

VOICEABILITY ADVOCACY

England & Wales · Charity number 1076630

Details

Other names	"SPEAKING UP", SPEAKING UP!, SPEAKING UP T/A ADVOCACY PARTNERS SPEAKING UP
Status	Registered
Legal form	Charitable company
Company number	03798884
Registered	1999-07-19
Register	View on the Charity Commission register

Contact

Address	Sayer Vincent Llp 110 Golden Lane London EC1Y 0TG
Phone	03003031660
Email	helpline@voiceability.org
Website	www.voiceability.org

Activities

Objects: A) TO RELIEVE AND SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH THE PROVISION OF ADVOCACY SERVICES AND PROJECTS. B) TO ADVANCE THE EDUCATION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC ABOUT THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES C) TO ADVANCE AND PROMOTE THE EDUCATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

Activities: To relieve and support people with disabilities through the provision of advocacy services and projects. To advance the education of the general public about the needs of people with disabilities To advance and promote education of people with disabilities

Classification

- **How:** Provides Buildings/facilities/open Space, Provides Services, Provides Advocacy/advice/information
- **What:** Education/training, Disability
- **Who:** People With Disabilities

Geography

- Scotland
- Throughout England And Wales

Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-03-31	£15,874,845	£15,400,679	£2,089,470	481
2024-03-31	£13,503,953	£14,913,705	£1,600,685	434
2023-03-31	£11,349,386	£12,409,145	£2,952,137	362
2022-03-31	£10,993,036	£10,307,595	£4,061,190	298
2021-03-31	£10,285,604	£10,240,123	£3,272,258	310

Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
Anthony Osijo		2020-10-27
Fiona Beyer		2023-10-31
James Schofield		2019-10-29
Liam Cunningham		2023-10-31
Matthew Smith		2019-01-28
Ria Davies		2023-10-31

VOICEABILITY ADVOCACY

England & Wales - Charity number 1076630

Accounts

Annual report and accounts

For the year ended 31 March 2025

VoiceAbility Advocacy: Charity number in England 1076630,

Charity number in Scotland SC050036, Company number 3798884.



Contents

Welcome from our Chair of Trustees	3
Welcome from our Chief Executive	4
Who we are	5
Why we're here	6
Our approach	7
What we do	8
Spotlight on Oliver McGowan training	9
Where we work	10
Delivering our 5 year strategy	12
Facing into challenges	13
What we achieved: 2019-2025	14
Spotlight on Advocacy in Scotland	15
Reflecting on 2024-2025	16
What we set out to do in 2024-2025	18
Spotlight on self-advocate Fahmina	20
Our next 5 year strategy	21
Built to last: VoiceAbility's strategy for change	22
Our commitment to progress over the next 12 months	23
Reference and administrative information	24
Governance structure and management	26
Financial review	31
Independent auditor's report to the members of VoiceAbility	34
Financial statement	38



Welcome from our Chair of Trustees

This is my first full year with VoiceAbility and it's been a busy one.

The challenges charities across the UK are facing through increased costs has been huge, with many having to reduce or cut services.

But thankfully, due to incredibly effective stewardship and forward thinking in financial management, VoiceAbility has a different story to tell.

We've been able to absorb these costs while growing our workforce and supporting more people across England and Scotland to be heard in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing.

This is some achievement, and I'm proud of how our teams have worked together with innovation and speed to make this a reality. A summary of these achievements, often involving the use of advancing technologies, are captured in this report.

Alongside this positive financial and operational picture, further stability has come through the appointment of Richard Jones as our new Chief Executive. Seeing Richard take up the role in September was a great delight.

Since then, the Board of Trustees has been meeting in person to work together on VoiceAbility's next 5-year strategy and set out our ambitions.

These are still centred around the belief that everyone should be able to live life to the full in the manner of their choosing, with a real focus at the end of this year's report on what these ambitions look out and the first steps we're taking to achieve them.

This starts with our own staff and volunteers, with a strengths-based approach to help everyone to give their best, and to build on their skills.

The trustees and leadership team have seen this first-hand through newly set up 'working groups', which bring together experts and support teams to have a clearer voice and greater influence over how things get done.

This approach is vital in supporting a vibrant and dynamic place to work, and has enabled trustees to better connect and engage with staff.

Times continue to be tough for so many, and I wish to thank everyone at VoiceAbility for their continued commitment, passion and expertise to make a positive difference in people's lives.

Ali Reid



Welcome from our Chief Executive

The past year has been big for VoiceAbility.

We've supported more people than ever before, we've delivered on a bold 5-year strategy, and we've built a financially stable model as we look ahead to an exciting future.

Significant investment from 2019-2025 has seen real, positive change for VoiceAbility; not just in what we set out to do, but how we did it. Thank you to everyone who has played their part in that.

In 2024-2025 we've continued to grow, supporting more people to be heard while still generating a surplus in funds.

The growth has been personal to me, too. 2024-2025 saw a controlled transition from my Chief Finance Officer role to Chief Executive, taking over from Jonathan Senker after many years' service. It's a privilege to lead this organisation.

The past year has also seen the strengthening of our leadership team, with the introduction of 3 new roles. Our new Director of Safeguarding ensures emphasis and focus in this essential area; our new Commercial Director recognises that while we are and always will be a purpose-driven organisation, we operate in a commercial environment; and our new Director of Innovation will help us navigate and maximise the opportunities available to us.

In this report we set out what we have achieved, and where we are heading.

Over the past year, we have:

- sharpened our sense of purpose
- named and owned the unique value that we bring as an organisation, through the outstanding work that our paid staff and volunteers do
- built on our operationally robust and financially sustainable platform
- through recognising the complex, uncertain world we operate in; prepare how to respond to its challenges and opportunities
- worked closely with our Board of Trustees to shape the next stage of our journey
- developed a bold new strategy with 3 clear areas of focus

2024-2025 marks a pivotal transition for VoiceAbility from one chapter to the next. While our purpose remains unchanged; to ensure everyone is able to live life to the full in the manner of their choosing, the path ahead demands renewed ambition.

Now, it's about **transforming our culture** so every member of our team feels empowered, valued and supported, to deliver their best for the people we support.

It's about **growing our impact** to reach more people, especially those who have been unseen and under-served.

It's about **changing the system**, so that the world in which we work, and our clients live, becomes more accessible and better equipped to support and respect their rights and choices.

Richard Jones

Who we are

We are VoiceAbility. We exist to ensure everyone's voice is heard and their rights are respected.

From community-based advocacy in the 1970s to becoming one of the UK's largest advocacy providers operating at a national level today, our work has always centred on ensuring that people have a voice, and that their voice matters.

The last 5 years have provided VoiceAbility with opportunities to embrace real and substantive change. We're facing into the future stronger, more resilient and more ambitious than ever.

We're able to respond quickly to internal and external challenges, work creatively, and deliver high-quality services, even in complex or tough environments. We've flourished under pressure, transforming our service delivery, adopting best practice and utilising innovation and technology to scale with consistency.

We've grown rapidly without compromising our values or quality, and continue to build the internal capability for agility and continuous improvement, through listening, taking action and investing for the future.

At our core, we believe everyone should be able to live life to the full in the manner of their choosing. Having your voice heard is not a privilege, it's a right.

However, many people experience obstacles and challenges to this being a reality.

That's where we come in, we build bridges across the gap.



Why we're here

We exist to support people to be heard in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing, especially when barriers like disability, mental health challenges or discrimination stand in the way.



Our aims

We believe everyone has a right to:

- be heard and respected
- have the same choice, control, and freedom as any other person
- be safe from violence, discrimination, harm or abuse



Our vision

Everyone has a voice which is heard and responded to. No-one has to face life-changing decisions alone.

This includes:

- delivering the best possible quality of support
- being the provider of choice for the services we offer
- being the source of authority for expert insight on voice and rights
- being the place to work or volunteer with, for anyone who shares our aim



Our values

Passionate.

We're dedicated to strengthening voice, supporting rights and changing lives.

Empowering.

We enable people to live life to the full.

Collaborative.

We listen and shape decisions with others.

Honest.

We work with integrity and we stick to our principles.

Resourceful.

We think ahead and find effective ways to achieve our mission.

Our approach

At VoiceAbility, our purpose drives everything we do. From how we work with clients, collaborate with partners and how we support our own people to thrive.

Client-centred

Across all our services, we are continually striving for a truly client-centred approach, amplifying the individual voices and lived experiences of the people we support, removing barriers where possible to help clients get what they need and ultimately, what they are entitled to.

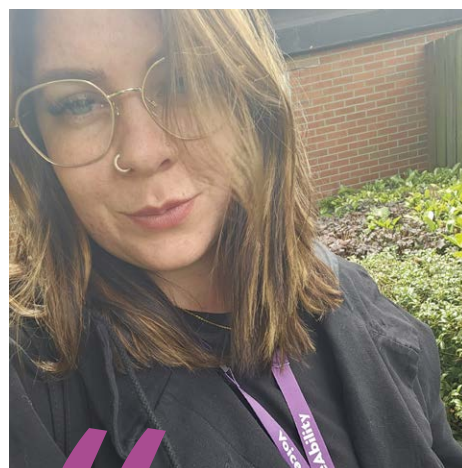
Deliver well

VoiceAbility is also committed to providing value for money alongside the safest, best practice delivery of service. Working in genuine partnership with commissioners, we're transforming contract management into a driver of insight, innovation and impact.

By capturing the right data at the right moment, building strong relationships, and working alongside local teams to understand real-world challenges, we offer recommendations that are informed, strategic and grounded in lived experience.

Every pound spent on advocacy should deliver more. More value. Better services. Stronger outcomes. And that's exactly what we're helping our partners achieve.

Whether we're re-imagining training or redesigning referral routes, we co-create what works and we do not settle for "good enough".



“

I have always wanted to be the person that I didn't have when I needed it and to be the person that others should have when they need it.

Advocate Lisa, whose own mental illness diagnosis has shaped her life and career – where she now specialises in statutory advocacy under the Mental Capacity Act and Mental Health Act.

What we do

Advocacy

Advocacy is at the heart of what we do at VoiceAbility. We provide free, independent advocacy across England and Scotland, ensuring children, young people and adults are involved in decisions that affect their lives.

We provide advocacy across a wide range of areas; including mental health, learning disability, benefits and healthcare complaints often under specific legislation.

Our team of advocates are skilled, specialist professionals who work with purpose, confidence and compassion to navigate often difficult and complex situations.

Whether we're helping to challenge a care decision, navigate a benefits tribunal, or raise concerns about treatment, our focus is always the same: helping people to be heard, understand their rights, and access the support they're entitled to.

Connections services

Through our Connections services, we create meaningful opportunities for people with lived experience to shape the support they receive and the systems they use.

We partner with local authorities, NHS trusts, care providers and national bodies to design and deliver bespoke projects that amplify the voices of people who could, should, or already do access services. By working together, we help shape those services to be more effective, accessible and inclusive.

Influencing policy

People's voices should shape not only their own care, but the systems and policies that affect their lives. At VoiceAbility, we remain committed to ensuring that the client voice reaches the heart of national decision-making.

Over the years, VoiceAbility has influenced significant policy reform, from access to advocacy in mental health settings to national safety investigations and disability payment reviews. This year, we built on that legacy.

Our **Use Your Power** campaign was showcased at the Labour Party Conference, calling on politicians to end long-term hospital detention for autistic people and people with a learning disability. We were commissioned by NHS England to produce a **lived experience report** on inpatient care for autistic people. We supported individuals to give direct **evidence to the Health Select Committee**, contributed to amendments to the **Mental Health Act**, and helped shape the independent **review of Adult Disability Payment** in Scotland.

At every opportunity, we use real stories, real data, and trusted relationships to influence.

Spotlight on...

Oliver McGowan training

Embedding person-centred and inclusive approaches is at the heart of everything we do, and in October 2024 we reached a significant milestone in our commitment to inclusivity and support for people with learning disabilities and autistic people when we were approved to deliver Tier 1 Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training.

We have since expanded our reach and are authorised to deliver Tier 2 training sessions and we now deliver both Tier 1 and Tier 2 training across England, working with organisations of all sizes to increase knowledge and understanding, build confidence and create change.

Why it's an important step for VoiceAbility

People with learning disabilities and autistic people continue to face preventable harm and exclusion, which ultimately lead to poorer outcomes. The training aims to save lives by ensuring the health and social care workforce have the right skills and knowledge to provide safe, compassionate and informed care to autistic people and people with a learning disability.

As we continue to invest in our capability to deliver Oliver McGowan training at scale, we're excited about the positive impact it will have both internally and among the broader community. This is a huge achievement for the team involved and moves us forward against our ongoing commitment to diversity, inclusion, and creating a supportive environment for all.

We continue to be trusted to deliver high-quality, high-impact partnerships that create real change, defining what services look like, how they're designed, governed and sustainable for the long term.



Where we work

Where we worked in Scotland in 2024-2025

We have included where our advocates are based currently but we service nationwide.

Aberdeen City
Aberdeenshire
Argyll and Bute
Ayrshire
Clackmannanshire
Dumfries and Galloway
Dunbartonshire
Dundee
Edinburgh
Falkirk
Fife
Forth Valley
Greater Glasgow and Clyde
Inverclyde
Highland
Kinross
Lothian and Borders
Morayshire
North and South Lanarkshire
Perth
Shetland
Stirling
Western Isles



8,484

cases opened

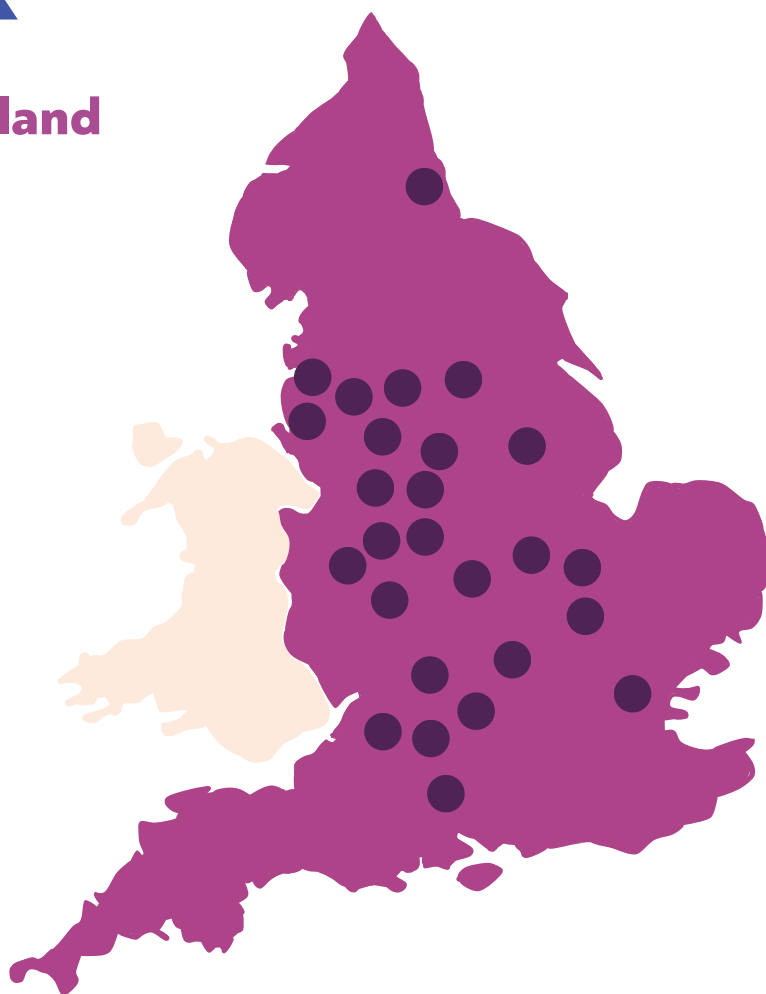
89%

increase in cases compared to last year due in part to stronger partnerships and more visibility of services

Where we work

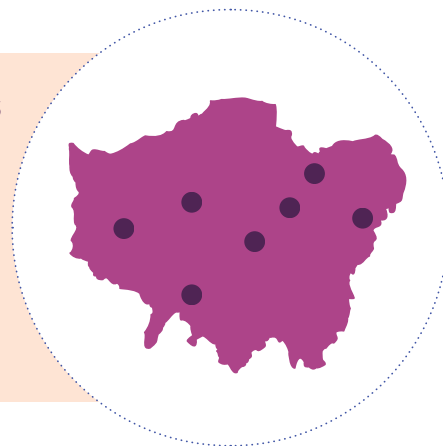
Where we worked in England in 2024-2025

Bedford / Central Bedfordshire
 Blackburn
 Bolton
 Bradford
 Cambridge
 Cheshire
 Coventry and Warwickshire
 Dudley
 East Riding of Yorkshire
 Essex
 Hampshire
 Lincolnshire
 Manchester
 North Northampton
 Oldham
 Oxfordshire
 Peterborough
 Preston (Guild Lodge setting only)
 Sefton
 Shropshire
 South Gloucestershire
 Sunderland
 Swindon
 Tameside
 Telford and Wrekin
 Wakefield
 Wiltshire
 Wolverhampton



London boroughs

Camden
 Ealing
 Merton
 Newham
 Redbridge
 Thurrock



35,393
 cases opened

10%

increase in cases
 compared to last year

Delivering our **5** year strategy



The past 5 years have been a time of bold ambition and real change for VoiceAbility, not just in what we set out to do, but how we did it.

In 2019, we launched a strategy to grow, professionalise and embed the client journey at the heart of everything we do. It was a decisive plan to reshape who we were and how we worked, focused around 5 pillars:

**Diversify
services**

**Value
our
people**

**Build
the
basics**

**Drive
quality**

**Lead the
market
and grow
authority**



“

As this period comes to an end, we want to take a moment to reflect and celebrate the substantial progress and impact VoiceAbility has made both internally and externally.

Sam Breckell, Chief Operating Officer

Facing into challenges

While the last 5 years have seen significant progress, it's not been without significant challenges.

What we could not have predicted was the extraordinary context that followed: a global pandemic, a political and economic reset, and seismic shifts in the way public services operate.

Like many in our sector, we've seen increasing demand for our services, with more complexity of need; particularly around mental health, autism and learning disabilities. This, combined with funding pressures, cuts and increased costs, continues to create a challenging backdrop in which to provide vital services.

There's been a continuously shifting and often uncertain political landscape, with the first 2 years of the strategy dominated by the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.



We closed our final office just before the first lockdown, not out of necessity, but as part of our plan to deliver better value for clients. We had already invested in remote tech and home-based working, which meant we were ready when it mattered most. While others were furloughing staff, we were front-loading improvements, handing iPads through windows, sourcing protective gear, and continuing to be there for people whose voices might otherwise have been lost.

We challenged unfair discharges from hospitals, held local authorities to account when statutory protections were suspended, and kept advocacy active when the risks were greatest and the stakes were highest.

At the same time, we grew. We expanded our reach across England and Scotland, won new contracts, and launched innovative services. We introduced Connections services, delivered national benefits advocacy, became accredited providers of Oliver McGowan training, and built our own practitioner-led quality framework – setting a new standard for advocacy delivery.

As this strategic period ends, the scale of what's been achieved is clear. In the most difficult of circumstances, we did not just deliver; we transformed. **And we did it with purpose, clarity, and authenticity.**

What we achieved: 2019-2025

Diversify services

We have expanded our geographic reach and service offering across both England and Scotland, enabling us to support tens of thousands more people each year. By utilising the skills and experience we have, we've successfully 'diversified our services'; launching Connections services to shape and run involvement and participation projects, embedding Experts by Experience, delivering benefits advocacy as a national service in Scotland, and becoming accredited to deliver Oliver McGowan training.

Drive quality

In 2019 we committed to 'drive quality'. In response to this challenge, we have bolstered our Outcomes Framework and reporting access, meaning we can robustly and confidently evidence our impact through data and facilitate continuous improvement. We're equipping commissioners, local authorities, devolved and national government with the insight needed to better understand people's needs and requirements, and make meaningful change.

Build the basics

Internally, we invested time and resource over the last 5 years into 'building the basics'. This includes launching a national advocacy helpline, building our central referrals system, introducing standardised case management tools, and aligning our service delivery under a single national model to ensure consistent, high quality and person-centred practice across all of our contracts.

Value our people

We have continued to invest in our people over the last 5 years, with specific focus on scaling our fantastic volunteer network. Their dedication has created strong connections within communities, amplifying the voices of those who are seldom heard. We are especially proud that 6 of our volunteers have gone on to become permanent members of staff, reflecting the powerful impact of volunteering as a pathway to personal and professional growth.

Lead the market and grow authority

We have taken a leadership role in influencing national policy, securing vital wins such as opt-out advocacy in Mental Health Act reform, and leading the call for improved advocacy for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.



Spotlight on...

Advocacy in Scotland

From a standing start, we have driven the development of a new national advocacy service so that over 10 times more disabled people across Scotland were supported in 2024 than in our launch year of 2022.

Commissioned by the Scottish Government and delivered by us, our independent service supports disabled people across the country to access Social Security Scotland benefits and is unique in a UK context.

If you identify as disabled in Scotland, our independent advocacy service provides free 1-1 support to access benefits from Social Security Scotland and is available from the moment anyone wants to start a benefits application. This support is also available to parents, guardians or carers accessing benefits for a disabled child.

In the 3 years from launch to the end of 2024, our advocacy service has received 11,385 referrals, leading to over 9,878 advocacy cases. In total, the service has supported 8,704 disabled people in Scotland (we have supported 1,174 disabled people with more than 1 case).

Much of that growth is attributable to the strong partnerships VoiceAbility has created with a wide range of community and statutory organisations in localities across Scotland. We have also successfully developed and trained a new workforce in Scotland, ensuring our service is accessible nationwide, from major cities to the Highlands and Islands.

That growth is predicted to continue during 2025, as more benefits are devolved to Scotland including the new Pension Age Disability Payment. This brings new groups of people to serve, demanding new partnerships and ways of working.

“

Paul, who's profoundly deaf, “didn't know who to turn to for help” for benefits support for himself and his son after Paul's father sadly passed away.

“Luckily, I came across VoiceAbility and had a 1-to-1 appointment with [my advocate] Lynn at home. I opened up and went through all the problems that I've had, the disabilities that I have and spoke about my son who's disabled as well. I got some help and information to move things forward.

“It's taken me 53 years to get benefits support, which I should have had from birth. I cannot thank VoiceAbility enough for what they've done for me and my son.”



Reflecting on 2024-2025

2024-2025 was a deliberate and decisive transition year. It marked a turning point that ensured VoiceAbility is well positioned for the future.

We moved from 2 years of planned investment from reserves into a financially sustainable model, generating a surplus while continuing to improve our services. With stabilised leadership through the appointment of our new Chief Executive, Richard Jones, and continued guidance from our Board of Trustees, we delivered confident, values-led growth.

We embedded cultural transformation, strengthened our operating model, and delivered steady, strategic improvements across teams, systems and services.

Since launching our volunteer programme in April 2021, we've created rewarding and inspiring opportunities for community members to get involved in our work. This was a continued focus in 2024-2025 as we expanded our volunteer network and deepened our engagement across communities.

Our 154 volunteers (and growing) are now supporting communities in 23 areas of England and Scotland, working in an impressive 11 different roles. Over the last 12 months we've created 7 distinct volunteer roles to offer diverse opportunities for involvement, implemented a new recruitment system, streamlining the process for prospective volunteers and enhanced our use of customer relationship management tool Salesforce to record volunteer hours and contributions across casework and non-casework, allowing us to better understand and celebrate the impact of our volunteers.

VoiceAbility has continued to deliver our mission despite the many external

challenges over the last 12 months. This includes ongoing financial pressures in public service funding, policy delays with Liberty Protection Safeguards, further political change and preparing for rising National Insurance costs.

Safeguarding progress

Safeguarding at VoiceAbility has undergone a transformative shift in 2024-2025, following a comprehensive audit. Moving beyond compliance, we have entered a phase of strategic implementation.

A new Director of Safeguarding was appointed to lead structural and cultural change, supported by the creation of a unified Safeguarding and Quality Assurance department and a cross-organisational Safeguarding Support and Protection group.

“

In December, 4 people who work with VoiceAbility shared their experiences of disability as part of an inquiry into the UK government's new 10-Year Health Plan for the NHS.

“What an amazing opportunity for people with lived experience to take their personal stories in their own words and in person to the heart of government. Well done to all and to VoiceAbility colleagues for facilitating.”

Toni Bawden, Commissioning Manager for Learning Disabilities and Autism at Cambridgeshire County Council.

Our year in numbers

In 2024-2025, we supported:

38,994
adults



4,883
children and
young people



Marking a

24%

increase in cases from
the previous year

This reflects the growing need, and the trust placed
in us across the communities we serve.

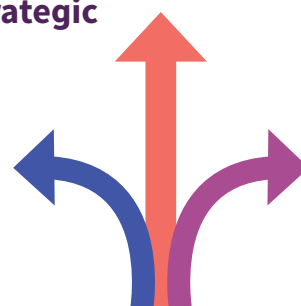


Our growing
team of
664

is made up primarily of **professional advocates and volunteers**, who bring **deep sector knowledge**, many with lived experience in health, care, disability rights and mental health. Their dedication and expertise ensure that people are supported effectively and compassionately every day.

We are governed by a **Board of Trustees** who bring diverse professional and lived experience.

They guide our **strategic direction**, ensure accountability, and uphold our mission and values.



What we set out to do in 2024-2025

Diversify services

What we said we'd do:

- improve outcomes for more people using a range of advocacy skills
- empower communities and the next generation of advocates
- extend our independent advocacy reach
- develop meaningful, reportable impact measurements
- create new tech and communication channels to support voice and rights

What we did:

- delivered national benefits advocacy in Scotland, expanding non-statutory reach
- scaled Connections services and created 7 new volunteer roles to support local communities
- increased involvement projects co-produced with people who use services
- began implementation of improved reporting and impact tracking via Salesforce and case management systems
- invested in digital platforms and comms to improve accessibility of rights-based information

Lead the market and grow authority

What we said we'd do:

- produce a new organisational strategy to 2030
- improve data collection and reporting
- acknowledge and reduce environmental impact
- strengthen our national and local influencing work

What we did:

- developed and prepared for launch our new 2025-2030 strategy
- continued improvements in data reporting and commissioner dashboards
- advocated for change through our Use Your Power campaign, calling for an end to long-term detention of people with a learning disability and autistic people
- facilitated lived experience input into NHS strategy and government reform consultations
- delivered Tier 1 and Tier 2 Oliver McGowan training nationally

Build the basics

What we said we'd do:

- continuously improve standards and processes using technology
- develop internal and external data analysis capabilities
- build a culture of learning and improvement in our operating model

What we did:

- embedded a more consistent operating model across services
- improved referral systems, case recording tools, and introduced tech-enabled volunteer tracking via Salesforce
- strengthened our data collection infrastructure to support real-time insight
- transitioned from 2 years of planned investment-funded deficit to a year-end surplus, while maintaining quality delivery

Drive quality

What we said we'd do:

- improve how we evidence outcomes and raise standards
- develop a strategy to increase involvement and co-production
- create a 3-year strategy to improve safeguarding through research and innovation

What we did:

- embedded our practitioner-led Quality Assurance Framework across operational teams
- increased involvement and co-production in Connections services and through campaign work
- strengthened use of outcomes data to evidence impact and support improvement
- took first steps in shaping a longer-term safeguarding improvement plan, including voice-led insights

Value our people

What we said we'd do:

- develop a new people strategy
- build on our CliftonStrengths model to support cultural transformation
- set out plans to eliminate race, gender and disability pay gaps
- improve our rewards strategy

What we did:

- strengthened supervision and development for staff, especially frontline teams
- continued embedding CliftonStrengths in team practice and leadership development
- expanded our volunteer programme to 154+ active contributors across 23 areas, using a new recruitment process and management tool to manage relationships
- continued internal equity work through the EEDI strategy rollout and practice review

Spotlight on...

Self-advocate Fahmina

Fahmina was looking for advocacy support, but learned she could become a self-advocate herself.

Here Fahmina tells her self-advocacy story, which started with a conversation with a VoiceAbility team leader in December 2022 and now sees her chairing working groups for the Hampshire Learning Disability Partnership and speaking at high-profile learning disability events.



More about me

I'm Fahmina, I live in Hampshire and have a learning disability. I like going to Mencap and the Friday Network with Speakeasy Advocacy, and when I'm at home I like watching TV and playing board games. I live independently with my partner Mehdi, who I married in 2023.

My story

I contacted social services after first moving to Hampshire because I was in search of an advocate. After social services said that I wasn't entitled to an advocate, they referred me to VoiceAbility because I was interested in advocacy.

Making a difference

I decided that I would attend 2 working groups – the adult social care working group and the health and wellbeing working group.

I am finding out lots of good information that is really helpful to me, but also giving back my ideas to the working groups.

I find this very important, because I know that I am speaking on behalf of people that also have learning disabilities and that have no voice in Hampshire.

We know how we would like to be supported and to make things better, like all the information that we have provided to the website that we have been designing.

“

Since becoming a self-advocate, I have grown in confidence and use my voice to help others.

“I have now chaired an adult social care working group meeting, attended Hampshire Learning Disability Partnership meetings and spoken at Learning Disability Network London event during Learning Disability Week.”



Our next 5 year strategy



We are proud of who we are, and how far we've come, but we know the world around us is becoming even more challenging for the people we support.

We have spent the last 5 years transforming ourselves, culturally, structurally and operationally. We're here not just to survive, but to lead. Through investment, resilience and a relentless focus on client voice, we've built firm foundations. Now, while others are retreating, reducing quality or folding altogether, we are stepping forward.

Our 2025 to 2030 strategy sets a clear course, with 3 areas of focus. Each year will build on the last, from strong foundations in 2025 to scaled, transformational impact by 2030.

**Transform
our
culture**

**Grow
our
impact**

**Change
the
system**

We're not just here to do more of the same.
We're here to grow, not by asking for more, but by doing what truly matters.

We will listen carefully, partner differently and act boldly
to meet real needs in a fast-changing world.

VoiceAbility is built for this.

Built to last: VoiceAbility's strategy for change

Transforming our culture

Create a values-led, inclusive and high-performing environment that supports our people to do their best work.

By 2030 we'll have a culture where all our staff:

- can bring their whole selves to work, without needing to change, hide or over-perform to belong
- are equally valued and consistently recognised for their contribution, whatever their role
- are clear about their accountabilities, confident in their work, and trusts others to do the same

Growing our impact

Expand and improve what we do in advocacy, co-production and influence so we reach more people with greater effect. **By 2030 we will:**

- have an agreed, accepted and co-produced method for defining, measuring and monitoring impact that is recognised across the sector and underpins public trust in advocacy
- be operating with demonstrably increased levels of impact, both in terms of outcomes for individuals and influence on systems
- be positively supporting significantly more people every year, while maintaining or improving the quality of outcomes we achieve

Changing the system

Use insight, data and voice to push for change where it matters most, from care homes to cabinet meetings alone.

By 2030 we will:

- be actively supporting client-led, place-based advocacy services across the UK, enabling more responsive and context-specific support
- have led the creation of an independent professional body that raises the profile of advocacy, drives standards, and is working toward sector regulation to ensure trust, consistency and public accountability
- have contributed to a significant uplift in advocate salary levels across the sector; recognising advocacy as a professional, skilled and essential career
- be deploying cutting-edge innovation across the organisation, freeing up advocates to focus on critical thinking, rights-based action and person-led practice

Our commitment to progress over the next 12 months

Transforming our culture

What we'll do in 2025-2026:

- launch our Gallup Leadership Programme, including CliftonStrengths assessments and strengths-based development for all people managers
- embed a 'hothouse' approach to accelerate transformation, boost engagement and build a resilient, connected workforce
- create clear career pathways and retention strategies, making VoiceAbility a place where people can grow and thrive
- roll out structured feedback systems and role clarity, helping build trust, transparency and psychological safety at every level

Growing our impact

What we'll do in 2025-2026:

- design a co-produced, evidence-based framework for defining, measuring and reporting our impact, beginning the pathway to defining sector standards
- begin scoping for an independent quality and practice institute, aligned with our goal of setting a new bar for professional advocacy standards and supporting sector-wide improvement
- strengthen the use of outcomes data in our services, refining how we track, evidence and learn from client experiences
- embed impact and quality themes into internal governance through operational plans, performance reporting, and the Quality & Performance Committee
- prepare to scale service delivery without compromising quality, through investment in training, digital tools and streamlined processes

Changing the system

What we'll do in 2025-2026:

- strengthen our policy and influence work, amplifying the voice of people we support at both national and local levels through campaigns, lived experience involvement and direct engagement with decision-makers
- pilot regional models of place-based service design, working with commissioners and communities to reshape services around client needs
- lay the foundation for an independent professional body, bringing together individuals and organisations in a shared commitment to standards, credibility and sector-wide leadership
- review workforce data and pay structures, using this insight to begin closing gaps and prepare the ground for long-term salary improvement
- invest in scalable innovation, identifying where technology can streamline operational activity and free up advocates for more complex, high-impact work

Reference and administrative information

Trustees

Alison Reid – Chair / Investment Committee Member

Susan Brown – Safeguarding Governance Committee Chair (resigned 28/01/25)

Andrew Weston – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member (resigned 27/03/25)

Matthew Smith – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Remuneration Committee Member

James Alistair Schofield – Audit and Risk Committee Chair

Viral Shah – Audit and Risk Committee Member

Gavin Sumner – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member (resigned 27/03/25)

Izaro Arbelaiz-Teresa

Anthony Osijo – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Remuneration Committee Member

Mahua Nandi – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member

Fiona Beyer – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member

Liam Cunningham – Safeguarding Governance Committee Chair

Ria Davies – Remuneration Committee Member

Elizabeth Debnam – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Remuneration Committee Chair



Secretary

Richard Jones (resigned 02/09/24)

Kerry Duke (appointed 02/09/24 / resigned 09/06/25)

Kirsty Farrand (appointed 09/06/25)

Chief Executive Officer

Jonathan Senker (resigned 02/09/24)

Richard Jones (appointed 02/09/24)

Registered Office

c/o Sayer Vincent

110 Golden Lane

London, EC1Y 0TG

Incorporated in United Kingdom, Company Number

03798884 Registered in England and Wales, Charity Number

1076630 Registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC050036

Auditors

Sayer Vincent LLP

110 Golden Lane

London, EC1Y 0TG

Bankers

National Westminster Bank Plc

21 Petty Cury

Cambridge, CB2 3NE

Solicitors

Radar Limited

6 Beacon Way

Hull, HU3 4AE

Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP

134 Edmund Street

Birmingham, B3 2ES

Governance structure and management

Governing document

The organisation is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 30th June 1999 and registered as a charity on 19th July 1999. The Company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the Company. It is governed by its Articles of Association which, following changes introduced by the Companies Act 2006, now also contain its objects and powers. The trustees present their report (including the strategic report) and audited financial statements for the year ended date. Reference and administrative information set out on page 24 forms part of this report. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

The financial statements comply with current statutory requirements, the memorandum and articles of association and the Statement of Recommended Practice — Accounting and Reporting by Charities: SORP applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with FRS 102. This trustees' annual report includes a directors' report as required by company law.

Appointment of trustees

As set out in the Articles of Association, members of the Board of Trustees must be appointed by an ordinary resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the trustees and must be appointed for a term of 3 years. On ceasing to be a trustee a person may be reappointed provided that no one may serve as a trustee for more than a maximum of 3 consecutive terms, after which they must cease to be a trustee for at least 12 months before they are eligible to be reappointed.

The Board members bring insight from their own lived experience of disability, understanding of the charity's social mission, and business and commercial skills. The range of experience is kept under review and in the event of any shortfalls, new trustees are sought to fill the gaps.

Trustee induction and training

New trustees undergo a period of induction to brief them on the values, direction and work of VoiceAbility, their legal obligations under charity and company law and good practice duties, the contents of the Articles of Association, the Board and decision-making processes, the business plan and recent financial performance of the charity. During the induction they view our services and meet with key employees and other trustees. Trustees are encouraged to participate in external and internally-run training and development where this will facilitate the undertaking of their role.

Organisational structure

The Board of Trustees administers the charity. The Board meets once per quarter with additional meetings when required to deal with issues of strategy in more depth. VoiceAbility also has within its constitution a number of Board sub-committees.

Audit and Risk Committee

Audit and Risk Committee members meet once per quarter in advance of the Board meetings to review and discuss matters such as management and statutory accounts, risk and governance.

Safeguarding Committee

The purpose of the Safeguarding Committee is to ensure quality safeguarding practices and approaches are developed and implemented, and to support the charity in discharging its statutory and good practice duties and responsibilities both as an employer and a provider in relation to safeguarding.

Remuneration Committee

The purpose of the remuneration committee is to ensure leadership succession planning and appraise organisational pay and benefit policies, ensuring pay equality. The committee was formed in 2024-25.

Day-to-day responsibility

The trustees have delegated the day-to-day responsibility for the provision of services to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for recommending strategy to the Board, for the management of its external profile and influencing work, ensuring that the charity delivers the services in line with its mission and requirements and ensuring that key performance indicators are met across the range of social and business objectives. The Chief Executive Officer leads an executive leadership team whose members are the executive managers of the charity.

Risk management

The principal risks and uncertainties facing the organisation are centred around 5 key areas:

- **safeguarding** – we fail to adequately protect staff, volunteers or vulnerable people from harm or abuse
- **impact** – the desired impact of activities is not delivered or cannot be adequately evidenced

- **financial sustainability** – our ability to continue to make an impact in the medium to long term is threatened
- **compliance** – the organisation fails to meet regulatory, legal or contract compliance requirements or expectations
- **reputation** – we do not respond effectively to any incident that could result in damage to VoiceAbility's reputation

The steps to manage these risks are set out below.

The trustees are responsible for setting the tone and influencing the culture of risk management within VoiceAbility.

The executive leadership team have established a risk register, identifying the types of risks faced and prioritising them in terms of potential impact and likelihood of occurrence. Having due regard to the strength of the current internal controls and procedures already in place, a series of mitigating actions have been identified to appropriately address these risks.

The executive leadership team, the Audit and Risk Committee, and the Board of Trustees periodically review the risks and the risk management strategies to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the organisation.

Public benefit

We have referred to the guidance in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and in planning our future activities. In particular, the trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives they have set.

Directors' liabilities

There are no specific provisions relating specifically to directors' liabilities to report.

There are no qualifying third-party indemnity provisions which are the direct responsibility of the charity.

There are no qualifying pension scheme indemnity provisions, due to the charity operating a Defined Contribution scheme.

Fundraising

We're not a fundraising charity, with our income deriving primarily from local government, NHS and central government contracts. We do not solicit donations, but do receive them from time to time and do approach grant-giving bodies. We're therefore registered with the fundraising regulator and follow their guidance. There were no issues of compliance with the guidance of the fundraising regulator. We received no complaints about fundraising activities carried out by the charity (2023-24: none). VoiceAbility does not use any professional fundraisers and no fundraising is undertaken on our behalf by third parties.

Disabled employees

We recognise the importance and benefits of having disabled people involved in and leading the organisation's work at every level including in governance roles, as employees and as volunteers. In relation to employment, the expertise in various aspects of our work which disabled people bring is valued strongly. Disabled applicants who meet the minimum essential criteria for posts are guaranteed interviews and we encourage applicants to identify any adjustments which are needed to ensure that they can participate equally in selection processes. Training has been provided to managers on equality and employment, including specifically on disability equality.

The organisation has a full policy on diversity and employment, which underlines our approach to exceed legal requirements in relation to diversity as we recognise the importance and value to the organisation and to people using our services of a workforce which is diverse in relation to all protected characteristics, including disability. We're continuing to work to improve the experience of and contribution by all employees, including disabled employees and are recognised as a Disability Confident employer. We have paid posts which specifically require personal insights that come from having a learning disability, particularly Expert by Experience posts and our Speak Out leaders. Additionally, we have roles of peer mentors and peer supporters which have provided work skills and therefore routes into employment for people who have used long-term mental health and substance use services.

Employee involvement

VoiceAbility's trustees and directors recognise employee engagement to be one of the most powerful drivers of organisational performance and of our success in enabling people who use our services to achieve their outcomes. It is central to our strategy, as outlined in this report.

The following are among the measures which we take to promote effective employee involvement and engagement, as well as to ensure that colleagues throughout the organisation are well-informed:

- cross sectional employee groups, who help to develop critical organisational policies and practices ranging from our pay policy and salary benchmarking to our approach to learning and development
- working groups, that bring together key personnel from across the organisation based on their expertise and strength, focusing on problem-solving, anticipating challenges, and driving continuous improvement. Working groups include People, Safeguarding, Finance and Performance, Commercial and Innovation
- a national forum, with the purpose of encouraging staff participation, and nurturing accountability to develop and implement strategies that ensure a culture of belonging is embedded throughout VoiceAbility
- a health, safety and wellbeing forum. The purpose of the forum is to represent, discuss and review how we keep everyone physically safe and mentally healthy at work
- an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) forum. The EDI forum brings together colleagues across the organisation with interest and experience in a wide variety of EDI issues such as ethnicity, cultural awareness, LGBTQ+ equality, domestic violence, veteran's issues, neurodiversity and more

- a carers staff forum, to provide a supportive space where carers can share their experiences, highlight the realities they face, and work together to explore potential ways forward
- a disability, long term health conditions and differently abled staff forum, to raise awareness and understanding of disability throughout VoiceAbility. To promote peer to peer support, and a culture of shared values and belonging for those that identify as having a disability, are differently abled, or have a long-term health condition
- a menopause staff forum, mostly comprised of those with lived experience although allies are present and welcome. Its aim is to have a consistent profile within VoiceAbility as an organisation, and to be reachable by those that need support around the menopause and a safe space to talk about how they're feeling
- a neurodivergent staff forum, to increase awareness, education, and understanding of both neurodivergence and neurodiversity throughout VoiceAbility. And provide and encourage peer-to-peer support and celebrate/harness difference

Pay policy

VoiceAbility operates an objective outcome pay policy. Staff are placed within bandings dependent on skillset and experience and, upon successful completion of agreed annual objectives, have the opportunity to progress in the banding by way of incremental 'spine points'. Regular supervisions and appraisals ensure that pay progression is measurable within a band, ensuring greater transparency and understanding of pay-related decisions. Although the executive leadership team are covered by the banding pay, ultimately decisions regarding the remuneration of these roles, and that of the Chief Executive Officer, are made by the Board.

Financial review

Overview

The Trustees are delighted to report that the Charity delivered a surplus of £488,785, despite the challenging economic climate.

2024-25 saw another year of significant growth, generating a total income of £15,894,583 – a 18% increase on prior year (2023-2024: £13,503,953).

Despite significant growth, total expenditure increased only 3% on last year to £15,400,679 (2023-24: £14,913,705), demonstrating the benefits and efficiencies from the planned strategic investment in fit-for-purpose structures, systems, processes and equipment over the last five year strategy, and the Charity's ability to sustainably scale.

Having generated deficits the last two years due to planned strategic investment funded from reserves, the return to a surplus generating model with reserves replenished to policy compliant levels provides a financially stable platform on which the 2025-30 strategy can be driven forward.

Cash and cash equivalents held at the end of the year was £969,833 (2023-24: £61,370).

Reserves

The unrestricted reserves are those funds that are available to be used on the charitable objects, to be spent as the trustees see fit.

The trustees hold unrestricted reserves as either general reserves or designated reserves. General reserves are there to support the day-to-day operations of the organisation and to ensure that VoiceAbility can meet its future financial obligations. Designated reserves are held as unrestricted funds that have been earmarked for a particular purpose by the trustees.

The fixed assets replacement designated fund, which is in place to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit-for-purpose equipment and systems on a long-term basis, has been reassessed and now stands at £280,000. Laptop and mobile phone purchases are recorded against the designated fund and, upon review of the charity's equipment requirements, transfers are then made from general funds to ensure the correct level of funds have been designated.

The remaining £382,583 is the balance of the tangible fixed assets which are not liquid and therefore removed from the undesignated, unrestricted reserves in the interest of prudence when calculating our reserve cover requirements.

VoiceAbility adopts a risk-based approach to determine the value of general reserves necessary to meet its future financial obligations, taking into account the reliability of income streams and the extent to which expenditure is committed, as well as the major risks to which the charity is exposed.

To inform decision-making over the value of general reserves required in any one year, VoiceAbility places a financial value on facing the key unmitigated risks identified in the risk register.

The approach used is to aggregate the assessed financial impact of the key unmitigated risks identified in the VoiceAbility risk register and assume that these risks occur either concurrently or sequentially over a timeframe that does not allow recovery between events. The quantification of those risks is assessed by the executive leadership team and validated by the Audit and Risk Committee alongside the annual review of the risk register.

Based on the outcome, the Audit and Risk Committee will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees on the required value of the general reserves for each financial year as part of the approval of the annual budget. The level of general reserves required at 31 March 2025 is £1,000,000.

The total reserves carried forward as at 31 March 2025 stand at £2,089,470, of which £1,426,887 is held as free reserves, excluding fixed assets and designated funds (2023-24: £888,829).

Investments and bank accounts

VoiceAbility's Investment Committee manages its investment portfolio with the support of management company CCLA. In 2024-25, the charity sold units with disposal proceeds totalling £250,000. The performance of the portfolio in 2024-25 generated an unrealised loss of £5,119 (2023-24: gain £58,300).

Events since the balance sheet date

There are no significant post-balance sheet events to note.

Going concern

The trustees have assessed whether the use of the going concern basis is appropriate and have considered possible events or conditions that might cast significant doubt on the ability of the charity to continue as a going concern. The trustees have made this assessment for a period of at least 1 year from the date of approval of the financial statements. The trustees and the executive leadership team have reviewed all budgets and expected income and expenditure projections and have concluded that, together with the reserves established to help in such circumstances, there is a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The charity, therefore, continues to adopt the going concern basis in preparing its financial statements.

Statement of trustees' responsibilities

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to
- presume that the charity will continue to operate
- state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006.

They are responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. The trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Disclosure of information to the auditors

So far as each person who was a director at the date of approving this report is aware, there is no relevant audit information, being information needed by the auditor in connection with preparing its report, of which the auditor is unaware. Having made enquiries of fellow directors and the charity's auditor, each director has taken all the steps that they are obliged to take as a director in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

This report along with the financial statements was approved by the trustees on:
and signed on their behalf by:

James Alistair Schofield – Audit and Risk Committee Chair

17 July 2025

Independent auditor's report to the members of VoiceAbility

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of VoiceAbility (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2025 which comprise the statement of financial activities, balance sheet, statement of cash flows and notes to the financial statements, including significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2025 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and regulation 8 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended)

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charitable company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on VoiceAbility's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other information

The other information comprises the information included in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information contained within the annual report. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon. Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended) require us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the statement of trustees' responsibilities set out in the trustees' annual report, the trustees (who are also the directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

We have been appointed as auditor under section 44(1)(c) of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and under the Companies Act 2006 and report in accordance with regulations made under those Acts.

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud are set out below.

Capability of the audit in detecting irregularities

In identifying and assessing risks of material misstatement in respect of irregularities, including fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations, our procedures included the following:

- we enquired of management and trustees, which included obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation, concerning the charity's policies and procedures relating to:
 - identifying, evaluating, and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
 - the internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations
- we inspected the minutes of meetings of those charged with governance
- we obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory framework that the charity operates in, focusing on those laws and regulations that had a material effect on the

financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of the charity from our professional and sector experience

- we communicated applicable laws and regulations throughout the audit team and remained alert to any indications of non-compliance throughout the audit
- we reviewed any reports made to regulators
- we reviewed the financial statement disclosures and tested these to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations
- we performed analytical procedures to identify any unusual or unexpected relationships that may indicate risks of material misstatement due to fraud
- in addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, we tested the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments, assessed whether the judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias and tested significant transactions that are unusual or those outside the normal course of business

Because of the inherent limitations of an audit, there is a risk that we will not detect all irregularities, including those leading to a material misstatement in the financial statements or non-compliance with regulation. This risk increases the more that compliance with a law or regulation is removed from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, as we will be less likely to become aware of instances of non-compliance. The risk is also greater regarding irregularities occurring due to fraud rather than error, as fraud involves intentional concealment, forgery, collusion, omission or misrepresentation.

A further description of our responsibilities is available on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and section 44(1)(c) of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Farrah Kitabi (Senior Statutory Auditor)

06 October 2025

for and on behalf of Sayer Vincent LLP, Statutory Auditor

110 Golden Lane, LONDON, EC1Y 0TG

Sayer Vincent LLP is eligible to act as auditor in terms of section 1212 of the Companies Act 2006

Financial statement

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Statement of financial activities (incorporating an income and expenditure account)

For the year ended 31 March 2025

	Note	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2025 Total £	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2024 Total £
Income from:									
Donations and legacies	2	3,587	–	–	3,587	1,192	–	–	1,192
Charitable activities	3	15,756,945	–	114,313	15,871,258	13,376,034	–	99,125	13,475,159
Investments		19,738	–	–	19,738	27,602	–	–	27,602
Total income		15,780,270	–	114,313	15,894,583	13,404,828	–	99,125	13,503,953
Expenditure on:									
Charitable activities	4a	15,286,366	–	114,313	15,400,679	14,062,405	752,174	99,125	14,913,705
Total expenditure	4	15,286,366	–	114,313	15,400,679	14,062,405	752,174	99,125	14,913,705
Net income / (expenditure) before net gains / (losses) on investments		493,904	–	–	493,904	(657,577)	(752,174)	–	(1,409,752)
Net gains / (losses) on investments		(5,119)	–	–	(5,119)	58,300	–	–	58,300
Net income / (expenditure) for the year	5	488,785	–	–	488,785	(599,277)	(752,174)	–	(1,351,452)
Transfers between funds		49,273	(49,273)	–	–	90,912	(90,912)	–	–
Net movement in funds		538,058	(49,273)	–	488,785	(508,366)	(843,086)	–	(1,351,452)
Reconciliation of funds:									
Total funds brought forward		888,829	711,856	–	1,600,685	1,397,195	1,554,942	–	2,952,137
Total funds carried forward		1,426,887	662,583	–	2,089,470	888,829	711,856	–	1,600,685

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities. There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in Note 17a to the financial statements.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Balance sheet

Company no. 03798884

As at 31 March 2025

	Note	2025 £	2024 £
Fixed assets:			
Tangible assets	10	382,583	471,856
Investments	11	6,533	261,652
		<u>389,116</u>	<u>733,508</u>
Current assets:			
Debtors	12	1,561,955	1,551,632
Cash at bank and in hand		969,833	61,370
		<u>2,531,788</u>	<u>1,613,002</u>
Liabilities:			
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	13	(811,434)	(716,793)
		<u>1,720,354</u>	<u>896,209</u>
Net current assets			
		<u>2,109,470</u>	<u>1,629,717</u>
Total assets less current liabilities			
Provision for liabilities	15	(20,000)	(29,032)
		<u>2,089,470</u>	<u>1,600,685</u>
Net assets			
		<u><u>2,089,470</u></u>	<u><u>1,600,685</u></u>
Funds:	16a		
Restricted income funds		-	-
Unrestricted income funds:			
Designated funds		662,583	711,856
General funds		1,426,887	888,829
		<u>2,089,470</u>	<u>1,600,685</u>
Total unrestricted funds			
		<u><u>2,089,470</u></u>	<u><u>1,600,685</u></u>
Total funds			
		<u><u>2,089,470</u></u>	<u><u>1,600,685</u></u>

Approved by the trustees on 17 July 2025 and signed on their behalf by

James Alistair Schofield
Trustee

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 31 March 2025

	2025 £	£	2024 £	£
Cash flows from operating activities				
Net income / (expenditure) for the reporting period (as per the statement of financial activities)	488,785		(1,351,452)	
Depreciation charges	218,863		176,552	
Losses/(gains) on investments	5,119		(58,300)	
Dividends and interest from investments	(19,738)		(27,602)	
(Decrease)/increase in provisions	(9,032)		12,000	
(Increase) in debtors	(10,323)		(69,309)	
Increase in creditors	94,641		10,085	
Net cash provided by operating activities		768,315		(1,308,025)
Cash flows from investing activities:				
Dividends and interest from investments	19,738		27,602	
Sale of investment units	250,000		1,050,000	
Purchase of fixed assets	(129,590)		(163,466)	
Net cash provided by / (used in) investing activities		140,148		914,136
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		908,463		(393,890)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		61,370		455,259
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year		969,833		61,370

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

1 Accounting policies

a) Statutory information

VoiceAbility Advocacy is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is incorporated in England & Wales. The registered office address is c/o Sayer Vincent, 110 Golden Lane, London, EC1Y 0TG.

b) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – (Charities SORP FRS 102), The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (September 2015) and the Companies Act 2006/Charities Act 2011.

The Charity has a subsidiary, Advocacy Experience Limited. The subsidiary is currently dormant and therefore consolidated financial statements have not been prepared.

Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy or note.

In applying the financial reporting framework, the trustees have made a number of subjective judgements, for example in respect of significant accounting estimates. Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The nature of the estimation means the actual outcomes could differ from those estimates. Any significant estimates and judgements affecting these financial statements are detailed within the relevant accounting policy below.

The trustees do not consider that there are any sources of estimation uncertainty at the reporting date that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next reporting period.

c) Public benefit entity

The charity meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102.

d) Going concern

The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

e) Income

Income is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and that the amount can be measured reliably.

Income from government and other grants, whether 'capital' grants or 'revenue' grants, is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the grants have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably and is not deferred.

Income received in advance of the provision of a specified service is deferred until the criteria for income recognition are met.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

f) Interest receivable

Interest on funds held on deposit is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably by the charity; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the bank.

g) Fund accounting

Restricted funds are to be used for specific purposes as laid down by the donor. Expenditure which meets these criteria is charged to the fund.

Unrestricted funds are donations and other incoming resources received or generated for the charitable purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds earmarked by the trustees for particular purposes.

h) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to make a payment to a third party, it is probable that settlement will be required and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is classified under the following activity headings:

- Costs of raising funds relate to the costs incurred by the charity in inducing third parties to make voluntary contributions to it, as well as the cost of any activities with a fundraising purpose
- Expenditure on charitable activities includes the costs of delivering services undertaken to further the purposes of the charity and their associated support costs

Irrecoverable VAT is charged as a cost against the activity for which the expenditure was incurred.

