

Welcome to our annual report

I initially became aware of DIAL a few years ago, when they assisted my wife who has spinal problems. Approximately 15 months ago I had the opportunity to join DIAL's board of Trustees and was subsequently elected as chair.

I was aware of the vast knowledge and experience of the CEO, Alice Singleton, and her staff. Due to my involvement and being on the board, I've come to realise the extensive depth of this experience and knowledge. I hope with mine, and the rest of the board's life experiences, we will guide the charity to a long and successful existence.

Alvin Follows Chair



About DIAL Solihull

DIAL Solihull provides information, advice and advocacy for disabled adults, children and their carers. Our services are free, impartial and confidential and can be accessed by adults and families who live in Solihull.

Since 1987 we have worked for disabled people to have more choice and control, feel more connected with their local community and be less isolated.

Advice and information - We provide all kinds of support and assistance on every-day practicalities to more complex issues. We advise on benefits, blue badges, disabled parking spaces, disabled facilities grants, local support groups, wills and trusts for disabled people, concessionary travel passes, aids and adaptations, social care assessments, short term equipment loan, and grants and trusts for disabled people.

Advocacy - We help people to get their voice heard, supporting them to understand and be involved in assessments, planning and decisions about their future needs and care packages.

Aspirations - We also advise people with disabilities and long-term conditions on finding and retaining paid employment and self-employment. For those people who are not 'work ready' we can support them to take steps towards employment through volunteering, education or training. We also work with employers to help them consider reasonable adjustments for employees who need extra support.

We are proud to support over 1,700 people each year to live more independent and active lives.

Our services

- Disability-related benefits advice for adults and children, and a form filling service
- Support to access social care
- Care Act advocacy and representation
- Local welfare provision
- Employment, education and training support
- Wheelchair and equipment loan
- Advance Credit Union local access point

Keeping our clients at the heart of all we do

2014-15 was another year of huge change in adult social care and Welfare Reform. Our information and advice service was extremely busy providing accurate information to clients about changes and timescales. There was huge concern from some of our most at risk clients with the closure of the Independent Living Fund looming on the horizon. In our organisation we have always kept our clients at the heart of what we do, focusing on the things that matter to them. Our staff, volunteers and directors ensure our service works holistically with a focus on prevention and early prevention. We worked hard to ensure DIAL Solihull was Care Act compliant for its introduction on 1 April 2015.

We were also one of three partners in the Advice in Our Area project – funded by the BIG Lottery Fund to establish an advice gateway portal – which enabled DIAL to achieve great outcomes for many clients, some of whom were engaged in the safeguarding process. Some wished to make huge changes to their lives in areas such as living independently or in a supported environment, taking charge of their own personal budgets as a direct payment, or disabled people who wanted to get back into work, or in some cases, into work for the first time.

Our welfare benefits advisers continue to achieve outstanding results. It is extremely rare that one of our clients has to appeal to the tribunal service. We endeavour to, and do, get things right first time. The complexity of the system is often a barrier to lots of our clients. The tenacity and skill of our advisers ensures that our clients are not disadvantaged by an ever more complicated system.

We were partners in the Community Advice Hub pilot alongside Age UK Solihull and with them we worked with Solihull Council to co-produce and design an holistic service for Solihull residents in preparation for the Care Act.

2014 also saw DIAL Solihull change its status from that of a registered charity to become a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO). The CIO, set out in the Charities Act 2011, allows charities to become incorporated charities. Trustees or members will have limited or no liability and the organisation will need only to register once with the Charity Commission rather than also going to Companies House, the aim of which is to reduce administrative burdens. CIOs are also not subject to company law. Organisations choosing this form have just one regulator. Our board felt that the reduced reporting requirements were a benefit, which would free us up to focus on our charitable work.

The end of the 2014-15 financial year saw DIAL Solihull commissioned by Solihull Council to deliver information and advice services and Care Act advocacy from April 2015 to March 2018. This gives our organisation financial stability and the opportunity to develop and grow our business further. We have recruited experienced, knowledgeable staff to help us deliver these services. We have identified gaps in provision of services for disabled people and as such are looking at ways of working in partnership with other organisations to fill these as quickly as possible in order to offer a truly holistic information, advice and advocacy service to disabled people in Solihull.

