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About us

Barristers' Chambers Limited's (BCL) purpose is to be the home of the Victorian Bar, open to all.

Established in 1959 as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Victorian Bar. BCL provides a broad range of chambers, technology and network services, full service desk support and managed floor service to over 1,431 barristers in seven buildings.

BCL is unique. It provides monthly occupancies and the flexibility to move across floors and buildings with technology, facilities management and administrative support with no entry or exit costs.



Why Take Chambers with BCL?



1. Chambers on monthly occupancies

- No financial barriers to entry or exit.
- 30 day chamber rules of occupancy and the flexibility to move across all BCL floors and buildings.
- No hidden costs or contractual risks that come with a commercial lease.
- All administration in one monthly invoice.
- Work alongside your fellow members of the Bar.



2. We coordinate all building management & maintenance

- BCL will liaise and coordinate with building managers and contractors on your behalf across 7 buildings, 78 floors and 1,349 chambers.



3. Technology services & support

- No set up costs.
- In chamber and remote technology consultant support.
- BCL corporate grade technology and network services provides you with a managed enterprise environment with corporate grade security platforms.



4. Managed floor services

- BCL can recruit paralegal, reception or secretarial support for you floor with no employment cost or risk.
- BCL can organise and manage the services you choose for your floor such as consumables, art and subscriptions.

BCL provides a variety of chambers across 78 floors in seven buildings in the Melbourne CBD legal precinct.

Three buildings are wholly owned: the original home of the Bar Owen Dixon Chambers East, Owen Dixon Chambers West and Douglas Menzies Chambers. The remaining four are leased properties known as Aickin Chambers (including Emmerson Chambers), Castan Chambers (including Gorman, Lonsdale, and Crockett Chambers), Isaacs Chambers, Ninian Stephen Chambers and Henry Winneke Chambers.

Our Locations

Buildings within the court precinct



1. Owen Dixon Chambers East
205 William Street, Melbourne
2. Owen Dixon Chambers West
525 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne
3. Douglas Menzies Chambers
180 William Street, Melbourne
4. Aickin Chambers
200 Queen Street, Melbourne
5. Isaacs Chambers
555 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne
6. Ninian Stephen Chambers
Henry Winneke Chambers
140 William Street, Melbourne
7. Castan Chambers
460 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne



Business Snapshot



Level 18, Owen Dixon Chambers West

	2023	2022
Buildings	7	7
Floors	78	77
Chambers	1,349	1,314
Barristers in BCL chambers	1,431	1,402
	88% market share of barristers who have chambers	89% market share of barristers who have chambers
Property asset value	\$247.0m	\$288.7m
Total investment into improving services	\$2.7m	\$2.7m
Revenue	\$44.4m	\$43.0m
Operating Profit Before Tax	\$1.9m	\$1.2m

Chairman's Summary

The Honourable
John Digby KC



The BCL team remained busy, investing \$2.7 million into floors, chambers and services, responding to 23,000 enquiries through the BCL Service Desk and assisting with 5,000 property and 11,000 technology service requests.

The 2023 financial year was a challenging one with BCL having to manage significantly increasing costs and higher vacancies. This impacted BCL's profitability and, together with continuing high levels of unpaid chamber fees (rent), has constrained BCL's capacity to reinvest in providing new and improved services to the Bar.

Despite historically high vacancy rates across the CBD, as at 30 June 2023 BCL had achieved 93% occupancy and provided accommodation to 1,431 barristers in 1,349 chambers, on 78 floors and in 7 buildings. BCL's strong financial performance in recent years allowed it to defer rent increases over the preceding four years to assist the Bar in recovering from the impact of the Covid pandemic. For part of that period BCL was also required to comply with the Victorian Government Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme by not increasing rents. During the Covid pandemic period BCL further assisted Victorian barrister tenants by providing significant rent relief.

