

Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022

VoiceAbility Advocacy

Charity number in England 1076630

Charity number in Scotland SC050036

Company number 3798884



Welcome from the Chair of Trustees



I am delighted to introduce this annual report as the chair of VoiceAbility's board. VoiceAbility strives to make sure that everyone is heard when it matters most. The past two years have brought the importance of VoiceAbility's work into even sharper focus.

Our annual report shows how people are at the centre of VoiceAbility's work. It also shows how when people are supported and empowered, they can self-advocate and build skills they will use long after having been supported by VoiceAbility.

As we entered the second year of the pandemic, one of the priorities for the board was to make sure VoiceAbility was able to continue to deliver support to people. The focus of this is to empower people to have more control over their lives, even at a times of such uncertainty and constant change. VoiceAbility staff and volunteers continued to step up and respond with agility to the challenges the pandemic presented. I am very proud of each and everyone of our people. At VoiceAbility, everyone made sure we never stopped supporting people, in-person where that was possible, and we strengthened safeguarding practice this year to make sure we are relentless in our commitment to challenge ourselves and constantly improve.

VoiceAbility has also been working hard to make sure the voices of people who access health and social care support are heard by policy-makers. This includes those making decisions about how to reform mental health law and how people's rights are upheld when they are deprived of their liberty. And we've celebrated two years of bringing the advocacy sector together to work in collaboration. Our joint aim is to tackle the big issues faced by those people we seek to serve and to drive up the quality and effectiveness of advocacy everywhere.

I am very pleased to report that this year VoiceAbility launched our benefits advocacy service in Scotland. We are proud to offer disabled people in Scotland bespoke advocacy support so they can access benefits from Social Security Scotland. As the service continues to roll out, we hope that advocacy can play its role in supporting disabled people in Scotland to live full lives and feel more empowered. This is particularly close to my heart as I am Scottish and have a long career of working closely with disabled people as a disability activist to enshrine our civil rights.

Every year it is important for me to thank our staff and volunteers for their hard work and thank our partners and commissioners who have collaborated with VoiceAbility. In these continuing times of challenge with coronavirus, I feel this is even more important. I would also like to thank my fellow trustees for their diligence and commitment to VoiceAbility's values, and our executive team, as together we work to push the organisation forward to have greater and more enduring social impact in the future.

Susan Douglas-Scott CBE

Welcome from the Chief Executive



As we look back at the last year, I reflect on the challenges facing the people who access our support. I also reflect on how people are agents for change in their own lives, and how empowerment and recognition of everyone as an individual is at the centre of VoiceAbility's work.

We closed the year shortly after the two-year anniversary of the first national lockdown. VoiceAbility had to navigate a constantly changing environment, but we had solid foundations to build upon, and experience under our belts from the previous year. I am enormously proud of every staff member and volunteer who continued to support people day-in, day-out to make sure people were heard when it matters most. We had a relentless focus on developing and iterating best practice to be responsive to the reality of the pandemic, while still strengthening our vital role in supporting people's voices, upholding people's rights and safeguarding.

The launch of our benefits advocacy service in Scotland, making sure disabled people are supported to access Social Security Scotland payments, could not come at a more opportune moment. The increasing cost of living means many people are making even tougher decisions about their lives. Making sure they are heard when it matters most becomes ever more important.

VoiceAbility exists to raise up people's voices, empower us all to speak out for ourselves, and to represent people and uphold rights when they are at risk. In VoiceAbility, we have a clear vision for the changes we want to see through next year and beyond. We have a vital role to make sure that everyone has a voice, that no one is forced to make life-changing decisions alone, and that we drive forward systemic change to make sure that people who draw on public services are truly listened to. It's a challenging context, but there are real opportunities for us to make positive change.

As much as we focus on supporting people who draw on our support to make changes in their lives or on external change, we must also look at changing ourselves. In VoiceAbility, we will continue to inspire, support and challenge each other as we seek to identify and address the root causes of inequality, within our own organisation as well as the systems in which we work. I am proud that we are investing time, energy and resources in the broad cultural change programme we have bannered 'Belonging' so that VoiceAbility is a more inclusive workplace, where colleagues thrive and feel we can all be our authentic selves.

The success we celebrate in this annual report would not happen without the determination and hard work of our staff and volunteers. I thank every single one of them for stepping up and putting people at the centre of our work. And I thank the board for their wisdom and guidance throughout the year.

Jonathan Senker

About us

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

Our aims

We believe that everyone, regardless of situation, illness or disability, has a right to:

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



In line with our charitable objectives, everything we do is focused on achieving these aims.

In this annual report, you can read about how we have achieved these aims through our work with individuals, through work with groups and communities, through working with other organisations and through influencing national policy.

The report also explains the changes we have made within our own organisation to make sure we are best placed to achieve our aims.

Our values

Passionate

We're dedicated to strengthening voice, supporting rights and changing lives. Because we are passionate we:

- are committed to delivering high quality support
- make what we offer accessible to all
- work with policy-makers to safeguard and strengthen people's rights

Empowering

We enable people to live life to the full.

Because we are empowering we:

- support people to speak up for themselves and grow in confidence
- equip people to understand and exercise their rights
- treat people as individuals with their own unique strengths

Collaborative

We listen and shape decisions with others.

Because we are collaborative we:

- involve people we support in shaping our organisation and what we do
- are easy to talk to, considerate and constructive
- ask for and respond to feedback so that we can improve

Honest

We work with integrity and we stick to our principles.

Because we are honest we:

- mean what we say and do what we promise
- make everything clear and transparent
- maintain independence, confidentiality and professionalism

Resourceful

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

Because we are resourceful we:

- focus on solutions
- try out new ideas
- achieve the most we can with the resources we have

Our vision

We will:

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

Our strategy for 2019 – 2025




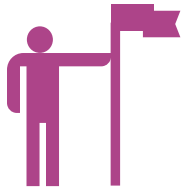

We want to deliver the best possible quality of support to people so they are heard, respected, safe and in control of their own life. Our strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision between 2019 and 2025.

We will diversify the services we offer

People need many kinds of support in order to be heard and have their rights upheld.

Advocacy is one vital type of support, but not the only one. By 2025 we will have significantly widened the range of services we offer which help people to be heard and have their rights upheld.

We will improve our organisational capability

	Value our people	Create an even more positive working culture and clearer opportunities for staff development and progression
	Build the basics	Increase clarity and consistency across all our standards, policies, systems and processes whilst maintaining person-centred service delivery to individuals
	Drive quality	Improve our ability to evidence our impact and outcomes
	Lead the market	Reflect the high quality of our services in how we look and speak as an organisation and in the digital tools we offer
	Grow authority	Continue to ensure that people's voices are heard and their rights respected in local and national policy decisions

Midway through our strategy

At the halfway point of our strategic plan, we took the opportunity to review our approach and step up work in certain areas.

Since 2019, we have delivered significant organisational change to address 'Build the basics' and 'Drive quality'. We will always seek to improve the quality of our services within a continuous improvement cycle. In previous years, we put the systems and foundations in place to deliver these strategic plans. You can read more about this when we cover our work on safeguarding, and how we have focused on continuing to roll out improvements and embed our practice expertise more consistently across the organisation through our practice team.

In this report, we also cover how we are now focusing our strategic delivery on 'Value our people,' 'Lead the market' and 'Grow authority,' in particular with our new Belonging workstream, through strengthening our leadership structure, and gaining leverage and building relationships with key decision-makers and stakeholders.

Our reach this year

We supported more than 26,000 people across England and Scotland this year. The launch of a new advocacy service in Scotland to support people who identify as disabled to access social security benefits means we have the potential to reach tens of thousands more people over the coming years. We also launched new services in Bolton, Blackburn, Shropshire, Lincolnshire, Swindon, Merton, Ealing, Barnet, Enfield, Southwark and Waltham Forest.

