

## **Civic Voice AGM 2022 - Statement on the theft**

As you know, the very existence of Civic Voice came under threat earlier this year - from a completely unexpected and trusted source. A volunteer who had been helping with Civic Voice's finances for many years without any problems, helped himself to Civic Voice's reserve money carefully built up over the last few years.

Under the cover of Covid disruption and staff absence, the perpetrator used the delegated limit of £1,000 to systematically empty our two bank accounts. It should have been detected and stopped sooner but I regret that our established checks proved insufficient. It happened at a time when we were not meeting face-to-face, the office could not be visited, and we were all struggling with Covid and Lockdown. However, as Trustees, we are ultimately responsible for the financial management of Civic Voice and this has happened on our watch. We apologise for this.

As soon as the theft was discovered in April it was immediately reported to the Police, Action Fraud and the Charity Commission. Since April we have been working to retrieve the situation. On the discovery, Civic Voice had but a few weeks to survive financially. I am glad to say that six months on we are in a much better position, mainly thanks to the generous support of our members.

As the perpetrator has admitted in writing what he has done, we wish we could report that the Police have charged him. Very frustratingly despite all the evidence we have provided, we have received little or no response from the Police. Similarly we have received little support from the Charity Commission. We are very disappointed at the lack of Police action, and we are intending to write to the relevant MP, Shabana Mahmood, whose Ladywood constituency covers Civic Voice's office address.

We are taking action to recover the stolen money but we are hampered by the high costs of legal advice which we can barely afford. We hope we shall soon be able to put a charge on the perpetrator's house, but we have to plan on the basis that we may never recover the money and certainly not any time soon.

We have taken a long hard look at Civic Voice's financial controls and have written a new version which hopefully will reduce the risk of such catastrophes happening again.

This blow has had a serious impact on Ian and Sarah, and we are immensely grateful to them for their patience and fortitude while we worked out how to deal with this wholly unexpected situation. They have kept the show on the road.

It has also taken its toll on the committee, and I would like to thank our remaining trustees who have unstintingly devoted far more of their time and energies to saving Civic Voice than they ever envisaged. The workload for the committee has escalated way beyond what they signed up for. Compared to the normal 5 meetings a year, we have met on 17 occasions. We have also had meetings with the Chief Planner, Joanna Averley, and the Chief Executive of Historic England, to discuss possible support. Unfortunately nothing has been forthcoming so far, but the meetings have helped to secure Civic Voice's reputation.

Staff and Trustees have put our shoulders to the wheel, and hopefully there is now light at the end of the tunnel.

We know that the work of Civic Voice is greatly valued, both by societies and more widely. The need for the Civic Movement is as important as ever. Together we will continue to work to make sure that the voice of the civic movement will continue to be heard locally and nationally.

3 December 2022