



Westbury Arts Centre – Treasurer Role

About Westbury Arts Centre

Westbury Arts Centre (Company number 08328547 and Registered Charity Number CC1151531) is a registered charity formed as a company limited by guarantee. Operating from an ancient farmhouse and barn in Shenley Wood Milton Keynes, we provide 18 affordable artists' studios and a wide range of low-cost arts-based workshops for the community of Milton Keynes.

The house is mentioned in the Domesday Book and was clearly important—the original moat still exists, and we know that the site once encompassed a chapel and a gatehouse. Since at least the 15th century it appears to have operated as a tenanted farmhouse and was acquired by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation in the 1980s.

In the 1990s a group of up-and-coming artists (calling themselves the Silbury Group) took on the management of the house as artists' studios which ever since has been the primary usage.

In 2012 Westbury Arts Centre was incorporated and became a registered charity. The site is owned by Milton Keynes Development Partnership ("MKDP") from whom we currently hold a 12-month rolling lease, soon to be replaced by a 5-year fixed term. (However, we are well underway with exciting plans for a redevelopment of the whole site – see more below!).

Our stated mission is to foster, promote, maintain, and improve education and engagement in and appreciation of all forms of art, in particular but not exclusively by the provision of affordable artists' studios.

Typical turnover is £85k pa., made up of studio rentals; workshop fees and room hire charges. In 2023 we have substantially increased our workshop offering with consequent benefit to annual income.

Our resident artists hold formal subleases from Westbury. These operate on a rolling 12-month basis with opportunity for Westbury or the artists to break at any time on 28 days' notice. Whilst this is considered to be an important provision in our sub-leases, in reality it has never been exercised by Westbury and we enjoy a very stable cohort of resident artists.

Indeed, we enjoy an excellent relationship with our resident artists with whom we are in regular dialogue.

In a typical year, Westbury holds 4 events: a Winter Market (with stall holders offering handmade goods for sale); MK Open and MK Young Artists (art competitions for local artists) as well as participating in the Heritage Open Days annual festival celebrating historical places. Apart from the Winter Market (which is unashamedly a commercial venture from which we aim to raise funds), we budget for our arts events to break even as we regard them as primarily a service to the community.

In addition, we host arts exhibitions throughout the year, run either by our resident artists or by independents, for which we charge a room hire fee.

We have a small number of "regulars bookers" who hire rooms for a variety of arts related purposes.

Treasurer role

In line with many charities, our Board members are referred to as "trustees" although – legally speaking – we are directors with all the duties rights and responsibilities applicable to companies limited by guarantee as set out in the Companies Acts.

We are seeking a new Treasurer because of the planned departure in March 2024 of our current treasurer, David Harbey who has very ably overseen and guided our finances for the past 3 years. David is a keen motorsport enthusiast and photographer and has longed planned a retirement filled with overseas excursions enabling him to indulge his interests to the full!

However, notwithstanding termination of his office in March 2024, David has confirmed that he will finalise the 2023 accounts and ensure that these are delivered to the independent examiner. He has also kindly offered to remain available through 2024 by email and phone to supply information as needed to the incoming Treasurer.

Our new Treasurer joins a board of 6, each of whom has strong skills which they bring to the role. Details of other trustees are set out on our website and together encompass an impressive range of expertise – including property; marketing; senior management; arts administration and legal.

Currently we have a permanent staff of two – an office and marketing manager and a live-in caretaker.

We also engage 3 external firms of accountants as bookkeeper; to manage PAYE & NEST and to act as external examiners.

Accordingly, whilst a full description is available, in summary this role is primarily one of delivering strategy and guidance with some business management elements and a need to oversee routine payments etc on a weekly basis. From January 1, 2024, Westbury will have the benefit of fully automated business reporting and invoicing thus alleviating the need for spreadsheeting day to day operational activities (such as workshops) and enabling the Treasurer to focus on business direction.