To maximise our impact and achieve our aims, we also work to influence change in legislation, policy and wider society. In our influencing work we want to make sure people's rights are protected and strengthened, and that people have the support to understand and use those rights to have power over their own lives. This year, we've continued to work with government and parliamentarians to advocate for an overhaul of social care and reform of the Mental Health Act. As a member of the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) National Steering Group, we have been providing evidence and insight to support the consultation on the Draft Code of Practice for the LPS.

We employ over 300 members of staff and have over 50 volunteers. We have an income of £10,993,036 per annum, largely from contracts with Local Authorities and the NHS.

Our services

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

Engagement

This year we have developed our contact centre to improve how we engage with people wanting to speak to us, whether this is someone asking directly for support, a family member or friend, a professional, or a casual enquiry. The major development this year has been the introduction of webchat. This means that in addition to people being able to contact us by post, telephone, or email, they can also chat directly through our website to a real person and trained advocate during our core opening hours of Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Advocacy services

Advocates are independent professionals who work with people to help them understand their options, know their rights and say what they want. This helps to make sure that people

are involved as much as possible in decisions about their health and care and are represented where required. There are several laws across the UK that mean some people have a legal right to advocacy to support them at particular points in their life, for example to access services or because they may find it hard to be heard when decisions are being made that affect them.

“Having an advocate there is like someone else on my side, someone to challenge for me.” – feedback to our Cheswold Park Hospital team

“I am so grateful that the advocate has visited me on the ward, that the advocate understands my autism and I know the advocate is there for me to talk to and can speak up for me when I ask him to” – Steph, someone we supported in Doncaster

An advocate can support someone to:

- communicate their views and wishes
- understand their rights
- understand any processes and decisions they are subject to
- understand the options they have
- challenge a decision

Even when someone may find it very hard to tell their advocate what they want, our advocates will use a range of approaches to establish their views and wishes as far as possible and secure their rights. We work with clients in the way that best suits their needs, circumstances and wishes. This means that we can meet face-to-face, online or by telephone, as well as meeting them in community locations of their choosing or in their own home or living space.



Connections services

Our Connections services continue to expand, and this year included:

- **Involvement and participation**
We work with providers, NHS bodies and local government to ensure that the voices of people who use services are heard. For example, our Experts by Experience and Speak Out projects employ people with learning disabilities and autistic people, to capture and convey the voices of their peers and facilitate user involvement networks. Recent successes include their co-production work on [a training film for lawyers who work in the Court of Protection](#).
- **Group advocacy**
We support people to meet together, identify common issues, share their experiences and take action. Where possible, we support these groups to become self-facilitating, empowering people to take more control of their own lives.

- **Peer mentoring**

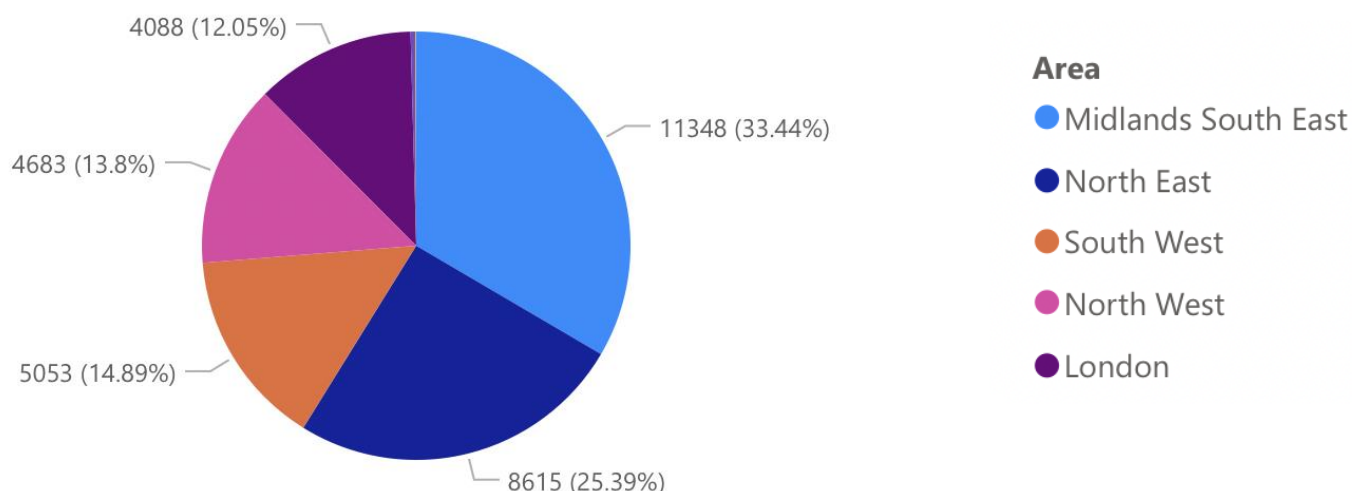
We all trust and feel more comfortable speaking with people who have been through some of the same experiences as we have. Peer advocacy can help us open up, find support and develop our own solutions. Mentors empathise, listen and provide emotional support. They also share their own experience, insights, advice and encouragement.

Where we worked this year

This year, we worked across the UK. In 2021 – 2022 we developed new or additional services in:

- Scotland
- Bolton
- Blackburn
- Shropshire
- Lincolnshire
- Swindon
- Merton
- Ealing
- Barnet
- Enfield
- Southwark
- Waltham Forest

Our presence is especially strong in the Midlands and the North East, with most cases opened in these regions.



New advocacy service in Scotland

On 31 January 2022, we launched a new type of advocacy service which supports disabled people to access benefits from Social Security Scotland. This service is independent of the Scottish government and Social Security Scotland.

“Our advocates will cover the length and breadth of Scotland. The advocacy we provide will support disabled people to make sure their voices are heard and that they know and understand their rights when applying for Social Security Scotland benefits.” – Jonathan Senker, Chief Executive, VoiceAbility

We are delighted to support people to understand their rights and have their voices heard in Scotland, and to help them to overcome any barriers they face when applying for social security benefits. Implementation was an organisation-wide team effort, and we continue to develop the service to reach people across the country.

As part of the launch, we developed an animated video to explain the service, what an advocate does and how people can get support. The video is available [on our website](#) in English, Gaelic, and British Sign Language, as well as with captions.



1. Creating change with individuals

Individual advocacy

Who we worked with

This year we provided individual advocacy support or peer support to 26,157 people. Each time we start a new piece of work with someone, we call it a case. In total, we worked on 33,927 cases this year. This includes both new cases and those we were continuing to work on that were opened in the previous year.

40% of people we worked with in 2021 – 2022 were over the age of 65. The three most common support needs of people we worked with were a mental health condition, dementia or a learning disability. You can find out more in the infographics on the following pages.

What we did

We provided the full range of advocacy types. This means we helped support the voice, rights and choices of people who:

- are detained under the Mental Health Act (Independent Mental Health Advocacy)
- are or may be deprived of their liberty under the Mental Capacity Act (Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy and Relevant Person's Representatives)
- are deemed under the Mental Capacity Act to lack capacity to make decisions about where they will live or the medical treatment they will receive (Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy)
- have substantial difficulty in being involved in local authority care planning processes (Care Act advocacy)
- wish to make a complaint about their NHS care and treatment (NHS complaints advocacy)

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) and Relevant Person’s Representatives (RPR) accounted for just over half of our work this year.

