

2023

Annual Impact Statement

The CommuniCare Trust (Reading)

⁸Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. ⁹Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and the needy.

Proverbs 31 v8-9

Registered Charity Number

1078694



Board of Trustees

Chair:	Andrew Taylor
Treasurer:	Helen Taylor
Member:	Alison Burford
Member:	Martin Chalmers
Member:	Marjory Codling
Member:	Rosemary Croft
Bookkeeper:	Bridget Barwick

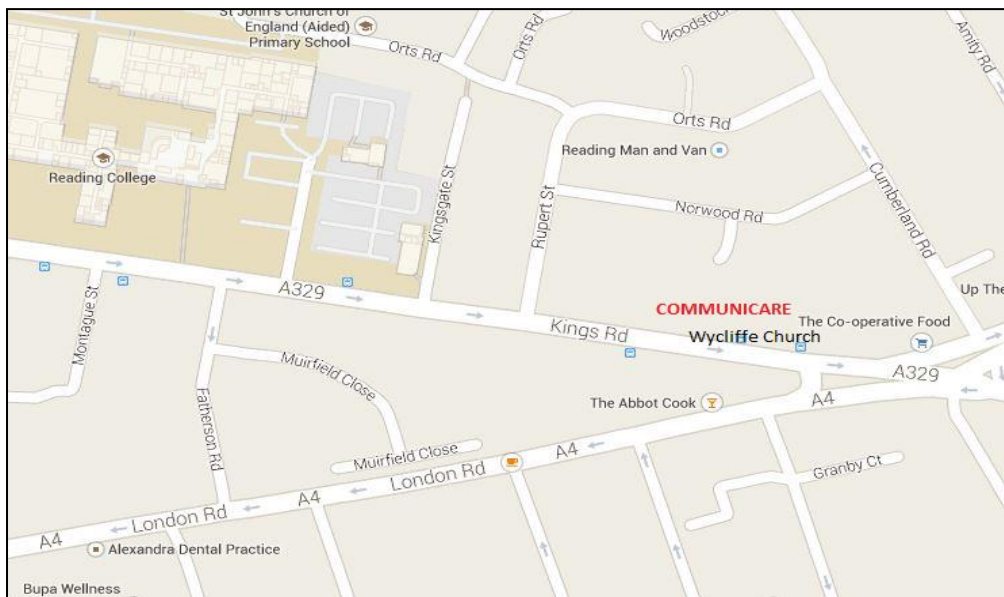
CommuniCare Staff

Executive Director:	Francesca Yates
Advice & Outreach:	Lynn Mann
Advice & Outreach:	Sara Harwood
Advice & Outreach:	Joanna Cowley
Advice & Outreach:	Tara Hensford
Advice & Outreach:	Hayley New
Administrator:	Edyta Worozbit

Advice Centre Volunteers

Isabel Allinson	Ishaan Gangar ^{New}	Ian Maynard
Stephen Barnes	Navjeet Gill ^{New}	Philip Pereira
Rukshi Brownlow	Puja Gurung	Andrew Taylor
Rosemary Croft	Kyle Harris ^{New}	Helen Taylor
Sheila Cox	Neil Hooley	
Sally D'Sa	Sue Jupp	

How to Find Us



Our office is situated behind Wycliffe Baptist Church on Kings Road.

We have a private car park in Norwood Road,

Bus number 4, X4, 13, 14 or 17 stop outside the Church (Cemetery Junction).



Dear Supporter

As I am sure you will appreciate the demand for CommuniCare's services is rising; in 2023 we helped nearly 5,300 people address nearly 7,650 issues. We are creating capacity to cope with this through outreach sessions on other organisations' premises, helping nearly 400 more people in 2023 than in 2022.

Whilst helping people navigate the welfare benefit system continues to grow and remains the largest area of our work, I would like to draw your attention to growth in housing and unpaid caring.

The demand for help with housing issues was up by 37% on 2022 and reflects the growing housing crisis in Reading in which:

- Rents are increasing whilst benefit support for housing is not.
- Availability is decreasing as landlords withdraw from the market.
- Landlords and letting agencies are refusing to accept potential tenants on benefits.

The increase in demand for help by carers is mainly as a consequence of winning, with VCS partners, a contract with Reading Borough Council to provide services to unpaid carers. The number of carers' issues that we recorded in 2023 was over 700 having been close to none in 2022.

