

# Autism Bucks Quarterly Bulletin October 2020

The Autism Bucks quarterly bulletins are provided to inform our trustees, volunteers and sponsors of the activities, performance and plans of the charity in its aim to support autistic adults living in Buckinghamshire.

## Introduction

Autism Bucks has been busy the last few months; dealing with changes to the trustees' board, launching the Awareness Programme and further developing our plans and ideas.

Listening and responding to our members, volunteers and sponsors is guiding plans for Autism Bucks in the future. We are excited about the shape those plans are taking and are looking forward to sharing them and hearing your views.

We continue to keep in touch and make sure members remain connected through our regular virtual meetings, our website and social media; all of which have seen a significant increase in growth in a short time.

In addition the launch of our Awareness Programme has been met with unprecedented interest and the sessions so far have attracted a high level of interest and very positive feedbacks.

As we all become accustomed to this new reality we thank our members, volunteers and trustees for their continued commitment and adaptability. Keep well and stay safe.

## Trustees and Volunteers

In July the Autism Bucks AGM was carried out virtually, making it easier for more members to participate. Following presentation of annual reports everyone agreed that despite the difficulties of the current situation the charity was making some good progress.

Unfortunately, Autism Bucks was not to escape entirely from the impact of COVID-19; Martin Hillier announced that he would be stepping down from both his role as chair and trustee. Martin, who works full time for an NHS Trust, said that he was saddened to go, but due to pressure on himself and his family, as a result of COVID-19 and he did not feel he could give the attention and energy Autism Bucks needed. There was praise and gratitude for Martin in the work he had done to help Autism Bucks gain its charity status. We wish him and his family well at this time and hope to be reacquainted in the not too distant future.

A proposal was made that Zita Calkin took up the role of the chair and this was agreed unanimously by those present. Zita has many years experience in social care and health;

she currently works for NHS England as part of the learning disability and autism team for the South East.

Since the summer Autism Bucks is pleased to say it has successfully recruited to bring the board back up to 6 trustees; the board is currently:

- Zita Calkin (chair),
- Martin Hollett (treasurer),
- Sue Keating,
- Paulette Hunn (operations),
- Paula Strawbridge
- Pippa Richardson

Autism Bucks also has 4 volunteers; facilitating our peer support groups and assisting in the administration of the website and social media profile.

#### **Next Steps:**

- Continuing the development of the Autism Bucks on-boarding processes to recruit and support trustees and volunteers.

### **Membership and Group Meetings**

The move to virtual members' meetings has proved successful and popular; our membership is currently at 63, up 6 this quarter. With no sign of an imminent return to face to face meetings these virtual meetings continue to provide opportunities for socialising and support. In the future we will certainly retain use of the on-line meetings alongside our face to face to reflect members' preferences.

#### **Next Steps:**

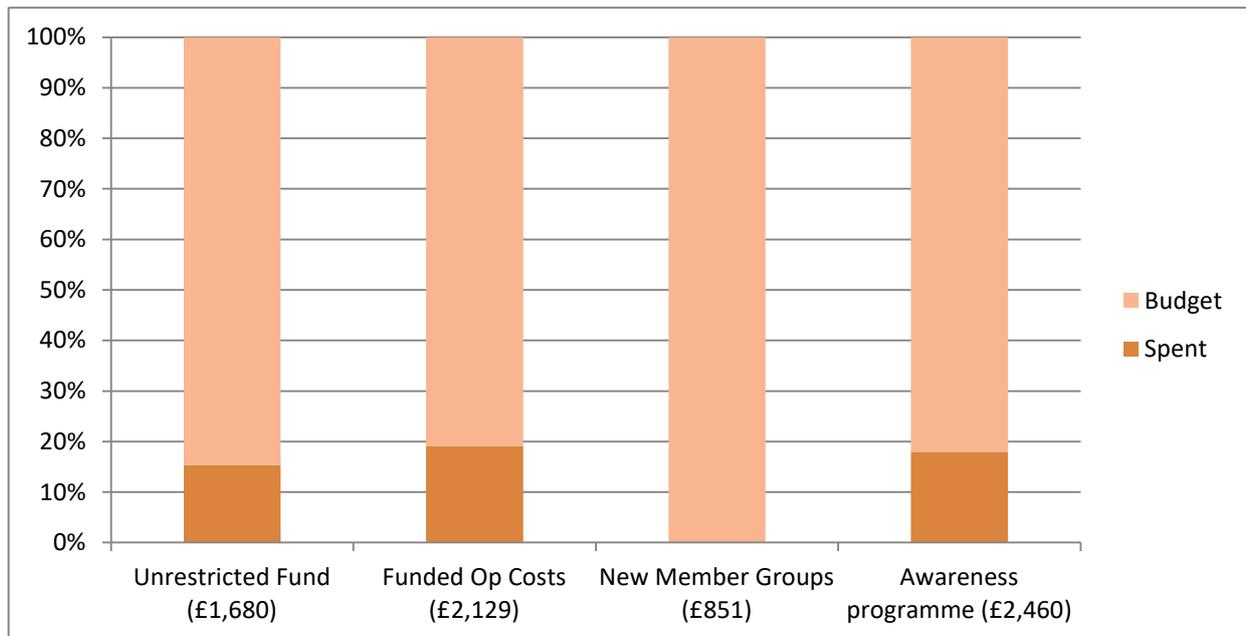
- We have been listening to autistic people and their families and are developing plans for new groups
- The ability to meet virtually will give us and individuals the opportunity to test out and establish new groups

