



Sway Welfare Aid Group

Registered Charity No. 261220

Minutes of the SWAG 2024 AGM held on 18^h February 2025 at 7.30pm

Attendees: Sally Smith – Chair, Sharon Millett – Treasurer, Sue Cornwell, Jon Hartley, Janet Kirk, Angela Willows, Mark Parker and Paul Loveridge (all trustees); Jane Pitts and Jonathan Elliott- Jones (both representing Luncheon Club), Revd Jane Mitchell, Howard Millett (Sway Parish Council), Hugh Marchant, Barry Cornwell, Jim Tebby, Sheila Butler, Russell Fry, Ian Gale, Pat Fleet (Sway Thursday Afternoon Club), Mike Butler, Dave Herrod, Colin Denman, Mike Perrett, Alan Perry, Edward Watts.

Apologies :

Apologies for absence were received from Steve and Jane Self; Jeremy Seacombe, Richard and Deborah Walker, Mike Green; Terry Simpson, Mary Llewellyn; Clive Potter, and Jeremy Stevens.

Agenda:

1. Approval of the minutes of the last AGM held on the 18th February 2024

The minutes were approved unanimously (proposed by Pat Fleet and seconded by Colin Denman). There were no matters arising.

2. Chair's Report:

Objectives and Activities

The objectives of the Sway Welfare Aid Group are the relief of the sick, needy, disabled or aged within Sway and its immediate neighbourhood. The charity makes grants to both individuals and local organisations within these constraints. In this connection, SWAG works closely with many local organisations.

The charity also organises a free transport service, manned by volunteer drivers, to take sick, elderly or infirm people to attend hospital and other medical appointments where they cannot provide, or are not capable of using their own transport. Mileage expenses of the drivers are met by the charity.

We run a twice-monthly Lunch Club service for elderly residents living alone. Volunteers cook the meal, and the participants pay only a nominal charge for the food; all other expenses are met by the charity.

We run a weekly Community Café to provide a focal point for social interaction. The café runs on a “donations only” basis. Reports will be given later by the respective organisers.

All activities are in accordance with the Charity Commission’s guidance on public benefit and the objectives of the charity.

SWAG runs an annual Christmas appeal within the village of Sway to raise funds for its activities, and benefits from voluntary donations from clients of its transport service and community café.

The trustees are grateful to all our volunteer Coordinators who organise much of the charity’s work and enable us to provide these services.

Achievements and Performance

During 2023-24, SWAG continued to support the residents of Sway and especially those in our community who are most vulnerable. Despite an economic environment which has been more challenging than expected at both national and local levels, and thanks to the generosity of our supporters and the hard work and dedication of our volunteers and activity coordinators, SWAG was able to respond quickly with financial support to those in need, has delivered efficient and reliable help with medical transport for elderly residents, and provided valued social interaction opportunities for elderly residents living alone.

In an unusually volatile market for investment activity, the trustees have continued to invest the funds of the charity cautiously.

Thanks also to the generosity of the people of Sway, the charity has concluded another twelve months in a secure financial position which will ensure the charity’s ability to continue providing these services in future years.

Grants

Once again, the charity has concentrated its grant resources on individuals and families. The charity has been able to respond to all requests for financial assistance received which were commensurate with our charitable objectives.

The amount of the traditional heating grants was increased to £800 per year in December 2023 due to the predicted increased costs of both gas and electricity. Seven households in the village benefitted from heating grants, paid in two instalments in December and March.

Approaches received by the charity from Sway residents experiencing financial hardship did not match, in financial terms, the amount disbursed in the previous year, however through our support to the local primary school a greater number of low-income families did receive much needed help thanks to a SWAG grant.

The relevant details of grant sums disbursed may be viewed in the Financial Review section of this report and will be explained by our treasurer in her report.

Community Café

The weekly Community Café had another successful year thanks to the leadership of the two coordinators, Sue Cornwell and Grete Steen, supported by a committed team of helpers. Operating on a donations-basis, the Café continues to provide a highly valued opportunity for social engagement for a loyal group of local clients, many of whom live alone. The Café also extends a welcome to a small number of residents of Sway Place residential home.

