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Recognised by HMRC as a charity for tax purposes, reference no. ZD03543

Exeter Street Community Hall Limited (ESCH)

## **Directors' Report – 2020/2021**

Please join us for the second ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of Exeter Street Community Hall Ltd, to be held on **Friday June 25<sup>th</sup> 2021** at 7:30pm (*via Zoom videoconference, details are in the AGM notice*), to take part and vote as shareholders. Here is the Directors' Report for the year.

### **Part 1: Living with Covid and Lockdown**

This year's Annual General Meeting takes place only 9 months after our 2019/2020 event. It isn't that time has speeded up, so don't be alarmed: we've just decided to hold the event nearer to the end of the financial year covered by the accounts and this report.

Reading this report you may share a sense of *deja-vu* in that life remains dominated by the pandemic and the associated restrictions we're all required to observe. Nevertheless, your Hall has been functioning in order to respond to the circumstances of the time and to meet the needs of the Community.

Although we are currently in the process of a staged reopening to hirers and tentatively looking at a limited range of events, the year has been characterised by a desire to serve a useful purpose without knowing how we would fare financially in the longer term. You will see that this has been largely achieved by the use of the Hall to provide meals for various categories of people in need, initially by Time To Talk Befriending (TTTB) and more recently by the Nourish project, both of which have been aided by some of our regular volunteers. Other activities include supporting initiatives such as food collections for the Brighton Unemployed Centre Family Pro-

ject (BUCFP) and hosting the 'Get That Job' employment programme, as well as remaining financially solvent, grappling with the ever changing Covid guidelines, continuing with the restoration and maintenance of the building, and producing a Community Bulletin.

## **Key Events in Lockdown and Beyond**

### **1. Completing the transition to ESCH**

- As part of the 'transfer of engagements' from The Hall Get Involved Ltd. (THGI) to Exeter Street Community Hall Ltd. (ESCH) the transfer of the Hall property was finally confirmed by the Land Registry in October 2020.

### **2. Financial Situation during Lockdown**

- You may recall that at the start of lockdown our financial situation was healthy, which gave us confidence that we could survive the Hall's closure in the short-to-medium term.
- In 2020, from 23 March to 31 August, and from 5 November to 2 December we had no trading income. This was a loss of around £1,500 per month.
- From 1 September until 4 November and again from 3 December until the Christmas holiday we had a much-reduced hire income, taking in only around 30% of what we would normally expect. During this period educational activities and some exercise classes (e.g. yoga & Pilates) took place but many others (some clubs, most indoor sports, all events, private parties and celebrations) were either not permitted or significantly restricted. At this time we had extra energy costs because of the need for increased ventilation and also extra cleaning costs to keep the Hall as Covid-safe as possible.
- Following a further period of total lockdown between 4 January 2021 and 12 April, the current period of restricted Hall opening has meant the return of certain classes and the possibility of some events from May onwards (at a maximum of 50% of the Hall's capacity) but we do not expect a return to normal levels of income until September at the very earliest – and this is of course uncertain.
- As before, we have two part-time employees, a manager and a caretaker/cleaner. We have not furloughed our employees during the Covid lockdown period, partly because we were helped by support grants but mainly because there was still a lot of work to be done The Hall still needed to be cleaned, more often and more intensively. Our manager was kept very busy dealing with arrangements for hirers (refunds, ascertaining hirers' intentions to return, etc.), producing a regular Com-

munity Bulletin, engaging with local support groups, liaising with Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) on the ever-changing interpretation of Covid regulations and preparing & provisioning the Hall for reopening once this was allowed.

- We did, however, make other savings. After we provided detailed information on our activities, security measures and policies our insurance broker was able to negotiate a new contract that was 20% cheaper than the previous one. On the basis of our recent usage and projections for the coming period we were able to reduce our monthly energy payment by 10%. Internet hosting company Kualo gave us free website hosting and a better service (thanks to David Amor for handling the transition). In addition our business rates were suspended for a year.
- In the light of the pandemic experience we took the decision to double the size of our reserves from its previous low level. In recent years we have never needed to dip into the reserves, but the threat to our solvency from the Covid crisis showed that it would be prudent to ring-fence a larger amount. The new figure of £10,000 is still not high for an organisation of our size and strikes a balance between having enough money to cope with unexpected problems and not withholding money unnecessarily. We also aim to keep another £10,000 available to serve as 'matching funds' for future large grant applications.
- We received extra funding from a number of sources during the year, for which we are very grateful. In April 2020 we received a business support grant of £10,000 from the government (distributed via BHCC) and we received further grants from the same source for the lockdown periods between November 2020 and March 2021. We successfully applied for support grants of £3,000 from the Sussex Community Foundation's Crisis Fund, which covered the period March-August 2020, and just over £6,000 from a fund administered by Power to Change, which covered the rest of 2020. We allocated portions of our employees' wages and our energy and insurance costs to these grants.
- The full Financial Report will be presented at the AGM. The income and expenditure account can be seen at and downloaded from our website.

