

MHVG

Morton Hall Visitors' Group Annual Report 2020

Registered Charity no: 1174056
Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2020

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MHVG is currently funded by:

The Leigh Trust
The Noel Buxton Trust
Marsh Christian Trust
The National Emergencies Trust

Previous funders have included:
The Allen Lane Foundation
The Hilden Charitable Fund
Swan Mountain Trust
The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
The Souter Trust

Morton Hall Visitors' Group Annual Report 2020

Morton Hall Visitors' Group: a brief history

Morton Hall Visitors' Group (MHVG) has provided emotional support and practical help to people detained indefinitely under immigration powers at the remote Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) in Lincolnshire, which houses 392 male foreign nationals, for almost a decade.

Since 2011, MHVG has cultivated a group of skilled and dedicated volunteers who have supported hundreds of people in detention at Morton Hall. Many of the people we support are waiting to find out if they will be allowed to stay in Britain or returned to their countries of origin. None of them are being detained as punishment for a crime and all can be held indefinitely.

In the year ending June 2020, 19,128 people entered the UK's detention estate¹, a decrease compared to the year before, due to the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Morton Hall IRC has a very diverse population, which varies frequently. In the most recent inspection in the fourth quarter of 2019, H M Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) reported² that there were 49 different nationalities represented including people from:

- Albania (19.7%)
- Pakistan (7.4%)
- India (8.6%)
- Bangladesh (6.1%)
- China (4.9%)
- Iran (4.5%)
- Iraq (3.7%)
- Poland (4.5%)
- Nigeria (3.5%)
- Vietnam (2.9%)

These figures change week to week. While 67% of the population had been held for under a month, at the time of inspection 37 men had been held for more than two months and six for more than 10 months.

It is our belief that indefinite detention at an IRC almost always has a detrimental impact on a person's mental health and wellbeing and that the experience can be especially traumatising for those who have fled violence and persecution, or for

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-june-2020/how-many-people-are-detained-or-returned>

² H M Inspectorate of Prisons "Report on an unannounced inspection of Morton Hall Immigration Removal Centre 28 October – 15 November 2019" Appendix III Detainee population profile pp 65-67

people who have been victims of human trafficking. Devastatingly yet unsurprisingly, the same report also highlighted 71% of people detained at Morton Hall felt depressed and 29% felt suicidal.

We believe that immigration detention should end and be replaced with more humane, community-based alternatives. Until then, our primary aim is to ease the isolation and anxiety associated with indefinite immigration detention; provide solidarity and signpost to services able to offer specialist advice and guidance. Our volunteers also act as unofficial human rights monitors, by providing a bigger-picture view of the reality of immigration detention. This helps to challenge negative rhetoric surrounding immigration and asylum. It also informs and supports national campaigns that promote progressive immigration policy reform.

In July 2020, it was announced that Morton Hall will be re-purposed to a category C adult prison for “foreign national offenders” during 2021. Despite this change, it is MHVG’s intention to continue providing friendship and support to people held at Morton Hall.

Annual report – achievements & performance

Chair's report

Last year I began my report by sharing the successes of the group, following the appointment of MHVG’s first member of staff - our project director/co-ordinator, Camille.

While Covid and the pending re-role has made this year a very different one from last, I am pleased to report that Camille, and Beth Godley who is covering Camille’s maternity leave, have continued to drive the group forward. Despite the significant challenges, we maintain a strong, trained group of visitors and supporters. It has again been a joy to witness the increased confidence and number of visitors who are able to support people in detention. In addition, they have led the group in educating a variety of individuals and other groups about the immigration detention system.

Camille has contributed hugely to the efforts of our group to provide joined-up support for those at Morton Hall IRC, by collaborating with The Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID) and many other organisations supporting people in detention and post-detention. Beth has brought a different set of skills and experiences and their combined efforts have ensured that the offer we can make is relevant, timely and appropriate.

Our aim is to work towards making the need for groups such as ours redundant, but even with the pandemic reducing the UK’s detention estate, in the year ending June 2020 19,128 people entered detention in the UK. This number is still far too high.

The trustees are very grateful to Camille, Beth, Stuart, Dave, who is our point of contact, Estelle Fisher, our examiner of accounts, and CA Plus who deal with salary payments. Together we have a strong team.