Support and governance costs are re-allocated to charitable activities in full.

i) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT (continued)

Governance costs are the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity. These costs are associated with constitutional and statutory requirements and include any costs associated with the strategic management of the charity's activities.

j) Operating leases

Rental charges are charged on a straight line basis over the term of the lease.

k) Tangible fixed assets

Items of equipment are capitalised where the purchase price exceeds £500 for an individual purchase. Depreciation costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the use of the related assets in those activities. Assets are reviewed for impairment if circumstances indicate their carrying value may exceed their net realisable value and value in use.

Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write down the cost of each asset to its estimated residual value over its expected useful life. The depreciation rates in use are as follows:

• Leasehold improvements	over the life of the lease
• Furniture, Computer, Telephones and Software	10% – 33%

l) Listed investments

Investments are a form of basic financial instrument and are initially recognised at their transaction value and subsequently measured at their fair value as at the balance sheet date using the closing quoted market price. Any change in fair value will be recognised in the statement of financial activities. Investment gains and losses, whether realised or unrealised, are combined and shown in the heading "Net gains/(losses) on investments" in the statement of financial activities. The charity does not acquire put options, derivatives or other complex financial instruments.

Investments in subsidiaries

Investments in subsidiaries are at cost.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

m) Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any trade discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

n) Cash at bank and in hand

Cash at bank and cash in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

o) Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

p) Financial instruments

The charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value.

q) Pensions

After three months of employment, employees are auto enrolled in the group stakeholder pension scheme (Aviva), via a salary exchange method. Employees are required to opt out should they not wish to be enrolled. The charity contributes 5% of gross salary and employees make a minimum contribution of 3% of gross salary. Employees joining the stakeholder pension contract directly with the insurance company. In addition to its own contribution the charity acts as agent in collecting and paying over employee pension contributions.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

2 Income from donations and legacies

	2025 Total £	2024 Total £
Donations (unrestricted)	3,587	1,192

3 Income from charitable activities

	Grants £	2025 Earned income contracts £	Total £	Grants £	2024 Earned income contracts £	Total £
Advocacy Services:						
Connections	31,538	604,974	636,512	31,350	702,615	733,965
London	–	1,164,386	1,164,386	–	1,318,360	1,318,360
Midlands & South East	60,000	3,016,924	3,076,924	45,000	2,265,977	2,310,977
North East	–	3,419,155	3,419,155	–	3,233,101	3,233,101
North West	–	2,794,763	2,794,763	–	2,164,650	2,164,650
Scotland	–	3,327,308	3,327,308	–	2,379,398	2,379,398
South West	–	1,421,054	1,421,054	–	1,310,440	1,310,440
	91,538	15,748,564	15,840,102	76,350	13,374,541	13,450,891
Support Services	22,775	8,381	31,156	22,775	1,494	24,269
Total income from charitable activities	114,313	15,756,945	15,871,258	99,125	13,376,034	13,475,159

All earned income is unrestricted and all grant income is restricted.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

4a Analysis of expenditure (current year)

	Advocacy Services £	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2025 Total £	2024 Total £
Direct staff costs	10,293,057	–	–	10,293,057	9,391,520
Indirect staff costs	–	–	2,264,368	2,264,368	2,632,950
Total staff costs (note 6)	10,293,057	–	2,264,368	12,557,425	12,024,470
Sub contractor Costs	69,386	–	–	69,386	206,609
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	170,758	–	–	170,758	139,409
Travel & Subsistence	541,220	–	–	541,220	466,374
Rent, Rates and Homeworking Allowance	153,991	–	–	153,991	148,720
Professional	27,704	–	–	27,704	199,066
Insurances	89,910	–	–	89,910	81,370
Depreciation	164,153	–	–	164,153	136,553
Software, Systems and Licensing	713,812	–	–	713,812	664,097
Other direct costs	310,157	–	–	310,157	343,963
Business Development	–	–	198,959	198,959	254,672
CEO and related expenses	–	–	48,260	48,260	42,096
Finance	–	–	28,560	28,560	32,073
Human resources	–	–	158,260	158,260	109,756
IT and Office Admin	–	–	139,662	139,662	19,473
Trustee and AGM costs	–	10,942	–	10,942	28,323
Audit and accountancy costs	–	17,520	–	17,520	16,680
	12,534,147	28,462	2,838,069	15,400,679	14,913,705
Support costs	2,838,069	–	(2,838,069)	–	–
Governance costs	28,462	(28,462)	–	–	–
Investment costs	–	–	–	–	–
Total expenditure 2025	15,400,679	–	–	15,400,679	–
Total expenditure 2024	14,913,705	–	–	–	14,913,705

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

4b Analysis of expenditure (prior year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs £	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2024 Total £
Direct staff costs	9,391,520	-	-	-	9,391,520
Indirect staff costs	-	456,599	-	2,176,351	2,632,950
Total staff costs (note 7)	9,391,520	456,599	-	2,176,351	12,024,470
Sub contractor Costs	206,609	-	-	-	206,609
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	137,528	1,881	-	-	139,409
Travel & Subsistence	432,637	33,737	-	-	466,374
Rent, Rates and Homeworking Allowance	146,079	2,641	-	-	148,720
Professional	13,071	185,995	-	-	199,066
Insurances	79,174	2,196	-	-	81,370
Depreciation	133,783	2,770	-	-	136,553
Software, Systems and Licensing	646,638	17,459	-	-	664,097
Other direct costs	295,066	48,897	-	-	343,963
Business Development	-	-	-	254,672	254,672
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	42,096	42,096
Finance	-	-	-	32,073	32,073
Human resources	-	-	-	109,756	109,756
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	19,473	19,473
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	28,323	-	28,323
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	16,680	-	16,680
	11,482,106	752,174	45,003	2,634,422	14,913,705
Support costs	2,634,422		-	(2,634,422)	-
Governance costs	45,003		(45,003)	-	-
Investment costs	752,174	(752,174)			
Total expenditure 2024	14,913,705		-	-	14,913,705

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

5 Net income / (expenditure) for the year

This is stated after crediting / (charging):

	2025 £	2024 £
Depreciation	218,863	176,552
Operating lease rentals:		
Property	-	-
Auditor's remuneration (excluding VAT):		
Audit	14,600	13,900

6 Analysis of staff costs, trustee remuneration and expenses, and the cost of key management personnel

Staff costs were as follows:

	2025 £	2024 £
Salaries and wages	10,778,708	10,264,051
Redundancy and termination costs	115,805	101,676
Social security costs	857,722	841,649
Employer's contribution to defined contribution pension schemes	803,711	774,548
Other staff costs	1,479	42,546
	12,557,425	12,024,470

The redundancy and termination costs were accrued at the balance sheet date.

The following number of employees received employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs and employer's national insurance) during the year between:

	2025 No.	2024 No.
£60,000 – £69,999	2	4
£70,000 – £79,999	1	1
£80,000 – £89,999	1	1
£90,000 – £99,999	1	1

The total employee benefits (including pension contributions and employer's national insurance) of the key management personnel were £300,572 (2024: £285,758).

The charity trustees were neither paid nor received any other benefits from employment with the charity in the year (2024: £nil). No charity trustee received payment for professional or other services supplied to the charity (2024: £nil).

Trustees' expenses represents the payment or reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs totalling £2,280 (2024: £464) incurred by 8 members (2024: 10) relating to attendance at meetings of the trustees.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

7 Staff numbers

The average number of employees (head count based on number of staff employed) during the year was 481 (2024: 434) and based on full-time equivalent was 406 (2024: 377).

8 Related party transactions

There are no related party transactions to disclose for 2025 (2024: none).

There are no donations from related parties which are outside the normal course of business and no restricted donations from related parties.

9 Taxation

The charity is exempt from corporation tax as all its income is charitable and is applied for charitable purposes.

10 Tangible fixed assets

Cost	Computer Equipment £	Telephones £	Software & Systems £	Total £
At the start of the year	635,734	253,579	133,658	1,022,971
Additions in year	101,702	27,888	–	129,590
Disposals in year	–	(78,186)	–	(78,186)
At the end of the year	737,436	203,281	133,658	1,074,375
Depreciation				
At the start of the year	363,670	126,662	60,783	551,115
Charge for the year	105,770	87,196	25,897	218,863
Eliminated on disposal	–	(78,186)	–	(78,186)
At the end of the year	469,440	135,672	86,680	691,792
Net book value				
At the end of the year	267,995	67,609	46,978	382,583
At the start of the year	272,064	126,917	72,875	471,856

All of the above assets are used for charitable purposes.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

11	Investments held as fixed assets	2025	2024
		£	£
	Fair value at the start of the year	261,652	1,253,352
	Additions at cost	-	-
	Disposal proceeds	(250,000)	(1,050,000)
	Net gain / (loss) on change in fair value	(5,119)	58,300
		6,533	261,652
	Fair value at the end of the year	6,533	261,652
		2025	2024
		£	£
	Investments comprise:		
	COIF Charities Investment Fund	6,533	261,652
12	Debtors	2025	2024
		£	£
	Trade debtors	1,056,999	946,337
	Other debtors	103,791	89,589
	Prepayments	292,388	373,070
	Accrued income	108,778	142,636
		1,561,955	1,551,632
13	Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	2025	2024
		£	£
	Trade creditors	235,285	91,012
	Taxation and social security	197,340	227,242
	Other creditors	212,302	223,598
	Accruals	64,838	122,991
	Deferred income (note 14)	101,668	51,950
		811,434	716,793

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

14 Deferred income

Deferred income comprises income invoiced in advance of work not undertaken by year end

	2025 £	2024 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	51,950	59,095
Amount released to income in the year	(51,950)	(59,095)
Amount deferred in the year	101,668	51,950
Balance at the end of the year	101,668	51,950

15 Provisions for liabilities

Provisions for liabilities comprises

	2025 £	2024 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	29,032	17,032
Increase/(decrease) in provision in the year	(9,032)	12,000
Balance at the end of the year	20,000	29,032
Dilapidations provision	–	1,750
Customer refund provision	–	7,282
Staffing provision	20,000	20,000
	20,000	29,032

Staffing Provision

To provide for HR issues identified pre 31st March 2025.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025**16a Analysis of net assets between funds (current year)**

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	382,583	–	382,583
Investments	6,533	–	–	6,533
Net current assets	1,440,354	280,000	–	1,720,354
Provisions	(20,000)	–	–	(20,000)
Net assets at 31 March 2025	1,426,887	662,583	–	2,089,470

16b Analysis of net assets between funds (prior year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	471,856	–	471,856
Investments	261,652	–	–	261,652
Net current assets	656,209	240,000	–	896,209
Provisions	(29,032)	–	–	(29,032)
Net assets at 31 March 2024	888,829	711,856	–	1,600,685

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

17a Movements in funds (current year)

	At 1 April 2024 £	Income & gains £	Expenditure & losses £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2025 £
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	22,775	(22,775)	-	-
** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	31,538	(31,538)	-	-
*** Voluntary Action Coventry	-	60,000	(60,000)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	114,313	(114,313)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Fixed Assets Replacement	240,000	-	-	40,000	280,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	471,856	-	-	(89,273)	382,583
Total designated funds	711,856	-	-	(49,273)	662,583
General funds	888,829	15,775,150	(15,286,366)	49,273	1,426,887
Total unrestricted funds	1,600,685	15,775,150	(15,286,366)	-	2,089,470
Total funds	1,600,685	15,889,463	(15,400,679)	-	2,089,470

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

*** Independent Health Complaints Advocacy service in Coventry

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund is to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

The **Tangible Fixed Assets** designated fund removes the non-cash element.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

17b Movements in funds (prior year)

	At 1 April 2024	Income & gains	Expenditure & losses	Transfers	At 30 March 2024
	£	£	£	£	£
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	22,775	(22,775)	-	-
** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	31,350	(31,350)	-	-
*** Voluntary Action Coventry	-	45,000	(45,000)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	99,125	(99,125)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	950,000	-	(752,174)	(197,826)	-
Fixed Assets Replacement	120,000	-	-	120,000	240,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	484,942	-	-	(13,086)	471,856
Total designated funds	1,554,942	-	(752,174)	(90,912)	711,856
General funds	1,397,195	13,463,128	(14,062,405)	90,912	888,829
Total unrestricted funds	2,952,137	13,463,128	(14,814,580)	-	1,600,685
Total funds	2,952,137	13,562,253	(14,913,705)	-	1,600,685

Investment in Development has now been concluded with the balance transferred back to general funds.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund is to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

The **Tangible Fixed Assets** designated fund removes the non-cash element.

VoiceAbility

☎ 0300 303 1660

✉ helpline@voiceability.org

🌐 voiceability.org

🐦 [@VoiceAbility](https://twitter.com/VoiceAbility)



About VoiceAbility

We make sure you're heard when it matters most. We've been supporting people to have their say in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.

VOICEABILITY ADVOCACY

England & Wales - Charity number 1076630

Accounts

Annual report and accounts

For the year ended 31 March 2024

VoiceAbility Advocacy: Charity number in England 1076630,

Charity number in Scotland SC050036, Company number 3798884.



Contents

Welcome from our Chief Executive Officer	4
Our aims, vision and values	6
What is advocacy and what do advocates do?	8
Our strategic direction and impact	22
New ways to deliver using advocacy skills	23
Value our people	29
Build the basics	32
Drive quality	35
Lead the market and grow authority	38
What will we do in 2024-25?	43
Reference and administrative information	45
Governance, structure and management	47
Financial review	52

Welcome from our Chair of Trustees

I am delighted to welcome you to our 2023-2024 Annual Report.

I joined as the Chair of VoiceAbility's Board of Trustees at the end of January, after spending over 30 years in the health and social care sector. My last full-time role was as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a leading social enterprise for people needing community and prison dentistry.



Figure 1: Ali Reid

Sadly, my first year in post is the last for VoiceAbility CEO Jonathan Senker. I'd like to thank Jonathan for his support and outstanding service to VoiceAbility over the last 14 years. I look forward to working with Jonathan's successor, Richard Jones, in the coming months and years to continue delivering our goal of ensuring people's voices are heard when it matters most.

The year just gone has been tough for many, especially for those in the social care sector. Funds for services are tight and expectations are higher than ever, with the cost-of-living crisis and delays in accessing care all impacting demand for our services.

Despite these challenging conditions, I'm genuinely proud of how we've united and adapted as an organisation to continue delivering and improving. What really stands out is the diverse range of challenges we face and how our work enables people to help themselves.

We can also celebrate supporting 22% more people than last year, responding to 45,000 enquiries and growing our volunteer network to 11% of our total workforce.

We've also expanded our Board to include 4 additional trustees, offering a diverse range of expertise to complement our work. We remain ambitious, so that we can support more people, through delivering quality services, influencing and campaigning to change the broken systems many struggle with and mobilising communities to have a strong voice.

Yet there is always more to do. We hope our report demonstrates our determination to do better by exploring the practical steps we've taken to build on what works, improve what does not work and expand our reach to achieve our goals.

Finally, I'd like to personally thank you for taking the time to read this. I look forward to working with everyone to achieve even more in the coming year as we strive to have an even greater positive impact on people.

Ali Reid

Welcome from our Chief Executive

At the core of a life well-lived is being heard, connected to others, and being safe and well. Yet recent failures of public services, from continuing unnecessary incarceration of people with learning disabilities and autistic people to the Post Office scandal, demonstrate a failure to listen to people's voices.

That is why VoiceAbility's guiding star is that everyone has a voice that is heard, and no one has to face life-changing decisions alone.

As I write this, in my final weeks at VoiceAbility, I shall take inspiring memories with me of time spent with people who draw on our services, and an abiding respect for our fabulous team. I'm incredibly proud of what we've accomplished, making a greater positive difference to people's lives year on year. I know that this will continue.

This year, we have delivered major new services from North Ayrshire to Essex while establishing new ways to ensure voices are heard and people are involved in shaping what happens in their lives and communities.

We know fulfilling our potential also means ensuring that everyone within VoiceAbility has a voice that counts — it would be absurd to believe otherwise.

This year, we have translated that commitment into a major programme of organisational culture change. Our all-staff conference focused on engagement and belonging, which launched our organisation-wide strengths programme.

We have built a stronger influencing platform to push for the systemic changes needed by those who use our services, working in partnership with others who share our aims. For example, our 'Use Your Power' campaign to end the unnecessary incarceration of people with learning disabilities and autistic people. We will continue to advocate for public services that truly put people first.

It is to lives well-lived that I return as I highlight the enormous contribution of our colleague Elspeth Jones, who sadly passed away in November 2023. As you will read in the tribute to her in this report, Elspeth's power, warmth and humour will continue to rouse us to greater things.

I hope that you enjoy reading this report and that it conveys some of the dramatic differences we make when we ensure that people are listened to. I hope that it also illustrates our ambition, aims and direction.

We cannot, however, take even a step towards them alone. Our ability to make change utterly depends on the inspiration, engagement and drive provided by those who use our services, the stunning work of our staff and volunteers, and the steadfast support of our many organisational partners and friends. I thank you all.

Jonathan Senker



Figure 2:
Jonathan Senker

Our story

We're VoiceAbility, a voice and rights charity with a vision and a mission.

We were the first advocacy organisation in the UK. We started in 1981 as the Advocacy Alliance and were born out of an urgent need to support the rights of people with learning disabilities enduring dreadful conditions in long-stay hospitals. The Advocacy Alliance spread the word about advocacy and took practical actions to uphold people's rights through the power of advocacy relationships.

In 2010 we joined forces with Speaking Up — a pioneering social enterprise, established with and by people who were traditionally sidelined, which enabled people to support one another, contribute to our communities and live more fully.

Today, together as VoiceAbility, we continue to provide high-quality, independent advocacy and participation services to thousands of people with many different needs in their homes and in many locations including hospitals, care homes and community centres.

We started with a passion to support people to lead fuller lives through our advocacy work. The name above the door may have changed, but our vision and mission to create a fairer world remains the same more than 40 years on.



Our aims, vision and values

We're an independent voice and rights charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and participation services.

We support people to be heard. We've been supporting people to be heard in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years.

Our aims

We believe everyone has a right to:

- be heard and respected
- have the same choice, control, and freedom as any other person
- be safe from violence, discrimination, harm or abuse

Our vision

Everyone has a voice which is heard and responded to.

No-one has to face life-changing decisions alone.

This includes:

- delivering the best possible quality of support
- being the provider of choice for the services we offer
- being the source of authority for expert insight on voice and rights
- being the place to work or volunteer with, for anyone who shares our aim

Our values

1. Passionate

We're dedicated to strengthening voice, supporting rights and changing lives.

2. Empowering

We enable people to live life to the full.

3. Collaborative

We listen and shape decisions with others.

4. Honest

We work with integrity and we stick to our principles.

5. Resourceful

We think ahead and find effective ways to achieve our mission.

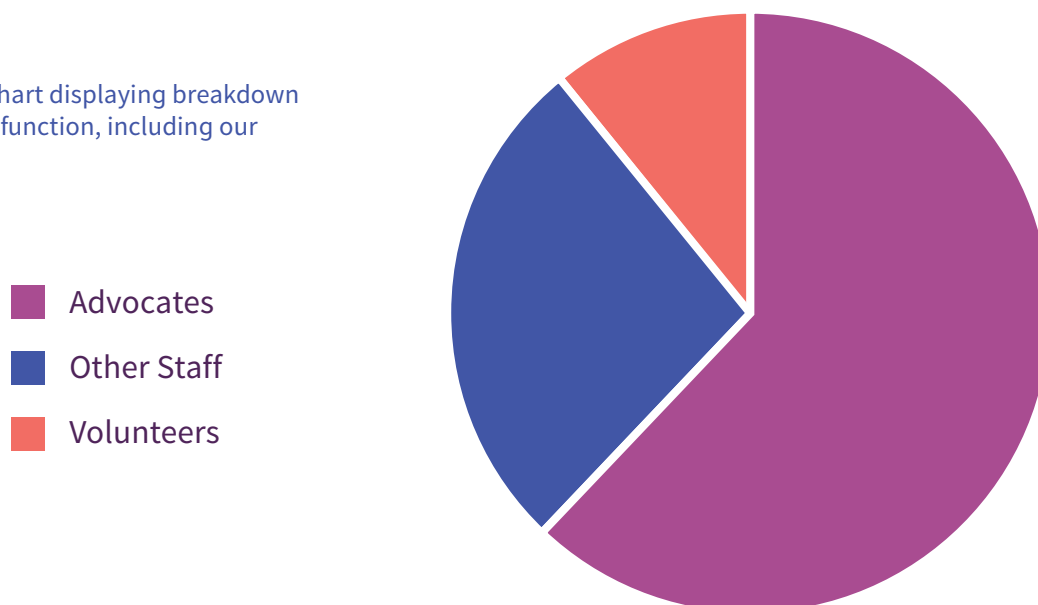
Our team

We have 468 staff (and 14 trustees), with 394 based in England and 60 in Scotland. Most of our staff are advocates, making up around 70% of our workforce. We also employ staff in our Connections services, Communications and Marketing, Finance, Human Resources, IT and policy functions who make up the remaining 30%. We work with 54 active volunteers who are based across the UK, with more coming through our training programme all the time.

Our senior leadership team is made up of directors, headed up by 2 executive leaders, Sam Breckell and Richard Jones, and a Chief Executive – Jonathan Senker. Jonathan will be leaving us shortly, and handing over his post to Richard.

As a charity, we're also accountable to a Board of Trustees who ensure we're working for the public good. Find out more about our leadership team on our [website](#).

Figure 3: Pie chart displaying breakdown of our staff by function, including our volunteers.



Our average staff member is:



Female



Over 45
years old



An
advocate

We're working on increasing diversity in our workforce through our Belonging programme, which you can find out about in our 'Value our people' section.

What is advocacy and what do advocates do?

Advocacy is independent support to involve you in decisions about your health, care and wellbeing. An advocate is an independent professional who supports you to speak up and know your rights. We explain more about 'What is advocacy?' on [our website](#).

All our services have the shared goal of supporting people to be heard when it matters most. Our independent advocacy services support people to be heard in important decisions about their health, care and wellbeing.

Figure 4:
Video - what is
advocacy?

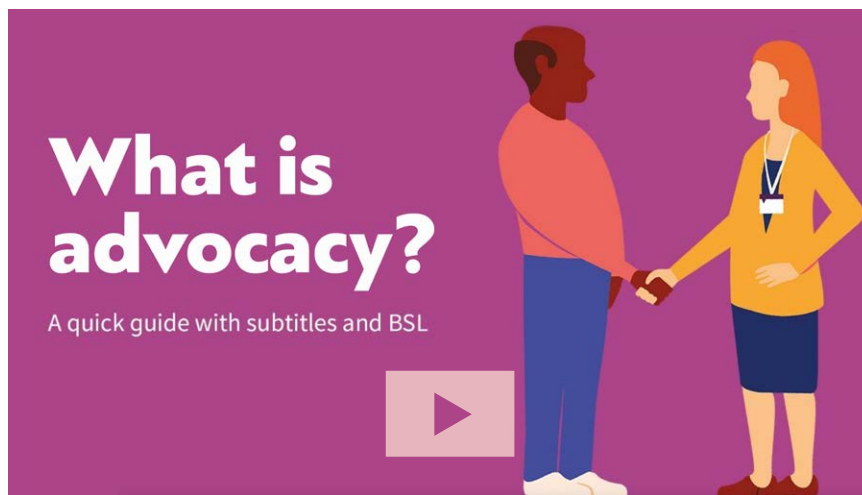
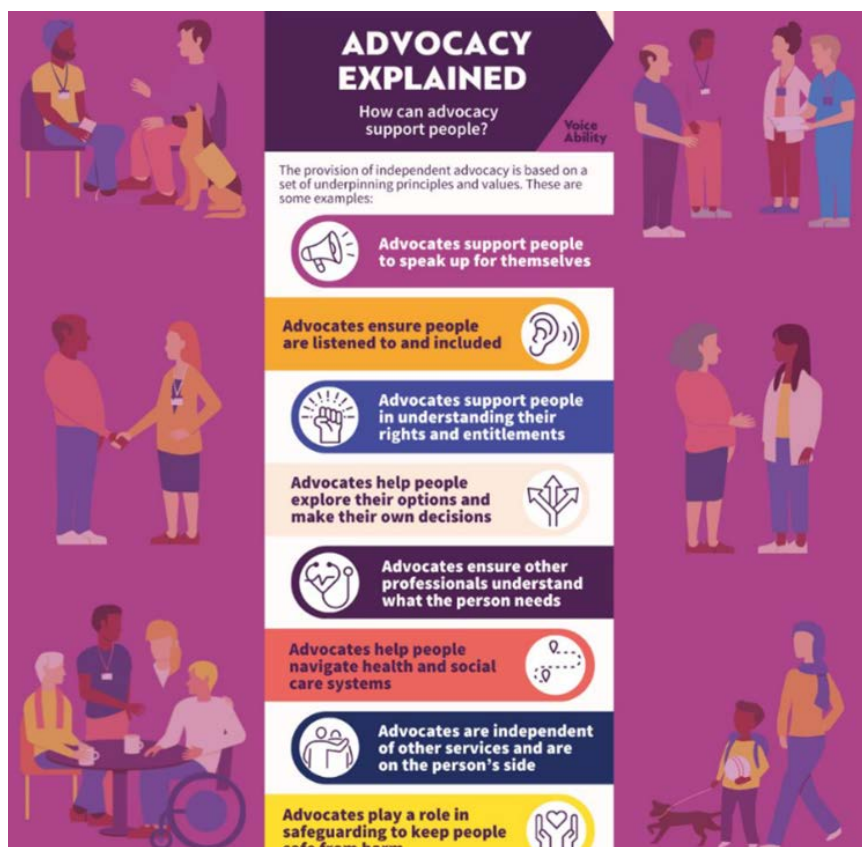


Figure 5:
Advocacy
explained



What we do in England:

Advocacy type	Description
Care Act advocacy	Care Act advocates support people to understand their rights under the Care Act and to be fully involved in a local authority assessment, care review, care and support planning or safeguarding process.
Children and young people advocacy	Although it varies by area, advocacy can be available for children and young people who ● are looked after children ● live in a secure children's home ● are going through the child protection process ● have special educational needs ● are in transition to adult care and support services
General advocacy	General advocates provide advocacy to people who need support to be heard, but do not fall into the eligibility criteria for other types of advocacy.
Independent mental capacity advocacy	Independent mental capacity advocates support people when they are assessed to lack capacity, and have no-one else to support them. Advocates ensure that the person's voice, views and wishes are heard as part of the best interest decision process.
Independent mental health advocacy	Independent mental health advocates support people with issues relating to their mental health care and treatment. They also help people understand and uphold their rights under the Mental Health Act.
NHS complaints advocacy	NHS complaints advocates support people to complain about the treatment or care that they, a friend or family member have received from an NHS service.
Relevant person's representative (RPR)	An RPR is a safeguard for people who are deprived of their liberty. They support people to help make sure their views, wishes and rights are respected and upheld.
Rule 1.2 representative	A Rule 1.2 representative speaks up for a person who lacks capacity to consent to restrictions on their freedom, when they are or may be deprived of their liberty in a community or domestic setting.

What we do in Scotland:

In Scotland, advocacy can sometimes be provided under specific legislation, but it can also be commissioned based on need.

Advocacy type	Description
Benefits advocacy	Advocates support people who self-identify as disabled to access benefits from Social Security Scotland, and those who are accessing benefits for a disabled child. This is underpinned by the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013. Benefits advocacy can be provided in a group settings.
General advocacy	General advocacy is for adults and people over 16 years old. It includes statutory advocacy provided under: ● The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 ● The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 ● The Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2015 ● Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 ● Carers (Scotland) Act 2016
Unpaid carers advocacy	We provide advocacy for adult unpaid carers in Edinburgh. Advocates can support carers with issues like: ● Guardianships ● Mental Health Act tribunals ● Communicating with health and social care professionals, including by letter and at meetings ● Making a complaint, for example about a care provider, a care package, direct payments or healthcare ● Housing ● Resolving problems ● Signposting to other services Carers advocacy can be provided in a group setting, and can also be provided under the same legislation listed above for general advocacy.

Why our advocates love what they do

We asked our advocates why they love what they do. Here's what they said:

“It is important to me as an individual that people are supported to understand and uphold their rights. The IMCA [independent mental capacity advocate] role gives people who lack capacity a voice in important decisions about their lives which may otherwise be overlooked by professionals. Most people can still express views, wishes and preferences in some way or form and, where they can't, IMCAs can ask those important questions for them. As with all advocacy, it's making sure that the person is still there at the centre of the decision that is being made.”

Amanda

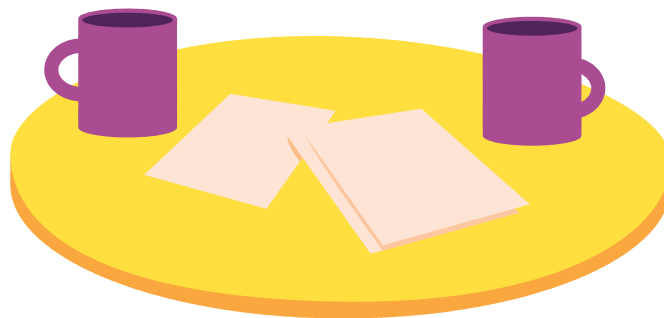
”



“My favourite aspect of providing NHS Complaints Advocacy is watching the growth in confidence of my clients who feel they are able to speak up for themselves and have their voices heard.”

Katie

”



“Helping someone complete a form and collate the supporting evidence required that stands as a barrier to getting the financial help needed is a great purpose to have. The gratitude I receive from clients for helping with this always surprises me, and it is very rewarding to have clients come back and tell me when they have received an award, and how they have used it to improve their life (from improving their diet to being able to travel to a hospital appointment without distress can make a difference to quality of life). Active listening, signposting and referring onwards means our service is so much more than filling in a form.”

Adrienne

”

“Individuals detained under the Mental Health Act are some of the most restricted individuals we work with. It is rewarding to support clients to gain confidence to speak up about their care and treatment and be treated as individuals rather than mental health patients. By empowering our clients to be able to discuss their treatment and discharge plan, we give them the tools to advocate for themselves.”

Charis

”

What we do – Connections services

Our Connections services bring together all our participation, involvement, co-production and peer support work into one team.



These varied services employ and work with people with similar lived experiences to ensure their human rights are upheld. People we employ and support include autistic people, disabled people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental illnesses.

Our services help people use their lived experience to speak out and be involved in decisions about things that are important to them. We also provide space for peer support and encourage self-advocacy.

● **Involvement and participation**

We work with providers, NHS bodies and local government to ensure that the voices of people who use their services are heard. For example, our Speak Out groups employ people with learning disabilities and autistic people, to capture and convey the voices of their peers.

● **Group advocacy**

We support people to meet, identify common issues, share their experience, and act. Where possible, we support these groups to become self-facilitating, empowering people to take more control of their own lives.

● **Peer mentoring and Experts by Experience**

Peer mentoring - we all feel more comfortable speaking to people who have been through some of the same experiences as we have. Our peer support workers and mentors draw on their own experience of mental health to provide emotional and practical support to others.

Experts by Experience - our Experts by Experience form an important part of the panel of experts for Care, Education and Treatment Reviews (CETR). CETR are held either when someone with a learning disability, autism or both is in hospital due to their mental health or requires additional support in the community to avoid hospital admission.

Here are some examples of great work done by our staff and people we support through our Connections services.

Speak Out Hampshire:

We support people with learning disabilities to be involved in the Hampshire Learning Disability Partnership (HLDP). Their involvement means their voices are heard by the local council and their partners.

In January 2024, Fahmina wrote for VoiceAbility's website about being supported by our staff to self-advocate and become involved with the HLDP. Fahmina's story was also published by national learning disability magazine, Community Living, and she was invited to speak at learning disability charity – Learning Disability Network's – event in June with an all-star panel.

You can read Fahmina's story on the news section of our **website**.



Figure 6: Fahmina

Speak Out Essex:

In June 2023, we were commissioned by Essex County Council as the co-production partners on the All Age Autism Partnership Board. Our role involves working with the council, the partnership board and autistic people, families, carers and professionals to improve services in Essex.

We ran a series of launch events (pictured to the right) across Essex to identify which service areas autistic people would like to prioritise. From the launch events, focus groups and attending networking events, we collected over 700 statements from autistic people, their families and professionals that support them. We then collectively created statements on the improvements people would like made to the diagnosis process, healthcare, education, and



Figure 7: Speak Out Essex organised launch events across the county, including in Colchester

employment. Our focus groups, which consist of autistic people, families and professionals who support autistic people, are currently meeting with service providers to identify how we can create meaningful change.

Sam Geden, a community support worker for Essex County Council's Local Linked Support Team, attended events in Chelmsford and Colchester. Sam said:

“As an autistic person, I certainly shared a lot of views from my experiences; it's been heartening to hear others talk about their struggles and their triumphs, and what we as a public sector can do to fill in as many service gaps as possible. I feel a lot more confident that we can all make a difference.”

Parent Ron Harrison, who attended the Colchester launch event, said:

“It's the first time that I've felt there might be a route through this.”



Figure 8: Speak Out Leader Michelle during a visit to a Lincolnshire hospital

Speak Out Southwark:

In Southwark, our team of young people, carers, and parents are working to make evening, weekend and holiday clubs more accessible for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The project, which is part of Southwark Council's Thrive-to-25 initiative, includes providing funding towards improvements, and events for people who run the clubs to share best practice and training. The February Speak Out Day included practical training sessions on how to use Makaton signing and how to facilitate activities for young people with SEND.



Figure 9: Attendees at a SEND Speak Out Day in Peckham during a Makaton signing training session

Experts by Experience

We have teams of Experts by Experience (EBEs) in Coventry, Warwickshire and Bedfordshire. They all have either direct or indirect lived experience of a learning disability, autism or both and form part of the Care, Education and Treatment Review (CETR) panels which focus on four main questions:

1. Is the person safe?

2. Is the person getting good care now?

3. What are their plans for the future?

4. Does the person need to be in hospital for their care and treatment?

EBEs draw on their own lived experience and provide reassurance to individuals and their families. They frequently raise questions regarding any of the support services around the individual and ask questions regarding care plans and community support, discharge planning, medication reviews and consent. We regularly receive praise from parents supporting their children through CETR panels and are told that they found the EBE's presence reassuring and useful.

The Chair in a CETR is responsible for planning the review panel and ensuring that all appropriate people are invited and provided with the right documentation, they are also responsible for facilitating the CETR, as well as sharing the agreed report and ensuring recommendations are embedded in the care process. We have received positive feedback from the Chair who valued our EBEs and highlighted the significance of co-working between hospital staff and new support teams.



Remembering Elspeth

Elspeth Jones was a Speak Out Leader in Cambridgeshire at VoiceAbility for 9 years. Speak Out Leaders are employees with lived experience of a learning disability or autism who work with local authorities and other professionals to focus their attention and action to what is important to people in their lives. In November 2023, Elspeth sadly died. Elspeth is survived by her brother, Bill, who is also a Speak Out Leader. The section below is a tribute to the vibrant and dedicated person



Figure 10: Elspeth

Elspeth was, and the tremendous impact she had on all who knew and worked with her. Elspeth described herself as someone who used their lived experience of Asperger's to help autistic people navigate life and access care. Talking with and not to people was incredibly important to Elspeth, and she really wanted people to have the opportunity to be heard. Her experience meant she was motivated to make sure other people did not suffer the way she had.

Elspeth was especially good at asking just the right question to get to the heart of an issue. Speaking about her work, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adult Social Care Forum said:

“‘Health and social care matters can often be complicated and sometimes bureaucratic and having somebody in the room who asks ‘why does it have to be that way?’ about a process, is so helpful and makes everybody think again about what we are doing.’”

We've received many, many messages from those who worked with Elspeth at VoiceAbility. The word 'powerful' comes up over and over again. Health and social care professionals who attended Elspeth's training always commented on how it made them see things differently.

Elspeth ensured the voices of autistic people were heard, loud and clear, holding people to account and helping them do better. Elspeth also challenged politicians when she joined a Select Committee on Disability to advocate for disabled people.

Elspeth's ability to say it how it was changed opinions and, because of that, she changed lives. Her work was serious, her messages were serious and meetings were often emotionally challenging for her. But she had a wonderful ability to make everyone laugh, with an off-the cuff comment, a story and her wonderful chuckle.

Elspeth had a great sense of fun and never wanted a meeting to be boring if it did not need to be, even going as far as encouraging a room full of parents and carers to do a Mexican wave! She really broke the ice there!

Our Speak Out team remember Elspeth as our kind, funny, warm colleague, who made us laugh and very importantly made sure all the Easy Read documents or presentations we made were really accessible. She was proud to call herself our official proof-reader and always checked our work. We miss her deeply.

Where we worked in 2023-2024

Where we worked in Scotland

We've been working in Scotland since 2022. Our work includes providing services, engaging volunteers and working in partnership with community groups, advocacy organisations and government.

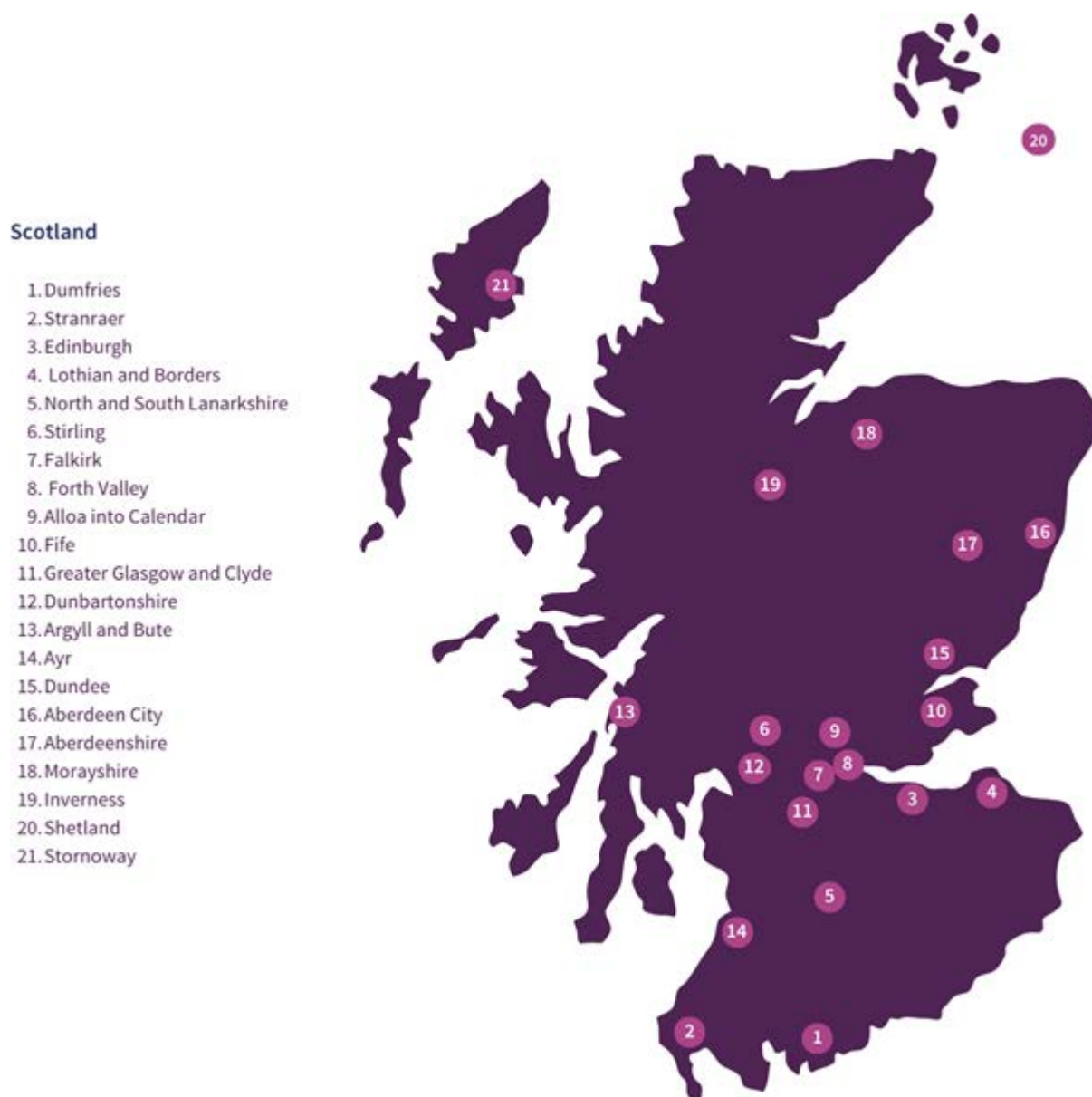
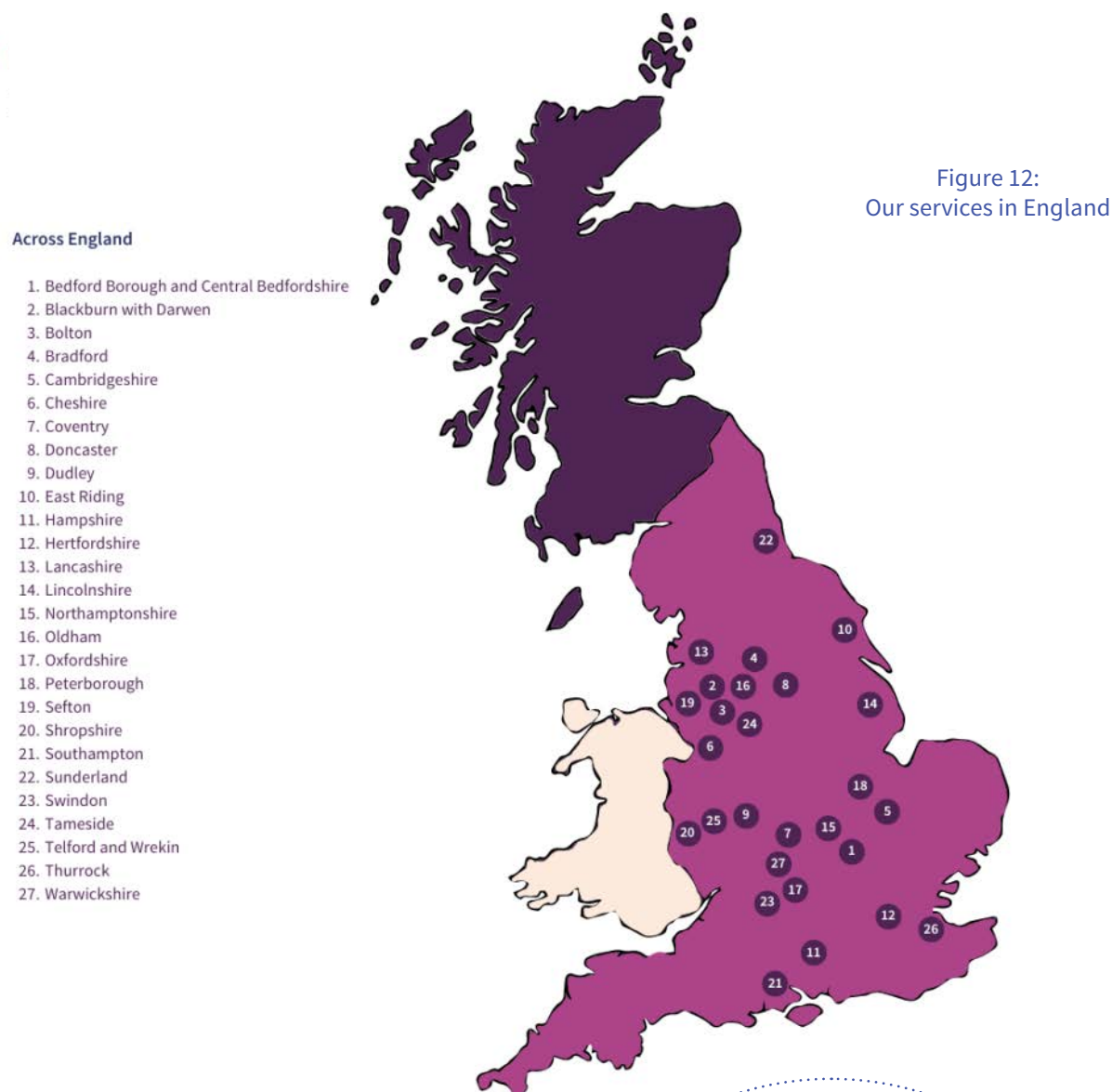


Figure 11: Our services in Scotland 2023-24. We provide services across the whole of Scotland.

Where we worked in England



London boroughs

1. Camden
2. Ealing
3. Merton
4. Newham
5. Redbridge
6. Southwark

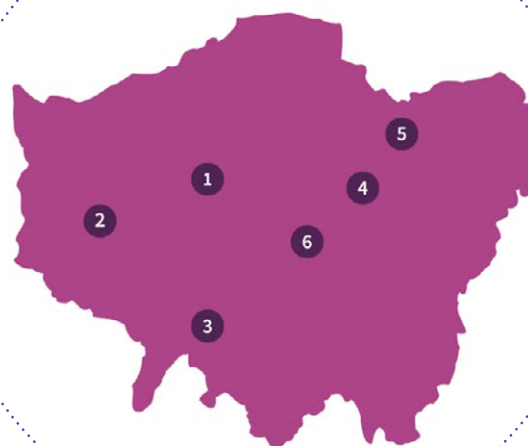


Figure 13: Our services in London

Who we supported in 2023-2024

We opened **36,637 cases** in 2023-24.

Of these:

4,471
were in Scotland

31,918
were in England

22%

We had a 22% increase in cases compared to last year.

We supported
34,611
adults

We supported
1,116
children¹

Breakdown of cases by area

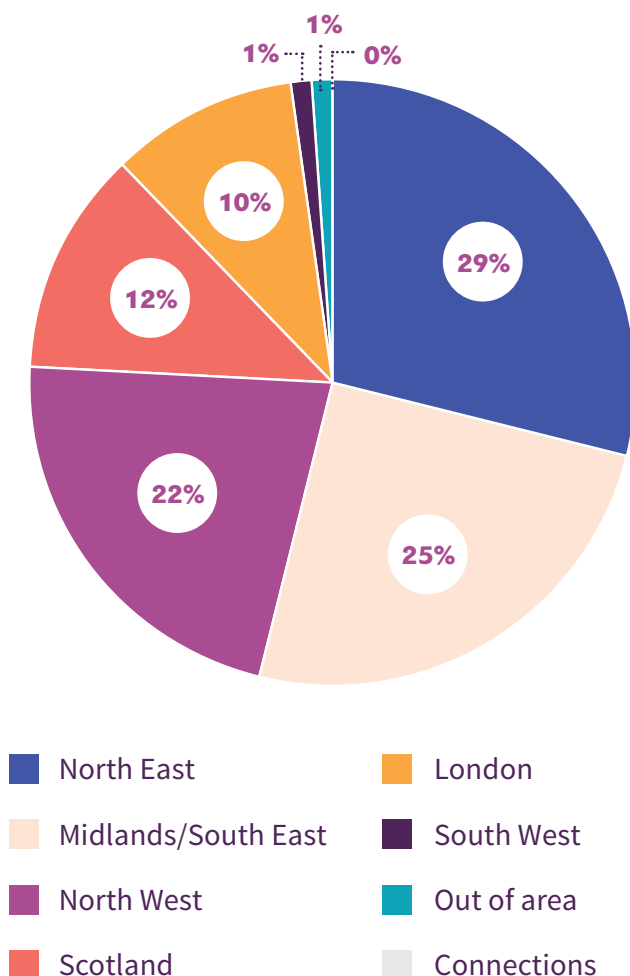


Figure 14: A pie chart showing our cases by area

¹We define children as people under the age of 18 here.

Our most used type of advocacy is independent mental health advocacy, which makes up 30% of cases. Our top 5 types of case are –

Our top types of advocacy by case

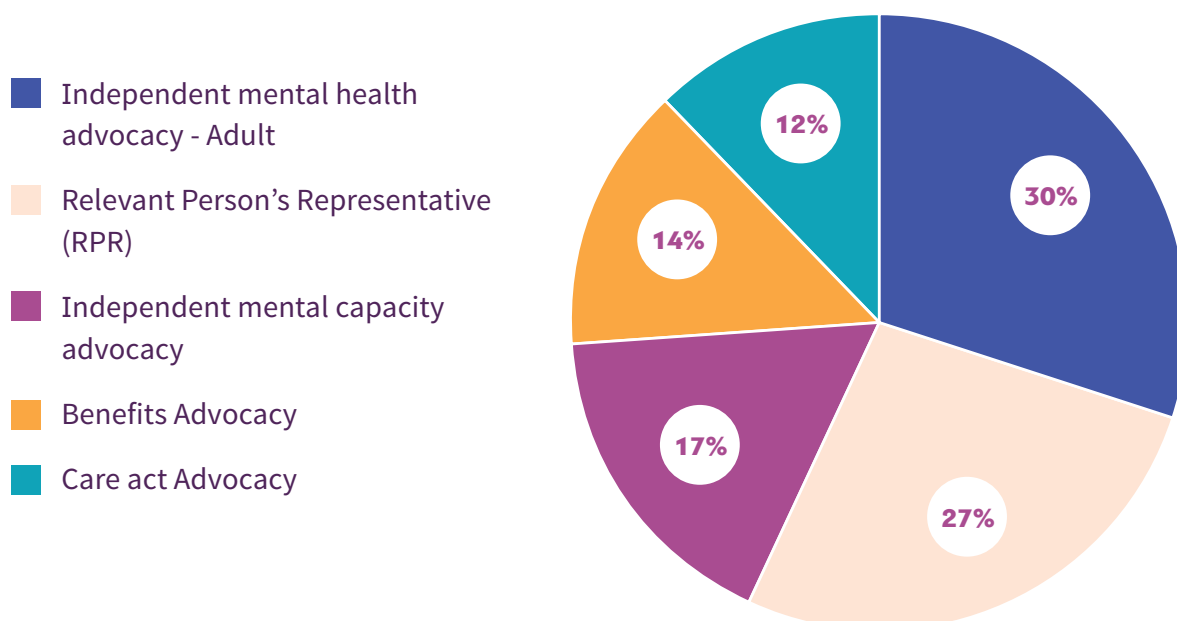


Figure 15: A chart showing the types of advocacy we provide by case

We received 45,609 enquiries this year, which converted into **35,243 cases**

47%

This is a 47% increase on enquiries compared to last year.

81%

of our enquiries came from our website and through email

We signposted services for

4,643 cases

Our strategic direction and impact



When we launched our 2019-25 strategy, the world was very different. Pre-Covid, post-Brexit — the UK has gone through seismic shifts as a society. Sadly, these years have also seen increasing reliance on the health and social care system and decreasing funding for local authorities and public services.

VoiceAbility is of course not immune to the wider landscape. However, by focusing on ensuring we deliver the very best service, continuing to raise our standards of advocacy practice, pushing for wider social care transformation, working with communities to support themselves, and building a sense of organisational wellbeing, we've weathered this storm.

The past 5 years have seen a significant change in how we operate, from embedding the right foundations into our working practices through to supporting professionalisation of advocacy practice. While the wider context has certainly been challenging, we're proud of where we stand today.

As you will see in the following sections, we've achieved many of our strategic goals and, where needed, adapted to ensure we remain focused on achieving our overall goal: that everyone's voices and rights are heard and respected, and that people can live how they want to.



New ways to deliver using advocacy skills

Improve outcomes for more people using a range of advocacy skills, empowering communities and the next generation of advocates.



We said we would focus on:

- Extending our independent advocacy reach and improving outcomes with a greater focus on driving high-quality delivery through new and innovative ways of working
- Providing the technology and channels to enable people to give and receive support about rights, voices, social care, and personal public services
- Researching, planning and seed funding better ways to empower individuals, families and supporting communities throughout and beyond the UK — harnessing our expertise

What we did:

1. Ensured people continue to get access to high quality advocacy across the UK:

- While we are operating in a challenging financial climate for local authorities, we have increased our advocacy footprint across both England and Scotland and now provide around 17% of advocacy services across both nations. We dealt with 22% more cases than last year

2. Established work with schools and colleges to educate and inspire the next generation:

- Our learning and development team helped create a 5-day placement for pupils at Scottish high schools. We also ran a session with facilitators to help with their skills while launching this placement
- We've hosted placement students in England, including 5 social work students in Bolton. Students work as advocates, reporting to team leaders and receiving supervisions every 10-14 days. Placement students stay for 70-100 days and have their own caseloads
- We've received positive feedback about our placement scheme. Our scheme in Bolton, for example, has a 98% pass rate and a good reputation among top universities

Staff who support our placement students say:

“Many of our previous students check in with us from time to time; they inform us that they teach their line managers all about statutory advocacy. They report that advocacy knowledge has better equipped them in their roles. They often feel that they have more knowledge on relevant legislation than most of their team members.”

- Former placement students also tell us how valuable they’ve found their time with us to be:

“During my placement as a Relevant Person Representative (RPR) in advocacy, I have gained crucial insights into advocating for individuals who may lack capacity to make decisions regarding their own care. [...] This whole experience so far has reinforced my dedication to championing the rights and dignity of vulnerable individuals in society.”

- Our outreach work raised has awareness about advocacy for people like trainee social workers and students. This is needed, as our advocates report many professionals in social care do not know or understand their role.
- 3. Provided the technology and channels to enable people to give and receive support about voices, rights, social care and personal public services, and inspire change:**
- Launched our first digital-only campaign for Advocacy Awareness Week
 - Launched an advocate dashboard for more thorough, centralised data collection
 - Began early thinking in the engagement and influencing team about a policy workstream on artificial intelligence. Engaged with campaigners working on tech-related campaigns like Stop Oxevision
 - Continued to make back-end improvements on our Employee Self-Service Platform — iTrent
 - Improved our website referral options for Care Act, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and independent mental capacity advocacy and best interest decision-maker advocacy.
 - We upgraded our Service Cloud Voice software which integrates with our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to reduce search time for clients. This enables advocates to have more time for meaningful conversations. In addition, it aligned our webchat and voice channels into one widget for simplified use, again with direct integration into our CRM reducing admin time and enabling our advocates to focus on supporting more people more quickly, without compromising on quality
 - We’ve laid the foundations for more tech-related work, exploring the link between human rights, social care and ethical technology

4. Empowered individuals, families and supportive communities, harnessing our expertise:

- We continued to empower communities by working in partnership with local charities, councils and commissioners in the UK
- We set up a new international advocacy network to learn how practices differ across the globe. Advocacy organisations from Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland and South Korea are represented. We discuss models of advocacy in relation to different country's barriers and opportunities
- We worked in partnership with organisations like the Care Quality Commission, the Department of Health and Social Care, and Hampshire County Council which we cover in the engagement and influencing section below. We also worked in partnership with the Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Centre in Sheffield on an IBD awareness toolkit, which communicated the wants and needs of patients
- We laid the groundwork for regular international work and alliances through a formal network and we've continued to strengthen our partnership working in the UK with partners at a national and local level
- We've begun to reach outside formal community connections by expanding our programme of partnership working and beginning to design an external partnership strategy. Our partnership working allows us to support people who may not have access to statutory advocacy to have the same benefits as those who do. This gets us closer to our larger vision of creating a society where all voices are uplifted and supported



Spotlight on partnership working with Hampshire County Council



An example of our partnership working in the UK is our work with Hampshire County Council on its consultation with homeless people.

