



Annual Report of the Trustee Executive Committee of Rising Voices Wessex 2024 - 2025

The Executive Committee of Rising Voices Wessex Community Choirs presents its annual report, covering the period from May 2024 to May 2025 and the accounting year ending March 2025.

Rising Voices Wessex is more than just another community choir, it supports adults affected by cancer, offering the benefits of making music and singing together in a supportive environment. It was initially launched on 8th January 2013 as a project funded by the Dorset Cancer Network to determine if there was local demand and whether singing in the choir proved beneficial. Initial assessment showed both to be the case, the choir continued.

Rising Voices Wessex became a registered charity in January 2016 and is a member of The National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Community Action Network

Music communicates with individuals at times of difficulty offering benefits for many chronic medical conditions. **Rising Voices Wessex**, based in the Bournemouth-Christchurch-Poole (BCP) conurbation, was established to support people in the community whose lives have been affected by cancer – whether as patients, those bereaved through cancer or carers. **Rising Voices Wessex** promotes the concept of living well “with and after cancer”.

Over the past 4 years **Rising Voices Wessex** has been on a “journey” of recovery following the effects of the Covid pandemic and its associated restrictions. These posed major musical and financial challenges. Choir membership dropped to less than 50% of pre-pandemic levels and income from donations at rehearsal attendance by 67%. Resources from the Lottery Grant awarded in 2019 have, in effect, proved to be crucial to the survival of **Rising Voices Wessex** through and following the pandemic.

During pandemic restrictions, the Trustee Board prioritised maintaining the choirs’ activity through Zoom and virtual events in order to sustain the empathetic and supportive network intrinsic to the choir. This provided valuable support during a very challenging time of increased anxiety and social isolation for many. Professional music direction was retained.

This did incur significant expenditure but both the choir members and **Rising Voices Wessex** as an organisation benefitted from this decision. **Rising Voices Wessex** remained “open” and was able to resume its normal activity directly after restrictions were lifted. Unfortunately, initial post-pandemic membership numbers were low, reflecting a general trend experienced by similar entities in that period. During 2023 it became clear that continuing with both the Bournemouth and Poole choirs was not viable in the short to medium term. The decision was taken by the Trustee Board to suspend the Bournemouth choir and focus on rebuilding numbers through the Poole based choir at St John’s Church in Upper Parkstone. Bournemouth choir numbers were frequently in single figures which was both musically and financially unviable.

Understanding and support in respect of this change by the membership has generally been positive and regular attendance at Poole is now approaching 30 each week – for better financial viability a weekly attendance of 40 is desirable and potentially achievable.

Rising Voices Wessex has performed at various charity events in the conurbation, especially those associated with cancer - further promoting singing for health and wellbeing as a means of living well with or after cancer. Importantly they also demonstrate the power of singing to build improved mental health. Public performances are a key objective and are important in the following respects:

- they demonstrate the benefits of singing for confidence, mental health and wellbeing,
- they help raise funds that enable the choirs to be sustainable,
- they encourage ongoing member recruitment.

Significant past performances that have boosted the choir's profile and sense of achievement include:

- Visiting Cherbourg, to feature at a French cancer awareness event early in 2013
- Being an invited supporting choir for Russell Watson at the Lighthouse in Poole in June 2015,
- Being an invited supporting choir for Blake at the Regent Centre in Christchurch in 2016
- Being an invited supporting choir for the Parry 100 Festival 'Glad Day' with Mike Westbrook at St Peters Church, Bournemouth in 2018.
- Creation of virtual choir recordings during lockdown to continue the spirit of public performance – its recording of "One Voice" has been especially well received and has proved emblematic for Rising Voices Wessex.
- Rising Voices Wessex also presented its work publicly during pandemic restrictions in two online virtual choir concerts
- Workshop and performance with Apollo 5 at the Layard Theatre Wimborne in 2022.
- Christmas performance at Wimborne Minster in 2022:
- Christmas performance in Romsey Abbey in 2023.
- Singing at the Christmas Fair in Rhinefield House 2023
- Recording and filming 3 music videos in Feb 2024.
- Our professional music videos are available on YouTube
<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=fgVgYbZfJKI> and Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/RisingVoicesChoir/videos/932243648901371>
- Following nomination by UK Music, Rising Voices Wessex was honoured to receive an invite to attend a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace to celebrate the Creative Industries.