“You have supported [your client] consistently... When the client calls you, you are on the phone to me straight away advocating on her behalf. I really can’t fault your practice and admire how you have supported the client through such difficult times.” – feedback from a social worker to our Bradford team

“I was so anxious regarding my first appointment with my advocate Klara, and had been in services, including inpatient settings, for so long that I didn’t even have the confidence to meet with her on my own for the first time, so my dad joined the appointment. Klara was friendly, encouraging and understanding, which made me soon feel able to meet with them by myself.” – Alex, who we supported in Hertfordshire

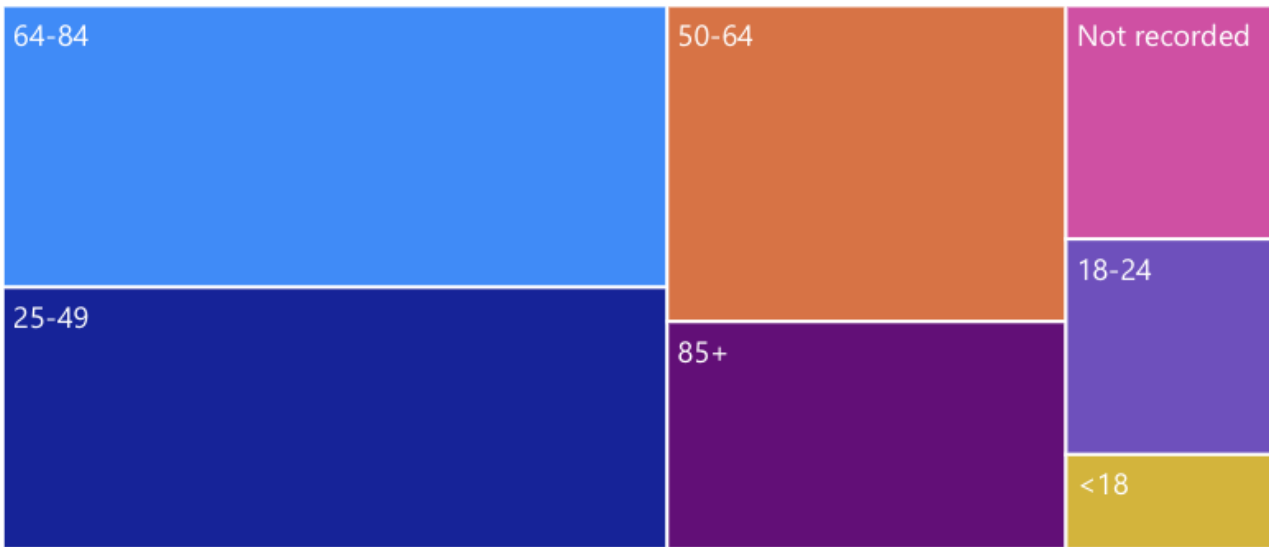
We also worked with children and young people who are:

- looked-after children
- care leavers
- have special education needs or who are disabled
- in custody

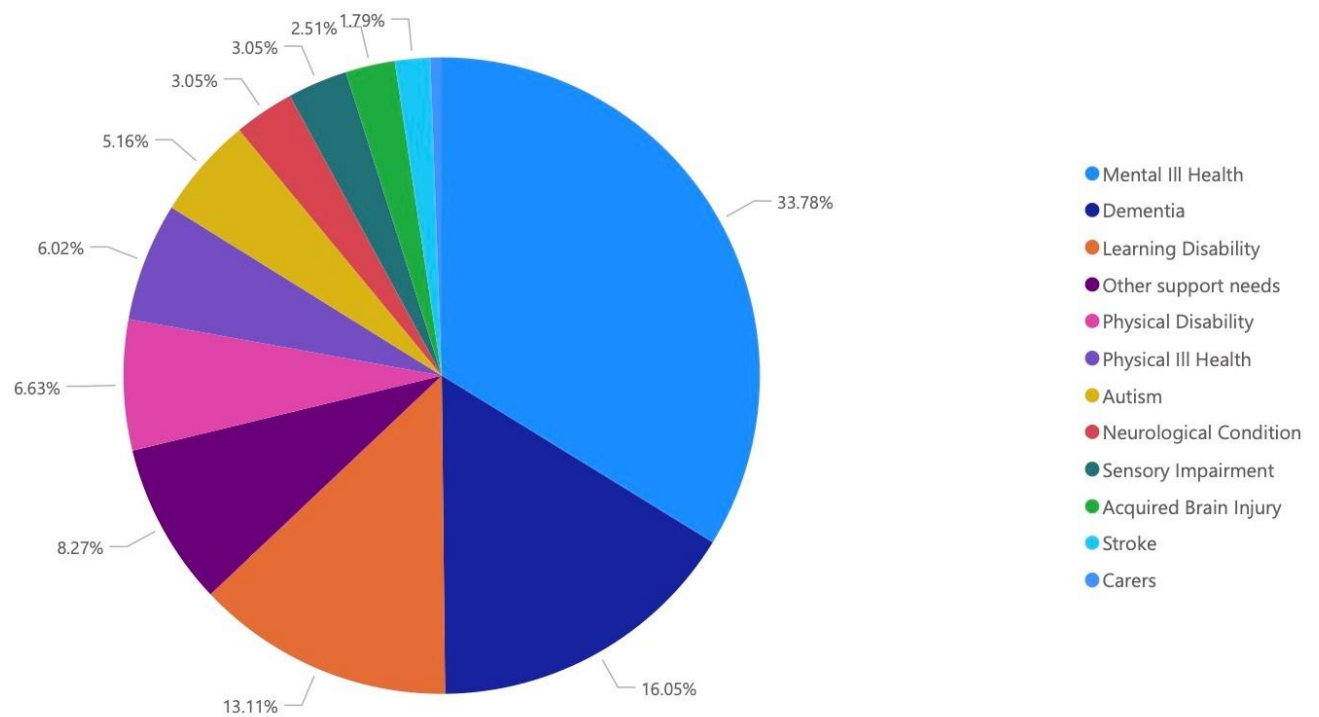
This is called ‘Children and young people’s advocacy’. In some areas, we also provide advocacy to children and young people going through child protection processes, and mental health advocacy for young people. 876 of our new cases this year were for children and young people.



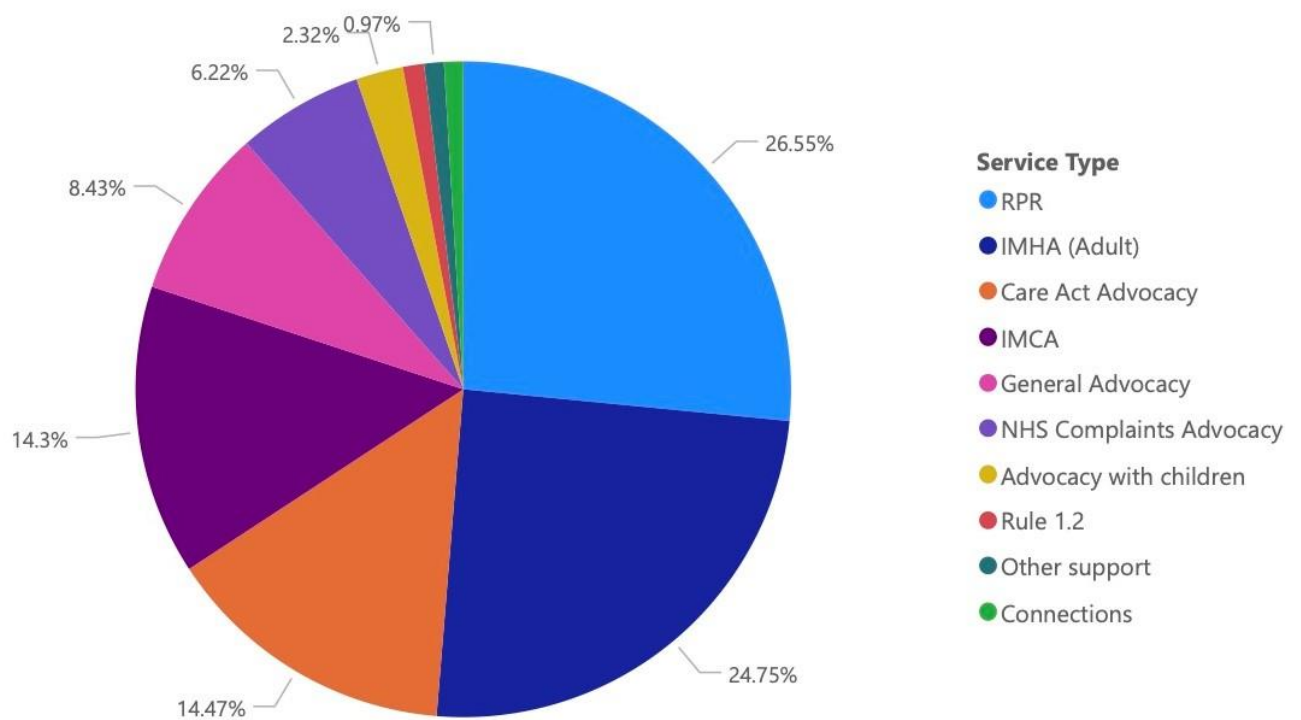
Ages of clients in 2021-22



Why our clients needed support in 2021-22



Number of cases by service type in 2021 – 2022



General advocates provide advocacy to people who need support to be heard, but do not fall into the eligibility criteria for other types of advocacy.

