

DRAFT

Poetry Whitchurch

Annual Report

2024-25



Registered charity no: 1187755

Foreword

Welcome to our annual report covering the period 4 February 2024 - 3 February 2025.

Poetry Whitchurch continued to embed activities in the local area and grow in line with our 3-year plan.

We increased our poetry open mic activities and found a new home for live poetry in the heart of town.

We added additional monthly poetry development groups with further opportunities for peer-to-peer support and mentoring.

We broadened our online activities, engaging new guest poets and audiences around the country.

We held our second, very lively, poetry slam and embedded the activity into the town's annual roster of events.

We improved our educational offer with additional, professionalised seminars, co-curated by local poetry enthusiasts.

We held a skills workshop on poetry performance featuring the multi award winning poet Emma Purshouse.

We began a range of poetry projects in areas such as professional development, assisting local poets through editorial processes to get their first collections in print.

Behind the scenes we added to our Trustee and volunteer capacity and capability and continued our organisational development.

We want to thank everyone that has played a part in everything that has happened this year, bringing poetry to people's lives in our area and helping creating a thriving, creative community.

The Trustees

Poetry Whitchurch

Governance

Trustees and Associate Members

Trustees in position

1. The following Trustees were in place at the start of the reporting period:

- Carol Finch
- Simon Hamlyn
- Helen Kay
- Harvey Vasey
- Gareth Von Dinther

New Trustees

2. We were joined by the following Trustees on the dates below.

- Siân Hughes (23 February 2024)
- Ted Eames (28 August 2024)

3. Further Trustee appointments were imminent at the end of the reporting period.

Departing Trustees

4. There were no departures from the Trustee Board during this period.

Key Trustees

5. The Chair of Trustees was Harvey Vasey; the Secretary, Gareth Von Dinther, the Treasurer, Carol Finch.

Associate Members

6. The following Associate Members were in place:

- Deborah Spiers (from December 2024, leading our seminars programme with Trustee Helen Kay)

Meetings

7. Trustee meetings were held remotely on a quarterly basis with a number of additional ad hoc meetings. The Trustee board was supported by a subcommittee structure to carry out delegated functions.

Annual report and accounts

8. Our annual reports and accounts are filed with the Charity Commission. Details can be found on the Charity Commission website or viewed with this report at our website: www.poetrywhitchurch.com

Registered address

9. The Charity's registered address remained Smallbrook Lodge, Smallbrook Road, Whitchurch, Shropshire SY131BX.

Activities, objectives and performance for the year

Activities

10. At the start of this reporting year Poetry Whitchurch trustees had six core operational activities, each overseen by a lead trustee.

- i) Poetry open mics (in person)
- ii) Poetry open mic (online)
- iii) Poetry seminars
- iv) Poetry development groups
- v) Poetry workshops
- vi) Poetry slams

11. Our operational focus in this period was to sustain, improve and grow these activities. A report on each of activity is outlined below.

i) Poetry Open Mics

12. Lead trustee for Open Mic, Harvey Vasey, reported:

Open mic was our initial key activity. In 2024/25 we held open mics in person on a bimonthly basis for the first time since Covid. We also established a new venue, Percy's live music and cafe bar, in the heart of the town. This has helped generate a new audience and opportunities.

Our open mics featured quality guest poets to ensure a varied offer for audiences. The guest poets work side by side with our local poets and provide encouragement and helpful professional advice. In 24/25 these poets included: Jean Atkin, Carol Forrester, Emma Purshouse, Steve Pottinger and Graham Bell.

We are hugely grateful to Percy's for free use of the venue, which has enabled us to provide a vibrant performance environment with professional sound and lighting. Audience / participants averaged around 25-40, which is extremely healthy.

ii) Online open mics

13. Lead Trustee for online open mic Helen Kay reported:

Over the last year our online open mics have become increasingly popular with an average of 15-25 guests per session. We have invited well established guests from all over England including Sally Baker, Elisabeth Sennitt Clough and Olga Dermott Bond. We have also supported younger poets, notably Leah Atherton.