The council's commissioning team were concerned involvement from homeless people would be limited, maybe non-existent; their participation reluctant and their voice would not be heard. They felt independent advocacy would ensure equal opportunity for anyone to take part in the survey.

We provided advocates who visited hostels and day centres operated by local charities to help collect feedback on proposed changes to the council's policy on homelessness.

Our advocates said:

“In all of this, the hostel, day centre and commissioners’ meetings, there was a place for independent advocacy, we were able to help bridge a gap between the financial decision makers and those most impacted by what might happen. We felt we were in a relationship of co-production, well maybe multi-production, with funders, professionals, volunteers, essential service providers and the service users. In some parts, we were able to ensure a conversation took place and voices, otherwise silent, would be heard.”

We received positive feedback about our involvement from commissioners, who said:

“Thank you all for your time, hard work, and enthusiasm in supporting the homelessness services consultation. Overall, it looks like we have completed around 30 responses from people who are either currently staying in the hostels, have used them in the past or who are at risk of homelessness and using the drop-in day services. These are from individuals who otherwise would not have had their say and responses that would not have been submitted — a great achievement.”

Spotlight on engaging with local partners in West Dunbartonshire



Figure 16: The Improving Lives (IL) logo

Improving Lives — a disability support charity — works in West Dunbartonshire, which has a higher percentage of disabled people than the Scottish average. Local people desperately needed help applying for disability benefits since the closure of a welfare rights charity in 2022.

Fortunately, we stepped in to work in partnership with Improving Lives and its founder, Kevin Crawford, using our expertise in benefits advocacy to help local people access the disability benefits they desperately needed.

The working relationship between Improving Lives and VoiceAbility has flourished into a powerful force for positive change. Our partnership has supported 130 people we would not have otherwise reached to access vital Social Security Scotland benefits.

Our involvement has also meant people can go to 1 place to access information about the services they need. Before, Improving Lives had to signpost people to benefit services outside the community. Now, people are seen in a 1-stop shop for advice for disabled people, in a place they feel comfortable, and without having to wait.

Our outstanding feedback demonstrates the real impact this partnership has had on local people. Many say the support has helped change their **“life around for the better”** — and that they cannot thank us enough for the help they received when they **“didn’t know which way to turn.”**

The partnership has become so embedded that people visit the Improving Lives building to speak to our advocates. The people we support get practical support from both organisations and enjoy catching up with each other — gaining invaluable peer support and interaction.

The partnership has also benefited our partner charity’s own growth. Improving Lives now receives referrals from social workers, local health centres and other organisations to help more people apply for advocacy support. As a result, we’re developing more community hubs across Scotland to support people to access disability benefits and connect them to their local communities — a fantastic outcome to working with a valuable local partner.

Mr and Mrs Morrison's story: Uplifting all voices

Our advocate, Janet, supported a deaf couple — Mr and Mrs Morrison — through our NHS complaints advocacy service. Janet's work was so effective that the relevant NHS trust pledged to roll out training on how to better support deaf patients.

Janet is an advocate who supported a deaf couple, Mr and Mrs Morrison. Mr and Mrs Morrison had a dreadful experience at hospital, which – they felt – reflected the whole local NHS trust. They experienced a total absence of deaf-friendly communication and awareness, which meant they missed appointments and received poorer treatment.

Janet said:

“No reasonable adjustments were ever made to accommodate their disability or take into consideration that British Sign Language (BSL) is their first language. They asked each time for an interpreter to be provided and this didn't happen.”

These experiences, understandably, made the Morrisons feel undermined and insulted.

The couple received NHS complaints advocacy support from Janet. Through a series of face-to-face meetings between Janet, the Morrisons and a BSL interpreter, Janet explained her role and began to help the Morrisons log their experiences to inform their complaint letters. Janet tells us this process took months. Janet then drafted full complaint letters for the Morrisons as they did not have the skills to do this themselves.

Symbolically, the Morrisons chose to hand-deliver these letters to the hospital themselves. The NHS trust replied in writing. They said:

“We cannot mend what happened, but we can certainly learn from it, and we have developed a clear process to ensure learning and actions are followed through and shared.”

They also made it clear they took the Morrisons' complaints very seriously.

In a face-to-face resolution meeting with the NHS trust, Mr and Mrs Morrison received an apology from staff representatives. Janet also remembers hospital staff were visibly moved by the couple recounting their experiences.

The NHS trust pledged to address failings in their services through rolling out new training across the county. This training will cover all staff from porters to doctors, provide better availability of BSL interpreters and increase awareness about the hurdles faced by members of the deaf community.

Mr and Mrs Morrison said they felt happy, relived and hopeful about the outcome. They're also very grateful to Janet for her support as they felt they could not have gone through the process on their own.

Value our people

Enable our staff and volunteers to utilise the strengths, gifts, and enthusiasms that they possess without being held back by lack of opportunity, access or power.



We said we would focus on:

- Continuing to roll out our cultural transformation plan and manifesto with the establishment of a new leadership and behaviour framework
- Developing our research into actionable plans in how we can achieve equal outcomes for our external work with people from groups who are traditionally poorly served
- Researching and articulating how we can eliminate race, gender and disability equality pay gaps in the organisation within the next 2 years
- Continuing to improve our people and rewards strategy

What we did:

1. We launched our Belonging programme in December 2022.

- Based on research from Harvard University, Belonging is central to our efforts to transform our culture so we become a place where everyone can thrive without being held back by lack of opportunity, access, or power

2. We've made significant progress in our goals to become a more inclusive organisation this year.

- In July 2023, we launched an all-staff survey. Our survey was completed by 81% of staff and showed us where a positive culture exists and where we can improve
- We were pleased to see around 3 quarters of our staff are engaged with our work, our values and our culture
- We used our survey to consult with teams across the organisation to see where we could make targeted improvements to our internal culture

3. We've also made tangible changes to people policy, including introducing a paid day of volunteering for all staff in August 2023 and a new Disability Leave Policy informed by feedback from our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) staff group in early 2024.

4. We hosted our first ever all-staff conference to include teams from across Scotland and England in October 2023 to launch our Belonging manifesto. This focused on organisational behaviours and personal strengths, and was a great success.
5. We launched company-wide professional development tool, CliftonStrengths, in 2024.
 - Access to this tool means every staff member receives a personalised report about their top strengths to inform their ongoing personal and professional development
 - Staff and teams will receive additional support from CliftonStrengths coaches to support their development with a strength-based approach. Becoming a strengths-based organisation will enable our staff to identify and utilise their strengths to flourish

Spotlight on our volunteering programme

We started as a volunteer organisation, which is why since 2021 we've focused on reinvigorating our approach to volunteering.



We know volunteering enriches the lives of our volunteers, people who use our services and local communities.

Our volunteering programme aims to support our excellent services and provide rewarding opportunities for people to help their communities. Many of our volunteers enjoy their experience so much, they become members of staff.

Louise Abbs, Director of Operations, who oversees our volunteer programme said:

“Our volunteer programme thrives on the strengths of doers, creators, and thinkers— individuals who bring energy and innovation to our work.”

We have over 50 active volunteers based across England and Scotland who help with both advocacy and Connections services.

Our longest-serving volunteer at VoiceAbility is Ben Iles. Ben is well known among our team leaders for being a proactive and capable volunteer. You can read more about Ben [on our website](#) or watch our video interview with him on our [YouTube channel](#).



If you're interested in becoming a volunteer then [visit our website](#) for more information.

Figure 17 : Video – the best thing about volunteering

Build the basics

Continuously improve our standards and processes, incorporating technological advances to ensure our whole organisation operates to focus on person-centred delivery.



We said we would focus on:

- Developing our internal and external data analysis capabilities to continually drive quality and look for opportunities to improve across our existing and new services in the UK
- Ensuring our internal operating model is being fully carried out across our teams as part of our new approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement
- Continually improving our new Human Resources and payroll systems to better enable a reduction in administrative processes to give more time to improve outcomes for clients

What we did:

1. Implemented national data collection to continually drive quality across UK:

- We introduced a new dashboard for advocates. This dashboard is a tool to, consensually, collect client data, which is centrally stored to allow for better continuous improvement. This data also creates a new evidence base for influencing, engagement, marketing and improving practice
- We improved against our key performance indicators for the contact centre, while data recording has become more accurate

2. Created a leading professional development and qualification platform:

- Our learning and development team have continued to diversify and expand training available to our staff. Examples of their work include:
 - Creating over 20 bespoke induction plans for a range of roles within the organisation to ensure all staff have the skills necessary to carry out their specific roles
 - Improving accessibility for our mandatory e-learning courses by converting them into easy read summaries

- Working with 2 solicitors who now run support sessions for us. One organisation runs monthly support sessions on a topic we choose to ensure advocates have access to the legal insight they need to give the correct advice to people they work with
- We launched new interactive refresher courses on non-instructed advocacy, children and young people's safeguarding, discriminatory abuse and escalating concerns
- We've improved and updated our safeguarding training
- We launched a training package dedicated to handling difficult situations
- We launched our frontline manager training in 2023 and a course for experienced managers in 2024. Both courses are a comprehensive offer lasting 3 and 6 months respectively. We've received lots of positive feedback from staff about our new courses

An advocate called our new course on discriminatory abuse **“engaging and impactful. Thought-provoking and directly related to how we can improve practice.”**

3. Embedded our operating model throughout the organisation:

- We implemented an engagement and influencing strategy focused on increased brand awareness, improved brand reputation and sustained digital engagement. These goals have translated to higher visibility and greater engagement with our content
- We implemented a digital-first strategy for marketing, phasing out paper materials and trialling our first digital campaign for Advocacy Awareness Week where we took a more accessible, conversational approach to creating digital content
- We reviewed and improved our engagement monitoring by producing monthly marketing and communications reports to track our engagement
 - We've grown the largest social media following (=audience) of all advocacy providers
 - We launched a new Instagram account in 2023
 - We grew our audience 41% and increased our engagement by around 300% during November's Advocacy Awareness Week
 - We began an extensive redesign of our website, with a section dedicated to our work in Scotland
- In December 2023, we streamlined the process through which we collect stories from advocates about how they've helped people they support through advocacy. This improved process is essential in helping advocates and people we support tell their stories in their own words
- Our work to improve practice has allowed more collaboration, particularly between the engagement and influencing and practice teams who now meet regularly to discuss how to campaign on quality advocacy

Getting the basics right and why it matters

SOS! Jonny's story

The example below is about our daily work and demonstrates the real impact we make on people through our advocacy services.

Jonny is in his 50s and loves listening to ABBA. He has a learning disability and communicates using Braille and deaf-blind sign language. He received independent mental capacity advocacy from VoiceAbility advocate, Charlie.

Jonny had recently moved into new supported accommodation, provided by the same care provider as his old home. In both homes, Jonny was under a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) authorisation, which meant other people had decided that was where he should live.

When a DoLS assessment meeting took place, Jonny had the support of advocate, Charlie, to make sure Jonny's view were heard.

As Jonny communicates using Braille and deaf-blind sign language, Charlie prepared information in Braille for him, explaining his role. He also introduced himself and asked Charlie questions in deaf-blind sign language. This support ensured Jonny could express that he liked his new home in the assessment meeting.

Charlie asked Jonny using deaf-blind sign language, **'You happy here?'**.

Jonny signed back, **'Nice'**.

Drive quality

Improve our ability to evidence our outcomes while driving up standards.



We said we would focus on:

- Launching a new quality assurance framework and embedding this across our teams
- Increasing our involvement and co-production opportunities, better using our advocacy skills
- Building a more empathetic and experience-based picture of how people we support feel and what they think about decisions being made
- Continuing to develop our unique research and implementation of new ways in improving safeguarding capabilities, while seeking ways to be able to better share learnings across our sector
- Finalising the development of a 'best-in-class' volunteer programme, ready to be rolled out across our teams

What we did:

1. Embedded a new quality assurance framework and a social values framework:

- We were awarded the Quality Performance Mark for our advocacy services

2. Explored new ways to use our core skills to deliver for people across personal public services:

- We won a new contract in Edinburgh for unpaid carers and a contract in Essex with an emphasis on co-production
- We're co-running a campaign with the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England called #ShareForBetterCare
- We won Speak Out contracts in Peterborough, Southwark and Essex focusing on co-production and the lived experiences of people with learning disabilities and autistic people

3. Set standards for quality advocacy:

- We made sustained efforts this year to increase the consistency and quality of our services UK-wide through expanding our practice team and influencing and engaging on the importance of quality advocacy services
- We expanded our practice team, increasing numbers of high-level practitioners (HLP) who facilitate our internal Communities of Practice. We now have a dedicated HLP for Scotland
- We continued to advocate for consistent, high-quality advocacy through raising advocacy standards in our policy work. We included sections on quality in our consultation responses to **Stable Homes Built on Love** and the **National Standards for the Provision of Children and Young People's Advocacy**
- We continued to engage government and other partners to build support towards the establishment of an institute for advocacy
- We shared learning from the serious abuse of people at Whorlton Hall about how robust advocacy can be delivered in such contexts. Our learning was included in the Whorlton Hall Safeguarding Adult Report published in May 2023
- We continued to lead by example. Our satisfaction surveys reveal:

70%

of our clients rate
their experience
'very good'

80%

felt listened to

Almost
90%

said we made
contact with them
quickly

Spotlight on Manchester

We launched services in Manchester in October 2023. Our team supports Mancunians to be heard in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing.



Figure 18: Some of our Manchester staff

Our services include providing independent support for people who have been detained under the Mental Health Act, for people deprived of their liberty in a care home or hospital, for decisions about care and support, and to make complaints to the NHS.

A Manchester Advocacy Hub – where advocates are based – has been set up in Ardwick, building on our services in nearby Tameside, Bolton and Oldham.

We're delighted to be working in Manchester to support the community with our services. We've received positive feedback from the Manchester commissioner, who said:

“We transitioned our advocacy service to VoiceAbility last year and I've been impressed with the level of professionalism and calm throughout the mobilisation period. They provided regular updates and availability for meetings, to support in and manage any seen or unforeseen risks and issues. We launched our service on time, with minimal disruption to service delivery during the transition, and I've been impressed with VoiceAbility's approach and adaptability since.”

We've also heard good things from local councillors like Thomas Robinson, Executive Member for Healthy Manchester and Social Care at Manchester City Council, about our purpose. Councillor Robinson said:

“It is really important that everyone has the opportunity to have their voice heard. By partnering with VoiceAbility, we want to make sure that every adult who needs help has the opportunity to communicate their wishes on health, care and wellbeing through a trusted independent advocate.”

Lead the market and grow authority



Seek to influence national and local changes that positively impact people's lives.

We said we'd focus on:

- Establishing a national opt-out requirement for advocacy wherever people have an entitlement
- Ending the long-term detention of people with learning disabilities and autistic people in inpatient settings and providing stronger protection for individual legal rights, with the objective to create a specialised national advocacy service
- Fully understanding, developing, and rolling out citizen and community advocacy to empower whole communities and localities
- Raising independent standards of advocacy by planning and influencing the establishment of formalised national independent bodies to better oversee, audit and support the professional development and regulation of our work

What we did:

1. Sought Mental Health Act reform and changes to practice:

- We continued to both support and lead sector-wide campaigning and influencing to secure a Bill to reform the Mental Health Act
- Our campaigning work included contacting all Members of Parliament (MPs) in constituencies where we provide independent mental health advocacy services. As a result, we secured agreement to a range of follow-up actions including MPs contacting decision-makers in government on our behalf
- We produced two additional research papers as members of the Complex Needs Consortium (CNC), while exploring the drafting and implementation of a future Bill. The CNC is a subgroup of the Health and Wellbeing Alliance, managed by the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England. The first paper focused on the advocacy needs of voluntary patients and the second examined the potential role of advocacy in supporting the use of Advance Choice Documents. These papers are [available on our website](#)

- Although a new Mental Health Bill wasn't included in November 2023's King's Speech, our work did lead to the Labour Party committing to reform the Mental Health Act in their first King's Speech in July 2024

2. Sought Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) reform and changes to practice:

- In April 2023 our expectations that LPS would not be implemented under the current government were confirmed. In response, we assembled a cross-sector group to discuss how to put LPS back on the agenda. We collectively decided to pause campaigning activity until a new government was in place. We continue to use the space to share learning and expertise on using the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) while it remains in force
- While LPS sadly has not been implemented, we used the opportunity to re-evaluate our policy strategy. We also created a peer-support space for advocates who use DoLS, which we will repurpose to evaluate any future influencing on LPS
- We created valuable partnerships through our shared influencing goals with colleagues across the advocacy and social care sectors. These partnerships will and have allowed us to expand our sphere of influence beyond the advocacy sector while contributing to greater impact through our combined efforts

3. Established a strong public voice of people who draw on our services to provide better protection for legal rights:

- This year, we framed our policy and influencing work to expressly highlight and amplify the voices of people with lived experience
- We fronted our 'Use Your Power' campaign video with people with direct lived experience of detention in long-stay hospitals. We also ensured they presented at events at political party conferences. Through these, we built close relationship with Jeremy (a parent to his "amazing autistic daughter" Bethany, who was detained in hospital for years), Lucy (who was herself detained in a mental health hospital) and Pam (who works for a user-led organisation called **My Life My Choice** in Oxfordshire)
- We met and received endorsements for Use Your Power from prominent lived experience campaigners including Alexis Quinn and Julie Newcombe of **Rightful Lives** and **Prof. Sara Ryan**
- We planned a campaign video to mark 2 years supporting people in Scotland to access benefits through Social Security Scotland
- We began scoping work for a Lived Experience Panel who can **"inform, guide and co-produce"** our engagement work
- Prioritising the voices of people with lived experience has also fundamentally changed the type of content we produce. Our content now focuses more on personal stories, told in people's own words

4. Raised our influence and grew our authority to support our policy positions:

- We've begun a sustained programme of engagement across England and Scotland to secure policy change and raise awareness of VoiceAbility's mission
- Our digital first strategy has expanded the reach of our policy work
- Our campaign videos collected 4,000 views, with an estimated reach of 24,000
- We met with the former Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Victoria Atkins, and Baroness Browning about our Use Your Power campaign

- We consolidated our influence in Scotland through our programme of engagement. We hosted a reception in Scotland on benefits advocacy for Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) in February 2024. 6 MSPs attended, including 2 Ministers — Kaukab Stewart and Paul McClennan. We invited all MSPs in attendance to see VoiceAbility's services in action after the event
- In March 2024 we were invited to contact the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Social Security to update on our independent advocacy service supporting people to access Social Security Scotland benefits
- We submitted evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee in March 2024 and contributed to a Scottish Parliament Information Centre briefing
- In September 2023, we held our **first ever events at the Labour and Liberal Democrat party conferences** on the unlawful detainment of people with learning disabilities and autistic people. We applied to attend the Conservative Party's conference, but were unsuccessful
- We were part of the Scottish Human Rights Bill wider implementation working group and the Department for Education's Expert Advisory Group on children and young people's advocacy, providing expert advice on social care reform
- We used our new expertise to proactively pitch to the media about our work, build relationships with journalists and frame our work in a way that amplifies the voices of people with lived experience
 - We made 110 pitches to the media, with around **41% resulting in published work**
 - Our sentiment analysis of media stories was **73.7% positive**
 - We've been featured in national media outlets, most notably in *The I*

5. Built capability to win acceptance of our positions into law, policy and their translation into people's lived experiences:

- We brought policy, communications and marketing together, and consolidated a vision and goals across all areas
- We focused on building brand awareness and reputation through our social media channels and website
- We used our policy campaigning work, for example, at Scottish Parliamentary receptions party conferences and during advocacy awareness weeks for England and Scotland, to serve a dual-purpose in marketing our services, highlighting our social impact and spotlighting our campaigns
- We developed impact analysis capability and measurement tools, so we can better demonstrate our impact and evidence policy positions

Spotlight on engaging and influencing Holyrood

We had a packed year of activity in the run-up to our 2-year anniversary of providing Scottish services in April.



Figure 19: Former Scottish Deputy Minister, Shona Robinson pictured with a member of our team

Our activity included a targeted programme of engagement with Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) to raise awareness about the impact of our services.

In March, we held a reception at Holyrood for MSPs, which was attended by some of the 4,000 people we supported through benefits advocacy. We heard from speakers like Paul Hunter, who's profoundly deaf. Paul described his father as his "support worker" — but, after Paul's father sadly passed away, he "just didn't know who to turn to for help".

“Luckily, I came across VoiceAbility and had a one-to-one appointment with [my advocate] Lynn at home.”

Paul told the reception.

“I opened up and went through all the problems that I’ve had, the disabilities that I have and spoke about my son who’s disabled as well. I got some help and information to move things forward.”

We also heard from organisations who work in partnership with us, like the Edinburgh Food Project and Community Links Scotland colleagues.



Figure 20: Our Scottish advocates and Chief Executive Officer, Jonathan Senker

Spotlight on campaigns

#UseYourPower



Did you know over 2,000 people with a learning disability and autistic people (of which around 200 are children) are detained, often for many years, in mental health hospitals in England? This is leading to lifelong trauma and loss of life.

This year we launched Use Your Power, a campaign aimed at ending the detention of people with learning disabilities and autistic people in mental health hospitals. Our campaign urges the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to use their powers of direction to improve support for the people affected to live in the community.

Our campaign has a dedicated webpage on [our website](#), an [online petition](#) and a hard-hitting [video](#) featuring people and their families who have been detained in mental health hospitals. Our petition has already collected over 1,000 signatories.

Watch our campaign video on [our YouTube channel](#), and don't forget to share on social media. **#UseYourPower**



Figure 21: Our Use Your Power campaign video

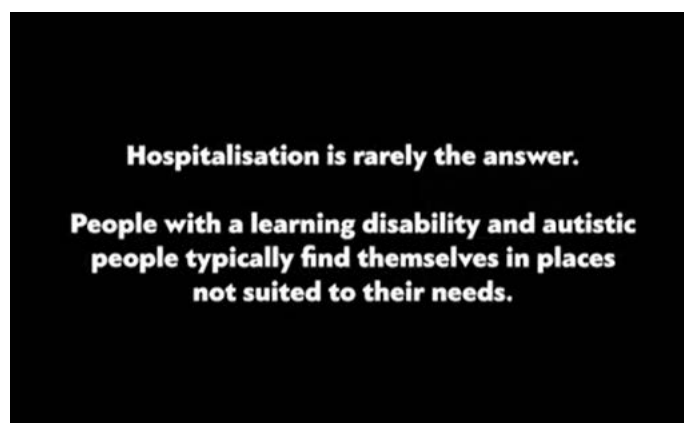


Figure 22: A still of our Use Your Power campaign video

What will we do in 2024-2025?

It's been a challenging year for all charities, and we're no exception to this.



As this report demonstrates, we've remained resilient to adapt and meet these challenges by remaining focused on our enduring commitment to help everyone be heard and live the lives they want.

Our next annual report will be our final assessment of what we achieved in our 2019-2025 strategic plan. In looking ahead, we've identified key areas to work on which will improve our ability to make our vision for the world a reality and set out a new vision to 2030.

We will:

Find new ways to deliver using advocacy skills

Improve outcomes for more people using a range of advocacy skills, empowering communities and the next generation of advocates.

- We will continue to provide extend our independent advocacy reach and improve outcomes, while focusing on creating meaningful and reportable impact measurements
- We will continue to develop the technology and channels to enable people to give and receive support about rights, voices, social care, and personal public services

Value our people

Enable our staff and volunteers to utilise the strengths, gifts, and enthusiasms that they possess without being held back by lack of opportunity, access or power.

We will develop a new people strategy to:

- Build on the foundations created in the 2019-2025 strategy to strengthen our cultural transformation plan and manifesto by building on our CliftonStrengths strategy
- Set out our plans to eliminate race, gender and disability equality pay gaps in the organisation
- Improve on our rewards strategy

Build the basics

Continuously improve our standards and processes, incorporating technological advances to ensure the whole organisation operates to focus on person-centred delivery.

- We will continue developing our internal and external data analysis capabilities
- We will articulate how we further develop our culture of continuous learning and improvements in our operating model

Drive quality

Improve our ability to evidence our outcomes, while driving up standards

- We will produce a strategy to increase our involvement and co-production opportunities, better using our advocacy skills
- We will produce a new 3-year strategy to develop our unique research and implementation of new ways to improve safeguarding

Lead the market and grow authority

Seek to influence locally and nationally to create positive impact.

- We will produce a new organisational strategy, taking us from 2025 and setting out a new vision that will take us beyond 2030

In 2019, when we launched our last strategy, we knew we needed better data collecting and reporting to evidence our impact, and have made significant progress in doing so. We also recognise our responsibility extends to our impact on the environment through our organisational sustainability.

In the next 12 months we will continue improving data collection — especially on equality, diversity and inclusion - for staff, the people we support and for those we have not reached, yet. We will also continue normalising and formalising thinking about and measuring impact across the organisation.

Building on groundwork for measuring impact through our social values framework, we will ensure this becomes embedded in our ways of working. We will also aim to explore reducing our environmental impact, recognising climate change is a universal and urgent issue, which fundamentally links to disability rights, human rights and our freedom to speak.

We write this report at a crucial time, both internally and externally. There have been significant political changes, which will have implications for our national policy goals and relationships. We're also going through a transition process to welcome a new Chief Executive Officer and thinking about our future goals in tandem. All these changes mean we have valuable new opportunities to create even more positive impact, as we build our future strategy in the coming year.

Reference and administrative information

Trustees

Susan Douglas-Scott – Chair / Investment Committee Member (resigned 30/01/24)

Alison Reid – Chair / Investment Committee Member (appointed 30/01/24)

Susan Brown – Safeguarding Governance Committee Chair

Andrew Weston – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member

Matthew Smith – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Performance and Quality Committee Member

James Alistair Schofield – Audit and Risk Committee Chair / Investment Committee Chair

Viral Shah – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member

Gavin Sumner – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member / Performance and Quality Committee Member

Izaro Arbelaiz-Teresa – Performance and Quality Committee Member

Anthony Osijo – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member

Mahua Nandi – Performance and Quality Committee Chair

Fiona Beyer – Performance and Quality Committee Member (appointed 31/10/23)

Liam Cunningham – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member (appointed 31/10/23)

Ria Davies – Performance and Quality Committee Member (appointed 31/10/23)

Elizabeth Debnam – Audit and Risk Committee Member (appointed 31/10/23)

Secretary

Richard Jones

Chief Executive Officer

Jonathan Senker

Registered Office

c/o Sayer Vincent
110 Golden Lane
London, EC1Y 0TG

Incorporated in United Kingdom, Company Number 03798884

Registered in England and Wales, Charity Number 1076630

Registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC050036

Auditors

Sayer Vincent LLP
110 Golden Lane London,
EC1Y 0TG

Bankers

National Westminster Bank Plc
21 Petty Cury
Cambridge, CB2 3NE

Solicitors

Radar Limited
6 Beacon Way
Hull, HU3 4AE

Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP
134 Edmund Street
Birmingham, B3 2ES

Governance structure and management

Governing document

The organisation is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 30th June 1999 and registered as a charity on 19th July 1999. The Company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the Company. It is governed by its Articles of Association which, following changes introduced by the Companies Act 2006, now also contain its objects and powers. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

The financial statements comply with current statutory requirements, the memorandum and articles of association and the Statement of Recommended Practice — Accounting and Reporting by Charities: SORP applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with FRS 102. This trustees' annual report includes a directors' report as required by company law.

Appointment of trustees

As set out in the Articles of Association, members of the Board of Trustees must be appointed by an ordinary resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the trustees and must be appointed for a term of 3 years. On ceasing to be a trustee a person may be reappointed provided that no one may serve as a trustee for more than a maximum of 3 consecutive terms, after which they must cease to be a trustee for at least 12 months before they are eligible to be reappointed.

The Board members bring insight from their own lived experience of disability, understanding of the charity's social mission, and business and commercial skills. The range of experience is kept under review and in the event of any shortfalls, new trustees are sought to fill the gaps.

Trustee induction and training

New trustees undergo a period of induction to brief them on the values, direction and work of VoiceAbility, their legal obligations under charity and company law and good practice duties, the contents of the Articles of Association, the Board and decision-making processes, the business plan and recent financial performance of the charity. During the induction they view our services and meet with key employees and other trustees. Trustees are encouraged to participate in external and internally-run training and development where this will facilitate the undertaking of their role.

Organisational structure

The Board of Trustees administers the charity. The Board meets once per quarter with additional meetings when required to deal with issues of strategy in more depth.

VoiceAbility also has within its constitution a number of Board sub-committees.

Audit and Risk Committee

Audit and Risk Committee members meet once per quarter in advance of the Board meetings to review and discuss matters such as management and statutory accounts, risk and governance. In addition to the Audit and Risk Committee, there's an Investment Committee. The Investment Committee meets twice a year. The purpose of the committee is to ensure that the charity is investing funds in line with the investment policy.

Safeguarding Committee

The purpose of the Safeguarding Committee is to ensure quality safeguarding practices and approaches are developed and implemented, and to support the charity in discharging its statutory and good practice duties and responsibilities both as an employer and a provider in relation to safeguarding.

Performance and Quality Committee

The core purpose of this Committee is to ensure performance and quality practice informs our cycle of continuous improvement through the application of good governance principles, as well as to assure VoiceAbility's performance in discharging its duties and responsibilities as both an employer and a provider. The Performance and Quality Committee report to the Board of Trustees on key opportunities and threats, and support trustees in discharging statutory duties.

Day-to-day responsibility

The trustees have delegated the day-to-day responsibility for the provision of services to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for recommending strategy to the Board, for the management of its external profile and influencing work, ensuring that the charity delivers the services in line with its mission and requirements and ensuring that key performance indicators are met across the range of social and business objectives. The Chief Executive Officer leads an executive leadership team whose members are the executive managers of the charity.

Risk management

The principal risks and uncertainties facing the organisation are centred around 5 key areas:

- **Impact** – the desired impact of activities is not delivered or cannot be adequately evidenced
- **Financial sustainability** – our ability to continue to make an impact in the medium to long term is threatened
- **Compliance** – the organisation fails to meet regulatory, legal or contract compliance requirements or expectations
- **Reputation** – we do not respond effectively to any incident that could result in damage to VoiceAbility's reputation
- **Safeguarding** – we fail to adequately protect staff, volunteers or vulnerable people from harm or abuse

The steps to manage these risks are set out below.

The trustees are responsible for setting the tone and influencing the culture of risk management within VoiceAbility.

The executive leadership team have established a risk register, identifying the types of risks faced and prioritising them in terms of potential impact and likelihood of occurrence. Having due regard to the strength of the current internal controls and procedures already in place, a series of mitigating actions have been identified to appropriately address these risks.

The executive leadership team, the Audit and Risk Committee, and the Board of Trustees periodically review the risks and the risk management strategies to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the organisation.

Public benefit

We have referred to the guidance in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and in planning our future activities. In particular, the trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives they have set.

Directors' liabilities

There are no specific provisions relating specifically to directors' liabilities to report.

There are no qualifying third-party indemnity provisions which are the direct responsibility of the charity.

There are no qualifying pension scheme indemnity provisions, due to the charity operating a Defined Contribution scheme.

Fundraising

We're not a fundraising charity, with our income deriving primarily from local government, NHS and central government contracts. We do not solicit donations, but do receive them from time to time and do approach grant-giving bodies. We're therefore registered with the fundraising regulator and follow their guidance. There were no issues of compliance with the guidance of the fundraising regulator. We received no complaints about fundraising activities carried out by the charity (2023: none). VoiceAbility does not use any professional fundraisers and no fundraising is undertaken on our behalf by third parties.

Disabled employees

We recognise the importance and benefits of having disabled people involved in and leading the organisation's work at every level including in governance roles, as employees and as volunteers. In relation to employment, the expertise in various aspects of our work which disabled people bring is valued strongly. Disabled applicants who meet the minimum essential criteria for posts are guaranteed interviews and we encourage applicants to identify any adjustments which are needed to ensure that they can participate equally in selection processes.

Training has been provided to managers on equality and employment, including specifically on disability equality.

The organisation has a full policy on diversity and employment, which underlines our approach to exceed legal requirements in relation to diversity as we recognise the importance and value to the organisation and to people using our services of a workforce which is diverse in relation to all protected characteristics, including disability.

We're continuing to work to improve the experience of and contribution by all employees, including disabled employees and are recognised as a Disability Confident employer.

We have paid posts which specifically require personal insights that come from having a learning disability, particularly Expert by Experience posts and our Speak Out leaders. Additionally, we have roles of peer mentors and peer supporters which have provided work skills and therefore routes into employment for people who have used long-term mental health and substance use services.

Employee involvement

VoiceAbility's trustees and directors recognise employee engagement to be one of the most powerful drivers of organisational performance and of our success in enabling people who use our services to achieve their outcomes. It is central to our strategy.

The following are among the measures which we take to promote effective employee involvement and engagement, as well as to ensure that colleagues throughout the organisation are well-informed:

- cross sectional employee groups, who help to develop critical organisational policies and practices ranging from our pay policy and salary benchmarking to our approach to learning and development

- regular attendance of the Chief Executive Officer and other members of the executive leadership team at team meetings throughout the organisation, to discuss the organisation's direction and development and to seek, receive and act on feedback
- weekly 'open phone' times publicised to all members of staff, at which the Chief Executive Officer seeks and receives feedback and responds to issues of concern. An alternative of email contact at any time is also made available to all colleagues
- regular internal communication updates and bulletins, including VoiceAbility News (a monthly e-update written by staff and distributed to all teams)
- a well-maintained intranet site and online collaboration tools, including webinars and extensive use of Microsoft Teams
- regular team and supervision meetings held throughout the organisation
- a health, safety and wellbeing forum. The purpose of the forum is to represent, discuss and review how we keep everyone physically safe and mentally healthy at work. The forum meets every 6 weeks. A number of initiatives have been rolled out including a Wellbeing Activity Day where staff were given the time to get together with their colleagues to focus on wellbeing and discuss how best to support one another, as well as an additional half day's discretionary leave entitlement for all staff
- an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) forum. The EDI forum brings together colleagues across the organisation with interest and experience in a wide variety of EDI issues such as ethnicity, cultural awareness, LGBTQ+ equality, domestic violence, veteran's issues, neurodiversity and more
- a national forum, with the purpose of encouraging staff participation, and nurturing accountability to develop and implement strategies that ensure a culture of belonging is embedded throughout VoiceAbility

Pay policy

VoiceAbility operates an objective outcome pay policy. Staff are placed within bandings dependent on skillset and experience and, upon successful completion of agreed annual objectives, have the opportunity to progress in the banding by way of incremental 'spine points'. Regular supervisions and appraisals ensure that pay progression is measurable within a band, ensuring greater transparency and understanding of pay-related decisions.

Although the executive leadership team are covered by the banding pay, ultimately decisions regarding the remuneration of these roles, and that of the Chief Executive Officer, are made by the Board.

Financial review

Overview

Although the charity delivered a deficit of £1,409,752, this is after designated strategic investment, and budgeted capacity building support function expenditure funded by general reserves to ensure a fit-for-purpose infrastructure in the future.

The underlying operating position for the year is a £9,783 deficit.

The net gain of £58,300 on investments held as fixed assets, brought the overall closing deficit to £1,351,452, in line with budget.

	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Operating Surplus/(Deficit)	(10)	(16)	846	394	217
Strategic investment	(752)	(333)	(197)	(385)	(330)
Capacity building	(675)	(655)	-	-	-
Non-consolidated pay award	-	(100)	-	-	-
Income from investment	28	44	37	36	43
Investment gains/(losses)	58	(49)	103	205	(32)
Surplus/(Deficit)	(1,351)	(1,109)	789	251	(102)

Figure 23: A table displaying our financial information

We generated a total income of £13,503,953 – a 19% increase on last year (2022-2023 – £11,349,386).

Growth, and the investment and capacity building detailed above, resulted in expenditure of £14,913,705, 20.2% higher than last year (2022-2023 – £12,409,145).

2023-24 saw the final planned tranche of investment in our organisational capability, expansion and diversification of the services we offer, taking us back into a planned overall surplus generating model in 2024-2025.

We take forward the benefits of the investment made, as we tick over into continuous improvement, building on the robust foundations that the organisation has in place. The significant time and resources invested in the creation of an operating model over the last 24 months will inform the continuous improvement cycle.

Over the last 12 months we've continued to focus on staff development and the working culture of the organisation by way of our Culture and Belonging workstream, officially launched at our all-staff conference in October 2023 where we brought staff together to share the findings of the externally administered staff survey and to talk about next steps including a strengths-based approach to the way we work, allowing all staff to be their authentic selves.

Further emphasis has been placed on the importance of data over the last 12 months with advocacy and management dashboards introduced to streamline data collection, reduce administration time and provide greater visibility in a timely manner to allow us to take action where needed, be that replication and expansion of what works well or where we can improve processes to ultimately benefit the clients we support.

We implemented a new accounting system in November 2023, the use of which, although still in its infancy, is already providing efficiencies across the organisation in the form of much improved reporting and visibility allowing the senior leadership team to effectively manage the organisation and plan accordingly.

The Project Management Office has been instrumental in the delivery of the various programmes outlined in this report, ensuring that progress against each is tracked and transparent and outcomes measurable.

Overseeing all of the above is our Board of Trustees, chaired by Ali Reid who was recruited in year and appointed in January 2024.

Reserves

The unrestricted reserves are those funds that are available to be used on the charitable objects, to be spent as the trustees see fit.

The trustees hold unrestricted reserves as either general reserves or designated reserves. General reserves are there to support the day-to-day operations of the organisation and to ensure that VoiceAbility can meet its future financial obligations. Designated reserves are held as unrestricted funds that have been earmarked for a particular purpose by the trustees.

Investment in development in a number of programmes over the last 5 years, including Culture and Belonging, Business Development, Policy and Influencing, and Data, has come to an end as planned with a fit for purpose, robust infrastructure in place to enable VoiceAbility to focus on continuous improvement.

The **fixed assets replacement** designated fund, which is in place to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit-for-purpose equipment and systems on a long-term basis, has been reassessed and now stands at £240,000. Laptop and mobile phone purchases are recorded against the designated fund and, upon review of the charity's equipment requirements, transfers are then made from general funds to ensure the correct level of funds have been designated.

The remainder of £471,856 is the balance of the **tangible fixed assets** which are not liquid and therefore removed from the undesignated, unrestricted reserves in the interest of prudence when calculating our reserve cover requirements.

VoiceAbility adopts a risk-based approach to determine the value of general reserves necessary to meet its future financial obligations, taking into account the reliability of income streams and the extent to which expenditure is committed, as well as the major risks to which the charity is exposed.

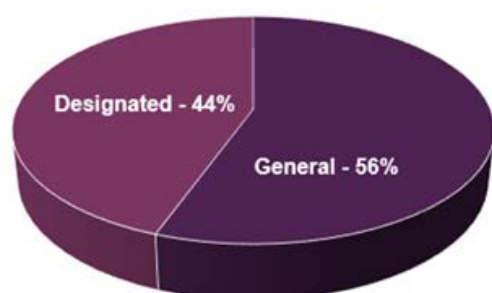
To inform decision-making over the value of general reserves required in any one year, VoiceAbility places a financial value on facing the key unmitigated risks identified in the risk register.

The approach used is to aggregate the assessed financial impact of the key unmitigated risks identified in the VoiceAbility risk register and assume that these risks occur either concurrently or sequentially over a timeframe that does not allow recovery between events. The quantification of those risks is assessed by the senior management team and the executive leadership team and validated by the Audit and Risk Committee alongside the annual review of the risk register.

Based on the outcome, the Audit and Risk Committee will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees on the required value of the general reserves for each financial year as part of the approval of the annual budget. The level of general reserves required at 31 March 2024 is £1,000,000.

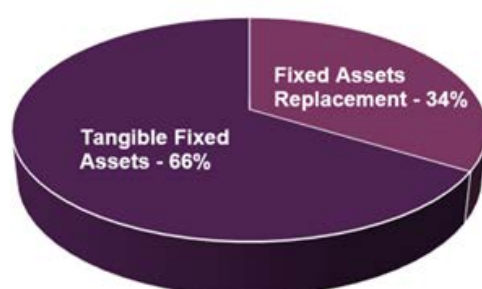
The total reserves carried forward as at 31 March 2024 stand at £1,600,685, of which £888,829 is held as general reserves. General reserves are forecast to be replenished in early 2024-2025 with the charity generating a surplus and positive net cashflows.

Total Reserves



General	£ 888,829
Designated	£ 711,856
Restricted	£ nil
Total	£ 1,600,685

Designated Reserves



Fixed Assets Replacement	£ 240,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	£ 471,856
Total	£ 711,856

Investments and bank accounts

VoiceAbility's Investment Committee manages its investment portfolio with the support of management company CCLA. In 2023-24, the charity sold units with disposal proceeds totalling £1,050,000. The performance of the portfolio in 2023-24 generated an unrealised gain of £58,300 (2023: loss £49,294).

Events since the balance sheet date

There are no significant post-balance sheet events to note.

Going concern

The trustees have assessed whether the use of the going concern basis is appropriate and have considered possible events or conditions that might cast significant doubt on the ability of the charity to continue as a going concern. The trustees have made this assessment for a period of at least 1 year from the date of approval of the financial statements. The trustees and the executive leadership team have reviewed all budgets and expected income and expenditure projections and have concluded that, together with the reserves established to help in such circumstances, there is a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The charity, therefore, continues to adopt the going concern basis in preparing its financial statements.

Statement of trustees' responsibilities

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue to operate
- state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006.

They are responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. The trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Disclosure of information to the auditors

So far as each person who was a director at the date of approving this report is aware, there is no relevant audit information, being information needed by the auditor in connection with preparing its report, of which the auditor is unaware. Having made enquiries of fellow directors and the charity's auditor, each director has taken all the steps that they are obliged to take as a director in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

This report along with the financial statements was approved by the trustees on:

and signed on their behalf by:

James Alistair Schofield – Audit and Risk Committee Chair

30 July 2024

Independent auditor's report to the members of VoiceAbility

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of VoiceAbility (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2024 which comprise the statement of financial activities, balance sheet, statement of cash flows and notes to the financial statements, including significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 *The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- Give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as of 31 March 2024 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- Have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- Have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and regulation 8 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended)

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charitable company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on VoiceAbility's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other information

The other information comprises the information included in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information contained within the annual report. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- The information given in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- The trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended) require us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- Adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- The financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- Certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- We have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the statement of trustees' responsibilities set out in the trustees' annual report, the trustees (who are also the directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

We have been appointed as auditor under section 44(1)(c) of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and under the Companies Act 2006 and report in accordance with regulations made under those Acts.

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud are set out below.

Capability of the audit in detecting irregularities

In identifying and assessing risks of material misstatement in respect of irregularities, including fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations, our procedures included the following:

- We enquired of management and trustees, which included obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation, concerning the charity's policies and procedures relating to:
 - Identifying, evaluating, and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - Detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
 - The internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations.

- We inspected the minutes of meetings of those charged with governance.
- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory framework that the charity operates in, focusing on those laws and regulations that had a material effect on the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of the charity from our professional and sector experience.
- We communicated applicable laws and regulations throughout the audit team and remained alert to any indications of non-compliance throughout the audit.
- We reviewed any reports made to regulators.
- We reviewed the financial statement disclosures and tested these to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- We performed analytical procedures to identify any unusual or unexpected relationships that may indicate risks of material misstatement due to fraud.
- In addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, we tested the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments, assessed whether the judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias and tested significant transactions that are unusual or those outside the normal course of business.

Because of the inherent limitations of an audit, there is a risk that we will not detect all irregularities, including those leading to a material misstatement in the financial statements or non-compliance with regulation. This risk increases the more that compliance with a law or regulation is removed from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, as we will be less likely to become aware of instances of non-compliance. The risk is also greater regarding irregularities occurring due to fraud rather than error, as fraud involves intentional concealment, forgery, collusion, omission or misrepresentation.

A further description of our responsibilities is available on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and section 44(1)(c) of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Judith Miller (Senior statutory auditor)

22 October 2024

for and on behalf of Sayer Vincent LLP, Statutory Auditor

110 Golden Lane, LONDON, EC1Y 0TG

Sayer Vincent LLP is eligible to act as auditor in terms of section 1212 of the Companies Act 2006

Financial statements

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Statement of financial activities (incorporating an income and expenditure account)

For the year ended 31 March 2024

	Note	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2024 Total £	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2023 Total £
Income from:									
Donations and legacies	2	1,192	–	–	1,192	1,948	–	–	1,948
Charitable activities	3	13,376,034	–	99,125	13,475,159	11,245,587	–	57,655	11,303,242
Investments		27,602	–	–	27,602	44,196	–	–	44,196
Total income		13,404,828	–	99,125	13,503,953	11,291,731	–	57,655	11,349,386
Expenditure on:									
Charitable activities	4a	14,062,405	752,174	99,125	14,913,705	12,018,236	333,254	57,655	12,409,145
Total expenditure	4a	14,062,405	752,174	99,125	14,913,705	12,018,236	333,254	57,655	12,409,145
Net income / (expenditure) before net gains / (losses) on investments		(657,577)	(752,174)	–	(1,409,752)	(726,505)	(333,254)	–	(1,059,759)
Net gains / (losses) on investments		58,300	–	–	58,300	(49,294)	–	–	(49,294)
Net income / (expenditure) for the year	⁵	(599,277)	(752,174)	–	(1,351,452)	(775,799)	(333,254)	–	(1,109,053)
Transfers between funds		90,912	(90,912)	–	–	99,007	(99,007)	–	–
Net movement in funds		(508,366)	(843,086)	–	(1,351,452)	(676,792)	(432,261)	–	(1,109,053)
Reconciliation of funds:									
Total funds brought forward		1,397,195	1,554,942	–	2,952,137	2,073,987	1,987,203	–	4,061,190
Total funds carried forward		888,829	711,856	–	1,600,685	1,397,195	1,554,942	–	2,952,137

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities. There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in Note 17a to the financial statements.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Balance sheet

Company no. 03798884

As at 31 March 2024

	Note	2024 £	2023 £
Fixed assets:			
Tangible assets	10	471,856	484,942
Investments	11	261,652	1,253,352
		733,508	1,738,295
Current assets:			
Debtors	12	1,551,632	1,482,323
Cash at bank and in hand		61,370	455,259
		1,613,002	1,937,582
Liabilities:			
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	13	(716,793)	(706,708)
Net current assets		896,209	1,230,874
Total assets less current liabilities		1,629,717	2,969,169
Provision for liabilities	15	(29,032)	(17,032)
Net assets		1,600,685	2,952,137
Funds:	16a		
Restricted income funds		–	–
Unrestricted income funds:			
Designated funds		711,856	1,554,942
General funds		888,829	1,397,195
Total unrestricted funds		1,600,685	2,952,137
Total funds		1,600,685	2,952,137

Approved by the trustees on 30 July 2024
by

and signed on their behalf

James Alistair Schofield
Trustee

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 31 March 2024

	2024 £	£	2023 £	£
Cash flows from operating activities				
Net (expenditure) for the reporting period (as per the statement of financial activities)	(1,351,452)		(1,109,053)	
Depreciation charges	176,552		138,096	
(Gains)/losses on investments	(58,300)		49,294	
Dividends and interest from investments	(27,602)		(44,195)	
Increase/(decrease) in provisions	12,000		(61,811)	
(Increase)/decrease in debtors	(69,309)		161,565	
Increase in creditors	10,085		71,791	
Net cash (used in) operating activities		(1,308,025)		(794,314)
Cash flows from investing activities:				
Dividends and interest from investments	27,602		44,195	
Sale of investment units	1,050,000		-	
Purchase of fixed assets	(163,466)		(375,836)	
Net cash provided by / (used in) investing activities		914,136		(331,641)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		(393,890)		(1,125,955)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		455,259		1,581,214
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year		61,370		455,259

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

1 Accounting policies

a) Statutory information

VoiceAbility Advocacy is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is incorporated in England & Wales. The registered office address is c/o Sayer Vincent, 110 Golden Lane, London, EC1Y 0TG.

b) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – (Charities SORP FRS 102), The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (September 2015) and the Companies Act 2006/Charities Act 2011.

The Charity has a subsidiary, Advocacy Experience Limited. The subsidiary is currently dormant and therefore consolidated financial statements have not been prepared.

Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy or note.

In applying the financial reporting framework, the trustees have made a number of subjective judgements, for example in respect of significant accounting estimates. Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The nature of the estimation means the actual outcomes could differ from those estimates. Any significant estimates and judgements affecting these financial statements are detailed within the relevant accounting policy below.

The trustees do not consider that there are any sources of estimation uncertainty at the reporting date that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next reporting period.

c) Public benefit entity

The charity meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102.

d) Going concern

The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

e) Income

Income is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and that the amount can be measured reliably.

Income from government and other grants, whether 'capital' grants or 'revenue' grants, is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the grants have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably and is not deferred.

Income received in advance of the provision of a specified service is deferred until the criteria for income recognition are met.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

f) Interest receivable

Interest on funds held on deposit is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably by the charity; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the bank.

g) Fund accounting

Restricted funds are to be used for specific purposes as laid down by the donor. Expenditure which meets these criteria is charged to the fund.

Unrestricted funds are donations and other incoming resources received or generated for the charitable purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds earmarked by the trustees for particular purposes.

h) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to make a payment to a third party, it is probable that settlement will be required and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is classified under the following activity headings:

- Costs of raising funds relate to the costs incurred by the charity in inducing third parties to make voluntary contributions to it, as well as the cost of any activities with a fundraising purpose
- Expenditure on charitable activities includes the costs of delivering services undertaken to further the purposes of the charity and their associated support costs

Irrecoverable VAT is charged as a cost against the activity for which the expenditure was incurred.

Support and governance costs are re-allocated to charitable activities in full.

i) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT (continued)

Governance costs are the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity. These costs are associated with constitutional and statutory requirements and include any costs associated with the strategic management of the charity's activities.

j) Operating leases

Rental charges are charged on a straight line basis over the term of the lease.

k) Tangible fixed assets

Items of equipment are capitalised where the purchase price exceeds £500 for an individual purchase. Depreciation costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the use of the related assets in those activities. Assets are reviewed for impairment if circumstances indicate their carrying value may exceed their net realisable value and value in use.

Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write down the cost of each asset to its estimated residual value over its expected useful life. The depreciation rates in use are as follows:

● Leasehold improvements	over the life of the lease
● Furniture, Computer, Telephones and Software	10% – 33%

l) Listed investments

Investments are a form of basic financial instrument and are initially recognised at their transaction value and subsequently measured at their fair value as at the balance sheet date using the closing quoted market price. Any change in fair value will be recognised in the statement of financial activities. Investment gains and losses, whether realised or unrealised, are combined and shown in the heading "Net gains/(losses) on investments" in the statement of financial activities. The charity does not acquire put options, derivatives or other complex financial instruments.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

m) Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any trade discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

n) Cash at bank and in hand

Cash at bank and cash in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

o) Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

p) Financial instruments

The charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

q) Pensions

After three months of employment, employees are auto enrolled in the group stakeholder pension scheme (Aviva), via a salary exchange method. Employees are required to opt out should they not wish to be enrolled. The charity contributes 5% of gross salary and employees make a minimum contribution of 3% of gross salary. Employees joining the stakeholder pension contract directly with the insurance company. In addition to its own contribution the charity acts as agent in collecting and paying over employee pension contributions.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

2 Income from donations and legacies

	2024 Total £	2023 Total £
Donations (unrestricted)	1,192	1,948

3 Income from charitable activities

	Grants £	2024 Earned income contracts £	Total £	Grants £	2023 Earned income contracts £	Total £
Advocacy Services:						
Connections	31,350	702,615	733,965	30,000	564,333	594,333
London	–	1,318,360	1,318,360	–	1,615,861	1,615,861
Midlands & South East	45,000	2,265,977	2,310,977	4,880	2,493,889	2,498,769
North East	–	3,233,101	3,233,101	–	2,830,844	2,830,844
North West	–	2,164,650	2,164,650	–	1,050,604	1,050,604
Scotland	–	2,379,398	2,379,398	–	1,381,880	1,381,880
South West	–	1,310,440	1,310,440	–	1,307,101	1,307,101
	76,350	13,374,541	13,450,891	34,880	11,244,513	11,279,393
Support Services	22,775	1,494	24,269	22,775	1,074	23,849
Total income from charitable activities	99,125	13,376,034	13,475,159	57,655	11,245,587	11,303,242

All earned income is unrestricted and all grant income is restricted.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

4a Analysis of expenditure (current year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs £	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2024 Total £	2023 Total £
Direct staff costs	9,391,520	-	-	-	9,391,520	7,818,226
Indirect staff costs	-	456,599	-	2,176,351	2,632,950	2,175,749
Total staff costs (note 6)	9,391,520	456,599	-	2,176,351	12,024,470	9,993,974
Sub contractor Costs	206,609	-	-	-	206,609	250,102
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	137,528	1,881	-	-	139,409	165,848
Travel & Subsistence	432,637	33,737	-	-	466,374	338,886
Rent, Rates and Homeworking Allowance	146,079	2,641	-	-	148,720	141,731
Professional	13,071	185,995	-	-	199,066	43,127
Insurances	79,174	2,196	-	-	81,370	76,653
Depreciation	133,783	2,770	-	-	136,553	80,538
Software, Systems and Licensing	646,638	17,459	-	-	664,097	629,691
Other direct costs	295,066	48,897	-	-	343,963	215,246
Business Development	-	-	-	254,672	254,672	234,017
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	42,096	42,096	26,063
Finance	-	-	-	32,073	32,073	38,201
Human resources	-	-	-	109,756	109,756	117,274
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	19,473	19,473	38,307
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	28,323	-	28,323	2,745
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	16,680	-	16,680	16,740
	11,482,106	752,174	45,003	2,634,422	14,913,705	12,409,145
Support costs	2,634,422	-	-	(2,634,422)	-	-
Governance costs	45,003	-	(45,003)	-	-	-
Investment costs	752,174	(752,174)	-	-	-	-
Total expenditure 2024	14,913,705	-	-	-	14,913,705	-
Total expenditure 2023	12,409,145	-	-	-	-	12,409,145

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

4b Analysis of expenditure (prior year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs £	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2023 Total £
Direct staff costs	7,818,226	-	-	-	7,818,226
Indirect staff costs	-	245,852	-	1,929,897	2,175,749
Total staff costs (note 7)	7,818,226	245,852	-	1,929,897	9,993,974
Sub contractor Costs	250,102	-	-	-	250,102
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	151,526	14,323	-	-	165,848
Travel & Subsistence	336,911	1,976	-	-	338,886
Rent, Rates and Homeworking Allowance	140,990	741	-	-	141,731
Professional	1,970	41,157	-	-	43,127
Insurances	75,463	1,190	-	-	76,653
Depreciation	80,188	350	-	-	80,538
Software, Systems and Licensing	609,260	20,431	-	-	629,691
Other direct costs	208,011	7,234	-	-	215,246
Business Development	-	-	-	234,017	234,017
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	26,063	26,063
Finance	-	-	-	38,201	38,201
Human resources	-	-	-	117,274	117,274
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	38,307	38,307
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	2,745	-	2,745
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	16,740	-	16,740
	9,672,647	333,254	19,485	2,383,759	12,409,145
Support costs	2,383,759	-	-	(2,383,759)	-
Governance costs	19,485	-	(19,485)	-	-
Investment costs	333,254	(333,254)	-	-	-
Total expenditure 2022	12,409,145	-	-	-	12,409,145

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

5 Net income / (expenditure) for the year

This is stated after crediting / (charging):

	2024 £	2023 £
Depreciation	176,552	138,096
Operating lease rentals:		
Property	–	79,474
Auditor's remuneration (excluding VAT):		
Audit	13,900	12,650

6 Analysis of staff costs, trustee remuneration and expenses, and the cost of key management personnel

Staff costs were as follows:

	2024 £	2023 £
Salaries and wages	10,264,051	8,525,501
Redundancy and termination costs	101,676	30,768
Social security costs	841,649	755,129
Employer's contribution to defined contribution pension schemes	774,548	605,342
Other staff costs	42,546	77,233
	12,024,470	9,993,974

The redundancy and termination costs were accrued at the balance sheet date.

