

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.



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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.



Figure 2:
Jonathan Senker

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

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.

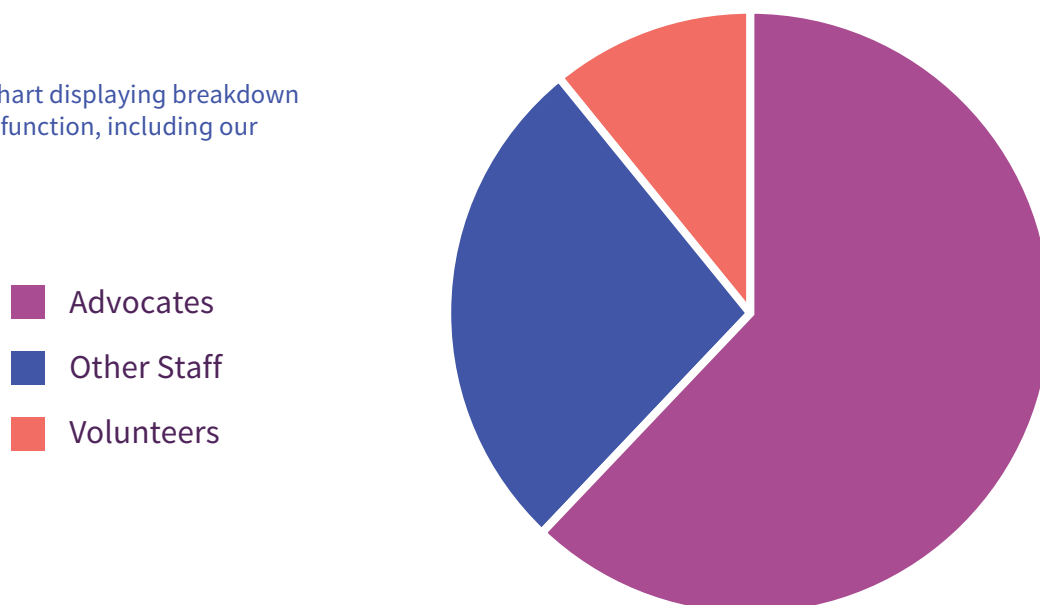
Our team

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?

