



# Friends of Stretford Public Hall



### Location

Stretford, Manchester



### Founded

2014



### Legal structure

Community Benefit Society



### Description of services

Maintenance and management of Stretford Public Hall, a community hub and office space

## Overview of the business

Stretford Public Hall was built for the local community by philanthropist John Rylands in 1878. Since then it had over 100 years of community, and later local authority uses, until its closure in 2012. In 2015, the Hall was placed into the stewardship of The Friends of Stretford Public Hall, and the intention has been to turn the hall into an exciting community venue.

*‘We had an unshakeable belief that we would save it and it would stay in the public arena... There was a strong feeling that this building shouldn’t be lost.’*

The organisation is still in its youth and many development paths are still emerging. The building currently provides office and activity space for social events, meeting spaces, micro start-ups and studios for local artists:

*‘It’s a community hub – that’s what we call it – the business arm is an anchor – MP’s office, architectural office – anchor tenants – and all have some values in putting something into the community.’ Seen as pragmatic way to balance community and*

*local work/start-ups: ‘at the start-up phase the ideas involved a balance of “fluffy, lovely community projects” plus “keeping the building standing”.’*

The aims gradually coalesced around a number of aspects, projects/ themes that could be undertaken and the aim of attracting tenants with a connection to the overall ethos. *‘It came together in a very important way... I wanted arts in the building, there was a diverse board – covering themes like health and well-being, sports, arts – we wanted to look at education, relaxation and well-being and inspiration...’*

## Why is community accountability important?

The ambition for the Hall was to establish a democratically run community resource: *‘We wanted it not to be run by a few people and what they thought the building should be providing... so rather aiming for “on-going conversation” and to do things that are not provided in the locality or area.’*



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*'We're all local people... we all had ideas – there was a consultation on what should happen here.'*

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The Hall is owned by people who are local investors and it therefore needs to reflect the needs and wants of local people and be run in a way that reflects these values: *'People invested money and those who invested can see what is happening – it is a vibrant place in the community... Before people commit time and money they need to be sure governance is in place and can be held to account.'*

Staff and trustees see themselves as accountable to the geographic community and as responsible for looking after a community resource. They recognised that individuals come and go, and so a long-term vision of accountability is important: *'After all, you don't want to run it into the ground – it has to be commercially viable so there is a balance between community and viability/funding.'*

### What does accountability look like locally?

Here we use three categories to provide a snapshot of some of the mechanisms and methods that the business uses in community accountability. These categories are not hard and fast; there is some overlap between the areas outlined.

### Structures

- Community shareholders who each have one vote
- Annual AGMs open to all
- A Dropbox where all business documents are stored for transparency and access
- The Hall is managed and run by local volunteers and a part-time paid administrator
- A community engagement policy is in the process of being developed to formalise some of this activity

### Relationships

Those leading the business saw themselves as holding a number of different relationships linked to accountability: *'There are different layers to this – there are members, then volunteers we listen mostly at meetings about their gripes and wishes. Then there is a broader scale – to people who live in Stretford.'*

Access and having a local presence were important: *'If people see stuff going on here they can see it's worked, it's a hub, it's very central, it's all about inclusivity.'*

### Communications

The community is drawn in and listened to in a range of ways: *'leaflet drops, posters, walk in, talk to people, feedback.'*

Overall, there is an ethos of access and inclusion. This has led to an investment in making sure that the building is open to the general public one day a week, despite the fact that this also raises some risks (e.g. safety issues re who comes in/out).