Charity No: 1154685

# HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE

## RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNTS

## FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

**HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE**
**CHARITY No: 1154685**

**CHARITY INFORMATION**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Independent Examiner** | Price Bailey LLP<br>Tennyson House<br>Cambridge Business Park<br>Cambridge<br>CB4 0WZ |
| **Registered address** | Central Library<br>Cross Street<br>The High<br>Harlow<br>CM20 1HA |
| **Trustees** | Michael Granger (Deceased January 2023)<br>Margaret Barrett<br>Martin Macey<br>Shaun Graham<br>Cara Sheridan |
| **Bankers** | Plane Saver Credit Union<br>Profile West<br>950 Great West Road<br>Brentford<br>TW8 9EJ |

**HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE**
**CHARITY No: 1154685**


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**HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE**
**CHARITY No: 1154685**
**TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT**

The committee present their report and financial statements for the year ending 31st March 2023. The committee act as trustees for Harlow & West Essex Law Centre and are referred to as such throughout this report. The report contains a level of detail consistent with the size of the charity.

**Structure, governance, and management**

Harlow & West Essex Law Centre (working name Harlow Advice Centre) is a charitable incorporated organisation. The charity is governed by a constitution dated November 2013. The objects are the relief of poverty, suffering and distress and the advancement of education among the inhabitants of the Eastern Region and Harlow by the provision of legal advice, information, and assistance.

During the period, the following trustees have been involved in the management of the organisation:

Margaret Barrett

Martin Macey

Shaun Graham

Cara Sheridan

The trustees were selected following meetings set up for this purpose. They are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and have many years of experience of the advice and other relevant sectors. As local residents involved in a wide range of community organisations, they have an in-depth understanding of the needs of the communities served.

The constitution is the foundation model recommended by the Charity Commission. The day-to-day management of the service rests with the Head of Service, Sue Jones.

**Principal activities and business review**

Harlow Advice Centre provides specialist level advice, advocacy and representation on benefits, housing, and debt plus assisted information on a wide range of related subjects. The service is free, confidential, and independent.

The Centre is a member of Advice UK, the national body which represents and supports the independent advice sector. The Advice Centre holds the Specialist Quality Mark (SQM). This is the quality assurance standard for specialist level legal advice services. The Solicitors Regulation Authority regulates its solicitor. The service is also regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

The service employs six qualified and experienced members of staff including a full-time housing solicitor, welfare benefits specialist, and part time money advice specialist who is an approved intermediary for Debt Relief Orders. The Advice Centre is located on the first floor of Harlow town centre library. There is a lift for people who cannot manage the stairs and a wheelchair accessible toilet.

**HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE**
**CHARITY No: 1154685**
**TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT**

The year under review has been a very busy time for the service. The cost-of-living crisis resulted in many local residents being unable to meet their food, fuel, rent, and other essential costs. There was also an increase in the number of people from other towns and cities being placed in temporary accommodation in Harlow. This puts an additional strain on local services including advice and other charitable services. Language and other barriers increase the cost of providing services for local residents. This is partly due to the cost of interpreting services and partly the additional time required to explain how the social security, housing, debt recovery, and other systems work. People who have little, or no prior knowledge of these systems find it difficult to obtain the help they need.

## Statistics

In the year ending 31st March 2023, the Advice Centre opened **303 complex cases**, and dealt with **751 enquiries**. Advisers also continued work on cases opened in the previous year but not closed.

In the twelve months ending 31st March 2023, the financial gains from casework alone were **£653,647**. The financial gains achieved as a result of the 751 advice enquiries are not included in this figure.

There was also a wide range of non-financial outcomes including the prevention of homelessness and better management of debt.

Cases often take several appointments and, in some cases, well over a year to resolve. The long timescale is often related to waiting times for appeal hearing dates. The money brought into Harlow because of Harlow Advice Centre's work helps to create a strong local economy, as well as improving the quality of life for those directly involved. Most of Harlow Advice Centre's clients are on very low incomes.

Three examples of the specialist casework undertaken during the year under review are set out below.

**Mr and Mrs A** are refugees with five children, including two over the age of 18. They came to see our housing solicitor soon after being given refugee status as they had contacted the local authority for assistance with housing as their National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation was coming to an end.