The following number of employees received employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs and employer's national insurance) during the year between:

	2024 No.	2023 No.
£60,000 – £69,999	4	1
£70,000 – £79,999	1	2
£80,000 – £89,999	1	1
£90,000 – £99,999	1	–

The total employee benefits (including pension contributions and employer's national insurance) of the key management personnel were £285,758 (2023: £288,320).

The charity trustees were neither paid nor received any other benefits from employment with the charity in the year (2023: £nil). No charity trustee received payment for professional or other services supplied to the charity (2023: £nil).

Trustees' expenses represents the payment or reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs totalling £464 (2023: £nil) incurred by 10 (2023: 0) members relating to attendance at meetings of the trustees.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

7 Staff numbers

The average number of employees (head count based on number of staff employed) during the year was 434 (2023: 362) and based on full-time equivalent was 377 (2023: 315).

8 Related party transactions

There are no related party transactions to disclose for 2024 (2023: none).

There are no donations from related parties which are outside the normal course of business and no restricted donations from related parties.

9 Taxation

The charity is exempt from corporation tax as all its income is charitable and is applied for charitable purposes.

10 Tangible fixed assets

	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Telephones £	Software & Systems £	Total £
Cost					
At the start of the year	–	544,557	203,244	111,704	859,505
Additions in year	–	91,177	50,335	21,954	163,466
At the end of the year	–	635,734	253,579	133,658	1,022,971
Depreciation					
At the start of the year	–	253,751	83,616	37,196	374,563
Charge for the year	–	109,919	43,046	23,587	176,552
At the end of the year	–	363,670	126,662	60,783	551,115
Net book value					
At the end of the year	–	272,064	126,917	72,875	471,856
At the start of the year	–	290,806	119,628	74,508	484,942

All of the above assets are used for charitable purposes.

11 Investments held as fixed assets

	2024 £	2023 £
Fair value at the start of the year	1,253,352	1,302,646
Additions at cost	–	–
Disposal proceeds	(1,050,000)	–
Net gain / (loss) on change in fair value	58,300	(49,294)
	261,652	1,253,352
Fair value at the end of the year	261,652	1,253,352
	2024 £	2023 £
Investments comprise:		
COIF Charities Investment Fund	261,652	1,253,352

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

12 Debtors

	2024 £	2023 £
Trade debtors	946,337	837,451
Other debtors	89,589	76,301
Prepayments	373,070	363,081
Accrued income	142,636	205,490
	1,551,632	1,482,323

13 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2024 £	2023 £
Trade creditors	91,012	137,695
Taxation and social security	227,242	189,933
Other creditors	223,598	203,679
Accruals	122,991	116,306
Deferred income (note 14)	51,950	59,095
	716,793	706,708

14 Deferred income

Deferred income comprises income invoiced in advance of work not undertaken by year end

	2024 £	2023 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	59,095	69,645
Amount released to income in the year	(59,095)	(69,645)
Amount deferred in the year	51,950	59,095
	51,950	59,095

15 Provisions for liabilities

Provisions for liabilities comprises

	2024 £	2023 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	17,032	78,843
Increase/(decrease) in provision in the year	12,000	(61,811)
	29,032	17,032
Dilapidations provision	1,750	1,750
Customer refund provision	7,282	7,282
Staffing provision	20,000	8,000
	29,032	17,032

Dilapidations Provision

To provide for outstanding costs relating to vacating of Cambridge office.

Customer Refund Provision

To provide for a potential refund to a customer.

Staffing Provision

To provide for HR issues identified pre 31st March 2024.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

16a Analysis of net assets between funds (current year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	471,856	–	471,856
Investments	261,652	–	–	261,652
Net current assets	656,209	240,000	–	896,209
Provisions	(29,032)	–	–	(29,032)
Net assets at 31 March 2024	888,829	711,856	–	1,600,685

16b Analysis of net assets between funds (prior year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	484,942	–	484,942
Investments	1,253,352	–	–	1,253,352
Net current assets	160,874	1,070,000	–	1,230,874
Provisions	(17,032)	–	–	(17,032)
Net assets at 31 March 2023	1,397,195	1,554,942	–	2,952,137

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

17a Movements in funds (current year)

	At 1 April 2023 £	Income & gains £	Expenditure & losses £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2024 £
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	22,775	(22,775)	-	-
** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	31,350	(31,350)	-	-
*** Voluntary Action Coventry	-	45,000	(45,000)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	99,125	(99,125)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	950,000	-	(752,174)	(197,826)	-
Fixed Assets Replacement	120,000	-	-	120,000	240,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	484,942	-	-	(13,086)	471,856
Total designated funds	1,554,942	-	(752,174)	(90,912)	711,856
General funds	1,397,195	13,463,128	(14,062,405)	90,912	888,829
Total unrestricted funds	2,952,137	13,463,128	(14,814,580)	-	1,600,685
Total funds	2,952,137	13,562,253	(14,913,705)	-	1,600,685

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

*** Independent Health Complaints Advocacy service in Coventry

Investment in Development has now been concluded with the balance transferred back to general funds.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund is to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

The **Tangible Fixed Assets** designated fund removes the non-cash element.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2024

17b Movements in funds (prior year)

	At 1 April 2022	Income & gains	Expenditure & losses	Transfers	At 31 March 2023
	£	£	£	£	£
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	22,775	(22,775)	-	-
** Cambridgeshire County Council	-	30,000	(30,000)	-	-
*** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	4,880	(4,880)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	57,655	(57,655)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	1,500,000	-	(333,254)	(216,746)	950,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	240,000	-	-	(120,000)	120,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	247,203	-	-	237,739	484,942
Total designated funds	1,987,203	-	(333,254)	(99,007)	1,554,942
General funds	2,073,987	11,291,731	(12,067,531)	99,007	1,397,195
Total unrestricted funds	4,061,190	11,291,731	(12,400,785)	-	2,952,137
Total funds	4,061,190	11,349,386	(12,458,439)	-	2,952,137

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Furtherance of existing Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

*** Covid-19 infection control receipts.

Investment in Development has been reviewed and now stands at £950,000. This will fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments throughout 2023/24.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund is to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

The **Tangible Fixed Assets** designated fund removes the non-cash element and represents the net book value of the fixed assets held.

VoiceAbility

☎ 0300 303 1660

✉ helpline@voiceability.org

🌐 voiceability.org

🐦 [@VoiceAbility](https://twitter.com/VoiceAbility)



About VoiceAbility

We make sure you're heard when it matters most. We've been supporting people to have their say in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.

VOICEABILITY ADVOCACY

England & Wales - Charity number 1076630

Accounts

Annual report and accounts

For the year ended 31 March 2023

VoiceAbility Advocacy: Charity number in England 1076630,

Charity number in Scotland SC050036, Company number 3798884.



Contents

Welcome from our Chair of Trustees	3
Welcome from our Chief Executive	4
Our aims, vision and values	5
What do we do?	6
Strategic report	8
Where we worked	8
Our year in numbers.....	9
Strategic direction.....	10
What did we do in 2022-2023?	10
What will we do in 2023-2024?	15
Our impact	17
Reference and administrative information	23
Governance structure and management	24
Financial review	28
Independent auditor's report to VoiceAbility trustees	32
Financial statements.....	36

Welcome from our Chair of Trustees



Looking back over the past year, I'm delighted that VoiceAbility continues to develop and grow as an organisation – one committed to making sure that the people we serve have their voices heard. This involves really listening, empathising and reflecting on the things that mean the person receiving support can break through the barriers they are facing.

Through our amazing teams, people tell us what a difference VoiceAbility makes to ultimately improve their lives. In other words, we do what it says on the tin! As Board Chair, and as a disabled person, this makes me very happy.

I'm also very aware of the importance of the quality of what is delivered. It's my responsibility to make sure we as trustees are assured that VoiceAbility, across all levels of the organisation, is delivering high-quality, effective, safe and person-centred services.

As a Board of Trustees, we care about positive outcomes for people using our services.

To this end, we've introduced a new board committee to scrutinise performance. We loved hearing good news stories about the impact advocacy has on people and their lives. And, as employers, we also enjoyed hearing about the people who work in VoiceAbility and their experience, their roles and what they bring to the organisation.

This year saw our Board supporting the executive leadership team to look at our strategy along with an improved management structure to deliver on this. As a learning organisation, we're keen to hear about how we can all continually strive for better ways of delivering our mission, vision and values. As trustees we have particularly enjoyed supporting the workforce strategy of connection and belonging, believing that this investment of time and personnel will positively impact on staff wellbeing.

I was delighted to see we remain financially secure and that we were able to invest in future developments and progress our strategy. We recently passed an ambitious budget to support the operational programmes for next year having been satisfied as a Board that this year, the one reflected in this report, has gone really well.

As you will read, VoiceAbility continues to excel so a huge thanks from me to all our staff and volunteers for their achievements. I hope everyone is looking forward with the ongoing passion required to ensure more people are supported to be heard when it matters most.

Susan Douglas-Scott CBE

Welcome from our Chief Executive



Throughout the year I've been inspired by my time spent with people who draw on VoiceAbility's support. They have demonstrated to me the life-changing difference which our services are making.

I've spent time with people whose colourful lives, loves and losses have been all but obscured by characterless care services, in which one bedroom is the same as the next, and needs are to be met, rather than people to be heard. And I've observed how the right person at the right time can start a process of understanding, valuing and properly supporting the person. Throughout this, I've held in awe the passion, empathy and skills shown by members of staff and volunteers at VoiceAbility and the spirit shown by people who draw on our services.

We've worked hard to continually improve the quality of our services and to increase our positive impact on people's lives.

We know so much more is needed before everyone has a voice when it matters most.

That's why we're determined not only to enable more people to benefit directly from our work, but also to work with others to address the systemic barriers which block so many of us from the life we want, and from the rights which we are entitled to enjoy.

Our priorities include ensuring that people have better access to independent support and representation. We will press the compelling case for advocacy to be offered on an 'opt-out' basis so that it's truly available to those who would benefit the most from it.

We're enraged by the enduring abuse of people with learning disabilities and autistic people in closed institutional settings. We'll lobby more vociferously for an effective specialist national advocacy service so that people's voices are heard, and to press for a shift to community-based support to stop so many people's unnecessary detention.

We'll not only continue to increase the quality and impact of our own services, but also work with others within and outside the advocacy sector to develop stronger mechanisms to ensure the consistent effectiveness of independent support and representation. And because we know that ultimately most of us rely for personal advice on people we already know and trust, we'll work with others to explore how we can more fully empower ourselves, our neighbourhoods, and our communities so that we can support each other's voices and rights.

We know that our achievements and fulfilling our potential relies upon our committed staff, volunteers, trustees, and upon the support for our work from those who share our objectives and who invest public resources in our abilities. I'd like to express my and our appreciation and gratitude to all of you.

Jonathan Senker

Our aims, vision and values

We support people to be heard when it matters most. We've been supporting people to be heard in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years.

We're an independent voice and rights charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.

Our aims

We believe everyone has a right to:

- be heard and respected
- have the same choice, control, and freedom as any other person
- be safe from violence, discrimination, harm or abuse

Our vision

Everyone has a voice which is heard and responded to.

No-one has to face life-changing decisions alone.

This includes:

- delivering the best possible quality of support
- being the provider of choice for the services we offer
- being the source of authority for expert insight on voice and rights
- being the place to work or volunteer with, for anyone who shares our aims

Our values

1. Passionate

We're dedicated to strengthening voice, supporting rights and changing lives.

2. Empowering

We enable people to live life to the full.

3. Collaborative

We listen and shape decisions with others.

4. Honest

We work with integrity and we stick to our principles.

5. Resourceful

We think ahead and find effective ways to achieve our mission.

What do we do?

All our services have the shared goal of supporting people to be heard when it matters most. Our independent advocacy services support people to be heard in important decisions about their health, care and wellbeing. Our 'Connections services' are about making sure that all of us can live the lives we choose and have our voices heard in decisions which matter to us personally, locally, regionally, and nationally.

Advocacy type	Description
Benefits advocacy	Advocates who support disabled people to access benefits from Social Security Scotland, and those who are accessing benefits for a disabled child
Care Act advocacy	Care Act advocates support people to understand their rights under the Care Act and to be fully involved in a local authority assessment, care review, care and support planning or safeguarding process
Children and young people	Although it varies by area, advocacy can be available for children and young people who: ● are looked after children ● live in a secure children's home ● are going through the child protection process ● have special educational needs ● are in transition to adult care and support services
General advocacy	General advocates provide advocacy to people who need support to be heard, but do not fall into the eligibility criteria for other types of advocacy
Independent mental capacity advocacy	Independent mental capacity advocates support people when they are assessed to lack capacity to make a best interest decision and do not have appropriate family or friends to consult
Independent mental health advocacy	Independent mental health advocates support people with issues relating to their mental health care and treatment. They also help people understand their rights under the Mental Health Act
NHS complaints advocacy	NHS complaints advocates support people to complain about the treatment or care that they or a friend or family member have received from an NHS service
Relevant person's representative	Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards aim to protect people who might be restrained or restricted in a way that amounts to depriving them of their liberty. This law says the affected person must have a 'representative' – someone to help make sure their views, wishes and rights are respected
Rule 1.2 representative	A Rule 1.2 representative speaks up for a person who lacks capacity to consent to restrictions on their freedom, when they are or may be deprived of their liberty in a community or domestic setting

Connections services

Our Connections services bring together all our participation, involvement, co-production and peer support work into one team. These services are varied but are all about ensuring that the voices of people we work with are really heard so that their rights are upheld, and they can make a difference to the services that affect them.

By employing and working with people who have similar experiences, we empower them to advocate for themselves and support others to speak out about the things that are important to them.

- **Involvement and participation**

We work with providers, NHS bodies and local government to ensure that the voices of people who use services are heard. For example, our Speak Out projects employ people with learning disabilities and autistic people, to capture and convey the voices of their peers and facilitate user involvement networks

- **Group advocacy**

We support people to meet, identify common issues, share their experience, and act. Where possible, we support these groups to become self-facilitating, empowering people to take more control of their own lives

- **Peer mentoring**

We all trust and feel more comfortable speaking with people who have been through some of the same experiences as we have. Our peer support workers and mentors draw on their own experiences of mental health to provide emotional and practical support to others and help them develop their own solutions

“I’ve been with VoiceAbility for a little over a year now and I absolutely love what I do.

It’s a priceless gift and opportunity to be able to assist in bettering the lives of those whom we aim to support on their road to recovery.”

Peer Support Worker Felicity Allimadi, pictured with Chief Executive Jonathan Senker who spent an afternoon with Felicity and a colleague to find out more about their work in Camden

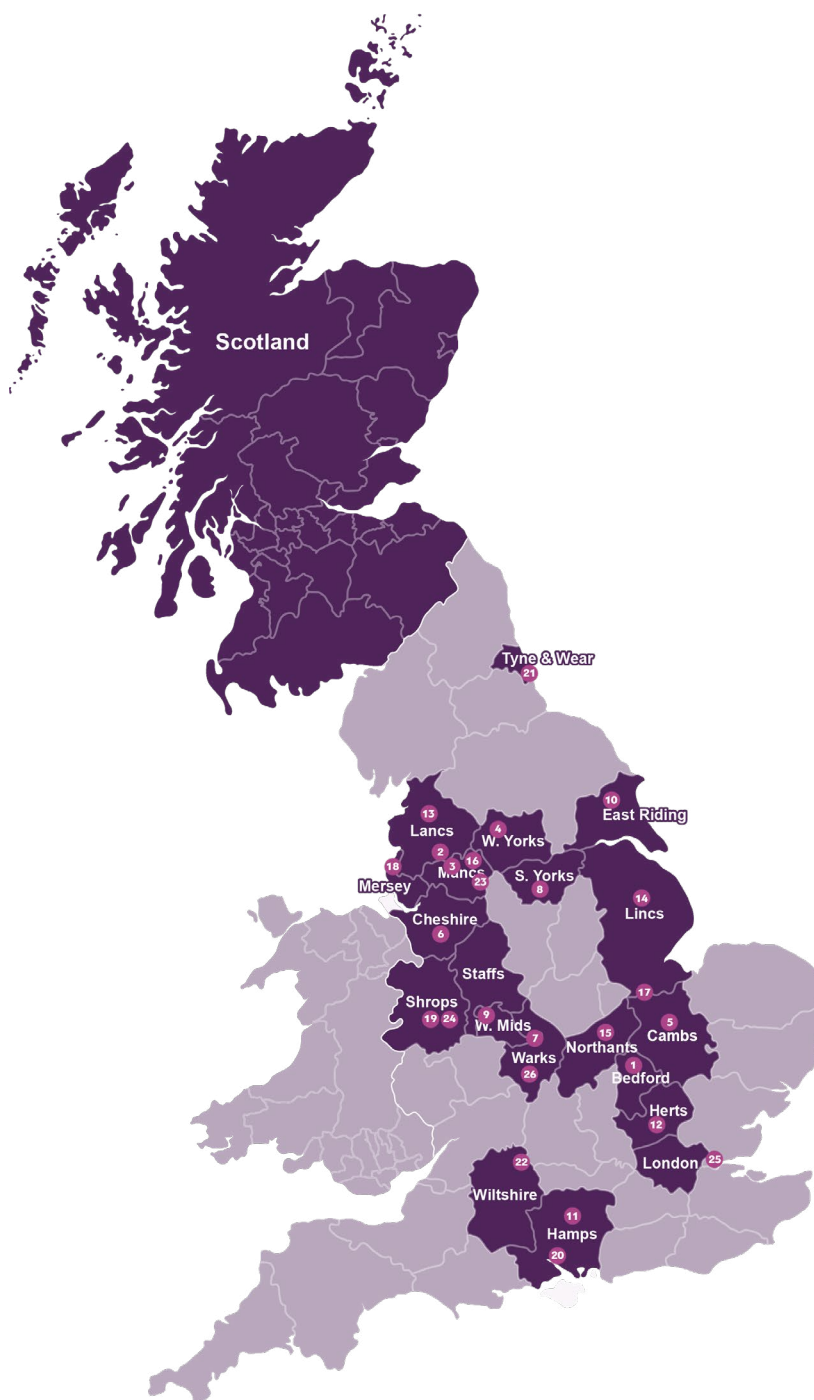


Where we worked 2022-2023

Across Scotland

England

- 1 Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire
- 2 Blackburn with Darwen
- 3 Bolton
- 4 Bradford
- 5 Cambridgeshire
- 6 Cheshire
- 7 Coventry
- 8 Doncaster
- 9 Dudley
- 10 East Riding
- 11 Hampshire
- 12 Hertfordshire
- 13 Lancashire
- 14 Lincolnshire
- 15 Northamptonshire
- 16 Oldham
- 17 Peterborough
- 18 Sefton
- 19 Shropshire
- 20 Southampton
- 21 Sunderland
- 22 Swindon
- 23 Tameside
- 24 Telford and Wrekin
- 25 Thurrock
- 26 Warwickshire



London boroughs

- 1 Barnet
- 2 Camden
- 3 Ealing
- 4 Enfield
- 5 Haringey
- 6 Merton
- 7 Newham
- 8 Redbridge
- 9 Southwark
- 10 Lewisham
- 11 Waltham Forest



Our year in numbers

37,149

people have been supported by VoiceAbility to ensure their voice is heard when it matters most

21,971

cases supported in person

1/4

of safeguarding reports related to neglect or acts of omission

2

average number of days statutory referrals are processed in

78

seconds is the average response time in our contact centre

409

people are contracted to work across our teams

955

people were supported across Scotland with independent benefits advocacy

2,811

clients signposted to other services

22,000

calls handled by our contact centre

50

people volunteer with VoiceAbility across the UK

37%

of our clients needed support due to mental illness

27%

of our work was related to relevant person's representative advocacy, our most used service

121

is the average number of safeguarding concerns we raised each month

15%

of local authority safeguarding alerts were for institutional abuse

986

children have benefited directly from our support

Strategic direction

We're here to build a society where everyone has a voice and where we can all be the authors of our own life. This is at the heart of developing a healthy society and will benefit us all at some point in our lives. We're working to ensure that no-one must be alone or without support when facing life-changing decisions.

To achieve this, we're striving to make sure that we all have ready access to the right support so that we can express ourselves and shape our present and future. We're determined to ensure that there's a comprehensive spectrum of support available to make this a reality.

Our strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision between 2019 and 2025, with two key areas of focus:

- continuing to diversify the services we offer
- improving our organisational capability

What did we do in 2022-2023?

New ways to deliver using advocacy skills

People need many kinds of support to be heard and have their rights upheld. By 2025 we will have significantly widened the range of advocacy services we offer.

We said we'd focus on:

- continued development of our national benefit advocacy contract for the Scottish Government over its first year of delivery
- continuing to invest in our structures to grow and develop our Connections services that focus on individual and collective advocacy
- expanding the breadth of our services to support more people

What we did:

- developed our benefit advocacy service to reach people across Scotland, with the number of referrals approaching 1,000 at the end of the year
- facilitated five groups for people with learning disabilities, mental health problems and autistic people this year as part of the development of our Connections services – working in Camden, Cambridgeshire, Hampshire and Lincolnshire
- funded a pilot in Cheshire to provide advocacy support for parents going through a child protection process
- launched new services in 19 local authority areas of England



Value our people

Create an even more positive working culture and clearer opportunities for staff development and progression.



We said we'd focus on:

- investing significant energy, time, and resources in our Belonging workstream to identity and embed culture change in an inclusive way
- reviewing our remuneration and benefits, including consulting staff where appropriate to make sure we pay fairly
- reviewing our approach to staff appraisals to make sure they are person-centred, support people to do their best work and be their authentic selves
- rolling out an improved self-service human resources (HR) system to make it easier for our staff to focus on the most important parts of their job
- establishing a national forum to support the work of our existing staff networks and resource groups

What we did:

- created our Belonging Manifesto and appointed a Belonging and Culture Lead to guide us on the development of internal and external change
- improved pay for the most vulnerable in our organisation during the cost-of-living crisis
- evaluated our review process, utilising our staff voice and expertise
- launched new HR and payroll systems
- launched a national forum and a disabilities forum for staff, to add to our existing forums focused on Armed Forces, equality, diversity and inclusion, health, safety and wellbeing, and the menopause
- developed a middle manager training programme to build on the success of our frontline management training
- provided coaching to the leadership team to support strategic growth

Build the basics

Increase clarity and consistency across all our standards, policies, systems and processes, while maintaining person-centred service delivery to individuals.



We said we'd focus on:

- investing in the creation of an operating model that would provide the basis for continuous improvement across everything we deliver

What we did:

- completed a full review of our policies, procedures and ways of working
- successfully created and launched our operating model to support our systemic change programme, which is being rolled out across our teams
- rolled out new systems, dashboards and training to better support decision-making at advocate and frontline manager level
- significant in-year review and repositioning of our practice function



Drive quality

Improve our ability to evidence our impact and outcomes.



We said we'd focus on:

- gaining reaccreditation for the Quality Performance Mark (QPM)
- building a more empathetic and experience-based picture of how people we support feel and what they think about decisions being made
- rolling out a new high-level practitioner role for advocates to support our peer-led quality processes for advocacy practice, so that quality advocacy is further embedded across our services
- developing our safeguarding work further, including making sure we're well connected into the relevant bodies, can escalate concerns, and can influence safeguarding practice more widely

What we did:

- gained reaccreditation for the QPM, which highlighted our strength around safeguarding and our highly-developed advocacy skills in meeting the Advocacy Charter
- improved how we capture and use data, including internal case auditing by the practice team
- grew our Communities of Practice where on-the-ground expertise and best practice from across our teams can be shared
- carried out a large research project looking at the experiences of our advocates in relation to safeguarding enquiries under Section 42 of the Care Act
- reviewed and improved our Outcomes Framework to better enable advocates to focus on delivering person-centred advocacy, while capturing the impact of our work in an accessible way
- rolled out the new high-level practitioner role, with five practitioners now in place
- reviewed our Advocacy Standards, which help to ensure consistency in the services we provide to our clients
- developed new safeguarding refresher learning courses, including e-learning in the basics of safeguarding and a choice of trainer-led workshops. This is to ensure our safeguarding training meets the learning needs of all staff
- held additional online training and trainer-led workshops on non-instructed advocacy and professional curiosity, as well as additional safeguarding drop-in sessions for our staff working in high-risk settings

Lead the market and grow authority

Reflect the high quality of our services in how we look and speak as an organisation and in the digital tools we offer.

Continue to ensure that people's voices are heard, and their rights respected in local and national policy decisions.



We said we'd focus on:

- making sure that changes to statutory advocacy under the Care Act, Mental Capacity Act, and Mental Health Act are person-centred and deliver change for our clients
- pushing for effective reform of the Mental Health Act so that more of us get the support of an advocate when it matters most
- contributing to the code of practice and regulations for the Mental Capacity Act, ahead of the launch of Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) in England and Wales
- pushing for a people-centred vision for social care so that social care reform prioritises our rights to have choice and control over how we live our lives and fosters a system where we're all empowered to thrive as well as survive

What we did:

- secured government agreement on our major requirements for the introduction of reform of the Mental Health Act (MHA). We were delighted that it included an opt-out for anyone detained under the MHA and would also extend the right to an independent advocate for voluntary patients – two issues we've been campaigning on for several years
- made the case for a specialist advocacy service for people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services which should be commissioned nationally. This was a key point in our evidence to the parliamentary committee scrutinising the draft Mental Health Bill and formed one of their recommendations on advocacy
- led a coalition of advocacy providers on a joint letter to Mental Health Minister Maria Caulfield MP urging the government to 'swiftly' implement the Mental Health Act reforms
- tirelessly campaigned for LPS and shaped its code of practice with colleagues from the Department of Health and Social Care. We were deeply disappointed to learn of government's decision in April 2023 to delay the implementation of LPS beyond the life of this Parliament
- worked with the Westminster government on children and young people's advocacy policy through the Department for Education's (DfE) Advocacy Expert Group
- worked on a response to DfE's consultation on Children's Social Care reform – Stable Homes Built on Love
- led and facilitated a sector-wide Advocacy Leadership Network, made up of over 50 organisations. Work this year included a joint response to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence advocacy guidelines, and a substantial discussion on how to use these guidelines to strengthen advocacy provision across the sector

What will we do in 2023-2024?

New ways to deliver using advocacy skills

We will focus on:

- extending our independent advocacy reach and improving outcomes with a greater focus on driving high-quality delivery through new and innovative ways of working
- providing the technology and channels to enable people to give and receive support about rights, voices, social care, and personal public services
- researching, planning and seed funding better ways to empower individuals, families and supporting communities throughout and beyond the UK – harnessing our expertise

Value our people

We will focus on:

- continuing to roll out our cultural transformation plan and manifesto with the establishment of a new leadership and behaviour framework
- developing our research into actionable plans in how we can achieve equal outcomes for our external work with people from groups who are traditionally poorly served
- researching and articulating how we can eliminate race, gender and disability equality pay gaps in the organisation within the next two years
- continuing to improve our people and rewards strategy

Build the basics

We will focus on:

- developing our internal and external data analysis capabilities to continually drive quality and look for opportunities to improve across our existing and new services in the UK
- ensuring our internal operating model is being fully carried out across our teams as part of our new approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement
- continually improving our new HR and payroll systems to better enable a reduction in administrative processes to give more time to improve outcomes for clients



Drive quality

We will focus on:

- launching a new quality assurance framework and embedding this across our teams
- increasing our involvement and co-production opportunities, better using our advocacy skills
- building a more empathetic and experience-based picture of how people we support feel and what they think about decisions being made
- continuing to develop our unique research and implementation of new ways in improving safeguarding capabilities, while seeking ways to be able to better share learnings across our sector
- finalising the development of a 'best-in-class' volunteer programme, ready to be rolled out across our teams

Lead the market and grow authority

We will focus on:

- establishing a national opt-out of advocacy wherever people have an entitlement, so we can strengthen the individual right to be heard when it matters most
- ending the unnecessary long-term detention of people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people in inpatient settings and providing stronger protection for individual legal rights, with the objective to create a specialised national advocacy service
- fully understanding, developing, and rolling out citizen and community advocacy to empower groups which automatically and naturally care for and look out for those around them, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and rights respected
- raising independent standards of advocacy by planning and influencing the establishment of formalised national independent bodies to better oversee, audit and support the professional development and regulation of our work



Our impact

VoiceAbility supported **more than 37,000 people** across England and Scotland this year.

We employ **more than 400 members of staff** and have **over 50 volunteers**.

In this section we shine a spotlight on examples of the work our staff have been doing this year and how this has supported our clients to be heard.



Advocacy

On 31 January 2022, we launched a **new type of advocacy service which supports disabled people in accessing benefits** from Social Security Scotland.

Kirsten is among those to have used the free service, after getting stuck while trying to complete an Adult Disability Payment form.

Kirsten contacted VoiceAbility via email, with advocate Alex assigned to her case.

“I don’t think I’ve met anybody who knows as much as Alex does. The way she can just draw things out of you is fantastic – it’s exactly what you need.

She was a huge help, and I don’t think I would’ve got it submitted if it hadn’t been for having that support.”

Kirsten, who was supported by advocate Alex to complete an Adult Disability Payment form



Support to access Social Security Scotland benefits.

Do you find it difficult to complete every-day tasks?

Do you have a long-term physical or mental health condition?

Do you need support to understand and say what you need?

to help. or get in touch

site: voiceability

We continue to develop the service to reach people across the country, with the number of referrals approaching 1,000 at the end of 2022-2023.

“We know how tough the experience of accessing benefits can be, so we’re pleased to have supported hundreds of people to do this. With the cost of living rising alarmingly, this has never been more important. This is just the start, as we know there are thousands more people who could benefit from independent support.”

Jonathan Senker, Chief Executive of VoiceAbility

”

Ben McPherson, then Minister for Social Security and Local Government, invited VoiceAbility to hold a reception for Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) sponsored by Kaukab Stewart, MSP for Glasgow Kelvin. This was an excellent opportunity for VoiceAbility to promote the service and to meet MSPs and parliamentary staff.



Our NHS complaints advocates support people like Chas, who wanted to complain about his GP practice. He knew what he wanted to say, but not how to say it.

Chas lives with mental health issues and dyslexia which affect his everyday communication. He finds himself constantly having to apologise to others for his perceived ‘aggressive’ conversation, and is frustrated that he’s labelled as a troublemaker.

Chas said he could read OK, but felt that he was unable to write a complaint letter in words that professionals would understand, and which perfectly illustrated how he felt.

He contacted VoiceAbility and his advocate, Aggie, arranged a series of telephone appointments so that he could talk through what he wanted to say. She then posted the draft letters for him to read.

By the end of the sessions, Chas grew in confidence and began to type out emails himself about what he wanted to say, as he knew that Aggie understood his language and needs. She used his own words as much as possible to include in the NHS Complaints Toolkit letter template.

Chas received his paper copies of the letter to sign and post. He said he was very pleased with how he had been supported by Aggie:

“Thank you very much for your patient and professional handling of my complaint. At the start of your support I was still in an exasperated state of mind. I deviated at times and got hyper at times, but by the end of our conversations I felt calm and reassured and better for having spoken with you, so once again thank you.”

Chas, who was supported by advocate Aggie

“Thank you so much for your support. I really appreciate your hard work and all you are doing for me. You made me believe again in justice and kindness of people.”

A VoiceAbility client in Cambridgeshire to their NHS complaints advocate

Culturally-appropriate advocacy

We recognise the broad diversity of people we support beyond their health and care needs.

Our team leaders consider the life experience, knowledge and language skills of our advocates, allocating staff with relevant experience whenever possible to offer a person-centred approach.

Advocate Salma is one example of this, communicating to her client Shafiq in her mother tongue of Punjabi and building a trusting relationship which was sensitive to her cultural and religious needs.

“We know Salma worked very hard to get my mother-in-law’s voice heard, and made sure her cultural needs weren’t ignored or minimised.

I say this with no exaggeration: you and this cultural advocacy service are literally saving lives.”

Shafiq’s daughter-in-law

”

Advocacy and mental health

Almost one third of our clients this year needed support due to mental illness.

Alex felt he’d been unsafely discharged from mental health services, and said he was at a “very low point” in his life when he was put in touch with our advocate Klara. Now, things are different.

“My advocate made me feel human and reminded me that I have inherent value despite my disabilities, sexuality, gender identity and economic status.

I am now working full time, helping others with disabilities move into work, and have the best weekends exploring in the camper van or going to gigs with my Direct Payment-funded personal assistant.

I feel the future is bright now and that, when challenges occur, I am better equipped and can ask for help from an advocate if needed.”

Alex, who used our services in Hertfordshire

”

Connections services

This year we've been providing Connections services in eight areas across England.

Quality checkers

Our quality checkers in Northamptonshire are people with lived experience of a learning disability who visit, in person or virtually, residential settings and day services to rate and report on the quality of that service.

Speak Out leaders and self-advocates

In Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire we have Speak Out leaders, and in Hampshire and Southampton we have self-advocates.

These are colleagues with a learning disability and/or autistic people who speak with their peers about all aspects of their lives and share feedback with the local authority and a wide range of services and organisations.

Recent successes include Speak Out Cambridgeshire's co-production with their local integrated care board to make GP appointments and health information more accessible, and Speak Out Lincolnshire working with their local hospital on videos to make visits less scary for people with learning disabilities.

“We spoke about the struggles that people in care homes have in getting the right support. They have a right to go socialising, out and about, but they often can't because of a lack of staff. That upsets me because people with learning disabilities in care homes have rights too. They should be able to do whatever they want to do – like I can.”

Richard, a self-advocate in Hampshire, reflects on a conversation with Mark Harper MP during an All Party Parliamentary Group for Learning Disabilities at Westminster

”



“The Speak Out leaders – they are an awesome group of people. They participate in meetings, going through the papers and preparing for the meeting, but don't hold back giving their opinions and saying it how it is. The Speak Out leaders also chair the meetings on a rota basis. They ensure that everyone has a fair say.”

Graham Lewis, Partnership Development Manager, Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Peer mentoring and peer support

Our peer support workers in Camden work with people as they are discharged from mental health crisis teams, and support them to explore ways to improve and maintain their wellbeing.

Our peer mentors are trained volunteers with lived experience of mental health challenges, who draw on this to support others to stay well and achieve health and wellbeing goals.

“What I saw was connection, solidarity, and humanity. People using their experience, insight, and compassion, to enable and support others in their journey. And I saw the courage with which people were moving forward.”

Chief Executive Jonathan Senker reflecting on time spent with some of our peer support workers in Camden

”

Experts by experience

Our experts by experience in Coventry and Warwickshire are people who have experience of, or caring for someone with, a learning disability or autism and of spending time in hospital because of being mentally unwell.



Reference and administrative information

Trustees

Susan Douglas-Scott – Chair / Investment Committee Member

Susan Brown – Safeguarding Governance Committee Chair

Andrew Weston – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member

Matthew Smith – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Performance and Quality Committee Member

James Alistair Schofield – Audit and Risk Committee Chair / Investment Committee Chair

Viral Shah – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member

Gavin Sumner – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member / Performance and Quality Committee Member

Izaro Arbelaiz-Teresa – Performance and Quality Committee Member

Anthony Osijo – Audit and Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member

Mahua Nandi – Performance and Quality Committee Chair

Secretary

Richard Jones

Chief Executive Officer

Jonathan Senker

Registered office

c/o Sayer Vincent

Invicta House

108-114 Golden Lane

London, EC1Y 0TL

Incorporated in United Kingdom, Company Number 03798884

Registered in England and Wales, Charity Number 1076630

Registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC050036

Auditors

Sayer Vincent LLP

Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane

London, EC1Y 0TL

Bankers

National Westminster Bank Plc

23 Market Street, Cambridge, CB2 3PA

Solicitors

Radar Limited, 6 Beacon Way, Hull, HU3 4AE

Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP, 134 Edmund Street, Birmingham, B3 2ES

Governance structure and management

Governing document

The organisation is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 30th June 1999 and registered as a charity on 19th July 1999. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the company. It is governed by its Articles of Association which, following changes introduced by the Companies Act 2006, now also contain its objects and powers. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

The financial statements comply with current statutory requirements, the memorandum and articles of association and the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting and Reporting by Charities: SORP applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with FRS 102. This trustees' annual report includes a directors' report as required by company law.

Appointment of trustees

As set out in the Articles of Association, members of the Board of Trustees must be appointed by an ordinary resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the trustees and must be appointed for a term of three years. On ceasing to be a trustee a person may be reappointed provided that no-one may serve as a trustee for more than a maximum of three consecutive terms, after which they must cease to be a trustee for at least 12 months before they're eligible to be reappointed.

The Board members bring insight from their own lived experience of disability, understanding of the charity's social mission, and business and commercial skills. The range of experience is kept under review and, in the event of any shortfalls, new trustees are sought to fill the gaps.

Trustee induction and training

New trustees undergo a period of induction to brief them on the values, direction and work of VoiceAbility, their legal obligations under charity and company law and good practice duties, the contents of the Articles of Association, the Board and decision-making processes, the business plan and recent financial performance of the charity. During the induction they view our services and meet with key employees and other trustees. Trustees are encouraged to participate in external and internally-run training and development where this will facilitate the undertaking of their role.

Organisational structure

The Board of Trustees administers the charity. The Board meets once per quarter with additional meetings when required to deal with issues of strategy in more depth.

VoiceAbility also has within its constitution an Audit and Risk Committee, known as ARC. The ARC members meet once per quarter in advance of the Board meetings to review and discuss matters such as management and statutory accounts, risk and governance. In addition to the Audit and Risk Committee, there's an Investment Committee. The Investment Committee meets twice a year. The purpose of the committee is to ensure that the charity is investing funds in line with the investment policy.

There's also a Safeguarding Committee, the purpose of which is to ensure quality safeguarding practices and approaches are developed and implemented, and to support the charity in discharging its statutory and good practice duties and responsibilities – both as an employer and a provider – in relation to safeguarding.

In 2022, a Performance and Quality Committee was formed. The core purpose of the newly-formed committee is to:

- ensure performance and quality practice informs our cycle of continuous improvement through the application of good governance principles
- assure VoiceAbility's performance in discharging its duties and responsibilities as both an employer and a provider
- report to the Board of Trustees on key opportunities and threats, and support trustees in discharging statutory duties

The trustees have delegated the day-to-day responsibility for the provision of services to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for recommending strategy to the Board, for the management of its external profile and influencing work, ensuring that the charity delivers the services in line with its mission and requirements and ensuring that key performance indicators are met across the range of social and business objectives. The Chief Executive Officer leads an executive leadership team whose members are the executive managers of the charity.

Risk management

The principal risks and uncertainties facing the organisation are centred around five key areas:

- **Impact** – the desired impact of activities is not delivered or cannot be adequately evidenced
- **Financial sustainability** – our ability to continue to make an impact in the medium to long term is threatened
- **Compliance** – the organisation fails to meet regulatory, legal or contract compliance requirements or expectations
- **Reputation** – we do not respond effectively to any incident that could result in damage to VoiceAbility's reputation
- **Safeguarding** – we fail to adequately protect staff, volunteers or the people we support from harm or abuse

The steps to manage these risks are set out below.

The trustees are responsible for setting the tone and influencing the culture of risk management within VoiceAbility.

The executive leadership team have established a risk register, identifying the types of risks faced and prioritising them in terms of potential impact and likelihood of occurrence. Having due regard to the strength of the current internal controls and procedures already in place, a series of mitigating actions have been identified to appropriately address these risks.

The executive leadership team, the Audit and Risk Committee, and the Board of Trustees periodically review the risks and the risk management strategies to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the organisation.

Public benefit

We've referred to the guidance in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and in planning our future activities. In particular, the trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives they have set.

Directors' liabilities

There are no specific provisions relating specifically to directors' liabilities to report.

There are no qualifying third-party indemnity provisions which are the direct responsibility of the charity.

There are no qualifying pension scheme indemnity provisions, due to the charity operating a Defined Contribution scheme.

Fundraising

We're not a fundraising charity, with our income deriving primarily from local government, NHS and central government contracts. We do not solicit donations, but do receive them from time to time and do approach grant-giving bodies. We're therefore registered with the fundraising regulator and follow their guidance. There were no issues of compliance with the guidance of the fundraising regulator. We received no complaints about fundraising activities carried out by the charity (2022: none). VoiceAbility does not use any professional fundraisers and no fundraising is undertaken on our behalf by third parties.

Disabled employees

We recognise the importance and benefits of having disabled people involved in and leading the organisation's work at every level including in governance roles, as employees and as volunteers. In relation to employment, the expertise in various aspects of our work which disabled people bring is valued strongly. Disabled applicants who meet the minimum essential criteria for posts are guaranteed interviews and we encourage applicants to identify any adjustments which are needed to ensure that they can participate equally in selection processes.

Training has been provided to managers on equality and employment, including specifically on disability equality.

The organisation has a full policy on diversity and employment, which underlines our approach to exceed legal requirements in relation to diversity as we recognise the importance and value to the organisation and to people using our services of a workforce which is diverse in relation to all protected characteristics, including disability.

We're continuing to work to improve the experience of and contribution by all employees, including disabled employees and are recognised as a Disability Confident employer.

We have paid posts which specifically require personal insights that come from having a learning disability, particularly expert by experience posts and our Speak Out leaders. Additionally, we have roles of peer mentors and peer supporters which have provided work skills and therefore routes into employment for people who have used long-term mental health and substance use services.

Employee involvement

VoiceAbility's trustees and directors recognise employee engagement to be one of the most powerful drivers of organisational performance and of our success in enabling people who use our services to achieve their outcomes. It's central to our strategy.

The following are among the measures which we take to promote effective employee involvement and engagement, as well as to ensure that colleagues throughout the organisation are well-informed:

- cross sectional employee groups, who help to develop critical organisational policies and practices – ranging from our pay policy and salary benchmarking to our approach to learning and development
- regular attendance of the Chief Executive and other members of the executive leadership team at team meetings throughout the organisation, to discuss the organisation's direction and development and to seek, receive and act on feedback
- weekly 'open phone' times publicised to all members of staff, at which the Chief Executive seeks and receives feedback and responds to issues of concern. An alternative of email contact at any time is also made available to all colleagues
- regular internal communication updates and bulletins, including VoiceAbility News (a monthly e-update written by staff and distributed to all teams)
- a well-maintained intranet site and online collaboration tools, including webinars and extensive use of Microsoft Teams
- regular team and supervision meetings held throughout the organisation
- a health, safety and wellbeing forum. The purpose of the forum is to represent, discuss and review how we keep everyone physically safe and mentally healthy at work. The forum meets every six weeks. A number of initiatives have been rolled out including a Wellbeing Activity Day where staff were given the time to get together with their colleagues to focus on wellbeing and discuss how best to support one another, as well as an additional half day's discretionary leave entitlement for all staff
- an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) forum. The EDI forum brings together colleagues across the organisation with interest and experience in a wide variety of EDI issues such as ethnicity, cultural awareness, LGBTQ+ equality, domestic violence, veteran's issues, neurodiversity and more
- a national forum, which has been recently launched with the purpose of encouraging staff participation, and nurturing accountability to develop and implement strategies that ensure a culture of belonging is embedded throughout VoiceAbility

Pay policy

VoiceAbility operates an objective outcome pay policy. Staff are placed within bandings dependent on skillset and experience and, upon successful completion of agreed annual objectives, have the opportunity to progress in the banding by way of incremental 'spine points'. Regular supervisions and appraisals ensure that pay-related is measurable within a band, ensuring greater transparency and understanding of pay-related decisions.

Although the executive leadership team are covered by the banding pay, ultimately decisions regarding the remuneration of these roles, and that of the Chief Executive, are made by the Board.

Financial review

Overview

Although the charity delivered a deficit of £1,059,759, this is after designated strategic investment, and budgeted capacity building support function expenditure funded by general reserves to ensure a fit-for-purpose infrastructure in the future.

The underlying operating position for the year is breakeven, demonstrating our inherent financial security.

The net loss of £49,294 on investments held as fixed assets, brought the overall closing deficit to £1,109,053.

We generated a total income of £11,349,386 – 3.2% higher than last year (2021-2022 – £10,993,036).

Due to the investment mentioned above, total expenditure of £12,409,145 is 20.4% higher than last year (2021-2022 – £10,307,595).

In 2022-2023 we continued to invest in our organisational capability and expansion and diversification of the services we offer, ultimately to positively impact the lives of many more people in the future.

Over the last 12 months we've continued to focus on staff development and the working culture of the organisation by way of our Belonging workstream. Investment from general and designated reserves included the expansion of our HR and learning and development teams, and the implementation of a new HR and payroll system. We reviewed our remuneration and benefits, increasing the majority of our incremental 'spine points'. This is in addition to performance and objective-driven pay increases.

Significant time and resources were invested in the creation of an operating model; getting the right people doing the right things at the right time, primarily to ensure high-quality service delivery as well as continuous improvement of organisational processes, keeping the experience of the clients we support at the forefront of decision-making. The newly created high-level practitioner role, which was rolled out this year, further embedded our peer-led quality advocacy delivery. We gained reaccreditation of the Quality Performance Mark.

To further improve the capturing and use of data, we increased our IT team capacity.

To ensure that we remain accountable for the delivery of the various programmes outlined in this report, and that progress is tracked and transparent, we introduced a project management office.

Reserves

The unrestricted reserves are those funds that are available to be used on the charitable objects, to be spent as the trustees see fit.

The trustees hold unrestricted reserves as either general reserves or designated reserves. General reserves are there to support the day-to-day operations of the organisation and to ensure that VoiceAbility can meet its future financial obligations. Designated reserves are held as unrestricted funds that have been earmarked for a particular purpose by the trustees.

Funds designated to fulfil our **investment in development** now stand at £950,000. This is to fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments over the period 2023 to 2025. Programmes include belonging, business development, and policy and influencing.

The **fixed assets replacement** designated fund, which is in place to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit-for-purpose equipment and systems on a long-term basis, has been reassessed and now stands at £120,000. Laptop and mobile phone purchases are recorded against the designated fund and, upon review of the charity's equipment requirements, transfers are then made from general funds to ensure the correct level of funds have been designated.

The remainder of £484,942 is the balance of the **tangible fixed assets** which are not liquid and therefore removed from the undesignated, unrestricted reserves in the interest of prudence when calculating our reserve cover requirements.

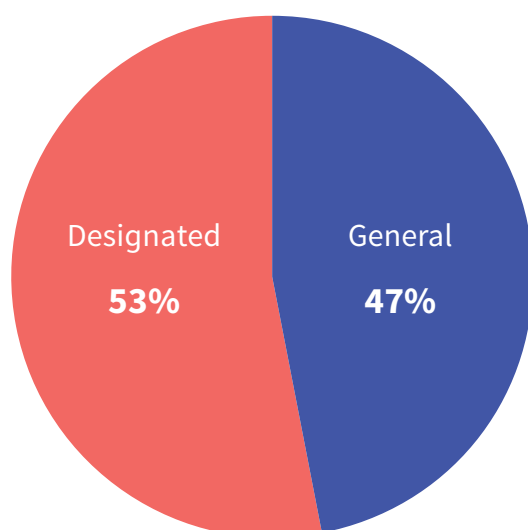
VoiceAbility adopts a risk-based approach to determine the value of general reserves necessary to meet its future financial obligations, taking into account the reliability of income streams and the extent to which expenditure is committed, as well as the major risks to which the charity is exposed.

To inform decision-making over the value of general reserves required in any one year, VoiceAbility places a financial value on facing the key unmitigated risks identified in the risk register. These are aggregated assuming that these risks occur either concurrently or sequentially over a timeframe that does not allow recovery between events. The quantification of those risks is assessed by the senior management team and the executive leadership team and validated by the Audit and Risk Committee alongside the annual review of the risk register.

Based on the outcome, the Audit and Risk Committee will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees on the required value of the general reserves for each financial year as part of the approval of the annual budget. The level of general reserves required at 31 March 2023 is £1,525,000.

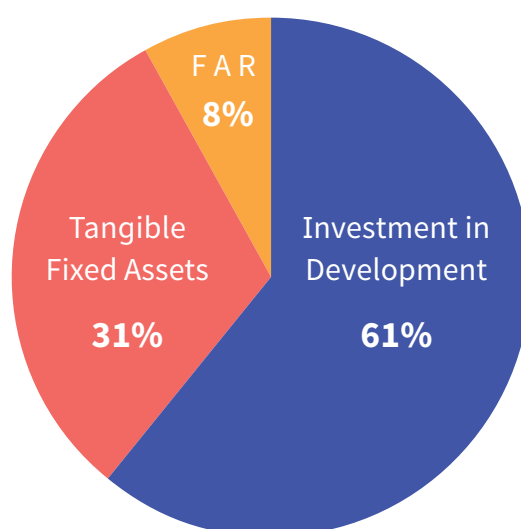
The total reserves carried forward as at 31 March 2023 stand at £2,952,137, of which £1,397,195 is held as general reserves. The shortfall in required general reserves is due to the conscious decision to designate a further £950,000 to strategic investment in 2023-2024. General reserves are forecast to be replenished in early 2024-2025.

Total reserves



General	£1,397,195
Designated	£1,554,942
Restricted	nil
Total	£2,952,137

Designated reserves



Investment in Development	£950,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	£120,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	£484,942
Total	£1,554,942

Investments and bank accounts

VoiceAbility's Investment Committee manages its investment portfolio with the support of management company CCLA. As at 31 March 2023, £849,500 had been invested. Due to the volatility of the investment markets, the performance of the portfolio in 2022-23 has generated an unrealised loss of £49,294 (2022: gain £103,490).

Events since the balance sheet date

There are no significant post-balance sheet events to note.

Going concern

The trustees have assessed whether the use of the going concern basis is appropriate and have considered possible events or conditions that might cast significant doubt on the ability of the charity to continue as a going concern. The trustees have made this assessment for a period of at least one year from the date of approval of the financial statements. The trustees and the executive leadership team have reviewed all budgets and expected income and expenditure projections and have concluded that, together with the reserves established to help in such circumstances, there is a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The charity, therefore, continues to adopt the going concern basis in preparing its financial statements.

Statement of trustees' responsibilities

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue to operate
- state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006.

They are responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. The trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Disclosure of information to the auditors

So far as each person who was a director at the date of approving this report is aware, there is no relevant audit information, being information needed by the auditor in connection with preparing its report, of which the auditor is unaware. Having made enquiries of fellow directors and the charity's auditor, each director has taken all the steps that they are obliged to take as a director in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

This report, along with the financial statements, was approved by trustees on:

26 July 2023

_____ and signed on their behalf by:

James Alistair Schofield – Audit and Risk Committee Chair

Independent auditor's report to the members of VoiceAbility

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of VoiceAbility (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2023 which comprise the statement of financial activities, balance sheet, statement of cash flows and notes to the financial statements, including significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 *The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- Give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2023 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- Have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- Have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and regulation 8 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended)

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charitable company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on VoiceAbility's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other information

The other information comprises the information included in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information contained within the annual report. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon. Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- The information given in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- The trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended) require us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- Adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- The financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- Certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- We have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the statement of trustees' responsibilities set out in the trustees' annual report, the trustees (who are also the directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

We have been appointed as auditor under section 44(1)(c) of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and under the Companies Act 2006 and report in accordance with regulations made under those Acts.

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud are set out below.

Capability of the audit in detecting irregularities

In identifying and assessing risks of material misstatement in respect of irregularities, including fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations, our procedures included the following:

- We enquired of management and trustees, which included obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation, concerning the charity's policies and procedures relating to:
 - Identifying, evaluating, and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - Detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
 - The internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- We inspected the minutes of meetings of those charged with governance.
- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory framework that the charity operates in, focusing on those laws and regulations that had a material effect on the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of the charity from our professional and sector experience.
- We communicated applicable laws and regulations throughout the audit team and remained alert to any indications of non-compliance throughout the audit.
- We reviewed any reports made to regulators.
- We reviewed the financial statement disclosures and tested these to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- We performed analytical procedures to identify any unusual or unexpected relationships that may indicate risks of material misstatement due to fraud.

- In addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, we tested the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments, assessed whether the judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias and tested significant transactions that are unusual or those outside the normal course of business.

