



“Welcoming and Supporting Refugees in Hertfordshire”

<https://www.hertswelcomes.org.uk/>

Patron: Robert Voss CBE CSTJ HM Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire

Herts Welcomes Refugees

Trustee Report and Accounts

January - December 2024



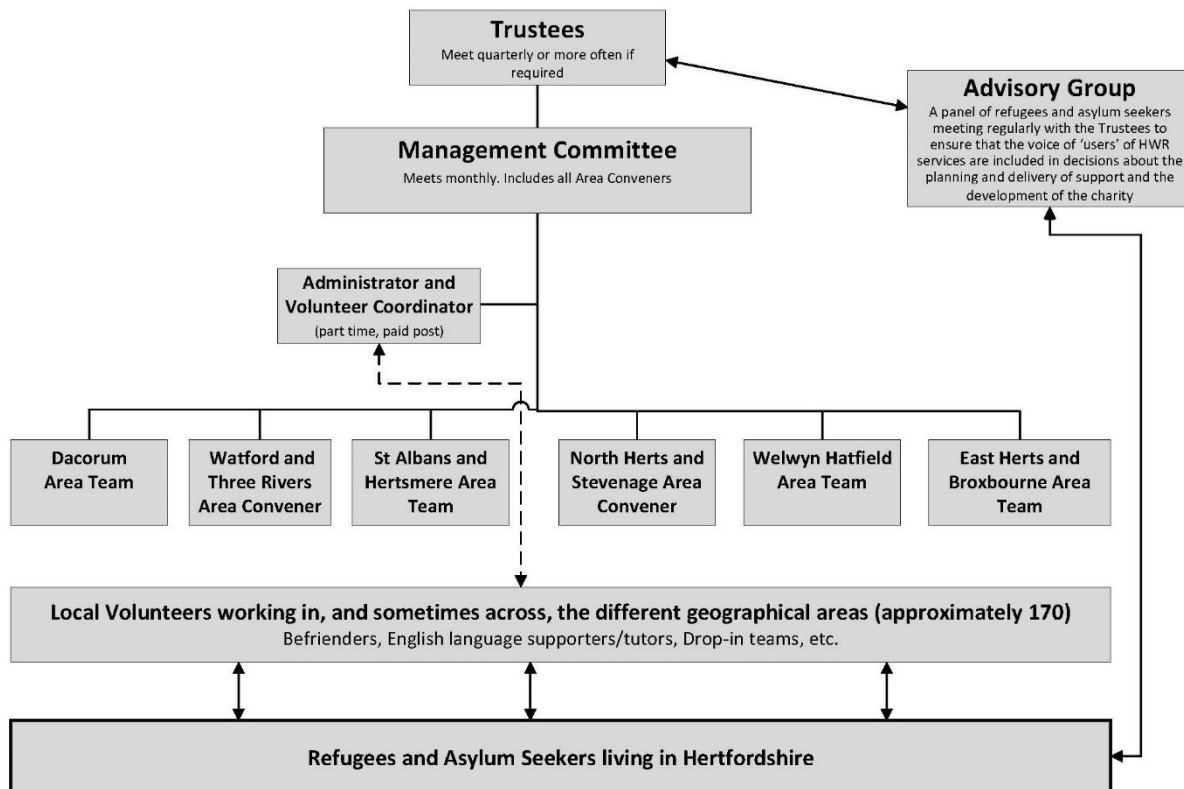
Herts Welcomes Refugees - A Charitable Incorporated Organisation - Registered charity No 1172687
Registered Address: 3 Newmarket Court, Goldsmith Way, St Albans, AL3 5LN

2024 was another extremely busy year for Herts Welcomes Refugees (HWR) as we have responded to an increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers we support and consequent increase in demand for our services, and fresh challenges presented by the significant and welcome increase in the rate of asylum seekers being granted leave to remain. The Trustees hope that this report will provide an insight into the work of HWR over the last year and inform you about our priorities and the challenges we envisage for 2025.

TRUSTEES

The Trustees met formally eight times in the year. We are pleased to have recruited a new Trustee, Amani Al Sharaf, who brings invaluable insight as someone with a professional background in the humanitarian sector who successfully applied for asylum in the UK and is now settling in the county. The other Trustees are Irene Austin (Chair), Adrian Ball (Treasurer), John Borton, Veronica Raymond, Kate Scott and Andy Gregg.

Organisational Structure of Herts Welcomes Refugees



Veronica Raymond will stand down as a Trustee at the 2025 AGM. Veronica has been a trustee since 2019 and we are very grateful for her support to the charity in this role. She will continue as the Area Convenor for North Herts and Stevenage. Samah Alrahabi has moved away from Hertfordshire and is no longer a Trustee.

In accordance with our constitution at the AGM we will ask you to endorse Amani Al Sharaf as a Trustee. John Borton and Adrian Ball will stand down but have offered themselves for re- election.

At Trustees' meetings, we consider matters of policy in line with the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit, receive financial reports and take decisions regarding the strategic direction of the

Charity according to the constitution, objectives for the year and the need to adapt as new challenges arise. Given the rapid development of the Charity in the last three years, the Trustees have decided to undertake a period of reflection on how we have developed so far and to consider the direction and sustainability of the Charity. To assist with that, we applied to Lloyds Bank Foundation Operational Development Programme. We are pleased to have been given a place on the Programme and started the process in January 2025.