Rising Voices Wessex has had a busy and successful year in 2024 - 2025 as indicated by the summary of its events below.

Rising Voices Wessex events from May 2024 – May 2025

- Eco Fair – Ringwood in May.
- Poole Day Care Centre in May.
- Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May.
- St Barnabus Church, Bournemouth. Women's Fellowship in May.
- Summer Concert with cream tea - Merley House in August.
- Phoenix Charity Quiz, Kinson in September.
- Annual general Meeting in June St John's Church, Poole.
- Workshop at the Grasshopper, Poole in July.
- With Kissing it Better - singing in Bournemouth Hospital in Oct.
- Autumn Concert at St Aldhelm's Church, Poole in November.
- Poole Christmas Singing, Poole High Street in November.
- November Ovacome event in November
- Parkstone & Poole Inner Wheel in November
- Christmas Concert St Aldhelm's in December.
- Pantomime Press Night, Lighthouse Poole in December.
- Christmas Carol Singing Poole Hospital Dome in December.
- Christmas Carol Singing Bournemouth Hospital Atrium in December
- RVW Christmas/Birthday Tea Party in January 2025.
- Avoncliff Care home, Christchurch in January
- Phoenix Quiz Night, Kinson in January.
- Wise Guy Charity Fundraising, Christchurch in January.
- Community Tea Party, St George's Church Hall, Oakdale in March.
- Burwood Nursing Home in April.
- Ringwood Eco Fair in May
- Spring Concert St Aldhelm's Church, Poole in May.

Rising Voices Wessex continues to appreciate the support and hospitality of St John's Church, Parkstone, Poole for its weekly rehearsals.

Musical Directors' report 2024 – 2025

It has come to that time of year again where we reflect on what the choir has done and achieved over the past twelve months. Wendy and I have worked very hard to provide fun and engaging choir sessions whilst also teaching the choir musical and vocal skills. None of this would be possible without the tireless efforts of the charity's volunteer trustees and steering group members who I'd like to pay tribute to.

Our two big concerts of 2024 were held at the wonderful St Aldhelm's Church in Poole where we are delighted to have been asked back to perform, in the spring of 2025. It is a gorgeous venue which was made even more special at Christmas time when we performed our Christmas concert there surrounded by lit up trees, sponsored by local charities – a real festive feel. It is great that our two big concerts of the year were well attended, as well as a slightly smaller scale Autumn concert which we put on in response to choir members wishing for an opportunity to showcase their work at the time. The choir performed a variety of new repertoire and old favourites, as voted for by the choir members. Wendy and I, incorporated our other musical disciplines of violin, flute and harp at points in the concerts add variety for our audience, and we are blessed to have such brilliant solo

musician and contacts from outside, who give up their time, time and time again, to perform with the choir, who I would also like to thank.

We have also been getting ourselves into the public eye as much as possible throughout the year, performing in hospitals, care homes and at fayres. Performing in public is a good way to help spread the joy and magic of singing, but also for people to hear about us – we have recruited new members by doing this too.

Overall, it has been another good year for Rising Voices Wessex – although still feeling the effects of the pandemic, we have continued making music and welcoming new members into our choir family. It has continued to be a joy working with Wendy Morrow and we are very proud of what the choir has achieved musically over the past twelve months. As I said at the start, none of this would be possible without the work of volunteers, so with their continued support, we look forward to another year of fun music making.