Because of the inherent limitations of an audit, there is a risk that we will not detect all irregularities, including those leading to a material misstatement in the financial statements or non-compliance with regulation. This risk increases the more that compliance with a law or regulation is removed from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, as we will be less likely to become aware of instances of non-compliance. The risk is also greater regarding irregularities occurring due to fraud rather than error, as fraud involves intentional concealment, forgery, collusion, omission or misrepresentation.

A further description of our responsibilities is available on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and section 44(1)(c) of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Judith Miller (Senior statutory auditor)

Date 11 September 2023

for and on behalf of Sayer Vincent LLP, Statutory Auditor

Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane, LONDON, EC1Y 0TL

Sayer Vincent LLP is eligible to act as auditor in terms of section 1212 of the Companies Act 2006

Financial statements

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Statement of financial activities (incorporating an income and expenditure account)

For the year ended 31 March 2023

	Note	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2023 Total £	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2022 Total £
Income from:									
Donations and legacies	2	1,948	–	–	1,948	4,834	–	–	4,834
Charitable activities	3	11,245,587	–	57,655	11,303,242	10,857,302	–	94,275	10,951,577
Investments		44,196	–	–	44,196	36,625	–	–	36,625
Total income		11,291,731	–	57,655	11,349,386	10,898,761	–	94,275	10,993,036
Expenditure on:									
Charitable activities	4a	12,018,236	333,254	57,655	12,409,145	10,016,189	197,131	94,275	10,307,595
Total expenditure	4	12,018,236	333,254	57,655	12,409,145	10,016,189	197,131	94,275	10,307,595
Net income / (expenditure) before net gains / (losses) on investments		(726,505)	(333,254)	–	(1,059,759)	882,572	(197,131)	–	685,441
Net gains / (losses) on investments		(49,294)	–	–	(49,294)	103,491	–	–	103,491
Net income / (expenditure) for the year	5	(775,799)	(333,254)	–	(1,109,053)	986,063	(197,131)	–	788,932
Transfers between funds		99,007	(99,007)	–	–	(1,361,187)	1,361,187	–	–
Net movement in funds		(676,792)	(432,261)	–	(1,109,053)	(375,124)	1,164,056	–	788,932
Reconciliation of funds:									
Total funds brought forward		2,073,987	1,987,203	–	4,061,190	2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258
Total funds carried forward		1,397,195	1,554,942	–	2,952,137	2,073,987	1,987,203	–	4,061,190

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities. There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in Note 17a to the financial statements.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Balance sheet

Company no. 03798884

As at 31 March 2023

	Note	2023 £	2022 £
Fixed assets:			
Tangible assets	10	484,942	247,203
Investments	11	1,253,352	1,302,646
		1,738,295	1,549,849
Current assets:			
Debtors	12	1,482,323	1,643,887
Cash at bank and in hand		455,259	1,581,214
		1,937,582	3,225,101
Liabilities:			
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	13	(706,708)	(634,917)
Net current assets		1,230,874	2,590,184
Total assets less current liabilities		2,969,169	4,140,033
Provision for liabilities	15	(17,032)	(78,843)
Net assets		2,952,137	4,061,190
Funds:	16a		
Restricted income funds		-	-
Unrestricted income funds:			
Designated funds		1,554,942	1,987,203
General funds		1,397,195	2,073,987
Total unrestricted funds		2,952,137	4,061,190
Total funds		2,952,137	4,061,190

Approved by the trustees on 26 July 2023 and signed on their behalf by

James Alistair Schofield
Trustee

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 31 March 2023

	2023 £	£	2022 £	£
Cash flows from operating activities				
Net income / (expenditure) for the reporting period (as per the statement of financial activities)	(1,109,053)		685,441	
Depreciation charges	138,096		109,505	
(Gains)/losses on investments	49,294		-	
Dividends and interest from investments	(44,195)		(36,625)	
Increase/(decrease) in provisions	(61,811)		(107,380)	
(Increase)/decrease in debtors	161,565		(630,718)	
Increase/(decrease) in creditors	71,791		263,434	
Net cash provided by / (used in) operating activities		(794,314)		283,657
Cash flows from investing activities:				
Dividends and interest from investments	44,195		36,625	
Purchase of fixed assets	(375,836)		(73,561)	
Net cash provided by / (used in) investing activities		(331,641)		(36,936)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		(1,125,955)		246,721
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		1,581,214		1,334,492
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year		455,259		1,581,214

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

1 Accounting policies

a) Statutory information

VoiceAbility Advocacy is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is incorporated in England & Wales. The registered office address is The Old Granary, Westwick, Oakington, Cambridge, CB24 3AR.

b) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – (Charities SORP FRS 102), The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (September 2015) and the Companies Act 2006/Charities Act 2011.

The Charity has a subsidiary, Advocacy Experience Limited. The subsidiary is currently dormant and therefore consolidated financial statements have not been prepared.

Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy or note.

In applying the financial reporting framework, the trustees have made a number of subjective judgements, for example in respect of significant accounting estimates. Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The nature of the estimation means the actual outcomes could differ from those estimates. Any significant estimates and judgements affecting these financial statements are detailed within the relevant accounting policy below.

The trustees do not consider that there are any sources of estimation uncertainty at the reporting date that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next reporting period.

c) Public benefit entity

The charity meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102.

d) Going concern

The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

e) Income

Income is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and that the amount can be measured reliably.

Income from government and other grants, whether 'capital' grants or 'revenue' grants, is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the grants have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably and is not deferred.

Income received in advance of the provision of a specified service is deferred until the criteria for income recognition are met.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

f) Interest receivable

Interest on funds held on deposit is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably by the charity; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the bank.

g) Fund accounting

Restricted funds are to be used for specific purposes as laid down by the donor. Expenditure which meets these criteria is charged to the fund.

Unrestricted funds are donations and other incoming resources received or generated for the charitable purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds earmarked by the trustees for particular purposes.

h) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to make a payment to a third party, it is probable that settlement will be required and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is classified under the following activity headings:

- Costs of raising funds relate to the costs incurred by the charity in inducing third parties to make voluntary contributions to it, as well as the cost of any activities with a fundraising purpose
- Expenditure on charitable activities includes the costs of delivering services undertaken to further the purposes of the charity and their associated support costs

Irrecoverable VAT is charged as a cost against the activity for which the expenditure was incurred.

Support and governance costs are re-allocated to charitable activities in full.

i) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT (continued)

Governance costs are the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity. These costs are associated with constitutional and statutory requirements and include any costs associated with the strategic management of the charity's activities.

j) Operating leases

Rental charges are charged on a straight line basis over the term of the lease.

k) Tangible fixed assets

Items of equipment are capitalised where the purchase price exceeds £500 for an individual purchase. Depreciation costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the use of the related assets in those activities. Assets are reviewed for impairment if circumstances indicate their carrying value may exceed their net realisable value and value in use.

Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write down the cost of each asset to its estimated residual value over its expected useful life. The depreciation rates in use are as follows:

● Leasehold improvements	over the life of the lease
● Furniture, Computer, Telephones and Software	10% – 33%

l) Listed investments

Investments are a form of basic financial instrument and are initially recognised at their transaction value and subsequently measured at their fair value as at the balance sheet date using the closing quoted market price. Any change in fair value will be recognised in the statement of financial activities. Investment gains and losses, whether realised or unrealised, are combined and shown in the heading "Net gains/(losses) on investments" in the statement of financial activities. The charity does not acquire put options, derivatives or other complex financial instruments.

Investments in subsidiaries

Investments in subsidiaries are at cost.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

m) Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any trade discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

n) Cash at bank and in hand

Cash at bank and cash in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

o) Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

p) Financial instruments

The charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

q) Pensions

After three months of employment, employees are auto enrolled in the group stakeholder pension scheme (Aviva), via a salary exchange method. Employees are required to opt out should they not wish to be enrolled. The charity contributes 5% of gross salary and employees make a minimum contribution of 3% of gross salary. Employees joining the stakeholder pension contract directly with the insurance company. In addition to its own contribution the charity acts as agent in collecting and paying over employee pension contributions.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

2 Income from donations and legacies

	2023 Total £	2022 Total £
Donations (unrestricted)	1,948	4,834

3 Income from charitable activities

	Grants £	2023 Earned income contracts £	Total £	Grants £	2022 Earned income contracts £	Total £
Advocacy Services:						
Connections	30,000	564,333	594,333	30,000	699,089	729,089
London	-	1,615,861	1,615,861	-	1,345,554	1,345,554
Midlands & South East	4,880	2,493,889	2,498,769	2,000	3,250,314	3,252,314
North East	-	2,830,844	2,830,844	-	2,429,588	2,429,588
North West	-	1,050,604	1,050,604	19,500	1,255,309	1,274,809
Scotland	-	1,381,880	1,381,880	-	572,200	572,200
South West	-	1,307,101	1,307,101	20,000	1,302,129	1,322,129
	34,880	11,244,513	11,279,393	71,500	10,854,183	10,925,683
Support Services	22,775	1,074	23,849	22,775	3,119	25,894
Total income from charitable activities	57,655	11,245,587	11,303,242	94,275	10,857,302	10,951,577

All earned income is unrestricted and all grant income is restricted.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

4a Analysis of expenditure (current year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2023 Total £	2022 Total £
Direct staff costs	7,818,226	-	-	-	7,818,226	6,307,390
Indirect staff costs	-	245,852	-	1,929,897	2,175,749	1,455,525
Total staff costs (note 6)	7,818,226	245,852	-	1,929,897	9,993,974	7,762,915
Sub contractor Costs	250,102	-	-	-	250,102	803,563
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	151,526	14,323	-	-	165,848	152,005
Travel & Subsistence	336,911	1,976	-	-	338,886	247,684
Rent & Rates	50,295	-	-	-	50,295	103,650
Professional	1,970	41,157	-	-	43,127	86,171
Other direct costs	1,063,617	29,946	-	-	1,093,564	816,726
Business Development	-	-	-	234,017	234,017	184,528
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	26,063	26,063	18,667
Finance	-	-	-	38,201	38,201	58,475
Human resources	-	-	-	117,274	117,274	35,587
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	38,307	38,307	23,638
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	2,745	-	2,745	185
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	16,740	-	16,740	13,800
	9,672,646	333,254	19,485	2,383,759	12,409,145	10,307,595
Support costs	2,383,759		-	(2,383,759)	-	-
Governance costs	19,485		(19,485)	-	-	-
Investment costs	333,254	(333,254)				-
Total expenditure 2023	12,409,145	-	-	-	12,409,145	-
Total expenditure 2022	10,307,595		-	-	-	10,307,595

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

4b Analysis of expenditure (prior year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs £	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2022 Total £
Direct staff costs	6,307,390	-	-	-	6,307,390
Indirect staff costs	-	91,158	-	1,364,367	1,455,525
Total staff costs (note 7)	6,307,390	91,158	-	1,364,367	7,762,915
Sub contractor Costs	803,563	-	-	-	803,563
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	143,777	8,228	-	-	152,005
Travel & Subsistence	247,684	-	-	-	247,684
Rent & Rates	103,650	-	-	-	103,650
Professional	295	85,876	-	-	86,171
Other direct costs	804,857	11,869	-	-	816,726
Business Development	-	-	-	184,528	184,528
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	18,667	18,667
Finance	-	-	-	58,475	58,475
Human resources	-	-	-	35,587	35,587
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	23,638	23,638
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	185	-	185
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	13,800	-	13,800
	8,411,217	197,131	13,985	1,685,262	10,307,595
Support costs	1,685,262		-	(1,685,262)	-
Governance costs	13,985		(13,985)	-	-
Investment costs	197,131	(197,131)			
Total expenditure 2021	10,307,595		-	-	10,307,595

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

5 Net income / (expenditure) for the year

This is stated after crediting / (charging):

	2023 £	2022 £
Depreciation	138,096	109,505
Operating lease rentals:		
Property	79,474	79,474
Auditor's remuneration (excluding VAT):		
Audit	12,650	11,000

6 Analysis of staff costs, trustee remuneration and expenses, and the cost of key management personnel

Staff costs were as follows:

	2023 £	2022 £
Salaries and wages	8,525,501	6,643,636
Redundancy and termination costs	30,768	10,833
Social security costs	755,129	530,677
Employer's contribution to defined contribution pension schemes	605,342	469,414
Other staff costs	77,233	108,354
	9,993,974	7,762,914

The redundancy and termination costs were accrued at the balance sheet date.

The following number of employees received employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs and employer's national insurance) during the year between:

	2023 No.	2022 No.
£60,000 – £69,999	1	–
£70,000 – £79,999	2	2
£80,000 – £89,999	1	1

The total employee benefits (including pension contributions and employer's national insurance) of the key management personnel were £288,320 (2022: £333,301).

The charity trustees were neither paid nor received any other benefits from employment with the charity in the year (2022: £nil). No charity trustee received payment for professional or other services supplied to the charity (2022: £nil).

Trustees' expenses represents the payment or reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs totalling £nil (2022: £185) incurred by 0 (2022: 11) members relating to attendance at meetings of the trustees.

7 Staff numbers

The average number of employees (head count based on number of staff employed) during the year was 362 (2022: 298) and based on full-time equivalent was 315 (2022: 254).

8 Related party transactions

There are no related party transactions to disclose for 2023 (2022: none).

There are no donations from related parties which are outside the normal course of business and no restricted donations from related parties.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

9 Taxation

The charity is exempt from corporation tax as all its income is charitable and is applied for charitable purposes.

10 Tangible fixed assets

	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Telephones £	Software & Systems £	Total £
Cost					
At the start of the year	17,598	333,519	76,589	102,842	530,548
Additions in year	–	211,038	126,655	38,143	375,836
Disposals in year	(17,598)	–	–	(29,281)	(46,879)
At the end of the year	–	544,557	203,244	111,704	859,505
Depreciation					
At the start of the year	17,598	168,598	74,376	22,774	283,346
Charge for the year	–	85,153	9,240	43,703	138,096
Eliminated on disposal	(17,598)	–	–	(29,281)	(46,879)
At the end of the year	–	253,751	83,616	37,196	374,563
Net book value					
At the end of the year	–	290,806	119,628	74,508	484,942
At the start of the year	–	164,921	2,213	80,068	247,201

All of the above assets are used for charitable purposes.

11 Investments held as fixed assets

	2023 £	2022 £
Fair value at the start of the year	1,302,646	1,199,156
Net gain / (loss) on change in fair value	(49,294)	103,490
	1,253,352	1,302,646
Cash held by investment broker pending reinvestment	–	–
Fair value at the end of the year	1,253,352	1,302,646
	2023 £	2022 £
Investments comprise:		
COIF Charities Investment Fund	1,253,352	1,302,646

12 Debtors

	2023 £	2022 £
Trade debtors	837,451	1,121,154
Other debtors	76,301	65,973
Prepayments	363,081	312,498
Accrued income	205,490	144,262
	1,482,323	1,643,887

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

13 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2023 £	2022 £
Trade creditors	137,695	122,784
Taxation and social security	189,933	145,831
Other creditors	203,679	235,066
Accruals	116,306	61,592
Deferred income (note 14)	59,095	69,645
	706,708	634,917

14 Deferred income

Deferred income comprises income invoiced in advance of work not undertaken by year end

	2023 £	2022 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	69,645	1,506
Amount released to income in the year	(69,645)	(1,506)
Amount deferred in the year	59,095	69,645
Balance at the end of the year	59,095	69,645

15 Provisions for liabilities

Provisions for liabilities comprises

	2023 £	2022 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	78,843	186,223
Amount released in the year	-	-
Increase/(decrease) in provision in the year	(61,811)	(107,380)
Balance at the end of the year	17,032	78,843
Dilapidations provision	1,750	14,500
Customer refund provision	7,282	7,282
Staffing provision	8,000	57,061
	17,032	78,843

Dilapidations Provision

To provide for the refurbishment of our Cambridge office at the end of our tenancy as required by our lease agreement. The likely cost of this is calculated and charged to projects as an additional accommodation cost on an annual basis.

Customer Refund Provision

To provide for a potential refund to a customer.

Staffing Provision

To provide for HR issues identified pre 31st March 2023.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

16a Analysis of net assets between funds (current year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	484,942	–	484,942
Investments	1,253,352	–	–	1,253,352
Net current assets	160,874	1,070,000	–	1,230,874
Provisions	(17,032)	–	–	(17,032)
Net assets at 31 March 2023	1,397,195	1,554,942	–	2,952,137

16b Analysis of net assets between funds (prior year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
* Tangible fixed assets	–	247,203	–	247,203
Investments	1,302,646	–	–	1,302,646
Net current assets	850,184	1,740,000	–	2,590,184
Provisions	(78,843)	–	–	(78,843)
Net assets at 31 March 2023	2,073,987	1,987,203	–	4,061,190

* Prior year tangible fixed assets of £170,905 have been reclassified as designated funds.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

17a Movements in funds (current year)

	At 1 April 2022 £	Income & gains £	Expenditure & losses £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2023 £
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	22,775	(22,775)	-	-
** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	30,000	(30,000)	-	-
*** North Northampton Council	-	4,880	(4,880)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	57,655	(57,655)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	1,500,000	-	(333,254)	(216,746)	950,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	240,000	-	-	(120,000)	120,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	247,203	-	-	237,739	484,942
Total designated funds	1,987,203	-	(333,254)	(99,007)	1,554,942
General funds	2,073,987	11,291,731	(12,067,531)	99,007	1,397,195
Total unrestricted funds	4,061,190	11,291,731	(12,400,785)	-	2,952,137
Total funds	4,061,190	11,349,386	(12,458,439)	-	2,952,137

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

*** Covid-19 infection control receipt.

Investment in Development has been reviewed and now stands at £950,000. This will fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments throughout 2023/24.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund is to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

The **Tangible Fixed Assets** designated fund removes the non-cash element and represents the net book value of fixed assets held.

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2023

17b Movements in funds (prior year)

	At 31 March 2021	Income & gains	Expenditure & losses	Transfers	At 31 March 2022
	£	£	£	£	£
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	22,775	(22,775)	-	-
** Cambridgeshire County Council	-	30,000	(30,000)	-	-
*** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	41,500	(41,500)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	94,275	(94,275)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	400,000	-	(197,131)	1,297,131	1,500,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	140,000	-	-	100,000	240,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	283,147	-	-	(35,944)	247,203
Total designated funds	823,147	-	(197,131)	1,361,187	1,987,203
General funds	2,449,111	11,096,527	(10,110,464)	(1,361,187)	2,073,987
Total unrestricted funds	3,272,258	11,096,527	(10,307,595)	-	4,061,190
Total funds	3,272,258	11,190,802	(10,401,870)	-	4,061,190

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Furtherance of existing Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

*** Covid-19 infection control receipts.

Investment in Development has been reviewed and now stands at £1,500,000. This will fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments over the period 2022 to 2025.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund is to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

The **Tangible Fixed Assets** designated fund removes the non-cash element and represents the net book value of fixed assets held.

18 Operating lease commitments payable as a lessee

The group and charity's total future minimum lease payments under non-cancellable operating leases is as follows for each of the following periods:

	Land and Buildings 2023	2022
	£	£
Less than one year	-	24,070
One to five years	-	12,675
Over five years	-	-
	-	36,745

VoiceAbility

☎ 0300 303 1660

✉ helpline@voiceability.org

🌐 voiceability.org

🐦 [@VoiceAbility](https://twitter.com/VoiceAbility)



About VoiceAbility

We make sure you're heard when it matters most. We've been supporting people to have their say in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.

VOICEABILITY ADVOCACY

England & Wales - Charity number 1076630

Accounts

Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Charity number in England 1076630

Charity number in Scotland SC050036

Company number 3798884



Welcome from the Chair of Trustees



I am delighted to introduce this annual report as the chair of VoiceAbility's board. VoiceAbility strives to make sure that everyone is heard when it matters most. The past two years have brought the importance of VoiceAbility's work into even sharper focus.

Our annual report shows how people are at the centre of VoiceAbility's work. It also shows how when people are supported and empowered, they can self-advocate and build skills they will use long after having been supported by VoiceAbility.

As we entered the second year of the pandemic, one of the priorities for the board was to make sure VoiceAbility was able to continue to deliver support to people. The focus of this is to empower people to have more control over their lives, even at a times of such uncertainty and constant change. VoiceAbility staff and volunteers continued to step up and respond with agility to the challenges the pandemic presented. I am very proud of each and everyone of our people. At VoiceAbility, everyone made sure we never stopped supporting people, in-person where that was possible, and we strengthened safeguarding practice this year to make sure we are relentless in our commitment to challenge ourselves and constantly improve.

VoiceAbility has also been working hard to make sure the voices of people who access health and social care support are heard by policy-makers. This includes those making decisions about how to reform mental health law and how people's rights are upheld when they are deprived of their liberty. And we've celebrated two years of bringing the advocacy sector together to work in collaboration. Our joint aim is to tackle the big issues faced by those people we seek to serve and to drive up the quality and effectiveness of advocacy everywhere.

I am very pleased to report that this year VoiceAbility launched our benefits advocacy service in Scotland. We are proud to offer disabled people in Scotland bespoke advocacy support so they can access benefits from Social Security Scotland. As the service continues to roll out, we hope that advocacy can play its role in supporting disabled people in Scotland to live full lives and feel more empowered. This is particularly close to my heart as I am Scottish and have a long career of working closely with disabled people as a disability activist to enshrine our civil rights.

Every year it is important for me to thank our staff and volunteers for their hard work and thank our partners and commissioners who have collaborated with VoiceAbility. In these continuing times of challenge with coronavirus, I feel this is even more important. I would also like to thank my fellow trustees for their diligence and commitment to VoiceAbility's values, and our executive team, as together we work to push the organisation forward to have greater and more enduring social impact in the future.

Susan Douglas-Scott CBE

Welcome from the Chief Executive

As we look back at the last year, I reflect on the challenges facing the people who access our support. I also reflect on how people are agents for change in their own lives, and how empowerment and recognition of everyone as an individual is at the centre of VoiceAbility's work.



We closed the year shortly after the two-year anniversary of the first national lockdown. VoiceAbility had to navigate a constantly changing environment, but we had solid foundations to build upon, and experience under our belts from the previous year. I am enormously proud of every staff member and volunteer who continued to support people day-in, day-out to make sure people were heard when it matters most. We had a relentless focus on developing and iterating best practice to be responsive to the reality of the pandemic, while still strengthening our vital role in supporting people's voices, upholding people's rights and safeguarding.

The launch of our benefits advocacy service in Scotland, making sure disabled people are supported to access Social Security Scotland payments, could not come at a more opportune moment. The increasing cost of living means many people are making even tougher decisions about their lives. Making sure they are heard when it matters most becomes ever more important.

VoiceAbility exists to raise up people's voices, empower us all to speak out for ourselves, and to represent people and uphold rights when they are at risk. In VoiceAbility, we have a clear vision for the changes we want to see through next year and beyond. We have a vital role to make sure that everyone has a voice, that no one is forced to make life-changing decisions alone, and that we drive forward systemic change to make sure that people who draw on public services are truly listened to. It's a challenging context, but there are real opportunities for us to make positive change.

As much as we focus on supporting people who draw on our support to make changes in their lives or on external change, we must also look at changing ourselves. In VoiceAbility, we will continue to inspire, support and challenge each other as we seek to identify and address the root causes of inequality, within our own organisation as well as the systems in which we work. I am proud that we are investing time, energy and resources in the broad cultural change programme we have bannered 'Belonging' so that VoiceAbility is a more inclusive workplace, where colleagues thrive and feel we can all be our authentic selves.

The success we celebrate in this annual report would not happen without the determination and hard work of our staff and volunteers. I thank every single one of them for stepping up and putting people at the centre of our work. And I thank the board for their wisdom and guidance throughout the year.

Jonathan Senker

About us

We support people to be heard when it matters most. We've been supporting people to be heard in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for over 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.

Our aims

We believe that everyone, regardless of situation, illness or disability, has a right to:

- be heard and respected
- have the same choice, control, and freedom as any other person
- be safe from violence, discrimination, harm or abuse



In line with our charitable objectives, everything we do is focused on achieving these aims.

In this annual report, you can read about how we have achieved these aims through our work with individuals, through work with groups and communities, through working with other organisations and through influencing national policy.

The report also explains the changes we have made within our own organisation to make sure we are best placed to achieve our aims.

Our values

Passionate

We're dedicated to strengthening voice, supporting rights and changing lives. Because we are passionate we:

- are committed to delivering high quality support
- make what we offer accessible to all
- work with policy-makers to safeguard and strengthen people's rights

Empowering

We enable people to live life to the full.

Because we are empowering we:

- support people to speak up for themselves and grow in confidence
- equip people to understand and exercise their rights
- treat people as individuals with their own unique strengths

Collaborative

We listen and shape decisions with others.

Because we are collaborative we:

- involve people we support in shaping our organisation and what we do
- are easy to talk to, considerate and constructive
- ask for and respond to feedback so that we can improve

Honest

We work with integrity and we stick to our principles.

Because we are honest we:

- mean what we say and do what we promise
- make everything clear and transparent
- maintain independence, confidentiality and professionalism

Resourceful

We think ahead and find effective ways to achieve our mission.

Because we are resourceful we:

- focus on solutions
- try out new ideas
- achieve the most we can with the resources we have

Our vision

We will:

- deliver *the* best possible quality of support
- be *the* provider of choice for the services we offer
- be *the* source of authority for expert insight on voice and rights
- be *the* place to work or volunteer with, for anyone who shares our aims

Our strategy for 2019 – 2025

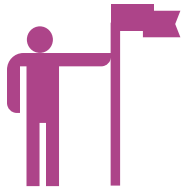
We want to deliver the best possible quality of support to people so they are heard, respected, safe and in control of their own life. Our strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision between 2019 and 2025.

We will diversify the services we offer

People need many kinds of support in order to be heard and have their rights upheld.

Advocacy is one vital type of support, but not the only one. By 2025 we will have significantly widened the range of services we offer which help people to be heard and have their rights upheld.

We will improve our organisational capability

	Value our people	Create an even more positive working culture and clearer opportunities for staff development and progression
	Build the basics	Increase clarity and consistency across all our standards, policies, systems and processes whilst maintaining person-centred service delivery to individuals
	Drive quality	Improve our ability to evidence our impact and outcomes
	Lead the market	Reflect the high quality of our services in how we look and speak as an organisation and in the digital tools we offer
	Grow authority	Continue to ensure that people's voices are heard and their rights respected in local and national policy decisions

Midway through our strategy

At the halfway point of our strategic plan, we took the opportunity to review our approach and step up work in certain areas.

Since 2019, we have delivered significant organisational change to address 'Build the basics' and 'Drive quality'. We will always seek to improve the quality of our services within a continuous improvement cycle. In previous years, we put the systems and foundations in place to deliver these strategic plans. You can read more about this when we cover our work on safeguarding, and how we have focused on continuing to roll out improvements and embed our practice expertise more consistently across the organisation through our practice team.

In this report, we also cover how we are now focusing our strategic delivery on 'Value our people,' 'Lead the market' and 'Grow authority,' in particular with our new Belonging workstream, through strengthening our leadership structure, and gaining leverage and building relationships with key decision-makers and stakeholders.

Our reach this year

We supported more than 26,000 people across England and Scotland this year. The launch of a new advocacy service in Scotland to support people who identify as disabled to access social security benefits means we have the potential to reach tens of thousands more people over the coming years. We also launched new services in Bolton, Blackburn, Shropshire, Lincolnshire, Swindon, Merton, Ealing, Barnet, Enfield, Southwark and Waltham Forest.

To maximise our impact and achieve our aims, we also work to influence change in legislation, policy and wider society. In our influencing work we want to make sure people's rights are protected and strengthened, and that people have the support to understand and use those rights to have power over their own lives. This year, we've continued to work with government and parliamentarians to advocate for an overhaul of social care and reform of the Mental Health Act. As a member of the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) National Steering Group, we have been providing evidence and insight to support the consultation on the Draft Code of Practice for the LPS.

We employ over 300 members of staff and have over 50 volunteers. We have an income of £10,993,036 per annum, largely from contracts with Local Authorities and the NHS.

Our services

All our services have the shared goal of supporting people to be heard when it matters most. Our advocacy services support people to be heard in important decisions about their health, care and wellbeing. Our diverse range of other services, which we call 'Connections services,' are about making sure that all of us can live the lives we choose and have our voices heard in decisions which matter to us personally, locally, regionally and nationally.

Engagement

This year we have developed our contact centre to improve how we engage with people wanting to speak to us, whether this is someone asking directly for support, a family member or friend, a professional, or a casual enquiry. The major development this year has been the introduction of webchat. This means that in addition to people being able to contact us by post, telephone, or email, they can also chat directly through our website to a real person and trained advocate during our core opening hours of Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Advocacy services

Advocates are independent professionals who work with people to help them understand their options, know their rights and say what they want. This helps to make sure that people

are involved as much as possible in decisions about their health and care and are represented where required. There are several laws across the UK that mean some people have a legal right to advocacy to support them at particular points in their life, for example to access services or because they may find it hard to be heard when decisions are being made that affect them.

“Having an advocate there is like someone else on my side, someone to challenge for me.” – feedback to our Cheswold Park Hospital team

“I am so grateful that the advocate has visited me on the ward, that the advocate understands my autism and I know the advocate is there for me to talk to and can speak up for me when I ask him to” – Steph, someone we supported in Doncaster

An advocate can support someone to:

- communicate their views and wishes
- understand their rights
- understand any processes and decisions they are subject to
- understand the options they have
- challenge a decision

Even when someone may find it very hard to tell their advocate what they want, our advocates will use a range of approaches to establish their views and wishes as far as possible and secure their rights. We work with clients in the way that best suits their needs, circumstances and wishes. This means that we can meet face-to-face, online or by telephone, as well as meeting them in community locations of their choosing or in their own home or living space.



Connections services

Our Connections services continue to expand, and this year included:

- **Involvement and participation**
We work with providers, NHS bodies and local government to ensure that the voices of people who use services are heard. For example, our Experts by Experience and Speak Out projects employ people with learning disabilities and autistic people, to capture and convey the voices of their peers and facilitate user involvement networks. Recent successes include their co-production work on [a training film for lawyers who work in the Court of Protection](#).
- **Group advocacy**
We support people to meet together, identify common issues, share their experiences and take action. Where possible, we support these groups to become self-facilitating, empowering people to take more control of their own lives.

- **Peer mentoring**

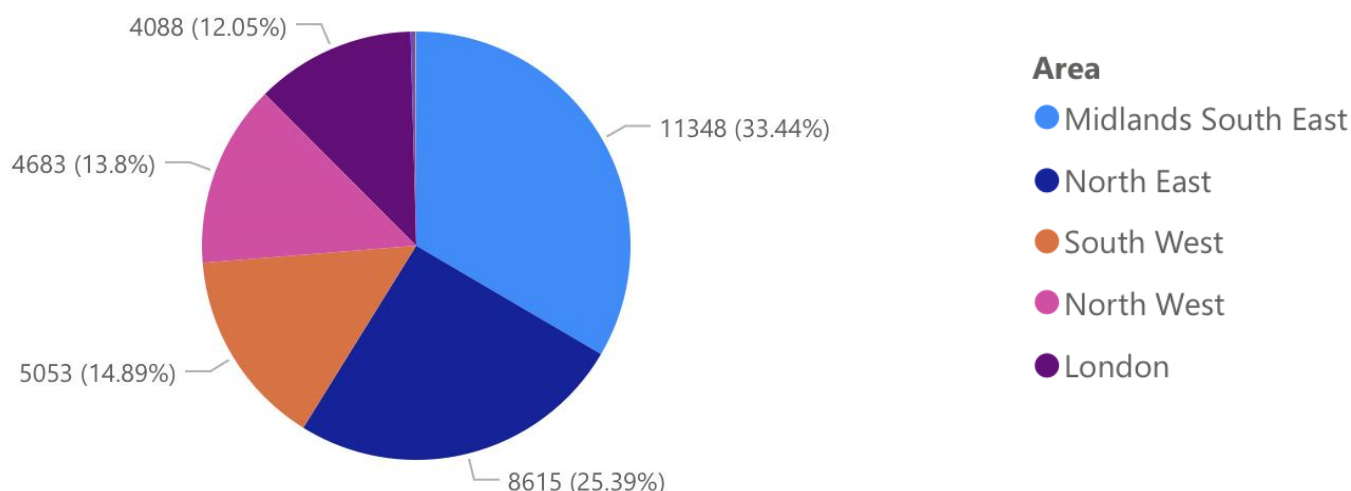
We all trust and feel more comfortable speaking with people who have been through some of the same experiences as we have. Peer advocacy can help us open up, find support and develop our own solutions. Mentors empathise, listen and provide emotional support. They also share their own experience, insights, advice and encouragement.

Where we worked this year

This year, we worked across the UK. In 2021 – 2022 we developed new or additional services in:

- Scotland
- Bolton
- Blackburn
- Shropshire
- Lincolnshire
- Swindon
- Merton
- Ealing
- Barnet
- Enfield
- Southwark
- Waltham Forest

Our presence is especially strong in the Midlands and the North East, with most cases opened in these regions.



New advocacy service in Scotland

On 31 January 2022, we launched a new type of advocacy service which supports disabled people to access benefits from Social Security Scotland. This service is independent of the Scottish government and Social Security Scotland.

“Our advocates will cover the length and breadth of Scotland. The advocacy we provide will support disabled people to make sure their voices are heard and that they know and understand their rights when applying for Social Security Scotland benefits.” – Jonathan Senker, Chief Executive, VoiceAbility

We are delighted to support people to understand their rights and have their voices heard in Scotland, and to help them to overcome any barriers they face when applying for social security benefits. Implementation was an organisation-wide team effort, and we continue to develop the service to reach people across the country.

As part of the launch, we developed an animated video to explain the service, what an advocate does and how people can get support. The video is available [on our website](#) in English, Gaelic, and British Sign Language, as well as with captions.



1. Creating change with individuals

Individual advocacy

Who we worked with

This year we provided individual advocacy support or peer support to 26,157 people. Each time we start a new piece of work with someone, we call it a case. In total, we worked on 33,927 cases this year. This includes both new cases and those we were continuing to work on that were opened in the previous year.

40% of people we worked with in 2021 – 2022 were over the age of 65. The three most common support needs of people we worked with were a mental health condition, dementia or a learning disability. You can find out more in the infographics on the following pages.

What we did

We provided the full range of advocacy types. This means we helped support the voice, rights and choices of people who:

- are detained under the Mental Health Act (Independent Mental Health Advocacy)
- are or may be deprived of their liberty under the Mental Capacity Act (Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy and Relevant Person's Representatives)
- are deemed under the Mental Capacity Act to lack capacity to make decisions about where they will live or the medical treatment they will receive (Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy)
- have substantial difficulty in being involved in local authority care planning processes (Care Act advocacy)
- wish to make a complaint about their NHS care and treatment (NHS complaints advocacy)

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) and Relevant Person’s Representatives (RPR) accounted for just over half of our work this year.

“You have supported [your client] consistently... When the client calls you, you are on the phone to me straight away advocating on her behalf. I really can’t fault your practice and admire how you have supported the client through such difficult times.” – feedback from a social worker to our Bradford team

“I was so anxious regarding my first appointment with my advocate Klara, and had been in services, including inpatient settings, for so long that I didn’t even have the confidence to meet with her on my own for the first time, so my dad joined the appointment. Klara was friendly, encouraging and understanding, which made me soon feel able to meet with them by myself.” – Alex, who we supported in Hertfordshire

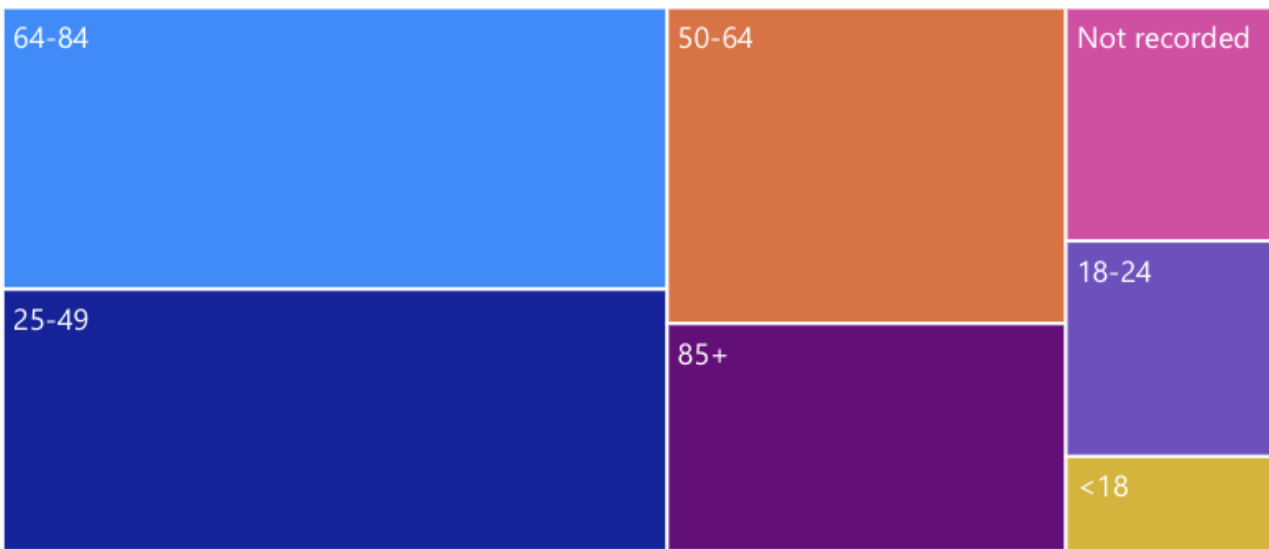
We also worked with children and young people who are:

- looked-after children
- care leavers
- have special education needs or who are disabled
- in custody

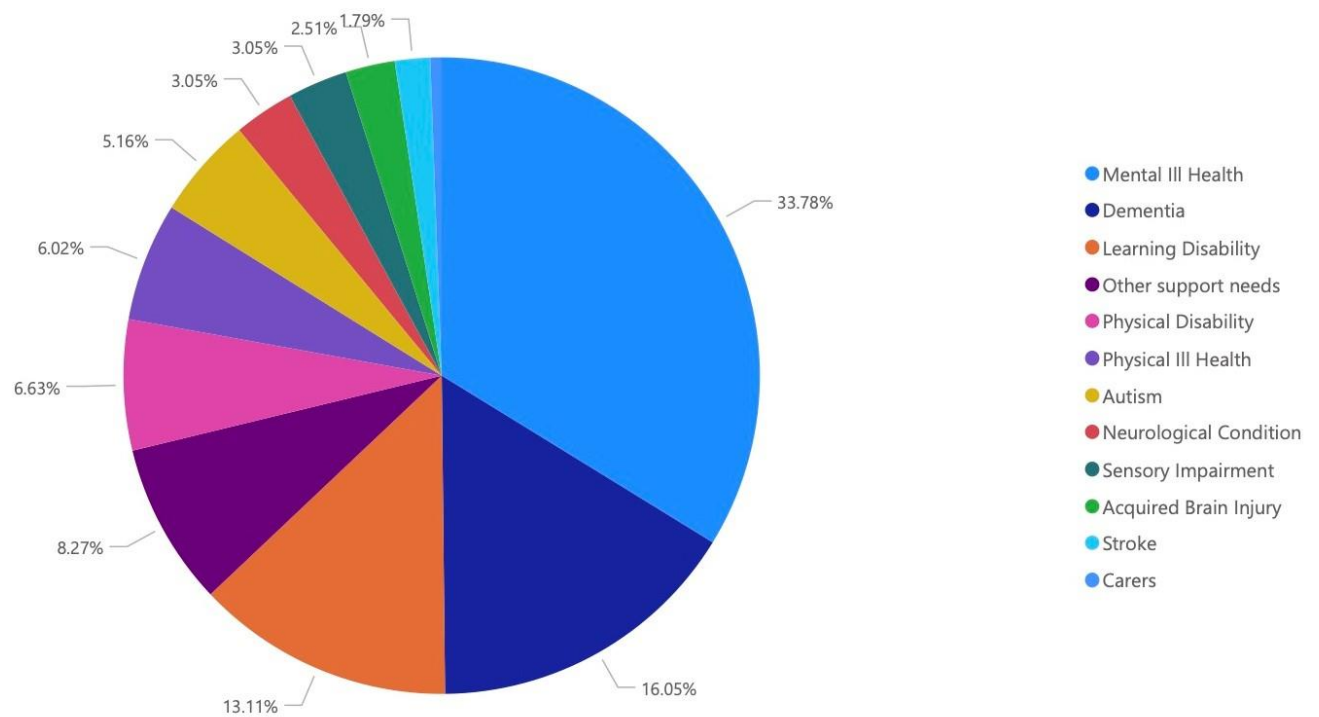
This is called ‘Children and young people’s advocacy’. In some areas, we also provide advocacy to children and young people going through child protection processes, and mental health advocacy for young people. 876 of our new cases this year were for children and young people.



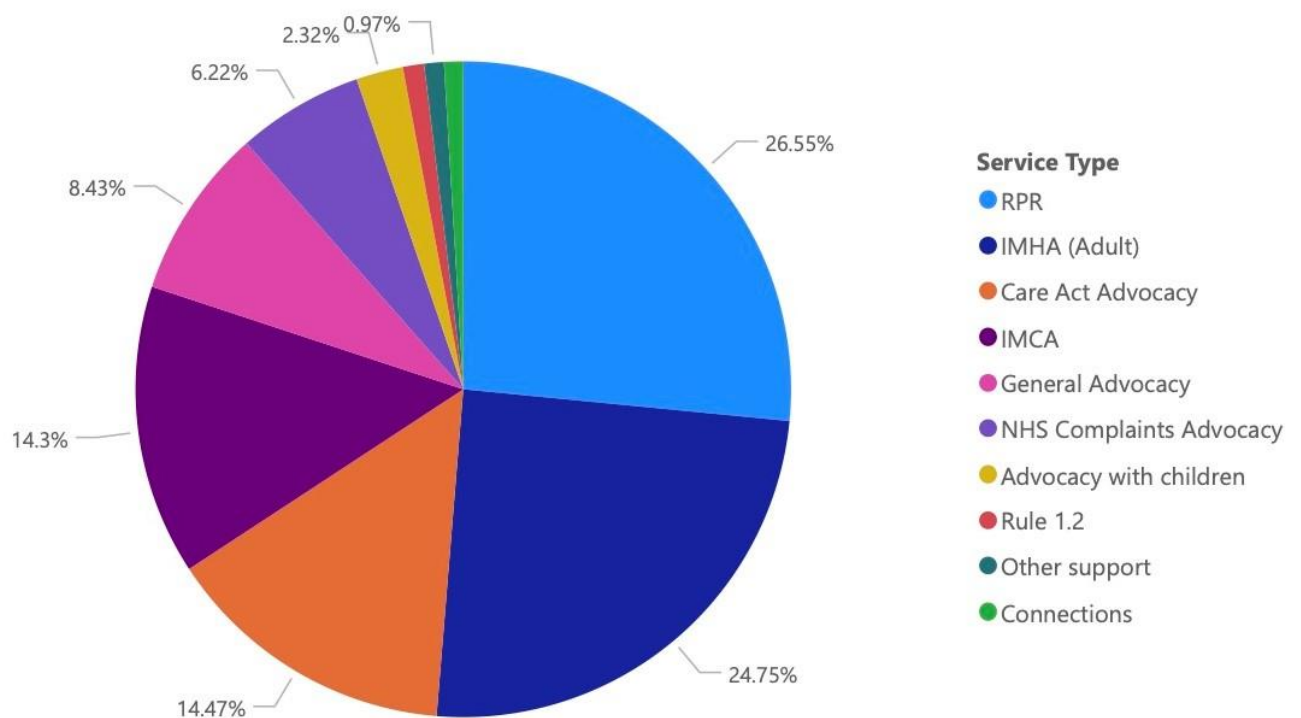
Ages of clients in 2021-22



Why our clients needed support in 2021-22



Number of cases by service type in 2021 – 2022



General advocates provide advocacy to people who need support to be heard, but do not fall into the eligibility criteria for other types of advocacy.

Amy is in her early twenties and a chatty, open and a creative individual who also enjoys musicals, sketching and drawing. Amy describes herself as a “cat mum” and loves animals. Amy is autistic and has mental health problems. Following an incident at home involving her mental health, Amy had been to hospital. Amy shares the family home with her mother and father, and since leaving hospital had been placed in emergency respite care.

She self-referred to our general advocacy services as she wanted support from an advocate. Amy was confused as to why she had been placed in the respite care and did not understand why she was being held against her will. She was scared, had expressed suicidal thoughts and lacked trust in the respite care staff. She needed someone impartial to listen to her and “fight her corner.” Amy was also keen to understand her rights and when she would be allowed to leave. At the visit, the advocate spoke to Amy and to the respite manager, and they supported Amy to help her understand why she was there.



Amy wanted to voice some things she would like while she was in respite, and wanted to have her voice heard at a Care Treatment review the following week. The advocate supported Amy to plan the things she wanted to ask the respite team, and to request a longer time to speak at her review. As a result, Amy was also given an hour to speak rather than half an hour, and the meeting agenda was revised to accommodate her wishes.

With the help of the advocate, Amy was able to plan and express her views in the meeting. She was confident enough to speak to the team at the meeting and express the things she wanted. With the support of the respite team, she was also able to write a timetable for her medication as well. At the next medication review, Amy felt empowered to independently ask questions around her medication. Amy was also assigned a new social worker, who she was able to meet and complete a care assessment with. Amy continues to work with her social worker who is making the appropriate arrangements to support Amy around a referral to a young person’s hostel, her education, volunteering, and her mental health.

Amy said that she was pleased with her outcomes and felt like she had been listened to about the things she wanted to happen in her life. Amy was excited about her future and about becoming more independent.

NHS complaints advocates support people to complain about the treatment or care that they or a friend or family member have received from an NHS service. This support is available at every stage of the complaints process.

This year we've substantially grown our NHS complaints services and revised and updated our popular self-help toolkit for making NHS complaints. We have made some information and guidance available to anyone who wants to understand more about the process and for areas where we are the advocacy provider, we have [a comprehensive Plain English self-help toolkit](#) that clients can use, meaning that they get the level of support that is right for them and we can support more people, more effectively.

Jennifer contacted VoiceAbility as she wanted to raise an NHS complaint regarding her daughter's care and treatment. Jennifer's daughter had a growing tumour between her brain and her eye. Jennifer felt like she was not being listened to by the specialists who were treating her daughter and felt that no services were taking the responsibility to act. Jennifer also felt that they had not received sufficient care and treatment in the past.

Jennifer asked VoiceAbility to support her in making her NHS complaint, as she felt that she was unable to progress through the NHS complaints process alone due to the stress she was under as a carer. Katie, our trained NHS Complaint Advocate, contacted Jennifer and discussed their options. Katie helped follow up Jennifer's complaint and support her in receiving a response. Katie contacted NHS England and discussed the case with an NHS England Complaints Manager who got in contact with Jennifer to manage the NHS complaint.

Katie sent Jennifer a copy of our toolkit which outlines the NHS Complaints process and is a really useful guide, specifically designed to empower our clients to advocate for themselves. Through several phone calls and emails, Katie built up Jennifer's confidence and empowered her to contact NHS England and other organisations independently. Jennifer now felt so confident that she was able to contact her MP to highlight the issues she had faced, in the hope that her MP would be able to support her and to ensure this did not happen to anybody else.

As a result of advocacy support, Jennifer has been able to secure appointments for her daughter, as well as putting assessments in place. Jennifer's daughter also now has a contact in place so they know what they can expect going forward for her treatment. On a telephone call, Jennifer told Katie that she has achieved the outcome she desired from using VoiceAbility, and said that she felt so much more confident in going about the NHS complaint by herself.

Independent Mental Capacity Advocates (IMCAs) support people who lack capacity to make decisions about their long-term accommodation or serious medical treatment and who do not have any friends or family appropriate to consult.

Arthur is a confident person who had recently been diagnosed with dementia. He enjoys watching television and speaking to people one on one. Arthur was living in a rehabilitation placement when his advocate, Sarah, met him. It had been decided that he did not have capacity to make decisions about the care and treatment he receives, but he did have capacity to make his own decisions about medication.

Arthur felt his placement was quite restrictive. He commented it was “like a prison” as he had to have staff go with him for cigarettes and he was not very happy. Sarah spoke with staff and Arthur at the placement, and challenged the capacity assessment completed by the doctor from the council because she did not feel it was clear enough. She also made recommendations to support Arthur to explore other options available to him, so he did not feel so restricted.



Sarah ensured that Arthur’s rights were upheld through this process. A new, more in-depth capacity assessment was completed by the best interest assessor and she was able to provide the council with recommendations to support Arthur in the future to feel less restricted. For Arthur, not being able to have a cigarette in peace was unsettling. The advocate listened to him and allowed his voice to be heard.

Impact of our advocacy

We use an Outcomes Framework, based on the NDTi Outcomes Framework, which enables advocates to focus on delivering person-centred advocacy, while capturing the impact of our work in an accessible way.

Through our Outcomes Framework, we support clients to identify and achieve:

- an ‘advocacy goal’, which is what the person would like to achieve through advocacy
- at least one ‘wider outcome’ we will support the person to develop, for example, ‘I feel confident’ or ‘I am being treated with respect and dignity’ or ‘I know what my rights are’

The person we’re working with completes a self-assessment at the start of their support, rating themselves from 1 – 5 using a straightforward scoring tool. This self-assessment is repeated when we close the case, enabling the person (where possible) and their advocate to reflect on their achievements, and the progress made. To ensure that we understand how effectively we’re supporting people who can’t self-assess, advocates can use our ‘observed goals and outcomes’ which have a 1 – 3 scale.

We use Action Planning to make sure we are focused on supporting people with their advocacy outcomes. It includes outcome-focused events and tasks which we record help an advocate and client to work together on a joint co-produced plan. It is regularly reviewed so that the case stays on the agreed track and is goal-oriented. An Action Plan is designed with the Advocacy Charter in mind. The plan is person-led, accessible and empowering for the client because it is co-produced, clear to both advocate and client, and has the client's desired outcomes as the steering force. Planning is done in a way that works best for the client. It is an important stage of the advocacy cycle.

We often do more than just help people tackle a single issue. Working with an advocate empowers people to achieve outcomes around their wellbeing, knowledge and use of their rights, or in being more able to speak up for themselves in the future.

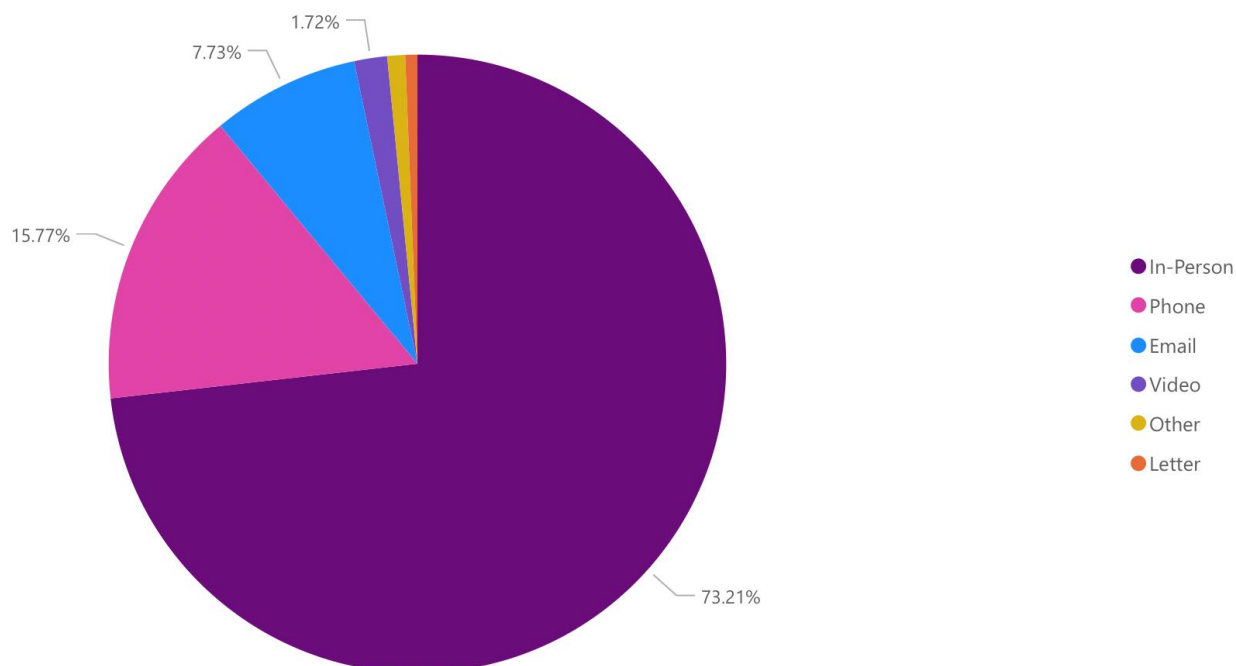
Working with our clients in 2021 – 2022

The still-changing situation with the coronavirus pandemic meant that we were even more flexible and responsive in our support to clients. We continued to provide updated guidance and recommendations to advocates on how they could work, and often shared these with advocacy organisations to support the sector to champion best practice.

Even during the strictest lockdowns, we continued to provide in-person support when the client needed it in order to safeguard their rights as well as health and wellbeing. We have robust risk assessment processes to keep clients and staff safe. In light of the pandemic, we had created a Covid-19 Risk Assessment Tool to support our colleagues who are at greater risk of complications or serious illness from coronavirus, as well as making sure our clients were safe and supported. We continued to review and update this assessment process along with our wider guidance as the situation changed.

People can contact us in a range of ways. Our single contact number is freephone and means that we can direct people to the right teams for support more effectively. We have continued to invest in our contact centre staff and functionality to make sure we are delivering the best service we can to our clients. We also launched webchat on our website this year to add another contact route that people can use to speak with an advocate. Since launching webchat, we have almost halved our response time, meaning that people get help from an advocate quicker, speeding up from our response time from 60 seconds on average to now responding to people in 31 seconds on average.

The different ways we engaged with clients in 2021 –2022



How we supported clients this year

This year, we continued to provide the overwhelming majority of support face-to-face, because we know that this is most effective for most people. We learnt during coronavirus restrictions that we can only effectively safeguard some clients by physically seeing them in their own environments. This is why it was so important for us to enable our staff to continue in-person visits during lockdowns, carefully observing precautions and implementing the robust risk assessment processes that allowed us to reduce the risk of coronavirus for our clients and staff.