A major re-pricing of chambers rent was announced in May 2023. This major re-pricing was required to safeguard BCL's long term solvency and to ensure that BCL can continue to support the Bar by providing a variety of chambers, technology, and other quality services at the lowest possible cost to Victorian barristers. The circumstances which necessitated the re-pricing of rent included dramatically increasing operating costs, the need to eradicate historical rent pricing inequities between many chambers, the effect of the COVID instigated rent increase moratorium and elevated vacancies.

It should be borne in mind in relation to BCL's operations and vulnerabilities that BCL offers Victorian barristers the flexibility of 30 day unsecured occupancies in order to minimise barriers to practice at the Victorian Bar and to provide a certain and uncomplicated rent product for the Bar. Monthly unsecured occupancies is one of the major benefits delivered by the BCL model. However, the BCL model, which operates in respect of a number of buildings in its portfolio owned by third party landlords, requires it to enter into long term leases and therefore gives rise to significant risk for BCL.

This coupled with BCL's beneficial pricing approach and determination to provide a suite of high-quality services to barrister occupants results in BCL being more financially exposed to significant increases in operating costs than typical commercial landlords. Consequentially, this model also depends upon a high level of barrister commitment to BCL.

Throughout the subject year the BCL team remained busy, investing \$2.7 million to improve its facilities, floors, chambers and services. BCL also responded to 23,000 enquiries through the BCL Service Desk, assisting with 5,000 property and 11,000 technology service requests.

Barristers have continued to see a year-on-year improvements in BCL's service and BCL continues to identify and invest in opportunities, in order to deliver value to members of the Bar. In FY2023 85% of the barristers who completed an Engagement Survey confirmed that they were satisfied with the services provided by BCL.

In the period under report the BCL Board welcomed Bar Vice President Georgina Schoff KC and Megan Tittensor S.C, as Directors from 13 December 2022. Sam Hay KC, BCL's Deputy Chairman, resigned from the Board on 14 November 2022 to take on the role of Victorian Bar Council President.

BCL thanks Victorian Barristers for their continued support for BCL.

**The Honourable John Digby KC
Chairman**



Level 14, Aickin Chambers

Snapshot of our Services

Service Desk

A Service Desk team at Owen Dixon Chambers.

- Answered 8,728 phone calls.
- Responded to 14,202 emails.
- 15,648 property and technology service requests completed.

Chamber Management

A Chamber Management team managing moves across the 1,349 chambers on 78 floors in 7 buildings.

- 93% of chambers occupied.
- Assisted 422 barristers moving and taking up new chambers.
- 352 barristers sharing in 160 rooms.
- Responded to 9,104 emails received in relation to chamber applications, moves etc.
- 2 new floors and 42 chambers at Henry Winneke Chambers (level 27, 140 William Street) and Aickin Chambers (level 14, 200 Queen Street).

Property

A Property team that manages a range of repairs and maintenance, operational services and fit-out programmes.

- Administered and co-ordinated 4,805 property related service requests.
- Facilitated 482 room preparations including access, signage, joinery, and improvements for incoming barristers.
- Facilitated essential maintenance and regulatory compliance across all BCL chambers and buildings.

Technology

A Technology team providing reliable, safe, competitive, innovative technology and network solutions and services.

- 10,843 service requests fulfilled with average of 80% same day completion.
- 35 million emails processed with over 12 million spam emails blocked.
- Over 50% of BCL floors are now using the BCL Managed Printer Service, with 717 users printing a total of 4.6 million pages – 74% more than FY2022.
- 7 new meeting rooms with audio visual (AV) facilities with over 50 AV rooms now available across all BCL chambers.
- Setup of equipment for over 250 barrister relocations within BCL chambers.

Managed Floor Services

- 15 BCL employees supporting 280 barristers across 13 floors of chambers.



New boardroom with AV facilities at Owen Dixon Chambers West

Key Projects & Initiatives

Over 50% of BCL floors are now using the BCL Managed Printer Service, with 717 users printing a total of 4.6 million pages – 74% more than FY2022.