The local authority took the application but insisted that their eldest son and daughter could not live with them and should make their own applications. Our solicitor sent a letter before action, threatening Judicial Review if the family were not allowed to remain together. She gave various legal reasons why the family should not be separated, including Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and section 176 of the Housing Act 1996. As a result of our solicitor's detailed representations, **the local authority agreed that they would accommodate the family together** and it was not necessary to issue court proceedings.

In addition to the clients' desire to keep their family together, the argument was particularly important as the eldest son and daughter are healthy and would not have been considered in priority need. Therefore, if they had made an application in their own right, it is likely that it would have been refused and they would have become homeless. Given the trauma the whole family had experienced before arriving in the UK, it was vital that they were able to remain together.

**Mrs B** came to see our welfare benefits adviser regarding a debt with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). She had received a letter from Debt Management seeking to recover an overpayment of Universal Credit (UC). She was no longer receiving Universal Credit and the overpayment had occurred over a year previously. Mrs B had no idea what the overpayment related to and asked for the decision to be reconsidered.

The DWP refused to reconsider the decision as it had been more than 13 months since the original overpayment decision had been placed on the claimant's journal. There are strict time limits to challenge a benefit decision, and this had been exceeded. However, our adviser lodged an appeal with the Tribunal Service and argued that the decision placed on the UC journal was not effective. This is because it had been placed on a closed account and the claimant could not have known that this had happened. The adviser argued that the letter from Debt Management should be treated as the effective decision and that the challenge to this was in time. The Tribunal agreed and allowed the appeal to continue. This meant that the DWP had to provide a submission detailing how the overpayment had come about.

The DWP's appeal submission showed that earnings during the relevant period had been entered twice. When the entitlement was recalculated to reflect the correct income figures the overpayment reduced significantly. The Tribunal Judge hearing the appeal, agreed with our adviser's analysis of what had happened, and **the overpayment was reduced by £1,140.48.**

**Mrs C**, a 38-year-old female residing in housing association rented property with her husband and three dependent children, was referred to Harlow Advice Centre by the mental health charity Mind.

Mrs C was employed part time and received her salary, child benefit, and universal credit (UC). Her husband was also employed and included in the UC assessment. Mrs C was advised to claim disability benefits. She had priority and non-priority debts and was being pursued by enforcement agents. She had no assets. In total she owed £10,191.

Initially our Money Adviser (who is an authorised intermediary for Debt Relief Orders) advised Mrs C on Breathing Space and she was entered into this respite scheme and a hold was placed on her debts for 60 days. It took time for Mrs C to engage but with a good working relationship between Mind and our Money Adviser she was able to obtain her chosen option of a Debt Relief Order. This resulted in Mrs C's **debts of £10,191 being written off**. Mrs C was relieved and was able to concentrate on improving her health.

## Financial review

During the period of account, the Charity received funds from the National Lottery Community Fund, Tudor Trust, Legal Aid Agency, Community Justice Foundation, and others totaling £188,226. This was significantly lower than the year ending 31st March 2022 partly because funding from the National Lottery Community Fund ended in January 2023, and partly because long term sickness temporarily reduced legal aid and settlement income. The total receipts figure for the period ending 31 March 2023 of £188,226 does not include the £84,164 carried over from the previous year. Most of the costs involved in running the service are related to wages, subscriptions, and general office expenses. Funding from Harlow Health Centres Trust, AB Charitable Trust, and others began in the financial year 2023/24.

The Trustees considered the Charity's position as a going concern. The Charity has secured continued funding which will last for a period in excess of one year. As such and having considered the level of free reserves against future plans and fixed costs, the Trustees consider this to be sufficient for at least the next 12 months and do not have any concerns regarding the Charity's ability to meet its liabilities as they fall due.

Balances as at 31 March 2023 were as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Plane Saver Credit Union Account | £62,001 |
| Petty Cash | £ 39 |
| Total | £62,040 |

## Risk management

The committee assessed the major risks when the charity was set up and reviewed the position in business planning meetings. Risk management was kept under review during the period covered by these accounts. The key risks the charity is exposed to are in relation to staff, e.g., from the loss of a key member of staff and long-term sickness. All risks were successfully addressed in the period covered by this report. The risks are mitigated by various means including the sick pay scheme, and employee assistance programme.

