WRCC

Annual Review
2016/17

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Statement from Chair of Trustees

"This has been another challenging and successful year for WRCC.

The rebranding has been achieved and the organisation restructured to ensure that we continue to develop and deliver the services that enable our rural communities to thrive.

Inevitably with change comes some disruption and I would like to thank all the staff and the volunteers for their patience, understanding and commitment to WRCC.

The Board of Trustees has worked hard to guide WRCC towards a bright future and I am absolutely certain that, through creative and exciting developments, we will continue to deliver an exceptional service to the rural communities throughout Warwickshire".

Rev. Viv Baldwin

WRCC Back & 4th

This year has been a busy one for the Back & 4th team.

Following the award of £70k funding from Warwickshire County Council's Transformation Fund, we have been able to extend our community transport service in to Rugby Borough. A Rugby Services Manager was appointed in August 2016 and new premises were sourced and occupied from December 2016.

During the year we purchased 2 wheelchair accessible minibuses for Rugby and recruited 4 new volunteers to support our community group hire service in the borough. Our first community booking was delivered in November and by the end of the financial year a total of 206 passenger journeys have been provided to voluntary and community groups within the Borough.

In the same period, 406 bookings were provided by our group hire services in South Warwickshire which resulted in 10,093 individual passenger journeys.

Our Shoppa-Hoppa assisted shopping service continued to provide a weekly service to isolated people living in Leamington and Warwick. The service collects passengers from their front door, transports them to a local supermarket where they are met with a volunteer assistant who helps them collect their shopping.

Back & 4th call upon the services of 20 volunteer drivers, all of whom undergo Midas Training and an enhanced DBS check.

WRCCCommunity Cars

Our volunteers have done an amazing job again this year!

Before handing the scheme over to VASA at the end of January 2017, we were on target to deliver well over 8000 individual passenger journeys during the year.

We continued to widen the scope of the project to include more social care trips – journeys that enable people to get out of the house, meet others and participate in activities many of us take for granted.

We also continued to grow the transport delivered on behalf of West Midlands Ambulance Service and Warwickshire County Council's People Group. This work allows residents of Warwick District to access essential services, but also generated over £8000 for the project this year.

The real heroes of this project are the volunteers. Approximately 30 volunteer drivers use their own cars to provide transport to our customers, offering a friendly face and helping hand. We also couldn't do the work without the 5 office volunteers that give their time to answer the phone, take bookings and help work out which driver to pair with each drive request.

As mentioned earlier, the scheme was handed over to VASA at the end of January 2017. There were various reasons to do with scale and efficiencies that prompted this move. The main reason however was that by combining the VASA scheme with our own has enabled the combined scheme to become self-financing, securing its future for many years to come.

WRCC Housing

The rising cost of housing in rural communities continues to be a significant issue. Local shops, employment opportunities, community facilities, transport and places to live are all required for a rural community to remain vibrant, but rising house prices mean that young families find it hard to return to the very villages in which they grew up in order to raise their own families.

Older people who want to downsize are often priced-out of their local community or simply find that there are no suitable smaller homes available. Returning to live, or continuing to live, in a rural community is often not a reality for many people.

The Rural Housing Enablers continue to work with rural communities throughout Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick districts to provide evidence of housing need, canvass for suitable sites and provide the necessary background information for small rural affordable housing schemes.

Work has been undertaken within the parishes of Bishops Itchington, Brailes, Butlers Marston, Coughton, Ettington, Farnborough, Hampton Lucy, Long Itchington, Tanworth in Arden, Tysoe and Warmington & Arlescote.

Advice and guidance has been provided to many more.

Within Stratford-on-Avon District the Local Plan has now been superseded by the Core Strategy, which was adopted in July 2016. This sets out the development strategy and planning policies for the district including the allocation of housing sites along with guidance on the provision of infrastructure and services.

Four planning applications for rural affordable homes were successfully submitted to SDC's Planning Department – Great Alne, Wootton Wawen, Broom and Long Compton. All of these proposals have come about through local people having an input, starting with a housing needs survey, and will provide much needed accommodation in each village.

"In the last 25yrs we have seen young and old neighbours leave or sell-up due to high rent or, in the case of the elderly, their inability to climb stairs or cope with gardens etc. Most local children have had to move away to find accommodation including our own. If there was somewhere in the village that could be developed in sympathy with these needs, and I believe there is, we would be delighted."

Quote from one of the Housing Needs Surveys carried out in 2016/17

WRCCHalls

Village Halls have continued to play an important role in maintaining social hubs for local communities, providing an accessible arena for events, services and classes which may otherwise be unavailable through cost or location.

In order to assist the committees and trustees to manage their Halls, we have supported them through our Village Hall Advisory service. This year our work has included:

- Offering help and advice on a range of issues, including governance, licencing, and accidental damage to facilities.

- Continuing to promote the Hallmark accreditation scheme, which recognises and rewards good practice by Village Hall committees, using a national benchmark. Halls gaining Hallmark this year included Halford, Budbrooke, Broom and Napton.

- Making awards from the WRCC's Rural Initiatives fund. This year funding went to Tysoe Village Hall, for the renovation of their wooden floor, Budbrook Village Hall for a contribution towards a digital sound system and Binley Woods Village Hall to help with replacement windows.

We have also continued to produce our Community Buildings e-newsletter, which provides up-to-date information on funding, legislative changes and events.

WRCCEnergy

Unfortunately, this year witnessed a steady increase in the price of domestic heating oil, rising by nearly 50% during 2016 - 2017.

