Board of CNet have worked tremendously hard to ensure that not only have we continued as an organisation but we but secured new work for the organisation. Credit and thanks goes to the commitment and hard work of all the staff.

Although much has changed as an organisation, we are committed to maintaining a principle approach to community development, community cohesion and development of health and wellbeing. We see it as a fundamental way of providing opportunities for engagement to those who are most marginalised in our communities.

CNet was commissioned by Bradford Council to help deliver the Friendship Grants on their behalf. These have been extremely well received and much needed within the target communities of those living with dementia and/or sensory impairment. In addition to this, we have also administered a number of other grants for the Council over the year.

Being true to our principles is important to us at CNet and this was reflected in our contract with the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP). We produced a number of 'How To...' booklets around support for grassroots organisations and groups, and ran training sessions to support the booklets.

One of our core services has been grant administration. This is the third year that we have been funded by Bradford Council Public Health team to administer the Mental Health Grants, with a focus on improving the mental health of Bradford citizens.

This leads us into the main element of our commission from the Council. During 2023-24 CNet was the lead organisation supporting the co-ordination of the business sustainability lot of the Council's wider Infrastructure Support Improvement Programme. This was delivered with our partners Race Equality Network and Impact Hub under the partnership name of Network Central. This has been an interesting and challenging new venture for us, working very closely with the Council commissioners in co-production and delivery of this contract.

This was the second year of this new contract and it has been extremely rewarding to have once again had the opportunity to work with and support so many small grassroots organisations. Bradford has a wealth of amazing organisations working to support the communities across the district and it is an honour that we are able to help and compliment the work they do.

I would like to once again thank the staff and board for their support over this last year which has in many respects been a transitional year for us. However, our strength lies with our partners and supporters, the Council, Health and all the other VCS colleagues.

Javed Khan (CEO)

Treasurers Report

Finance Report

2024 has already seen the advent of a new Labour government with a large majority despite polling less than 40% of the total vote. The major question, when considering the future outlook for charities is - what does this mean for the VCS? Looking back over the previous 14 years of government, the VCS has had a hard and up and down existence.

Austerity policies took away a considerable amount of local authorities' funding which adversely impacted charities at the local level, whilst the pandemic released funding to address COVID's effect on local populations, whether by providing national funding to retain employment or persuading charitable funders to turn their focus to local problems. The current economic situation of the UK was widely foreshadowed and has now been confirmed – there is little or no leeway for the new government to undertake widespread regeneration at any level.

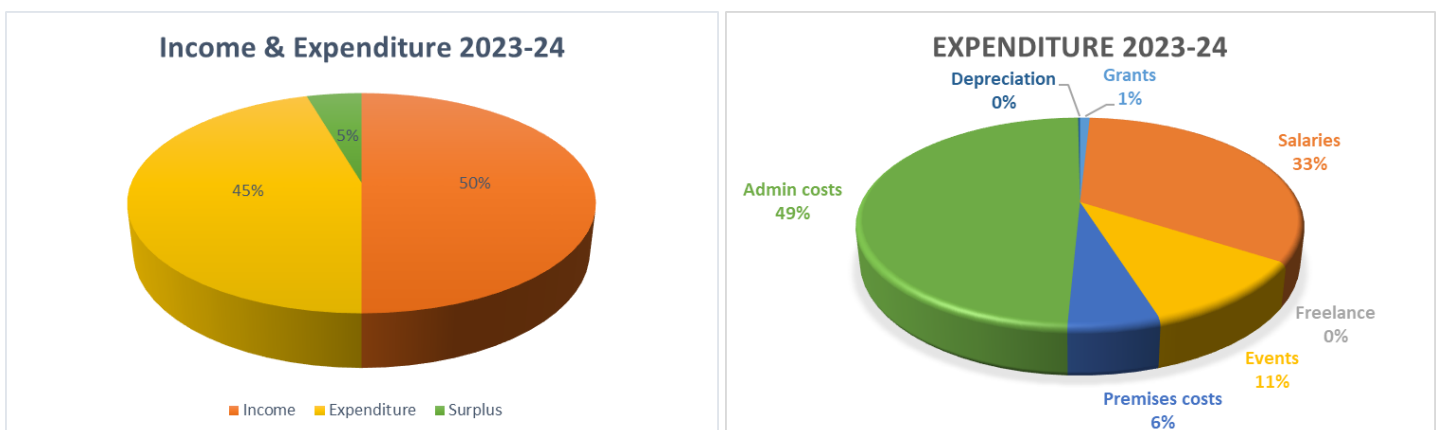
There is, however, a glimmer of hope – 242 of the current members of Parliament have a history of involvement in the charitable sector, including eight members of the Cabinet (compared with two in the previous one). This, hopefully, will result in a wider appreciation of the position, purposes and potential of charities in today's world, but, realistically, the current situation will not be radically altered in the short term and the VCS's contributions at local levels will still be necessary, meaningful and valuable.