Amy is in her early twenties and a chatty, open and a creative individual who also enjoys musicals, sketching and drawing. Amy describes herself as a “cat mum” and loves animals. Amy is autistic and has mental health problems. Following an incident at home involving her mental health, Amy had been to hospital. Amy shares the family home with her mother and father, and since leaving hospital had been placed in emergency respite care.

She self-referred to our general advocacy services as she wanted support from an advocate. Amy was confused as to why she had been placed in the respite care and did not understand why she was being held against her will. She was scared, had expressed suicidal thoughts and lacked trust in the respite care staff. She needed someone impartial to listen to her and “fight her corner.” Amy was also keen to understand her rights and when she would be allowed to leave. At the visit, the advocate spoke to Amy and to the respite manager, and they supported Amy to help her understand why she was there.



Amy wanted to voice some things she would like while she was in respite, and wanted to have her voice heard at a Care Treatment review the following week. The advocate supported Amy to plan the things she wanted to ask the respite team, and to request a longer time to speak at her review. As a result, Amy was also given an hour to speak rather than half an hour, and the meeting agenda was revised to accommodate her wishes.

With the help of the advocate, Amy was able to plan and express her views in the meeting. She was confident enough to speak to the team at the meeting and express the things she wanted. With the support of the respite team, she was also able to write a timetable for her medication as well. At the next medication review, Amy felt empowered to independently ask questions around her medication. Amy was also assigned a new social worker, who she was able to meet and complete a care assessment with. Amy continues to work with her social worker who is making the appropriate arrangements to support Amy around a referral to a young person’s hostel, her education, volunteering, and her mental health.

Amy said that she was pleased with her outcomes and felt like she had been listened to about the things she wanted to happen in her life. Amy was excited about her future and about becoming more independent.

NHS complaints advocates support people to complain about the treatment or care that they or a friend or family member have received from an NHS service. This support is available at every stage of the complaints process.

This year we've substantially grown our NHS complaints services and revised and updated our popular self-help toolkit for making NHS complaints. We have made some information and guidance available to anyone who wants to understand more about the process and for areas where we are the advocacy provider, we have [a comprehensive Plain English self-help toolkit](#) that clients can use, meaning that they get the level of support that is right for them and we can support more people, more effectively.

Jennifer contacted VoiceAbility as she wanted to raise an NHS complaint regarding her daughter's care and treatment. Jennifer's daughter had a growing tumour between her brain and her eye. Jennifer felt like she was not being listened to by the specialists who were treating her daughter and felt that no services were taking the responsibility to act. Jennifer also felt that they had not received sufficient care and treatment in the past.

Jennifer asked VoiceAbility to support her in making her NHS complaint, as she felt that she was unable to progress through the NHS complaints process alone due to the stress she was under as a carer. Katie, our trained NHS Complaint Advocate, contacted Jennifer and discussed their options. Katie helped follow up Jennifer's complaint and support her in receiving a response. Katie contacted NHS England and discussed the case with an NHS England Complaints Manager who got in contact with Jennifer to manage the NHS complaint.

Katie sent Jennifer a copy of our toolkit which outlines the NHS Complaints process and is a really useful guide, specifically designed to empower our clients to advocate for themselves. Through several phone calls and emails, Katie built up Jennifer's confidence and empowered her to contact NHS England and other organisations independently. Jennifer now felt so confident that she was able to contact her MP to highlight the issues she had faced, in the hope that her MP would be able to support her and to ensure this did not happen to anybody else.

As a result of advocacy support, Jennifer has been able to secure appointments for her daughter, as well as putting assessments in place. Jennifer's daughter also now has a contact in place so they know what they can expect going forward for her treatment. On a telephone call, Jennifer told Katie that she has achieved the outcome she desired from using VoiceAbility, and said that she felt so much more confident in going about the NHS complaint by herself.

Independent Mental Capacity Advocates (IMCAs) support people who lack capacity to make decisions about their long-term accommodation or serious medical treatment and who do not have any friends or family appropriate to consult.

Arthur is a confident person who had recently been diagnosed with dementia. He enjoys watching television and speaking to people one on one. Arthur was living in a rehabilitation placement when his advocate, Sarah, met him. It had been decided that he did not have capacity to make decisions about the care and treatment he receives, but he did have capacity to make his own decisions about medication.

Arthur felt his placement was quite restrictive. He commented it was “like a prison” as he had to have staff go with him for cigarettes and he was not very happy. Sarah spoke with staff and Arthur at the placement, and challenged the capacity assessment completed by the doctor from the council because she did not feel it was clear enough. She also made recommendations to support Arthur to explore other options available to him, so he did not feel so restricted.



Sarah ensured that Arthur’s rights were upheld through this process. A new, more in-depth capacity assessment was completed by the best interest assessor and she was able to provide the council with recommendations to support Arthur in the future to feel less restricted. For Arthur, not being able to have a cigarette in peace was unsettling. The advocate listened to him and allowed his voice to be heard.

Impact of our advocacy

We use an Outcomes Framework, based on the NDTi Outcomes Framework, which enables advocates to focus on delivering person-centred advocacy, while capturing the impact of our work in an accessible way.

Through our Outcomes Framework, we support clients to identify and achieve:

- an ‘advocacy goal’, which is what the person would like to achieve through advocacy
- at least one ‘wider outcome’ we will support the person to develop, for example, ‘I feel confident’ or ‘I am being treated with respect and dignity’ or ‘I know what my rights are’

The person we’re working with completes a self-assessment at the start of their support, rating themselves from 1 – 5 using a straightforward scoring tool. This self-assessment is repeated when we close the case, enabling the person (where possible) and their advocate to reflect on their achievements, and the progress made. To ensure that we understand how effectively we’re supporting people who can’t self-assess, advocates can use our ‘observed goals and outcomes’ which have a 1 – 3 scale.

We use Action Planning to make sure we are focused on supporting people with their advocacy outcomes. It includes outcome-focused events and tasks which we record help an advocate and client to work together on a joint co-produced plan. It is regularly reviewed so that the case stays on the agreed track and is goal-oriented. An Action Plan is designed with the Advocacy Charter in mind. The plan is person-led, accessible and empowering for the client because it is co-produced, clear to both advocate and client, and has the client's desired outcomes as the steering force. Planning is done in a way that works best for the client. It is an important stage of the advocacy cycle.

We often do more than just help people tackle a single issue. Working with an advocate empowers people to achieve outcomes around their wellbeing, knowledge and use of their rights, or in being more able to speak up for themselves in the future.