Of course, this is one of the reasons that WRCC operates the oil syndicate: off-gas households have to cope with price fluctuations that are not common in the domestic gas and electricity markets. For example, a tank of oil that cost £313 in April 2016 cost £465 by March 2017.
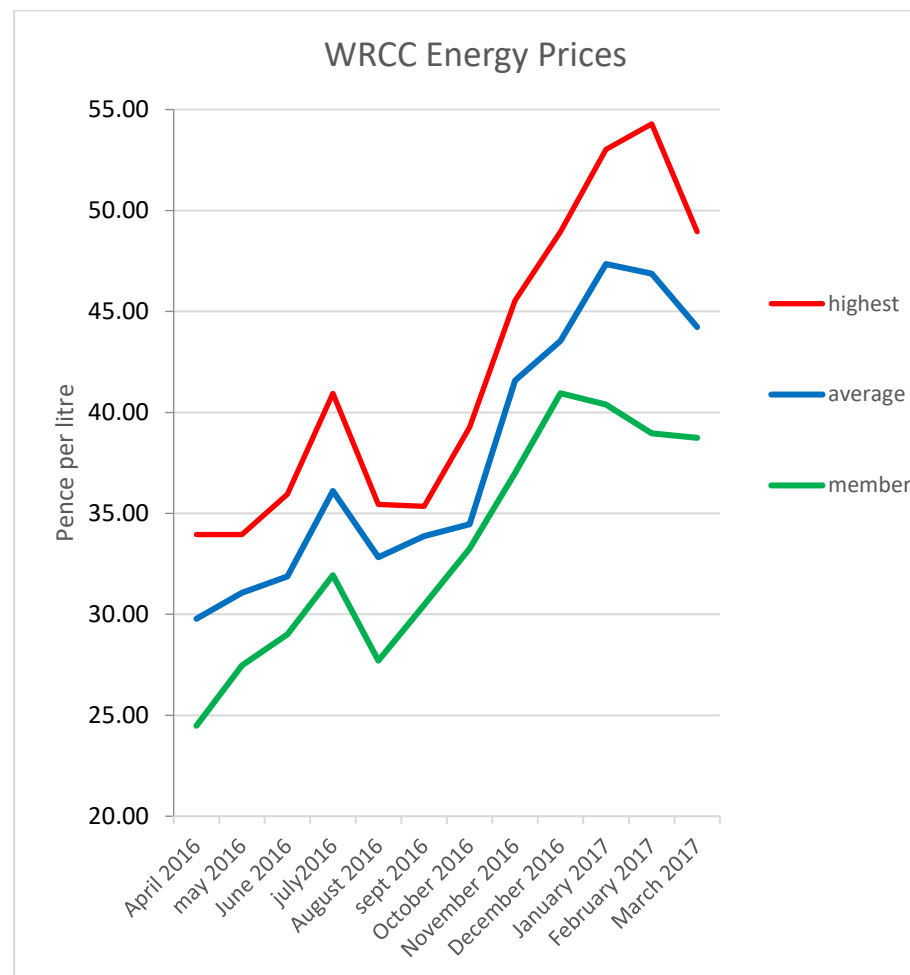
Members placed 1,078 orders during the year totalling 868,500 litres of kerosene and was delivered by 7 different suppliers.

We check prices with suppliers at the same time as every order and calculate that members saved £40,698 against average prices and £81,887 against the highest prices quoted during the year.

We consulted with members in January 2017. Members enthusiastically supported the removal of membership fees (removed in September 2017) and plans to introduce a small grant scheme for those struggling to heat their homes (coming soon).

The scheme was introduced to try to protect the most vulnerable in our rural communities, but we hope that everyone can benefit from membership.

Indeed, the savings are only achieved through volume orders - in a way, the more fortunate are able to help the more vulnerable by clubbing together.

WRCC Energy Prices

Staff

Alison Gregory - Communications & Support Officer
Barry Arthur - Driver
Barry Twyneham - Driver
Bill Grant - Driver
Carole Evered - Passenger Assistant
Carole Veness - Passenger Assistant
Colin Harris - Passenger Assistant
David Skelton - Driver
David Wright - Contract Service Manager
Fiona Henderson - Rural Housing Enabler/Village Halls Advisor
Gareth Jones - Volunteer Development Manager
Gerard Veness - Driver
Jan Lemmon - Passenger Assistant
Jane Gibson - Passenger Assistant
Jennifer Evetts - Passenger Assistant
John Crossling - WALC County Secretary
Lorraine Sayers - Passenger Assistant
Jude Henderson - Senior Project Manager
Kate Skinner - Project Manager
Kim Slater - Chief Executive
Lauren Hancox - Passenger Assistant
Margaret Moorse - Passenger Assistant
Mark French - Passenger Assistant
Mark Russell - Driver
Nicola LeMarquand - Driver
Nigel Palmer - Driver
Paul Gibson - Driver and Fleet Manager
Paul Hinks - Rugby Services Manager
Paul Seaman - Driver
Richard Price - Driver
Ruth Hawksworth - Administrator
Sarah Brooke-Taylor - Rural Housing Enabler
Sharn Dymond - Administrator

Sharon Milligan - Driver
Sophie Basi - Book-keeper
Susan Bacon - Driver/Passenger Assistant
Tracy Bailie - Passenger Assistant
All the driving and office volunteers

Trustees

WRCC would like to thank our funders

Warwickshire Rural Housing Association
AON
Stratford District Council
Warwick District Council
Warwickshire County Council
ACRE
DEFRA