



Supporting people and good causes
around Oxted, Godstone, Lingfield,
Edenbridge and surrounding villages.

Chairman's Report 2023

Registered Charity Number: 1085009

Presented at the Annual General Meeting on
Wednesday 10th May 2023

Our charity's purpose remains: the provision of support to relieve financial hardship and sickness as well as the furtherance of education, within the areas of Oxted, Godstone, Lingfield, Edenbridge and surrounding villages.

At the time of writing we have four trustees – Emma Evans, Mark Hughes, Judy Whittaker and Stephen Wilson. For the reporting year to 31st March 2023 Judy Whittaker was Chairman, Stephen Wilson was Treasurer.

The charitable activities are managed on a day-to-day basis by a management committee that includes further volunteer members – Ian Dodd, Stephen Evans, Sean O'Reilly and Valerie O'Reilly.

As our financial year began, whilst the UK had largely returned to 'business as usual' after COVID, the war in Ukraine and related factors had pushed fuel prices and inflation to levels of great concern. The rise in the cost of living over the last year has put great pressure on people at all levels. Inflation hit a 41-year high in October 2022, at 11.1%¹. Whilst easing very slightly now, and whilst state pension and benefit payments have increased broadly in line with inflation, for so many people there is more mouth than there is money. This squeeze is happening particularly to low and middle income households where wage increases are not sufficient to cover the gap. The Trussell Trust reports that food bank use in the same period as our financial reporting year increased by 37%².

It's no surprise therefore that the demand for assistance provided by our charity increased in the year and we were able to support more people, spending £9,500 on direct support (£6,000 in prior year). This 58% increase is certainly significant, although is not solely attributable to the financial climate. It must also be acknowledged that volunteers from our team have been very pro-active in building new contacts and networking within the volunteer community and with support staff from local housing associations and other charities. This has resulted in greater awareness of how St Silvan's can help and a welcome increase in applications. Over 300 people have benefited directly from our help at a rate of almost one successful application each week.

The assistance provided could be through the purchase of essential equipment such as white goods and furniture. It could be clothing, school uniform or a gas or electric meter top-up. It could also be food parcels. Our charity has been immensely grateful to the Oxted branch of COOK who have elected to use St Silvan's as part of their social responsibility programme. They donate delicious and easy-to-cook frozen ready meals each week which

¹ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/cost-of-living-and-inflation/>

² <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

our volunteers collect, store and take to client visits. These meals have provided both short term assistance and become a regular lifeline for a number of longer term cases. There's a lot to be said for having top quality food to hand at a time when physical and mental health are unlikely to be ideal.

Another concern about the impact of the cost of living crisis on our charity was our ability to fundraise as effectively as before. We rely heavily on donations from individuals and money raised from events, and charitable giving is not likely to be a priority when energy bills and mortgage payments are at such high levels.

Thankfully with the COVID situation back to normal we were able to hold our usual fundraising events, with the income level boosted for the year by virtue of two charity clay shoots organised by Keston Gun Club and another fun quiz night at Holland Sports in Hurst Green.

We benefitted from another grant from The Great Stone Bridge Trust which is ringfenced to assist our clients in the Edenbridge area, and from partnership working alongside other charitable and social organisations such as the local Roundtable and Rotary Clubs, from the Tandridge Lottery and from our collection pots in local shops and pubs.

This income ensured that whilst our charity had increased draw on our funds, that we were more than able to meet the demand. The combination of expenses and assistance given has reduced our reserve funds by some £1700 to leave a balance of £14,577 going forward into this year. Our Treasurer reports that this level of funding would sustain our charity for a period of 13 months were we only to spend from our assets. Our firm belief is that money donated to St Silvan's Area Charity is given for us to use to support local people in need in the here and now. We endeavour therefore to keep the ideal balance between maintaining a healthy asset fund to sustain us as a charity, to hold sufficient in reserve for a more significant sum should need arise, and to continue directly supporting those in need.

As ever, our charity relies on a dedicated group of volunteers who give their time so generously. This year we welcomed Ian Dodd as a new committee member. He has very quickly become a core volunteer and a valued part of our team giving many hours to our cause. It's tremendously difficult for busy people to meet the commitments of work and home, and to give their time effectively to volunteering. Visiting clients requires not only time but sensitivity, wisdom and attention to detail in delivering on the support need. Whilst everyone plays an important role in what we do, I would like to ensure that Emma Evans receives due recognition for her service to St Silvan's, manning the phone, visiting clients, forging new connections and keeping us all in line at meetings.

Stephen Wilson has provided his exemplary service as our Treasurer once again this year. His counsel and his attention to detail in managing our funds and preparing our accounts are of huge value to what we do and on behalf of our committee I offer him our very grateful thanks.

We move forward now into what is inevitably another busy year in a good position, helped by superb volunteers and committed local supporters. My thanks to all for helping ensure that people in our area continue to have the option of a helping hand from St Silvan's Area Charity at a time of need.

Judy Whittaker, May 2023