Property and Chambers

- With the flexibility of 30 days occupancies over 200 barristers relocated on their floor, to another floor or to another BCL building through FY2023. These moves are coordinated by BCL from room preparations, joinery design and installation along with technology support and overall administration support.
- Utilising a government grant, BCL invested just under \$2 million in installing LED lights in Owen Dixon Chambers East, Owen Dixon Chambers West and Douglas Menzies Chambers. These lights consume less power, produce less carbon emissions and are longer lasting.
- Funding and coordination of conversion of many vacant chambers on many floors in BCL buildings to provide a common area space and meeting room with the installation of audio-visual capability to support online trials.
- In January 2023 Henry Winneke Chambers at 140 William Street joined BCL.
- In May 2023, a new non-group BCL Managed Floor on level 14 at Aickin Chambers became available, providing 30 cost effective chambers. This floor was previously tenanted by law firms and other professional businesses as part of Opus Workspaces (the wholly owned subsidiary of BCL).
- Several floor upgrades, furniture options and common area upgrades were completed and further floors will be completed in FY2024.
- BCL continues to review chamber vacancies for continual improvement and to ensure optimal use of space such as room subdivisions, creation of meeting rooms with video conferencing facilities and room preparations, improvement and joinery design, construction and installation.

Technology and Network Services and Support

With the increased amount of online cyber security risk, FY2023 saw a strong focus on increasing barrister technology security measures including:

- Resourcing technology consultant support throughout the year to respond to over 10,000 service requests (emails and calls) remotely and in chamber, processing 35 million emails, and blocking 12 million of these as potential scam or risk.
- Over 50% of BCL floors are now using the BCL Managed Printer Service, with 717 users printing a total of 4.6 million pages – 74% more than FY2022. This is more than 50% of occupants now using a high quality BCL subsidised and supported printer with connection, management and billing all co-ordinated and supported by the BCL team.
- The uplift to Microsoft's modern authentication which provides a higher level of encryption for barrister passwords when accessing BCL systems.
- The introduction of multi-factor authentication (MFA) for all @vicbar.com.au accounts. This was achieved through increased support and resourcing to ensure all barristers were upgraded and secured with minimal disruption.
- Further enhancements and automation to international access and stronger administrative mechanisms to further protect privileged accounts with greater monitoring of third-party applications integrated by barristers.
- Discounted pricing for Enterprise grade Dropbox services to better support and protect barrister data.
- Introduction of a new Technology Subscription Portal (initially with Dropbox) to ultimately provide one channel for subscription management and payment of BCL software (to be further extended throughout FY2024).

FY2024 will continue to focus on enhanced security and system performance with initiatives designed around barrister data and network measures to limit the reach of potential security risks.

The year will also deliver more Managed Desktop services to better support barristers and protect individual devices.

Our Board Members



**The Honourable John Digby KC
(Chairman)**
LLB (Melb)

Appointed 10 September 2021



Eugene Wheelahan KC
BA, LLB, LLM, FTI

Appointed 1 June 2021



Frank Parry KC
B Sc (Hons), LLB

Appointed 23 December 2021



Romauld Andrew KC
BA (Hons), LLB, LLM

Appointed 23 December 2021



Georgina L Schoff KC
LLB, LLM

Appointed 13 December 2022



Megan Tittensor S.C.
B Com, LLB (Hons)

Appointed 13 December 2022



Benjamin Murphy
BA, LLB (Hons)

Appointed 10 September 2021



Catherine Walter AM
LLB (Hons), LLM, MBA (Melb)

Appointed 22 March 2019



Mick Brennan
B Com (Qld), CA

Appointed 24 May 2019



Paul Clark
B Bus (Acc) FCA, EMBA (AGSM),
SFFinsia, GAICD

Appointed 21 March 2018

Financial Results and movement in Equity

BCL's operating profit before tax increased from \$1.2 million in FY2022 to \$1.9 in FY2023. This increase is attributable to a growth in revenue as a result of new floors offset by continued growth in all expenses, particularly rates and taxes, people costs and finance expenses given the steadily increasing interest rates.