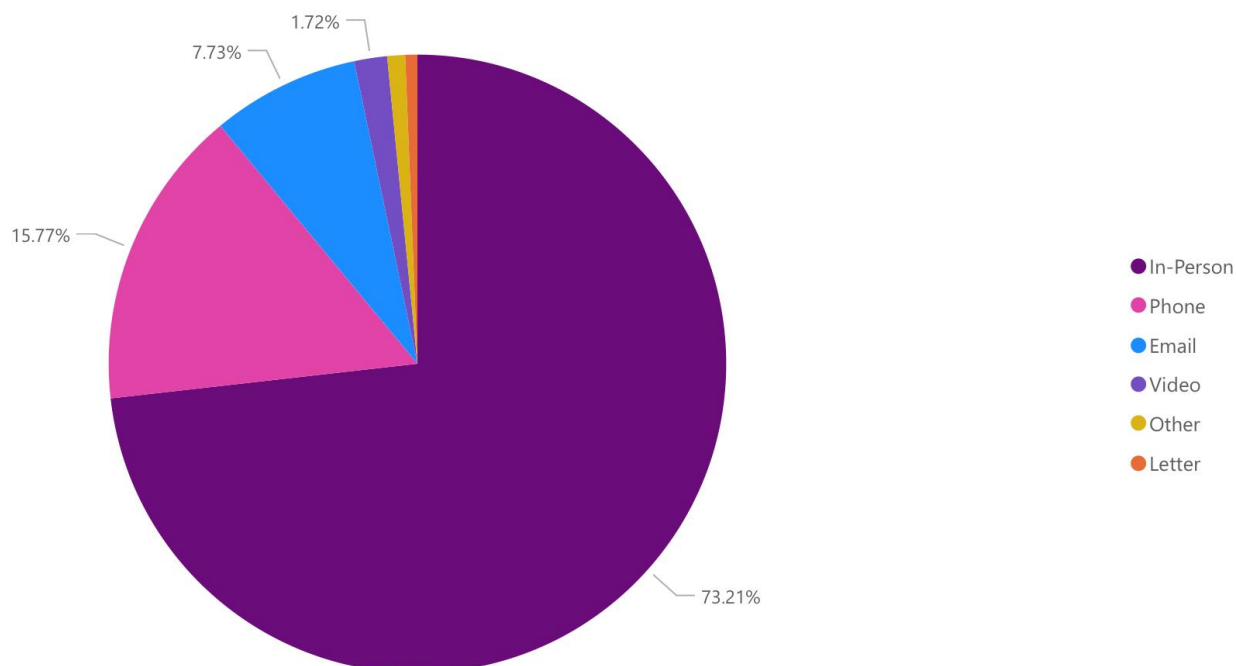
Working with our clients in 2021 – 2022

The still-changing situation with the coronavirus pandemic meant that we were even more flexible and responsive in our support to clients. We continued to provide updated guidance and recommendations to advocates on how they could work, and often shared these with advocacy organisations to support the sector to champion best practice.

Even during the strictest lockdowns, we continued to provide in-person support when the client needed it in order to safeguard their rights as well as health and wellbeing. We have robust risk assessment processes to keep clients and staff safe. In light of the pandemic, we had created a Covid-19 Risk Assessment Tool to support our colleagues who are at greater risk of complications or serious illness from coronavirus, as well as making sure our clients were safe and supported. We continued to review and update this assessment process along with our wider guidance as the situation changed.

People can contact us in a range of ways. Our single contact number is freephone and means that we can direct people to the right teams for support more effectively. We have continued to invest in our contact centre staff and functionality to make sure we are delivering the best service we can to our clients. We also launched webchat on our website this year to add another contact route that people can use to speak with an advocate. Since launching webchat, we have almost halved our response time, meaning that people get help from an advocate quicker, speeding up from our response time from 60 seconds on average to now responding to people in 31 seconds on average.

The different ways we engaged with clients in 2021 –2022



How we supported clients this year

This year, we continued to provide the overwhelming majority of support face-to-face, because we know that this is most effective for most people. We learnt during coronavirus restrictions that we can only effectively safeguard some clients by physically seeing them in their own environments. This is why it was so important for us to enable our staff to continue in-person visits during lockdowns, carefully observing precautions and implementing the robust risk assessment processes that allowed us to reduce the risk of coronavirus for our clients and staff.

We also use technology to support people when people prefer this and where it is effective. For example, our Southampton team observed that remote working went well in their children and young people's advocacy service. It was a way of communicating young people were familiar with, and they were able to turn their camera off if they felt they needed to. This helped them to be more comfortable engaging with their advocate, so that they could work together to achieve the outcome they wanted.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a cornerstone of the work we do, and so we are highly attentive to the ways in which we can understand what a client might be experiencing. We support people to be heard, respected, safe and in control of their own life. Safeguarding is fundamental to delivering on our aims, not just as a regulatory and legal requirement. It is delivered by every single member of our staff and volunteers, constantly.

Internal improvements

In 2020, our Change Programme and operational restructuring saw safeguarding become better embedded into management and led by our Practice team. This year the benefits of this continued to be evident. We have improved oversight which allows us to identify safeguarding issues, and we have a strong culture of learning and development spearheaded by our dedicated Safeguarding Lead who works closely and constantly with the whole Practice team.

Our Safeguarding Lead is a specialist point of contact for advocacy team leaders, and their work includes identifying and monitoring potential issues and concerns, reviewing our procedures and policies, assessing whether we have any blind-spots, including in light of national investigations and external intelligence, and making sure that our advocates receive the best training and continuous professional development, so that our service delivery is of an excellent quality. We deliver bespoke and refresher training. Staff and volunteers are supported to be reflective practitioners and to identify areas where they need more support, so that they can be given the tools and training they need to keep improving the service they provide. We respond to internal feedback, for example issues raised about where low-level concerns can be recorded.

We also have a safeguarding Community of Practice, where our staff can share and discuss safeguarding issues, best practice, dilemmas and questions. Staff on the safeguarding Community of Practice include Experts by Experience – ensuring the voice of people with lived experience is central to our development of best practice within the organisation.

Our external work

This year, we have undertaken audits on our practice in services we provide or have provided where concerns have been raised externally, including by CQC reports, OFSTED, media or other professionals. We have also influenced change ourselves, escalating concerns externally.

In Hampshire, we were asked by the Safeguarding Adults Board to represent the voice of a young person who had died. A key aim of this was to develop an advocacy model that could be used in other Safeguarding Adults Reviews, to bring into focus the experience of the person and their views and wishes. We spoke to people who had known the young person, and the feedback from the Safeguarding Adult Board and Independent Reviewer on the advocacy report and input was overwhelmingly positive. We were informed that it was “extraordinarily helpful” to the process and meant that the focus of the full day session was on the young person’s voice. The young person’s parent said she felt the advocacy report had “nailed it.” Following the success of this work, the Hampshire Safeguarding Adults Board commissioned VoiceAbility to carry out a similar piece of work for a thematic review. We will continue to identify how we can strengthen the role of advocacy in SABs.

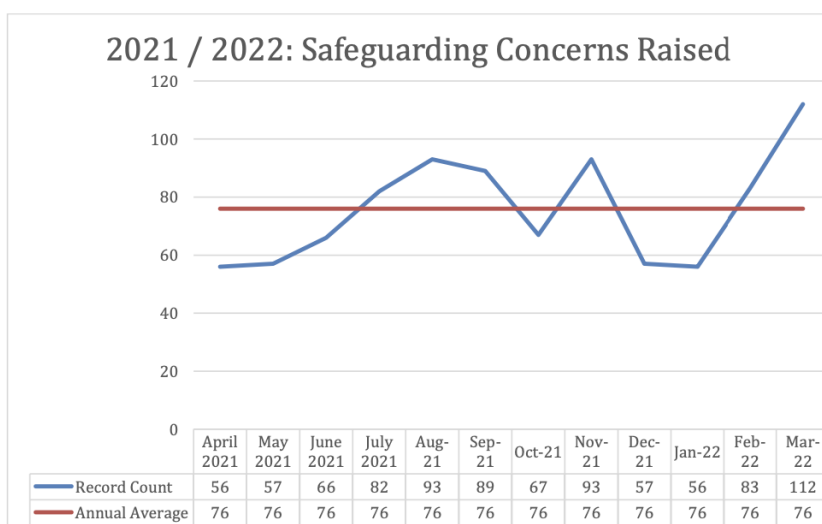
For Safeguarding Adults Week 2021, our Safeguarding Lead wrote [a series of articles](#) which were shared publicly. These articles reflected on and provided resources on key issues in safeguarding and on ways advocates can develop their practice to be alert to these issues.