I encourage you to read the whole of this report to gain a fuller picture of the scope of the work we do, the ways in which we do it and the outcomes for clients both in practical terms, often financial, and in terms of their wellbeing.

I would like to thank our long-term supporters, Reading Borough Council, Wycliffe Baptist Church, St John and St Stephen's Church, Redland's Church, Shoosmiths and a growing number of individuals for their continued generosity. We are very grateful for all this support.

I would also like to record my thanks to all our Trustees, with a special mention for Sarah Adlard who stood down during 2022, and to the staff and volunteers of CommuniCare for all the work they do for an organisation with which I am very proud to be associated.

Finally, thank you for your ongoing support without which we could not continue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "ATaylor".

Andrew Taylor.
Chair of Trustees



MISSION AND VALUES STATEMENT

CommuniCare is a team of Christians motivated by their faith who care for and help people to meet their complete needs through offering information, advice and support. In particular, we look to help people who are in need, hardship or distress because of their social or economic circumstances.

We seek to do this by:

- Treating all the people we help equally and, in particular not discriminating on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity
- Always acting in the best interests of the people we help
- Working with people not issues and establishing an appropriate relationship with each person
- Empowering people in their situation and, thereby, building independence
- Being flexible in our approach and extending our service to meet the needs of an increasing number of people
- Linking people into community activities where appropriate
- Operating on the understanding that our activities are an outworking of our faith; that our “doing” derives directly from our “being” and that the link between who we are and what we do cannot be broken
- If invited, praying or sharing with people something of ourselves and our faith
- Building on our strengths as a team, demonstrating trust, patience and sensitivity to each other
- Believing that each team member has a contribution to make
- Encouraging a sense of community within our team

What We Do.

We are a charity providing information, advice and support to anyone in need. We aim to support people in understanding and navigating the everyday services that they need to access to enable them to live better lives. We deal with a large range of issues including benefits, form filling and housing advice. We work closely with both voluntary & statutory sector groups across Reading to provide the wrap around support our clients need.

Where We Work.

We aim to make our services as accessible as possible for everyone in Reading. Our Advice Centre in East Reading is open Monday to Thursday for confidential 1:1 drop in sessions. We also run a number of weekly outreach advice sessions based in community locations across the town, making our services accessible to as many communities as we can in Reading. For the more vulnerable clients we offer home visits.

Our Clients

Our clients face many barriers in their day to day lives, such as English as a second language; low literacy levels; poor mental health; being digitally excluded and homelessness. These are some of the more vulnerable people in the town, and those that are in the most need of help. We offer an holistic approach and walk alongside our clients, working with them to access the benefits & support they need. We work with clients to help them grow their confidence and become empowered in the decisions they must make, working with them until they feel able to do this.



Case Study: We supported a client with their PIP application. The initial application was declined, so we supported the client with an MR and then the appeal. The client was awarded a **backdated payment of £7,790** and on-going **monthly payments of £411.66**

The Headlines for 2023

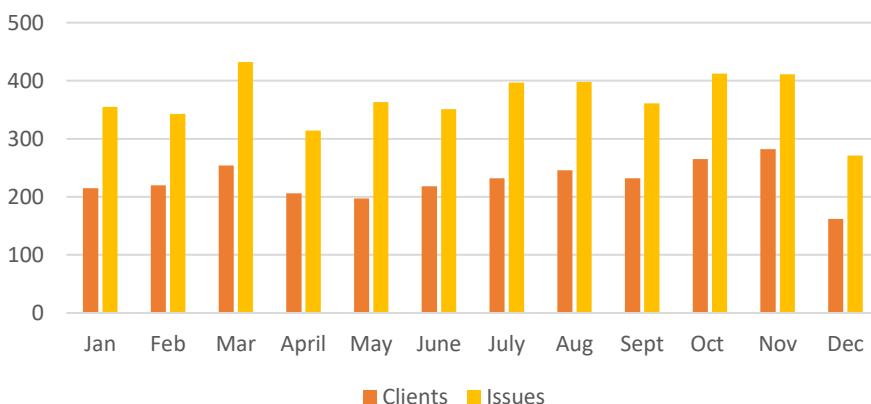
Total Client Issues Supported	7,738	22% increase on 2022
New Clients Supported	2,599	29% increase on 2022
Clients Issues face to face	6,180	24% increase on 2022
Client Issues by Email	427	36% increase on 2022
Client Issues on the telephone:	1,079	5% decrease on 2022

How We Work

CommuniCare Advice Centre

CommuniCare run a drop in service rather than an appointment system. We open at 10am Monday to Thursday and see clients in the order that they arrived. This does mean that our waiting room can be busy, and the waiting times can be long. However, it means we can see clients on the same day and there is no need for them to wait several days or weeks for an appointment. We work closely with other agencies in Reading and our service compliments those of our partner agencies. Clients are often signposted to us from these agencies as they have urgent issues or tight deadlines and they need immediate assistance.