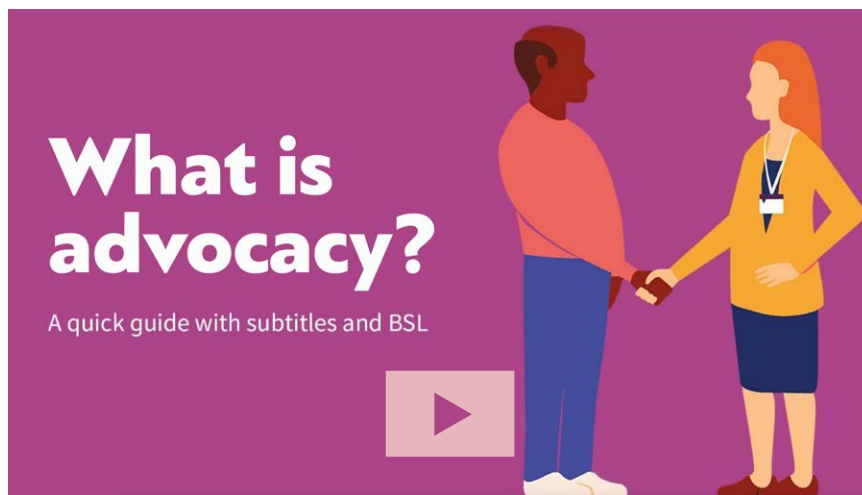
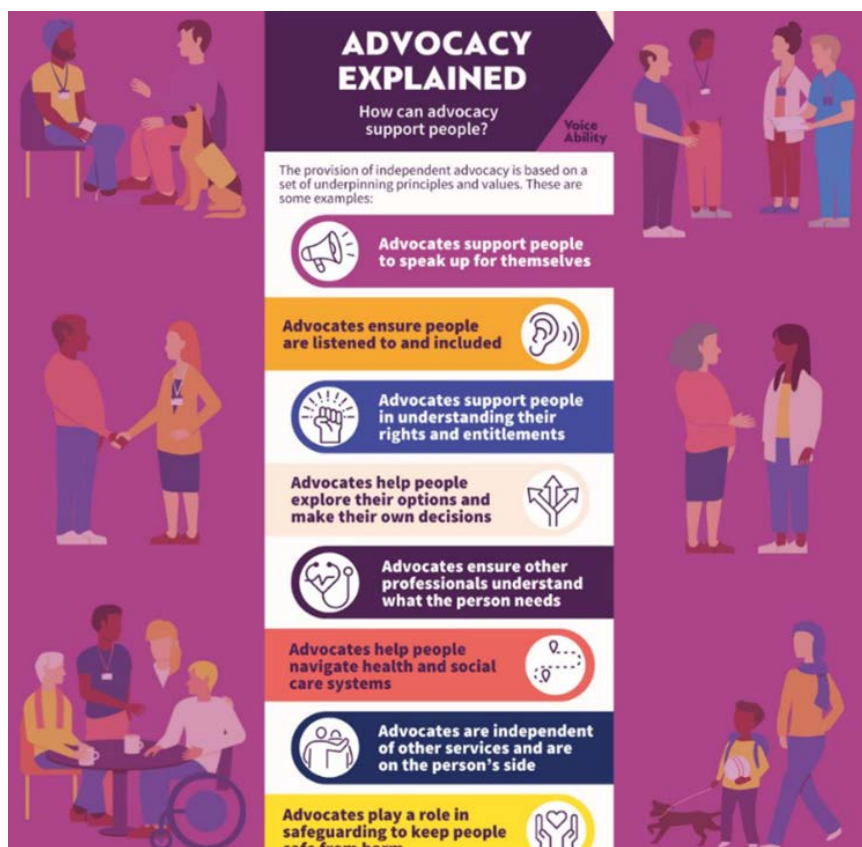


Figure 5:
Advocacy
explained



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	<p>Although it varies by area, advocacy can be available for children and young people who</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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	<p>General advocacy is for adults and people over 16 years old. It includes statutory advocacy provided under:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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	<p>We provide advocacy for adult unpaid carers in Edinburgh. Advocates can support carers with issues like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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 <p>Carers advocacy can be provided in a group setting, and can also be provided under the same legislation listed above for general advocacy.</p>

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

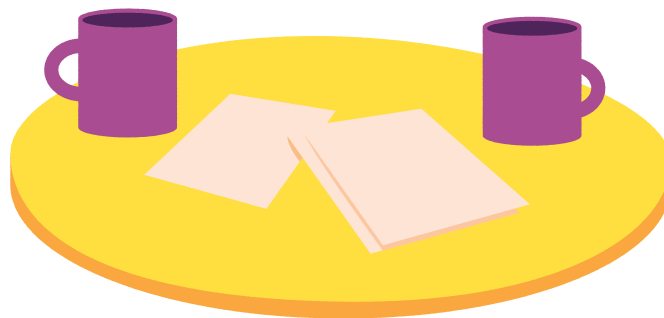
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“My favourite aspect of providing NHS Complaints Advocacy is watching the growth in confidence of my clients who feel they are able to speak up for themselves and have their voices heard.”

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.