Using data to inform our safeguarding work

Our safeguarding data is reported quarterly, and we monitor and use this data to identify areas where further examination is needed – for instance, why numbers of safeguarding concerns might vary across regions, or if we have lower or higher than expected levels of reporting of concerns. An example of this in our Safeguarding Annual Report, where we observe trends in data and take action to review and audit services where our experience suggests there might be anomalies. This means we can make sure we are always taking the action we need to to safeguard our clients.

The data we have supports our hypothesis that coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions reduced the number of safeguarding concerns raised, strongly suggesting that reduced face-to-face contact with clients had an impact on our ability to observe safeguarding concerns. We are proud to have continued to offer in-person advocacy at all times, and to have successfully made the case across the sector and to government and other bodies that advocacy must be prioritised as an essential service and advocates must be able to carry out their duties.

Number of Safeguarding cases raised

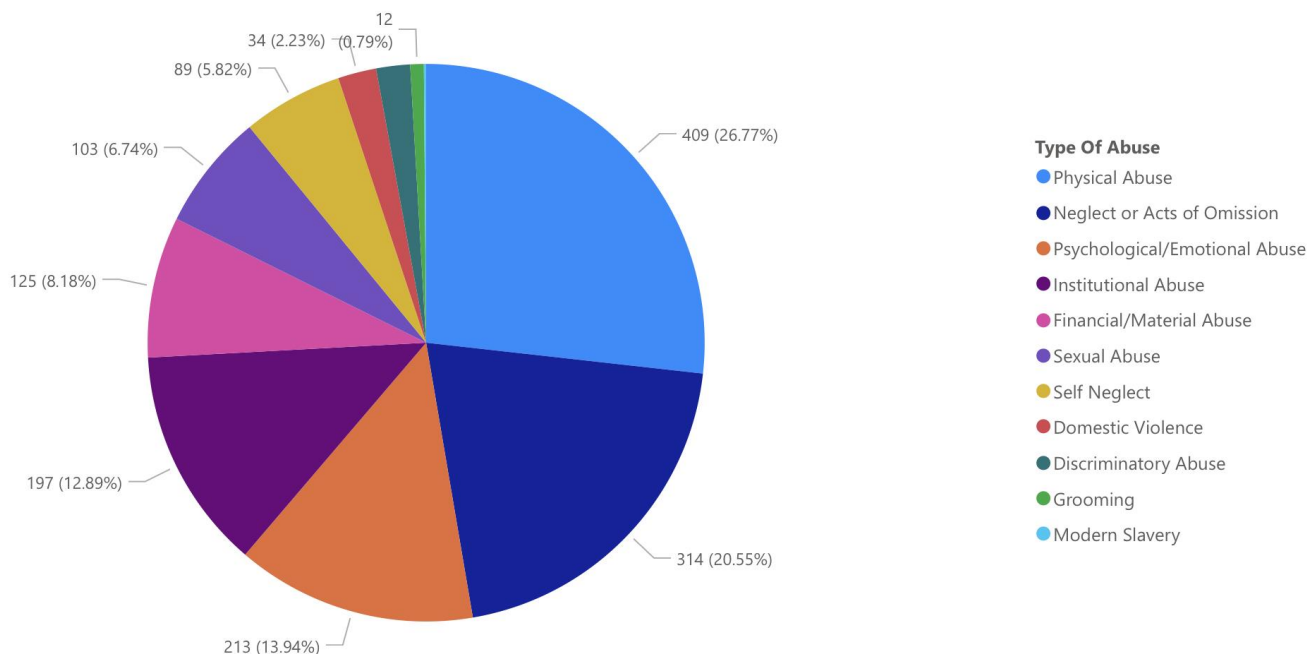


The improved oversight we have comes from several sources, including:

- improved supervision and audit of advocates by line managers, who observe advocates while they practice and then discuss findings and then create a learning and development plan (this year we updated our Advocacy Practice Audit and Supervision guidance to reflect our new Advocacy Standards Framework)
- better use of data to identify concerns (and changes to how we capture data, including adding additional sections to gather more information)
- internal case auditing by the practice team
- increased monitoring of external intelligence
- frontline staff through our Communities of Practice

Safeguarding concerns in 2021 – 2022

This chart shows the number of safeguarding concerns raised to the relevant authorities by our colleagues this year, by type of abuse:



Connections services: our work with individuals

Our Connections service brings together all of our participation, involvement, co-production and peer support work into one team. These services are varied but are all about ensuring that the voices of people we work with are really heard so that their rights are upheld, and they can make a difference to the services that affect them. By employing and working with people who have similar experiences, we empower them to advocate for themselves and support others to speak out about the things that are important to them.

Our Quality Checkers in Northamptonshire are people with lived experience of a learning disability who visit, in person or virtually, residential settings and day services to rate and report on the quality of that service.

In Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire we have Speak Out Leaders, and in Hampshire and Southampton we have Self-Advocates. These are people with a learning disability and/or autistic people who speak with their peers about all aspects of their lives, and share feedback with the local authority and a wide range of services and organisations.

Peer mentoring and peer coaching

We're part of Camden and Islington's Peer Involvement Network. Our Peer Coaches (a paid role) work with people as they are discharged from the Camden Crisis Teams, and support them to explore ways to improve and maintain their wellbeing. Our peer mentors are trained volunteers with lived experience of mental health challenges, who draw on this to support others to stay well and achieve health and wellbeing goals. This year, we trained 17 peer mentors.

In June 2021 the Camden Mental Health Resilience Network Alliance, of which our Camden Peer Mentoring service is a key member, was shortlisted for a Health Service Journal (HSJ) Partnership Award in recognition of the support they have given people in Camden to live fulfilling lives as part of their community.

The Resilience Network Alliance works with statutory mental health services, General Practitioners, Social Care, other voluntary and community organisations, and people who use mental health services in Camden to co-produce a range of preventative community-based support services for adults. It also works together with Camden residents to design and deliver services that improve their mental health, and is:

- available early to stop problems getting worse
- easy to access
- focused on reducing inequalities in mental health
- flexible and responsive to suit people's needs

Experts by Experience: helping to ensure quality care for people in Coventry and Warwickshire

Experts by Experience are people who have experience of, or caring for someone with, a learning disability or autism and of spending time in hospital because of being mentally unwell. They are invited to take part in Care and Treatment Reviews, which take place when people with a learning disability and/or autistic people are either at risk of being admitted to, or are currently detained in, an inpatient psychiatric service.

Experts by Experience will often have one-to-one conversations with people, so they can share their views and wishes about their care and treatment. They want to know whether the person is safe, if they are getting good care and treatment, what their plans are for the future, and whether care and treatment can happen in their own home and their own community.

By drawing on their own experiences of being in hospital and adapting this to what the patient is going through, they share their thoughts with the rest of the panel, the person themselves and their family, to ensure that their care plan is person-centred.

Developing the quality of our services for individuals

Quality Performance Mark

We hold the QPM (Quality Performance Mark) which is independently assessed and awarded by NDTi. We have held the QPM since 2011, with our 2020 reappraisal highlighting:

- our highly person-centred advocacy practice
- our excellence in non-instructed advocacy
- our thorough approach to safeguarding
- overwhelmingly positive feedback from clients and external stakeholders

This year, we have started to get ready for our QPM assessment in 2022 to make sure we are able to reflect the improvements and developments we have made as an organisation to further drive up quality of our advocacy.

Launching our own Advocacy Standards

Our first Advocacy Standards were developed in 2019. The standards set a minimum level that clients can expect from our advocacy services. This year, we reviewed and updated our Advocacy Standards to make sure they stay relevant to our work.

Our Advocacy Standards set out the key components of what is required for quality advocacy at VoiceAbility, ensure consistency in the services we provide to our clients, and provide a framework for consistent and fair professional development and appraisals for advocates.

VoiceAbility advocates asked for more clarity on what the standards look like in practice, so we developed a new framework which gives a clear guidance for what an advocate needs to do to achieve the standards.