During the year the organisers began to provide “Soup and Sandwich” in addition to the regular coffee and tea on a trial basis once a month and this has proved very popular with up to 20 people per session enjoying home-made soup and freshly prepared sandwiches. This initiative will be continued over the winter months.

In 2023, the Community Café was successful in being selected by the Co-operative Group team to be one of three community causes to benefit from the proceeds of Co-op customers’ purchases from shops in the New Forest area. The sum raised from this source was £2,063.

Luncheon Club

Due to the dedication and enthusiasm of the two Coordinators, Jane Pitts and Deborah Walker and a team of volunteer cooks and helpers, the Lunch Club met on 23 occasions with an average attendance of 24, providing members with a two-course hot meal and an opportunity for social interaction which is much appreciated by our members who live alone.

Transport is provided to those members who need it by SWAG volunteer drivers.

Both the Community Café and the Lunch Club have raised, through voluntary donations and subscriptions respectively, sums which contribute towards the cost of food and refreshments and to room hire costs which are funded from SWAG charitable funds.

Medical Transport Service

Our medical transport service provided an impressive 477 journeys to various hospitals, local surgeries and other medically-related facilities providing a service to 105 clients, some requiring support on a regular basis for limited periods of time.

The trustees’ thanks are due to the volunteer team of coordinators led by Hugh Marchant who give up their free time to run the service, in addition to themselves acting as volunteer drivers. There are currently 63 volunteer drivers plus 4 who are inactive at present. We have been very fortunate to attract several new volunteer drivers this year, which has enabled us to maintain our driver strength at approximately the same level as the year before.

Thanks goes to all our volunteer drivers, whose efforts are so appreciated by the residents who rely on this service to be able to get to their medical appointments.

Support for Sway community activities

In 2023-24 SWAG has again granted to the Sway Thursday Afternoon Club a sum sufficient to cover entirely the group's venue hire costs.

Referral activities

Over the period of this report, SWAG, acting as a local agent, made a number of referrals to the New Forest Basics Bank. We also inform clients of the local Fareshare scheme and are aware that some have taken advantage of this.

Future Outlook

Thanks to donations from Sway residents over the years, and the prudent management of our invested reserves, SWAG has during our previous financial year been able to continue to support our local community.

In the immediate future the outlook, both national and international, remains uncertain and we anticipate that residents of Sway will continue to request and value our help.

Finally, the trustees wish to reiterate our thanks to all our volunteers who willingly give their time to help with all our activities and without whose help we would be unable to continue to provide assistance to the residents of our village.

On a personal note, I wish to place on record my thanks to my fellow trustees for their help and support over the year.

3. Treasurer's Report

Sources of income

We were fortunate to receive £817 in memory of two residents in Sway. Our clients being transported to medical appointments donated £6,639, which is up 8% on the previous year. The Christmas appeal generated donations of £5,799 which included a single generous donation of £2,500. The appeal donations were down by 11% on the previous year. We also received another generous donation of £3,062 including gift aid during the year, which wasn't allocated to the appeal. The Community Café donations amounted to £743, a decrease of £303 on the previous year. All of the above figures include gift aid claimed at 25% where appropriate. In addition, we were fortunate that the Co-op group's New Forest area community fund nominated the Community Café as one of their good causes during the year and collected and donated £2,063. Overall, donations decreased by 4.5% on the previous year.

Charitable Activities

We increased our regular heating grants again this year to £800, which is paid in two equal instalments in December and March. This benefitted seven families.

Requests under the normal hardship scheme for individuals fell by 45% from last year. Four families benefitted from this scheme and this totalled £2,304.

The organisations that benefitted were:

St Luke's Primary School received £3,000 – this supports low-income families.

£500 was granted to Spudworks for a bespoke handrail to improve access.
The Thursday Afternoon club received £525 for room hire for their get togethers.