Clients Seen in Advice Centre



Whilst we support clients with many different issues, **53% of the work** we did in the Advice Centre in 2023 was **benefits related**. We work with clients to ensure they are receiving the benefits that they are entitled to and challenge any incorrect decisions made by the DWP.



Case Study: A client with complex mental health issues felt pressurised to return to work due to financial hardship. This would have had a detrimental effect on their recovery. We assisted them to apply for both PIP and Limited Capability for Work Related Activity (on UC). Both applications were successful, meaning the financial pressures are eased and the client can concentrate on their recovery. They client is now **receiving an additional £685.16 per month** in benefits.

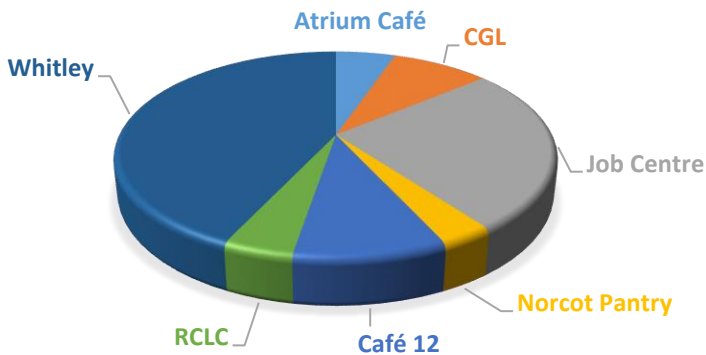
Outreach

<p>DROP IN ADVICE SESSIONS</p> <p>Whitley Community Café (Northumberland Avenue, RG2 7QA) Monday & Wednesday 10.00am – 12.30pm</p> <p>Reading Community Learning Centre (London Street, RG1 4SJ – ladies only) Tuesday 10.00am – 12.30pm</p> <p>Atrium Café (Friar Street, RG1 1EL) Tuesday 10.30am – 12.30pm</p> <p>Change Grow Live (Oxford Road, RG1 7UR) Wednesday 1.00pm – 4.00pm</p> <p>Café 12 (The Pavilion, RG1 7UY) Thursday 10.00am – 12.00pm</p> <p>Norcot Pantry (Norcot Mission Church, RG30 4YP) Friday 10.00am – 12.00pm</p> <p>Job Centre Plus (Adelphi House, Friar Street) Monday – Friday 9.30am-11.30am</p>
--

We run outreach advice sessions in different areas around Reading. We partner with local community groups or services so we can run our advice service alongside services that are already being offered. Our aim is to make our service as accessible to as many people as we can.

We continually work with other organisations to review where our outreach services would be of most benefit. In 2023 we added 4 new locations to our weekly outreach programme, taking our total to 8 sessions across 7 locations. We recruited a new member of staff to run these advice sessions.

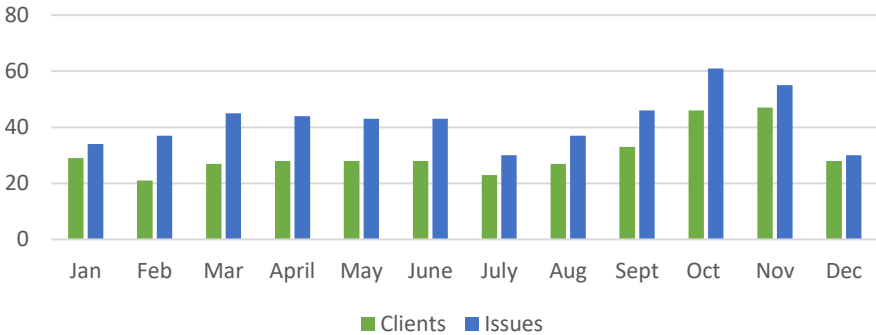
CLIENTS SEEN AT OUTREACH



Home Visits

We offer home visits for clients who are unable to access support out of their home. The people we visit at home are some of the most vulnerable clients we support. Referrals for our Home Visits come to us from other agencies across Reading, including other voluntary sector organisations, Reading Borough Council, Adult Social Care, Health Care Professionals, Social Services, Social Prescribers and the Community Mental Health Team. During 2023 **54% of the work we did on home visits was benefits related.**