### **3. Summarising our Response to Covid and lockdown**

#### **a) We supported our regular hirers and Hall users:**

- Terms and conditions of hire were revised to incorporate Covid safety measures.
- Hirers could pause their hires and restart later without financial penalty.

- Many hirers left their money with us, banked for whenever we could reopen, and some offered to turn deposits into a donation or a shareholding. Heartfelt thanks go to our hirers for their goodwill and support.

*"It's great for us having use of the hall and it's always clean and in good condition for our session. Thanks for all your hard work coordinating the sessions and keeping this wonderful hall going. Susan has been extremely welcoming to us since we started using the hall and very helpful when we've had to change dates etc. She's kept us well informed of what's happening when the hall has been in lockdown and re-opening in what I'm sure has been a difficult time for her co-ordinating everyone's needs."* Diane, dancer

- Increased cleaning and visible signs of safety in the Hall e.g. lots of signage, sanitisers etc.

#### **b) We responded to changes in legislation/restrictions:**

- There was much poring over government legislation and guidance by our Manager, members of the Management Committee and other volunteers in order to form practical, understandable interpretations for implementation.
- Officers at Brighton & Hove City Council were consulted for advice on local regulations and interpretations of the details of national guidance.
- Particular thanks to Hall Manager Susan Corlett and volunteers Tim Nichols & Robin Bailey for their work on safety policies and risk assessments.

#### **c) We spent money where we needed to:**

- New ventilation unit in the main Hall and a vent/heat exchanger in the Community Room.
- Purchase of heaters, hand sanitisers, signage and stronger cleaning materials.
- Creation of a lockable cupboard for the more hazardous cleaning products.

#### **d) We supported the local community:**

- The Community Bulletin was written and edited each month by Susan Corlett and then formatted and distributed by Norman Wright.

*"Sincere congratulations on what you've done over the past year – especially the community communications, which have been outstanding."* Marek, community activist.

- The streets were brightened at Christmas with the Hall's display (thanks to Mike Fox and Dave Fellows for setting this up) and the Festive Windows competition judged by our Art Club.

- We had great fun with our Christmas Zoom Quiz, featuring fiendish questions and dazzling costume changes by Alexa Povah and Sally Hunt.
- We produced an attractive 2021 calendar with a seasonal selection of Hall posters from previous years; thanks go to Marianne Craig and to Gill & Andy Hasson for design and distribution.

**e) We researched and applied for grants:**

- There were some successful applications: Sussex Communities Foundation, Power to Change, National Lottery Community Fund, BHCC business support grants from November onwards.
- There were also some unsuccessful applications, for different reasons including pot luck in the draw and not being in the main target categories: OneFamily, a different Power to Change fund, the FORE. We can't win them all, and we learned something from each of the 'failures'.

**f) We offered our facilities as an emergency kitchen:**

- Approximately 15,000 (that's fifteen thousand!) meals in total were produced by Time To Talk Befriending (TTTB) during the first lockdown, mainly for isolated people and those in supported accommodation, and subsequently by 'Nourish', an organisation supporting vulnerable people including care leavers.
- Both projects were led by chef Wendy Maas, staffed by her team and aided by our own volunteers, particularly Rose Dewick, Sally Hunt and Alexa Povah.
- The Nourish Community Meals project operated in the Hall until the end of May 2021.

**g) We thought about how to deliver new things:**

- Initiated by Susan Corlett and designed and led by employment counsellor and Hall volunteer Kay Stephan, the new 'Get That Job' employment skills programme aimed at providing practical skills and techniques to help people get a job at a time when unemployment was predicted to rise. This is the first time that we have directly run a training/advice programme.
- The three-week programme, which was delivered twice early in 2021, covered how to get a job, confidence at work, rethinking work options and optional First Aid and Food Hygiene sessions, and was delivered by professional trainers and mentors.
- We had originally hoped to host the programme in the Hall but were forced to move it to Zoom by the post-Christmas lockdown. We had to postpone the practical First Aid and Food Hygiene sessions until the Hall could reopen.

- 42 people attended the sessions, and a number of these took up the option of one-to-one mentoring afterwards. Plus we had a waiting list. Feedback from the programme was very positive and some of the participants found employment soon afterwards.
- The delivery of the programme was enabled by a £7,100 grant from the National Lottery Community Fund.
- Particular thanks go to Susan, Kay, Annette Bento, Gill Hasson, Jamie Trentham and the mentors for bringing the programme to life.

*"I came away from the course inspired, having thoroughly enjoyed myself and with newfound enthusiasm to explore different opportunities."* Testimonial from a participant.