Mark Anstead and Wendy Morrow (Musical Directors)

How Rising Voices Wessex makes a difference:

The charity's overall strategy continually aims to try and capture the benefits of being part of the choir through the use of a simple questionnaire. Annual Survey Monkey questionnaires are utilised by **Rising Voices Wessex** to obtain feedback and an indication of how much members benefit from being part of the choir – full results from the survey are available on the website at <https://www.risingvoices.org.uk/about-us/governance-documents>

Key findings from the survey include the following quotes and observations from choir members taken from the March 2025 survey:

- *Always enjoy it: made me feel welcome straight away;*
- *Provision of music / lyrics; good organisation by refreshment team;*
- *Pleased to be asked which songs I wanted in the core repertoire;*
- *Good number of events; good general info – e.g. events board.*

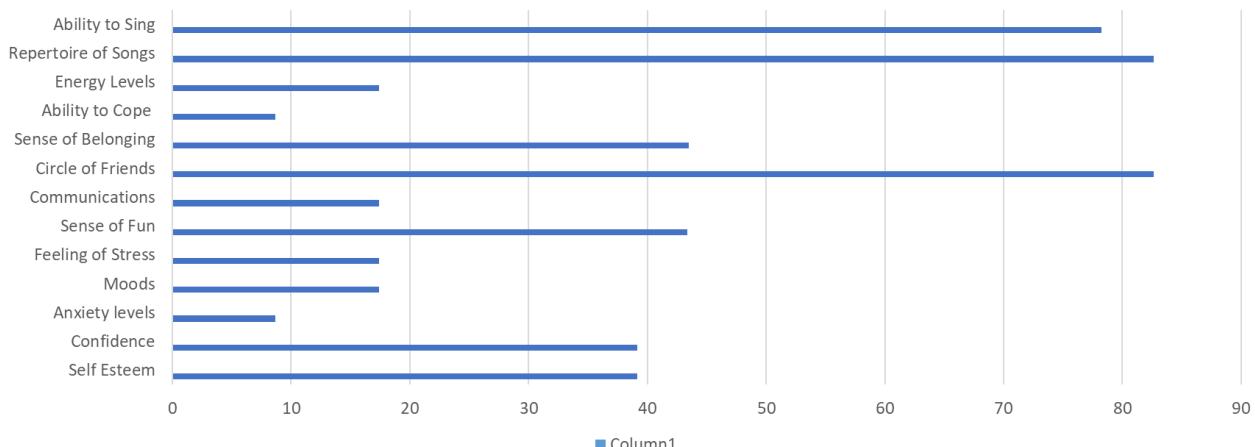
What do we do well –

- *Members are pleased to have a hand in to choosing what songs go in the core repertoire.*
- *Good range of songs to accommodate formal and informal events.*
- *Our two Musical Directors are very different and thus provide a chance to sing a variety of songs. They are great at finding songs that are right for the choir.*

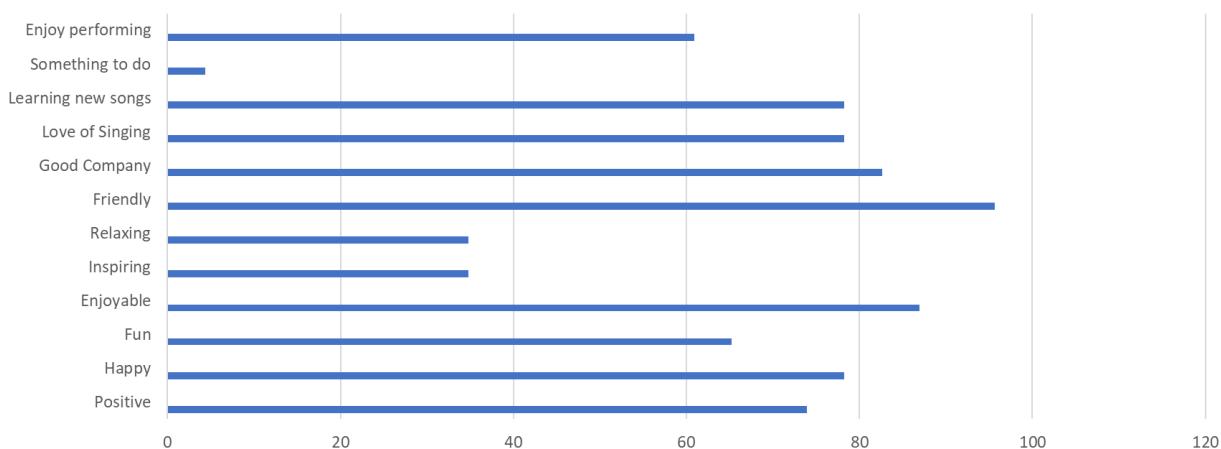
There were 23 respondents to the online March 2025 Annual Survey. The 10 questions included the benefits to both mental health and wellbeing from attending choir.