### **Finances**

Our Finances are in good order

- Covid continues to impact our operations; we are unable to collect member subscriptions and conversely have to meet the costs of hiring venues.
- We can foresee that two of our regular sponsors have also been affected (Freemasons and Round Table) and it is likely we will not receive donations from them this year.
- We have introduced some changes in our financial practices following advice from our examiner, Jonathan Bullock CGMA ACMA, and in accordance with the regulations set by the Charities Commission and agreements linked to our grant funding:

- Our accounts are divided into 4 different funds, one the continuation of our normal account (the Unrestricted Fund) and the other three linked to money reserved for specific purposes (Restricted Funds)
- We will need to adopt a different reporting procedure with the Charities Commission at the end of the financial year and will additionally need to report on Accruals and Prepayments, but no immediate action is required.



This bar chart shows how our money is split into four funds and how much of our total budget has been spent so far this year.

- We need to adopt a reserve policy and a reserve fund of £3,000 has been proposed, although we can foresee a need to eat into that as a result of Covid
- We have changed the bank account details to reflect the change of Chair
- Our first instalment of the Grant from Bucks CC Community Prevention fund has been received and goes towards funding the Awareness Project
- Our two main projects are currently running significantly under budget:
  - Awareness Project - no hiring of venue costs and no marketing expenditure in the form of leaflets etc.
  - Planned new Social Groups have not been started due to COVID-19
- Autism Bucks Quarterly Finance Report (for Quarter 2) has been completed; it is 14 pages but does map out the four funds more comprehensively if anyone is interested.

**Next Steps:**

- Review projects to bring forward plans to benefit from current under spend
- Report to grant sponsors on progress to date

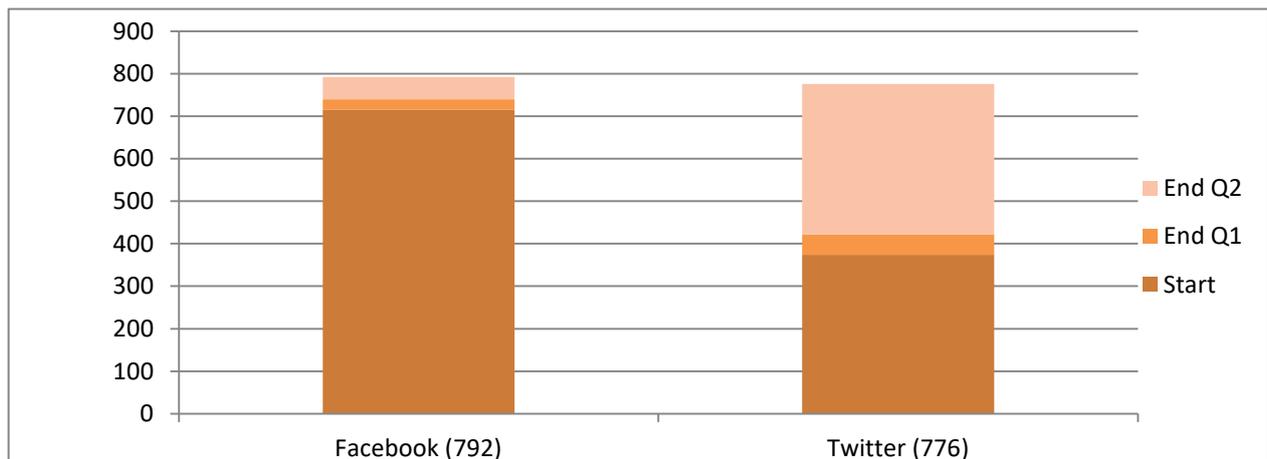
### Digital Communication Channels

**Autism Bucks Website** – trustees have been considering the role of the website and social media and how it may support the vision and aims of the charity. A proposed model is being developed and will be shared with members for feedback before progressing further.