We are aiming to recruit new Trustees during 2025.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Management Committee is made up of Area Convenor team members and key role holders (comms, evaluations, Volunteer Coordinator). Please see the above structure chart. They meet monthly to discuss and be updated on finances, safeguarding, training and developments as they arise.

We are pleased to announce that in December, we recruited a new Safeguarding Lead, Chichi Ezech, following the resignation of Lucile Bertolaso as Lead. We thank Lucile for her contribution as Lead and for remaining part of the safeguarding team. Chichi brings experience and expertise from her professional role in Social Services and we are already seeing the benefit of her joining us.

Our Volunteer Coordinator gave in her resignation in December and left the charity in January 2025. We are considering how the administrative team might be restructured to meet the charity's needs.

The Management Committee and the Trustees have been on a steep learning curve over the last few years, much of it has been knowledge acquired to meet challenges as they arise. We have benefited from formal training such as that delivered by Right to Remain which gave us a better overview of the asylum system and made us aware of the valuable resources that are available to us through them. We have also benefited from media training by IMIX and taken advantage of other training opportunities.

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN OPERATIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS DURING 2024

The context in which the Charity operates, and the needs of the refugees and asylum seekers it seeks to support, are constantly changing and evolving. Compared to previous years there were five significant developments during 2024 that are highlighted here and described in greater detail in later sections.

Increase in the number of Afghan families arriving under resettlement schemes: 2024 saw the arrival of another 22 Afghan families made up of 95 individuals under the two resettlement schemes for Afghan nationals. We are now supporting 58 resettled Afghan families (287 individuals) in total. This group have full entitlement to benefits, to work and further education on arrival. They move into furnished accommodation. The primary caseworkers for this group in most areas of the county are the Refugee Council and, in Dacorum, the Humanitarian team at Dacorum Borough Council, with HWR volunteers providing befriending support to arriving families across the county.

Accelerated processing of asylum claims leading to greater “churn” in the system: the charity is providing support in six of the nine contingency asylum sites (mostly hotels) in the county and to some asylum seekers living in dispersed (self-catering) accommodation. Asylum seekers receive minimal subsistence and little practical support, have no right to benefits or to work and can only access government-funded ESOL and other types of further education after six months. There has always been some turnover or “churn” in asylum seekers living in contingency accommodation as

people were moved, often at short notice, to dispersed accommodation or other sites in the Home Office contracted estate. The welcome increase in positive decisions during the year has significantly increased the churn as this group (referred to as 'positive move-ons' by local and national authorities) move out of asylum accommodation and into the community, creating space for new arrivals. Any vacancies in the contingency asylum sites are quickly filled by new arrivals to the country, or by people transferred from other sites that have been closed as part of efforts to reduce the number of sites and overall expenditure. In some contingency sites, the Charity has seen a churn rate of more than 80%.

An increase in the number of asylum seekers being housed in dispersed accommodation: 2024 also saw an increase in the numbers of dispersed asylum seekers in the county. This change has several implications for HWR and its volunteers. Communicating with asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation is difficult because HWR is rarely informed about where they are located, when they arrive or leave, and we are not able to communicate with them to offer support until they find their way to us.

Changes in the demographic makeup of asylum seekers being supported: whereas previously the residents in the hotels supported by HWR volunteers were, for the most part, families, 2024 saw the arrival of significant numbers of single men as a result of the closure of hotels housing single males in other areas of the country. This has created challenges for HWR and its volunteers as the needs of single men are significantly different from those of families with children. Volunteers who may have joined the charity to support homework clubs, have found it challenging to adjust to the changed pattern of needs and the altered dynamics in the communal spaces in the hotels.

These changes, especially the increased churn within the system, make it challenging to put a figure on the number of asylum seekers supported by HWR during 2024. We consider that 1900 is a conservative view of the number of asylum seekers to whom HWR provided some form of support during 2024.

A significant increase in the number of 'positive move-ons' requiring support after leaving contingency accommodation: the faster processing of asylum claims has resulted in a significant increase in the numbers given Leave to Remain and having to leave the contingency accommodation and establish themselves in the community. During 2024 HWR significantly developed the support provided to this group. These people have several essential tasks to deal with (including finding accommodation, claiming benefits, searching for work) within a short time frame. Apart from their legal obligation to prevent homelessness among families with children under 18 and those with health issues, county and district authorities owe no duties to this group in addition to those owed to other people facing homelessness, nor is there any tailored support to help them to settle in their communities. Part of the national increase in number of homeless and rough-sleepers has been attributed to the increase in the numbers being granted Leave to Remain.

Varying approaches have been adopted by district authorities in Hertfordshire to provide support to this group. Dacorum Borough Council has had to cope with a high number of positive move-on cases and its staff have worked hard to avoid homelessness and rough-sleeping by working creatively with private landlords and collaborating closely with the HWR Dacorum team which provides information about positive decisions and eviction dates, liaises with the Dacorum Borough Council team and those with positive decisions with the aim of making what is often a very difficult transitional stage easier to understand. The HWR team also provides practical support through the provision of donated and purchased household items.