As I ease out of the role as chair and trustee, I wish our newly invigorated group members my very best wishes for next year.

We support some of the most vulnerable members of society at particularly stressful times and our actions can and do make a huge difference to their lives. To those of you who have volunteered in any way to support the group and/or people in detention this year, the trustees thank you.

Lynda Wilson
Chair

Coordinator's report

The last 12 months has brought significant change and challenge for MHVG.

The onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic in March saw MHVG lose access to the people we support, as the centre closed its doors in a bid to prevent the transmission of the virus. With all visitor groups across the country prevented from entering IRCs, Non-Government Organisations' (NGOs) visibility across the entire detention estate diminished dramatically and along with it referrals.

Suddenly, we found ourselves operating in the dark, unsure of how many people were being detained at Morton Hall, whether their needs were being met or if they had access to the legal advice and healthcare support to which they are entitled. We were reliant on updates from Morton Hall's management and separate NGOs to establish facts and seek out individuals who may have required support from MHVG but were unaware of our services.

In addition to the disruption caused by the pandemic, the announcement in July 2020 of Morton Hall's planned repurposing into a prison for "foreign national offenders", represented a crossroads for our charity. Turn in one direction and celebrate Morton Hall IRC's closure and wind down MHVG having achieved our goal, turn in the other direction and recognise the repurposing as contributing towards a national trend that has seen a marked increase in the use of prison places to detain people under immigration powers, once custodial sentences have been served. We chose the latter.

Whether people are serving sentences or being held under immigration powers, prison is a tough environment. It compounds many of the feelings of isolation, desperation and anxiety people experience in IRCs. The harsher conditions and stark differences in regimes can combine to render people invisible to the outside world - making it difficult to access publicly funded legal advice or communicate with loved ones and heightening the risk of harm, mistreatment and unjust outcomes.

While the last year has been rife with challenges and uncertainty, it has also galvanised our group. The injustices that we have witnessed, and the continuation of a cruel, inhumane and frankly dangerous immigration system has served to fuel our commitment. It has given us a clear mandate to continue and expand our provision

to accommodate people held under immigration powers and non-British nationals serving sentences.

Without judgement or prejudice, we will work to ensure people do not become lost in the prison system, that advocacy for improvement of conditions continues and that people have access to friendship, support, solidarity and services able to champion their human rights and secure just outcomes.

Bethan Godley, acting project co-ordinator, February 2020

Responding to change

Since March 2020, Covid-19 restrictions have prevented us from accessing Morton Hall. In order to respond to this challenge, we have undertaken several actions. These include:

- Liaising with remaining clients about the safety measures in place at Morton Hall, during the early weeks and months of the pandemic. This remote IRC monitoring was part of a nationally coordinated effort and informed sector-wide advocacy activity
- Collating information for the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) relating to access to phones/video contact/ computers needed to facilitate contact with the outside world during the pandemic
- Liaising closely with legal organisations to support access to making a claim for unlawful detention for those being held despite Covid-19
- Undertaking regular contact with Morton Hall's management to establish relevant facts relating to conditions during the pandemic
- Providing training on how to support people over the phone (see training section below) and offering telephone support to people in detention at Morton Hall
- Designing and distributing Covid-19 specific leaflets to people at Morton Hall, informing them of our befriending services and the new option of being contacted by phone by volunteers
- Taking part in weekly Zoom meetings with coordinators of other visitor groups across the country to understand the broader picture and inform our response to Covid-19
- Producing a risk assessment for re-establishing Covid-secure face to face visiting, once restrictions lift

