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West Northumberland Food Bank

Chair's Report for the year 2020 -2021

The objects of the CIO are the prevention or relief of poverty in West Northumberland in particular but not exclusively, by providing emergency food supplies and related provisions to individuals in need, and to charities or other organisations working to prevent or relieve poverty.

West Northumberland Food Bank has continued to receive exceptional support from its local community. This support has been in the form of donations of food and money and from folk volunteering to work on the help lines, warehouse duties or home deliveries. We thank you all for what you do in furtherance of our objects.

We continue with the service model, developed to provide continuity of service following the Covid-19 outbreak, where the user's first point of contact is the phone helpline, available for 4 hours per day Monday - Friday. Here, they can state their food requirements though, just as important, they are led into a discussion about the causes of their situation and offered advice and signposting to other helpful agencies. In the most extreme situations, they may receive a Hardship Grant.

When West Northumberland Food Bank came into being in 2013/14, it was thought it would be a temporary measure, only needed for a couple of years or more. Sadly, we have seen an increase in demand for our services year on year with perhaps the increase since October 2021 being the steepest yet. The forecasted economic climate going forward in 2022 does not bode well for individuals and households, especially for those who are struggling to manage. We continue to apply our resources where it can make a big difference.

We continue to update our organisation and ways of working. The vans we purchased through 2021 have proved their worth as demand has grown. More can be safely carried on delivery runs than in volunteers own vehicles. Ideally, larger premises would be a benefit, especially to our food storage and handling area. In the absence of suitable premises, we are discussing some physical changes with our landlord with a view to increasing useful floor area which would create a better flow of food coming in to food going out. We have also recently appointed a Warehouse Deputy Manager and will shortly be appointing a Finance & Administration Assistant. Both these roles are part-time and should help reduce pressures and build in greater depth and resilience. Resilience will be further considered in the current year as we provide an essential service to our users and must continue operating no matter what.

I must take this opportunity to thank Sam Gilchrist, our Project Manager and our brilliant staff, John Stoker and Owain Bennet, and our volunteers who work so well with our users, providing food, information and compassion in equal measure. Thanks must also go to our team of diligent Trustees, working behind the scenes and keeping us aligned with our statutory responsibilities as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Finally, a special mention for David Ratcliff, a founder Trustee, who stepped down in November to concentrate on other commitments and have just a bit more quality time for himself and family. David was instrumental in the creation of WNFB some 9 years ago and helped steer it along the way to what we have now.

Jonathan Hill – March 2022