Statement of Financial Position

The net asset position of BCL deteriorated during FY2023 due to write downs in the carrying value of assets totaling \$47.6 million, offset by savings in tax expenses associated with the reduction in asset values of \$11.2 million. The net assets and therefore shareholder equity of BCL fell by \$34.5 million. This compares to the prior year where the net asset position of BCL increased in the order of \$12.7 million due to increased asset values.

The fall in assets value of the BCL owned properties is consistent with the general property market in the Melbourne CBD. BCL's properties are viewed as B Grade properties and were devalued more than A Grade or Premium properties. BCL experienced falls of \$26.4m at Owed Dixon West, \$10.5m at Owen Dixon East and \$4.8m at Douglas Menzies Chambers or 14% across all three properties. In addition to this the Opus Right of Use Asset (capitalised value of leases held) was written off totaling \$4.7 million due to ongoing trading losses. Opus is BCL's serviced office business at 200 Queen Street and was purchased in 2018 to secure more floors in the building for chambers. Opus floors are now being converted into chambers.

Statement of Cashflows

BCL started the year with \$4.9 million in cash and generated an operating cashflow of \$8.3 million compared to FY2022 of \$5.8 million. This increase in operating cashflow (before capital expenditure and debt repayments) was due to the collection of prior year debtors and delayed payment to suppliers. The suppliers will be paid in FY2024. Excess funds were used to temporarily reduce BCL's debt by \$8.5 million to lessen the impact of increasing interest rates. BCL's net cash holdings reduced by \$2.9 million, closing at \$2 million as at 30 June 2023. BCL has the ability to redraw some or all of the debt repaid if necessary.

Statement of Comprehensive Income

Financial results and movement in Equity extracted from the audited Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2023

	2023 (\$'000)	2022 (\$'000)	Commentary for 2023
Revenue from contracts with customers	44,383	43,033	1
Employee benefits expense	(5,487)	(4,936)	2
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(15,943)	(15,896)	3
Utilities and taxes	(3,263)	(2,883)	4
Other expenses	(3,714)	(4,778)	5
Building management expenses	(9,852)	(9,818)	6
Technology expenses	(2,065)	(1,825)	7
Finance expenses	(2,180)	(1,693)	8
Operating profit before tax	1,879	1,204	
Movement in Asset values and reserves			
(Loss) Gain on revaluation/Impairment of Assets	(47,663)	12,489	9
Fair value gain on interest rate hedges	-	332	10
Dividend Paid	-	(200)	
Net movement in Shareholder equity	(47,663)	12,621	
Income tax (expense) / benefit	11,281	(1,118)	11
Net movement in Shareholder equity	(34,503)	12,707	

Statement of Comprehensive Income Notes

- Revenue marginally above the prior year as an additional floor brought into the portfolio.
- Total employment costs including accrued annual and long service leave.
- Depreciation of Right of Use Asset (capitalised leases) and plant and equipment.
- Increased rates and Land taxes across the portfolio.
- Increased other expenses attributable to increased provision for make good offset by decreases in provision for bad and doubtful debts.
- Consistent with prior year.
- Increase the result of further security upgrades and increased cost of application licenses
- Increase in finance costs and interest rates.
- Properties independently valued. FY23 fall in values compared to FY22 increases in value.
- Recognition of movement in interest rates and shortening length of fixed hedge contract (ceased May 2022).
- FY23 Decrease in tax liability due to fall in asset value of investment properties.