Home Visits

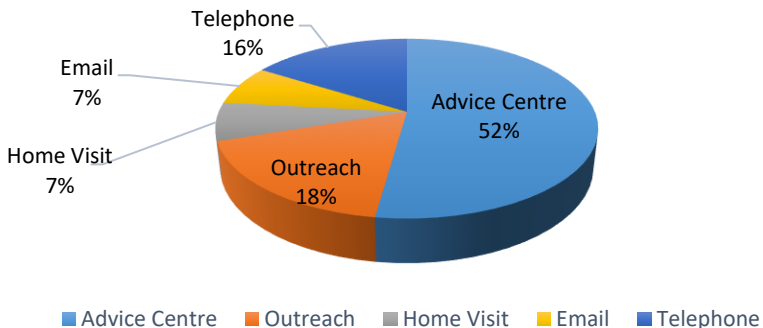


Case Study: The client needed support to claim their free TV license. In talking to the client we realised they were in financial hardship and were not claiming any benefits. We also discovered they were in poor health. We assisted the client to claim Pension credit, Council Tax Support and Attendance Allowance. The client is now **receiving £658 per month in benefits** they did not realise they were entitled to – plus the **free TV license**.

Email & Telephone Support

CommuniCare is primarily a face to face service and we would normally direct clients to come in to us, or one of our outreach sessions. However, we have adapted our service to include remote support via the telephone and email as there are times when a telephone conversation, or email is enough.

Where Clients Supported



The Clients We Support

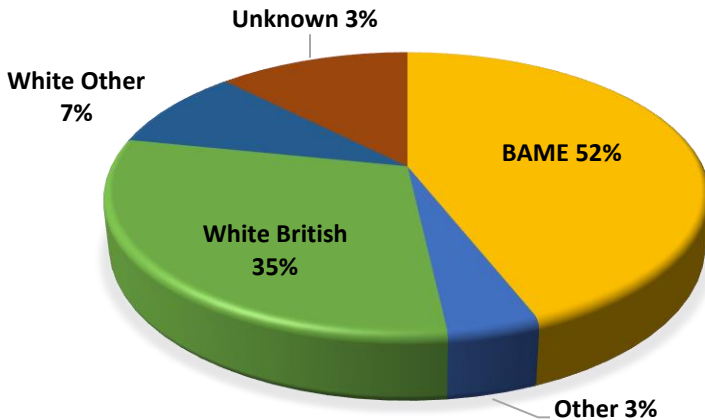
A high percentage of our clients have complex needs and are vulnerable; many falling into the 'hard to reach' categories in the town.

Due to the complex needs of our clients, and the language and literacy issues many have, we give as much time as we can. This can lead to clients spending many hours with an adviser. Allowing this time enables us to uncover some of the many needs they have.

Giving our clients time to talk shows them that we genuinely care about them and their situation. Many clients have told us we have been the first people to listen to their story, and just having us listen and knowing we care, eases a lot of the stress they are feeling. We feel this is as important as any of the practical support we can give.

Many of our clients have English as a second language. Through the diversity of the volunteers we have at CommuniCare we cover 9 different languages.

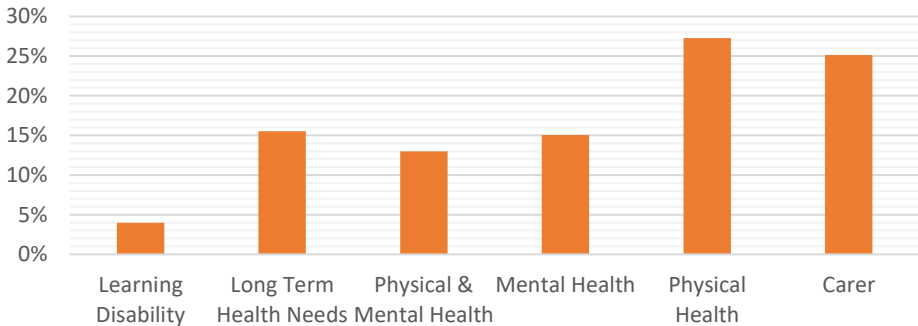
CLIENT ETHNICITY



Poor health is an increasing issue with the clients we see, particularly poor mental health. Understanding and supporting these clients takes time, patience and understanding. We work with all clients to understand what they need and how we can best support them. It can take time to gain the trust that is needed, with

clients returning numerous times, but our holistic approach helps us to put clients at ease.