Alice Singleton Chief Executive Officer

Highlights of 2014-15: a year of innovation

Information, advice & special educational needs advocacy project

Grant support from Lloyds TSB over a two year period (which ended in March 2015) enabled DIAL Solihull to provide advice on children's benefits and special needs advocacy. We used the funding to employ a part time benefits adviser and a full time SEN (special education needs) advocate.

From February 2014 to March 2015, our benefits adviser made 135 separate benefit applications on behalf of 51 families. This covered a range of benefits from Disability Living Allowance through to Child Tax Credits – all relating to the special needs of the child.

We are delighted to report that we exceeded our target of 100 to support 121 families in total, with the total number of applications reaching 211 over the project lifetime. Of the benefits we are able to track, the financial benefit for the families over the two years is around £1.1 million.

Over a similar timeframe our SEN Advocate worked with 11 families who required assistance with either Statements of Special Educational Needs, or social care assessments. Whilst most of the cases are still ongoing, progress towards more appropriate provisions and care are evident. The impact of SEN advocacy has resulted in schools having to be more accountable for their SEN support and our parent referrals are at an all time record!

The grant has enabled DIAL to achieve recognition not only amongst the local authority but also families. DIAL is now seen as a one stop shop for families that have a child with special needs, where they can have one visit and get advice on all issues that will impact on their child and that this advice has, so far, a 100% success rate.

West Midlands Police partnership awards

During Summer 2014, all West Midlands Police Local Policing Units implemented referral portals to appropriately support at risk people across their areas. In Solihull, West Midlands police officers and partner agencies, including Age UK

A great place to work

Our highly experienced and knowledgeable team provide information and advice to people with disabilities and long term conditions to live independently and safely in our community.

“ I help people living in Solihull to obtain outcomes including welcome benefits which enables them to have a better standard of living, which in turn generates more income to be spent in Solihull. I feel that the wide range of support and information that’s given by the friendly, approachable and experienced staff at DIAL helps all our clients have a better standard of life. ”

Linda Nasreisfahany IAG (Disability Benefits)

“ I have recently begun working with DIAL as a Care Act Advocate. Under the terms of the Care Act 2014 DIAL can advocate for any person with a physical disability or an enduring condition who are undergoing care assessments, support planning, care and support reviews or safeguarding enquiries and reviews. Carers may also be eligible for advocacy support from DIAL. ”

Helen Pitt Care Act Advocacy Manager

A professional and influential organisation

“ We have worked in partnership with DIAL for the last 5 years to support Solihull residents through the changes to welfare benefits. DIAL are an excellent organisation who understand the issues facing people in financial difficulty. They look holistically at the customer and support them in a range of issues to get the best outcome they can. ”

Alison McGrory Head of income & awards, Solihull Council

We secured around **£1.1 million** in financial benefits for over **200 families** during 2014-15

86% of clients rated our service 'excellent' and 14% 'good'
DIAL Customer Satisfaction Survey 2015

100% of clients said that they would recommend our services, 35% said they already had
DIAL Customer Satisfaction Survey 2015

and DIAL Solihull, collaborated to implement this portal, taking a very innovative approach. Partnership training was organised and delivered to all front line police officers and PCSOs resulting in a steady increase in referrals. Our CEO, Alice Singleton, was personally recognised by West Midlands Police for her role in this project, which has made a real difference to the communities of Solihull.

Advice in our area

2014-15 saw the successful conclusion of the Advice in Our Area lottery funded project, where we partnered with Citizens Advice Solihull Borough and Age UK Solihull for the first time to deliver more joined up advisory services across Solihull. The project achieved its target of providing over 5,000 people with access to IAG services and also attracted and trained volunteers to support the sustainability of services across Solihull. A total of 36 volunteers were engaged, of which several were recruited and trained by DIAL Solihull. This project demonstrated that by working collaboratively we could increase access to advice, enhance the quality of advice services, improve efficiency, build capacity and add value to advice services in Solihull.

Direct payments service

We were pleased to partner with Age UK Solihull when the local authority wanted to put in place a direct payments information and advice service. We pooled our resources to make available two staff to handle queries on all aspects of direct payments, including how to employ a personal assistant and legal obligations as an employer. All clients who were assessed for a personal budget were supported through the process.