Participants have commended that fact that we stick to a one-hour long event with poets only reading one poem per session. Poems have been pleasantly varied and of a very high standard. We have often shared poems on screen to support viewers with hearing issues.

iii) Poetry Seminars

14. Associate Member lead for Poetry Seminars, Deborah Spiers, reported:

We continued our successful bi-monthly seminars which were led by individual members of the regular seminars group. The format of focusing on selected poems enables close reading and takes away the requirement for homework in advance of the seminar. Seminars are always lively and enlightening.

This year saw an excellent overview of the Beat poets and our final session of the 2024 was a 'pick and mix' evening where the group shared poems and poets of their own choice. Other seminars focused on Caroline Bird, David Harsant, Michael Longley, Patricia Beer and Adrienne Rich.

Seminars are held at the Barn at Sainsburys which is a free-to-use community space. The seminars enrich our understanding of poetry of all genres through peer discussion. We would like to thank those who put in research time in leading the seminars and to Sainsbury's for use of the Barn.

iv) Poetry development groups

15. Lead Trustee for Poetry Development Groups Helen Kay reported:

We now have 4 development online groups of 3-5 people running on a monthly basis tailored to suit the needs of participants.

The groups focus on prompts for writing new poems and a critique of individual poems, but they also include discussion of how poets move forward and what they are aiming to achieve. Group members also receive personal feedback outside of the sessions where relevant.

It is felt that at this point we have reached initial capacity in terms of groups we can run under the current model and we will be looking at options for future sustainability and growth in the next period.

v) Poetry Slams

16. Lead Trustee Helen Kay reported:

Our second annual poetry slam was held in August 2024 at Percys live music venue in Whitchurch. 15 poets competed in front of a packed and diverse audience to win the slam crown. Participants came from around the country and the event was won by poet Morgan Birch.

The slam has been particularly helpful in bringing a new audience to our activities and helping cross pollinate creativity across poetry genres. From this year's slam we now have new writers in the area coming to open mic, seminars and development groups. The slam really helps get the word out about what we do.

We are grateful for the support of Obsidian who provided this year's £50 slam prize.

vi) Poetry workshops

17. Trustee Siân Hughes, who took on responsibility for workshops late in 2024 said:

This year we held a workshop at Bargates Hall on improving performance skills, hosted by the award-winning poet Emma Purshouse.

The workshop was notable for its impact on a group of poets that hadn't performed their work widely, or in some cases at all - and the tips and practice really helped those present gain confidence. We have seen some of these skills in play already at our open mics.

The subject matter at the workshop was incredibly powerful, giving a prominent voice to survivors of domestic abuse and those that have fled war torn countries. The workshop had an incredibly varied age group and achieved astonishing poetry and a real sense of kinship and community between the attendees.

Objectives and performance

Three-year plan

18. In July 2023 Trustees agreed a 3-year plan, which is available in full on our website at www.poetrywhitchurch.com/aboutus.

19. The reporting period in this report ran from February 2024 (7 months into year 1 of the 3-year plan) to February 2025 (around half way through the 3-year period).

20. Progress against objectives was kept under regular review by Trustees with a full review of year one undertaken by Trustees in summer 2024. Actions from this review were taken forward in detailed planning for year 2, which will be reviewed retrospectively in summer 2025.

Three-year plan metrics

21. Trustees have established a working group to review key data to help assess our efficacy. The three-year plan is based around four strategic plinths:

- A Get more people writing poetry
- B Get more people reading and listening to poetry
- C Improve understanding of poetry
- D Establish poetry as an activity that Whitchurch does

22. Recommendations from the working group will be reviewed by Trustees on an ongoing basis. One of the initial outputs, on attendee numbers, is reviewed by Trustees on a quarterly and annual basis.

Young people

23. We are pleased to report that our partnership with Sir John Talbot's School—the town's key educational provider for students aged 11 to 18—is now embedded in the school's *Community Engagement Plan*. This plan supports the school's strategic aims of building strong local links and enriching the student experience through meaningful collaboration.

24. In addition, our work with the school contributes to raising academic outcomes at GCSE and A-Level by embedding the love and study of poetry into the wider curriculum. Poetry Whitchurch remains one of the school's primary community partners for creative enrichment, and we are proud to continue supporting students' confidence, expression, and academic achievement.