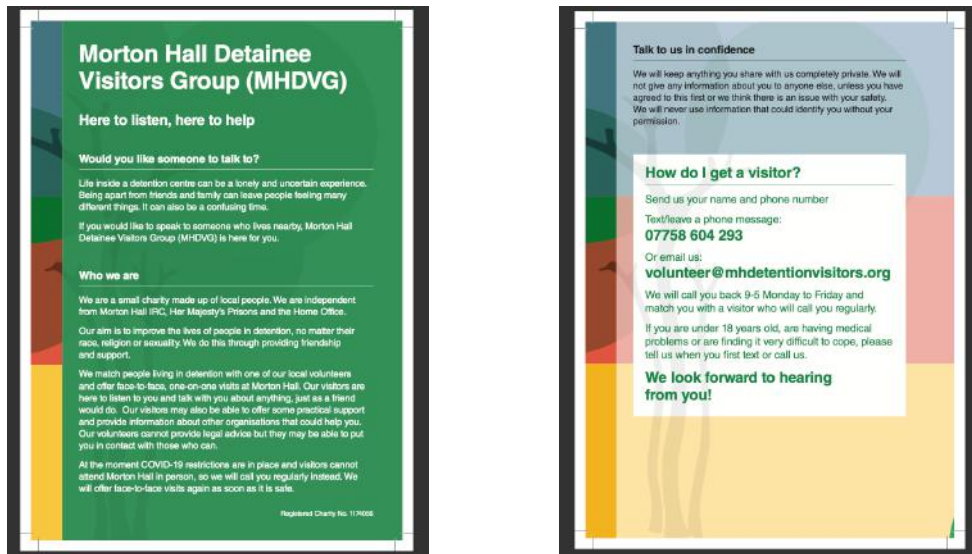


Figure 1: New leaflet redesigned and distributed to people at Morton Hall to promote telephone support offering during Covid-19 lockdown

To respond to Morton Hall’s planned repurposing into a category C adult prison for “foreign national offenders”, we have:

- Released a statement to local and national press, acknowledging the news but highlighting our concern at the increasing use of prisons to hold people under immigration powers, once custodial sentences are complete
- Liaised with management on a monthly basis to enquire about plans and timelines and keep volunteers informed of any progress
- Undertaken extensive research into the requirements, challenges and opportunities of visiting in prisons as opposed to visiting in IRCs. This included consultation with experts in the field, ranging from the deputy director of Detention Action, a specialist immigration law solicitor with Duncan Lewis and two coordinators from other visitor groups (Asylum Welcome & Lewes Organisation in Support of Refugees & Asylum Seekers) that visit people in prisons
- Produced a document outlining key challenges associated with visiting in prisons and potential operational adaptations needed to rise to them successfully
- Drafted a ‘new narrative’ for MHVG, acknowledging the pending re-role of Morton Hall and confirming our intention to continue providing friendship, practical support and signposting to people held under immigration powers and to non-British nationals serving sentences
- Rebranded from MHDVG to MHVG to acknowledge the fact that our client base may expand to include non-British nationals serving sentences, once the transition is complete

- Became a member of Clinks - an organisation that promotes and represents the voluntary sector working with people in the criminal justice system and their families
- Established a 'Visiting in Prisons' working group with volunteers, which is conducted over Zoom with the aim of scrutinising research and developing practicable solutions to the identified challenges in order to promote service continuity
- Recruited and trained 10 new volunteers in anticipation of the rising demand, once Covid-19 restrictions lift and the repurposing is complete

Volunteers & visits

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our organisation and we are especially grateful to our members who have maintained their commitment to the charity and to supporting people in detention at Morton Hall, despite not being able to visit in person.

This year we have been delighted to welcome 10 new volunteer visitors, from both the Nottingham and Lincoln regions.

While we had planned to use funding obtained from the National Emergencies Trust to support a recruitment drive in the last quarter of 2020, we made the decision to postpone this activity until more clarity is available re: a return to face to face visits.

Due to Covid-19, we have been unable to maintain 2019's presence of a visit every 3.3 days. However, before lockdown came into force, we were able to visit Morton Hall on 24 occasions to provide face to face support. Post lockdown, volunteers who received specific telephone support training have also been able to support a number of people detained at Morton Hall by phone, with 62 calls placed.

Having established an active group of volunteers in Lincoln in 2018/9, including monthly supervision, to complement the long-established monthly meeting of volunteers in Nottingham, it has been a strange and testing year not being able to meet in person to share difficult experiences and learn from and support each other.

To prevent disengagement and to keep our much-valued volunteers up to date with activity, in September 2020 we launched our email newsletter. The newsletter is published and circulated every month and provides news about the rapidly shifting immigration detention landscape, details of training opportunities and updates about the repurposing of Morton Hall. While a monthly newsletter does not compare favourably with face-to-face meetings, it has been well received by volunteers and supporters and is something we hope to continue post-Covid.