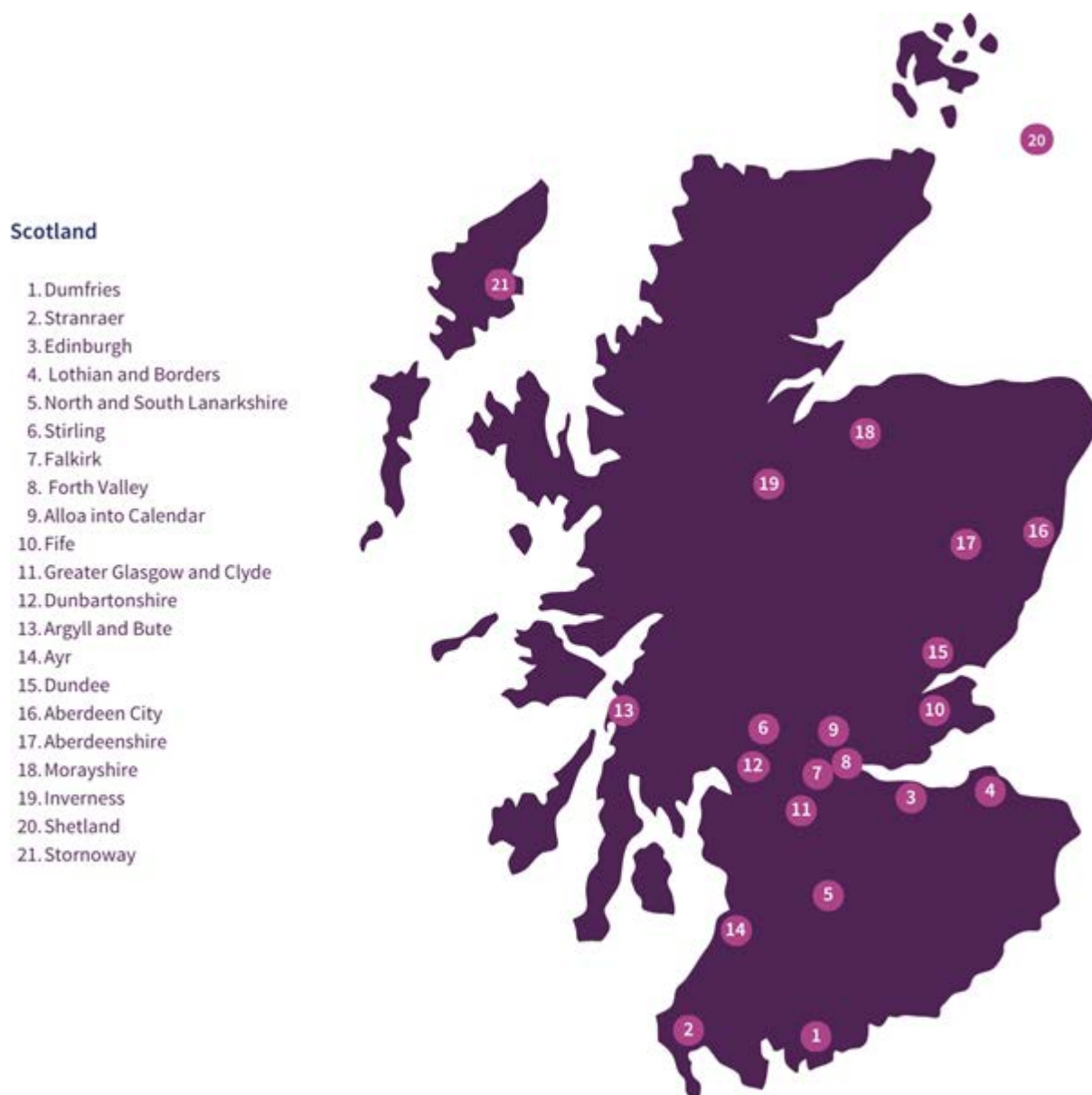