## Part 2: Looking to the Future

### 1. Continuing Work

- We continue to support the street-by-street food collections for the Brighton Unemployed Centre Family Project (BUCFP) encouraged by FareShare, previously co-ordinated by Sally Hunt and now by Suzy Murdoch.
- We will maintain a network of street reps to relay information about Covid services to the people who need them and to maintain the profile and accessibility of the Hall.
- Our Hall Manager and Cleaner/Caretaker Chris Phipps remain our front line key workers, directly supporting our hirers and Hall users.

*"I am so happy and excited to have the time all on one evening in the Hall (which I love) to develop my School. It also means I will be able to have an extra tea time with my children at home! I am really grateful for everything that you have done to make it happen. So thank you."* Clair, ballet teacher

- The Management Committee, Building Team and Hall Action Group continue to meet via Zoom, although we keep our fingers crossed that we can return to actual human contact soon.
- We continue to revise and update the Hall's business plan to reflect what has been achieved and what has still to be done in terms of meeting community needs and creating a building to adequately serve that purpose. Our Business Plan Executive Summary 2020 is available [here](#).

### 2. The Building and Environs

- As previously reported in our last Directors' Report nine months ago, the main works completed during 2020-21 were to the front windows and doors, renovating the woodwork, re-glazing and decorating, plus sanding and varnishing the floor of the main Hall.
- Other jobs completed in financial year 20/21 included new bicycle rails in front of the Hall, a new chimney cowl above the Community Room, the overhaul of the gas fire and surroundings, and installing an additional door at the end of the corridor to improve fire safety and soundproofing.
- Much gratitude is due for the efforts of volunteer Jo Sandgrove who has turned the small yard at the back of the Hall into a lovely garden and continues to make it better each season.
- To improve energy efficiency we are continuing to install underfloor insulation in the main Hall (AKA "The Great Escape" project because of the low-slung trolley that volunteers lie on in order to move around under the floorboards - see the video on our website). The work, in a dusty environment, is arduous and we are grateful to Manolis Datseris, Richard Davies and others for volunteering to do this.
- Our future ambitions include a new heating system for the whole building, as well as further insulation and ventilation works, e.g. ensuring that all window lights are openable.
- Our plans for small extensions at the rear of the building, to house improved toilets at one end and an office / consultancy room at the other, are in abeyance for the time being, due to the pandemic. The scheme was designed and submitted to BHCC by our architect Manolis Datseris, and is still (subject to an archeological survey to check for Saxon remains) a valid planning approval that we hope to proceed with when restrictions and finance permit.

### **3. Reopening and Fundraising**

- As stated above, we have prepared, and continue to prepare, the Hall for reopening in the 'new normal'. All measures will remain under review and will require updating when new local and national guidance is issued.
- We have continued to review our risk assessments, terms & conditions for hire and relevant forms and policies.
- Because we have received support grants we haven't emphasised fundraising in the past year. However, it will still be some time before we can get back to our former level of hire income and we will need to raise funds to help cover the costs of keeping the Hall available to the community. We can't yet put on the sort of events that have filled the Hall in the past, so we will need other ways to sustain our income, e.g:



- Online donations via our website, which will soon be using the secure Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) funding platform.
- Friends of the Hall – a standing order of a few pounds a month will help us cover our increased running costs.
- Easyfundraising – raise money for the Hall when you shop online, via an app or a Web browser plugin at no cost to yourself. It's easy, and every little helps. See <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/exeterstreethall/>
- Future events – once we're allowed to hold full-capacity events in the Hall again we can use them to raise funds. More importantly, though, events are fun, give us all renewed energy and bring the community together.

This was shown recently by the positive response to the successful Doorstep Sale organized by Gill Hasson, where people flocked to the 80-odd doorstep stands despite the rain at the start of the day.

- Possible Share Issue – this is one for the future, but we're exploring the possibility of a new ESCH share issue to help pay for the building extensions and to involve more people in the Hall.
- As always we'll need your help, enthusiasm and ideas. Please do make suggestions of how we can raise funds for the Hall and have fun while we're doing it!

#### **4. Sustaining the Community in the 'New Normal'**

Our principal areas of priority and provision remain unchanged. They are broadly:

- Community Activities – we aim to bring back our regular community activities including: table tennis club, children's film club, Stay and Play, Brownies, Boys' Brigade, the monthly Tea Club, art classes, defibrillator training, volunteer days, FareShare food collection.
- Regular, Occasional and One-Off Hires (though in some cases they may not be able to return immediately), for instance:
 

Yoga, Pilates, Fitness League, Tai Chi, adult tap dance, high impact exercise class, Gong Bath meditation, table tennis coaching, learning disabled adults' enrichment activities, baby sensory sessions, children's ballet classes, mini-athletics, pre-school football, NHS meetings, fostering drop-in, parenting sessions, therapeutic massage, language classes, singing/musical workshops, rehearsals, performances, dance classes and workshops, drawing workshops, Brighton Fringe Festival performances, film shoots, children's parties, family celebrations, Christmas makers' market.
- Social Justice and Low Cost Hires – these will remain an essential aspect of our 'normal'. We are always keen to support local projects and charities e.g. for refu-



gees and other disadvantaged groups. We offer special hire rates to these groups.