The new framework shows advocates and managers how to achieve the standards in practice. Our standards are part of our supervision and practice audits to make sure our standards are consistent and high across the organisation.

Dedicated practice team

Our Director of Practice, Development Lead, System Support Lead, Practice Lead and Safeguarding Lead head teams who continuously deepen and broaden staff training and professional development. They are responsible for making sure that all our services are delivered in line with relevant legislation, codes of practice, guidance and national standards. We also have a Training Manager in Scotland, to oversee these functions and ensure quality in our social security benefits advocacy service.

The practice team engage constantly with the policy and news landscape and share insights to ensure that our services follow the very best practice, are of high quality and that all advocacy disciplines provide specialist support. The team work closely with the policy, public affairs and communications team to disseminate information and feed in expertise into our policy influencing work. The teams also meet regularly to share updates and as a means to reduce the risk of potential silo working.

‘Communities of Practice’ for advocacy specialisms

Our advocates are connected with those across the UK who deliver the same type of advocacy, to form Communities of Practice where on-the-ground expertise and best practice from across our staff team can be shared. They quickly address issues and rapidly disseminate new advocacy practice information to ensure a consistent approach across our teams and they provide first-hand and expert insight to inform our policy and public affairs work.

Following the success of our Safeguarding and IMHA Communities of Practice, we have implemented new communities to support the following advocacy specialisms:

- Children and Young People
- Care Act
- Mental Capacity Act (IMCA & RPR)
- NHS Complaints
- Litigation Friends

Creating change with individuals: future plans

Next year, we will continue to deliver improvements to our advocacy practice and the support we provide to individuals. In particular, we will:

- Continue to support the implementation of our new contract in Scotland, in particular as new benefits come under the remit of Social Security Scotland
- Roll out a new High-Level Practitioner role for advocates to support our peer-led quality processes for advocacy practice, so that quality advocacy is further embedded across our services
- Finalise the development of the learning and development elements of the new HR system to include excellent Learning and Development functionality and launch e-learning across the organisation
- Work across teams in policy, practice and operations to make sure that changes to statutory advocacy under the Mental Capacity Act, Care Act, and Mental Health Act are person-centred and deliver change for our clients
- Develop our safeguarding work further, including making sure we are well connected into the relevant bodies, can escalate concerns, and can influence safeguarding practice more widely

2. Creating change with groups and communities

Many of our Connections services enable people to be involved in their communities, shaping services they need and making decisions in their own communities. This work promotes inclusion and social justice.



Supporting people to shape their communities and local services

We facilitated four groups for people with learning disabilities this year:

- Speak Out meetings in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
- Hampshire's Learning Disability Partnership Board
- Busy People group in Southampton, who also participate in Southampton Learning Disability Partnership board

Most of the project leaders and participants have learning disabilities or are autistic and bring the benefit of their own experience to their role.

Spotlight on Hampshire

The Busy People group worked with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) on the recommissioning of learning disabilities services provided by Southern Health NHS. Self-advocates explored issues around learning disabilities and mental health, and were supported to feed this back to the Learning Disability Partnership Board. Busy People were concerned about the pandemic's impact on the mental health of people with learning disabilities and led the Board's thinking about the support needed as the 'unlocking road map' was implemented.

Self-advocates were also involved in the production of a transition plan for Hampshire Learning Disability Partnership (HLDP), where they gave their views on the plan content, leading to clarification on what was expected from Local Implementation Group meetings. This included recommendations for accessibility: they said that shorter meetings and information in Easy Read were needed so that people could better engage.



Our Connections services co-produced a film

Our Speak Out project in Cambridgeshire and our Experts by Experience project in Coventry and Warwickshire worked with researchers at ICPR, Birkbeck School of Law to make [a training film](#) for specialist lawyers who work in the Court of Protection. The film was called 'Participation and Communication in The Court of Protection' and was developed by the Judging Values and Participation in Mental Capacity Law team. The film will help lawyers better understand the perspectives of autistic people and people with learning disabilities, and improve how they plan for meetings. Using role-play and roundtables with lawyers and autistic people and/or people with learning disabilities, the film shows lawyers how to enhance communication and achieve better quality evidence for the court.

As Speak Out Leader Sean Nightingale said, "Being able to work and build trust with people with disabilities better than they might do already is really important, it may help people when solicitors are making decisions for them. If they can get to know the people themselves, it will help the person they are working with to trust them."

Feedback was hugely positive. Andrew Spooner, Associate Solicitor, Head of Mental Capacity at Biscoes Solicitors said: "The video is the most important video on technical practice I have ever seen. It really conveys how to improve communication with a protected party in the Court of Protection and I think it is going to revolutionise practice, thank you again."

Mat Culverhouse, partner at Irwin Mitchell solicitors and co-chair of the Court of Protection Practitioners' Association, said: "This film is an invaluable resource for Court of Protection practitioners at all levels, from those starting out in this field to those with many years of experience. This important project demonstrates the value of training based on rigorous research and learning from those with lived experience, and it is to be hoped that this video will be just the first of many future resources produced by the project team."

Change with groups and communities: future plans

As part of our 2019 – 2025 strategy, we will continue to diversify our Connections services. Our aim in this is to help more people to have their voices heard and to have choice, control and freedom in their lives. To achieve this we will:

- invest in our structures to grow and develop our Connections services
- expand the breadth of our services to support more people whose voice often goes unheard
- build a more empathetic and experience-based picture of how people we support feel and what they think about decisions being made
- improve our ability to make a difference in the lives of more individuals, whether that is through direct delivery of support or by influencing local authorities and policy makers

3. Creating changes in law, policy and society

Working in partnership for wider change

We are here to make sure that everyone has a voice when it matters most. To achieve this, we need to work alongside other organisations who have the same goals, ethos and visions as us. This is especially necessary in our work to change and influence national policies and practices so that there is greater support for, and fewer barriers to, people's voices being heard and rights respected. We put time, effort and resources into working collectively and influencing policy and practice alongside the people who we support.



We lead and facilitate a sector-wide [Advocacy Leadership Network](#), made up of over 50 organisations.

“The early meetings of the ‘Advocacy Leaders Group’ resulted in hugely valuable sharing of knowledge about the impact of the pandemic on people we support and on our work. It helped us to shape how we responded both within each of our organisations and collectively. Now the conversation reaches well beyond coronavirus. Ultimately, working together is helping us as an advocacy sector do what we are here to do: make sure that people’s voices are heard.” – Jonathan Senker, VoiceAbility Chief Executive

We are part of the following alliances and membership organisations:

- Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Health and Wellbeing Alliance, via the Complex Needs Consortium
- Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition
- Care and Support Alliance (CSA)
- Association of Mental Health Providers (AMHP)
- Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG)
- National Voices
- Clinks
- ALLIANCE
- National Council of Voluntary Organisations

Influencing public policy

Liberty Protection Safeguards

VoiceAbility have been working to support the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) over the past four years as they have developed the Code of Practice and regulations. Because of this, DHSC invited us to join the National Implementation Steering Group. We are the only advocacy provider in this group, and this means we have a formal role in supporting the consultation and the co-production of the Code of Practice and the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS).

At the end of 2021, the DHSC confirmed that LPS will not be implemented in April 2022. Following this update, the draft Code of Practice, regulations and a new Impact Assessment have been published for consultation. The consultation is open until July 2022 and VoiceAbility is working with others across the sector to develop a consultation response that brings together the value of advocacy and provides a coherent shared sector voice on LPS.

“The decision to deprive someone of their liberty is a serious one and the Liberty Protection Safeguards are complex so we must get implementation right. Open dialogue and consultation is the best way to do that.” – Charlotte Gill, Director of Policy, Public Affairs and Communications at VoiceAbility

One of our priorities is that LPS is rolled out successfully from day one. Now we have the draft code published, we’re more intensively reviewing our IMCA service model and how we will make sure we are able to be agile in our response to the implementation of LPS.

