

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

Introduction

April this year has an added sense of hope and newness about it, as COVID restrictions start to ease and the vaccination programme continues to reach more people.

At Autism Bucks we also have a sense of optimism and anticipation as we look ahead to the possibilities for growth and development; building on all that has been achieved in such a short time (in unprecedented times). The success of the awareness programme and the continued commitment to the social groups has been fantastic – a big thank you to all of you who attended, viewed and supported.

Looking forward we have been focusing on the Autism Bucks website which we want to improve to ensure it is an effective resource for Buckinghamshire. We will be developing our next awareness programme and we are exploring ways to expand the social groups to best meet the needs of autistic people in Buckinghamshire.

We will be sharing more of our plans and asking for your input.

Trustees and Volunteers

Over the last year trustees and volunteers have been working hard to establish Autism Bucks as a charity and all that entails. Much of this background work has been administrative, to ensure the organisation is underpinned with clear and robust governance and systems to support the delivery of our plans and projects.

Through this work and whilst developing plans for the future we have identified the skills and knowledge we need to take Autism Bucks forward. With that in mind we plan to recruit to both our trustees' board and our team of volunteers and to do that we need to ensure our recruitment process is fit for purpose.

Next steps:

- Review and refine recruitment policy and process
- Review and refine on-boarding and induction process
- Develop profiles for roles within Autism Bucks aligned with plans
- Start recruitment campaign

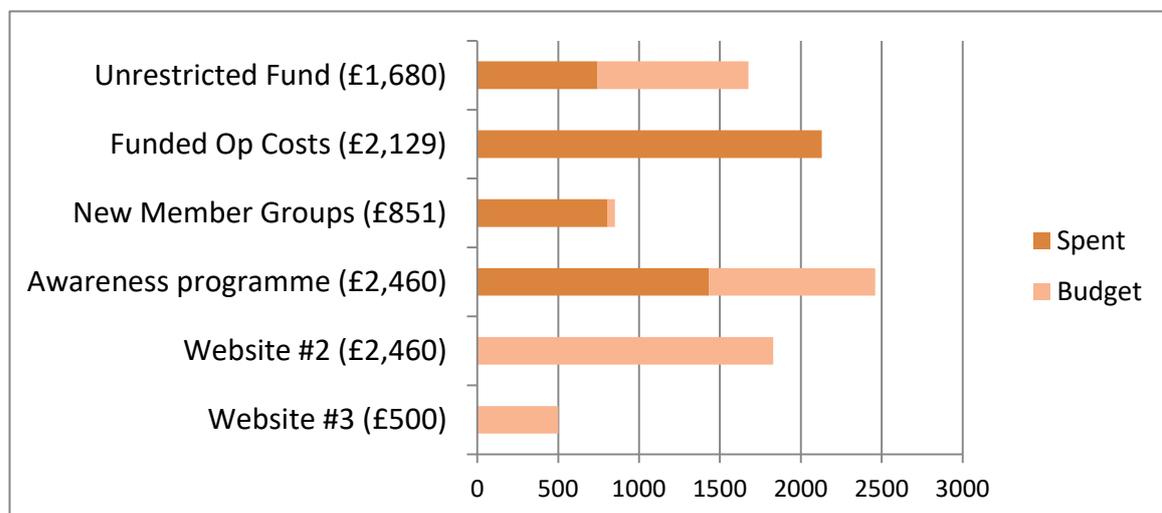
Membership and Group Meetings

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. We are mindful of government guidance and the views of our members as to the timeframe for a return to face to face meetings, currently we are looking at facilitating outdoor activities and opportunities to meet in the summer months.

Finances

Our Finances are in good order

- Covid continues to impact our operations; reduced income and no costs for hiring meeting venues
- Our income was lower than in previous years but thanks to an unexpected personal donation of £500 which has come to us via the Charities Aid Foundation, we aren't far adrift
- We have revisited budgets for existing projects and with permission from the Heart of Bucks, been able to redirect £1,830 of funding towards our website redevelopment work, which will run through the middle of 2021
- Additional Bucks CC Prevention Grant funding of £500 has been secured for another internet project and will be awarded in two parts - April 2021 and September 2021.



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

- General Operating or Unrestricted Fund – we have not spent as much because of restrictions in our operations – no venue fees, reduced fundraising etc
- Money left in our Funded Operations fund (part funded by Heart of Bucks) has been redirected to fund our Website project #2 and this fund will close after the AGM
- We have reduced the scope of our New Member Groups project, (also part funded by Heart of Bucks) and the money saved has been redirected to fund our Website project #2
- Our Awareness programme is on track and will finish in the new financial year within budget and unspent funds transferred to the General Operations Fund. An additional objective was added to this project, to run a supermarket poster campaign at a cost of £124.14. The Awareness project is part funded by the Bucks CC Community Prevention grant and is expected to run through to July 2021
- The Website project #1 was established to deliver some much needed changes to

our website and is expected to be achieved within the scope of existing contracts

- The Website project #2 has been established to refresh the overall look and feel of the website. This project is part funded by a Bucks CC Community Prevention Grant and should be completed July 2021
- Following a successful grant application, the Website project #3 will be wholly funded by a Bucks CC Community Prevention Grant and will involve a feasibility study into increasing user generated content.