The charities with which I am personally involved have not seen any discernible change in demand or beneficiary in terms of numbers or nature. Our local Council has prepared itself for another two years of reduced funding in its budgeting measures in part resulting from previous overspending in areas of growing need. There is a feeling of battenning down the hatches and trying to survive, which, to be honest, is not the way forward to maintain an active and prospering VCS. Funding may become tighter and local, small charities, without the resources to access large nationally based funding, will undoubtedly suffer.

However, charities possess a unique resilience, gained through experience, and a love for what they do and for whom they do it and I am sure, they will echo a certain person's current strap-line – we are not going back! Let us hope that government perceives and understands the need, going forward, for a vibrant and relevant VCS in the medium to long term development of the country and how this may be achieved.

Financial Review

The statement of financial affairs shows total income of £371,151, a decrease of 41.5% on the previous year, and total expenditure of £288,408, a decrease of 45.8%, resulting in a surplus of £28,743, compared with a surplus of £10,629 for 2022-23. The decreases in income and costs were affected by reductions in grant income and grants paid of £226,776, following the decision by the local Council to take grant payments in house, whilst outsourcing their administration.



Reserves Policy

In accordance with the Charity Commission Guidance, the trustees have considered the reserve needs of the charity and have established a policy whereby unrestricted funds neither committed nor invested in fixed assets (free unrestricted reserves) should equate to 6 (2023 - 3) months of total expenditure (excluding grants paid) plus statutory redundancy and notice period costs. At 31 March 2024, free unrestricted current reserves totaled £303,640. After deducting the costs of statutory redundancy and notice costs (£137,231), the remaining reserves represent 7.0 months (2023 – 5.8 months) of total expenditure (excluding grants paid) for the year. The trustees will continue to seek to maintain the achievement of the policy target.

Peter Bloom (Treasurer)

Projects

Anti-Social Behaviour Grants - March 2023 - August 2024

The Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) Small Grants scheme was funded by the District Community Safety Partnership to empower communities to tackle antisocial behaviour. Small grants of up to £1,000 - £1,500 were available for grassroots community organisations and groups to run initiatives tackling anti-social behaviour. £11,000 was distributed to 8 groups/organisations across the Bradford District.

Public Health Small Grants Contract – April 2023 - March 2024

Adversity, Trauma & Resilience Grants (£73,750)

The Adverse Childhood Experiences, Trauma and Resilience (ATR) grants were funded by the Adversity, Trauma and Resilience (ATR) Programme, Public Health, Bradford Council. Four grants were available to grassroots VCS organisations, totalling £73,750, to help inform the development of an ATR Implementation Plan. Organisations were able to apply for one or more of the grants and partnership working would be required if different organisations were successful in being awarded. 11 applications for all four grants were received and one organisation was successful in being awarded all four grants.

Community Health Development (CHD) Grants

The Community Health Development (CHD) Grants were funded by the Living Well Service, Public Health, Bradford Council. The grants were aimed at small groups and organisations who are passionate about reducing health inequalities, promoting health and wellbeing and representing the voice of defined community of interest groups across the Bradford District. Grants from £5,000 - £15,000 were available. 43 applications were received in total, with grants awarded to 11 organisations / groups, totalling £121,991.60.

Mental Wellbeing Grants

The Mental Wellbeing Grants Scheme was funded by Bradford Council's Public Health team to improve the mental wellbeing of the district's citizens using the five ways to wellbeing:

- 1) Connecting with other people
- 2) Being physically active
- 3) Learning new skills
- 4) Giving to others
- 5) Paying attention to the present moment (mindfulness).