**Virtual Meetings** – The benefits of being able to meet virtually are clear and so we plan to continue making this option available; offering a blended approach when we are able to return to face to face meetings.

**Shared cloud based area** – Adopting the use of Microsoft Office 365 for Autism Bucks has proved slower than anticipated. The trustees have agreed that recruiting some expertise will help us progress at pace and provide improved efficiency.

**Facebook and Twitter** – Continue to grow in following. Twitter has shown an unprecedented growth in the last quarter as the following bar chart shows. This is likely linked to our awareness sessions.



### Next Steps:

This area has been a steep learning curve for many of us and we thank those volunteers and members who have contributed to bringing us to our current position. We plan to develop further maturity in this area in order to optimise our digital presence and reach. If social distancing is to become part of our lives for some time to come, then this will mean further developments in the ways we can all connect and stay in touch virtually.

### The Awareness Project

Paulette and Paula have worked with members and volunteers to develop the Autism Bucks Awareness Project; delivering a range of topics providing new awareness about autism. The training will be delivered via Zoom and our YouTube channel, and include short sessions presented by experts by experience on a range of topics.

Topics that have been presented so far are:

- What is Autism with Paul Isaacs: <https://youtu.be/QTyfs2fONBc> to date 30th Oct there has been 275 views.

- Autism as a fruit salad with Paul Isaacs: <https://youtu.be/27aOdVXyAgM> to date 30th Oct there has been 97 views (this is after one week).

The response to the autism awareness sessions has been overwhelming, with people wanting to attend sessions. However, our target audience was our group members, although some members have been attending the sessions, we have had a huge response from professional and family members. A positive from the present situation of Covid 19 has been that by holding the sessions via Zoom we have reached more people and been able to record sessions. As we are not hiring venues to hold the sessions this has left us with more funds to provide more sessions.

We closed the booking for the first session at 93 attendees, with 51 people attending the live session. 42 were on a waiting list and these were sent a link to the recording. Our second session we had 78 people booked to attend the live session, with only 27 attending.

Feedback from both session has been very positive.

- A very engaging and interesting insight into the complexity of Autism.
- Thank you for the opportunity
- The session was very informative and well presented
- Brilliant first part to the Autism training, I learnt a lot more than I already knew about Autism. Can't wait for the next one!

Topic for further session are:

- Autism and sensory issues with Paul Isaacs (this session is fully booked with 92 attendees and a waiting list of 20 people).
- Autistic Parents and parenting with Georgina Watts
- Autism & exposure anxiety with Paul Isaacs
- Autism coping with death & loss with Paul Isaacs
- Neuro developmental delay and autism with Paul Isaacs
- Mindfulness and Autism with Zaffy Simone
- Awkward Demographic with Kristianne Drake
- "The double empathy problem" with Damian Milton
- Autism Bucks members talking about their experience of living with autism
- With more topic and speakers to be confirmed.

## Partners and Sponsors

In June we were informed of our successful application for funding from Buckinghamshire Council. This funding has supported the development and delivery of the Autism Bucks Awareness project.

Sponsorship from the Heart of Bucks, has in part met some of our operational costs, the remainder ring-fenced to support the development of additional member groups across Buckinghamshire.

Funding from the Beaconsfield Freemasons last year will probably not be repeated this year as the money comes from donations from individual members – they have not been able to hold any meetings.

We are in dialogue with Amersham Round Table about going out with Santa on a street collection evening in December as we have done in the past two years; Unfortunately it is unlikely the event will take place in a form we can participate in this year.

### **Feedback**

If you have any comments on this bulletin or any other aspects of our communications, we would value your feedback. We aim to continually develop and improve the way we engage and inform our members, trustees, volunteers and sponsors.

Speak to a trustee directly or email us on [autismbucks18@gmail.com](mailto:autismbucks18@gmail.com)