

# Trustees' Annual Report for the period

Period start date

Period end date

14th November 2024

31st December 2025

From

To

## Section A

## Reference and administration details

Charity name

The Society of Visually Impaired Lawyers

Other names charity is known by

Registered charity number (if any)

1210939

Charity's principal address

11 Oakleigh Park North

Whetstone London

Postcode N20 9AN

### Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity

	Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year	Name of person (or body) entitled to appoint trustee (if any)
1	Adal Ibrar	Chair		Membership
2	Sharon Grennan Page	Secretary		Membership
3	Jonathan Fenton	Treasurer		Membership
4	Bashir Alao			Membership
5	Alice Mary Bisset			
6	Riyaz Hazi		14.11.24 – 16.12.25	
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### Names of the trustees for the charity, if any, (for example, any custodian trustees)

Name	Dates acted if not for whole year

**Names and addresses of advisers (Optional information)**

Type of adviser	Name	Address

**Name of chief executive or names of senior staff members (Optional information)**

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## Section B Structure, governance and management

**Description of the charity's trusts**

Type of governing document	Adopted Constitution of CIO
How the charity is constituted	Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Trustee selection methods	Appointed by resolution of the members at the AGM. Charity Trustee Board has power to co opt to fill vacancies for remainder of year until next AGM

**Additional governance issues (Optional information)**

You **may choose** to include additional information, where relevant, about:

- policies and procedures adopted for the induction and training of trustees;
- the charity's organisational structure and any wider network with which the charity works;
- relationship with any related parties;
- trustees' consideration of major risks and the system and procedures to manage them.

In 02 24 the current Charity Trustees (then of SOVIL in unincorporated form) completed an extensive training session on the role and duties of charity Trustees of a CIO. This covered key areas related to the financial management of the Charity, charity accounts, fund raising, CIO Constitution, conflicts of interest and the trustee legal standard of care and conduct.

The Charity Trustees intend to put in place appropriate policies relating to:

- internal financial controls;
- financial and risk management;
- trustee expenses;
- trustee conflicts of interest
- serious incident reporting

as soon as practicable during 2026.

The Charity's beneficiaries are visually impaired and to that extent may be regarded as adults at risk who have a need for specific additional care and support. The Trustees aim to design all our activities and programs with the needs of our visually impaired members in mind. Again, we will be developing a more detailed safeguarding policy in this regard during 2026.

## Section C Objectives and activities

**Summary of the objects of the charity set out in its governing document**

Promotion of equality and diversity for public benefit by protecting and promoting the interests and welfare of visually impaired lawyers and others wishing to enter the legal profession.

**Summary of the main activities undertaken for the public benefit in relation to these objects (include within this section the statutory declaration that trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit)**

Since our AGM on 27 November 2024, the majority of activity by the trustees has been in relation to setting up the SOVIL CIO structure and new SOVIL bank account, and in running events for SOVIL members. The trustees anticipate that the work involved in setting up the new CIO structure and bank account is almost complete.

The trustees organised a variety of events for members this year with differing aims - to inform members and to encourage networking and peer support.

**Workshops and webinars**

SOVIL has run two online events with a panel of vision impaired lawyers who are senior practitioners in their fields to explain their own career path, challenges faced along the way and adjustments that have helped them succeed. SOVIL trustees chaired these events and were joined by four panellists for each event representing solicitors working in-house and in private practice, barristers, academia and the judiciary.

- Wednesday, 9 April 2025 - Transactional law panel event
- Thursday, 12 June 2025 - Advocacy and litigation panel event

These events were well received and over 50 members attended these two online events.

On Sunday 6 July 2025, SOVIL Chair, Adal Ibrar gave a presentation streamed live from a conference by the American Association of Visually Impaired Attorneys. The seminar was on the uses of Artificial Intelligence in legal practice and the use of Artificial Intelligence by visually impaired lawyers. A joining link was shared with SOVIL members.

And on Thursday, 30 September 2025, Jennifer MacKay of Jump Training led an in-person interactive workshop for SoVIL members on speaking and presentation skills. The event took place at the London office of Freshfields. This was a great opportunity for SoVIL members to practice their speaking and presentation skills in a safe space with other visually impaired lawyers and to get feedback on their presentation style, body language, and use of their voice. After a couple of cancellations, 4 members attended the workshop. The low take-up for this workshop was disappointing but the feedback from those who attended was excellent.