Our 'Visiting in Prisons' working group is also providing a great opportunity for us to come together and contribute to MHVG, while not being able to visit people in detention. We hope to use this working group as a template to establish other working group off-shoots, with the aim of encouraging greater volunteer involvement with various operational segments, from fundraising to promotion.

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Active volunteers over the year	11	28	32	22
New volunteers trained/inducted		16	9	10
Volunteers in Lincoln	0	7	10	11
Active volunteers		18	22	16
Non visiting volunteers	2	3	3	8
Client referrals		45	68	16
Number of visits	62	94	110	24 (+62 calls)

Training

During 2020, despite being unable to meet in person, with the support of AVID, MHVG was able to redesign and deliver online initial training to five new volunteers. Over the course of several weeks, we covered:

- Introduction to immigration detention
- Immigration detention policy and practice
- Access to health and legal services in detention

The remaining new volunteers either received induction/training prior to lockdown measures being introduced or are currently awaiting training.

In collaboration with a variety of organisations, in 2020, new and existing volunteers also attended multiple training sessions, including:

- Two sessions on supporting people by phone
- Trafficking, delivered by an independent solicitor
- Legal aid, delivered by an independent solicitor
- 'Working in Prisons', delivered by Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)
- Time limit amendments to the Immigration Bill webinar
- 'Charter flights, access to legal advice and the Detention Duty Advice (DDA) scheme should work, delivered via AVID
- A session on 'Immigration detention and the risk of transfer to an EU country', delivered via AVID
- Unlearning racism webinar, delivered by the Racial Justice Network
- Supporting LGBTQI+ people in detention delivered by UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG)
- Virtual lunch and learn event with Dr. Teresa Degenhardt, co-ordinator of Larne House Visitors' Group (exploring the impact of Covid-19 on visitors to immigration detention)
- 'Healthcare in Immigration Detention; Training / Q&A for support and visitor groups working with people in detention', delivered by Medical Justice



Figure 2: Initial training session for new volunteers, delivered over Zoom in several evening sessions by MHVG and AVID

Partnership work and organisational profile

Through the recruitment of new volunteers, extensive research and engagement with key stakeholders, we have continued to extend our reach. Some of 2020's highlights include:

- Accepted as members of the Detention Forum, a group established to enable a more coordinated approach across a broader spectrum of NGOs working on the theme of detention (not just inside centres)
- Accepted as members of Clinks
- Attended quarterly meetings with Detention Forum
- Developed and strengthened our relationships with other organisations working in the field
- Continued to develop our relationship with the management of Morton Hall IRC and the welfare team, with regular correspondence taking place between all parties
- Worked with a wide range of partner organisations e.g. Detention Action, Medical Justice, other visitors' groups across the UK, UKLGIG, the British Red Cross, and HOST Nottingham, to name a few
- Attended online event: 'Migration and Coronavirus, What Now and Where Next?'
- Met with Music in Detention who also work within Morton Hall
- Took part in online webinar re: strategic communications around immigration detention
- Co-signed several NGO letters to advocate for urgent review/reform of immigration detention, including: an open letter from BID calling for the release of everybody held in prisons under immigration powers, a letter drafted by Liberty addressed to immigration minister, Chris Philip MP, calling for 'no return to normal' following the initial reduction in immigration detention as a result of Covid-19 and a letter from AVID calling for the release of everyone held in barracks accommodation
- Participated in research interview "Visitors' Group Involvement in Inspection Process"

We have a very good relationship with AVID, and we have attended bi-monthly AVID co-ordinators' meetings since the onset of the pandemic. This has been a vital exercise in sharing information re: the rapidly evolving nature of the detention estate, as well as providing an opportunity to share and learn from best practice with other visitors' groups, (15+), across the UK.

A new website and social media presence

Although in recent years we've managed well without a website, we believe building a stronger online presence is essential as we adapt to meet evolving demands. As such, we have invested some of our resources during 2020 in developing a new website and joining Twitter (@WeAreMHVG).

Our website will raise awareness of our services to the people being held at Morton Hall and their families; offering a quick and simple way for them to self-refer. It will help us to attract new volunteers, better communicate with existing volunteers through a secure members' area, offer fast access to information for prospective benefactors and provide an additional funding stream for the charity with the inclusion of a 'donate now' button (coming soon).