Responses to two of the questions below:

I feel that attending choir has improved my:



What best describes your experience of Rising Voices Wessex



The full report can be found here: <https://www.risingvoices.org.uk/about-us/governance-documents> and time will be set aside for discussion with the members.

Management, Governance and Administration:

As a registered charity **Rising Voices Wessex** is managed at a strategic level by a Board of Trustees drawn principally from the community. The Board encompasses a range of professional backgrounds - clinical, musical, finance and business – appropriate to the needs of the charity. The Chairperson and other Trustees are appointed (and may be re- appointed) at the Annual General Meeting.

The skill mix of Trustees is subject to review to enable succession planning and optimum balance of expertise. There are currently two unfilled Trustee vacancies which are advertised on the website and locally; the Trustees may also approach suitable skilled and qualified individuals to become Trustees - obtaining new Trustees with the right skills, expertise and understanding of the work of **Rising Voices Wessex** is a priority as the board looks to securing its long-term sustainability and ongoing development.

Executive Trustee Board members are:

- Mrs Noëline Young (Chair), Retired Clinical Nurse Specialist/ former National Cancer Survivorship Project Manager.
- Mr Robert Taylor (Treasurer), Finance Director, Porterbrook Leasing.
- Ms Sara Schwetje-Kemp, Businesswoman & Musician.
- Chani Darnell- Retired Midwife, retired Clinical Acupuncturist
- Ian Roberts – Local businessman and musician.

Dr Alastair Smith retired as a Trustee following the 2024 AGM. Alastair was one of the founders of **Rising Voices Wessex** and his guidance and contributions to the running and success over the past 12 years was substantial and we thank him for all his hard work and attention to detail. Dr Alastair Smith continues as a Benefactor and Patron of the charity.

Robert Taylor will be standing down as Treasurer at the 2025 AGM once he has completed his work for the Charity Commission on this year's Annual Report and Accounts. He has been an absolute stalwart and we owe him an enormous debt of gratitude for his support, especially over the last few years.

At the 2026 AGM Noëline Young plans to retire as a Trustee after 14 yrs with the charity. Noëline is one of the founders of the charity, a choir member and has been Vice Chair and is currently Chair of the Trustees.

The Trustees Board ensures continued registered charity status so that singing is made available to those affected by cancer at minimal cost – there is no subscription required, accessibility thus is a critical part of the project.

To continue as a charity, we must retain a minimum of three, ideally five Trustees (as per Charity Commission requirements and our Constitution), in this context **Rising Voices Wessex** is actively looking to recruit new Trustees with the necessary skills to be able to take the charity forward.

Operational management and administration:

Day to Day organisation continues to be undertaken by the Steering Group with two of the current Trustees and volunteer choir members, capitalizing on the range of skills that members can offer. The Steering Group meets monthly and reports to the board of Trustees. The Musical Directors are also part of the Steering Group.

Rising Voices Wessex aims to present a professional image that highlights its identity in public performance. Members wear black clothing with royal blue accessories for formal evening performances; for informal daytime events members wear **Rising Voices Wessex** badged polo shirts and royal blue fleeces or waterfalls.

