

Westbury Community Shop and Cafe Ltd

Report to Parish Council, April 2018

During the last year we have faced a number of challenges but at the end of the financial year we continue to have a social business which provides a community asset for Westbury, local employment and other opportunities for residents to be involved, a cafe which attracts people from within and outside the village, and we continue to provide the basic supplies for local residents as well as locally sourced food and craft items.

Challenges and achievements

The year has certainly not been without its problems. Staffing in particular has been difficult, and we were unable to find recruit a manager who could take on the responsibility of both the business, including the catering responsibility, and the volunteer support. We have been fortunate that Emily Winks, as a young Westbury resident, has remained in post during the year. She has made it possible to keep the shop open. During the summer and autumn of 2017, there was a very heavy burden on a few loyal volunteers who worked long hours, and we were concerned about the viability of the business at this time. However, in November we negotiated an agreement with Sarah Myers, who runs the Old Fire Station cafe in Brackley, to take on the management of the cafe in Westbury. In agreement with the committee, it was decided to reduce the shop element of the business and expand the cafe element, which was now possible with Sarah's catering experience. This decision was taken as it became clear over the first year that the while sugary drinks, sweets, milk, bread and a few basics were in demand, sales of a wider range of groceries were not viable. While this transition is still in progress, it seems to have been a successful decision. Sarah has also brought in more staff, and the opening hours have been extended and the menu expanded. This means we can cater better for the sporting events at weekends.

The cafe would not survive without the volunteer support we have from the village and nearby. From the start, we had hoped for, and the business plan assumed, stronger volunteer support, but we have had only a small core of very loyal and hardworking volunteers who have made the enterprise possible. As ever, we would welcome, and need, more involvement.

We have provided an opportunity for youngsters to volunteer within the village to carry out their Duke of Edinburgh medal requirements and school requirements for work experience in the summer holidays, and we are pleased that this has been successful.

As a Community Benefit Society, we hold an Annual Members Meeting annually, and following this we consulted our members on the changes in direction of the business, receiving positive comments about the plans for the cafe.

Financial summary

The first two years of the business have been supported by Power to Change with a grant to cover equipment for the start-up and wage costs for the first two years. Without this financial help we could not have started.

Year 2 sales were down on year 1 but with cash reserves still healthy, we hope to be able to continue in the near future, while looking for other funding opportunities such as HS2 for any new ventures based on the shop and cafe.

Without consideration of any grant support, the year 2 sales total were £39,496 (TBC), whereas the Year 1 sales total were £53,282– a fall of just under 26%. Cost of sales fell by 44% which culminated in an increase in gross profit of just 8.8% to £19,972.

After staff costs and overheads the Nett trading figure was a loss of £4,219.

Future

After the initial trial with Sarah, she is prepared to continue to help us on a more informal basis in the short term rather than a formal contract. We will maintain the association with the Old Fire Station but, with Sarah's support, we will now seek a manager for the cafe in Westbury to take forward the renewed structure and manage staff and volunteers. Dependent on finding a manager, we hope to see the cafe expand further, with some evening openings, and Sundays. However, this also depends on the commitment of local residents and volunteer support. We will continue the transition to a cafe rather than a shop, and we hope to extend the range of local goods available and to hold more events in the cafe, with better co-ordination with the village hall. For all this, we depend on the goodwill and support of Westbury residents for it is this goodwill which will ultimately determine the longer term future of the shop and café..

Finally, I would like to thank the committee of John Heal, Ros Christian, Suzie Walton, Hazel Rainbow and Jo Lee. The team has worked extraordinarily hard over the last year to keep this community facility going, doing many things beyond any expectation at the beginning of the venture.

Sue Lucas, Chair, Westbury Community Shop and Cafe Ltd.