## Reserves policy

The committee reviewed current and potential liabilities and determined that the reserves policy should cover unavoidable costs and legal obligations only which are of an estimated value of £25,000. Current premises costs do not require payments beyond a short notice period. The deficit set out in the funds analysis relates to legal aid. The Legal Aid Agency (LAA} has strict rules concerning how much it will pay for legal aid work. The length of time between the start and end of legal aid cases is often many months and sometimes well over a year.

Given the above, and the extensive insurance cover taken out by the charity, the committee is satisfied that the small reserve set out is sufficient to meet current and potential liabilities. The reserves policy will be kept under review.

**Public benefit**

The Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit has been considered when reviewing Harlow Advice Centre's aims and objectives and planning future activities. The committee has considered how planned activities contribute to the aims and objectives.

**Acknowledgements and thanks**

The committee and employees of the charity acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of many individuals, agencies, and organisations. These include:

Funders - National Lottery Community Fund, Tudor Trust, Legal Aid Agency, Community Justice Foundation.

Others – Access to Justice Foundation, AB Charitable Trust, Plane Saver (formerly known as Harlowsave) Credit Union, Plane Saver Credit Union, Harlow Health Centres Trust, Advice UK, Steve Johnson, Law Centres Network, Julie Bishop, Noeleen Adams, Ros Lucas, Pat Ruder, Friends of HWRA (particular thanks to office holders Cliff Moore, Jim Rogers, Alan Jones, David Forman and chief fundraisers Judy Chan and Howard Chan), Harlow Trades Union Council, Essex County Council, Harlow Central Library, Harlow Foodbank, Price Bailey, Rainbow Services, Dennis Nadin, David Anderson, Everlevel, Luna Logistics, Ian Hudson, Harlow and District Chamber of Commerce.

The committee apologises in advance for any names omitted in error. Organisations rather than individuals have been listed where appropriate.

On behalf of the Committee

MBarrett

Mag Barrett (Sep 20, 2023, 9:48pm)
Mag Barrett

Shaun Graham (Sep 23, 2023, 1:27pm)
Shaun Graham

Dated: 20 Sep 2023

23 Sep 2023

## INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2023 which are set out on pages 7 to 10.

**Responsibilities and basis of report**

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

**Independent examiner's statement**

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the charity as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Michael Cooper-Davis FCCA ACA
for and on behalf of
Price Bailey LLP
Chartered Accountants
Tennyson House
Cambridge Business Park
Cambridge
CB4 0WZ

Dated: 25 September 2023

**HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE**
**CHARITY No: 1154685**

## STATEMENT OF ASSETS
## AS AT YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

| | 2023 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|
| **Cash funds** | | |
| Plane Saver Credit Union Account | 62,001 | 84,553 |
| Petty cash | 39 | 61 |
| **Subtotal** | 62,040 | 84,614 |
| **Other assets** | | |
| Legal Aid work in progress | 18,818 | 18,712 |
| Fixed assets | 8,798 | 10,698 |
| Certificated work in progress | 22,792 | 19,126 |
| **Total** | 112,448 | 133,150 |
| **Liabilities** | | |
| Independent Examiner Fee | 2,640 | 3,660 |
| March Payroll | 4,215 | 4,070 |
| Total | 6,855 | 7,730 |

**Notes to the accounts**

These accounts have been prepared on a receipts and payments basis, and the accounts comply with Section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. The Trustees confirm, in accordance with the Charitable Incorporated Organisations (General) Regulations 2012, that at year end the CIO did not have any outstanding guarantees to third parties nor any debts secured on assets of the CIO.

I approve these accounts and confirm that I have made available all accounting records and information for their preparation.

MBarrett

Mag Barrett (Sep 20, 2023, 9:48pm)