We also use technology to support people when people prefer this and where it is effective. For example, our Southampton team observed that remote working went well in their children and young people's advocacy service. It was a way of communicating young people were familiar with, and they were able to turn their camera off if they felt they needed to. This helped them to be more comfortable engaging with their advocate, so that they could work together to achieve the outcome they wanted.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a cornerstone of the work we do, and so we are highly attentive to the ways in which we can understand what a client might be experiencing. We support people to be heard, respected, safe and in control of their own life. Safeguarding is fundamental to delivering on our aims, not just as a regulatory and legal requirement. It is delivered by every single member of our staff and volunteers, constantly.

Internal improvements

In 2020, our Change Programme and operational restructuring saw safeguarding become better embedded into management and led by our Practice team. This year the benefits of this continued to be evident. We have improved oversight which allows us to identify safeguarding issues, and we have a strong culture of learning and development spearheaded by our dedicated Safeguarding Lead who works closely and constantly with the whole Practice team.

Our Safeguarding Lead is a specialist point of contact for advocacy team leaders, and their work includes identifying and monitoring potential issues and concerns, reviewing our procedures and policies, assessing whether we have any blind-spots, including in light of national investigations and external intelligence, and making sure that our advocates receive the best training and continuous professional development, so that our service delivery is of an excellent quality. We deliver bespoke and refresher training. Staff and volunteers are supported to be reflective practitioners and to identify areas where they need more support, so that they can be given the tools and training they need to keep improving the service they provide. We respond to internal feedback, for example issues raised about where low-level concerns can be recorded.

We also have a safeguarding Community of Practice, where our staff can share and discuss safeguarding issues, best practice, dilemmas and questions. Staff on the safeguarding Community of Practice include Experts by Experience – ensuring the voice of people with lived experience is central to our development of best practice within the organisation.

Our external work

This year, we have undertaken audits on our practice in services we provide or have provided where concerns have been raised externally, including by CQC reports, OFSTED, media or other professionals. We have also influenced change ourselves, escalating concerns externally.

In Hampshire, we were asked by the Safeguarding Adults Board to represent the voice of a young person who had died. A key aim of this was to develop an advocacy model that could be used in other Safeguarding Adults Reviews, to bring into focus the experience of the person and their views and wishes. We spoke to people who had known the young person, and the feedback from the Safeguarding Adult Board and Independent Reviewer on the advocacy report and input was overwhelmingly positive. We were informed that it was “extraordinarily helpful” to the process and meant that the focus of the full day session was on the young person’s voice. The young person’s parent said she felt the advocacy report had “nailed it.” Following the success of this work, the Hampshire Safeguarding Adults Board commissioned VoiceAbility to carry out a similar piece of work for a thematic review. We will continue to identify how we can strengthen the role of advocacy in SABs.

For Safeguarding Adults Week 2021, our Safeguarding Lead wrote [a series of articles](#) which were shared publicly. These articles reflected on and provided resources on key issues in safeguarding and on ways advocates can develop their practice to be alert to these issues.

Using data to inform our safeguarding work

Our safeguarding data is reported quarterly, and we monitor and use this data to identify areas where further examination is needed – for instance, why numbers of safeguarding concerns might vary across regions, or if we have lower or higher than expected levels of reporting of concerns. An example of this in our Safeguarding Annual Report, where we observe trends in data and take action to review and audit services where our experience suggests there might be anomalies. This means we can make sure we are always taking the action we need to to safeguard our clients.

The data we have supports our hypothesis that coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions reduced the number of safeguarding concerns raised, strongly suggesting that reduced face-to-face contact with clients had an impact on our ability to observe safeguarding concerns. We are proud to have continued to offer in-person advocacy at all times, and to have successfully made the case across the sector and to government and other bodies that advocacy must be prioritised as an essential service and advocates must be able to carry out their duties.

Number of Safeguarding cases raised

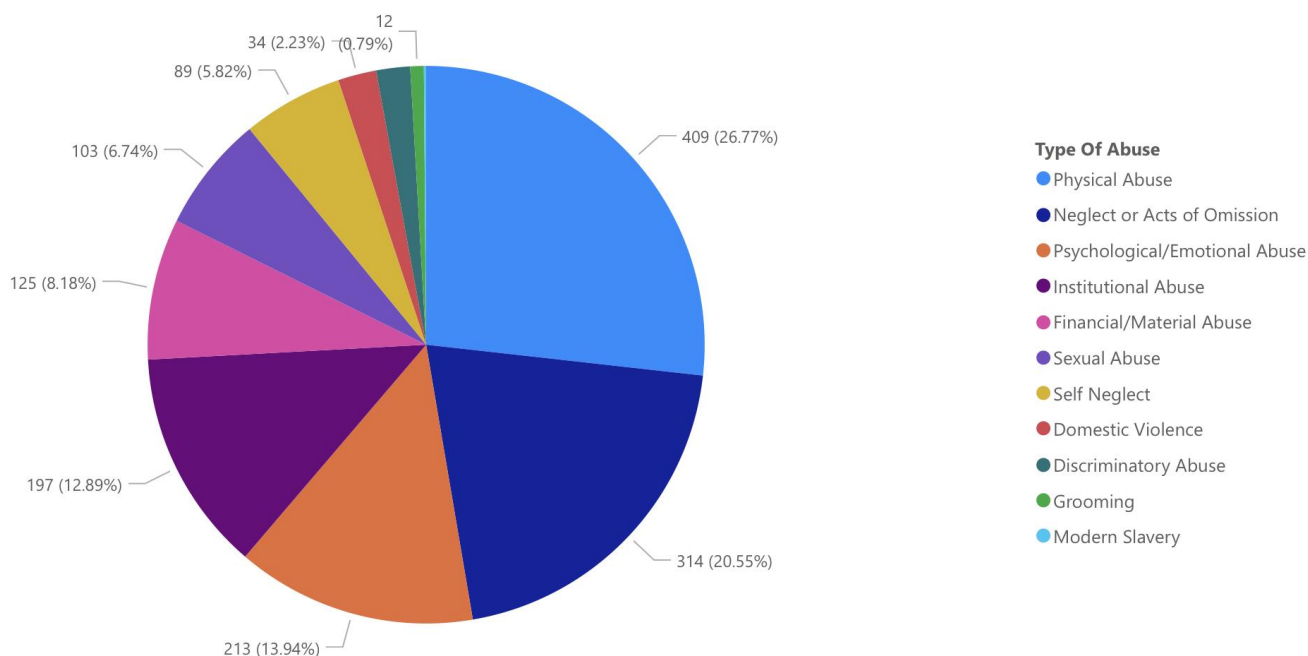


The improved oversight we have comes from several sources, including:

- improved supervision and audit of advocates by line managers, who observe advocates while they practice and then discuss findings and then create a learning and development plan (this year we updated our Advocacy Practice Audit and Supervision guidance to reflect our new Advocacy Standards Framework)
- better use of data to identify concerns (and changes to how we capture data, including adding additional sections to gather more information)
- internal case auditing by the practice team
- increased monitoring of external intelligence
- frontline staff through our Communities of Practice

Safeguarding concerns in 2021 – 2022

This chart shows the number of safeguarding concerns raised to the relevant authorities by our colleagues this year, by type of abuse:



Connections services: our work with individuals

Our Connections service brings together all of our participation, involvement, co-production and peer support work into one team. These services are varied but are all about ensuring that the voices of people we work with are really heard so that their rights are upheld, and they can make a difference to the services that affect them. By employing and working with people who have similar experiences, we empower them to advocate for themselves and support others to speak out about the things that are important to them.

Our Quality Checkers in Northamptonshire are people with lived experience of a learning disability who visit, in person or virtually, residential settings and day services to rate and report on the quality of that service.

In Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire we have Speak Out Leaders, and in Hampshire and Southampton we have Self-Advocates. These are people with a learning disability and/or autistic people who speak with their peers about all aspects of their lives, and share feedback with the local authority and a wide range of services and organisations.

Peer mentoring and peer coaching

We're part of Camden and Islington's Peer Involvement Network. Our Peer Coaches (a paid role) work with people as they are discharged from the Camden Crisis Teams, and support them to explore ways to improve and maintain their wellbeing. Our peer mentors are trained volunteers with lived experience of mental health challenges, who draw on this to support others to stay well and achieve health and wellbeing goals. This year, we trained 17 peer mentors.

In June 2021 the Camden Mental Health Resilience Network Alliance, of which our Camden Peer Mentoring service is a key member, was shortlisted for a Health Service Journal (HSJ) Partnership Award in recognition of the support they have given people in Camden to live fulfilling lives as part of their community.

The Resilience Network Alliance works with statutory mental health services, General Practitioners, Social Care, other voluntary and community organisations, and people who use mental health services in Camden to co-produce a range of preventative community-based support services for adults. It also works together with Camden residents to design and deliver services that improve their mental health, and is:

- available early to stop problems getting worse
- easy to access
- focused on reducing inequalities in mental health
- flexible and responsive to suit people's needs

Experts by Experience: helping to ensure quality care for people in Coventry and Warwickshire

Experts by Experience are people who have experience of, or caring for someone with, a learning disability or autism and of spending time in hospital because of being mentally unwell. They are invited to take part in Care and Treatment Reviews, which take place when people with a learning disability and/or autistic people are either at risk of being admitted to, or are currently detained in, an inpatient psychiatric service.

Experts by Experience will often have one-to-one conversations with people, so they can share their views and wishes about their care and treatment. They want to know whether the person is safe, if they are getting good care and treatment, what their plans are for the future, and whether care and treatment can happen in their own home and their own community.

By drawing on their own experiences of being in hospital and adapting this to what the patient is going through, they share their thoughts with the rest of the panel, the person themselves and their family, to ensure that their care plan is person-centred.

Developing the quality of our services for individuals

Quality Performance Mark

We hold the QPM (Quality Performance Mark) which is independently assessed and awarded by NDTi. We have held the QPM since 2011, with our 2020 reappraisal highlighting:

- our highly person-centred advocacy practice
- our excellence in non-instructed advocacy
- our thorough approach to safeguarding
- overwhelmingly positive feedback from clients and external stakeholders

This year, we have started to get ready for our QPM assessment in 2022 to make sure we are able to reflect the improvements and developments we have made as an organisation to further drive up quality of our advocacy.

Launching our own Advocacy Standards

Our first Advocacy Standards were developed in 2019. The standards set a minimum level that clients can expect from our advocacy services. This year, we reviewed and updated our Advocacy Standards to make sure they stay relevant to our work.

Our Advocacy Standards set out the key components of what is required for quality advocacy at VoiceAbility, ensure consistency in the services we provide to our clients, and provide a framework for consistent and fair professional development and appraisals for advocates.

VoiceAbility advocates asked for more clarity on what the standards look like in practice, so we developed a new framework which gives a clear guidance for what an advocate needs to do to achieve the standards.

The new framework shows advocates and managers how to achieve the standards in practice. Our standards are part of our supervision and practice audits to make sure our standards are consistent and high across the organisation.

Dedicated practice team

Our Director of Practice, Development Lead, System Support Lead, Practice Lead and Safeguarding Lead head teams who continuously deepen and broaden staff training and professional development. They are responsible for making sure that all our services are delivered in line with relevant legislation, codes of practice, guidance and national standards. We also have a Training Manager in Scotland, to oversee these functions and ensure quality in our social security benefits advocacy service.

The practice team engage constantly with the policy and news landscape and share insights to ensure that our services follow the very best practice, are of high quality and that all advocacy disciplines provide specialist support. The team work closely with the policy, public affairs and communications team to disseminate information and feed in expertise into our policy influencing work. The teams also meet regularly to share updates and as a means to reduce the risk of potential silo working.

‘Communities of Practice’ for advocacy specialisms

Our advocates are connected with those across the UK who deliver the same type of advocacy, to form Communities of Practice where on-the-ground expertise and best practice from across our staff team can be shared. They quickly address issues and rapidly disseminate new advocacy practice information to ensure a consistent approach across our teams and they provide first-hand and expert insight to inform our policy and public affairs work.

Following the success of our Safeguarding and IMHA Communities of Practice, we have implemented new communities to support the following advocacy specialisms:

- Children and Young People
- Care Act
- Mental Capacity Act (IMCA & RPR)
- NHS Complaints
- Litigation Friends

Creating change with individuals: future plans

Next year, we will continue to deliver improvements to our advocacy practice and the support we provide to individuals. In particular, we will:

- Continue to support the implementation of our new contract in Scotland, in particular as new benefits come under the remit of Social Security Scotland
- Roll out a new High-Level Practitioner role for advocates to support our peer-led quality processes for advocacy practice, so that quality advocacy is further embedded across our services
- Finalise the development of the learning and development elements of the new HR system to include excellent Learning and Development functionality and launch e-learning across the organisation
- Work across teams in policy, practice and operations to make sure that changes to statutory advocacy under the Mental Capacity Act, Care Act, and Mental Health Act are person-centred and deliver change for our clients
- Develop our safeguarding work further, including making sure we are well connected into the relevant bodies, can escalate concerns, and can influence safeguarding practice more widely

2. Creating change with groups and communities

Many of our Connections services enable people to be involved in their communities, shaping services they need and making decisions in their own communities. This work promotes inclusion and social justice.



Supporting people to shape their communities and local services

We facilitated four groups for people with learning disabilities this year:

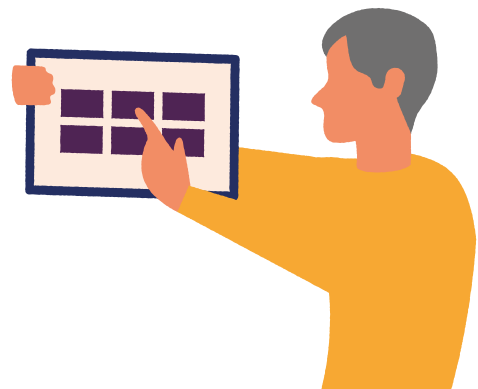
- Speak Out meetings in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
- Hampshire's Learning Disability Partnership Board
- Busy People group in Southampton, who also participate in Southampton Learning Disability Partnership board

Most of the project leaders and participants have learning disabilities or are autistic and bring the benefit of their own experience to their role.

Spotlight on Hampshire

The Busy People group worked with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) on the recommissioning of learning disabilities services provided by Southern Health NHS. Self-advocates explored issues around learning disabilities and mental health, and were supported to feed this back to the Learning Disability Partnership Board. Busy People were concerned about the pandemic's impact on the mental health of people with learning disabilities and led the Board's thinking about the support needed as the 'unlocking road map' was implemented.

Self-advocates were also involved in the production of a transition plan for Hampshire Learning Disability Partnership (HLDP), where they gave their views on the plan content, leading to clarification on what was expected from Local Implementation Group meetings. This included recommendations for accessibility: they said that shorter meetings and information in Easy Read were needed so that people could better engage.



Our Connections services co-produced a film

Our Speak Out project in Cambridgeshire and our Experts by Experience project in Coventry and Warwickshire worked with researchers at ICPR, Birkbeck School of Law to make [a training film](#) for specialist lawyers who work in the Court of Protection. The film was called 'Participation and Communication in The Court of Protection' and was developed by the Judging Values and Participation in Mental Capacity Law team. The film will help lawyers better understand the perspectives of autistic people and people with learning disabilities, and improve how they plan for meetings. Using role-play and roundtables with lawyers and autistic people and/or people with learning disabilities, the film shows lawyers how to enhance communication and achieve better quality evidence for the court.

As Speak Out Leader Sean Nightingale said, "Being able to work and build trust with people with disabilities better than they might do already is really important, it may help people when solicitors are making decisions for them. If they can get to know the people themselves, it will help the person they are working with to trust them."

Feedback was hugely positive. Andrew Spooner, Associate Solicitor, Head of Mental Capacity at Biscoes Solicitors said: "The video is the most important video on technical practice I have ever seen. It really conveys how to improve communication with a protected party in the Court of Protection and I think it is going to revolutionise practice, thank you again."

Mat Culverhouse, partner at Irwin Mitchell solicitors and co-chair of the Court of Protection Practitioners' Association, said: "This film is an invaluable resource for Court of Protection practitioners at all levels, from those starting out in this field to those with many years of experience. This important project demonstrates the value of training based on rigorous research and learning from those with lived experience, and it is to be hoped that this video will be just the first of many future resources produced by the project team."

Change with groups and communities: future plans

As part of our 2019 – 2025 strategy, we will continue to diversify our Connections services. Our aim in this is to help more people to have their voices heard and to have choice, control and freedom in their lives. To achieve this we will:

- invest in our structures to grow and develop our Connections services
- expand the breadth of our services to support more people whose voice often goes unheard
- build a more empathetic and experience-based picture of how people we support feel and what they think about decisions being made
- improve our ability to make a difference in the lives of more individuals, whether that is through direct delivery of support or by influencing local authorities and policy makers

3. Creating changes in law, policy and society

Working in partnership for wider change

We are here to make sure that everyone has a voice when it matters most. To achieve this, we need to work alongside other organisations who have the same goals, ethos and visions as us. This is especially necessary in our work to change and influence national policies and practices so that there is greater support for, and fewer barriers to, people's voices being heard and rights respected. We put time, effort and resources into working collectively and influencing policy and practice alongside the people who we support.



We lead and facilitate a sector-wide [Advocacy Leadership Network](#), made up of over 50 organisations.

“The early meetings of the ‘Advocacy Leaders Group’ resulted in hugely valuable sharing of knowledge about the impact of the pandemic on people we support and on our work. It helped us to shape how we responded both within each of our organisations and collectively. Now the conversation reaches well beyond coronavirus. Ultimately, working together is helping us as an advocacy sector do what we are here to do: make sure that people’s voices are heard.” – Jonathan Senker, VoiceAbility Chief Executive

We are part of the following alliances and membership organisations:

- Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Health and Wellbeing Alliance, via the Complex Needs Consortium
- Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition
- Care and Support Alliance (CSA)
- Association of Mental Health Providers (AMHP)
- Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG)
- National Voices
- Clinks
- ALLIANCE
- National Council of Voluntary Organisations

Influencing public policy

Liberty Protection Safeguards

VoiceAbility have been working to support the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) over the past four years as they have developed the Code of Practice and regulations. Because of this, DHSC invited us to join the National Implementation Steering Group. We are the only advocacy provider in this group, and this means we have a formal role in supporting the consultation and the co-production of the Code of Practice and the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS).

At the end of 2021, the DHSC confirmed that LPS will not be implemented in April 2022. Following this update, the draft Code of Practice, regulations and a new Impact Assessment have been published for consultation. The consultation is open until July 2022 and VoiceAbility is working with others across the sector to develop a consultation response that brings together the value of advocacy and provides a coherent shared sector voice on LPS.

“The decision to deprive someone of their liberty is a serious one and the Liberty Protection Safeguards are complex so we must get implementation right. Open dialogue and consultation is the best way to do that.” – Charlotte Gill, Director of Policy, Public Affairs and Communications at VoiceAbility

One of our priorities is that LPS is rolled out successfully from day one. Now we have the draft code published, we’re more intensively reviewing our IMCA service model and how we will make sure we are able to be agile in our response to the implementation of LPS.

Influencing reform of the Mental Health Act to improve access to IMHA

The government is expected to bring forward its reform of the Mental Health Act later this year. As part of the reforms, they are seeking to expand the role of Independent Mental Health Advocates and improve access to IMHAs, including for those who are voluntary or informal patients. VoiceAbility has been working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to inform their legislative proposals on advocacy as part of the Mental Health Act reforms.

“It wasn’t until I had been in the hospital for two weeks that I met an advocate. His presence was reassuring in amongst the horror that I was experiencing inside my head, and I was relieved to have someone there who appeared to be ‘on my side’. However, almost as soon as the advocacy began, I was discharged from the hospital and unable to benefit from continued support of this kind.

“Because I didn’t know I had the right to an advocate and I wasn’t well enough at the time to ask for an advocate as soon as I arrived in hospital, I didn’t get support that might have made a big difference to my experience. Surely, we want to make sure people find it easy to get support when so unwell and going through such a difficult time?” – Emma, a VoiceAbility advocate who has first-hand experience of having support from an advocate

In advance of the legislation arriving in parliament, VoiceAbility continues to promote the benefits of extending eligibility to IMHA as part of the reforms of the Mental Health Act. [Our briefing](#) makes clear the case for increased access to advocacy. We have recently agreed a

joint project, as part of our VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance programme with DHSC and NHS England, where we will be undertaking further research into the value of enhanced access to advocacy as part of the MHA reforms.

“The Department should commit to expanding Independent Mental Health Advocates support so that all children and young people admitted to hospital informally have the same legal right to an Independent Mental Health Advocate as those admitted under legislation without qualification. This advocacy should all operate on an opt-out basis.” – Health and Social Care Select Committee, November 2021

We are also getting traction with our messages on the Mental Health Act. The chair of the Health Select Committee, Jeremy Hunt MP, [referenced our correspondence](#) and passed on our questions about pre-legislative scrutiny to the Health Secretary. A question about racial disparities in mental health treatment asked by Stephen Hinchley, our Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer, was also selected by the Health Select Committee to be put directly to the Health Secretary and [you can hear his response](#).

Building the Right Support: the case for a specialist advocacy service

There is serious concern and anger about the experiences of people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services. Around 2,000 people continue to be held in mental health facilities, despite the heightened risks of abuse and neglect and lack of therapeutic benefit. Some people can be held for decades facing a system that is unable to support them.

“Mental health inpatient services for people with a learning disability and autistic people present heightened risks of abuse and neglect, prolonged detention without therapeutic benefit and excessive delays to hospital discharge. To be effective in these challenging circumstances, an advocacy service needs highly skilled staff with the time to provide more intensive support and working closely with family members. This can only be achieved through a model of national commissioning which would also provide greater national accountability.” – VoiceAbility

In response to the Care Quality Commission’s (CQC) Out of Sight progress report, published on 25 March 2022, VoiceAbility shared [our paper](#) setting out the case for a new, specialist and nationally commissioned advocacy service for people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services. Our recommendations for the Department of Health and Social Care are that they should:

- nationally commission a specialist advocacy service to provide more effective and consistent support for people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services. This model would better meet people’s needs by allowing for more intensive and long-term support, and relationship development between an advocate and the person. It would enable higher quality consistent national standards, where providers have well-developed skillsets and training in specialist advocacy.
- legislate for an opt-out model of advocacy provision in reform of the Mental Health Act, as recommended by the independent review and a wide range of other stakeholders. This ‘opt-out’ model would improve access to advocacy services. Currently one in four people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services do not receive any support from an independent advocate, and the current legal duty to inform and refer eligible people is weak.

New law on the use of force in mental healthcare settings

New rules on the use of force in mental healthcare settings were implemented from 31 March 2022. The new rules identify an important role for independent advocates in supporting people to understand and exercise their rights in relation to the use of force. VoiceAbility advocates working within mental health settings, whether as IMHA, IMCA or other forms of advocacy, have been instructed to read the Mental Health Units (Acts of Force) Act 2018 statutory guidance to understand the role they are expected to play. We have also developed a presentation that explains the changes and a template letter that advocates can use. We have made this available to all VoiceAbility teams and have also shared this through the advocacy leadership group that we facilitate of over 50 advocacy providers.



Changes in law, policy and society: future plans

Our priorities for the year ahead include:

- **Improving people's experiences** when receiving care or treatment for mental ill health - pushing for effective reform of the Mental Health Act so that more of us get the support of an advocate when it matters most
- **Making sure that people are heard and their rights are respected** by contributing to the code of practice and regulations for the Mental Capacity Act, ahead of the launch of LPS, and working with policy-makers and parliamentarians as these progress through parliament
- **Pushing for a people-centred vision for social care** so that social care reform prioritises our rights to have choice and control over how we live our lives and fosters a system where we are all empowered to thrive as well as survive
- **Challenging inequalities** so that we all get the support, care and treatment we need to live healthy and fulfilled lives, especially if we are disabled, have a learning disability, or are autistic
- **Establishing our proactive agenda** for the changes we want to see in the coming years, setting out a future vision that drives through our work to influence policy, law and practice
- **Empowering and supporting the voices of people** who draw on our services and provide a perspective which is genuinely grounded in lived experience

4. Creating change in VoiceAbility

Strengthening our leadership team

This year, we reviewed and updated our leadership structure so that we can deliver more effectively on our mission to ensure that people are heard when it matters most. To take VoiceAbility forward, we formed new executive leadership and senior management teams to accelerate our development, make sure that change is better managed, and provide greater consistency and clarity for our staff and volunteers. These teams saw our 'heads of' functions step into director roles to give clearer lines of accountability and oversight, and our former director roles were strengthened by created two new 'chief of' roles.

Our Executive Leadership Team (ELT) is a Chief Operating Officer and a Chief Financial Officer, reporting into the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer continues to report into the Board of Trustees.

Our Senior Management Team (SMT) brought eight new director roles together with each director reporting to either the Chief Operating Officer or the Chief Financial Officer. Our SMT consists of directors of:

- Operations
- Practice
- IT and Data
- Finance and Reporting
- People
- Business and Strategy
- Project Management
- Policy, Public Affairs and Communications

Jonathan Senker explained why these changes were made:

"There is a huge need for quality support to enable people to have a voice in all aspects of our lives. These changes will bring the depth and experience we need across our leadership so that VoiceAbility can grow, diversify and continuously improve our services, so that together we can support more people to be heard when it matters most.

We need to have the right structure and approach in order to support and bring out the best in our whole staff and volunteer team. I know from listening to people throughout the organisation how important it is that we lead and manage change in a coordinated and effective way. Bringing together our senior staff into a team of directors, and investing in project management, will help ensure that we all move forward together."

In the new leadership structure, director roles and chief officer roles have greater accountability, authority and decision-making ability than they previously had, while in most cases, covering the same areas of responsibility. Empowering this team means that we can make swifter decisions, closer to our work on the ground. It will also free up the executive leadership team to focus on achieving our long-term mission and growing our overall positive social impact.

Professional development and supporting our people

We continue to invest in operational improvement and in our people, in order to provide the best possible quality of support. This year we worked on:

- **Making our service delivery resilient by ensuring that all of our staff are experts**
Our practice team continue to review and develop our advocacy standards, and ensure that our advocates can implement best practice by sharing and communicating both worries and excellent models of working to their team and to their Community of Practice. This means that they are ready for change, constantly supported and can share successes.
- **Investing in learning and development**
This year, we have invested significantly in our learning and development function by recruiting two new Learning and Development Officers. We have developed a new learning hub which is an e-learning platform to provide modules for staff to continue to reflect on and grow their understanding of advocacy, and to streamline and improve our induction processes for all staff and volunteers. This learning hub launches in May 2022.
- **Engaging staff around remuneration and benefits**
We review our approach to remuneration and benefits at the end of this financial year and have identified the changes we will make and that will be rolled out next year. We will be working with our staff forums to understand what is of most value to staff so that any changes are informed by our employees. When reviewing pay we take on board a range of considerations, including making sure pay is fair and competitive. We are a certified Living Wage Employer and are proud to be so.
- **Belonging Project and staff forums**
Our Belonging workstream launched recently with a dedicated Belonging Project Manager. It has been established to drive forward a seismic cultural change in VoiceAbility, so that people can feel more valued, can bring their authentic selves to work, and can thrive personally and professionally. Our work on Belonging is building on our previous work creating thematic or issue-led staff forums and is establishing an all-staff forum which will include regional representation. This staff forum will meet every quarter, and will collaborate to continue to strengthen VoiceAbility's culture of inclusiveness, in practical ways and in response to what our colleagues express. Our staff forums are a space where staff can come together and discuss issues that matter to them, share expertise and experiences, and also make proposals to the organisation of things that could be improved or new ideas for us to explore. They are also a source of valuable information and feedback where we can seek staff views on new initiatives.
- **New HR system**
We worked on developing a new HR and payroll system, with increased Learning and Development functionality, to continue to meet our vision of delivering the best possible quality of support to our staff and clients. This system will roll out through 2022. We will work with managers and employees to guide and coach them with a particular focus on wellbeing and performance. This holistic approach contributes to a

central aim of all of us in VoiceAbility: that VoiceAbility is a great place to work, where people are valued and can be themselves and feel supported.

- **Recruitment and Organisation Design Lead**

This is a new role which focuses on advocacy recruitment, identifying how we can reach more candidates both at trainee and qualified level and how to appeal to and reach underrepresented groups. They will review our recruitment and onboarding processes, and ensure that we are focused on the behaviours, values and skills that our staff need in our approach to recruitment.

- **Exploring more diverse routes into advocacy**

We are working with others in the Advocacy Leadership Network to discuss opportunities to collaborate across the advocacy sector, to strengthen the case for a career in advocacy, and to explore apprenticeships.

Change in VoiceAbility: future plans

People are central to VoiceAbility. To make sure our people can be supported to thrive in work or volunteering, we will:

- Invest significant energy, time and resources in our Belonging workstream by putting a senior leadership role in to drive it forward and support the team to identity and embed culture change, while ensuring our approach is inclusive and the voices of everyone in VoiceAbility are heard
- Review our approach to internal communications and establishing a new role specifically to support a strong internal communications function and further support our work on Belonging
- Review our remuneration and benefits, including consulting staff where appropriate to make sure we are pay fairly and in recognition of the skills and expertise VoiceAbility staff bring with them to work every day
- Review our approach to staff reviews and appraisals to make sure they are person-centred, support people to do their best work and be their authentic selves, playing to their strengths in their role
- Roll out an improved self-service HR system to make it easier for our staff to focus on the most important parts of their job

Reference and administrative information

Trustees

Susan Douglas-Scott – Chair / Investment Committee Member
Susan Brown – Safeguarding Governance Committee Chair
Andrew Weston – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member
Louisa Whait – Audit & Risk Committee Member (resigned 10 July 2021)
Matthew Smith – Audit & Risk Committee Member
James Alistair Schofield – Audit & Risk Committee Chair / Investment Committee Chair
Viral Shah – Audit & Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member
Gavin Sumner – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member
Izaro Arbelaiz-Teresa
Anthony Osijo – Audit & Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member
Mahua Nandi - Audit & Risk Committee Member

Secretary

Richard Jones

Chief Executive Officer

Jonathan Senker

Registered Office

c/o Sayer Vincent
Invicta House
108-114 Golden Lane
London, EC1Y 0TL

Incorporated in United Kingdom, Company Number 03798884

Registered in England and Wales, Charity Number 1076630

Registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC050036

Auditors

Sayer Vincent LLP
Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane
London, EC1Y 0TL

Bankers

National Westminster Bank Plc
23 Market Street
Cambridge, CB2 3PA

Solicitors

Radar Limited
6 Beacon Way
Hull, HU3 4AE

Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP
134 Edmund Street
Birmingham, B3 2ES

Structure, governance and management (including Strategic Report)

Governing document

The organisation is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 30th June 1999 and registered as a charity on 19th July 1999. The Company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the Company. It is governed by its Articles of Association which, following changes introduced by the Companies Act 2006, now also contain its objects and powers. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

The financial statements comply with current statutory requirements, the memorandum and articles of association and the Statement of Recommended Practice - Accounting and Reporting by Charities: SORP applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with FRS 102. This trustees' annual report includes a directors' report as required by company law.

Appointment of Trustees

As set out in the Articles of Association, members of the Board of Trustees must be appointed by an ordinary resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the Trustees and must be appointed for a term of three years. On ceasing to be a Trustee a person may be reappointed provided that no one may serve as a Trustee for more than a maximum of three consecutive terms, after which they must cease to be a Trustee for at least 12 months before they are eligible to be re-appointed.

The Board members bring insight from their own lived experience of disability, understanding of the Charity's social mission, and business and commercial skills. The range of experience is kept under review and in the event of any shortfalls, new Trustees are sought to fill the gaps.

Trustee induction and training

New Trustees undergo a period of induction to brief them on the values, direction and work of VoiceAbility, their legal obligations under charity and company law and good practice duties, the contents of the Articles of Association, the Board and decision-making processes, the business plan and recent financial performance of the Charity. During the induction they view our services and meet with key employees and other Trustees. Trustees are encouraged to participate in external and internally run training and development where this will facilitate the undertaking of their role.

Organisational structure

The Board of Trustees administers the Charity. The Board meets once per quarter with additional meetings when required to deal with issues of strategy in more depth.

VoiceAbility also has within its constitution an Audit and Risk Committee, known as ARC. The ARC members meet once per quarter in advance of the Board meetings to review and discuss matters such as management and statutory accounts, risk and governance. In addition to the Audit and Risk sub-committee, there is an Investment Committee. The Investment Committee convenes twice a year. The purpose of the committee is to ensure that the Charity is investing funds in line with the Investment Policy. There is also a Safeguarding Committee, the purpose of which is to ensure quality safeguarding practices and approaches are developed and implemented, and to support the Charity in discharging its statutory and good practice duties and responsibilities - as both an employer and a provider - in relation to safeguarding.

The Trustees have delegated the day to day responsibility for the provision of services to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for recommending strategy to the Board, for the management of its external profile and influencing work, ensuring that the Charity delivers the services in line with its mission and requirements and ensuring that key performance indicators are met across the range of social and business objectives. The Chief Executive Officer leads an Executive Leadership Team whose members are the executive managers of the Charity.

Risk management

The principal risks and uncertainties facing the organisation are centred around five key areas:

- **IMPACT** – The desired impact of activities is not delivered or cannot be adequately evidenced
- **FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY** – Our ability to continue to make an impact in the medium to long term is threatened
- **COMPLIANCE** - The organisation fails to meet regulatory, legal or contract compliance requirements or expectations
- **REPUTATION** – We do not respond effectively to any incident that could result in damage to VoiceAbility's reputation
- **SAFEGUARDING** – We fail to adequately protect staff, volunteers or vulnerable people from harm or abuse

The steps to manage these risks are set out below.

The Trustees are responsible for setting the tone and influencing the culture of risk management within VoiceAbility.

The Executive Leadership Team have established a risk register, identifying the types of risks faced and prioritising them in terms of potential impact and likelihood of occurrence. Having due regard to the strength of the current internal controls and procedures already in place, a series of mitigating actions have been identified to appropriately address these risks.

The Executive Leadership Team, the Audit & Risk Committee, and the Board of Trustees, periodically review the risks and the risk management strategies to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the organisation.

Public benefit

We have referred to the guidance in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and in planning our future activities. In particular, the Trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives they have set.

Directors' liabilities

There are no specific provisions relating specifically to Directors' liabilities to report.

There are no qualifying third-party indemnity provisions which are the direct responsibility of the Charity.

There are no qualifying pension scheme indemnity provisions, due to the charity operating a Defined Contribution scheme.

Fundraising

We are not a fundraising charity, with our income deriving primarily from local government, NHS and central government contracts. We do not solicit donations but do receive them from time to time and do approach grant giving bodies. We are therefore registered with the fundraising regulator and follow their guidance. VoiceAbility does not use any professional fundraisers and no fundraising is undertaken on our behalf by third parties.

Disabled employees

We recognise the importance and benefits of having disabled people involved in and leading the organisation's work at every level including in governance roles, as employees and as volunteers. In relation to employment, the expertise in various aspects of our work which disabled people bring is valued strongly. Disabled applicants who meet the minimum essential criteria for posts are guaranteed interviews and we encourage applicants to identify any adjustments which are needed to ensure that they can participate equally in selection processes.

Training has been provided to managers on equality and employment, including specifically on disability equality.

The organisation has a full policy on diversity and employment, which underlines our approach to exceed legal requirements in relation to diversity as we recognise the importance and value to the organisation and to people using our services of a workforce which is diverse in relation to all protected characteristics, including disability.

We are continuing to work to improve the experience of and contribution by all employees, including disabled employees. We have built on the guidance published in July 2016 and have been recognised as a Disability Confident employer.

We have paid posts which specifically require personal insights that come from having a learning disability, particularly Expert by Experience posts and our Speak Out Leaders. Additionally, we have roles of peer mentors and peer supporters which have provided work skills and therefore routes into employment for people who have used long-term mental health and substance use services.

Employee involvement

VoiceAbility's Trustees and Directors recognise employee engagement to be one of the most powerful drivers of organisational performance and of our success in enabling people who use our services to achieve their outcomes. It is central to our strategy.

The following are amongst measures which we take to promote effective employee involvement and engagement as well as to ensure that colleagues throughout the organisation are well-informed.

Cross sectional employee groups, who help to develop critical organisational policies and practices, ranging from our pay policy and salary benchmarking to our approach to learning and development. As part of VoiceAbility's strategy these groups are being formalised in the form of a Staff Forum.

Regular attendance of the Chief Executive and other members of the Executive Leadership Team at team meetings throughout the organisation, to discuss the organisation's direction and development and to seek, receive and act on feedback.

Weekly 'open phone' times publicised to all members of staff, at which the Chief Executive seeks and receives feedback and responds to issues of concern. An alternative of email contact at any time is also made available to all colleagues.

Regular internal communication updates and bulletins, including VoiceAbility News (a monthly e-update written by staff and distributed to all teams).

A well-maintained intranet site and on-line collaboration tools, including webinars and extensive use of Microsoft Teams.

Regular team and supervision meetings held throughout the organisation.

A Health, Safety and Wellbeing forum. The purpose of the forum is to represent, discuss and review how we keep everyone physically safe and mentally healthy at work. The forum meets every six weeks. In year there were a number of initiatives rolled out including a Wellbeing Activity Day where staff were given the time to get together with their colleagues to focus on wellbeing and discuss how best to support one another, as well as an additional half day's discretionary leave entitlement for all staff.

An Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) forum. The EDI forum brings together colleagues across the organisation with interest and experience in a wide variety of EDI issues such as ethnicity, cultural awareness, LGBTQ+ equality, domestic violence, veteran's issues, neurodiversity and more.

Pay policy

VoiceAbility operates an objective outcome pay policy. Staff are placed within bandings dependent on skillset and experience, and upon successful completion of agreed annual objectives, have the opportunity to progress in the banding by way of incremental 'spine points'. Regular supervisions and appraisals ensure that pay progression is measurable within a band, ensuring greater transparency and understanding of pay related decisions.

Although the Executive Leadership Team are covered by the banding pay, ultimately decisions regarding the remuneration of these roles, and that of the Chief Executive, are made by the Board.

Financial review

Overview

The Trustees are pleased that the Charity delivered a surplus of £685,441. This is after designated investment expenditure of £197,131. The net gain of £103,491 on investments held as fixed assets, brought the overall closing surplus to £788,932, significantly better than budget.

We generated a total income of £10,993,036 – 6.9% higher than last year (2021 - £10,285,603). The securing of the Scotland Social Security contract which went live 31 January 2022 contributed £572,200 to the 2021-22 income.

Total expenditure of £10,307,595 is 0.7% higher than last year (2021 – £10,240,122).

The easing and eventual lifting of covid-19 restrictions in 2021-22 meant that staff were able to resume more face to face meetings with clients. This resulted in significantly higher travel and subsistence costs of £247,684 (2021 - £98,307).

Strategic investment was almost half of that in 2020-21 due to substantial system development in the prior year.

In 2021-22 the Charity transitioned to remote working and a number of office spaces were returned, resulting in savings in rent and rates, partially offset by homeworking allowance costs.

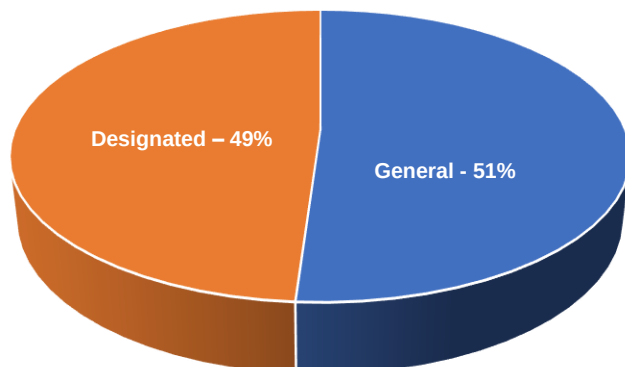
The increase in debtors from 2021 to 2022 is largely due to higher trade debtors. Over a third of the movement relates to one invoice which was settled in April 2022.

In 2021-22, VoiceAbility changed its annual leave entitlement period from financial to calendar year. The majority of staff not utilising a proportionate amount of their annual leave entitlement in the first quarter of the calendar year resulted in a higher holiday pay accrual.

Reserves

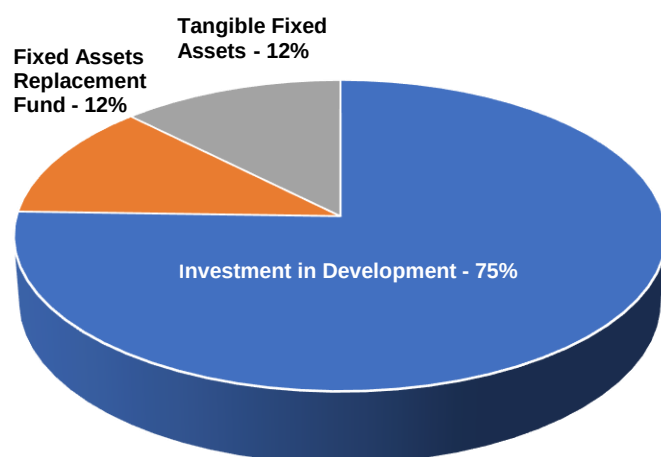
The reserves carried forward as at 31 March 2022 stand at £4,061,190:

Reserves as at



General	£2,073,987
Designated	£1,987,203
Restricted	nil
Total	£4,061,190

Designated



Investment in Development	£1,500,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	£240,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	£247,203
Total	£1,987,203

The Unrestricted Reserves are those funds that are available to be used on the charitable objects, to be spent as the Trustees see fit.

The Trustees hold Unrestricted Reserves as either General Reserves or Designated Reserves. General Reserves are there to support the day-to-day operations of the organisation and to ensure that VoiceAbility can meet its future financial obligations. Designated Reserves are held as unrestricted funds that have been earmarked for a particular purpose by the Trustees.

Funds designated to fulfil our **Investment in Development** now stand at £1,500,000. This is to fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments over the period 2022 to 2025. Themes include VoiceAbility's base operating model, belonging, business development, and policy and influencing.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund, which is in place to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long-term basis, has been re-assessed and now stands at £240,000. Laptop and mobile phone purchases are recorded against the designated fund and upon review of the Charity's equipment requirements, transfers then made from general funds to ensure the correct level of funds have been designated.

The remainder of £247,203 is the balance of the **Tangible Fixed Assets** which are not liquid and therefore removed from the undesignated, unrestricted reserves in the interest of prudence when calculating our reserve cover requirements.

VoiceAbility adopts a risk-based approach to determine the value of General Reserves necessary to meet its future financial obligations, taking into account the reliability of income streams and the extent to which expenditure is committed, as well as the major risks to which the charity is exposed.

VoiceAbility uses two approaches to inform decision-making over the value of General Reserves required in any one year. One places a financial value on facing the key unmitigated risks identified in the Risk Register; the other provides a finite time-based cover for the committed expenditure faced by the organisation.

The first approach used is to aggregate the assessed financial impact of the key unmitigated risks identified in the VoiceAbility Risk Register and assume that these risks occur either concurrently or sequentially over a timeframe that does not allow recovery between events. The quantification of those risks is assessed by the Senior Management Team and the Executive Management Team and validated by the Audit & Risk Committee alongside the annual review of the Risk Register.

For the second approach, the Trustees require a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 6 months' worth of fixed costs cover to be held in General Reserves. The Trustees consider these periods a reasonable and realistic amount of time to curtail, change or serve notice on contractual agreements with suppliers or staff.

Fixed costs are defined in this context as those that VoiceAbility are legally obliged to pay for a period of time regardless of delivery levels and income streams. These costs comprise Influenceable Costs (Insurances, Premises, Communications & Software, and Contact Centre) and Support Function Costs. Due to the predominantly contract-based nature of the income streams, it is assumed that operational staff are subject to TUPE legislation and as such are not included in these calculations.

Utilising the outcomes of these two approaches, the Audit & Risk Committee will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees on the required value of the General Reserves for each financial year as part of the approval of the annual budget.

Employing the first method, the level of reserves required is £1,050,000.

As a cross check and employing the second method, to cover monthly fixed costs of £311,000 the Charity would look to hold between £1,244,000 and £1,866,000 (4-6 months) in undesignated, unrestricted reserves. Taking the undesignated, unrestricted reserves as at 31 March 2021, VoiceAbility are able to cover their monthly fixed costs for just over 6.5 months.

Investments and bank accounts

VoiceAbility's Investment Committee manages its investment portfolio with the support of management company CCLA. In 2021-22 the fair value of the investment continued to recover from the impact of covid-19. This reflects the composition of the CCLA portfolios and the emphasis on assets with sustainable underlying real returns and robust growth prospects independent of the general economic trend. As at 31 March 2022 £849,500 had been invested. Below shows the results of our investment over the last 7 years:-

2015-16	1,385
2016-17	87,877
2017-18	15,681
2018-19	71,848
2019-20	(32,497)
2020-21	205,362
2021-22	103,490
Total	453,146

Events since the balance sheet date

There are no significant post balance sheet events to note.

Going concern

The Trustees have assessed whether the use of the going concern basis is appropriate and have considered possible events or conditions that might cast significant doubt on the ability of the charity to continue as a going concern. The Trustees have made this assessment for a period of at least one year from the date of approval of the financial statements. The Trustees and the Executive Leadership Team have reviewed all budgets and expected income and expenditure projections and have concluded that, together with the reserves established to help in such circumstances, there is a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The charity, therefore, continues to adopt the going concern basis in preparing its financial statements.

Statement of Trustees' responsibilities

Company Law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- a) select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently
- b) observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- c) make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- d) prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Charity will continue to operate
- e) state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Disclosure of information to the auditors

So far as each person who was a director at the date of approving this report is aware, there is no relevant audit information, being information needed by the auditor in connection with preparing its report, of which the auditor is unaware. Having made enquiries of fellow directors and the Charity's auditor, each director has taken all the steps that they are obliged to take as a director in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

This report along with the financial statements was approved by the Trustees on:

26 July 2022

and signed on their behalf by:

James Alistair Schofield – Audit & Risk Committee Chair

Independent Auditor's Report to the Members of VoiceAbility Advocacy

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of VoiceAbility Advocacy (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2022 which comprise the statement of financial activities, balance sheet, statement of cash flows and notes to the financial statements, including significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 *The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- Give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2022 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended
- Have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- Have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charitable company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on VoiceAbility Advocacy's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other Information

The other information comprises the information included in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information contained within the annual report. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon. Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- The information given in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- The trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' annual report including the strategic report. We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- Adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- The financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- Certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- We have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the statement of trustees' responsibilities set out in the trustees' annual report, the trustees (who are also the directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements

and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud are set out below.

Capability of the audit in detecting irregularities

In identifying and assessing risks of material misstatement in respect of irregularities, including fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations, our procedures included the following:

- We enquired of management, which included obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation, concerning the charity's policies and procedures relating to:
 - Identifying, evaluating, and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - Detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
 - The internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- We inspected the minutes of meetings of those charged with governance.
- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory framework that the charity operates in, focusing on those laws and regulations that had a material effect on the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of the charity from our professional and sector experience.
- We communicated applicable laws and regulations throughout the audit team and remained alert to any indications of non-compliance throughout the audit.
- We reviewed any reports made to regulators.

- We reviewed the financial statement disclosures and tested these to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- We performed analytical procedures to identify any unusual or unexpected relationships that may indicate risks of material misstatement due to fraud.
- In addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, we tested the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments, assessed whether the judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias and tested significant transactions that are unusual or those outside the normal course of business.

Because of the inherent limitations of an audit, there is a risk that we will not detect all irregularities, including those leading to a material misstatement in the financial statements or non-compliance with regulation. This risk increases the more that compliance with a law or regulation is removed from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, as we will be less likely to become aware of instances of non-compliance. The risk is also greater regarding irregularities occurring due to fraud rather than error, as fraud involves intentional concealment, forgery, collusion, omission or misrepresentation.

A further description of our responsibilities is available on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Judith Miller (Senior statutory auditor)

21 September 2022

for and on behalf of Sayer Vincent LLP, Statutory Auditor

Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane, LONDON, EC1Y 0TL

Statement of financial activities (incorporating an income and expenditure account)

For the year ended 31 March 2022

	Note	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2022 Total £	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2021 Total £
Income from:									
Donations and legacies	2	4,834	–	–	4,834	4,938	–	–	4,938
Charitable activities	3	10,857,302	–	94,275	10,951,577	10,192,750	–	51,775	10,244,525
Investments		36,625	–	–	36,625	36,140	–	–	36,140
Total income		10,898,761	–	94,275	10,993,036	10,233,829	–	51,775	10,285,603
Expenditure on:									
Charitable activities	4a	10,016,189	197,131	94,275	10,307,595	9,803,311	385,036	51,775	10,240,122
Total expenditure	4	10,016,189	197,131	94,275	10,307,595	9,803,311	385,036	51,775	10,240,122
Net income before net gains on investments		882,572	(197,131)	–	685,441	430,518	(385,036)	–	45,481
Net gains on investments		103,491	–	–	103,491	205,363	–	–	205,363
Net income for the year	5	986,063	(197,131)	–	788,932	635,881	(385,036)	–	250,844
Transfers between funds		(1,361,188)	1,361,188	–	–	(163,184)	163,184	–	–
Net movement in funds		(375,125)	1,164,057	–	788,932	472,697	(221,853)	–	250,844
Reconciliation of funds:									
Total funds brought forward		2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258	1,976,414	1,045,000	–	3,021,414
Total funds carried forward		2,073,986	1,987,204	–	4,061,190	2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities. There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in Note 17a to the financial statements.

Balance sheet

Company no. 03798884

As at 31 March 2022

	Note	2022 £	2021 £
Fixed assets:			
Tangible assets	10	247,204	283,147
Investments	11	1,302,646	1,199,156
		1,549,850	1,482,303
Current assets:			
Debtors	12	1,643,887	1,013,168
Cash at bank and in hand		1,581,214	1,334,492
		3,225,101	2,347,660
Liabilities:			
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	13	(634,918)	(371,483)
Net current assets		2,590,183	1,976,177
Total assets less current liabilities		4,140,033	3,458,481
Provision for liabilities	15	(78,843)	(186,223)
Net assets		4,061,190	3,272,258
Funds:	16a		
Restricted income funds		-	-
Unrestricted income funds:			
Designated funds		1,987,204	823,147
General funds		2,073,986	2,449,111
Total unrestricted funds		4,061,190	3,272,258
Total funds		4,061,190	3,272,258

Approved by the trustees on 26 July 2022 and signed on their behalf by

James Alistair Schofield
Trustee

Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 31 March 2022

	2022 £	£	2021 £	£
Cash flows from operating activities				
Net income / (expenditure) for the reporting period (as per the statement of financial activities)	685,441		45,481	
Depreciation charges	109,505		116,955	
(Gains)/losses on investments	-		-	
Dividends and interest from investments	(36,625)		(36,140)	
Increase/(decrease) in provisions	(107,380)		70,148	
(Increase)/decrease in debtors	(630,718)		(25,271)	
Increase/(decrease) in creditors	263,435		(457,272)	
Net cash provided by / (used in) operating activities		283,658		(285,829)
Cash flows from investing activities:				
Dividends and interest from investments	36,625		36,140	
Purchase of fixed assets	(73,561)		(47,356)	
Net cash provided by / (used in) investing activities		(36,936)		(11,215)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		246,722		(297,044)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		1,334,492		1,631,536
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year		1,581,214		1,334,492

1 Accounting policies

a) Statutory information

VoiceAbility Advocacy is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is incorporated in England & Wales. The registered office address is The Old Granary, Westwick, Oakington, Cambridge, CB24 3AR.

b) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – (Charities SORP FRS 102), The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (September 2015) and the Companies Act 2006/Charities Act 2011.

The Charity has a subsidiary, Advocacy Experience Limited. The subsidiary is currently dormant and therefore consolidated financial statements have not been prepared.

Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy or note.

In applying the financial reporting framework, the trustees have made a number of subjective judgements, for example in respect of significant accounting estimates. Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The nature of the estimation means the actual outcomes could differ from those estimates. Any significant estimates and judgements affecting these financial statements are detailed within the relevant accounting policy below.

The trustees do not consider that there are any sources of estimation uncertainty at the reporting date that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next reporting period.

c) Public benefit entity

The charity meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102.

d) Going concern

The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

The trustees have specifically considered the impact of covid-19 on the charity and do not consider there to be an material uncertainty as a result. Further discussion on the impact of and response to covid-19 by the charity can be found in the trustees' annual report.

e) Income

Income is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and that the amount can be measured reliably.

Income from government and other grants, whether 'capital' grants or 'revenue' grants, is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the grants have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably and is not deferred.

Income received in advance of the provision of a specified service is deferred until the criteria for income recognition are met.

f) Interest receivable

Interest on funds held on deposit is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably by the charity; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the bank.

g) Fund accounting

Restricted funds are to be used for specific purposes as laid down by the donor. Expenditure which meets these criteria is charged to the fund.

Unrestricted funds are donations and other incoming resources received or generated for the charitable purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds earmarked by the trustees for particular purposes.

h) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to make a payment to a third party, it is probable that settlement will be required and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is classified under the following activity headings:

- Costs of raising funds relate to the costs incurred by the charity in inducing third parties to make voluntary contributions to it, as well as the cost of any activities with a fundraising purpose
- Expenditure on charitable activities includes the costs of delivering services undertaken to further the purposes of the charity and their associated support costs

Irrecoverable VAT is charged as a cost against the activity for which the expenditure was incurred.

Support and governance costs are re-allocated to charitable activities in full.

i) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT (continued)

Governance costs are the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity. These costs are associated with constitutional and statutory requirements and include any costs associated with the strategic management of the charity's activities.

j) Operating leases

Rental charges are charged on a straight line basis over the term of the lease.

k) Tangible fixed assets

Items of equipment are capitalised where the purchase price exceeds £500 for an individual purchase. Depreciation costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the use of the related assets in those activities. Assets are reviewed for impairment if circumstances indicate their carrying value may exceed their net realisable value and value in use.

Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write down the cost of each asset to its estimated residual value over its expected useful life. The depreciation rates in use are as follows:

● Leasehold improvements	over the life of the lease
● Furniture, Computer, Telephones and Software	10% – 33%

l) Listed investments

Investments are a form of basic financial instrument and are initially recognised at their transaction value and subsequently measured at their fair value as at the balance sheet date using the closing quoted market price. Any change in fair value will be recognised in the statement of financial activities. Investment gains and losses, whether realised or unrealised, are combined and shown in the heading "Net gains/(losses) on investments" in the statement of financial activities. The charity does not acquire put options, derivatives or other complex financial instruments.