Statement of Financial Position

Financial Results 2023 extracted from the audited
Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2023

	2023 (\$'000)	2022 (\$'000)	Commentary for 2023
Current assets			
Cash and cash equivalents	2,000	4,859	1
Trade and other receivables	3,471	4,314	2
Current tax receivables	406	607	3
Total current assets	5,877	9,780	
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	26,437	30,755	4
Right-of-use asset	42,603	55,369	5
Investment properties	247,000	288,700	6
Total non-current assets	316,040	374,824	
Total assets	321,917	384,604	
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	2,027	1,457	7
Lease Liabilities	13,038	12,596	8
Contract Liabilities	6,220	6,716	9
Provisions	587	478	10
Borrowings	–	37,800	11
Total current liabilities	21,872	59,047	
Non-current liabilities			
Contract Liabilities	463	540	12
Borrowings	29,300	–	13
Lease Liabilities	53,541	64,121	14
Deferred tax liabilities	12,446	23,882	15
Provisions	8,011	6,227	16
Total non-current liabilities	103,761	94,770	
Total liabilities	125,633	153,817	
Net assets	196,284	230,787	
Contributed equity	10,187	10,187	
Dividends Paid	–	(200)	
Retained earnings	186,097	220,800	17
Total equity	196,284	230,787	

Statement of Cash Flows

Financial Results 2023 extracted from the audited
Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2023

	2023 (\$'000)	2022 (\$'000)	Commentary for 2023
Cash flow from operating activities			
Receipts from customers	48,976	46,461	1
Payments to suppliers and employees	(26,241)	(27,042)	2
	22,735	19,419	
Interest received	–	–	
Interest and other costs of finance paid	(2,180)	(1,693)	3
Income taxes paid	46	(634)	4
Net cash inflow from operating activities	20,601	17,092	
Cash flows from investing activities			
Payments for property, plant and equipment	(1,431)	(2,276)	5
Payments for investment property improvements	(1,219)	(411)	6
Net cash (outflow) from investing activities	(2,650)	(2,687)	
Cash flows from financing activities			
Repayment of borrowings	(8,500)	(7,200)	7
Principal elements of lease payments	(12,310)	(11,229)	8
Dividends paid to Shareholders	–	(200)	
Net cash inflow from financial activities	(20,810)	(18,629)	
Net (decrease) increase in cash and cash equivalents	(2,859)	(4,224)	
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year	4,859	9,083	
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year	2,000	4,859	9