We are also supporting refugees who have been placed in housing in the county by local authorities from outside the county, and some Ukrainian refugees, who find us by word of mouth, through our website or by referral from other organisations.

Overall, the increase in numbers and the addition of the new positive move on group of people have required significant additional resources in terms of volunteer time, diversification of support and funding. We have coped well with addressing increased and changing needs but we envisage that we need to adapt further, particularly with regard to collaborating with other organisations to develop more drop ins rather than providing support in contingency accommodation so that we can continue to support those who have received leave to remain and provide more accessible support to dispersed asylum seekers and refugees from other communities.

ADVISORY GROUP

HWR's Advisory Group is made up of 15 refugees and asylum seekers of 7 different nationalities living in different areas of Hertfordshire. Advisory Group members meet regularly with Trustees to discuss issues and ensure that the voice of 'users' of HWR services are included in decisions about the planning and delivery of support, and in the development of the Charity.

2024 was the Advisory Group's first full year of operation following its establishment in October 2023. As part of the Advisory Group's development and refinement, Terms of Reference were approved in April 2024 and the two-way flow of information established between its meetings and the monthly Management Committee. To encourage exchange and discussion by members between their meetings with trustees, a 'members-only' WhatsApp group was set up in October 2024.

Five Advisory Group meetings were held during 2024 – four on Zoom and one face-to-face. The physical meeting took place in April, immediately prior to the AGM. This was the first occasion on which members had met each other in-person and it was a happy, positive occasion. As part of the AGM, a panel of Advisory Group members spoke about themselves and the challenges they face. Advisory Group members also participated in the social event for volunteers in December 2024 and so were able to meet HWR volunteers from other areas as well as those they already knew from their own areas.

Issues raised by Advisory Group members led directly to a range of actions and follow-up by the Charity, some of which are summarised below.

An October 2023 request by an Advisory Group member for help in finding legal aid-funded immigration and asylum lawyers prompted analysis by HWR that revealed the absence of any such providers in the whole of Hertfordshire. HWR then identified legal aid-funded lawyers with capacity for new clients in Luton. Starting in November 2023 HWR began introducing, and in many cases taking, clients to Luton. In this way 50 asylum-seeking clients from Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield were provided with legal support between November 2023 and December 2024. The results of the October 2023 analysis were shared with Herts County Council (HCC) and contributed to their contracting Citizens Advice Stevenage to provide immigration and asylum advice in Hertfordshire starting in mid-2024.

Coping with the 'cost of living crisis' and the need to support refugees to find employment were recurring themes in the Advisory Group meetings and led to actions including:

- Circulation of the ‘Signposting for Support’ guidance developed by HCF to refugees and volunteers
- Referrals of individuals to the Refugee Employment Programme (REP) and Employability for Overseas Nationals (EON) programmes managed by the East of England Strategic Migration Partnership.
- Use of HWR’s network of volunteers to identify openings and links with potential employers – which resulted in one member (an Architecture graduate) starting her first job with a London-based practice in January 2024.
- Requests by refugee members for help in moving from Biometric Residence Permits (BRP) cards to the new eVisa system led, in November 2024, to HWR developing its own guidance for use by refugees and by HWR volunteers supporting refugees locally, and to link the practical, in-person support offered by Migrant Help to local needs in Dacorum.
- Advisory Group members also raised their concern at the exceptionally high costs faced by refugees applying for UK citizenship (£1630 per adult). This issue was raised by HWR in its correspondence and meetings with new MP’s following the General Election.

The churn in asylum seekers also has an impact on the Advisory Group, with some being transferred at short notice to accommodation in other parts of the country and others being granted Leave to Remain (LTR) and so crossing to the ‘refugee member’ category. Consequently, it is necessary to regularly recruit new members to ‘refresh’ the asylum-seeking members. During the year we were delighted that two members received their LTR. Unfortunately, one (who had been moved to west London after the Advisory Group was established) has been rough sleeping in London since October 2024 whilst working shifts as a barista. HWR continues its efforts to link him to other charities and housing groups and continues to provide limited support during this period of hardship.

The Trustees are very grateful to the members of the Advisory Group for their contribution.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

We continue to be very definitely a volunteer-led organisation. The Trustees do not envisage that changing. We now have more than 160 volunteers. There is of course a turnover of volunteers as some leave the area and circumstances change for others, but we are encouraged that many of our volunteers have been with us for several years and we were able to recruit 51 new volunteers in 2024. We are constantly amazed by our volunteers’ commitment, enthusiasm and compassion. The wider use of Monday.com helps the Trustees to evidence and celebrate this.

Notwithstanding the strength of our volunteer force, we cannot offer the same level of support across the county and the need for support is growing. We are supporting more refugees and asylum seekers. We are diversifying the support we offer as we adapt to support those who have received Leave To Remain and are settling in the county. We need to recruit more volunteers, if we are to provide a comparable range of support across the county.

The Trustees are conscious that some of the support we provide places an emotional strain on our volunteers and that some volunteers, particularly those who are Area Convenor Team members, are contributing amounts of time to the charity which, coupled with the challenges of trying to meet complex and increasing needs, is placing them under an unsustainable burden. The Trustees are actively trying to address these issues by providing more training opportunities, clarifying our expectations of our volunteers, explaining the boundaries within which volunteers must work, providing more opportunities for volunteers to share experiences and raise concerns through

informal “Table Talk” sessions and training. The Trustees are confident that the work they are undertaking with the Lloyds Bank Development Programme will contribute to this process.