Members pay a lower than cost price to **Rising Voices Wessex** for these garments; members on joining also receive a folder for music and song lyrics of the choirs' repertoire.

Financial summary 2023-2024

Overall donated income remains significantly reduced, and the level of income from choir donations remains well below the expenditure incurred. The suggested donation for those attending remains

at £5.00. A Benefactors' scheme has helped the financial position, thank you to all who have donated via this scheme.

The successful **National Lottery Community Fund - Reaching Communities** grant from May 2021 has now ended. This support was critical during and in the aftermath of the pandemic restrictions. The grant made a significant contribution towards running costs over a five-year period and has ensured the survival of Rising Voices Wessex to date.

In 2024 - 2025 **Rising Voices Wessex** received a generous grant from the Hendy Foundation, towards the costs of the Big ABBA Singalong in 2024 to which other choirs and the public were invited to take part. There was also a grant, from Dorset Community Foundation to support promotion and publicity for the choir across the year and valuable help and support from two local businesses - Palm Print and the Douch family for posters and leaflets for our concerts.

Following initial funding in 2012 by the Dorset Cancer Network, **Rising Voices Wessex** has sought and received financial support from various other sources, these include:

- Macmillan Cancer Support.
- The Big Lottery.
- The People's Lottery Fund.
- Going for Bust.
- Greggs Foundation.
- Bournemouth Football Club – 'The Cherries'.
- Arts and Health South West.
- Pegasus Life.
- Westbourne Rotary Club.
- Chorali Fiscus
- Music For All
- Waitrose
- The Hendy Foundation.
- Dorset Community Foundation.

We thank the following local organisations for fundraising for us:

- Phoenix Charity
- Inner Circle Parkstone and Poole Inner Wheel
- Broadstone and Corfe Mullen Floral Decoration Society

Grant application in 2024 – 2025 to the following organisations have been unsuccessful.

- Arts Council England.
- Ormiston Fund.
- Hall and Woodhouse.
- Benefact Group.
- Macarthy and Stone.
- GSK Kings Fund.
- Boots the Chemist.
- Chorali Fiscus

Financial Review

Income: We saw a reduction in income in the year, from £31.0k in 23-24 to £24.7k in 24-25. Whilst amounts from choirs and donations remained broadly similar to last year, a decrease in grant income of (£6.0k) accounts for the reduction. The final National Lottery grant income of £12.0k (23-24: £12.5k) was received.

Expenditure: Expenditure was £21.1k in 24-25, a reduction of (£5.3k) from £26.4k in 23-24. The primary reasons were a reduction in professional fees of £4.2k, an increase in function and venue costs of c. (£1.1k) and reduced other costs of £2.2k. The bulk of expenditure was incurred on professional fees, being £14.7k, the cost of venues of £2.5k (excluding functions), storage of £0.6k and admin, function and other costs of £3.3k.

We expect expenditure to remain at similar levels in 25-26.

The net trading position was a surplus of £3.6k (£4.6k 23-24) reflecting an operational shortfall of £8.4k, offset by Lottery grant income of £12.0k. In 25-26 we forecast that the operational shortfall will be at a similar level.

Cash: The cash position at 31 March 2025 was £24.1k, an increase of £3.8k from £20.5k in March 2024. With anticipated income in 25-26, the charity has sufficient resources to continue operations for more than 12 months.

Thanks, and acknowledgments:

The Trustees thank all those who continue to support the choir – many have done so since its foundation; the additional commitment of members ‘old and new’ is so important to the ongoing existence of the choir for weekly rehearsals and performances. Help with fundraising, running raffles, support at venues for events and making cakes are all examples of the terrific support given by volunteers and members.

Thanks also to those involved in the administration of the day to day running of the choirs by the Steering Group.

A big thank you to our Musical Directors, Wendy Morrow and Mark Anstead, for their musical and technical expertise and support.

Signed:

June 2025

Chair of the Trustee – Noëline Young

Vice Chair of the Trustees – Sara Kemp