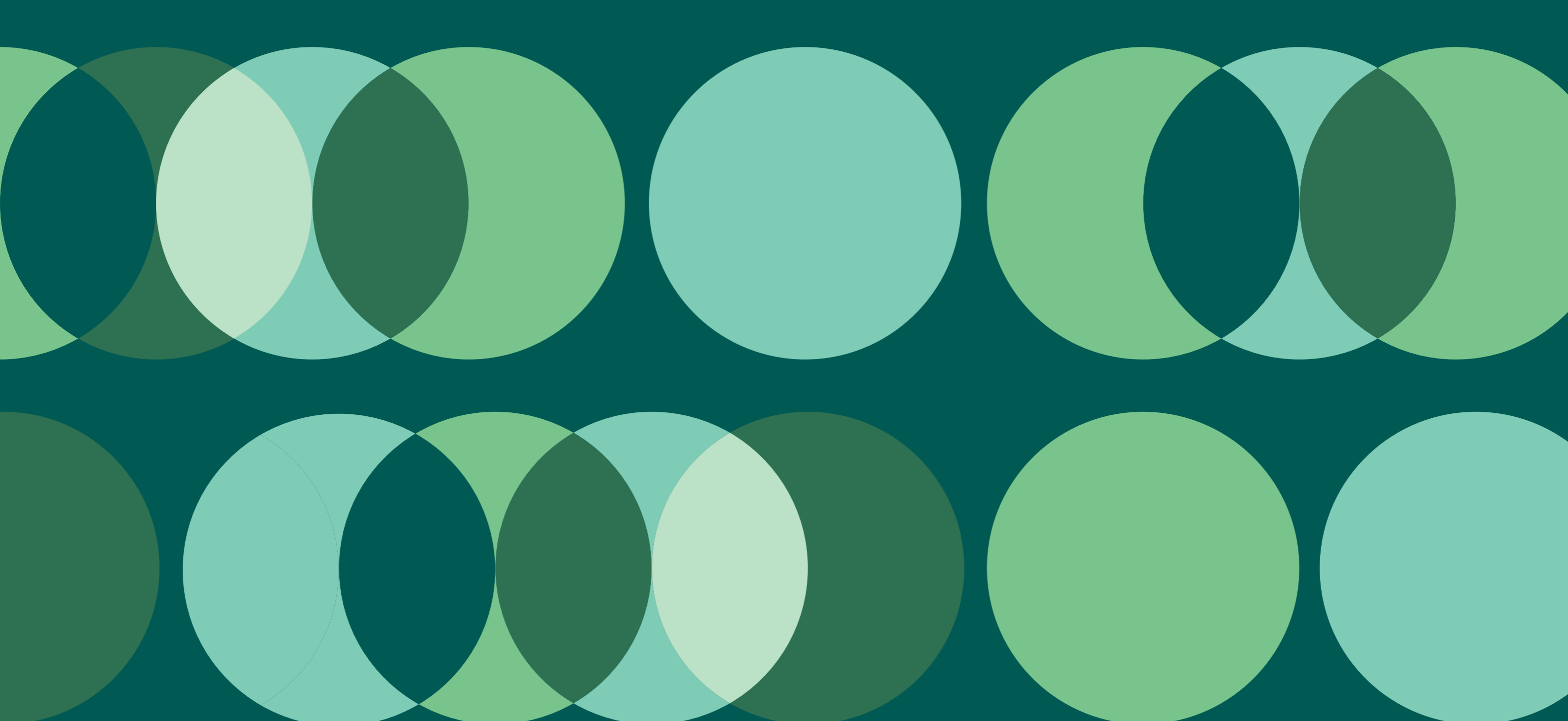
Statement of Financial Position Notes

- Fall in cash reflects reduced operational performance and repayment of debt compared to the prior year.
- Receivables owed relating to unpaid rents
- Prepaid company tax.
- Reduction reflects depreciation of assets in excess of new capital expenditure.
- Capitalised value of the external leases BCL has entered into at Castan, Ninian Stephens, Aickin and Isaacs chambers. Value reduces each year as the leases cessation date nears.
- Market value of Douglas Menzies, Owen Dixon West and Owen Dixon East properties as valued externally by Colliers. Properties values decreasing in line with the market.
- Amounts owed to suppliers including landlords.
- Value of lease payments owed during the next 12 months.
- Amounts owed to Barristers for prepaid rent for the period ending June 2024.
- Employee entitlements owed as at year end.
- Borrowings classified as Non-Current as borrowing facility renewed until May 2026 (see note 13).
- Amounts owed to Barristers for prepaid rent for the period extending beyond June 2024.
- Borrowings classified as Non-Current as borrowing facility renewed until May 2026.
- Value of lease payments owed beyond June 2023.

- Recognition of potential tax payable resulting from property revaluations. Decrease compared to prior year as property values fell at June 2023.
- Progressive recognition of costs to make good leased properties. Full liability recognised by end of each lease.
- Movement represents FY23 loss (including building valuations) less \$200k dividend paid.

Statement of Cash Flows Notes

- Increased receipts from Barristers as a result of collection of prior year debtors.
- Marginally reduced payments to suppliers related to the increase in payables (timing effect).
- Increases interest costs related to increases in interest rates.
- Payment of income tax for the 2023 Year. Prior year negative due to refund received.
- Reduced capital expenditure during FY23 due to the reduced funds available for reinvesting back into technology, plant and equipment.
- Capital expenditure on buildings growing given the ageing nature of the properties.
- Debt reduction during FY23 and FY22.
- Lease payments made to Landlords.
- Fall in Cash compared to the prior financial year.



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