We were delighted that our Trustee and Area Convenor Veronica Raymond won the Caring category of the North Herts Local Hero award in March. The short film made by North Herts Council was an opportunity to showcase the role of volunteers generally and featured a Syrian refugee who is on our Advisory Board.

We are proud to report that the Refugee Council has nominated us for the King’s Award for Voluntary Service. We hope that we will be successful in recognition of all the amazing work our volunteers do.

DIRECT SUPPORT PROVIDED BY OUR VOLUNTEERS

The support we provide aims to address the needs of different groups and reflects the context in which we provide support and the availability of resources. Our website and social media record many of the activities and events organised by the Charity.

Resettled refugees

We continue to offer befriending support to refugees who arrive under the resettlement schemes, supplementing the support they receive from their caseworkers. This support ranges from language support, to help with sourcing additional household goods, school related support, providing opportunities for people to get together and to meet people from their wider communities. Most befriending support is provided in refugees’ homes, but this year has seen the development of drop in sessions hosted by the Refugee Council and, in the case of Dacorum Borough Council, a women’s group. Our volunteers provide support to these initiatives.

Many of the Syrian families whom we have supported are thriving and no longer need any, or the same level of, support from HWR. We are pleased to report that significant numbers of them have obtained British citizenship. We continue to support some families and volunteers remain in contact in many cases. Our primary focus now is on supporting Afghan resettled families.

Several members of the Advisory Group are drawn from the resettled Syrian families that HWR has supported and we are pleased that they want to contribute to the development of the Charity.

Asylum seekers

The range of support provided by HWR to asylum seekers in contingency accommodation varies according to the availability of local volunteers and the willingness of the accommodation managers to engage with the Charity. We offer at some but not all locations:

- English classes – open to all, with different classes to address different levels where possible
- childcare so that parents with young children, who are unable to attend college because of this, can attend classes
- opportunities to cook – most asylum seekers do not have the facilities to cook for themselves
- free shops for clothes sourced from donations from supporters, Goods for Good and One Impossible Thing

- art and craft sessions
- education support: liaising with Herts County Council Admissions team, colleges and schools, accompanying families to inductions, sourcing school uniform, shoes and equipment
- a testimony project which gives asylum seekers the opportunity to record their story so that they can make best use of their time when they get to see a solicitor or have to pursue their claim without legal advice
- introductions to Legal Aid immigration solicitors: Hertfordshire is a legal aid immigration advice desert but we have identified some firms outside the county who are prepared to take on asylum seekers whom we refer to them
- homework clubs
- play groups
- outings to local places of interest
- SIM cards provided by Vodafone – essential for connecting with Migrant Help, solicitors and friends and family and for accessing eVisas
- clothing vouchers for new arrivals and for school uniform provided by the Church of Latter-day Saints and in part by HCC Housing Support Fund
- listening and advice: this may take the form of helping people to contact Migrant Help, school or college or simply passing the time of day with someone who feels isolated

Positive move-ons

In some locations we operate through drop ins rather than in the asylum accommodation. In those locations, positive move ons can continue to access the same support as asylum seekers. The increase in the numbers of positive move-ons, most of whom cannot access HWR support once they leave the contingency accommodation is causing us to consider how to develop the drop in model elsewhere, working in partnership with other organisations.

This group face significant challenges regarding housing and adjusting to all the practicalities of integrating into their communities. In some cases, people move into unfurnished or partially furnished accommodation and do not have the financial resources to buy essentials such as beds and white goods, or find the bureaucracy associated with being a tenant difficult to understand. HWR is adapting to try to address this group's needs. This requires more funding and more effort on the part of our volunteers. In 2024 we helped in the region of 150 people move into accommodation – sourcing and organising white goods, household items and furniture, making and supporting applications to grant making bodies for individuals/families, helping to navigate the benefits system, obtain eVisas, open bank accounts, deal with Council Tax, utilities, school and college changes.

Collaborative working

HWR collaborates with other organisations that can support refugees and asylum seekers to ensure that they are aware of their needs, and where support is offered, acts as a bridge between providers and those who would benefit from that support, by virtue of our first-hand relationships. Here are some examples of collaborative working:

- We hosted an Education Fair which was attended by over 50 people of 22 nationalities, with a 60%/40% split between asylum seekers and refugees. Seven organisations took part: West Herts College; Community Action Dacorum; South Hill Centre, Steps2Skills; Herts Services for

Young People; the Employability for Overseas Nationals Programme and the DENS employment team. The Fair enabled local providers to explain what they offer to refugees and asylum seekers and gave them access to people they sometimes struggle to engage with. Among the follow up actions was a course provided by Hart Learning and Development, which led to a recognised qualification in Work Skills.