(See below for more detail on Website projects)

- Autism Bucks Quarterly Finance Report (for Quarter 4) has been completed and is available on request.

Next Steps:

- Complete end of financial year reporting for examiners and the Charities Commission
- Engage with our examiner (Jonathan Bullock) to produce a set of final accounts for the AGM
- Draft Budgets for the coming year. This will be an outline budget, reflecting the uncertainties of the time; more detailed budget for each quarter in turn will be developed, with updates to the annual budget to account for changes in our operating environment
- Updates to our Finance Policy are currently in progress

Digital Communication Channels

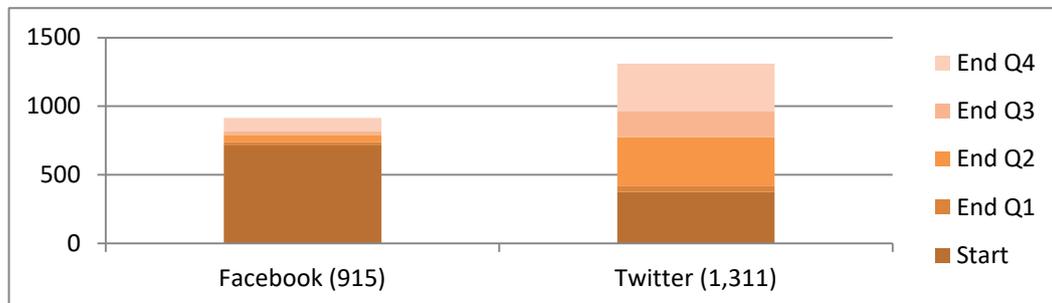
Autism Bucks Website - In accordance with our plans (Website project #1), we have temporarily closed the existing website. A slightly amended structure has been designed and agreed within the existing website constraints. New content has been drafted and agreed and this has been submitted to our service supplier for implementation week commencing 12th April 2021. It is expected that this project will involve little or no cost and is linked to our setting up some new email addresses that we will launch in May or June 2021.

Website project #2 will involve an update of the overall look and feel and will take advantage of using a newer version of the underlying software with the potential for additional functionality. This project will also see the responsibility for making updates to the website return to the trustees so that we can be more responsive in drafting and implementing changes. This project now has funding and has been scheduled for May/June 2021.

Website project #3 will investigate the feasibility of increasing the user generated content of the website; setting up a members' only facility including a chat room or message hub. The project will look at available software, lessons from other charities, costs and administration implications. This project now has funding and will run through to Autumn 2021.

Shared cloud based area – Adopting the use of Microsoft Office 365 to improve efficiency for Autism Bucks has proved slower than anticipated. However, progress is now being made with the support of relevant expertise.

Facebook and Twitter – Continue to grow in following. Our Twitter following has now overtaken Facebook!



Next Steps:

Although still finding our way, we are growing in knowledge and understanding from the experience. We are very grateful to those volunteers and members who have helped in bringing us to our current position.

- Continue to progress with website projects as planned
- Ensure feedback and testing by members and stakeholders underpins work
- Develop and recruitment to roles within Autism Bucks that better reflect the skills and knowledge necessary to take forward digital and communication plans

The Awareness Project

The team, led by Paulette, has worked with members and volunteers to develop the Autism Bucks Awareness Project; a range of varied and accessible awareness and training resources, created and delivered by autistic people and/or parent/carers of autistic people. The programme format is simple; short sessions on a given topic or theme, presented by experts by experience, followed by a short Q&A with the presenter.

Some of the topics covered include:

- What is Autism?
- Autism as a Fruit Salad
- Autism Parents and Parenting Issues
- Mindfulness & Autism
- Autism coping with death & loss
- Asperger's Covid-19 and My Coping Strategies

The current programme is delivered virtually; to date the Autism Bucks YouTube channel has had 839 views. Autism Bucks are grateful to the presenters on this programme and look forward to working with them in the future.

The awareness programme sessions are available to watch again on our [Autism Bucks YouTube Channel](#). Also, visit the Autism Bucks website and read more about the

presenters.

The Poster Campaign

Using under spend from the Awareness Project budget and following consultation with the members, we created an A4 poster with the aim to support and inform supermarket staff (and managers) as to how they can improve the shopping experience for autistic people.

We targeted some 90 supermarkets throughout county and have followed up with stores who have displayed the posters and given us some very positive feedback. Although we cannot claim any part in Morrison's announcing shopping sessions with no music and reduced lighting, we would like to feel we have made some contribution to Autism Awareness Week and plan to build on this next year.

Partners and Sponsors

COVID-19 continues to cause disruption to plans and the delivery of projects; however, we are grateful to our sponsors, Heart of Bucks and Buckinghamshire Council who have been both supportive and flexible in their responses to the situation. The original end point for work to be undertaken has been extended from 5th April to the end of July 2021. In addition, we have agreed with Heart of Bucks to re-direct funds and Buckinghamshire Council have awarded us a second Community Prevention Grant - these monies will be used to support the Autism Bucks website developments as described above.

We have temporarily lost funding for this year from the Beaconsfield Freemasons and Amersham Round Table, as they meet their own fundraising challenges, but we remain in contact for when the situation improves for us all.

We have met with Thames Valley Police, specifically their Autism Lead, who is working on a project to support autistic people who may come in to contact with the police. Initial discussions have been about the use of alert cards and training for police officers.

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