**Networking and peer support**

The trustees arranged a private group tour of the UK Supreme Court on Friday 6 December 2024 for 10 SoVIL members and 12 sighted companions. This was an informative and educational experience for SOVIL lawyers who may act in a Supreme Court appeal during their career but members met for lunch beforehand in the café in the Supreme Court to make the most of the social interaction and networking opportunity.

And in response to member requests to build individual connections with other SoVIL members, we have continued the monthly online "coffee catch ups". There have been 10 rounds of this since the last AGM and 76 pairs have been matched in this initiative since then. This is a flexible way for members to speak informally at a time that is convenient for them around other commitments. And is a great way to share experience and tips with peers. We encourage all members to participate. Just watch out for the emails and respond if you want to participate that month.

### Additional details of objectives and activities (Optional information)

You **may choose** to include further statements, where relevant, about:

- policy on grantmaking;
- policy programme related investment;
- contribution made by volunteers.

Planned activity for the 2026 financial year includes:

1. Relaunch SOVIL's mentoring scheme with a more structured process incorporating feedback from potential mentors. Recruit mentors at all career stages and open the scheme to all SOVIL members, rather than at the start of the career journey.
2. Organise 2 events in 2026 for members at an early stage in their career. A panel event covering a range of careers for lawyers and a 'speed interviewing' session for members applying for new roles. We will explore advertising and/or running these events in collaboration with Blind in Business to reach a wider audience.
3. Develop a strategic plan of priority activities, projects and initiatives for SOVIL. These should be realistic and attainable having regard to funding and other resources available to the Charity. In addition to the other points mentioned in this section, specific examples of the above discussed at the 2025 AGM were as follows:
  - Provision of funding for legal mini pupillages or other short term internships;
  - Advice and guidance to Universities and Law Colleges on reasonable adjustments to be made for VI law students;
  - Advice and guidance to professional bodies within the legal profession as regards practical problems faced in the Court

system by VI lawyers eg as regards Court signage, court forms and on other accessibility issues and as regards reasonable adjustments which could be made in that regard.

The Board also intends to design and implement an aligned fund raising strategy in line with principles we have previously approved.

4. Grant making to individuals: The Charity Trustees have adopted a grant making policy in relation to potential grants to individuals under Constitution rule 5.2(a) eg in cases of hardship to assist with the cost of training for the legal profession.
5. It is the intention of the Charity to seek grants from other grant making charities during financial year 25/26 to enable the Charity to expand our activities and fulfil our objectives summarised above and indeed to provide a firm financial base on which such individual grants by the Charity could be made.

## Section D

## Achievements and performance

**Summary of the main achievements of the charity during the year**

As described in section C above, the trustees have completed the process for setting up the SoVIL CIO structure and the documentation required by NatWest for the new bank account. We await NatWest's confirmation of the new bank account details.

During the 2024/2025 financial year, SoVIL has organised a range of online and in-person events for professional development and networking for SoVIL members. Feedback on the events has been excellent. The trustees are working to plan a calendar of events for the coming year.

## Section E

## Financial review

**Brief statement of the charity's policy on reserves**

The Board has adopted a cautious approach in relation to expenditure on its activities and has been fortunate to benefit from many individuals who are sympathetic to the aims of the Charity donating their time to our activities. The Trustees are confident that the Charity should be able to meet its commitments for the coming financial year 2026 ie 1 1 26 to 31 12 26 from cash reserves held at Bank.

**Details of any funds materially in deficit**

Arrears of member subscriptions of £1220 at 31 12 25 are a matter of concern to the Charity Trustees and a program of engagement with members is in hand to recover these so far as possible.

**Further financial review details (Optional information)**

You may choose to include additional information, where relevant about:

- the charity's principal sources of funds (including any fundraising);
- how expenditure has supported the key objectives of the charity;
- investment policy and objectives including any ethical investment policy adopted.

Please see attached Report and financial statements from the Treasurer for the period 14 11 24 to 31 12 25..