A new, accessible and regularly updated website will also help us to challenge the stereotypes associated with immigration detention more broadly.

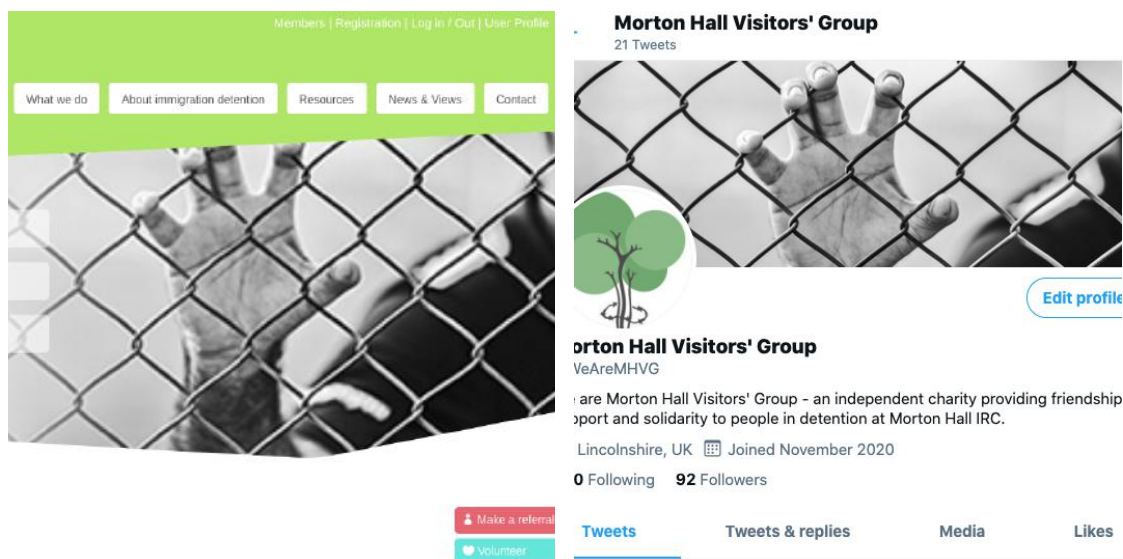


Figure 3: A new website and Twitter presence for a new era of MHVG

Fundraising

Grants received in this financial year comprised £1,500 from The Leigh Trust, £3,000 from The Noel Buxton Trust, £450 from the Marsh Christian Trust, and £1,500 from the National Emergencies Fund Lincolnshire COVID19 for a specific volunteer recruitment project. Donations of £600 were also received.

Trustees report for the year ending 31 December 2020

The trustees during the financial year and up to and including the date the report was approved were:

Name	Position	Dates
Lynda Wilson	Chair	Appointed August 2017
Francesca Bargiela	Trustee	Appointed August 2017
James Moulton	Trustee	Appointed February 2019
Sayeeka Farnes	Trustee	Co-opted February 2021
Chris Leaman	Trustee	Co-opted February 2021

Charity number

Charity number 1174056. The charity was registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales on the 1 August 2017.

Registered and principal address

The Sycamore Centre
33A Hungerhill Road
Nottingham
NG3 4NB

Bankers

CAF Bank Ltd
25 Kings Hill Avenue
Kings Hill
West Malling
Kent
ME19 4J

Structure, governance and management

The charity is governed by a constitution adopted on the 1 August 2017 and amended on 18 January 2021.

Method of recruitment and appointment of trustees

The trustees of the charity are appointed by the members at the AGM.

Objectives and activities

The charity's objectives

For the public benefit, to relieve the needs of foreign nationals who are, or who have been, detained under UK law at the Morton Hall Immigration Removal Centre, or elsewhere, who are suffering financial hardship, distress or are otherwise in need by the provision of financial support, goods, items, advocacy and support, particularly through, but not limited to, the provision of a trained visiting network.

The charity's main activities

1. The provision of a trained visiting network of volunteers who can offer emotional and practical support to detainees in Morton Hall IRC

2. The education of the public about the plight of immigration detainees, the experiences they may have had historically or whilst detained, and the broader legal situation for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

Public benefit statement

In setting our objectives and planning our activities our Trustees have given serious consideration to the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit and in particular the prevention and relief of need.