Investments in subsidiaries

Investments in subsidiaries are at cost.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

m) Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any trade discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

n) Cash at bank and in hand

Cash at bank and cash in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

o) Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

p) Financial instruments

The charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

q) Pensions

After three months of employment, employees are auto enrolled in the group stakeholder pension scheme (Aviva), via a salary exchange method. Employees are required to opt out should they not wish to be enrolled. The charity contributes 5% of gross salary and employees make a minimum contribution of 3% of gross salary. Employees joining the stakeholder pension contract directly with the insurance company. In addition to its own contribution the charity acts as agent in collecting and paying over employee pension contributions.

2 Income from donations and legacies

	2022	2021
	Total	Total
	£	£
Donations (unrestricted)	4,834	5,214

3 Income from charitable activities

	2022			2021		
	Grants	Earned	Total	Grants	Earned	Total
	£	income	£	£	contracts	£
		contracts			£	
		£			£	
Advocacy Services:						
Connections	30,000	699,089	729,089	31,775	631,933	663,708
London	–	1,345,554	1,345,554	–	1,212,781	1,212,781
Midlands & South East	2,000	3,250,314	3,252,314	–	3,192,772	3,192,772
North East	–	2,429,588	2,429,588	–	2,315,930	2,315,930
North West	19,500	1,255,309	1,274,809	–	1,440,905	1,440,905
Scotland	–	572,200	572,200	–	–	–
South West	20,000	1,302,129	1,322,129	–	1,381,310	1,381,310
	71,500	10,854,183	10,925,683	31,775	10,175,631	10,207,406
Support Services	22,775	3,119	25,894	20,000	17,120	37,120
Total income from charitable activities	94,275	10,857,302	10,951,577	51,775	10,192,750	10,244,525

All earned income is unrestricted and all grant income is restricted.

4a Analysis of expenditure (current year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2022 Total £	2021 Total £
Direct staff costs	6,307,390	-	-	-	6,307,390	6,252,050
Indirect staff costs	-	91,158	-	1,364,367	1,455,525	1,378,416
Total staff costs (note 6)	6,307,390	91,158	-	1,364,367	7,762,915	7,630,465
Sub contractor Costs	803,563	-	-	-	803,563	866,084
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	143,777	8,228	-	-	152,005	169,740
Travel & Subsistence	247,684	-	-	-	247,684	98,307
Rent & Rates	103,650	-	-	-	103,650	157,145
Professional	295	85,876	-	-	86,171	227,128
Other direct costs	804,858	11,869	-	-	816,727	764,407
Business Development	-	-	-	184,528	184,528	104,012
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	18,667	18,667	11,674
Finance	-	-	-	58,475	58,475	92,984
Human resources	-	-	-	35,587	35,587	58,544
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	23,638	23,638	15,294
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	185	-	185	31,078
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	13,800	-	13,800	13,260
	8,411,217	197,131	13,985	1,685,262	10,307,595	10,240,123
Support costs	1,685,262		-	(1,685,262)	-	-
Governance costs	13,985		(13,985)	-	-	-
Investment costs	197,131	(197,131)				-
Total expenditure 2022	10,307,595	-	-	-	10,307,595	-
Total expenditure 2021	10,240,123		-	-	-	10,240,123

4b Analysis of expenditure (prior year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs £	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2021 Total £
Direct staff costs	6,252,050	-	-	-	6,252,050
Indirect staff costs	-	125,455	138	1,252,823	1,378,416
Total staff costs (note 7)	6,252,050	125,455	138	1,252,823	7,630,465
Sub contractor Costs	866,084	-	-	-	866,084
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	168,244	1,496	-	-	169,740
Travel & Subsistence	98,296	11	-	-	98,307
Rent & Rates	157,145	-	-	-	157,145
Professional	3,604	223,523	-	-	227,128
Other direct costs	729,855	34,551	-	-	764,407
Business Development	-	-	-	104,012	104,012
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	11,674	11,674
Finance	-	-	-	92,984	92,984
Human resources	-	-	-	58,544	58,544
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	15,294	15,294
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	31,078	-	31,078
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	13,260	-	13,260
	8,275,279	385,036	44,476	1,535,331	10,240,123
Support costs	1,535,331		-	(1,535,331)	-
Governance costs	44,476		(44,476)	-	-
Investment costs	385,036	(385,036)			
Total expenditure 2021	10,240,123		-	-	10,240,123

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

5 Net income for the year

This is stated after crediting / (charging):

	2022 £	2021 £
Depreciation	109,505	116,955
Operating lease rentals:		
Property	79,474	172,199
Auditor's remuneration (excluding VAT):		
Audit	11,500	11,000
	<u>109,505</u>	<u>116,955</u>

6 Analysis of staff costs, trustee remuneration and expenses, and the cost of key management personnel

Staff costs were as follows:

	2022 £	2021 £
Salaries and wages	6,643,637	6,547,123
Redundancy and termination costs	10,833	9,921
Social security costs	530,677	505,596
Employer's contribution to defined contribution pension schemes	469,414	496,287
Other staff costs	108,354	71,539
	<u>7,762,915</u>	<u>7,630,465</u>

The redundancy and termination costs were accrued at the balance sheet date.

The following number of employees received employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs and employer's national insurance) during the year between:

	2022 No.	2021 No.
£60,000 – £69,999	–	2
£70,000 – £79,999	2	1
£80,000 – £89,999	1	1
	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>

The total employee benefits (including pension contributions and employer's national insurance) of the key management personnel were £333,301 (2021: £332,157).

The charity trustees were neither paid nor received any other benefits from employment with the charity in the year (2021: £nil). No charity trustee received payment for professional or other services supplied to the charity (2021: £nil).

Trustees' expenses represents the payment or reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs totalling £185 (2021: £nil) incurred by 11 (2021: 0) members relating to attendance at meetings of the trustees.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

7 Staff numbers

The average number of employees (head count based on number of staff employed) during the year was 298 (2021: 310) and based on full-time equivalent was 254 (2021: 215).

8 Related party transactions

There are no related party transactions to disclose for 2022 (2021: none).

There are no donations from related parties which are outside the normal course of business and no restricted donations from related parties.

9 Taxation

The charity is exempt from corporation tax as all its income is charitable and is applied for charitable purposes.

10 Tangible fixed assets

	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Telephones £	Software & Systems £	Total £
Cost					
At the start of the year	26,505	333,519	76,589	29,281	465,894
Additions in year			–	73,561	73,561
Disposals in year	(8,907)				(8,907)
At the end of the year	17,598	333,519	76,589	102,842	530,548
Depreciation					
At the start of the year	20,020	106,035	48,883	7,808	182,746
Charge for the year	6,485	62,561	25,493	14,966	109,505
Eliminated on disposal	(8,907)	–	–	–	(8,907)
At the end of the year	17,598	168,596	74,376	22,774	283,344
Net book value					
At the end of the year	–	164,923	2,213	80,068	247,204
At the start of the year	6,485	227,484	27,706	21,473	283,148

All of the above assets are used for charitable purposes.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

11 Investments held as fixed assets

	2022 £	2021 £
Fair value at the start of the year	1,199,156	993,794
Net gain / (loss) on change in fair value	103,490	205,362
	1,302,646	1,199,156
Cash held by investment broker pending reinvestment	-	-
Fair value at the end of the year	1,302,646	1,199,156
	2022 £	2021 £
Investments comprise:		
COIF Charities Investment Fund	1,302,646	1,199,156

12 Debtors

	2022 £	2021 £
Trade debtors	1,121,154	584,584
Other debtors	65,973	41,758
Prepayments	312,498	215,322
Accrued income	144,262	171,504
	1,643,887	1,013,168

13 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2022 £	2021 £
Trade creditors	122,784	126,658
Taxation and social security	145,831	129,512
Other creditors	235,066	70,497
Accruals	61,592	43,311
Deferred income (note 14)	69,645	1,506
	634,918	371,483

14 Deferred income

Deferred income comprises income invoiced in advance of work not undertaken by year end

	2022 £	2021 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	1,506	119,883
Amount released to income in the year	(1,506)	(119,883)
Amount deferred in the year	69,645	1,506
Balance at the end of the year	69,645	1,506

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

15 Provisions for liabilities

Provisions for liabilities comprises

	2022 £	2021 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	186,223	115,805
Increase/(decrease) in provision in the year	(107,380)	70,418
Balance at the end of the year	78,843	186,223
Dilapidations provision	14,500	11,500
Customer refund provision	7,282	136,241
Staffing provision	57,061	38,482
	78,843	186,223

Dilapidations Provision

To provide for the refurbishment of our Cambridge office at the end of our tenancy as required by our lease agreement. The likely cost of this is calculated and charged to projects as an additional accommodation cost on an annual basis.

Customer Refund Provision

To provide for a potential refund to a customer.

Staffing Provision

To provide for HR issues identified pre 31st March 2022.

16a Analysis of net assets between funds (current year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	247,204	–	247,204
Investments	1,302,646	–	–	1,302,646
Net current assets	850,183	1,740,000	–	2,590,183
Provisions	(78,843)	–	–	(78,843)
Net assets at 31 March 2022	2,073,986	1,987,204	–	4,061,190

16b Analysis of net assets between funds (prior year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
* Tangible fixed assets	–	283,147	–	283,147
Investments	1,199,156	–	–	1,199,156
Net current assets	1,436,178	540,000	–	1,976,178
Provisions	(186,223)	–	–	(186,223)
Net assets at 31 March 2021	2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258

* Prior year tangible fixed assets of £170,905 have been reclassified as designated funds.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

17a Movements in funds (current year)

	At 1 April 2021 £	Income & gains £	Expenditure & losses £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2022 £
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	22,775	(22,775)	-	-
** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	30,000	(30,000)	-	-
*** Infection control grants (various)	-	41,500	(41,500)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	94,275	(94,275)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	400,000	-	(197,131)	1,297,131	1,500,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	140,000	-	-	100,000	240,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	283,147	-	-	(35,943)	247,204
Total designated funds	823,147	-	(197,131)	1,361,188	1,987,204
General funds	2,449,111	11,096,527	(10,110,464)	(1,361,188)	2,073,986
Total unrestricted funds	3,272,258	11,096,527	(10,307,595)	-	4,061,190
Total funds	3,272,258	11,190,802	(10,401,870)	-	4,061,190

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Furtherance of existing Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

*** Covid-19 infection control receipts.

Investment in Development has been reviewed and now stands at £1,500,000. This will fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments over the period 2022 to 2025.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund is to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

The **Tangible Fixed Assets** designated fund removes the non-cash element.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

17b Movements in funds (prior year)

	At 31 March 2020	Income & gains	Expenditure & losses	Transfers	At 31 March 2021
	£	£	£	£	£
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	20,000	(20,000)	-	-
** Cambridgeshire County Council	-	1,775	(1,775)	-	-
*** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	30,000	(30,000)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	51,775	(51,775)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	695,000	-	(385,036)	90,036	400,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	350,000	-	-	(210,000)	140,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	-	-	-	283,147	283,147
Total designated funds	1,045,000	-	(385,036)	163,184	823,147
General funds	1,976,414	10,490,966	(9,855,086)	(163,184)	2,449,111
Total unrestricted funds	3,021,414	10,490,966	(10,240,123)	-	3,272,258
Total funds	3,021,414	10,542,741	(10,291,898)	-	3,272,258

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Police and Crime Commissioner's Youth and Community Fund. Grant for membership to the Safe Places National Network

*** Furtherance of existing Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

Designated funds Change Programme **Investment in Development** has been reviewed and now stands at £695,000. This will fund VoiceAbility's Change Programme 5 year objectives as outlined in the annual report.

A **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund of £350,000 has been introduced to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

18 Operating lease commitments payable as a lessee

The group and charity's total future minimum lease payments under non-cancellable operating leases is as follows for each of the following periods:

	Land and Buildings	
	2022	2021
	£	£
Less than one year	24,070	98,120
One to five years	12,675	36,745
Over five years	-	-
	36,745	134,865

VOICEABILITY ADVOCACY

England & Wales - Charity number 1076630

Accounts

Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Charity number in England 1076630

Charity number in Scotland SC050036

Company number 3798884



Welcome from the chair of trustees



I am delighted to introduce this annual report as the new chair of VoiceAbility's board. Striving for equality and human rights has always been at the core of my life, inside and outside of work, so I was extremely pleased to become part of an organisation that aims to ensure that everyone is heard when it matters most.

Joining the board during the pandemic, I've seen how coronavirus has disproportionately affected people who use health and care services and made existing inequalities worse. It's highlighted just how important VoiceAbility's work is.

Throughout the pandemic, VoiceAbility has been continuing to work one person at time, to enable everyone to make their own decisions and have control of their lives. We've also facilitated collective action, recognising that disabled people and people who use social care and health services are the experts on what needs to change, in order that we can all live the lives we choose. The positive journeys that people have taken by working with VoiceAbility staff and volunteers reinforce to me the enormous difference that can be made when we truly listen to people.

VoiceAbility also works strategically to generate change. I am so pleased that we have brought organisations together, especially providers of advocacy, to work co-operatively and for the common good during this critical year. I am proud to share with you the ways in which we have influenced public policy so that it better enables people's voices to be heard and their rights to be respected.

I would like to offer my appreciation and sincere thanks to all VoiceAbility staff and volunteers, to my fellow trustees, and the many people and organisations who have partnered with VoiceAbility this year. I would also like to express my deep respect and admiration for my predecessor as chair, Peter Letley, who steered the board with such skill over the past decade.

While we remain in highly uncertain times, the inspiration I have taken from VoiceAbility over the past year leaves me in no doubt that whatever happens around us in the year ahead, we must and will play a full role in supporting people's voices to be heard.

Susan Douglas-Scott CBE

Welcome from the chief executive



Crises force us to focus on what is most important. For VoiceAbility, the crisis of the pandemic has drawn into even clearer focus our overall purpose.

We're here to make sure that people have a voice when it matters most. That is what is important to us, not narrow organisational interests. So, I'm proud that during the pandemic we have invested time and effort into working co-operatively with other organisations who share our values, successfully galvanising and supporting collective work to support people to have a voice. You can read more about the work of the 'Advocacy Leaders Network' later in this report.

People who draw on our support services face barriers to having genuine choice and real control in life changing decisions. During the pandemic, those barriers have become even higher. To provide the right support so that people can overcome this, our staff and volunteers have worked with determination and flexibility. I would like to express my thanks to every one of them.

Even in the challenging context, we have further enhanced the quality and effectiveness of our services. This has included strengthening our dedicated quality team; developing communities of practice to identify and disseminate best practice and improving access to our services for people who may benefit from them and for referrers.

We have emerged from an enormously challenging year for everyone, in a stronger position than ever to enable people to be heard. We are determined to do this. I look forward to working with people who draw on our services, colleagues and friends inside and outside VoiceAbility in the year ahead to achieve this.

Jonathan Senker

About us

We support people to be heard when it matters most. We've been supporting people to be heard in decisions about their health, care and wellbeing for almost 40 years. We're an independent charity and one of the UK's largest providers of advocacy and involvement services.

Our aims

We believe that everyone, regardless of situation, illness or disability, has a right to:

- be heard and respected
- have the same choice, control, and freedom as any other person
- be safe from violence, discrimination, harm or abuse



In line with our charitable objectives, everything we do is focused on achieving these aims.

In this annual report, you can read about how we have achieved these aims through our work with individuals, through work with groups and communities, through working with other organisations and through influencing national policy.

The report also explains the changes we have made within our own organisation to make sure we are best placed to achieve our aims.

Our values

Passionate

We're dedicated to strengthening voice, supporting rights and changing lives.

Because we are passionate we:

- are committed to delivering high quality support
- make what we offer accessible to all
- work with policy-makers to safeguard and strengthen people's rights

Empowering

We enable people to live life to the full.

Because we are empowering we:

- support people to speak up for themselves and grow in confidence
- equip people to understand and exercise their rights
- treat people as individuals with their own unique strengths

Collaborative

We listen and shape decisions with others.

Because we are collaborative we:

- involve people we support in shaping our organisation and what we do

- are easy to talk to, considerate and constructive
- ask for and respond to feedback so that we can improve

Honest

We work with integrity and we stick to our principles.

Because we are honest we:

- mean what we say and do what we promise
- make everything clear and transparent
- maintain independence, confidentiality and professionalism

Resourceful

We think ahead and find effective ways to achieve our mission.

Because we are resourceful we:

- focus on solutions
- try out new ideas
- achieve the most we can with the resources we have

Our vision

We will:

- deliver *the* best possible quality of support
- be *the* provider of choice for the services we offer
- be *the* source of authority for expert insight on voice and rights
- be *the* place to work or volunteer with, for anyone who shares our aims

Our reach

We supported more than 22,000 people across England this year. To maximise our impact and achieve our aims, we also work to influence change in legislation, policy and society. This means that people have stronger rights, and the support to understand and use those rights, and to have those rights respected.

We employ over 300 members of staff and have 52 volunteers. We have an income of £10.3m per annum, overwhelmingly from contracts with Local Authorities and the NHS.

Our services

What all our services have in common is that they support people to be heard when it matters most. Our advocacy services support people to be heard in important decisions about their health, care and wellbeing. Our diverse range of other services, which we call 'Connections services', are about making sure that all of us can live the lives we choose and have our voices heard in decisions which matter to us, locally, regionally and nationally.

Advocacy services

Advocates are independent professionals who work with people to help them understand their options, know their rights and say what they want. This helps to make sure that people are involved as much as possible in decisions about their health and care and are represented where required. The law says that some people have a legal right to advocacy because they may find it very hard to be heard.

“You helped me make sense of what was happening, and break it down into manageable chunks I could deal with. I feel stronger now, and more able to cope.” – feedback to our Bradford team

An advocate can support someone to:

- communicate their views and wishes
- understand their rights
- understand any processes and decisions they are subject to
- understand the options they have
- challenge a decision

“What’s so important is that you are there for the client, you are independent. You’re there to help them raise their voice and strengthen their voice.” – Emma, VoiceAbility advocate, speaking on BBC Radio 4’s Listening Project



Even when someone may find it very hard to tell their advocate what they want, our advocates will use a range of approaches to establish their views and wishes as far as possible and secure their rights.

Connections services

Our range of Connections services is growing but this year it included:

- **Involvement and participation:** we work with providers, NHS bodies and local government to ensure that people who use services have a real voice that counts when they make decisions. For example, we employ people with learning disabilities and autistic people to capture and convey the voices of their peers and facilitate user involvement networks.
- **Group advocacy:** We support people to meet together, identify common issues, share their experiences and take action. Where possible, we support these groups to become self-facilitating, empowering people to take more control of their own lives.
- **Peer mentoring:** We all trust and feel more comfortable speaking with people who have been through some of the same experiences as we have. Peer advocacy can help us open up, find support and develop our own solutions. A peer mentor is a trained volunteer who has had similar experiences to the people they are supporting. They listen and provide emotional support. They also share their own experience, insights, advice and encouragement.
- **Supporting people to navigate support networks:** For example, in Suffolk, our Community Wellbeing Service helps to match people to local services, activities and opportunities that can help them achieve their goals.

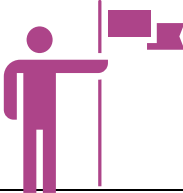
Our strategy for 2019 – 2025

1. Diversify the services we offer

People need many kinds of support in order to be heard and have their rights upheld. Advocacy is one vital type of support, but not the only one. By 2025 we will have significantly widened the range of services we offer which help to achieve this.

Progress this year included that we introduced a new peer coaching service in Camden, took on facilitation of learning disability user involvement in Hampshire and Southampton, and invested in new staff roles to drive forward our diversification.

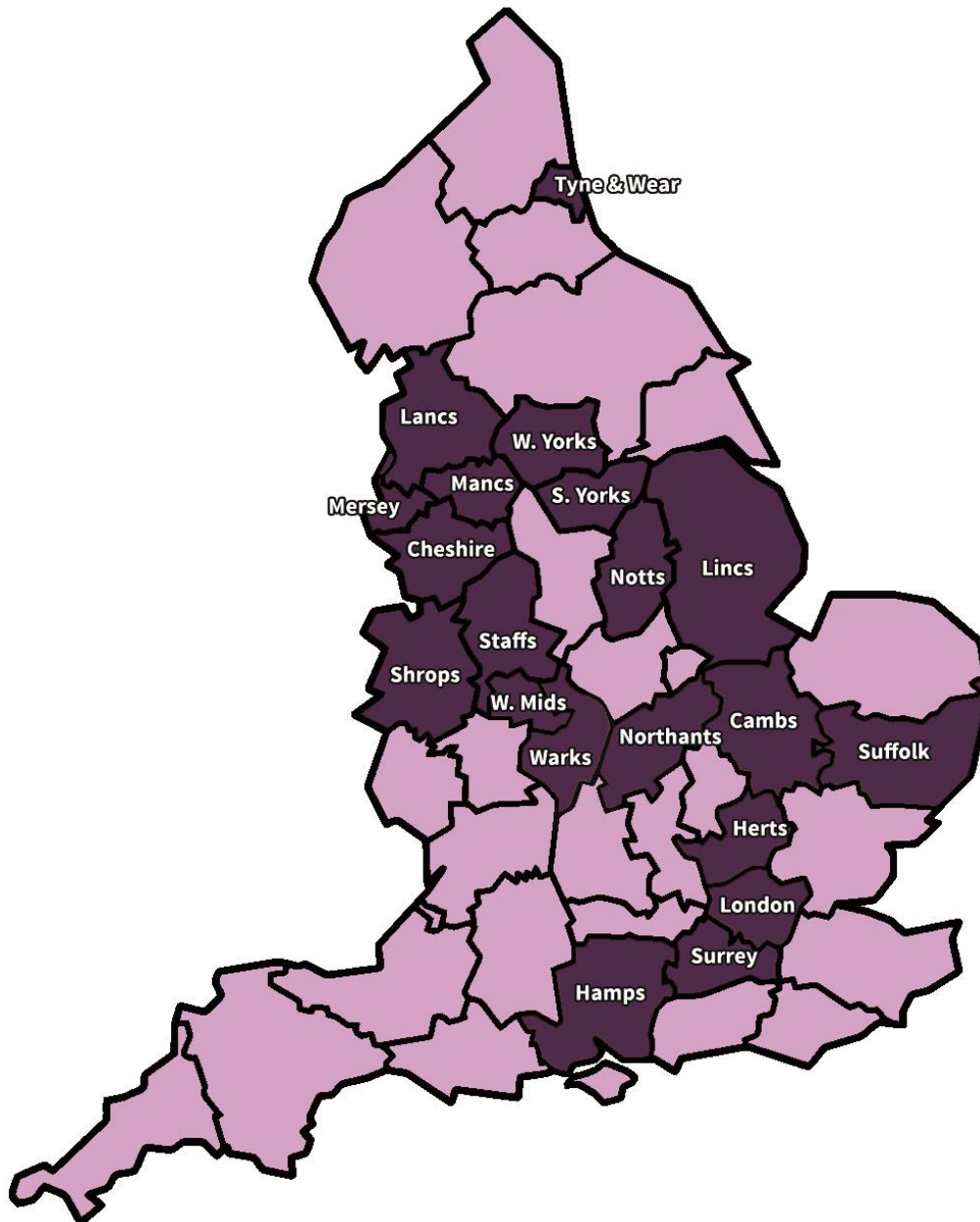
2. Improve our organisational capability

	Aim	How we'll do it	Progress this year included that we:
	Value our people	Create an even more positive working culture and clearer opportunities for staff development and progression.	- enhanced our management structure - invested in staff training and new e-learning platform - improved pay progression opportunities for advocates with multiple specialisms - established a range of health and wellbeing initiatives
	Build the basics	Increase clarity and consistency across all our standards, policies, systems and processes whilst maintaining person centred service delivery to individuals.	upgraded Salesforce, our case management system and database, enabling greater consistency in practice and improving the accuracy of our recording
	Drive quality	Improve our ability to evidence our impact and outcomes.	- introduced new Outcomes Framework - introduced dedicated quality and practice function and 'communities of practice' for staff to ensure continuous quality development
	Lead the market	Reflect the high quality of our services in how we look and speak as an organisation and in the digital tools we offer.	- launched new brand with accessible tone of voice - launched new website with online referral function, and new leaflets and print materials
	Grow authority	Continue to ensure that people's voices are heard and their rights respected in local and national policy decisions.	- influenced reform of the Mental Health Act - published our coronavirus resources to help benefit others nationally - shaped the NICE advocacy guidelines - facilitated the national Advocacy Leaders Network

You can find out more about all the above later in this report.

Where we worked this year

Map correct at 31 March 2021: we worked in the named areas



In 2020-21 we developed new or additional services in:

- Hampshire and Southampton
- Oldham
- Bolton
- Shropshire
- Swindon
- London Boroughs of Ealing, Enfield, Barnet, Redbridge and Merton

1. Creating change with individuals

Individual advocacy

Who we worked with

This year we provided individual advocacy support or peer support to 22,585 people. Each time we start a new piece of work with someone, we call it a case. This year we opened 33,166 cases, as sometimes we work with one person across more than one case. 23,768 of those were new cases opened this year. The rest were cases we continued working on that were opened in the previous year.

45% people we worked with in 2020-21 were over the age of 65. The three most common support needs of people we worked with were a mental health condition, dementia or a learning disability. You can find out more in the pie charts on the next page.

What we did

We provided the full range of advocacy types. This means we helped support the voice, rights and choices of people who:

- are detained under the Mental Health Act ('Independent Mental Health Advocacy')
- are or may be deprived of their liberty under the Mental Capacity Act ('Relevant Person's Representatives')
- are deemed under the Mental Capacity Act to lack capacity to make decisions about where they will live or the medical treatment they will receive ('Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy')
- have substantial difficulty in being involved in local authority care planning processes ('Care Act advocacy')
- wish to make a complaint about their NHS care and treatment ('NHS complaints advocacy')

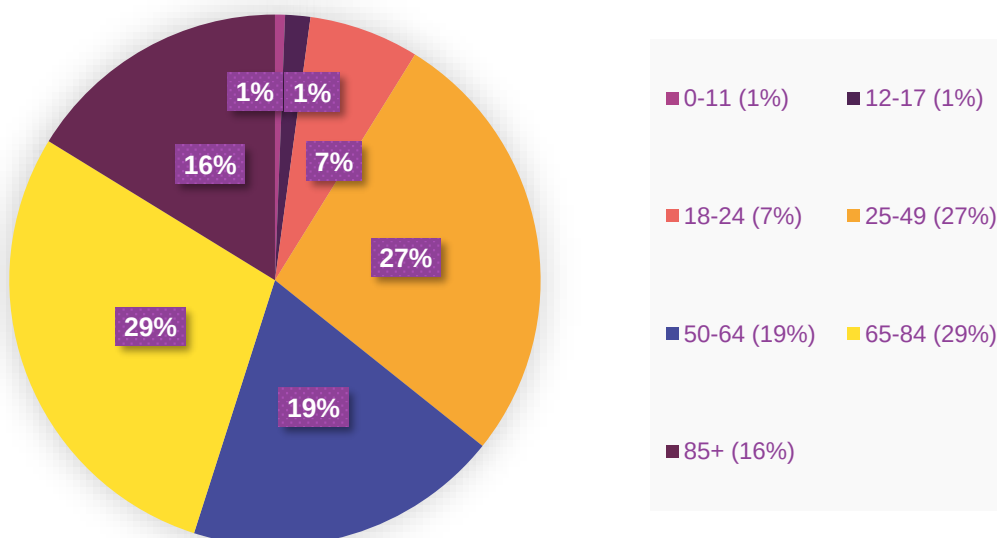
Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) and Relevant Person's Representatives (RPR) accounted for about half of our work this year.

"Because I had an advocate in my Mental Health Act review, things have changed, the doctor and staff were more respectful and listened. Thank you!" – feedback to our Northamptonshire team

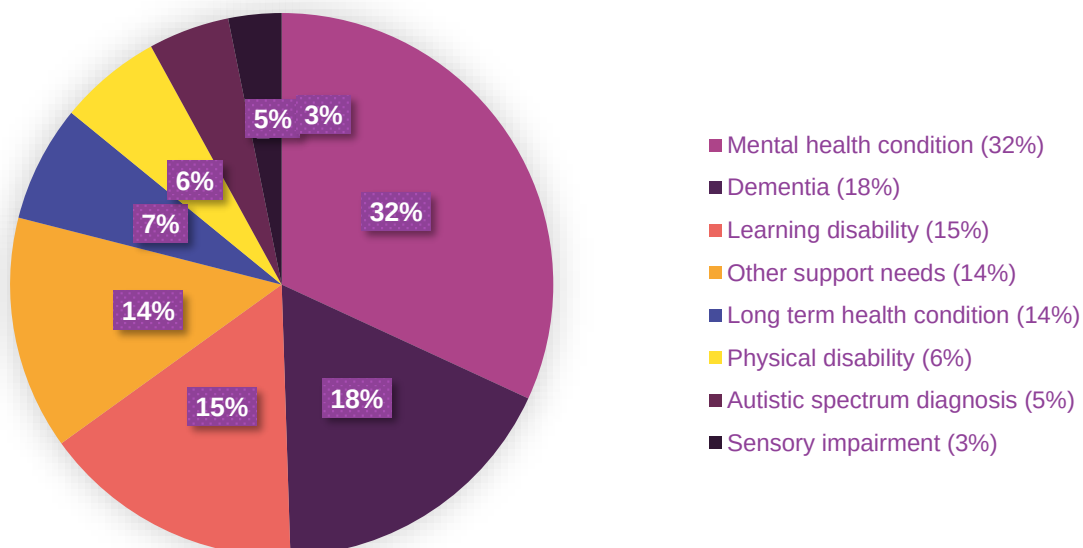
We also worked with children and young people who are looked after, have special education needs or disabilities or are in custody ('Children and young people's advocacy'). In some areas, we also provide advocacy to children and young people going through child protection processes, and mental health advocacy for young people. 840 of our new cases this year were for children and young people, which is a 200% increase from the previous year.



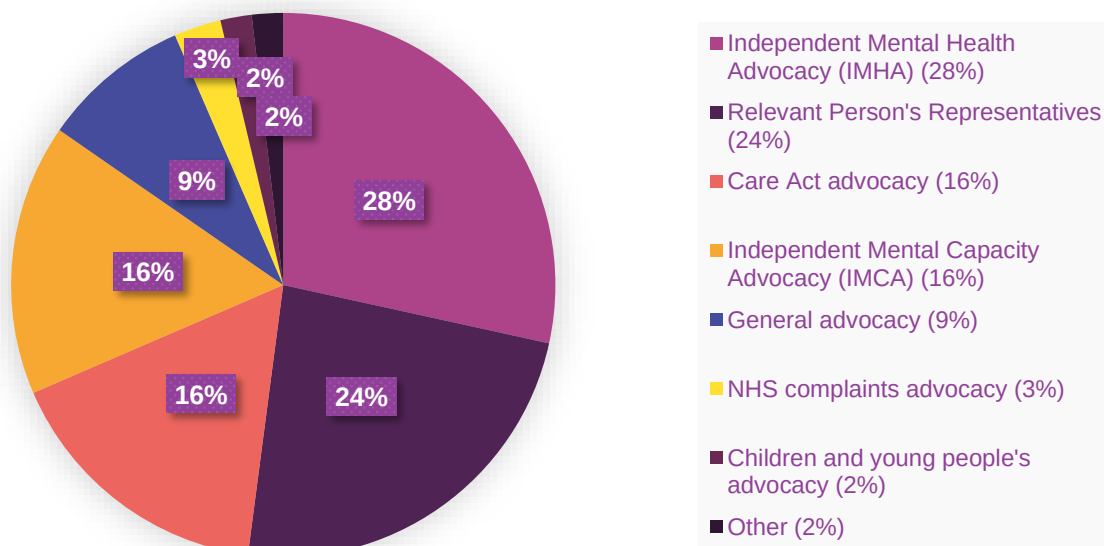
Ages of clients in 2020-21



Support needs of clients, for cases worked on in 2020-21



New advocacy cases opened in 2020-21



General advocates provide advocacy to people who need support to be heard, but do not fall into the eligibility criteria for other types of advocacy.

48 year old hairdresser Tahsin had had to move out of his home after a flood. While he was in temporary accommodation, his landlady decided to sell his house. That meant Tahsin would have nowhere to live when he left his temporary accommodation.

Tahsin had not been able to work for some time due to pandemic restrictions, and couldn't afford to pay a deposit or rent for a new home. He had been prescribed psychotropic medication for severe anxiety, which made it very difficult for him to fully understand the situation, or to explain his needs and wishes to professionals. Tahsin also had asthma, and was very concerned about becoming infected with coronavirus if he had to go out to appointments.

Advocate Richard spoke to Tahsin to understand his views and wishes, and then contacted a housing solicitor for advice to pass on to Tahsin. Richard spoke to Tahsin about his housing rights, explaining them in a way Tahsin was able to understand without becoming distressed. Richard gave Tahsin all the information he needed to be able to understand his options, and make his own choices about what actions he wished to take.

Throughout their work together, Richard made sure that Tahsin didn't have to leave his temporary accommodation unless it was absolutely necessary, and this helped to minimise Tahsin's anxiety about coronavirus infection. Richard took every opportunity to encourage Tahsin and boost his confidence in handling the situation for himself. Richard found out that Tahsin had the right to challenge his landlady and have the chance to return to his old home once it had been repaired, but Tahsin found this prospect too stressful. He told Richard that he would rather find a new place to live.

When pandemic restrictions were lifted, Tahsin was able to start working again, and he found a new flat with affordable rent. But he still needed money for a deposit. Tahsin worked with Richard to discuss the situation with his landlady and her insurance company. Tahsin's landlady offered to pay his deposit personally, so that he would be able to move out, and she would be able to sell his old home. Tahsin agreed to this offer, and moved to his new flat.

Tahsin's temporary housing provider told us that without Richard's support, it was very likely that Tahsin would have ended up sleeping rough.

NHS complaints advocates support people to complain about the treatment or care that they or a friend or family member have received from an NHS service. This support is available at every stage of the complaints process.

This year we've substantially grown our NHS complaints services and revised and updated our popular self-help toolkit for making NHS complaints: voiceability.org/nhscomplaints

43 year old Stewart had been sectioned twice, and had to give up his job. He wasn't happy about the care and treatment he'd received for his mental health issues, and believed that his experience with the service had caused his second section. He had tried to complain independently but wasn't happy with the outcome.

Stewart wanted an investigation, and possibly a change of care team. But his medication meant that it was hard for him to concentrate, and to find out his rights. He also wasn't sure how to make a formal complaint about a team of professionals while still under their care.



Advocate Gill helped Stewart understand the complaints process, and explained what the different outcomes might be. She made sure that it was Stewart who decided which steps to take, and when he'd made a plan, she listened and supported him to work towards his goal.

Stewart wrote a letter of complaint and asked Gill to make suggestions about how to improve it. Stewart was worried about handling a conversation with the investigator on his own, so Gill joined him on the telephone meeting to make sure he was able to get his views heard.

The investigation upheld Stewart's complaint. The Trust investigator agreed that internal communication and handover processes at the Trust fell short, and that this may have led to a preventable second section for Stewart.

Because the Trust upheld Stewart's complaint, he felt respected and was willing to trust them with his ongoing care and treatment. He would not have been able to complete his complaint, or submit it within NHS timelines, without Gill's support. He also would not have felt able to continue using the service voluntarily, which could have led to a further section - putting his future career and wellbeing at risk.

As a result of Stewart's complaint, the Trust committed to putting new procedures in place to improve their communication and handover processes, for the benefit of everyone using the service. Gill is helping Stewart consider next steps, whether it's legal action for possible negligence, or support from Gill at meetings to make sure that he is involved in decisions about his future care.

Impact of our advocacy

In September 2020, we introduced a new Outcomes Framework based on the NDTi Outcomes Framework. It enables advocates to focus on delivering strength-based person-centred advocacy, whilst capturing the impact of our work in an accessible way. In order to effectively implement the recording required for our new Outcomes Framework, we invested in changes to our case management system, Salesforce.

Through the new Outcomes Framework, we now support clients to identify and achieve:

- an 'advocacy goal', which is what the person would like to achieve through advocacy
- at least one 'wider outcome' we will support the person to develop within, for example 'I feel confident' or 'I am being treated with respect and dignity' or 'I know what my rights are'

The person we're working with completes a self-assessment at the start of their support, rating themselves from 1-5 using a straightforward scoring tool. This self-assessment is repeated when we close the case, enabling the person (where possible) and their advocate to reflect on their achievements, and the progress made. To ensure that we understand how effectively we're supporting people who can't self-assess, advocates can use our 'observed goals and outcomes' which have a 1-3 scale.

We are pleased that this new system is able to genuinely reflect the difference that we make, because it measures against the baseline set at the start of the work with someone.

As this system has only been in place since September 2020, the initial data we have does not reflect the whole year. However, we already have 5096 advocacy goal records and 8777 wider outcome records.

	Overall	For people who can self-assess	When progress is observed
Advocacy goal (5096 records)	62% positive progress	71% positive progress	50% positive progress
		27% stayed the same	47% stayed the same
		2% got worse	3% got worse
Wider outcomes (8777 records)	55% positive progress	58% positive progress	52% positive progress
		38% stayed the same	45% stayed the same
		4% got worse	3% got worse

We are delighted that over 70% of people who self-assess say we have helped them achieve their main goal. The figures are lower where people have not been able to self-assess. Our data shows us that when observed progress is recorded as staying the same, in most cases, this is because the starting point was already 'things are as good as they can be'.

For more than half of the people we work with, we successfully do more than just help them tackle a single issue. Working with an advocate empowers them to achieve outcomes around

their wellbeing, knowledge and use of their rights or in being more able to speak up for themselves in the future.

The arrows on the table below indicate the average progress that our clients have seen from their work with an advocate, based on our data since September 2020. For both advocacy goals and wider outcomes, average progress for clients that can self-assess was one point, usually from a 3 to a 4. For other clients, it was half a point, the most common shift being from a 2 to a 3.

	For people who can self-assess (5 point scale)	When progress is observed (3 point scale)
Advocacy goal 	1. I don't know what I want to happen	1. The person's rights, likely wishes and feelings are not being heard or respected
	2. I know what I want to happen but not how to get it	
	3. I am getting the support I need to plan to get what I want	2. Changes are happening to make sure that the person's rights are respected and their likely wishes and feelings are understood, heard and respected
	4. Someone is supporting me to get what I want	3. The person's rights, likely wishes and feelings have been represented and acknowledged
	5. I can get what I want by myself	
Wider outcomes 	1. I can't do this	1. The person can't address this
	2. Someone is helping me	
	3. I am beginning to understand / learn	2. Making progress
	4. I'm beginning to do this myself / things are getting better	3. Things are as good as they can be
	5. Things are as good as they can be	

Advocacy support during coronavirus

There has probably never been a more important time for people to be able to get independent advocacy to ensure that their voices are heard and their rights protected. Our teams have been working tirelessly through the coronavirus pandemic to promote the voices of our clients, protect their rights and safeguard their wellbeing. This has included ensuring that any decisions to give or withhold treatment in relation to coronavirus are based on individual medical assessments and not blanket decisions.

We're proud to have made sure that all our vital services remained fully available during coronavirus, without using the furlough scheme. Whenever people needed in-person support, we worked with our commissioners and colleagues in health and social care to make this happen safely and protect people's human rights. During the coronavirus lockdowns we also delivered some of our services remotely, where possible.

Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCAs) support people who lack capacity to make decisions about their long term accommodation or serious medical treatment and who do not have any friends or family appropriate to consult.

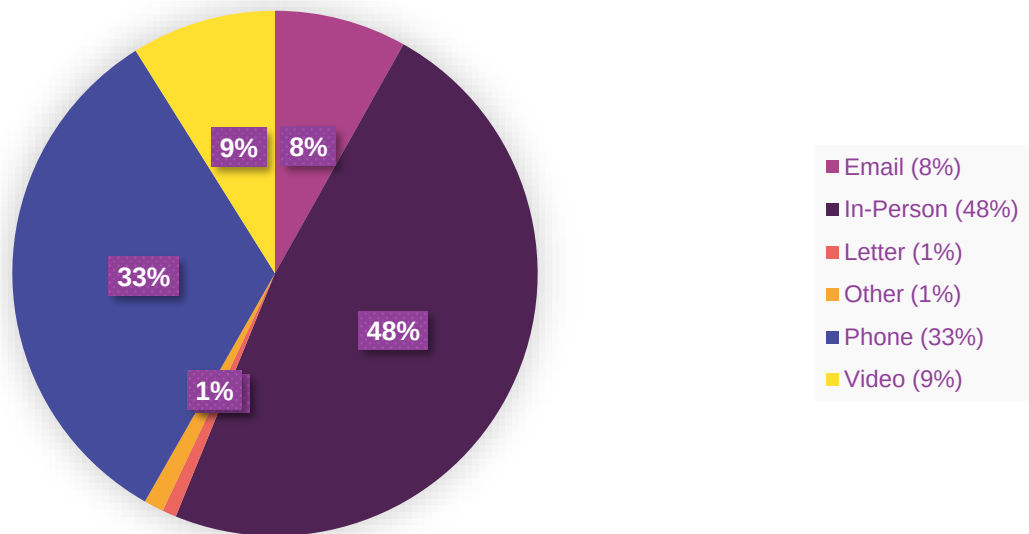
"I was working with Luka, who enjoys living in her village where she has lots of connections and friendships. But she was desperate to move out of the care home into the village and to be able to live independently in her own home. She had been assessed to lack capacity to decide about her accommodation, but she didn't agree with this assessment and didn't want the accommodation placements she was offered, none of which were in the village. As instructed by Luka, I asked for a new social worker for her and for another Mental Capacity Assessment.

Luka and I would usually have met face to face with the new social worker, who was going to carry out the new Mental Capacity Assessment. Because of coronavirus, I arranged an online video meeting for everyone involved, using Microsoft Teams. I spoke to staff about helping Luka get connected to the online meeting, and about contributing examples of Luka's capacity for the assessment

The reassessment found that Luka does have capacity, enabling her to make decisions over her own life, regain her liberty and live in her own home in the village." - Sheila, advocate



How we worked with clients in 2020-21



When the Prime Minister announced the first lockdown in March 2020, we immediately implemented our pandemic response plan. This meant that all staff moved to home-based working overnight. We created robust guidance for advocates through the 'coronavirus hub' on our intranet, ensuring that staff always had access to the most up-to-date information and advice. We also shared this with other advocacy providers and made publicly available our internal guidance and tools to support the wider response to the pandemic, putting people first. This included guidance empowering advocates to:

- ensure face to face in-person contact where needed, by risk assessing in-person delivery and engaging constructively with setting managers to deliver this safely and effectively
- deliver advocacy at a distance, and identify concerns about provision
- challenge restrictions on rights, particularly around access to healthcare and treatment, blanket DNACPR decisions and changes to provision through Care Act Easements
- look after their own wellbeing and support to self-isolate when necessary

We contacted all our commissioners and referring professionals at the beginning of the first lockdown to remind them of the ongoing need to make referrals and reassure them about our processes to provide safe, effective support.

We have now revised our coronavirus risk assessment process to support increasing in-person visits whenever our clients require them. This helps us to ensure our clients have the best service, and means we can see the environment our clients are living in to ensure they are safe. However, we have learnt from our experience of remote advocacy during coronavirus and will be offering people support in the way that suits them best going forward – which may include remote support by phone or video.

Connections services – work with individuals

Peer mentoring

In Camden, our peer mentors help people who have recovered from mental health problems to stay well and achieve health and wellbeing goals. Our peer mentors are trained volunteers, who draw on their own experiences of mental ill health. Due to the pandemic, the mentors have provided this support on telephone and video calls. We also set up a new weekly virtual peer support group which is facilitated by one of our peer mentors. The group is available to anyone currently using or newly referred to the service and is a place where people can share their experiences and exchange tips on surviving and thriving in the lockdown period.

Peer coaching

This year we were awarded funding to add to our Camden service by employing peer coaches to support people with more complex needs. Beginning in September 2020, 2 coaches have supported people at their joint discharge meetings with mental health crisis team staff, or, when this is not possible, provided introductory phone calls to explain the service further, answer any queries the person may have and arrange their first peer coaching appointment together. We are working towards the coaches supporting up to 10 people at any one time. Both peer coaches have been praised by clients for being truly empathetic, able to truly understand some of the difficulties that they face and offer support and guidance based upon their own personal experiences.

“Having peer coaching has been an incredible, informative, formative and affirming process that has truly changed my life. My peer coach met me when I was at my lowest point in many years, but through our sessions, he listened to me, was responsive to my needs and insightful as to how I could help myself. He was the first person in many years to simply ask ‘what I wanted’ in life - in the short, medium and long-term - and listened actively to my answer and then wanted to discuss how I could achieve these aims.” – Peer coaching participant, Camden

Supporting people to navigate support networks

In Suffolk we deliver a Community Development Service to promote wellbeing. It promotes early recovery from emotional health problems such as low mood, stress and anxiety. We help people identify their individual support needs and get in touch with local organisations or groups that could help them, and support people to create and develop peer support networks. New this year, the project now includes peer support and coaching. This has improved recovery rates overall and provided employment opportunities for people with lived experience of mental ill health.

Volunteers supporting our advocacy work in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough this year, 27 volunteers contributed a total of 919 volunteering hours. They raised awareness of our services, offered drop-in information sessions, helped us to collect feedback and supported the work of our advocates by visiting people deprived of their liberty in care homes. We now have 30 locations across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough that we visit regularly, including local mental health inpatient wards. This model and pattern of volunteer roles is now also being trialled in our Hampshire and Southampton service.

Face to face volunteering was not possible in the first half of the year due to the coronavirus pandemic, but we took the opportunity to arrange refresher training for the volunteers during this time and focus on online activities.

Experts by Experience: helping to ensure quality care for people in Northamptonshire, Coventry and Warwickshire

Experts by Experience are people who have experience of using or caring for someone who uses health or social care services. We have 2 Experts by Experience in Northamptonshire and 10 in Coventry and Warwickshire. They work with people who have a learning disability and/or autism who are either at risk of being admitted to, or are currently detained in, an in-patient psychiatric service. Experts by Experience support people at review meetings to discuss their care and treatment – these are called Care and Treatment Reviews (CTRs). For under 18s, these meetings also discuss their education – these are called Care, Education and Treatment Reviews (CETRs).

Our Experts by Experience have where possible continued to attend these meetings in person. Experts by Experience in Coventry and Warwickshire participated in 159 CTRs and CETRs in the year, using their lived experience to provide invaluable insight to the panels of health professionals and ensure that the voice of the individual and their family is central to the decision-making process. For example, their own experience enables our Experts by Experience to look for signs of whether a person has been receiving sufficient care, and to pick up and feedback to the panel any warning signs based on how the individual presents themselves. Experts by Experience are also able to have one-to-one conversations with people based on empathy and shared experience. This often means the person shares views and wishes about their care and treatment that might not otherwise have been communicated.

This year we also established reflective practice and peer support sessions, where Experts by Experience come together to learn from one another and improve the support they offer.

Improving access for individuals and referrers

This year we launched our new website. Based on user research, we restructured and rewrote all our information about our services to make it more accessible and approachable. As well as providing improved information about advocacy types for professionals, we now have pages aimed at people in different situations, explaining how advocacy could help them. This helps people understand that they could get help from us without having to take in the technical names or eligibility requirements of different advocacy types. We have also revised all our print information in the same way.

The new website also offers an online referral tool for the first time, suitable for self-referrals and referrals for professionals. Many people prefer this way of referring and it is improving the quality of our referrals. Over 16% of referrals were made through our website in 2020-21. We also continue to offer a range of other ways to refer to us, including by speaking to advocates on wards, telephone and email.

In January 2021 we relaunched a fully updated version of our popular NHS complaints toolkit, in standard and Easy Read formats, to help people self-advocate when complaining to the NHS. This includes useful editable templates for the first time.

This year we also moved to offering just one freephone phone number and one email address everyone can use to contact us for questions or referrals, no matter where they are in the country. As part of this, we brought all staff involved in responding to enquiries into one single helpline team. These changes are helping us to make sure it's always free to call us and that it's always easy to find the right number and get your call answered.

Developing the quality of our services for individuals

We hold the QPM (Quality Performance Mark) from NDTi, which is the minimum standard to evidence that a provider delivers advocacy which meets the requirements of the advocacy charter and the codes of practice. We have held the QPM since 2011, with our 2020 reappraisal highlighting:

- our highly person-centred advocacy practice
- our excellence in non-instructed advocacy
- our thorough approach to safeguarding
- overwhelmingly positive feedback from clients and external stakeholders

Dedicated practice team

To ensure continuous development of our quality, and strengthening of our safeguarding practice, this year we set up a dedicated practice team, including a head of practice, practice lead and safeguarding lead. This unique national quality and practice function is responsible for ensuring that all our services are delivered in line with relevant legislation, codes of practice, guidance and national standards.

This national support function is independent of contractual funding and is therefore able to develop long-term standards and agility in training, best practice, quality assurance and specialist support for all advocacy disciplines.

Strengthening our safeguarding

Safeguarding is absolutely central to the work we do, and we are always looking to improve and strengthen our safeguarding practice. This year we appointed a dedicated safeguarding lead as part of our new quality and practice function and added a safeguarding information hub to our intranet.

We also launched a safeguarding ‘community of practice’, where our staff can share and discuss safeguarding issues, best practice, dilemmas and questions. Staff on the safeguarding community of practice include Experts by Experience – ensuring the voice of people with lived experience is central to our development of best practice within the organisation.

‘Communities of practice’ for advocacy specialisms

We’ve invested in connecting our advocates across the country with others who deliver the same type of advocacy. These communities of practice will help us to provide the best support to people who use our services by harnessing on the ground expertise from across our staff team. The communities of practice will help us to:

- disseminate new advocacy practice information fast - especially important as the pandemic continues to evolve
- share best practice for each advocacy specialism
- quickly address any issues, ensuring a consistent approach across our teams
- provide first-hand and expert insight to inform our policy and public affairs work

Enhancing our management structure and investing in staff skills

We introduced a new role of contract manager to work alongside our other operations leaders. This is further strengthening oversight of our contractual responsibilities and how we evidence our impact to commissioners. It also means that our team leaders who directly manage our advocates can focus on service to our clients and staff development. We have

set a cap on the number of staff each team leader can manage to ensure they can provide this in-depth professional support.

The new Independent Advocacy Practice (IAP) qualification launched in January 2021, reflecting the latest developments in advocacy practice and an increasingly diverse and multi-skilled advocacy workforce. It gives our staff a sound grounding across advocacy roles and key legislation. VoiceAbility are committed to ensuring all staff are suitably qualified to provide high quality advocacy services. We offer a range of training in addition to the IAP.

This year we also:

- announced changes to our pay policy that mean that the more advocacy specialisms our staff are qualified in, the more they can see that reflected in their pay
- invested in a new e-learning platform that better meets our training needs
- established a health and wellbeing staff forum and carried out health and wellbeing checks for all staff
- became a certified Living Wage employer

Creating change with individuals: future plans

As well as continuing our existing services for individuals we are mobilising a range of new contracts from April 2021, including a new contract for a range of advocacy types across Lincolnshire, NHS complaints advocacy across a range of London boroughs and a new children's advocacy contract in Bolton

We will continue to invest in operational improvement and in our people, in order to continue to provide the best possible quality of support. In the year ahead, these plans include:

- **Continuous quality improvement and strengthened quality assurance:** growing our new practice team with the appointment of a 'practice lead' to review and develop our advocacy standards, develop a peer-led service assessment process and continue to grow our communities of practice.
- **Staff skills, wellbeing, pay and recognition:** reduction in standard working hours to allow staff to have a one-hour lunch break with no reduction in pay; provision of extra holiday for long service; easier access to higher points on our pay scale through good performance; additional support for managers to effectively support and track staff performance; more opportunities for professional development of our front line staff.
- **Safeguarding:** running an internal research project to better understand how statutory advocacy is supporting people with Care Act Section 42 Safeguarding processes. We want to track how advocacy is helping to support the 'Making Safeguarding Personal' initiative. The findings will help us support our commissioners and Safeguarding Adults Boards to better understand the role of advocacy in this context.
- **Performance intelligence and learning from outcomes:** fully embedding our new outcomes framework and ensuring everyone in the organisation has access to the data they need to learn from the findings and develop our services based on what works and what could be better.
- **Remote advocacy:** returning to face-to-face support by default, but with remote advocacy continuing where preferred by the person and genuinely effective. We expect this will include flexible options for those requiring less intensive levels of NHS complaints advocacy support to receive this as soon as they get in touch, from qualified advocates sitting within our helpline team.

2. Creating change with groups and communities

Many of our Connections services enable groups of people to be involved in their communities, shaping services they need and making decisions in their own communities. This work promotes inclusion and social justice.

Supporting people with learning disabilities to shape their communities and local services

We facilitated four groups for people with learning disabilities this year:

- Speak Out Council in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
- Voices for All in Lincolnshire
- Hampshire's Learning Disability Partnership Board
- Busy People group in Southampton, who also participate in Southampton Learning Disability Partnership board



Most of the project leaders and participants have learning disabilities or are autistic and bring the benefit of their own experience to their role.

The groups ran consultations, drop-ins and surveys to gather views of local people with learning disabilities on a particular topic each quarter. Topics this year have included life in the pandemic and staying fit and healthy. They then help meetings between project participants and relevant local professionals, to ensure effective communication and to plan practical changes in response to the findings.

All our groups found ways to continue their work during the pandemic, holding their events and meetings online. This meant that many people involved in the projects who previously found Microsoft Teams inaccessible have improved or developed new skills in video calls, sharing presentations online and running online events on Microsoft Teams.

Particular successes this year:

- Thanks to the work of the Speak Out Council, Cambridgeshire County Council's 0-25 years team social workers now send out Easy Read letters to young people which describe their jobs and include their photos.
- We started facilitating the Hampshire and Southampton groups for the first time during this year. We have reinvigorated these groups by providing facilitation, mentoring and administrative support to the members. We are now conducting a full review of the Hampshire Learning Disability Board so that it works in the best way possible for the

future. This has involved creating Easy Read surveys and running 13 workshops to gather the views of people with learning disabilities and parent carers.