Grants from £500 to £10,000 were available. 84 applications were received in total and 23 groups / organisations were awarded a total of £179,798.58.

LGBTQ Community Health Development Grants

The Community Health Development (CHD) Grants – LGBTQ+ was funded by the Living Well Service, Public Health, Bradford Council. The aim was to award one or two groups / organisations who are passionate about reducing health inequalities, promoting health and wellbeing and representing the voice of the LGBTQ+ community across the Bradford District. A £15,000 allocation was available with grants from £7,500 - £15,000 being available. Two groups / organisations were awarded.

Community Led Gardening and Food Growing Grants

The Community Led Gardening and Food Growing Small Grants were funded by Bradford Council Public Health to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Bradford District citizens. The aim was to support projects focusing on key priorities relating to the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Bradford and Airedale 2018-2023 and the Good Food Strategy 2022, encouraging community food growing. The scheme aimed to fund new or existing community gardening and food growing projects. Grants up to £2,000 were available; six organisations were awarded.

Bradford District Local Friendship Grants – Saima Ashfaq / Wendy Collins

The Bradford District Friendship Grants scheme is funded by Bradford Council to help community groups within the Bradford District to support people living with dementia and/or sensory impairment to live independently, build friendships and be engaged with their local community.

CNet has been facilitating the grants on behalf of Bradford Council since April 2023. Up to March 2024 there were two rounds of grants, each taking applications for projects from £500 to £2,000. Amounts awarded in each round were:

Round 1 - £22,511.37 in total

- Dementia: £9,463.80
- Sensory Impairment: £13,047.57

Round 2 - £30,390.00 in total

- Dementia: £20,221.00
- Sensory Impairment: £10,169.00

Projects funded have included a sensory meadow for people with visual impairment, dementia awareness events for communities of interest, and interactive music sessions.

Walking Projects

With funding that the Gateway Centre had secured from JU:MP, in the first quarter of the year Muppett completed a series of guided family walks in the Ravenscliffe and Greengates area, continuing from the previous financial year. This led on to leading further JU:MP funded walks from the Centre. Originally teatime family walks, due to the attendance being low these were rearranged to take place as part of the Centre's summer holiday scheme.

A further walking project took place later in the year with Beacon House, which provides supported accommodation. They secured funding from West Yorkshire Combined Authority to run a series of guided walks, however due to wet and bad weather conditions the walks were put on hold over the winter months and restarted in April 2024.

Citizen Engagement Project

The Citizen Engagement Project has worked alongside our CEP Partners taking part in the Listen In Cycles across the district, collating Experience of Care & Community insight and promoting the Women's Health Network the Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership and the Health & Care Partnership's EngageBDC platform. We took part in 42 group sessions and attended meetings across West Bradford and city wide.

All six localities had Listen In weeks during 2023; moving forward Listen In will be targeted and focus on particular groups such as disability and the LGBTQ+ communities.

In addition to the Listen In cycles and Experience of Care & Community, we have been actively involved in the following engagement projects:

- The Keighley Health & Wellbeing Hub and the Citizen Panel recruitment
- Shipley health, wellbeing and community campus
- The new Airedale Hospital Development
- Development of the Network of Networks

Violence Reduction Partnership & Policing & Crime Team, West Yorkshire Combined Authority

During the second quarter of the year two further How To... booklets were produced: How to Organise an Event and How to Campaign and Lobby. Hard copies of the booklets were produced and were also available to download from the CNet website. The booklets have proved very popular. Two How to... workshops, based on the booklets were also delivered by Muppett at CNet, and both were well attended.

As part of our contract with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the Violence Reduction Partnership, throughout the year Muppett promoted their work and shared information with relevant groups and organisations across the district, including attending a number of their showcase events and Advisory Group meetings in person and via Zoom.

Network Central

During 2023-24 CNet was the lead organisation supporting the co-ordination of the business sustainability lot of the Council's wider Infrastructure Support Improvement Programme, partnered with Race Equality Network and Impact Hub. As part of this work, CNet administered the Local Community Support Grants (formerly Day Opportunities). The grants support projects for older people and people with learning disabilities.