Donations received from clients of the medical transport service of £6,639 were more than enough to cover the mileage expenses of £4,976 paid to our drivers, which left a surplus for the service of £1,663. The Lunch Club members paid £4 for their food at the start of the financial year, however this increased to £5 part way through and SWAG continues to meet the room hire costs and other support costs which amounted to £829.

The cost to operate the Community Café was £1,101 and it generated donations of £743, therefore a shortfall of £358.

Investment Performance

SWAG's investments generated an income of £18,250, which amounted to just over 45% of our total income. Both the equity funds and the fixed interest fund have grown over the year, 7% and 4% respectively.

The Overall Position

SWAG has ended the year with income exceeding expenditure, creating a surplus of £20,949, which is up 21% on the previous year.

Expenditure on charitable activities was down by 18% and the total reserves in the Unrestricted Fund amounted to £76,754.

In round terms total funds for the charity have grown from £469,000 to £521,000, an increase of just over 11%.

Overall, I'm pleased to report a stronger position than last year.

4. Election of Trustees

The Chair said that all the currently serving trustees were offering themselves for re-election. In addition, two co-opted trustees, Mark Parker and Paul Loveridge, were standing for election for the first time. The Chair invited each of them to say a few words of introductions.

The following persons therefore offered themselves for election as Trustees at this AGM:

Sally Smith, Sharon Millett, Sue Cornwell, Janet Kirk, Angela Willows, Jon Hartley, Mark Parker and Paul Loveridge.

Upon a show of hands, the members approved unanimously the election of the named trustee candidates.

5. Election of the Independent Examiner

Mr. Mike Butler had kindly indicated that he was willing to continue for a second year to act as SWAG's Independent Examiner, for which the trustee group was most appreciative.

Upon a show of hands, the members approved unanimously the re-election of Mr. Mike Butler as Independent Examiner of the Charity, proposed by Jon Hartley and seconded by Barry Cornwell.

6. Luncheon Club Report- Jane Pitts

Another luncheon club year is over and the new one has begun with a full complement of volunteers. It is the 32 cooks, 27 volunteer drivers, six welcomers and one very hard-working drivers' organiser, Hugh, who make this club viable and we can't thank them enough for their efforts. Our end of year tea party for our volunteer cooks and welcomers allows us to sort out the next year's rota and to remind everyone of the health and safety issues that are so important. This year we will have an inspection- probably in the autumn- and we hope to maintain our 5-star rating.

We have at present 33 members. Sadly, we have lost one member this year, Pat Claven. She will be missed by us all.

On average we have around 24 members attending each session, except for Christmas, when virtually all members attend! They continue to enjoy a wide variety of main meals and desserts. We are fortunate to have no members with serious allergies and we can easily cater for likes and dislikes. The meal cost remains at £5 for a two course meal with tea or coffee. With the support of SWAG (who pay our room hire costs), we are financially sound. We have sufficient funds accruing during the year to pay for a full Christmas lunch in early December and a small bag of treats for each member.

On a personal note, after giving notice for more than a year, I intend to step down as a Lunch Club organiser in July of this year. I have been Deborah's assistant for the last 18 delightful years and have cooked for the lunch club since moving into the village in 1983. I fully intend to remain as a volunteer cook as long as I am able.

I am very pleased to share with you that Jonathan Elliott-Jones has agreed to take my place. He has cooked for us for some time now (and is very good at it!), and I know he will ably support Deborah, who is staying on until she is happy to step down.

It has been a privilege to serve the community in this way and I will miss seeing our members on such a regular basis. No doubt I will pop in from time to time and will continue to see some members at the Hub.

The Chair took this opportunity to thank Jane for her incredible support and commitment to the Club over so many years, and this met with the acclaim of all those present. Janet Kirk presented a bouquet of flowers as a sign of the charity's appreciation for Jane's outstanding voluntary work.

7. Community Cafe Report- Sue Cornwell

Community Cafe is a successful SWAG activity which is held every week in the Sway Church rooms. We are open from 10:30am to 11:30am and provide a friendly, warm environment where all Sway Village people can meet. This includes residents from Sway Place and the St. Luke's Church yard gardening team, among others.