Achievements and performance

Please see annual report 2020 achievements and performance section (see contents page).

Financial review

We started the year with £15,883 in the bank. The net payments for the year were £18,545 and net receipts were £7,050. Grants received in this financial year comprised £1,500 from The Leigh Trust, £3,000 from The Noel Buxton Trust, £450 from the Marsh Christian Trust, and £1,500 from the National Emergencies Fund Lincolnshire COVID19 for a specific volunteer recruitment project. £600 in individual donations were also received. At the end of the financial year our closing balance was £4,529 with a further £112 in petty cash. We are however still owed 3 months of Statutory Maternity Pay from HMRC to cover Oct-Dec.

The main items of expenditure were the Project Coordinator's wages, which were higher this year due to an additional 2-month crossover period prior to the Project Coordinator taking maternity leave and her maternity cover replacement. However, travel expenses were significantly reduced due to the impact of the pandemic on our ability to visit people in detention at Morton Hall. And although the total expenditure on travel was similar to last year's, this was only because the vast majority of visitors last year did not claim expenses.

Given the current economic climate we recognise that fundraising is going to be even harder in the months and years ahead, and have tried to reduce our outgoings as much as possible. We no longer have an office and storage space and our freelance administrator has offered to volunteer his time. We will continue to look for savings where we can.

Reserves policy

Last year we adopted a 'reserves policy', which sought to ensure that winding-up costs are covered should it be desirable or necessary to cease activity. These will be sufficient to cover staff redundancies, rent and utility costs and any professional fees likely to be incurred. The reserves target has been met for this financial year.

Signed on behalf of the board of trustees:

Signed: Date: 1/03/2021

Name: Lynda Wilson, Chair

Independent Examiner's Report

Morton Hall Visitors' Group Registered Charity number 1174056
The Sycamore Centre, 33A Hungerhill Road, St Anns, Nottingham NG3 4NB

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of Morton Hall Visitors' Group, for the year ended 31 December 2020.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Trust you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

Having satisfied myself that the charity is not subject to audit under company law and is eligible but not required, to be subject to an independent examination, it is my responsibility to examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145 of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the Trust as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts did not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed: Estelle Fisher

Name: Estelle Fisher, Postgraduate Diploma in Audit Management and Consultancy, Institute of Internal Auditors, Advanced Diploma.

Address: 35, Mere Road, Erdington, Birmingham B23 7LH

Morton Hall Visitors' Group: Receipts and Payments Accounts for the year ending December 31 2020

	2020		2019	
Receipts	£	£	£	£
Donations		600		1,370
Grants		6,450		21,900
The Leigh Trust	1,500			
The Noel Buxton Trust	3,000			
NET Lincs Covid 19	1,500			
Marsh Christian Trust	450			
Total receipts	7,050		23,270	
Payments				
Wages, NI, Pensions & Payroll		16,410		12,434
Bank charges		60		60
Insurance		297		265
Office/Phones/Website		405		804
Visitors Travel/Expenses		268		177
Staff Travel/Expenses		389		387
Detainee Phone Cards		-		-
Recruitment		-		-
Membership/Subs		72		60
Publicity		462		362
Equipment		-		-
Events		35		110
Misc Expenses & Training		147		90
Total Payments		18,545		14,749
Surplus		(11,495)		8,521
Statement of Assets and Liabilities		2020		2019
Cash in bank		4,417		15,883
Cash in hand		112		141
Less Liabilities due in year		-		-
Total		4,529		16,024
Represented by bank balance b/f		15,883		7,455
Cash in hand b/f		141		49
Surplus income over expenditure		(11,495)		8,521
Total		4,529		16,024

Notes to Morton Hall Visitors' Group accounts for the year ended 2020

Accounting policies

Basis of accounting

- The trustees have taken advantage of section 133 of the Charities Act 2011 and have prepared the accounts on a receipts and payments basis
- There has been no change to the accounting policy since last year
- No changes have been made to the accounts for previous years

Taxation

As a registered charity the organisation benefits from rates relief and is generally exempt from income tax and capital gains tax but not from VAT. Irrecoverable VAT is included in the cost of those items to which it relates.