**Trustee**
**On behalf of the Committee**

**Dated:** 20 Sep 2023

**HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE**
**CHARITY No: 1154685**

**RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT**
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

| | Restricted | Unrestricted | 2023 Total | 2022 Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Receipts** | | | | |
| Big Lottery Fund | 55,696 | - | 55,696 | 85,333 |
| CJF | 60,900 | - | 60,900 | 59,739 |
| Legal Aid | - | 19,105 | 19,105 | 33,469 |
| IMA Grant | 460 | - | 460 | 1,050 |
| Tudor Trust | 52,000 | - | 52,000 | 25,000 |
| Settlements | - | - | - | 37,639 |
| Miscellaneous | - | 65 | 65 | 280 |
| **Total Receipts** | **169,056** | **19,170** | **188,226** | **242,510** |
| **Payments** | | | | |
| BLF recharge | 7,304 | - | 7,304 | - |
| Employee Costs | 129,218 | 35,430 | 164,648 | 143,054 |
| Training | 1,193 | 390 | 1,583 | 693 |
| Telephones | 1,681 | 280 | 1,961 | 2,436 |
| Payroll Costs | 660 | 110 | 770 | 775 |
| Equipment and Materials | 327 | 9 | 336 | 974 |
| Photocopying | 197 | 8 | 205 | - |
| Library and Information | 548 | 161 | 709 | 1,062 |
| Stationery | 264 | 70 | 334 | 377 |
| Costs associated with website | 249 | - | 249 | - |
| Travel and Subsistence | 202 | - | 202 | 50 |
| Miscellaneous | 2,150 | 222 | 2,372 | 2,636 |
| Insurance | 3,246 | 2,662 | 5,908 | 1,055 |
| Professional Body Membership | 994 | 385 | 1,379 | 888 |
| Postage | 233 | 208 | 441 | 241 |
| IT | 4,400 | 877 | 5,277 | 4,894 |
| Independent examination fee | 1,300 | 1,100 | 2,400 | 3,360 |
| Expert reports | - | 7,207 | 7,207 | 30,717 |
| Big Issue expenditure | - | - | - | 7,063 |
| Health and safety | 2,978 | 541 | 3,519 | 2,689 |
| Volunteer Expenses | - | - | - | 31 |
| Rental to Library | 2,235 | 1,761 | 3,996 | - |
| **Total Payments** | **159,379** | **51,421** | **210,800** | **202,995** |
| **Net of Receipts/(Payments)** | **9,677** | **(32,251)** | **(22,574)** | **39,515** |
| **Cash Funds From Previous Year** | **80,503** | **4,111** | **84,614** | **45,099** |
| **Cash Funds This Year End** | **90,180** | **(28,140)** | **62,040** | **84,614** |

**HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE**
**CHARITY No: 1154685**

**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS**
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

## 1. Statement of Funds Analysis

| | Big Lottery Fund | Hertfordshire Action on Disability | ATJF | CJF | Tudor Trust | Big Issue | DRO | Un-restricted | Settle-ments (Unre-stricted) | Legalaid (Unre-stricted) | Total 2023 | Total 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Opening Funds** | 27,197 | (18) | (507) | 21,032 | 28,128 | 3,621 | 1,050 | 1,708 | 32,244 | (29,841) | 84,614 | 45,099 |
| **Funds Received** | 55,696 | - | - | 60,900 | 52,000 | - | 460 | 65 | - | 19,105 | 188,226 | 242,510 |
| **Funds Expended** | 82,893 | - | - | 52,991 | 21,988 | 1,507 | - | 72 | 32,244 | 19,105 | 210,800 | 202,995 |
| **Transfer of funds** | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Closing Funds** | - | (18) | (507) | 28,941 | 58,140 | 2,114 | 1,510 | 1,701 | - | (29,841) | 62,040 | 84,614 |

**HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE**
**CHARITY No: 1154685**

**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS**
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

**2. Statement of Funds Analysis (prior year, as restated)**

| | Big Lottery Fund | Hertfordshire Action on Disability | ATJF | CJF | Tudor Trust | Big Issue | DRO | Un-restricted | Settle-ments (Unre-stricted) | Legal aid (Unre-stricted) | Total 2022 | Total 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Opening Funds** | 13,763 | (18) | (507) | 2,752 | 39,819 | 6,622 | - | 1,442 | 18,413 | (37,187) | 45,099 | 33,270 |
| **Funds Received** | 85,333 | - | - | 59,739 | 25,000 | | 1,050 | 280 | 37,639 | 33,469 | 242,510 | 235,374 |
| **Funds Expended** | 71,899 | - | - | 41,459 | 36,692 | 3,001 | - | 14 | 23,808 | 26,122 | 202,995 | 223,545 |
| **Transfer of funds** | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Closing Funds** | 27,197 | (18) | (507) | 21,032 | 28,127 | 3,621 | 1,050 | 1,708 | 32,244 | (29,840) | 84,614 | 45,099 |

The funds above have been restated to more accurately reflect the payments made from Settlements in the year.