- We worked with Emmaus who offered us furniture as part of their solidarity programme which was distributed to 10 households.
- We hosted, with Hertfordshire Asian Women's Association, a picnic so that resettled Syrian refugees and newly arrived Afghan refugees could get together.
- In June we were pleased to showcase the words and art from over 100 refugees and asylum seekers who contributed to the Visions of Home display as part of Refugee Week. The St Albans Museum and Gallery hosted a workshop for asylum seeker children from Welwyn and Hatfield hotels, and they created bunting, which was on display inside the building, along with a slideshow. Outside there were panels on the railings which was a good way for passers-by to see the artwork and think about the situation of asylum seekers. There were visits by the Mayor and St Albans MP Daisy Cooper, as well as a piece in the BBC Beds Herts and Bucks website as well as the Herts Advertiser and Mix FM Radio Four refugee artists' work was on display at the St Albans Art Society Summer Exhibition.
- In August, the weekend after the riots and working with the Masorti Synagogue, we organised a picnic fun day for Hatfield asylum seekers in a local park. We debated whether to go ahead given that the riots had started elsewhere the weekend before, but it was a joyous occasion for the 35 adults and 15 children from at least 14 countries who joined in, some of whom had not been out for days.
- In October, Halloween gifts distributed in conjunction with Herts Community Foundation.
- In December there was a whole range of festive parties and gifts for asylum seekers sourced from Goods For Good and several local churches and community groups.

The year saw many examples of refugees and asylum seekers helping each other and supporting the Charity:

- Members of the Advisory Group contributing their time and views to help the Charity identify priorities
- Barbering at the Welwyn hotel from the brother of a refugee on our Advisory Group.
- At Ramadan local refugees took Iftar meals to one of the hotels and gifts were distributed at Eid.
- Learners helping each other at ESOL classes.
- People acting as informal translators to help us understand needs and communicate how we can help.
- Shared meals for resettled Afghan refugees at Refugee Council sessions.
- Refugee artists donating their work to Dontsendmeacard.

A list of the organisations we work with is provided at the end of this report.

Bike scheme

In 2024 we received, repaired and delivered over 100 bikes across Hertfordshire as well as repairing countless others. We always give out a helmet, USB rechargeable lights and a lock with each bike. Over 50 of these bikes went to asylum seekers in hotels, some hotels are in remote locations and asylum seekers cannot access public transport. With regret, we decided part way through the year to stop providing bikes to asylum seekers in hotels. The churn in asylum seekers makes it too difficult to meet demand so we now focus on providing bikes to those with refugee status.

Providing bikes has a positive impact on physical and mental wellbeing, makes getting to school and work easier, and opens up access to local amenities.

INDIRECT SUPPORT

Some volunteers, primarily the Trustees and Management Committee, work behind the scenes for the benefit of refugees and asylum seekers. This takes a variety of forms, some of which are explained below.

Advocacy

We see it as a fundamental part of our role to advocate for refugees and asylum seekers. To that end, Trustees and members of the Management Committee attend meetings at local, county and regional level with the purpose of bringing the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers to their attention.

We have also established relationships that allow us to provide feedback to the Home Office and Clearsprings, the contracted providers of asylum accommodation and other limited support in Hertfordshire. By way of example, the introduction of eVisas in place of Biometric Residence Permits as the primary means for those with refugee status has been problematic, particularly for those in the positive move on process because it impacts on their ability to open bank accounts, claim benefits, prove right to rent and to employment. We see these issues first hand as people come to us asking for support, often with issues relating to the instability of the eVisa system or lack of follow through with other government departments, errors in the generation of eVisas or lack of familiarity with the changes on the part of other services such as Department of Work and Pensions and banks. HWR is well placed to flag these issues.

We consider that the Charity's standing with other organisations which is built on our practical interactions with refugees and asylum seekers is particularly important: those who are making decisions about these groups are often remote from them and do not have the hands-on involvement and understanding that we have. We were pleased to be invited by Herts County Council to take part in their conference focusing on refugees and asylum seekers. One of our volunteers facilitated a discussion with a panel of people who have been granted Leave To Remain. They shared their experiences of the challenges they faced as asylum seekers and are facing as they settle in their communities.

Our Area Convenor teams wrote to all 12 Hertfordshire MPs asking them to sign up to the Fair Begins Here Parliamentary Promise and this resulted in some extra meetings, to complement those that had already been initiated. David Taylor MP for Dacorum, Kevin Bonavia MP for Stevenage and Daisy Cooper MP for St Albans are engaging directly with the charity.

In November we published the report **Forced to Flee**: testimonies of young refugees in Hertfordshire. This was the result of interviews conducted by Dr Marianne Coleman with 35 young male asylum seekers about how they came to the UK. The report dispels the myth that young men arriving on our shores are just economic migrants, our report has found that young male asylum seekers arriving in Hertfordshire fled their homeland because of ill treatment and fear of persecution. The report attracted positive attention, was featured in a news clip on regional Heart Radio and there was a full length interview on Mix FM.

Gathering information and evaluating our work

Over the last year we have continued to strengthen the methods we use to evaluate the difference the Charity is making. We have now rolled out across the Charity the use of a database called Monday.com, as a tool to measure how much work the volunteers are doing each and every day. This data also demonstrates what the focus of our work is. The results are staggering: for example, during January and February 2025, our volunteers gave 2684 hours of their time (direct work 2110 hours, indirect work 574 hours). 31% of the time was spent in providing ESOL/language support. Generally, this strand of support takes up a third of our volunteers' time each month. There are various contributory factors to this figure. Asylum seekers cannot access college for the first six months after they arrive. Many ESOL courses have a once a year start date in September. Colleges only offer between two and a half and five hours a week ESOL and many asylum seekers continue to attend our classes even when studying at college. 10% of volunteer time was spent on sourcing and providing goods. 8% was spent on supporting those with positive decisions to move into accommodation and 10% was spent on listening and advice, which includes advice given to those granted leave to remain relating to transitional arrangements.