CLIENT DISABILITY & HEALTH NEEDS



The Issues We Deal With

CommuniCare assist clients with a wide range of different issues, from benefit claims to letter writing. Clients will often come to us with 2 or more issues at any one time. Also, through the listening skills of our advisers, and the time we give to our clients, we will often uncover additional issues that the client needs support with.

In 2023 **53% of the issues** we dealt with were **Benefits** related. In total we assisted clients to claim the annual equivalent of **£3,529.044 in benefits**



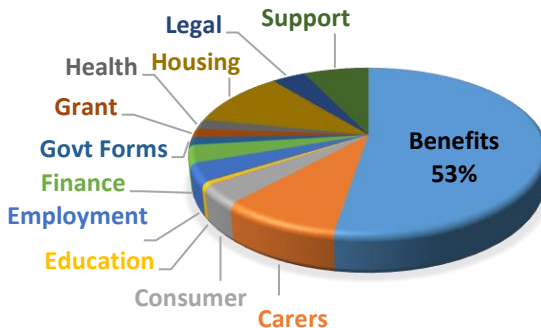
Case Study: The client was begging in Reading, they were directed to us as they were elderly and vulnerable. We discovered that they had been moving around and not receiving post. Their Attendance Allowance had stopped, and they were not receiving a pension. We issued them emergency vouchers to cover their gas & electricity.

We contacted the Pension Service and helped them to apply for their pension. We contacted Attendance Allowance and gave them the updated information they needed. We also applied for a concessionary bus pass (the client was walking to us from West Reading as they had no funds). Attendance Allowance made a **backdated payment of £1,100** and then on-going **monthly payments of £295.10**, they also started receiving their monthly pension payments.



Case Study: Client had been subject to a scam, losing £30,000 from their on-line bank. The bank had refused to repay the money, stating they had not satisfied the banks criteria for this. We investigated this further, discovering that the bank had signed up to a set of rules regarding this type of scam. We assisted the client in writing an official complaint to the bank. The Bank reversed their decision and **refunded the £30,000 to the client.**

CLIENT ISSUES 2023



Case Study: An elderly client was struggling with their electricity company. Issues with their smart meter meant the company were basing the bills on estimated readings and would not accept the actual readings the client was giving. We contacted them on the clients behalf, and they finally accepted that their figures were incorrect. The **outstanding amount due was reduced from £2,300 to £8.**

Partnership Working

CommuniCare has always worked closely with both voluntary and statutory organisations across Reading. We strongly believe that partnership working is the key to giving people in Reading the support they need. We actively participate in numerous focus groups, steering groups and co-production meetings with Reading Borough Council and other voluntary sector organisations.



In 2022, working in partnership with other voluntary sector organisations, we secured 3 contracts for delivering services for Reading Borough Council. The work for these three contracts started in November 2022 and will run until October 2025.



Reading & West Berkshire Carers Partnership.

In partnership with Age UK Berkshire, Age UK Reading and Reading Mencap, we are supporting unpaid carers in Reading & West Berkshire. We are supporting the 2 local

borough councils by completing Carers Assessments, giving information and advice and running support groups for the many unpaid carers in the area.



TACKLING POVERTY PARTNERSHIP

Tackling Poverty Partnership. In partnership with CCA, CiRDiC, Mustard Tree, Reading Welfare Rights, Readifood and Reading Community Learning Centre, we are working to support people in Reading to get out and stay out of poverty

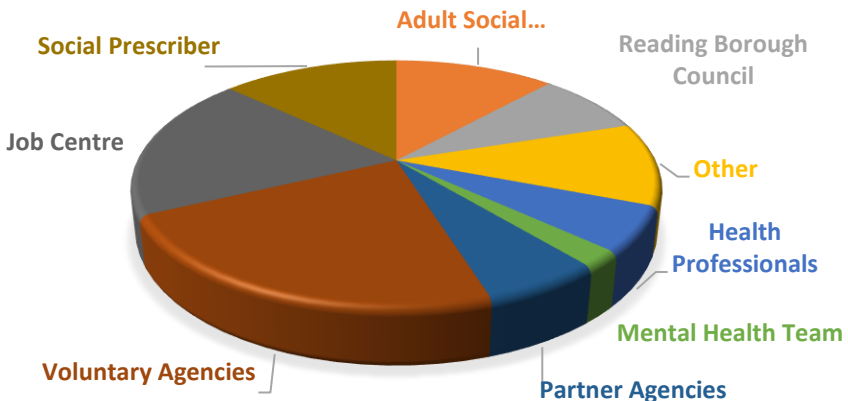


Wellbeing Partnership. In partnership with Age UK Berkshire, Age UK Reading, Engage Befriending and Sports in Mind we are working to build resilience,

independence and wellbeing and connect people to support and focus on individual and community strengths.