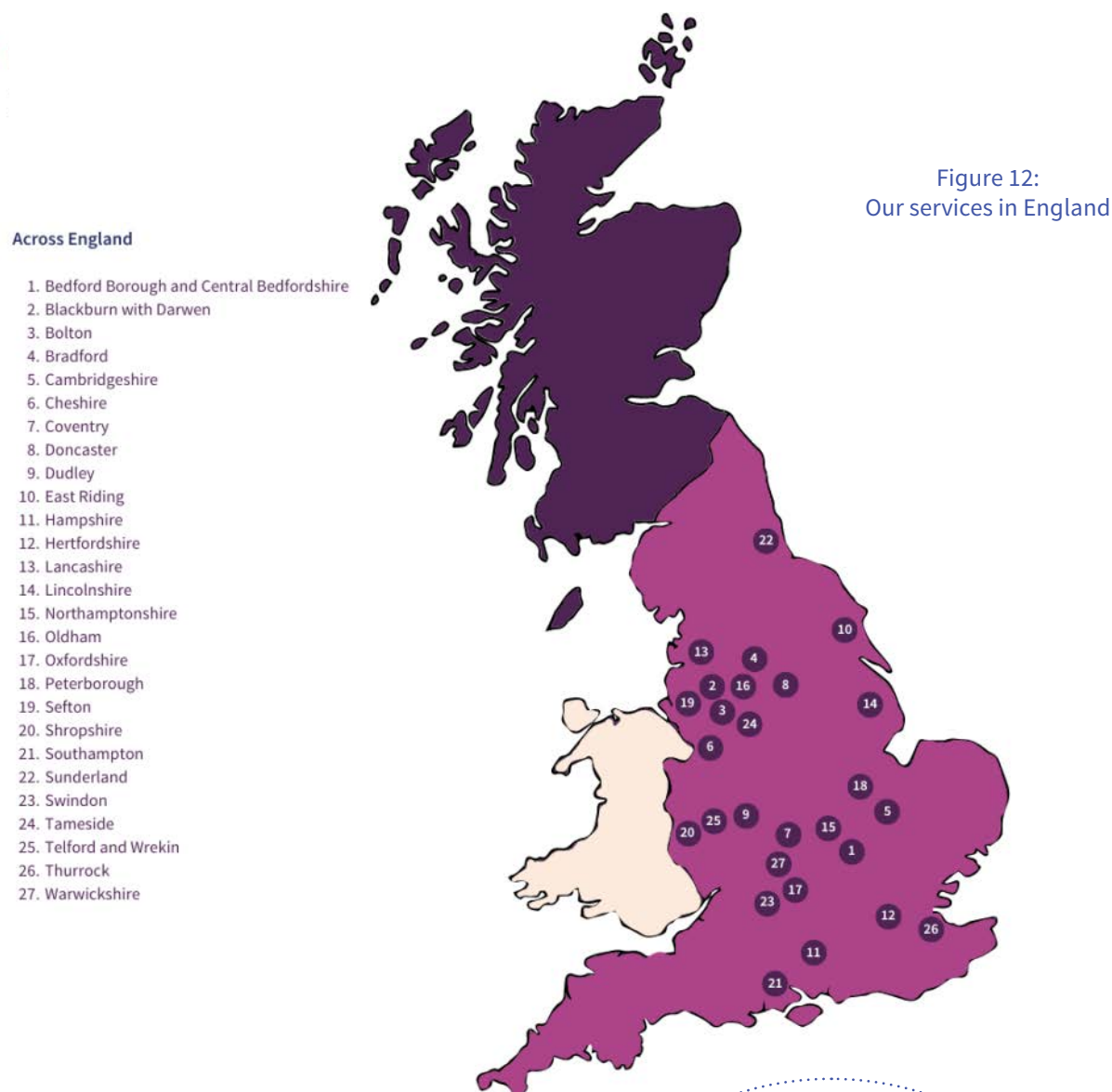