Recording volunteer activity is invaluable in several ways. It gives the Trustees a clear picture of the amount and range of support provided; it allows us to acknowledge and celebrate that support; and it gives us information that is useful when we apply for funding or other forms of recognition.

We undertook our first volunteer survey in September. Over one third of our volunteers responded and provided really useful feedback. 93% of volunteers who responded told us that they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their experience of volunteering with HWR. 85% said they were very likely to continue to volunteer with HWR. The volunteer survey showed that, overall, volunteers are satisfied with the charity and their role in it. A small group has been established to review the findings and ensure the feedback was considered and acted on where appropriate. As a result, we have revitalised our training programme and are sending monthly updates to volunteers to advertise new volunteer opportunities and provide more information about what is happening across the county.

We have been piloting an ESOL survey with some of our ESOL teachers and their students to find out how they feel about the classes. The aim for the forthcoming year is to roll this survey out across the whole of the County.

We continue to collate case studies from those we support which provide powerful testimonies to the difference the work of our volunteers makes to people's lives.

Communications

The Comms team aims to raise awareness of our work and the situation of asylum seekers and refugees, to encourage donations and recruit more volunteers. 2024 has seen developments that

have made our external facing presence more accessible and effective and our internal processes more robust.

Here are some highlights:

- Our website is now more readily accessible to users and has new pages on partnership working and help for new arrivals. The website attracted 9,000 unique visits and nearly 22,000 page views in 2024
- Over 300 enquiries to our website, an increase of over 100 from the previous year, from potential volunteers, refugees and asylum seekers asking for support and other organisation looking for support for refugees and asylum seekers or offering their support
- Increased presence and traffic on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (now X). We are gradually moving from X to BlueSky and we have set up a Threads account
- the supporters' newsletters are receiving positive feedback

PRIORITIES

The priorities set for 2024 were:

- To work to increase the sustainability of the Charity. We have secured funding from a number of different sources. Our volunteer numbers have increased and area teams strengthened. However, circumstances are constantly changing and we need to continue to review and adapt the support the Charity offers
- Work to increase diversity and inclusion throughout the Charity. We have a new trustee and have widened the Advisory Board. We are attracting volunteers from a range of different ethnicities and some of the people we support are contributing to the Charity in a voluntary capacity. We will continue to do this next year
- Continue to support refugees and asylum seekers whilst responding to changing circumstances, working with our partners. We have described throughout this report how we have done this and will continue to do this. We are thankful for the donations and grants that have enabled us to do this
- Develop our volunteer workforce. We have described how we have done this in our report and this area is one of our priorities for 2025
- Establish robust measures to evaluate the impact of the Charity. As noted in the report, we have made considerable progress with this and work is ongoing

Our priorities for 2025 are:

- To create a Volunteering Development Programme
- To explore the scope for strategic engagement and practical collaboration with at least one partner organisation, in order to deliver better services for refugees and asylum seekers
- To recruit three new trustees, at least one with lived experience, and review the Board's performance twice annually
- To explore how HWR, through its volunteers, can better support and add value to wider efforts to improve employability
- To increase the sustainability of the Charity by streamlining our management structure to be more effective, including the potential for paid for management support (funding dependent)
- To review the way we work with our Advisory Group to ensure that their views are heard and acted upon both within HWR and in the wider community

- To strengthen our advocacy work, making greater use of the experiences and voices of the refugees and asylum seekers whom we support
- To ensure that we continue to explore and implement methods to better monitor and evaluate our work.
- The Trustees are working with the Lloyds Bank Development Foundation to review our mission and purpose and to consider the robustness of our systems. This will help us to define and achieve our priorities over the coming year.

WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

We continue to work with many organisations in Hertfordshire and some outside

- the East of England Local Government Association on resettlement and asylum seeker related issues
- the Refugee Council who are the contracted caseworkers for many of the Afghan evacuees and some of the original Syrian resettled families
- the Humanitarian team at Dacorum Borough Council who are the caseworkers for some of the resettled Afghan evacuees and are stepping up to support former asylum seekers to make a positive move on to permanent accommodation once leave to remain is granted
- the Humanitarian team and others at Herts County Council
- the Red Cross
- Migrant Help
- Flourish who fund cookery and art activities and to whom we have referred those in need of mental health support
- the Hertfordshire New Migration Partnership which we Co-Chair
- The South Hill Centre and Alexandra Road Congregational Church, both in Hemel Hempstead, who provide the venues for our drop ins and a range of other support
- Goods for Good who have generously provided clothing, toiletries and SIM cards
- Alternatives who provide baby boxes
- One Impossible Thing who provide trainers
- Community Action Dacorum and West Herts College with whom we have collaborated on various ESOL related projects
- Beauty Banks for toiletries
- The Vineyard Verso Church St Albans
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Communities 1st
- GoVolHerts
- Hertfordshire Asian Women's Association
- Herts Help
- Hertfordshire Services for Young People
- Herts Young Homeless
- Herts Sports Partnership
- Emmaus
- The churches of St Mary Magdalene and Peartree Christchurch in Welwyn Garden City with whom we work on the asylum seekers' cooking project and St John's Church in Hatfield