## Section F

## Other optional information

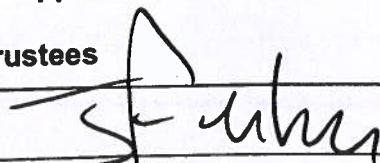
## Section G

## Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature(s)



Full name(s)

Jonathan Gabriel Fenton

Position (eg Secretary, Chair, etc)

Charity Trustee and Treasurer

Date

5 February 2026

**Society of Visually Impaired Lawyers**  
**Registered with the Charity Commission as a CIO under number 1210939**  
**Report and Financial statements from the Treasurer: Period 14 11 24 to 31 12 25**

*Background and summary of current position and notes to the Report.*

Members will recall that the legal status of SOVIL was changed with member approval at the special meeting of members on 27 11 2024. SOVIL was established as a registered charity and as a charitable incorporated organisation ("CIO") on 14 11 2024.

SOVIL as an unincorporated association ("Old SOVIL") was accordingly put into the process of dissolution. There were (and are) no assets of Old SOVIL other than cash at our current account with National Westminster Bank ("NWB") and amounts due from members by way of subscription. These amounts are detailed in the balance sheet below.

The Members' Resolution of 27 11 2024 authorised the relevant Committee members of Old SOVIL to take such action as is necessary to give effect to the transfer of funds from our current account with NWB to a new bank account to be set up for SOVIL as a CIO. We need to have a new Bank Account because SOVIL CIO is a separate a new legal entity as a registered charity.

As Charity Trustees of SOVIL CIO we decided to set up a new Bank Account with NWB because (i) the Bank was familiar with SOVIL as we have held an account with the Bank for many years and (ii) charity and community accounts with the Bank in credit don't incur charges.

All the extensive and exacting formalities required by NWB for the Charity Trustees to open a new bank account with the Bank for the CIO have been completed. We are waiting for the new Account details at the time of this report. Once that Account is open, we will then be able to transfer funds from our existing account to our new Account and complete the dissolution of Old SOVIL.

Meantime the funds in the existing account previously owned by old SOVIL have been held on trust for SOVIL CIO. The existing account has remained open pending the opening of the new account in the name of SOVIL CIO eg to allow the collection of subscription income.

*Arrears of Subscription amounts due:*

Under rule 9.4 of the new constitution of the CIO, members can be required by the Charity Trustees to pay reasonable membership fees to the CIO. Annual membership fees had been kept at a nominal level for many years in Old SOVIL (£10 for members in employment and £5 for those in training). In view also of its plans to expand the range of activities (see Trustee Report for 24/25), the Board felt that it was justified to increase annual membership fees to a standard rate of £30 for those in full time practice, whether employed or self employed, with a reduced rate of £10 for those not in paid employment. Regrettably there remain substantial arrears of unpaid subscriptions totalling £1220 at 31 12 25. We are engaging with members to try and collect these arrears. At present we have shown these arrears at



their full recovery value of £1220 but this figure may need to be discounted depending on the success of the recovery exercise now underway.

**Statement of Income and expenditure for the period 14 11 24 to 31 12 25 .... £**

*Income received*

Subscription income including voluntary ones.....	795
Adjustment credit re Boat trip 28 9 24.....	30
Adjustment credit from Secretary S. Grennan.....	18
Adjustment credits re Supreme Ct trip .....	21
.....Total.....	864

*Expenditure*

Re imbursement of travel ticket for SOVIL member for event attendance Under Constitution rule 5.2(a).....	55
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*Net income received during the period.....*809

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**Balance sheet at 31 12 25:**

Cash at Bank held by Society of Visually Impaired Lawyers ("Old SOVIL") on trust for SOVIL CIO  
.....**£3245.92...**

Arrears of unpaid subscriptions from SOVIL CIO members as detailed above shown at full  
recovery value .....- **£1220**

**Total.....£4465.92**

*Notes:*

*An earlier version of this statement (5 12 24 to 31 10 25) was presented to the SOVIL CIO AGM on 16 12 25.*

*I confirm that this Report is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief based on the bank statements, records and information relating to Old Sovil and to SOVIL CIO available to me at 31 12 25*

Jonathan Fenton  
SOVIL CIO Treasurer  
5 February 2026