25. We aimed to following up last year's successful visit of 60 Sir John Talbot's School students to The Hurst, the Arvon Foundation's creative writing centre, with additional Arvon tuition this year, but this has not been possible in the time available. This partnership will be a key priority going forward and the subject of additional recruitment.

3-year plan projects

26. Year 2 of the 3-year plan set out a range of projects for initial consideration and planning during this reporting period.

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3-year plan projects

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36. We have managed to scope and commence a small range of pilot projects ahead of time. Trustee Ted Eames reports:

We have been working with an initial local poet, Kevin Evanson to help edit and assemble a collection of his poems. Kevin is a genuine original, and the finished product will definitely reflect this.

We are also mentoring a second poet and in discussion with a range of other unpublished poets to help bring a series of initial collections to fruition.

Organisational development

37. As part of our ongoing self-improvement processes Secretary Gareth Von Dinther reported:

This year, we continued to strengthen the Poetry Whitchurch policy framework, ensuring our activities remain well-structured, inclusive, and aligned with our charitable objectives. To support our expanding programme and enhance governance, we developed new key policies, including a Communications Policy, a refined Seminars, Development Groups and Open Mic Policies.

Alongside these new policies, we continue our annual review process to assess compliance, governance, and opportunities for improvement. This commitment ensures our policies remain effective, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of our community, strengthening Poetry Whitchurch's long-term impact in delivering its charitable objects.

Financials

38. During the year Trustees regularly reviewed our financial position on a quarterly basis. Our financial position has continued to strengthen over the past year. We received generous support from Obsidian for the Poetry Slam, a trustee donation of £120 from Helen Kay, and an overall increase in donations and engagement compared to the previous year. We were also successful in securing further grant funding from Whitchurch Town Council, which has provided additional stability and allowed us to plan future activities with confidence

39. This financial growth has enabled us to continue running both our sets of poetry open mic series free of charge, ensuring that cost is never a barrier to local people wishing to take part or attend. These activities directly support our charitable objects by advancing education in the arts for the public benefit through the promotion of poetry.

40. The work was underpinned by the work of the Finance and Fundraising Subcommittee, chaired by Simon Hamlyn.

Simon Hamlyn reported:

As a unique local charity, we are very grateful for support of Whitchurch Town Council for their generous grant of £1000 during this period. We are also indebted to Obsidian for the £50 cash prize for the 2024 Poetry Slam and for their pledge to support Poetry Whitchurch in future years.

All of the Trustees remain grateful for all gifts and donations from supporters and sponsors including those from fellow Trustees

Annual accounts

41. Our full accounts have been submitted to the Charity Commission, a summary of which can be found online at:

<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search/-/charity-details/5150263>

This report is dedicated to Ian Malcolm Parr, a local poet and poetry activist. Ian ran the original poetry open mic in Whitchurch and helped with our administration in the period up to our charity registration in 2019.



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Poetry Whitchurch

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Receipts and payments accounts

For the period from	02/04/2024	To	31/03/2025
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Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Activities for generating funds (trading)	226	-	-	226	270
Other Receipts	16	-	-	16	-
Whitchurch Town Council Grant	1,000	-	-	1,000	400
Deepbridge Donation	-	-	-	-	300
Gareth Von Dinther Donation	120	-	-	120	120
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	1,362	-	-	1,362	1,090
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	1,362	-	-	1,362	1,090
A3 Payments					
Venue Rental	85	-	-	85	86
Poet Travel Expenses	25	-	-	25	102
Sir John Talbot School	-	-	-	-	200
Trustee Expenses	-	-	-	-	41
Zoom Costs	156	-	-	156	120
Workshop Costs	130	-	-	130	-
Banners and Fliers	206	-	-	206	-
Other Costs	143	-	-	143	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	745	-	-	745	549
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	745	-	-	745	549
Net of receipts/(payments)	617	-	-	617	541
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	1,357	-	-	1,357	816
Cash funds this year end	1,974	-	-	1,974	1,357

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Bank Balance	1,974	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	Total cash funds	1,974	-	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK
B2 Other monetary assets	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
B3 Investment assets	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B5 Liabilities	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name	Date of approval	