- The Hospice of St Francis for wellbeing walks
- Islamic Relief
- Sebby's Corner in Barnet
- Hertford Pantry
- DENS
- Stevenage World Forum
- Stevenage Borough Council
- North Herts Council
- St Albans District Council
- Broxbourne Muslim Community
- Churches Together Broxbourne

TREASURER'S REPORT

2024 was a record year for HWR in terms of both receipts and payments. The year saw a significant increase in our activity in support of asylum seekers, and in support of those receiving leave to remain and setting up their new homes. These programmes are reflected in our large charitable payments for the year for clothing, household goods and financial support. Our overall payments for the year were £122,427 (2023: £96,612), with charitable payments of £86,908 (2023: £61,678) and core salary and related costs of £33,445 (2023: £31,295.)

Our receipts for the year were £162,035, a very significant increase by comparison with £70,679 in 2023. The restricted receipts included new grants of £52,231 to meet core costs over both 2024 and 2025, with almost half of that total being carried forward at the end of the year. We received restricted grants of £62,749 to fund charitable payments and used almost all of these funds over the year. Our unrestricted receipts from local authorities were significantly higher than in 2023, and included reimbursement of previous charitable payments by Hertfordshire County Council under the Household Support Fund, and funding from Dacorum Borough Council for our furniture storage costs and for the premises for one of the weekly drop-in centres.

Much of our volunteer activity does not involve charitable payments and is not reflected in our financial results except by the increase in the cost of volunteer coordination and administration. We rely on the time, effort and expertise given so generously by our volunteers, including the management group. This generosity is fundamental to the Charity's character and operations, and we do not believe it is appropriate to assign a monetary value to it for the purposes of the accounts.

Support from the broader community is also fundamental to HWR, both from our members and registered supporters and from the general public. This includes significant financial support, and we would particularly like to thank all those who have contributed to our appeals and donated so generously in 2024. We receive many direct individual donations as well as donations from congregations and members of community organisations and contributions through fundraising events. This generosity has helped us to finish the year with increased unrestricted reserves: excluding the unrestricted grant received for salary costs, unrestricted reserves at the end of the year were £39,489 (2023: £27,148.)

2024 Payments

a) Charitable payments (71% of total payments)

We are very grateful to all the organisations and individual donors who have provided funds for 2024 to support our charitable payments:

- A grant in three instalments from the Church of Latter-Day Saints which allowed us to carry out a large programme of essential support for asylum seekers and refugee families, providing emergency hardship support, vouchers and clothing for children starting school. These grants also supported our bike scheme which continued very successfully through the year.
- A grant from Hertfordshire County Council using the Household Support Fund, to provide household goods and hardship support principally to asylum seekers and those with new leave to remain.
- Grants from Brookman's Park and Hatfield Rotary clubs to fund the laptops we provide to families and individuals particularly for educational purposes.
- A grant from DF Foundation which will be used to help families with the greatest needs.
- The last instalment of a grant from Mind Hertfordshire from 2023 to fund a cooking project and arts and craft activities for asylum seekers.
- A grant from HCC for a winter celebration event in Dacorum.

b) Payments for volunteer coordination and administrative support, including salaries and related costs (27% of total payments)

These core costs were funded in 2024 principally from five grants, and we are grateful to these institutions for their support:

- A new grant from the Postcode Places Trust to fund our salaries, and the balance of the similar grant received in 2022 for our administrative support post.
- A grant from Hertfordshire County Council to support the expansion of HWR's provision of services.
- A grant from Hertfordshire Community Foundation for our Volunteer Coordinator post.
- The two-year unrestricted grant to support our salaries from the Hilden Charitable Fund.

The volunteer coordinator and administrator are employed through Community Development Agency Hertfordshire, and we maintain a reserve with CDA for this purpose.

c) General administration (2% of total payments)

General administration and governance costs were £2,074 in 2023 (2022: £3,639). These include the cost of the AGM which we were again able to hold as a live meeting with a strong social element. We are very grateful for the time and effort given so generously by the unpaid volunteers in our management group.

Reserves Policy

Our policy is to have a minimum level of available reserves equal to three months' operating costs for the Charity.

The Annual Accounts for 2024 and the Examiner's letter are attached. We are very grateful to Sean Good, our examiner who has succeeded Geoff Harper, for his support and professional expertise.

On behalf of all the Trustees of Herts Welcomes Refugees we would like to thank you all for your continued support.