Future plans for Westbury Arts Centre

For the past 2 years, the Board has been in discussion with our Landlord, MKDP in order to secure a long lease of the 2-acre site occupied by Westbury. In order to achieve this, MKDP (itself wholly owned by Milton Keynes City Council ("MKCC")), require to be satisfied that the house and barn will be fully repaired, and services brought up to date and in addition, that the charity is able to be self-sustaining. In order to deliver on this, a major redevelopment of the site is required, and current plans envisage a "mixed economy" of artists' studios; workshops and events spaces alongside commercial ventures such as café and conference facilities and workshop

units. The aim is for Westbury to position itself as a destination site within Milton Keynes attracting up and coming and emerging artists from a wide range of disciplines (including digital media) as well as continuing to showcase fine arts, textiles, and sculpture in a sustainable garden setting.

As a result, this is a great time for a new Treasurer to come onboard with lots of opportunity to get involved with all aspects of negotiation with our landlord, with MKCC as well as developers and commercial suppliers. The redevelopment will be a major news item in Milton Keynes in the coming years and so this role is likely to have considerable profile.

Trusteeship in general

Our Trustees are appointed by the Board (with the appointment being put to our members for approval at the next succeeding AGM) for a period of 3 years, with opportunity to renew the appointment.

Each of our Trustees was appointed for their ability to bring appropriate skills to the organisation. As such and as applicable we allocate day to day responsibilities on matters such as property issues; legal; marketing and arts administration to individual trustees.

However, we are an open, friendly, and collegiate Board led by our Chair, Jane Herriman who encourages all Trustees to speak freely and engage fully with all decisions.

To maintain efficiency, routine and day to day matters are handled by one or more Trustees as appropriate within closely defined and pre-agreed terms of reference. In these cases, outcomes are reported at regular Board Meetings. Other decisions are taken to full Board supported where appropriate by detailed papers. In this way we aim to manage affairs efficiently and smoothly and avoid over lengthy correspondence and meetings. Our Board meetings are run to a strict agenda and kept to time.

The commitment (time, place)

Trustees meet monthly (typically on the first Thursday of the month). Each month we alternate between face to face (5:45-7-45pm) and Zoom/Teams (5-7pm) meetings.

Our face-to-face meetings are usually held at the offices of our one of our Trustees giving us the benefit of a fully serviced board room.

Support and training for the role of Treasurer

Trustee appointments are voluntary, unpaid positions. In order to fill the role of Treasurer you will be able to evidence a high degree of financial competence: you may be an accountant or bookkeeper or may have held posts involving significant financial acumen.

Depending on the date of appointment, the successful candidate will enjoy the opportunity to work alongside our outgoing Treasurer up to 31 March 2024 and/or we will fund training on our bookkeeping systems with the incoming bookkeeper (taking up appointment from 1 January 2024) is appointed.

In addition, a programme of familiarisation of our procedures (financial; management and operational) will be arranged over a period of 1 month following appointment or longer if needed. You will be provided with at least one Trustee to act as a "buddy" during the "settling in" period who will be available to meet with you – face to face or by phone or email – to ensure that you are able to get the information you need to feel fully competent in the role.

Governance training will be provided if required.

Interview and appointment process

If this role is of interest but you have questions or wish to have more information prior to submitting an application, please feel free to contact Moira North, Trustee on moira.north@westburyartscentre.org.uk.

Subject to that, please submit your application by email (accompanied by short CV and indicating your interest in Westbury and suitability for the role) to our Chairperson, Jane Herriman at jane.herriman@westburyartscentre.org.uk.

In the first instance, after an initial contact by phone, you will be asked to meet Jane and two trustees for an informal, no-obligation chat. The purpose of this is simply to allow both of us to assess if we are “on the same page” as regards your application and so that we can mutually assess if there appears to be a good “fit” between us. Opportunity will be provided to meet our outgoing Treasurer to allow you to gain a greater insight into the role.

If we both decide to proceed, we will move to formal interview with the full Board.

A decision will be taken rapidly after that meeting and you will be notified in person as to the outcome.