We began in July 2021 and our meetings have become an important part of many people's week, with numbers rising into the mid 30s. Twice a month we offer delicious homemade cake, and every week we offer the chance to share information and the making of friendships. We are so thankful for our volunteers, in the kitchen, making cake and setting out the table and chairs.

During the summer months we make use of the Church rooms' garden, under a large gazebo.

During the Winter months we offer a delicious, warming, homemade "Soup & Sandwich" every 2nd Tuesday. We have been granted a 5, the highest rating, by the Food Hygiene office. This activity has encouraged new participants.

This year we had the good fortune to be awarded a grant from the Sway Carnival Committee. This has allowed us not to charge for the soup lunches, and so we continue on a donations - only basis.

All are welcome.

8. Medical Transport Coordinator's Report- Hugh Marchant

First, enormous thanks to Mike Green who did this job for many years. When he returned from his travels last year (neatly avoiding presenting at the last AGM!) he used his prodigious powers of persuasion to pass the buck to me. His are big boots to fill, but I'll do my very best.

As medical transport coordinator I work with a brilliant team of call handlers: Mike Green, Colin Denman, Sheila Butler and Jim Tebby, managing the SWAG help line option 1 transport requests. Mike and Colin are old hands and bring years of knowledge and experience to the job. Sheila has been part of our team for well over a year now and Jim started at the end of last year. Thank you all for keeping the transport side running so smoothly, not forgetting of course Jeremy Stevens, without whose IT expertise we would find keeping track of everything impossible. Many thanks also to Rick Walker who retired from the call handling side of things recently after many years' service.

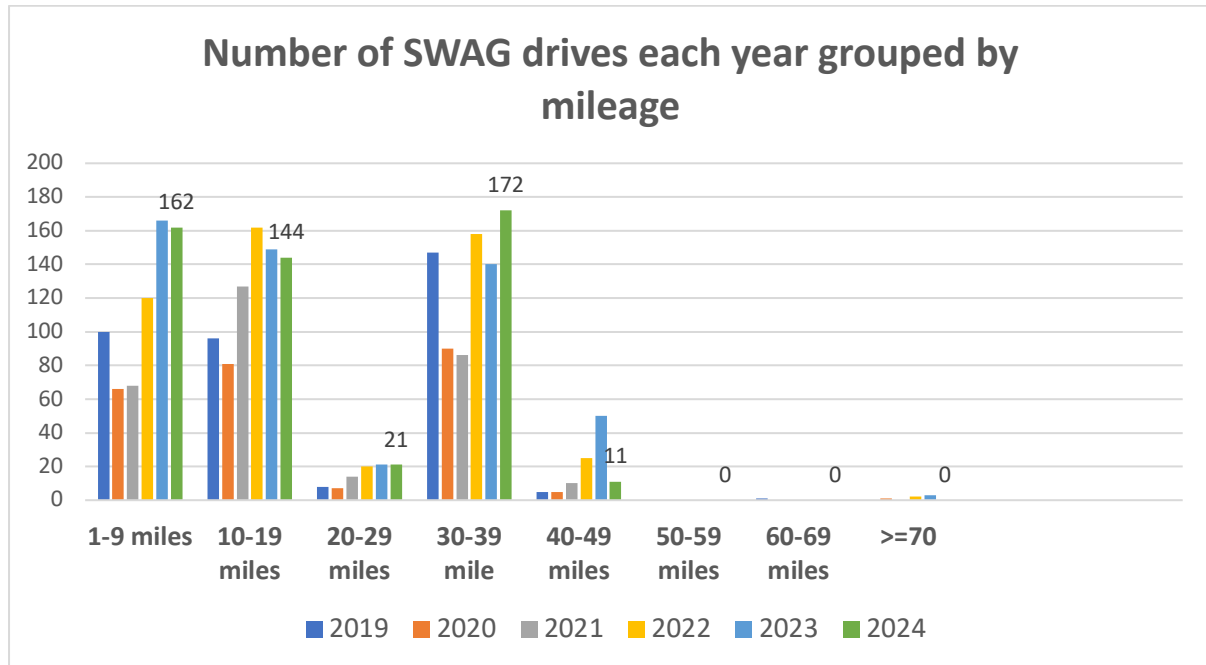
Enormous thanks to all our volunteer drivers, and a very warm welcome to the new ones who joined during this last year, swelling our ranks to well over 60. We need a constant stream of new volunteers to replace those who for various reasons find they are unable to continue. Thank you all.