- In partnership with Active Lincolnshire, Voices for All facilitated and promoted a 13-week walking challenge encouraging people to move more, which has led to over 3 million steps taken.

“This has been life changing for me. I feel much healthier and walking makes me happy too” Amy Hodson, walking challenge participant

“The Walking Challenge has done exactly what we wanted to achieve, getting more people, more active, more often.” Ian Brown, Active Lincolnshire

The groups regularly create accessible resources for use in their area, and this year many of the resources were to help people with learning disabilities in the coronavirus pandemic:

- Active Voices supported Lincolnshire Public Health to produce an Easy Read leaflet on lateral flow tests.
- Our groups in Hampshire and Southampton came together with Southern Health NHS to co-produce a video explaining coronavirus and what happens when you go for vaccination.

“Thank you so much for all your support in making this happen. I couldn’t have done it without you and Busy People!” – Becky Sparks, Strategic Health Facilitation Team, Southern Health NHS Trust

Quality Checkers in Northamptonshire

Our Quality Checkers in Northamptonshire changed from their usual work to help with the response to the pandemic. Instead of visiting local care services to check their quality, the Quality Checkers called local care services to check they had correct measures in place for coronavirus safety and to check that people with learning disabilities and autistic people in the services were still getting the annual health checks and dentist and eye checks they were entitled to during the pandemic.

“I still enjoy doing my job, making sure residents get the correct support so that they feel happy and safe” Paul C, Quality Checker

Influencing for easier access to mental health services in Camden

As well as running our peer mentoring and peer coaching projects, our Camden team and volunteers have been working to shape changes in mental health provision in Camden, collaborating with other organisations to ensure that clients can get full range of support locally with a seamless referral route between each organisation for ease of access. For example, we:

- participated in co-production workshops in support of the implementation of the new Community Mental Health Framework for Adults – a new place-based model of delivering mental health services aligned to primary care networks
- helped to develop Camden Mental Health Resilience Network – collaboration between providers and commissioners of mental health services, ensuring that services are joined up and working together to offer a holistic ‘no wrong door’ approach focused on outcomes and solutions

Change with groups and communities: future plans

As part of our 2019-2025 strategy, we will continue to diversify our Connections services. Our aim in this is to help more people to have their voices heard and to have choice, control and freedom in their lives. We are delighted to have already been awarded new group and community focused contracts to be implemented this year, including maintaining our services in Lincolnshire, and supporting young people in a number of residential schools to deliver change within their communities. We will invest in development activity to make sure that we're continuing to develop new Connections services which are fit for the future now that we're emerging from the pandemic.

We're also investing in our existing Connections services. We have appointed a Connections manager and a volunteer manager, who will begin work this year to develop the consistency of our Connections services and volunteering work, supporting our teams to learn from each other and embed shared best practice.

This year we have successfully run many of our existing Connections groups and meetings online and we expect to keep doing this in 2021, as well as resuming in-person sessions where it is safe to do so. We will also draw on the experience within our Connections services to help us embed more involvement and leadership of people with lived experience in all our services and our external facing communications and policy influencing.

Our investment in systems over the last year will also mean that in the year ahead we can better evidence the impact our individual advocacy work has on wider groups and communities, for example by identifying systemic or recurring issues and addressing them.

3. Creating change in advocacy practice, health and social care and society

Working in partnership for wider change

We are here to make sure that everyone has a voice when it matters most. We recognise that we will never achieve this alone. That's why we are truly committed to working co-operatively with other organisations so that we are all more effective. It's why we work hard to change national policies and practices so that there is greater support for, and fewer barriers to people's voices being heard and rights respected. We put time, effort and resources into working collectively and influencing policy and practice alongside the people who we support.

We extended the impact of this work significantly this year by bringing advocacy organisations to work together on issues which are of pressing concern to us as organisations and impact on the lives of the people we collectively support. We convened and facilitated a network of people in leadership positions in advocacy, initially to co-ordinate an effective response to the coronavirus pandemic. Twelve months later, this 'Advocacy Leaders Network' is now well-established, meeting regularly online to discuss and act on a range of issues, with almost 40 organisations taking part. It has fostered a culture of genuine support for one another, including by sharing insight, information, guidance, and advice in relation to the pandemic and a wide range of other issues. It has also paved the way for joint engagement with government and external bodies on key policy issues that will affect the people we support, such as the proposed reform of the Mental Health Act.

We have contributed resources and staff time across all levels of the organisation to support these partnership activities, including through our chief executive chairing the group and VoiceAbility providing policy, communications and administrative support to ensure the network functions effectively. We have publicised the work of the network so that new people and organisations join us and that external organisations know of our commitment to work together to benefit people who draw upon our services.

We also refocused our policy and public affairs work to ensure better integration across our external communications and policy work and have more impact through our influencing activities. We replaced our previous head of policy role with a new role, head of policy, public affairs and communications, that has strategic oversight of our external communications and influencing and directs our policy and public affairs work with support from the senior policy and public affairs officer.

We are confident that a commitment to joint working and continuous investment in our policy and public affairs work will ultimately drive-up quality and effectiveness of advocacy services nationally and strengthen people's voices and rights across the country.

Protecting rights in the coronavirus pandemic

To help health and social care professionals, other advocacy organisations and ultimately everyone who needs support to be heard, we took an early decision to publish essential guidance about advocacy during coronavirus on our website. We worked with the Advocacy Leaders Network to ensure there was clear information about people's rights and that advocacy referrals should continue. Between March 2020 and October 2020 there were over 8000 views of our coronavirus pages on our website which offered both resources we developed and those developed collaboratively as part of the Advocacy Leaders Network.

Our own guidance covered how to make decisions about when advocacy should continue in person with appropriate risk assessments, and how to deliver advocacy effectively at a distance. It also explained what the Coronavirus Act did and did not change in terms of people's rights to advocacy and social care

Alongside this, the rich range of resources developed collaboratively through the Advocacy Leaders Network included a 'mythbuster'; principles for providing advocacy coronavirus and beyond; and a report on what advocates across the sector had observed during the pandemic.

"It's been a breath of fresh air to work together for change, especially with COVID-19 and all the challenges it has brought. I was part of the group that developed the ['mythbuster'](#) about advocacy during coronavirus [[also available in Easy Read](#)]. There was lots of inaccurate information flying around about people's rights. We created the mythbuster to set the records straight about expected practice, and explain how to work effectively as an advocacy practitioner. Everyone has shared it with their networks and across their organisations." – Leanne Hignett, Service Delivery Director, Advocacy Focus

"Even before the pandemic, there were barriers to advocacy – people not understanding their rights to advocacy, or referrers not understanding their duty to refer. The Leaders network has really raised the profile of advocacy throughout the health and social care sector, and local communities. [The national advocacy survey report, 'Valuing Voices'](#) is a great example. Representatives from advocacy organisations across England and Wales, with support from NDTi, designed, created and shared the survey to gather advocates' experiences of providing advocacy during the pandemic. The 450 responses showed that people's human rights were not being consistently upheld. This evidence helped us all prepare for the second wave, and winter pressures. We also got [coverage of the survey report in the press](#), to influence the national conversation. – Lindsay Graham, Advocacy Director, People First.

We spoke out about the importance of fair and non-discriminatory access to healthcare during the pandemic. We also highlighted inappropriate use of Do Not Attempt Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPRs) orders, providing our own template letters for challenging instances of this practice, and made these publicly available on our website to members of the Advocacy Leaders Network and beyond. Together, the Advocacy Leaders Network supported the CQC's rapid review into use of DNACPR, providing them with evidence. We [welcomed the recommendations](#) made by the CQC and emphasised that there is no place for blanket decisions about people's access to medical care or treatment.

In [our response](#) to the survey by the Chief Social Workers on Care Act Easements, we explained why we thought the easements should be withdrawn completely. We suggested an alternative approach to helping local authorities and people who use services to build resilience, plan and prepare. Our submission was strengthened by contributions and endorsements from many organisations represented in the Advocacy Leaders Network and others. The Care Act Easements were removed at the most recent review and update of the Coronavirus Act passed by parliament on 25 March 2021.

We also invested time in collaborating with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) to help shape their recent paper on '[Advocacy during COVID-19 and beyond](#)'. We attended an online workshop together with some other members of the Advocacy Leaders Network, consulted the wider group and shared the content with them. We offered substantive feedback on the draft paper, most of which was reflected in the final published version. The paper provides background about advocacy and outlines 6 sets of actions which leaders, commissioners, and managers in local authorities can take to better use the potential of advocacy at this critical time and into the future.



In collaboration with fellow members of the Advocacy Leaders Network, we are continuing to work with partners across health and social care to ensure that guidance provided to practitioners and clinicians is effective, proportionate and legal throughout the pandemic.

Driving up advocacy standards nationally

A working group of the Advocacy Leaders Network has been inputting to the review of the Quality Performance Mark, the national advocacy standard. Our Head of Practice has represented VoiceAbility on this group and we've been active in the discussions about quality advocacy and how best to identify and measure it. We've also supported discussions in the sector exploring principles around regulation, accreditation and setting standards for advocacy, as part of our drive to enhance the quality of our own services and share best practice across the sector. Our work to encourage safe face-to-face advocacy during the pandemic, for example by sharing our internal guidance and explaining external rules, has also contributed to maintaining quality in advocacy practice nationally.

Influencing the reform of the Mental Health Act

In January 2021, the government published a [white paper](#) with their proposals to reform the Mental Health Act. We agree that the Mental Health Act needs changing. Reform has the potential to dramatically change the lives of those who experience mental ill health and spend time in hospital or on community treatment orders.

"My experience was very harsh. I felt staff lacked empathy and so instead of being put at ease that I was being put in a 'place of safety', I was confused and scared at what was happening. I was not consulted on the procedures and process of being detained or made to feel less anxious." - Feedback we collected for the independent review of the Mental Health Act

We have met regularly with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to help to shape the proposed reforms, in particular, to support policy discussions about enhancing and extending advocacy. We have also been active in several mental health networks to work with others to influence the vital reform of the Mental Health Act and share evidence and insight on advocacy with organisations who do not have expertise in this area.

We led work within the Advocacy Leaders Network to develop a joint [response](#) setting out what we think about the proposals to reform the Mental Health Act, which we submitted in May 2021. We make the case that advocacy should be available automatically for anyone who is in hospital because of mental ill health, and that there should be more powers for Mental Health Tribunals to make sure people get the support they need outside of hospital. We will continue to actively engage with DHSC as they draft a Bill to reform the Mental Health Act and will work with others across the health, social care, and rights sectors to make sure that reforms go far enough and make a difference to people's lives.



Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) and the Mental Capacity Act

LPS is a new process for deciding whether a person is deprived of their liberty, currently due to be introduced in 2022. We had been calling on government not to make care home managers responsible for leading the LPS assessment process to inform decisions about whether a person is deprived of their liberty. We celebrated our success when the government announced that it had changed this proposal and that care home managers would no longer have this responsibility, as if implemented this would have been a backwards step in people's rights.

The latest [Impact Assessment](#) for the Mental Capacity Act, which was published in February 2021, is much improved and includes reference to insight which VoiceAbility shared in order to better reflect the reality of advocacy provision and workforce and training requirements that will be needed to support the implementation of LPS. We continue to work with the LPS policy team at DHSC to support their understanding of advocacy and are pushing for the Code of Practice to strengthen people's rights as much as possible.

In the Advocacy Leaders Network, we have started to prepare together for LPS through a working group. VoiceAbility will work across the advocacy sector to develop our response to the Code of Practice once it is published. We will continue to share our first-hand insight with policymakers and parliamentarians as the code goes through the consultation and parliamentary processes, pushing for people to be at the centre of LPS.

Shaping NICE advocacy guidelines

VoiceAbility submitted a consultation response to NICE on its draft scope for the development of guidelines for 'advocacy services for adults with health and social care needs.' Our feedback was endorsed by 12 other organisations from the Advocacy Leaders Network. [NICE responded to our feedback](#) in their most recent update of the scope of the guidelines and incorporated many of our comments into the revised scope. Our chief executive, Jonathan Senker, has been appointed to the guideline committee.

Health inequalities

Health inequality is a pressing issue for the people we work with. It's why we are part of the Health and Wellbeing Alliance, a partnership between voluntary sectors and the health

system which aims to provide a voice for all communities and improve their health and wellbeing and to influence DHSC and NHS England's work to address health inequality. We participate in the Alliance as part of the [Complex Needs Consortium](#), alongside the National Autistic Society (NAS) and Sense. Through the Alliance this year, we helped to shape the health system's response to the coronavirus pandemic. We considerably increased the scale and pace of this work due to the challenges the pandemic brought. The Health and Wellbeing Alliance's three-year programme came to an end in March 2021 and we have been selected to continue as a member of the Alliance in the new programme from May 2021.

Coronavirus has exposed health inequalities and made them worse, including for people with learning disabilities. In response to several reports on this inequality, Jonathan Senker set out some [concise and concrete actions](#) that would improve the situation, which were picked up by [The Guardian](#) as an opinion piece and featured on their home page.

Through the Health and Wellbeing Alliance we have also supported a project to form an advisory group of people with lived experience to sit on the Building the Right Support Delivery Board. Building the Right Support is the national plan, established in 2015, to make sure people with learning disabilities and autistic people are not left in hospitals when they would be better off living with support in the community.

We also produced, with input from Kate Mercer, a [paper](#) that sets out the critical ingredients for effective delivery and commissioning of advocacy for people with learning disabilities and autistic people who are subject to seclusion, segregation or restraint. We are sharing and developing learning from this within the Advocacy Leaders Network through a working group established to look solely at this issue.

NHS complaints advocacy

Over summer 2020, we surveyed our advocates and people we've worked with on their experience of giving and getting support to make an NHS complaint. This first-hand insight helped to shape our submission to the Parliamentary Health Services Ombudsman's (PHSO) consultation on a new Complaint Standards Framework. We've been working in [partnership with PHSO](#) to create the framework, which was published in March 2021, and to define next steps on how it will be embedded across the NHS. This work has helped us to develop an even more effective, future-ready model for NHS complaints advocacy, which has helped us to win new contracts to provide the benefit of this model to more people.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

In 2020 we started an equality, diversity and inclusion staff forum to help guide our actions as we seek to continually improve in these areas. We also increased diversity at the most senior level of our organisation, recruiting [four new trustees](#), Susan Douglas-Scott (chair), Izaro Arbelaiz, Mahua Nandi, and Anthony Osijo, who bring a range of diverse experience.

Within the Advocacy Leaders Network, we have helped to form a subgroup on equity, diversity and inclusion, chaired by our Head of Operations. In this group advocacy organisations to work together, share practical steps they are taking and hold each other to account on diversity and equity in their services and in their own organisations. Also as part of the Advocacy Leaders Network, we developed and published the sector's '[advocacy principles](#) for coronavirus and beyond' which included to take positive anti-discrimination action and work together to promote systemic change.

This year we will bring in external expertise and capacity to help us develop a clear plan to address systemic disparities within our own organisation and support the work of the Advocacy Leaders Network to address systemic disparities across the sector.

Other partnership activities

In 2020-2021, we were also part of the following alliances and membership organisations:

- [National Voices](#)
- [Voluntary Organisations Disability Group \(VODG\)](#)
- [National Council of Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#)
- [Care and Support Alliance \(CSA\)](#)
- [Continuing Healthcare Alliance](#)
- [Association of Mental Health Providers \(AHMP\)](#)
- **Mental Health Alliance**

Change in advocacy practice, health and social care and society: Future plans

Our policy priorities for the year ahead include:

- improving people's experiences when receiving care or treatment for mental ill health - pushing for effective reform of the Mental Health Act so that more of us get the support of an advocate when it matters most
- making sure that people are heard and their rights are respected by contributing to the code of practice and regulations for the Mental Capacity Act, ahead of the launch of LPS, and working with policy-makers and parliamentarians as these progress through parliament
- pushing for a people-centred vision for social care so that social care reform prioritises our rights to have choice and control over how we live our lives and fosters a system where we are all empowered to thrive as well as survive
- challenging health inequalities so that we all get the care and treatment we need to live healthy and fulfilled lives, especially if we are disabled, have a learning disability, or are autistic

We will also have three overarching priorities in all our work to change advocacy practice, health and social care and society. These are to:

1. continue to prioritise and invest in partnership working
2. put the voice of experience at the centre of the policy changes we want to see
3. play our part in promoting equality and equity

Reference and administrative information

Trustees

Susan Douglas-Scott – Chair / Investment Committee Member (*appointed 27 October 2020*)

Peter Letley – Chair / Investment Committee Member (*resigned 26 January 2021*)

Philip Tatt (*resigned 26 January 2021*)

Kate Markey - Audit & Risk Committee Member (*resigned 28 August 2020*)

Susan Brown – Safeguarding Governance Committee Chair

Andrew Weston – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member

Louisa Whait – Audit & Risk Committee Member

Matthew Smith – Audit & Risk Committee Member

James Alistair Schofield – Audit & Risk Committee Chair / Investment Committee Chair

Viral Shah – Audit & Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member

Gavin Sumner – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member

Izaro Arbelaiz-Teresa (*appointed 27 October 2020*)

Anthony Osijo – Audit & Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member (*appointed 27 October 2020*)

Mahua Nandi - Audit & Risk Committee Member (*appointed 27 October 2020*)

Secretary

Richard Jones

Chief Executive Officer

Jonathan Senker

Registered Office

The Old Granary - Westwick, Oakington

Cambridge CB24 3AR

Incorporated in United Kingdom, Company Number 03798884

Registered in England and Wales, Charity Number 1076630

Registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC050036

Auditor

Sayer Vincent LLP

Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane

London EC1Y 0TL

Bankers

National Westminster Bank Plc

23 Market Street

Cambridge CB2 3PA

Solicitors

Radar Limited

6 Beacon Way

Hull

HU3 4AE

Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP

134 Edmund Street

Birmingham

B3 2ES

Structure, governance and management (including Strategic Report)

Governing document

The organisation is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 30th June 1999 and registered as a charity on 19th July 1999. The Company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the Company. It is governed by its Articles of Association which, following changes introduced by the Companies Act 2006, now also contain its objects and powers. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

The financial statements comply with current statutory requirements, the memorandum and articles of association and the Statement of Recommended Practice - Accounting and Reporting by Charities (SORP) applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with FRS 102. This trustees' annual report includes a directors' report as required by company law.

Appointment of Trustees

As set out in the Articles of Association, members of the Board of Trustees must be appointed by an ordinary resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the Trustees and must be appointed for a term of three years. On ceasing to be a Trustee a person may be reappointed provided that no one may serve as a Trustee for more than a maximum of three consecutive terms, after which they must cease to be a Trustee for at least 12 months before they are eligible to be re-appointed.

The Board members bring insight from their own lived experience of disability, understanding of the Charity's social mission, and business and commercial skills. The range of experience is kept under review and in the event of any shortfalls, new Trustees are sought to fill the gaps.

Trustee induction and training

New Trustees undergo a period of induction to brief them on the values, direction and work of VoiceAbility, their legal obligations under charity and company law and good practice duties, the contents of the Articles of Association, the Board and decision-making processes, the business plan and recent financial performance of the Charity. During the induction they view our services and meet with key employees and other Trustees. Trustees are encouraged to participate in external and internally run training and development where this will facilitate the undertaking of their role.

Organisational structure

The Board of Trustees administers the Charity. The Board meets once per quarter with additional meetings when required to deal with issues of strategy in more depth.

VoiceAbility also has within its constitution an Audit and Risk Committee (ARC). The ARC members meet once per quarter in advance of the Board meetings to review and discuss matters such as management and statutory accounts, risk and governance. In addition to ARC, there is an Investment Committee. The Investment Committee convenes twice a year. The purpose of the committee is to ensure that the Charity is investing funds in line with the

Investment Policy. There is also a Safeguarding Committee, the purpose of which is to ensure quality safeguarding practices and approaches are developed and implemented, and to support the Charity in discharging its statutory and good practice duties and responsibilities - as both an employer and a provider - in relation to safeguarding.

The Trustees have delegated the day to day responsibility for the provision of services to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for:

- recommending strategy to the Board
- management of the Charity's external profile and influencing work
- ensuring that the Charity delivers the services in line with its mission and requirements
- ensuring that key performance indicators are met across the range of social and business objectives

The Chief Executive Officer leads an Executive Leadership Team whose members are the executive managers of the Charity.

Risk management

The principal risks and uncertainties facing the organisation are centred around five key areas:

1. **Impact** – the desired impact of activities is not delivered or cannot be adequately evidenced
2. **Financial sustainability** – our ability to continue to make an impact in the medium to long term is threatened
3. **Compliance** - the organisation fails to meet regulatory, legal or contract compliance requirements or expectations
4. **Reputation** – we do not respond effectively to any incident that could result in damage to VoiceAbility's reputation
5. **Safeguarding** – we fail to adequately protect staff, volunteers or vulnerable people from harm or abuse

The steps to manage these risks are set out below.

The Trustees are responsible for setting the tone and influencing the culture of risk management within VoiceAbility.

The Executive Leadership Team have established a risk register, identifying the types of risks faced and prioritising them in terms of potential impact and likelihood of occurrence. Having due regard to the strength of the current internal controls and procedures already in place, a series of mitigating actions have been identified to appropriately address these risks.

The Executive Leadership Team, the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board of Trustees periodically review the risks and the risk management strategies to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the organisation.

Public benefit

We have referred to the guidance in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and in planning our future activities. In particular, the Trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives they have set.

Directors' liabilities

There are no provisions relating specifically to Directors' liabilities to report.

There are no qualifying third-party indemnity provisions which are the direct responsibility of the Charity.

There are no qualifying pension scheme indemnity provisions, due to the charity operating a Defined Contribution scheme.

Fundraising

We are not a fundraising charity, with our income deriving primarily from local government, NHS and central government contracts. We do not solicit donations but do receive them from time to time and do approach grant giving bodies. We are therefore registered with the fundraising regulator and follow their guidance. VoiceAbility does not use any professional fundraisers and no fundraising is undertaken on our behalf by third parties.

Disabled employees

We recognise the importance and benefits of having disabled people involved in and leading the organisation's work at every level including in governance roles, as employees and as volunteers. In relation to employment, the expertise in various aspects of our work which disabled people bring is valued strongly. Disabled applicants who meet the minimum essential criteria for posts are guaranteed interviews and we encourage applicants to identify any adjustments which are needed to ensure that they can participate equally in selection processes.

Training has been provided to managers on equality and employment, including specifically on disability equality.

The organisation has a full policy on diversity and employment, which underlines our approach to exceed legal requirements in relation to diversity as we recognise the importance and value to the organisation and to people using our services of a workforce which is diverse in relation to all protected characteristics, including disability.

We are continuing to work to improve the experience of and contribution by all employees, including disabled employees. We have built on the guidance published in July 2016 and have been recognised as a Disability Confident employer.

We have paid posts which specifically require personal insights that come from having a learning disability, particularly Expert by Experience posts and our Speak Out Leaders. Additionally, we have roles of peer mentors and peer supporters which have provided work skills and therefore routes into employment for people who have used long-term mental health and substance use services.

Employee involvement

VoiceAbility's Trustees and Directors recognise employee engagement to be one of the most powerful drivers of organisational performance and of our success in enabling people who use our services to achieve their outcomes. It is central to our strategy.

We use a range of approaches to promote effective employee involvement and engagement and make sure that colleagues throughout the organisation are well-informed. These include:

1. Cross sectional employee groups, who help to develop critical organisational policies and practices, ranging from our pay policy and salary benchmarking to our approach to learning and development. As part of VoiceAbility's strategy these groups are being formalised in the form of a Staff Forum.
2. Regular attendance of the Chief Executive and other members of the Executive Leadership Team at team meetings throughout the organisation, to discuss the organisation's direction and development and to seek, receive and act on feedback.
3. Weekly 'open phone' times publicised to all members of staff, at which the Chief Executive seeks and receives feedback and responds to issues of concern. An alternative of email contact at any time is also made available to all colleagues.
4. Regular internal communication updates and bulletins, including VoiceAbility News (a monthly e-update written by staff and distributed to all teams).
5. A well-maintained intranet site and on-line collaboration tools, including webinars and extensive use of Microsoft Teams.
6. Regular team and supervision meetings held throughout the organisation.
7. A Health, Safety and Wellbeing forum, formed in 2020. The purpose of the forum is to represent, discuss and review how we keep everyone physically safe and mentally healthy at work. The forum meets every six weeks. Their initiatives in 2020-21 included an additional half day's discretionary leave entitlement for all staff and a Wellbeing Activity Day, where staff were given the time to get together with their colleagues to focus on wellbeing and discuss how best to support one another.

Pay policy

VoiceAbility operates an objective outcome pay policy. Staff are placed within bandings dependent on skillset and experience, and upon successful completion of agreed annual objectives, have the opportunity to progress in the banding by way of incremental 'spine points'. Regular supervisions and appraisals ensure that pay progression is measurable within a band, ensuring greater transparency and understanding of pay related decisions.

Although the Executive Leadership Team are covered by the banding pay, ultimately decisions regarding the remuneration of these roles, and that of the Chief Executive, are made by the Board.

Financial review

Overview

The Trustees are delighted that despite the challenges VoiceAbility has faced over the last financial year, the Charity delivered a surplus of £45,481. This is after designated investment expenditure of £385,036. The net gain of £205,363 on investments held as fixed assets, brought the overall closing surplus to £250,844, significantly better than budget.

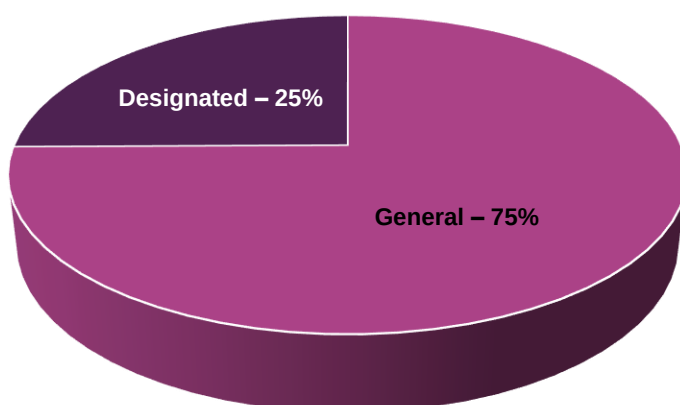
We generated a total income of £10,285,604. This is 16.4% higher than last year (2020 - £8,834,090).

Total expenditure of £10,240,123 is 15.0% higher than last year (2020 – £8,903,887), a lower percentage increase than income. Due to the restrictions brought about by coronavirus, we quickly adapted to new ways of delivering some of our services remotely. These changes resulted in a slightly lower net cost to deliver.

Reserves

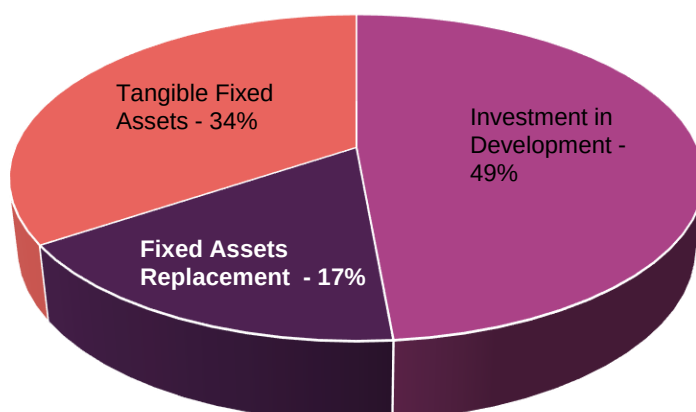
The reserves carried forward as at 31 March 2021 stand at £3,272,258:

Total reserves as at 31 March



General	£2,449,111
Designated	£823,147
Restricted	nil
Total	£3,272,258

Designated reserves breakdown as at 31 March



Investment in Development	£400,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	£140,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	£283,147
Total	£823,147

The Unrestricted Reserves are those funds that are available to be used on the charitable objects, to be spent as the Trustees see fit.

The Trustees hold Unrestricted Reserves as either General Reserves or Designated Reserves. General Reserves are there to support the day-to-day operations of the organisation and to ensure that VoiceAbility can meet its future financial obligations. Designated Reserves are held as unrestricted funds that have been earmarked for a particular purpose by the Trustees.

Funds designated to fulfil our **Investment in Development** now stand at £400,000. This is to fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments over the period 2020 to 2022.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund, which is in place to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long-term basis, has been re-assessed and now stands at £140,000. Laptops and mobile phone purchases are recorded against the designated fund and upon review of the Charity's equipment requirements, transfers then made from general funds to ensure the correct level of funds have been designated.

The remainder of £283,147 is the balance of the **Tangible Fixed Assets** which are not liquid and therefore removed from the undesignated, unrestricted reserves in the interest of prudence when calculating our reserve cover requirements.

VoiceAbility adopts a risk-based approach to determine the value of General Reserves necessary to meet its future financial obligations, taking into account the reliability of income streams and the extent to which expenditure is committed, as well as the major risks to which the charity is exposed.

VoiceAbility uses two approaches to inform decision-making over the value of General Reserves required in any one year. One places a financial value on facing the key unmitigated risks identified in the Risk Register; the other provides a finite time-based cover for the committed expenditure faced by the organisation.

The first approach used is to aggregate the assessed financial impact of the key unmitigated risks identified in the VoiceAbility Risk Register and assume that these risks occur either concurrently or sequentially over a timeframe that does not allow recovery between events. The quantification of those risks is assessed by the Executive Leadership Team and validated by the Audit and Risk Committee alongside the annual review of the Risk Register.

For the second approach, the Trustees require a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 6 months' worth of fixed costs cover to be held in General Reserves. The Trustees consider these periods a reasonable and realistic amount of time to curtail, change or serve notice on contractual agreements with suppliers or staff.

Fixed costs are defined in this context as those that VoiceAbility are legally obliged to pay for a period of time regardless of delivery levels and income streams. These costs comprise Influenceable Costs (Premises, Communications and Software, Insurances, and Contact Centre) and Support Function Costs. Due to the predominantly contract-based nature of the income streams, it is assumed that operational staff are subject to TUPE legislation and as such are not included in these calculations.

Utilising the outcomes of these two approaches, the Audit and Risk Committee will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees on the required value of the General Reserves for each financial year as part of the approval of the annual budget.

Employing the first method, the level of reserves required is £950,000.

As a cross check and employing the second method, to cover monthly fixed costs of £243,000 the Charity would look to hold between £972,000 and £1,458,000 (4-6 months) in undesignated, unrestricted reserves. Taking the undesignated, unrestricted reserves as at 31 March 2021, VoiceAbility are able to cover their monthly fixed costs for just over 10 months. The Trustees recognise that the current level of reserves is higher than the policy requirement and are continually looking at ways to appropriately further the objects of the Charity, using these excess reserves.

Investments and bank accounts

VoiceAbility's Investment Committee manages its investment portfolio with the support of management company CCLA. At the end of 2019-20 CCLA's funds had been adversely impacted by the fall in investment markets but notably less than the overall market decrease. At the end of 2020-21, the fair value of the investment has grown materially. This reflects the composition of the CCLA portfolios and the emphasis on assets with sustainable underlying real returns and robust growth prospects independent of the general economic trend. As at 31 March 2021 £849,500 had been invested. Below shows the results of our investment over the last 6 years:

2015-16	£1,385
2016-17	£87,877
2017-18	£15,681
2018-19	£71,848
2019-20	(£32,497)
2020-21	£205,363
Total	£349,657

Events since the balance sheet date

There are no significant post balance sheet events to note.

Going concern

The Trustees have assessed whether the use of the going concern basis is appropriate and have considered possible events or conditions that might cast significant doubt on the ability of the charity to continue as a going concern. The Trustees have made this assessment for a period of at least one year from the date of approval of the financial statements. Given the exceptional circumstances of the coronavirus crisis in 2020, the Trustees and the Executive Leadership Team have reviewed all budgets and expected income and expenditure projections and have concluded that, together with the reserves established to help in such circumstances, there is a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The charity therefore continues to adopt the going concern basis in preparing its financial statements.

Statement of Trustees' responsibilities

The trustees (who are also directors of VoiceAbility for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Trustees' annual report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company Law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- a) select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently
- b) observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- c) make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- d) prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Charity will continue to operate
- e) state whether applicable UK accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements
- f) prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and group if group and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the trustees are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditor is unaware
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information

The trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Auditor

Sayer Vincent LLP was re-appointed as the charitable company's auditor during the year and has expressed its willingness to continue in that capacity.

The Trustees' annual report which includes the strategic report along with the financial statements has been approved by the Trustees on:

_____27 July 2021_____ and signed on their behalf by:

James Alistair Schofield – Audit & Risk Committee Chair

Independent Auditor's Report to the Members of VoiceAbility Advocacy

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Voiceability Advocacy (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2021 which comprise the statement of financial activities, balance sheet, statement of cash flows and notes to the financial statements, including significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 *The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2021 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and regulation 8 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended)

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charitable company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on Voiceability Advocacy's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other Information

The other information comprises the information included in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information contained within the annual report. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon. Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report, has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' annual report, including the strategic report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended) require us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the statement of trustees' responsibilities set out in the trustees' annual report, the trustees (who are also the directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable,

matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

We have been appointed as auditor under section 44(1)(c) of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and under the Companies Act 2006 and report in accordance with regulations made under those Acts.

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud are set out below.

Capability of the audit in detecting irregularities

In identifying and assessing risks of material misstatement in respect of irregularities, including fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations, our procedures included the following:

- We enquired of management, and the audit and risk committee, which included obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation, concerning the charity's policies and procedures relating to:
 - Identifying, evaluating, and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - Detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
 - The internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- We inspected the minutes of meetings of those charged with governance.
- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory framework that the charity operates in, focusing on those laws and regulations that had a material effect on the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of the charity from our professional and sector experience.
- We communicated applicable laws and regulations throughout the audit team and remained alert to any indications of non-compliance throughout the audit.
- We reviewed any reports made to regulators.
- We reviewed the financial statement disclosures and tested these to supporting documentation to assess compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- We performed analytical procedures to identify any unusual or unexpected relationships that may indicate risks of material misstatement due to fraud.
- In addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, we tested the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments, assessed whether the

judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias and tested significant transactions that are unusual or those outside the normal course of business.

Because of the inherent limitations of an audit, there is a risk that we will not detect all irregularities, including those leading to a material misstatement in the financial statements or non-compliance with regulation. This risk increases the more that compliance with a law or regulation is removed from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, as we will be less likely to become aware of instances of non-compliance. The risk is also greater regarding irregularities occurring due to fraud rather than error, as fraud involves intentional concealment, forgery, collusion, omission or misrepresentation.

A further description of our responsibilities is available on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and section 44(1)(c) of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Judith Miller (Senior statutory auditor)

20 August 2021

for and on behalf of Sayer Vincent LLP, Statutory Auditor

Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane, LONDON, EC1Y 0TL

Sayer Vincent LLP is eligible to act as auditor in terms of section 1212 of the Companies Act 2006

Statement of financial activities (incorporating an income and expenditure account)

For the year ended 31 March 2021

	Note	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2021 Total £	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2020 Total £
Income from:									
Donations and legacies	2	4,938	–	–	4,938	5,214	–	–	5,214
Charitable activities	3	10,192,750	–	51,775	10,244,525	8,737,838	–	47,575	8,785,413
Investments		36,140	–	–	36,140	43,463	–	–	43,463
Total income		10,233,829	–	51,775	10,285,604	8,786,515	–	47,575	8,834,090
Expenditure on:									
Charitable activities	4a	9,803,311	385,036	51,775	10,240,123	8,458,416	397,896	47,575	8,903,887
Total expenditure	4	9,803,311	385,036	51,775	10,240,123	8,458,416	397,896	47,575	8,903,887
Net income / (expenditure) before net gains / (losses) on investments		430,518	(385,036)	–	45,481	328,099	(397,896)	–	(69,797)
Net gains / (losses) on investments		205,363	–	–	205,363	(32,497)	–	–	(32,497)
Net income / (expenditure) for the year	5	635,881	(385,036)	–	250,844	295,602	(397,896)	–	(102,294)
Transfers between funds		(163,184)	163,184	–	–	(467,896)	467,896	–	–
Net movement in funds		472,697	(221,853)	–	250,844	(172,294)	70,000	–	(102,294)
Reconciliation of funds:									
Total funds brought forward		1,976,414	1,045,000	–	3,021,414	2,148,708	975,000	–	3,123,708
Total funds carried forward		2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258	1,976,414	1,045,000	–	3,021,414

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities. There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in Note 17a to the financial statements.

Balance sheet

Company no. 03798884

As at 31 March 2021

	Note	2021 £	2020 £
Fixed assets:			
Tangible assets	10	283,147	352,747
Investments	11	1,199,156	993,794
		<u>1,482,303</u>	<u>1,346,541</u>
Current assets:			
Debtors	12	1,013,168	987,897
Cash at bank and in hand		1,334,492	1,631,536
		<u>2,347,660</u>	<u>2,619,433</u>
Liabilities:			
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	13	(371,483)	(828,754)
		<u>1,976,178</u>	<u>1,790,679</u>
Net current assets			
		<u>3,458,481</u>	<u>3,137,220</u>
Total assets less current liabilities			
Provision for liabilities	15	(186,223)	(115,805)
		<u>3,272,258</u>	<u>3,021,414</u>
Net assets			
		<u>3,272,258</u>	<u>3,021,414</u>
Funds:	16a		
Restricted income funds		-	-
Unrestricted income funds:			
Designated funds		823,147	1,045,000
General funds		2,449,111	1,976,414
		<u>3,272,258</u>	<u>3,021,414</u>
Total unrestricted funds			
		<u>3,272,258</u>	<u>3,021,414</u>
Total funds		<u>3,272,258</u>	<u>3,021,414</u>

Approved by the trustees on

27 July 2021

and signed on their behalf by

James Alistair Schofield
Trustee

Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 31 March 2021

	2021		2020	
	£	£	£	£
Cash flows from operating activities				
Net income / (expenditure) for the reporting period (as per the statement of financial activities)	45,481		(69,797)	
Depreciation charges	116,955		67,564	
(Gains)/losses on investments	–		–	
Dividends and interest from investments	(36,140)		(43,463)	
Increase/(decrease) in provisions	70,418		7,191	
(Increase)/decrease in debtors	(25,271)		75,720	
Increase/(decrease) in creditors	(457,272)		46,704	
Net cash provided by / (used in) operating activities		(285,829)		83,919
Cash flows from investing activities:				
Dividends and interest from investments	36,140		43,463	
Purchase of fixed assets	(47,356)		(249,406)	
Net cash provided by / (used in) investing activities		(11,215)		(205,943)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		(297,044)		(122,024)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		1,631,536		1,753,559
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year		1,334,492		1,631,536

1 Accounting policies

a) Statutory information

VoiceAbility Advocacy is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is incorporated in England & Wales. The registered office address is The Old Granary, Westwick, Oakington, Cambridge, CB24 3AR.

b) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – (Charities SORP FRS 102), The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (September 2015) and the Companies Act 2006/Charities Act 2011.

The Charity has a subsidiary, Advocacy Experience Limited. The subsidiary is currently dormant and therefore consolidated financial statements have not been prepared.

Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy or note.

In applying the financial reporting framework, the trustees have made a number of subjective judgements, for example in respect of significant accounting estimates. Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The nature of the estimation means the actual outcomes could differ from those estimates. Any significant estimates and judgements affecting these financial statements are detailed within the relevant accounting policy below.

The trustees do not consider that there are any sources of estimation uncertainty at the reporting date that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next reporting period.

c) Public benefit entity

The charity meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102.

d) Going concern

The trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

The trustees have specifically considered the impact of covid-19 on the charity and do not consider there to be an material uncertainty as a result. Further discussion on the impact of and response to covid-19 by the charity can be found in the trustees' annual report.

e) Income

Income is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the income have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and that the amount can be measured reliably.

Income from government and other grants, whether 'capital' grants or 'revenue' grants, is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the funds, any performance conditions attached to the grants have been met, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably and is not deferred.

Income received in advance of the provision of a specified service is deferred until the criteria for income recognition are met.

f) Interest receivable

Interest on funds held on deposit is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably by the charity; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the bank.

1 Accounting policies (continued)

g) Fund accounting

Restricted funds are to be used for specific purposes as laid down by the donor. Expenditure which meets these criteria is charged to the fund.

Unrestricted funds are donations and other incoming resources received or generated for the charitable purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds earmarked by the trustees for particular purposes.

h) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to make a payment to a third party, it is probable that settlement will be required and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is classified under the following activity headings:

- Costs of raising funds relate to the costs incurred by the charity in inducing third parties to make voluntary contributions to it, as well as the cost of any activities with a fundraising purpose
- Expenditure on charitable activities includes the costs of delivering services undertaken to further the purposes of the charity and their associated support costs

Irrecoverable VAT is charged as a cost against the activity for which the expenditure was incurred.

Support and governance costs are re-allocated to charitable activities in full.

i) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT (continued)

Governance costs are the costs associated with the governance arrangements of the charity. These costs are associated with constitutional and statutory requirements and include any costs associated with the strategic management of the charity's activities.

j) Operating leases

Rental charges are charged on a straight line basis over the term of the lease.

k) Tangible fixed assets

Items of equipment are capitalised where the purchase price exceeds £500 for an individual purchase. Depreciation costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the use of the related assets in those activities. Assets are reviewed for impairment if circumstances indicate their carrying value may exceed their net realisable value and value in use.

Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write down the cost of each asset to its estimated residual value over its expected useful life. The depreciation rates in use are as follows:

• Leasehold improvements	over the life of the lease
• Furniture, Computer, Telephones and Software	10% – 33%

l) Listed investments

Investments are a form of basic financial instrument and are initially recognised at their transaction value and subsequently measured at their fair value as at the balance sheet date using the closing quoted market price. Any change in fair value will be recognised in the statement of financial activities. Investment gains and losses, whether realised or unrealised, are combined and shown in the heading "Net gains/(losses) on investments" in the statement of financial activities. The charity does not acquire put options, derivatives or other complex financial instruments.

Investments in subsidiaries

Investments in subsidiaries are at cost.

m) Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any trade discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

n) Cash at bank and in hand

Cash at bank and cash in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2021

1 Accounting policies (continued)

o) Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

p) Financial instruments

The charity only has financial assets and financial liabilities of a kind that qualify as basic financial instruments. Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at their settlement value with the exception of bank loans which are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

q) Pensions

After three months of employment, employees are auto enrolled in the group stakeholder pension scheme (Aviva), via a salary exchange method. Employees are required to opt out should they not wish to be enrolled. The charity contributes 5% of gross salary and employees make a minimum contribution of 3% of gross salary. Employees joining the stakeholder pension contract directly with the insurance company. In addition to its own contribution the charity acts as agent in collecting and paying over employee pension contributions.

2 Income from donations and legacies

	2021 Total £	2020 Total £
Donations (unrestricted)	4,938	5,214

3 Income from charitable activities

	Grants £	2021 Earned income contracts £	Total £	Grants £	2020 Earned income contracts £	Total £
Advocacy Services:						
London	–	1,380,239	1,380,239	–	1,469,951	1,469,951
North East	–	2,315,930	2,315,930	–	2,367,002	2,367,002
North West	–	1,440,905	1,440,905	–	1,325,550	1,325,550
Midlands & South East	31,775	5,038,557	5,070,332	32,575	3,569,411	3,601,986
	31,775	10,175,631	10,207,406	32,575	8,731,914	8,764,489
Support Services	20,000	17,120	37,120	15,000	5,924	20,924
Total income from charitable activities	51,775	10,192,750	10,244,525	47,575	8,737,838	8,785,413

All earned income is unrestricted and all grant income is restricted.

4a Analysis of expenditure (current year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2021 Total £	2020 Total £
Direct staff costs	6,252,050	–	–	–	6,252,050	5,050,765
Indirect staff costs	–	125,455	138	1,252,823	1,378,416	1,184,205
Total staff costs (note 6)	6,252,050	125,455	138	1,252,823	7,630,465	6,234,970
Sub contractor Costs	866,084	–	–	–	866,084	1,040,295
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	168,244	1,496	–	–	169,740	168,572
Travel & Subsistence	98,296	11	–	–	98,307	248,885
Rent & Rates	157,145	–	–	–	157,145	220,774
Professional	3,604	223,523	–	–	227,128	138,297
Other direct costs	729,855	34,551	–	–	764,407	476,363
Business Development	–	–	–	104,012	104,012	94,420
CEO and related expenses	–	–	–	11,674	11,674	19,377
Finance	–	–	–	92,984	92,984	80,495
Human resources	–	–	–	58,544	58,544	97,135
IT and Office Admin	–	–	–	15,294	15,294	56,191
Trustee and AGM costs	–	–	31,078	–	31,078	12,270
Audit and accountancy costs	–	–	13,260	–	13,260	15,841
	8,275,279	385,036	44,476	1,535,331	10,240,123	8,903,887
Support costs	1,535,331	–	–	(1,535,331)	–	–
Governance costs	44,476	–	(44,476)	–	–	–
Investment costs	385,036	(385,036)	–	–	–	–
Total expenditure 2021	10,240,123	–	–	–	10,240,123	–
Total expenditure 2020	8,903,887	–	–	–	–	8,903,887

4b Analysis of expenditure (prior year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs £	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2020 Total £
Direct staff costs	5,050,765	–	–	–	5,050,765
Indirect staff costs	–	112,577	1,238	1,070,390	1,184,205
Total staff costs (note 7)	5,050,765	112,577	1,238	1,070,390	6,234,970
Sub contractor Costs	1,040,295	–	–	–	1,040,295
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	145,868	22,704	–	–	168,572
Travel & Subsistence	246,074	2,811	–	–	248,885
Rent & Rates	220,774	–	–	–	220,774
Professional	6,849	131,447	–	–	138,297
Other direct costs	415,570	60,793	–	–	476,363
Business Development	–	–	–	94,420	94,420
CEO and related expenses	–	–	–	19,377	19,377
Finance	–	–	–	80,495	80,495
Human resources	–	–	–	97,135	97,135
IT and Office Admin	–	–	–	56,191	56,191
Trustee and AGM costs	–	–	12,270	–	12,270
Audit and accountancy costs	–	–	15,841	–	15,841
	7,126,196	330,332	29,349	1,418,010	8,903,887
Support costs	1,418,010	–	–	(1,418,010)	–
Governance costs	29,349	–	(29,349)	–	–
Investment costs	330,332	(330,332)	–	–	–
Total expenditure 2020	8,903,887		–	–	8,903,887

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2021

5 Net income / (expenditure) for the year

This is stated after crediting / (charging):

	2021 £	2020 £
Depreciation	116,955	67,564
Operating lease rentals:		
Property	172,199	188,531
Auditor's remuneration (excluding VAT):		
Audit	11,000	10,750
Prior year (over)/ under accrual	–	1,000
Other services	–	–
	<u>116,955</u>	<u>67,564</u>

6 Analysis of staff costs, trustee remuneration and expenses, and the cost of key management personnel

Staff costs were as follows:

	2021 £	2020 £
Salaries and wages	6,547,123	5,351,671
Redundancy and termination costs	9,921	64,777
Social security costs	505,596	404,782
Employer's contribution to defined contribution pension schemes	496,287	387,203
Other staff costs	71,539	26,538
	<u>7,630,465</u>	<u>6,234,970</u>

The redundancy and termination costs were accrued at the balance sheet date.

The following number of employees received employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs and employer's national insurance) during the year between:

	2021 No.	2020 No.
£60,000 – £69,999	2	2
£70,000 – £79,999	1	1
£80,000 – £89,999	1	1
	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>

The total employee benefits (including pension contributions and employer's national insurance) of the key management personnel were £332,157 (2020: £326,022).

The charity trustees were neither paid nor received any other benefits from employment with the charity in the year (2020: £nil). No charity trustee received payment for professional or other services supplied to the charity (2020: £nil).

Trustees' expenses represents the payment or reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs totalling £0 (2020: £1,765) incurred by 0 (2020: 3) members relating to attendance at meetings of the trustees.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2021

7 Staff numbers

The average number of employees (head count based on number of staff employed) during the year was 310 (2020: 266) and based on full-time equivalent was 259 (2020: 215).

8 Related party transactions

There are no related party transactions to disclose for 2021 (2020: none).

There are no donations from related parties which are outside the normal course of business and no restricted donations from related parties.

9 Taxation

The charity is exempt from corporation tax as all its income is charitable and is applied for charitable purposes.

10 Tangible fixed assets

	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Telephones £	Software & Systems £	Total £
Cost					
At the start of the year	37,496	313,805	60,773	29,281	441,355
Additions in year	–	31,540	15,816	–	47,356
Disposals in year	(10,991)	(11,826)	–	–	(22,817)
At the end of the year	26,505	333,519	76,589	29,281	465,894
Depreciation					
At the start of the year	17,971	48,522	20,163	1,952	88,608
Charge for the year	13,040	69,339	28,720	5,856	116,955
Eliminated on disposal	(10,991)	(11,826)	–	–	(22,817)
At the end of the year	20,020	106,035	48,883	7,808	182,747
Net book value					
At the end of the year	6,485	227,484	27,705	21,473	283,147
At the start of the year	19,525	265,283	40,610	27,329	352,747

All of the above assets are used for charitable purposes.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2021

11 Investments held as fixed assets

	2021 £	2020 £
Fair value at the start of the year	993,794	1,026,291
Additions at cost	–	–
Disposal proceeds	–	–
Net gain / (loss) on change in fair value	205,362	(32,497)
	1,199,156	993,794
Cash held by investment broker pending reinvestment	–	–
Fair value at the end of the year	1,199,156	993,794
	2021 £	2020 £
Investments comprise:		
COIF Charities Investment Fund	1,199,156	993,794

12 Debtors

	2021 £	2020 £
Trade debtors	584,584	416,321
Other debtors	41,758	17,234
Prepayments	215,322	285,809
Accrued income	171,504	268,534
	1,013,168	987,897

13 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2021 £	2020 £
Trade creditors	126,658	451,357
Taxation and social security	129,512	110,382
Other creditors	70,497	65,637
Accruals	43,311	81,495
Deferred income (note 24)	1,506	119,883
	371,483	828,754

14 Deferred income

Deferred income comprises income invoiced in advance of work not undertaken by year end

	2021 £	2020 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	119,883	57,549
Amount released to income in the year	(119,883)	(57,549)
Amount deferred in the year	1,506	119,883
Balance at the end of the year	1,506	119,883

15 Provisions for liabilities

Provisions for liabilities comprises

	2021 £	2020 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	115,805	108,614
Amount released in the year	–	–
Increase in provision in the year	70,418	7,191
Balance at the end of the year	186,223	115,805
Dilapidations provision	11,500	4,250
Customer refund provision	136,241	69,890
Staffing provision	38,482	41,665
	186,223	115,805

Dilapidations Provision

To provide for the refurbishment of our Cambridge office at the end of our tenancy as required by our lease agreement. The likely cost of this is calculated and charged to projects as an additional accommodation cost on an annual basis.

Customer Refund Provision

£93,772 relates to two services regarding potential repayment due to under delivery. The remainder relates to duplicate receipts from four customers.

Staffing Provision

To provide for HR issues identified pre 31st March 2021.

16a Analysis of net assets between funds (current year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	283,147	–	283,147
Investments	1,199,156	–	–	1,199,156
Net current assets	1,436,178	540,000	–	1,976,178
Provisions	(186,223)	–	–	(186,223)
Net assets at 31 March 2021	2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258

16b Analysis of net assets between funds (prior year)

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
* Tangible fixed assets	–	352,747	–	352,747
Investments	993,794	–	–	993,794
Net current assets	745,679	1,045,000	–	1,790,679
Provisions	(115,805)	–	–	(115,805)
Net assets at 31 March 2020	1,623,668	1,397,746	–	3,021,414

* Prior year tangible fixed assets of £170,905 have been reclassified as designated funds.

17a Movements in funds (current year)

	At 1 April 2020 £	Income & gains £	Expenditure & losses £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2021 £
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	–	20,000	(20,000)	–	–
** Cambridgeshire County Council	–	1,775	(1,775)	–	–
*** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	–	30,000	(30,000)	–	–
Total restricted funds	–	51,775	(51,775)	–	–
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	695,000	–	(385,036)	90,036	400,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	350,000	–	–	(210,000)	140,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	–	–	–	283,147	283,147
Total designated funds	1,045,000	–	(385,036)	163,184	823,147
General funds	1,976,414	10,490,966	(9,855,086)	(163,184)	2,449,111
Total unrestricted funds	3,021,414	10,490,966	(10,240,123)	–	3,272,258
Total funds	3,021,414	10,542,741	(10,291,898)	–	3,272,258

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Police and Crime Commissioner's Youth and Community Fund. Grant for membership to the Safe Places National Network.

*** Furtherance of existing Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

Investment in Development has been reviewed and now stands at £400,000. This will fund VoiceAbility's Change Programme 5 year objectives as outlined in the annual report.

The **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund is to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

The **Tangible Fixed Assets** designated fund removes the non-cash element.

17b Movements in funds (prior year)

	At 1 April 2019 £	Income & gains £	Expenditure & losses £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2020 £
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	15,000	(15,000)	-	-
** Cambridgeshire County Council	-	2,575	(2,575)	-	-
*** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	30,000	(30,000)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	47,575	(47,575)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	975,000	-	(330,332)	50,332	695,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	-	-	(67,564)	417,564	350,000
Total designated funds	975,000	-	(397,896)	467,896	1,045,000
General funds	2,148,708	8,801,593	(8,505,991)	(467,896)	1,976,414
Total unrestricted funds	3,123,708	8,801,593	(8,903,887)	-	3,021,414
Total funds	3,123,708	8,849,168	(8,951,462)	-	3,021,414

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Police and Crime Commissioner's Youth and Community Fund. Grant for membership to the Safe Places National Network.

*** Furtherance of existing Quality Checker service that sees people with a learning disability employed to inspect local services and to provide advice on how they can better meet the needs of individuals with a learning disability.

Designated funds Change Programme **Investment in Development** has been reviewed and now stands at £695,000. This will fund VoiceAbility's Change Programme 5 year objectives as outlined in the annual report.

A **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund of £350,000 has been introduced to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

18 Operating lease commitments payable as a lessee

The group and charity's total future minimum lease payments under non-cancellable operating leases is as follows for each of the following periods:

	Land and Buildings	
	2021 £	2020 £
Less than one year	98,120	162,278
One to five years	36,745	153,874
Over five years	-	-
	134,865	316,152