Figure 11: Our services in Scotland 2023-24. We provide services across the whole of Scotland.

Where we worked in England



London boroughs

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

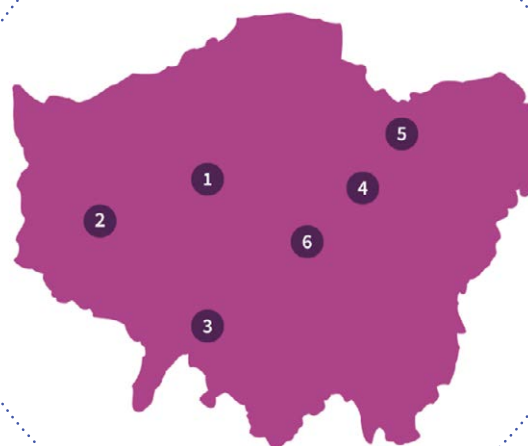


Figure 13: Our services in London

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

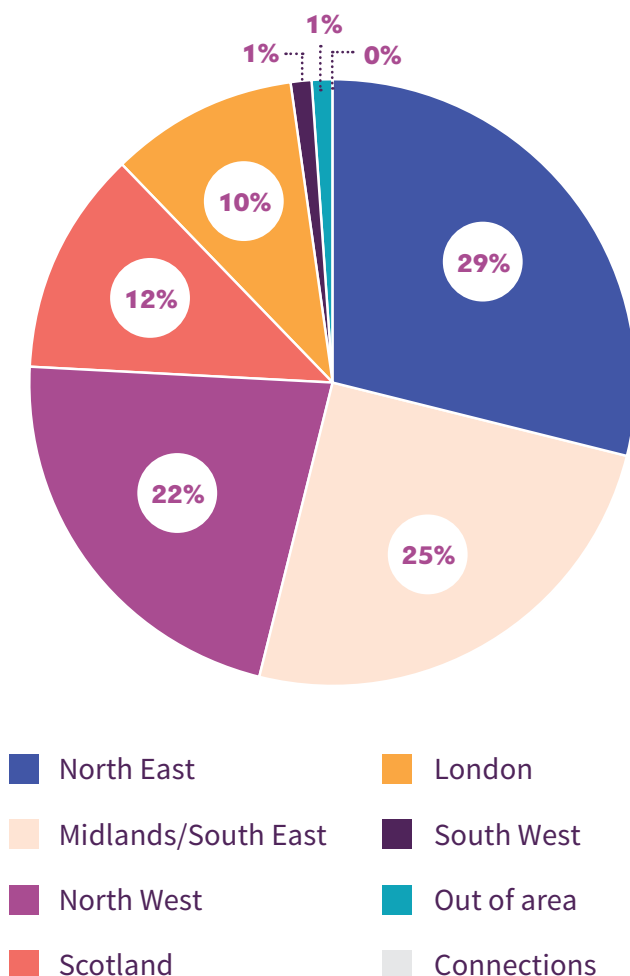


Figure 14: A pie chart showing our cases by area

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

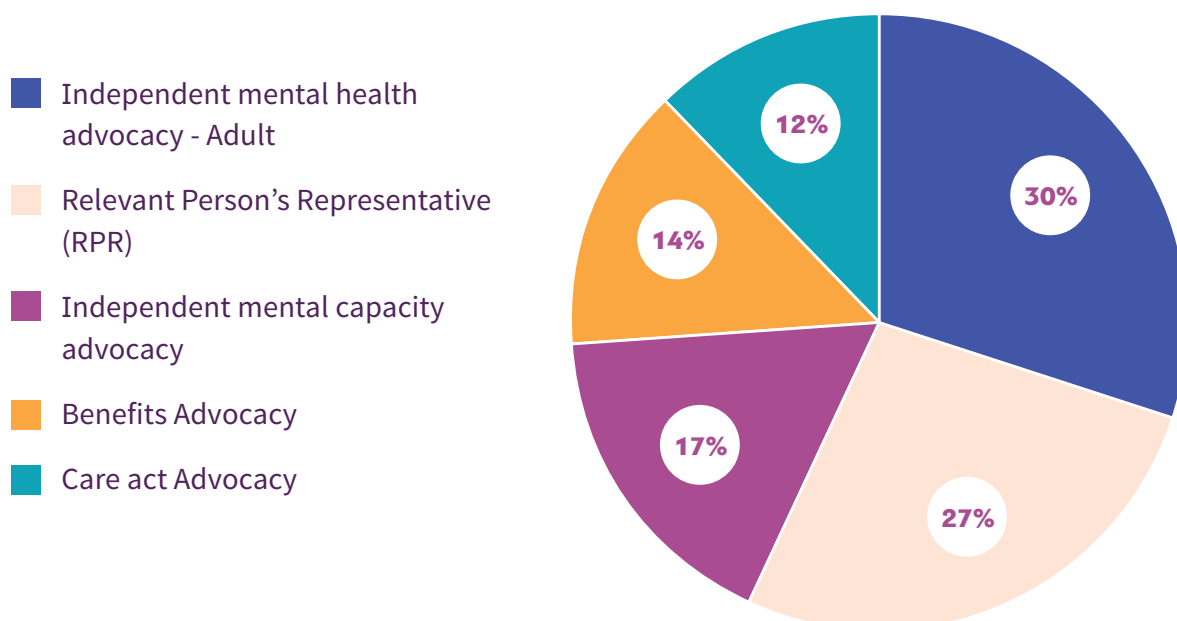


Figure 15: A chart showing the types of advocacy we provide by case

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

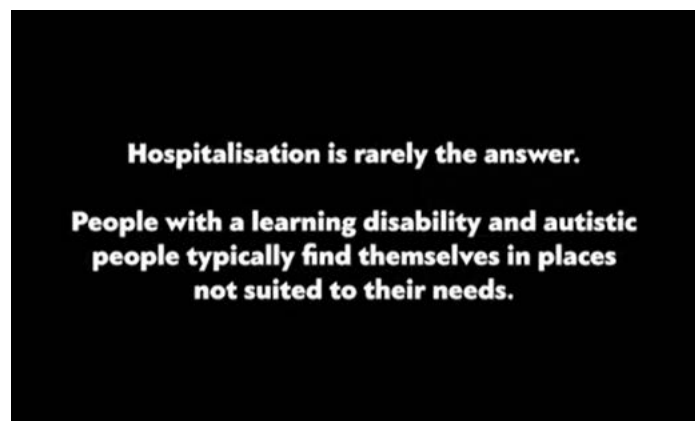


Figure 22: A still of our Use Your Power campaign video

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.

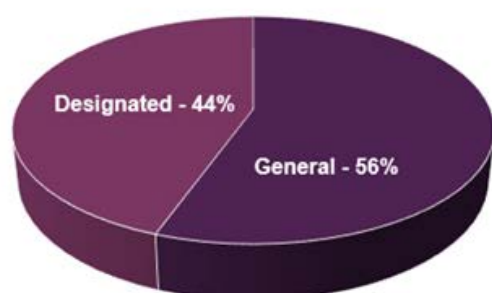
To inform decision-making over the value of general reserves required in any one year, VoiceAbility places a financial value on facing the key unmitigated risks identified in the risk register.

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.

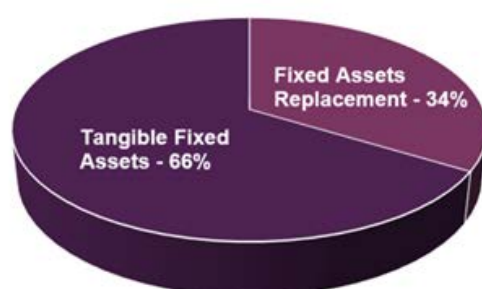
The total reserves carried forward as at 31 March 2024 stand at £1,600,685, of which £888,829 is held as general reserves. General reserves are forecast to be replenished in early 2024-2025 with the charity generating a surplus and positive net cashflows.

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

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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
Balance at the end of the year	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)
Balance at the end of the year	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

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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.