Grant panels were held and decisions made at the end of 2022-23. Project funding began from April 2023, covering 139 projects across 75 organisations, for a total of £1,338,344 per year, for two years. The funds were allocated across the district, with a fair balance of both geographic and community of interest spread. There are a number of new projects and continuation of some existing ones. Some groups offered to merge projects which allowed the funds to stretch further and benefit more people.

Bradford District European Roma Communities Strategy – Creation of Action Plan and Working Group Support

The Bradford District European Roma Strategy was adopted by the Stronger Communities Partnership in 2021 and participating partners agreed at that time to jointly adopt and implement the strategy. In 2023 CNet was commissioned by Stronger Communities to lead work towards the development of a delivery plan.

The activity involved the establishment of two groups: an Implementation Group to move the strategy forward and a Network Group to allow operational level practitioners, including those from the Roma community, to meet and build collaboration.

A multi-agency event was held at Margaret McMillan Tower on 26th February 2024. 42 participants, from 18 organisations, including statutory agencies, VCS and the Roma community, came together to discuss progress in delivering the Bradford District European Roma Strategy. Facilitated workshop groups discussed current activity, gaps,

barriers to progress and ideas for future action. We concentrated on five areas: Housing, Health and Wellbeing, Families, Children and Young people, Community, and Skills and Opportunities

Overall, the event confirmed that many issues and problems identified in the strategy remain. However, more action is being taken in many areas. A common cross-cutting theme was that communication and co-ordination around services needs attention. Also, barriers to communication with the Roma community, inadequacy of translation provision and need for more staff cultural awareness training.

The final delivery plan has been submitted to the Council for action.

Active Travel in Keighley Central, Manningham and Girdlington & Barkerend and Bradford Moor: Community Readiness Model (CRM)

CNet was commissioned by Bradford Council to use the “Community Readiness Model” (CRM) tool as a way to gauge how ready a community is to consider Active Travel, as defined below:

“Active travel can mean cycling, walking or wheeling as a means of transport in order to get to a particular destination such as school, work, the shops or to visit friends. Active travel can also include trips made by wheelchair, mobility scooter, adapted cycles and scooters, with cycling including bicycles, tricycles and electric cycles, powered by feet or hands. Active travel may also include the use of public transport as part of an active journey.”

The CRM was developed in the United States to assess levels of readiness within a community, and achieves this by placing a community in one of nine possible stages of readiness, ranging from ‘no awareness’, at stage one, right through to high levels of community ownership, at stage nine.

The project covered three areas: Keighley Central, Manningham/Girdlington and Barkerend/Bradford Moor. The process started by identifying and interviewing six to eight key respondents in each area, with enough knowledge of the community to act as representatives of the community as a whole.

We also held two focus groups in each area to assess if the scores obtained from the interviews matched the perspectives of residents in the community. Sessions took place at local community venues, with 10-12 participants at each, who were rewarded with shopping vouchers in recognition of their time and commitment. The full report, including analysis and recommendations, has been submitted to the Council.

Dedication to Muppett

Our friend and colleague, Muppett, sadly passed away on 7th August 2024. He was doing what he loved, singing on stage at an open mic night, when he suffered a fatal heart attack.

Muppett began working for CNet in 2006, and over the past 18 years worked on a variety of community development projects, always bringing his own unique perspective on how best to engage with community members. Muppett was committed to his work and dedicated himself fully to each project, whether that was gathering people for an event to celebrate Yorkshire Day, leading walks round Bradford District and beyond, or passing on his knowledge to communities through training events.

In recent years, Muppett produced a series of 'How To...' booklets, aimed at helping grassroots groups to set up, raise funds, campaign, and plan community events. These have ensured that Muppett's invaluable knowledge and experience have not been lost with his passing. He also collated a series of walks around Bradford District into a book, titled Muppett's Rambles. This book serves as a permanent reminder of Muppett's passion for walking, and his dedication to encouraging others to get out and explore the nature and beauty that our District has to offer.

The team at CNet all miss Muppett dearly, but we are also extremely grateful to have been able to call him our friend. As we move forward, we will carry with us the lessons learned from Muppett, ensuring to always carry out our work with passion and commitment. We will also, of course, always remember the 'Muppettisms' that were so unique to him, including his classic greeting, "Nah then. Ow yer diddling?"