Over the last financial year **63** (previously 59) Swag drivers drove **9,057** miles (previously 9,760) miles on **477** (previously 496) journeys helping **105** (previously 94) Sway residents. I believe this to be the highest number of drivers and clients since SWAG began, and although the number and total length of journeys is slightly less than in 2023, they are still more than 30% higher than before Covid. The average number of journeys per driver last year was **7.6** (previously 8.4).

Compared to 2023, there has been a **23%** increase in the number of drives in the 30-39 mile range. These are typically trips to/from hospitals in the Southampton area. We saw a big **78%** drop in the number longer than 40 miles. This would include Poole, Chandlers Ford and Eastleigh. The numbers of the more local drives are broadly the same as in 2023.

A chart showing the figures in more detail follows.

So, in summary, it looks as though we will continue to be very busy and an extremely important service to Sway residents. Again, thank you all.



9. Public Forum

A very active discussion took place, with the following main points raised from the floor:

Dave Herrod observed that SWAG is clearly in a strong financial position. It being known that some potential clients are reluctant to approach the charity for assistance because they are reluctant to disclose information about their finances, he asked what more could SWAG's trustees do to promote the availability of financial grants? This was a point echoed in a follow up question from Alan Perry. A further question from Ian Gale enquired how many grants SWAG had declined this year.

The Chair mentioned the importance of trustees being able to satisfy themselves that persons approaching the charity were in genuine difficulties. SWAG's privacy policy, a copy of which is provided to all new clients, explains the basis of how personal information is held and for what period. The Chair also explained the practice of two trustees making a house call on potential grant clients so that matters can be discussed in a completely confidential environment and one comfortable for clients.

The Chair referred to trustees' recent increased presence on social media and the leaflets outlining the main services of the charity, including heating and financial grants, which will be refreshed and re-printed later this year. It is a rare event for a grant request to be turned away, but this might happen for example in cases where household earnings, or savings were at a level higher than would be acceptable under current policies.

Colin Denman asked if SWAG might benefit from holding a “surgery” session at the Sway Community Hub, a practice which the Parish Council had introduced. Ted Watts suggested that SWAG might benefit from engaging with youth group leaders in the village. The Chair mentioned that she had attended the Hub on a number of occasions, and that while there could be some benefit in introducing SWAG and its services to Hub attendees, we should not expect individual residents to come forward and raise personal financial concerns at these opportunities. The most important benefit would likely be to have SWAG flyers describing our services available, and to make sure that any resident who may be motivated to contact SWAG should have the charity’s help line number. On the youth group leader point, the Chair referred to SWAG’s annual grant to St. Luke’s Primary which is restricted to parents of children in straitened financial circumstances. Trustees would give some attention to what other opportunities for engaging with youth leaders could be explored.

Hugh Marchant suggested that our volunteer drivers might distribute flyers to our medical transport clients, while Barry Cornwell, referring to the earlier point about possible client confidentiality concerns, expressed himself as confident that SWAG’s trustee group is widely trusted in the village to keep personal information completely confidential.

Jonathan Elliott-Jones noted SWAG’s role as a village agent for referrals to the New Forest Basics Bank (“NFBB”), and enquired whether the Basics Bank ever makes reciprocal referrals of Sway residents back to SWAG. The Chair explained that all referrals made by SWAG are clearly identifiable to the NFBB. The Chair felt that there might be scope for additional reciprocal referrals, and this could be explored with the NFBB.

There being no further questions from the floor, the Chair thanked all those present for attending the AGM and for their active participation, before declaring the meeting closed at 8:10 p.m.