Irene Austin
Chair

Adrian Ball
Treasurer



Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

**Report to the trustees/
members of**

Charity Name
Herts Welcomes Refugees

**On accounts for the year
ended**

31 December 2024

**Charity no
(if any)**

1172687

Set out on pages

1 to 3

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended

**Responsibilities and
basis of report**

As the charity trustees of the Trust, 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 Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed 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 (~~other than that disclosed below~~ *) in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

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

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed:

Sean Good

Date:

18/03/2025

Name:

Sean Good

**Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):**

Retired chartered Accountant

Address:

22 Stanhope Road

St Albans

Herts AL1 5BL

Section B

Disclosure

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Herts Welcomes Refugees

Receipts and payments accounts for the period 1 January to 31 December 2024

		£			
		Unrestricted	Restricted	Total 2024	Total 2023
Receipts					
	Private donations	27,633		27,633	29,837
	Charitable trusts and other organisations	7,287	81,702	88,989	36,328
	Local authority and other	12,135	33,278	45,413	4,514
	Total receipts	<u>47,055</u>	<u>114,980</u>	<u>162,035</u>	<u>70,679</u>
Payments					
Note 1	Charitable payments	24,556	62,352	86,908	61,678
Note 2	Volunteer coordination and administrative support, including salaries and related costs	3,331	30,114	33,445	31,295
Note 3	General administration	2,074		2,074	3,639
	Total payments	<u>29,961</u>	<u>92,466</u>	<u>122,427</u>	<u>96,612</u>
Cash funds					
	Net receipts/ (payments)	17,095	22,514	39,609	(25,933)
	Transfers between funds	(6)	6		
	Cash funds at 1 January	29,400	9,876	39,276	65,209
Note 4	Cash funds at 31 December	<u>46,489</u>	<u>32,396</u>	<u>78,885</u>	<u>39,276</u>

Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

		£			
		Unrestricted	Restricted	Total 2024	Total 2023
Cash funds					
	Cash at bank	46,489	30,753	77,242	37,633
	Balance at CDA		1,643	1,643	1,643
	Total cash funds	<u>46,489</u>	<u>32,396</u>	<u>78,885</u>	<u>39,276</u>
Other monetary assets					
	Gift aid due	95			128

Signed:

Irene Austin
Chair

Adrian Ball
Treasurer

18th March 2025

Note 1 Charitable payments from all funds by category

Category	2024	£	2023
Clothing	36,772		5,578
Household goods and furniture	17,600		2,973
Bike scheme	8,080		10,507
Activities	5,630		6,398
Financial support	4,745		11,978
Storage	4,016		
TV and licences	2,561		4,903
Computers	1,768		1,373
Phones	1,649		3,588
Support for asylum seeker applications	1,197		908
Transport	1,050		1,693
Arabic school	700		3,257
Educational support	577		214
Volunteer mileage	463		549
Driving lessons	100		100
Festival gifts			7,270
Sports			289
Other			100
Total	<u>86,908</u>		<u>61,678</u>

Note 2 Volunteer coordination and administration

Payments for volunteer coordinator, administrator and related activities

Category	2024	£	2023
Payments to CDA for salaries and related costs	31,353		28,700
DBS costs	1,116		885
Travel	401		577
Training	290		624
Utilities	233		373
Office equipment and supplies	52		137
Total	<u>33,445</u>		<u>21,884</u>

Note 3 General administration

General administration costs from Unrestricted funds

Category	2024	£	2023
Insurance	755		707
Website and publications	461		457
Website and publications prior years			747
Other	315		444
Subscriptions and courses	312		270
Safeguarding membership	145		145
Office equipment and supplies	86		369
Professional fees			500
Total	<u>2,074</u>		<u>3,639</u>

Note 4 Table of Restricted funds, Designated unrestricted funds and CDA reserve

	Opening balance	Receipts	Payments	Net	Transfer	Closing balance
£						
Restricted funds for core costs						
HCF Salary		8,672	8,672			
HCC Expansion grant		20,000	12,986	7,014		7,014
Postcode Lottery 2022 grant	3,422		3,422			
Postcode Lottery 2024 grant		23,559	5,400	18,159		18,159
Total restricted funds for core costs	3,422	52,231	30,480	25,173		25,173
Restricted funds for charitable payments						
Church of Latter Day Saints		45,575	44,646	929		929
HCC Household support grant		12,778	12,778			
Rotary Laptops		1,646	918	728		728
Herts Mind project	1,601	1,250	1,891	961		961
DF Foundation		1,000		1,000		1,000
HCC Winter Event		500	175	325		325
HWR Ukraine appeal	1,397		179	1,218		1,218
Arabic School COSARAF	738		738			
HCC locality bike scheme	450		456	(6)	6	
Library	517		98	419		419
Redmill Solutions Education Fund	108		108			
Total restricted funds for charitable payments	4,811	62,749	61,986	5,574	6	5,580
Total all restricted funds	8,233	114,980	92,466	30,747	6	30,753

	Opening balance	Receipts	Payments	Net	Closing balance
£					
Designated unrestricted funds					
Hilden Charitable Fund grant 2023	2,253		2,253		
Hilden Charitable Fund grant 2024		7,000		7,000	7,000
HWR Warm Welcome appeal	2,210	1,135	2,309	1,036	1,036
Dacorum Christmas appeal	130	165	295		
HWR Bike scheme	651	258	514	395	395
Total designated unrestricted funds	5,244	8,558	5,370	8,431	8,431

Designated unrestricted funds are included in the total Unrestricted funds at 31 December of £46,489

CDA reserve: the balance held with CDA for payroll management at 31 December 2024 was £1,643 (2023: £1,643)