- Our Events – they normally include theatrical, musical, literary, comedy and local history events, quizzes, film showings, themed meals and many other events. We will need to assess which of these are viable over the coming months but we're really keen to get them going again.

One big annual event had to be cancelled in 2020, but in 2021 we hope to revive the **Great Get-Together** street party (in collaboration with St. Luke's Church and the Prestonville Community Association). We have consulted with residents and started cautious preparations. At the time of writing it is unclear if Covid restrictions will be fully relaxed in time to allow our planned street party to go ahead on July 25<sup>th</sup> but we can postpone it if necessary. Lots of entertainers and volunteers are standing by.

- The Building – its restoration and enhancement whilst in the fullest possible use.
- Our Shareholders – in April 2021 we introduced a new policy to allow shareholders either to sell shares back to ESCH or to donate shares to the society. Selling shares can only be done in a small way each year because ESCH has very limited funds for this purpose, and we hope that very few shareholders will feel the need to sell, but nine years on from the original share issue we wanted to make it possible. For details see <https://exeterstreethall.org/share-buyback-scheme/>
- Our Links and Networks – we are a member of Co-operatives UK, Locality and Brighton & Hove Community Works. We send a representative to meetings of the Prestonville Community Association and Community Buildings Network. We also have strong links to the Brighton Open Air Theatre and the Sustainable Business Partnership. These connections have proved very helpful during the pandemic and we will continue to maintain them in the coming year.

## 5. Sustaining the Hall in the Year to Come

Like 2020, 2021 remains a very difficult and unpredictable year. Nevertheless we're in reasonably good shape to serve the community and enhance the local 'social infrastructure'. In the coming months we aim to continue in the direction outlined above, address new challenges, and increase the number and diversity of our volunteers and Hall users. If you have any suggestions for new activities, initiatives and projects the Hall could undertake, please let us know.

As said in previous Directors' Reports, we continue to be enthusiastic about and committed to the Hall and its ethos and trust that this is shared by you, the shareholders, as well as by other volunteers and supporters. We are aware, though, that

over the last couple of years our volunteer numbers have diminished, perhaps because the Hall is now seen as running along nicely and doesn't need the start-up effort of earlier years. However, we are always in need of new volunteers to help out across a broad range of areas. Currently a few volunteers are spending significant amounts of their time dedicated to the continued existence and development of our Hall, but this may not be sustainable over time. We urge anyone who's interested in being part of this great project to take the plunge and support it in any way you feel able to, be it in a practical way with the building, in communications including our website and social media, in helping to organise events, helping with admin or making a financial donation – all are needed.

So please consider what you can do to support the Hall. Ways to get started include:

- Come along to a **Hall Action Group** meeting (all welcome – 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of every month), find out what's going on and help to plan future events.
- Join the **Building Team** (3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month) and help to improve the Hall building.  
Note - both of these groups are currently meeting via Zoom. For details of how to join meetings or to be put in contact with someone who can tell you what goes on in them, email [secretary@exeterstreethall.org](mailto:secretary@exeterstreethall.org)
- Make a one-off or regular **donation**. Go to [our web page for donating](#)
- **Tell your neighbours and new arrivals** in the area about the Hall. They may also wish to become shareholders like you, or contribute and participate in other ways.

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## Directors

The following people served as Directors during the year April 2020 – March 2021. (Dates before 2020 refer to THGI – THGI Directors became ESCH Directors following the transfer of engagements and were all newly elected at the 2020 AGM):

- Jo Camplisson (Treasurer) – first elected 6 October 2016, last re-elected 18 September 2020.
- David Fellows (Chair) – first elected 17 July 2015, last re-elected 18 September 2020
- Sunita Shier (Policies) – first elected 28 September 2018, last re-elected 18 September 2020, *standing down 25 June 2021*

- Graham Thomas (Secretary) – first elected 4 October 2019, last re-elected 18 September 2020
- Norman Wright (Communications) – first elected 6 October 2016, last re-elected 28 September 2018, *stood down 18 September 2020*

### **Co-Opted Management Committee Members**

- Dexter Coombe (Bar Manager)
- Amanda Nichols (Building Team Coordinator) April-September 2020
- The Hall Manager (Susan Corlett) reports to the management committee and attends meetings as required.

### **Dave Fellows – Chair of the Management Committee**

(on behalf of the Directors)