As well as the formal partnerships we have in place, we work closely with many other organisations across Reading. Many of the clients we support have been referred or signposted to us from other agencies in Reading.

REFERRALS INTO COMMUNICARE FROM





SHOOSMITHS

Pro Bono Legal Clinic

The Legal clinic is run with Shoosmiths Solicitors and law students from Reading University Law School. The client initially meets with a CommuniCare adviser so their situation can be assessed. If their case is appropriate, the client is referred to the Legal Clinic. The solicitor will work with their allocated law student to review the case. They will prepare the advice for the client and use the most appropriate method to communicate with the client, this can be by email, telephone, on-line meeting or face to face.

CommuniCare Client Feedback during 2023

"I just want you to know that every little bit of help and support you have provided has made a significant difference in my life. Words cannot express how grateful I am".

"I would like to say a huge thank you for your kindness, patience and wonderful work completing my client's MR last week. She was extremely anxious, and you made her feel so comfortable and at ease. You all do an absolutely wonderful job; it really was awe inspiring to see you all at work"

"I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for your exceptional professionalism, understanding, and compassion throughout our interactions. Your attentiveness and support have truly been outstanding, and I cannot thank you enough for your dedication."

"Thank you so much for all you do. You are all so kind and helpful and never make me feel rushed. I don't know what I'd do without you"

"I don't know where people like me would be without you! I'd never understand all this stuff and you just sort it all out for me – thank you"

"Once again, thank you for your unwavering support. Your dedication and commitment to your role at Communicare have made a massive difference to my life, and I am truly grateful for everything you have done".



Financial Details for the Financial Year Ending March 2023

INCOME

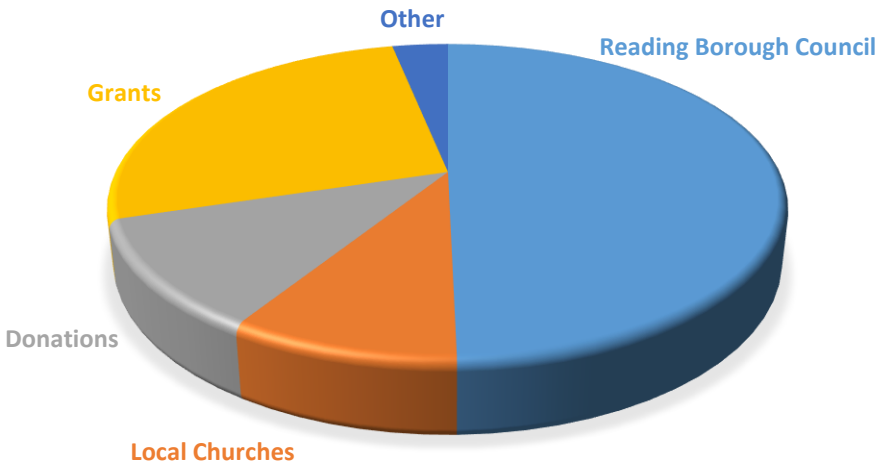
Reading Borough Council	£62,523
Local Churches	£11,750
Individuals	£14,182
Grants	£33,456
Corporate & Other	£ 4,021
	£125,932

EXPENDITURE

CommuniCare Salaries (& pensions)	£103,536
CommuniCare Overheads	£ 11,636
	£115,172

TOTAL SURPLUS **£10,760**

COMMUNICARE FUNDING FINANCIAL YEAR 2022-2023





Thank you to everyone who supports CommuniCare financially. Without this support we would not be able to continue helping those in need



ST LAURENCE LANDS TRUST



Individual Donors



If you would like to support our work, you can donate on our Local Giving page.



Localgiving.com/CommuniCareRDG

CommuniCare Quality Marks & Accreditations



Contact Us:



www.communicare.org.uk



office@communicare.org.uk



233 Kings Road
Reading, RG1 4LS



0118 9263941

Registered Charity Number

1078694