Community Advice Hub

Community Advice Hubs are a new way of making IAG services accessible for the citizens of Solihull. Two hubs, one central and the other in the North of the borough, bring together advice workers from DIAL Solihull, Age UK Solihull, Independent Advocacy and BID Services to provide information and advice for Solihull residents. Commissioned by Solihull Council, we were involved in a pilot project in 2014-15 to test and develop the model, enabling us to work in a holistic way – something very important to us. It has now been fully implemented, with a hub at Solihull Arts Complex and a second at Chelmsley Wood Library. Our advisers can make appointments to meet clients at the hubs.

Success stories

As a result of being financially reassessed for a care package, a client's contribution had gone from nil to £75 per week. After receiving support from one of our advisers the amount was reduced to £45 per week. In addition she had arrears of almost £1,500. Our adviser applied to the client's ex-employer (retired client) for a grant from their company's benevolent scheme. As a result the client received £1,200 from them enabling her to pay off the majority of the arrears.

“ Since my wife went into respite I have been helped by DIAL on numerous occasions. Whenever I need advice I know I can just pop in to see someone. ”

Carer

Volunteering

Most DIAL volunteers are disabled or have experience of caring for someone with a disability. We support disabled people to volunteer and in the past year have provided volunteering opportunities for five people.

“ The experience I gained during my time at DIAL gave me the confidence and skills to get back into paid employment. My self-esteem has been restored! ”

DIAL Solihull volunteer

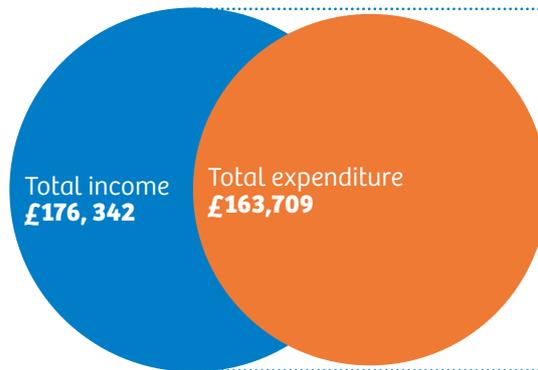
Against the backdrop of tightening national and local government spending and the related impacts on service commissioning, DIAL's management have carefully organised the affairs of the charity so that they are now able to achieve increased service offering whilst maintaining financial stability.

At the end of the financial year, the closing balance was £82k. The charity had a surplus of £12.6k compared to a deficit of £10.3k in the previous year. Whilst expenditures increased by 2.7%, income increased by 18.2% year on year. Subject to the charity continuing to obtain funding, its financial health is viewed as acceptable.

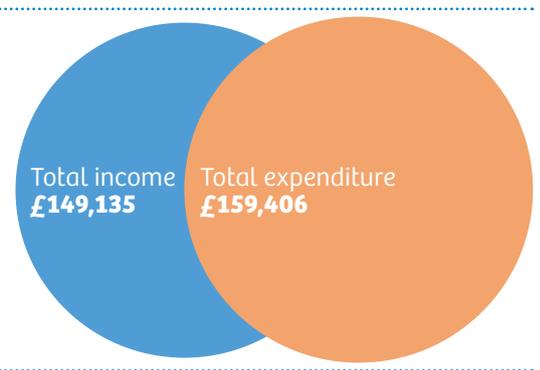
Paul Wilkinson Treasurer

Summary of income and expenditure

Year ending 31 March 2015



Year ending 31 March 2014



Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2015 were independently examined by West Business Consultants who on 31 August 2015 reported that the accounts present a 'true and fair view' with no matters identified.

We have a positive working relationship with our local authority, Solihull Council, who commission us to deliver several advice and advocacy services for Solihull residents. We also raise funds through applications to grant making trusts and other bodies so that we can provide a service that is free at the point of access for our service users.

Standing officers 2014-15

Paul Wilkinson - Treasurer

Alvin Follows - Chair

Joan Edge

Thank you

Our work would not be possible without the help and support of so many people and organisations.

We would like to thank our funders and partners at Lloyds TSB, BIG Lottery Fund, Solihull Council, Age UK Solihull, Citizen's Advice Solihull Borough and Development in Social Enterprise CIC.

Thanks to our dedicated staff team, board members and also to our volunteers. A special mention to retired volunteer Paul Dempsey, and to Kyle Todd, Sharon Gates, Justin Walsh who have moved onto pastures new. We would also like to thank Jacqui Bates who left us after four years in 2015 to take up a post at the Community Hub and Hannah Fountain who left to train as a barrister.