Influencing reform of the Mental Health Act to improve access to IMHA

The government is expected to bring forward its reform of the Mental Health Act later this year. As part of the reforms, they are seeking to expand the role of Independent Mental Health Advocates and improve access to IMHAs, including for those who are voluntary or informal patients. VoiceAbility has been working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to inform their legislative proposals on advocacy as part of the Mental Health Act reforms.

“It wasn’t until I had been in the hospital for two weeks that I met an advocate. His presence was reassuring in amongst the horror that I was experiencing inside my head, and I was relieved to have someone there who appeared to be ‘on my side’. However, almost as soon as the advocacy began, I was discharged from the hospital and unable to benefit from continued support of this kind.

“Because I didn’t know I had the right to an advocate and I wasn’t well enough at the time to ask for an advocate as soon as I arrived in hospital, I didn’t get support that might have made a big difference to my experience. Surely, we want to make sure people find it easy to get support when so unwell and going through such a difficult time?” – Emma, a VoiceAbility advocate who has first-hand experience of having support from an advocate

In advance of the legislation arriving in parliament, VoiceAbility continues to promote the benefits of extending eligibility to IMHA as part of the reforms of the Mental Health Act. [Our briefing](#) makes clear the case for increased access to advocacy. We have recently agreed a

joint project, as part of our VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance programme with DHSC and NHS England, where we will be undertaking further research into the value of enhanced access to advocacy as part of the MHA reforms.

“The Department should commit to expanding Independent Mental Health Advocates support so that all children and young people admitted to hospital informally have the same legal right to an Independent Mental Health Advocate as those admitted under legislation without qualification. This advocacy should all operate on an opt-out basis.” – Health and Social Care Select Committee, November 2021

We are also getting traction with our messages on the Mental Health Act. The chair of the Health Select Committee, Jeremy Hunt MP, [referenced our correspondence](#) and passed on our questions about pre-legislative scrutiny to the Health Secretary. A question about racial disparities in mental health treatment asked by Stephen Hinchley, our Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer, was also selected by the Health Select Committee to be put directly to the Health Secretary and [you can hear his response](#).

Building the Right Support: the case for a specialist advocacy service

There is serious concern and anger about the experiences of people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services. Around 2,000 people continue to be held in mental health facilities, despite the heightened risks of abuse and neglect and lack of therapeutic benefit. Some people can be held for decades facing a system that is unable to support them.

“Mental health inpatient services for people with a learning disability and autistic people present heightened risks of abuse and neglect, prolonged detention without therapeutic benefit and excessive delays to hospital discharge. To be effective in these challenging circumstances, an advocacy service needs highly skilled staff with the time to provide more intensive support and working closely with family members. This can only be achieved through a model of national commissioning which would also provide greater national accountability.” – VoiceAbility

In response to the Care Quality Commission’s (CQC) Out of Sight progress report, published on 25 March 2022, VoiceAbility shared [our paper](#) setting out the case for a new, specialist and nationally commissioned advocacy service for people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services. Our recommendations for the Department of Health and Social Care are that they should:

- nationally commission a specialist advocacy service to provide more effective and consistent support for people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services. This model would better meet people’s needs by allowing for more intensive and long-term support, and relationship development between an advocate and the person. It would enable higher quality consistent national standards, where providers have well-developed skillsets and training in specialist advocacy.
- legislate for an opt-out model of advocacy provision in reform of the Mental Health Act, as recommended by the independent review and a wide range of other stakeholders. This ‘opt-out’ model would improve access to advocacy services. Currently one in four people with a learning disability and autistic people in mental health inpatient services do not receive any support from an independent advocate, and the current legal duty to inform and refer eligible people is weak.

New law on the use of force in mental healthcare settings

New rules on the use of force in mental healthcare settings were implemented from 31 March 2022. The new rules identify an important role for independent advocates in supporting people to understand and exercise their rights in relation to the use of force. VoiceAbility advocates working within mental health settings, whether as IMHA, IMCA or other forms of advocacy, have been instructed to read the Mental Health Units (Acts of Force) Act 2018 statutory guidance to understand the role they are expected to play. We have also developed a presentation that explains the changes and a template letter that advocates can use. We have made this available to all VoiceAbility teams and have also shared this through the advocacy leadership group that we facilitate of over 50 advocacy providers.



Changes in law, policy and society: future plans

Our priorities for the year ahead include:

- **Improving people's experiences** when receiving care or treatment for mental ill health - pushing for effective reform of the Mental Health Act so that more of us get the support of an advocate when it matters most
- **Making sure that people are heard and their rights are respected** by contributing to the code of practice and regulations for the Mental Capacity Act, ahead of the launch of LPS, and working with policy-makers and parliamentarians as these progress through parliament
- **Pushing for a people-centred vision for social care** so that social care reform prioritises our rights to have choice and control over how we live our lives and fosters a system where we are all empowered to thrive as well as survive
- **Challenging inequalities** so that we all get the support, care and treatment we need to live healthy and fulfilled lives, especially if we are disabled, have a learning disability, or are autistic
- **Establishing our proactive agenda** for the changes we want to see in the coming years, setting out a future vision that drives through our work to influence policy, law and practice
- **Empowering and supporting the voices of people** who draw on our services and provide a perspective which is genuinely grounded in lived experience

4. Creating change in VoiceAbility

Strengthening our leadership team

This year, we reviewed and updated our leadership structure so that we can deliver more effectively on our mission to ensure that people are heard when it matters most. To take VoiceAbility forward, we formed new executive leadership and senior management teams to accelerate our development, make sure that change is better managed, and provide greater consistency and clarity for our staff and volunteers. These teams saw our 'heads of' functions step into director roles to give clearer lines of accountability and oversight, and our former director roles were strengthened by created two new 'chief of' roles.

Our Executive Leadership Team (ELT) is a Chief Operating Officer and a Chief Financial Officer, reporting into the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer continues to report into the Board of Trustees.

Our Senior Management Team (SMT) brought eight new director roles together with each director reporting to either the Chief Operating Officer or the Chief Financial Officer. Our SMT consists of directors of:

- Operations
- Practice
- IT and Data
- Finance and Reporting
- People
- Business and Strategy
- Project Management
- Policy, Public Affairs and Communications

Jonathan Senker explained why these changes were made:

"There is a huge need for quality support to enable people to have a voice in all aspects of our lives. These changes will bring the depth and experience we need across our leadership so that VoiceAbility can grow, diversify and continuously improve our services, so that together we can support more people to be heard when it matters most.

We need to have the right structure and approach in order to support and bring out the best in our whole staff and volunteer team. I know from listening to people throughout the organisation how important it is that we lead and manage change in a coordinated and effective way. Bringing together our senior staff into a team of directors, and investing in project management, will help ensure that we all move forward together."

In the new leadership structure, director roles and chief officer roles have greater accountability, authority and decision-making ability than they previously had, while in most cases, covering the same areas of responsibility. Empowering this team means that we can make swifter decisions, closer to our work on the ground. It will also free up the executive leadership team to focus on achieving our long-term mission and growing our overall positive social impact.

Professional development and supporting our people

We continue to invest in operational improvement and in our people, in order to provide the best possible quality of support. This year we worked on:

- **Making our service delivery resilient by ensuring that all of our staff are experts**
Our practice team continue to review and develop our advocacy standards, and ensure that our advocates can implement best practice by sharing and communicating both worries and excellent models of working to their team and to their Community of Practice. This means that they are ready for change, constantly supported and can share successes.
- **Investing in learning and development**
This year, we have invested significantly in our learning and development function by recruiting two new Learning and Development Officers. We have developed a new learning hub which is an e-learning platform to provide modules for staff to continue to reflect on and grow their understanding of advocacy, and to streamline and improve our induction processes for all staff and volunteers. This learning hub launches in May 2022.
- **Engaging staff around remuneration and benefits**
We review our approach to remuneration and benefits at the end of this financial year and have identified the changes we will make and that will be rolled out next year. We will be working with our staff forums to understand what is of most value to staff so that any changes are informed by our employees. When reviewing pay we take on board a range of considerations, including making sure pay is fair and competitive. We are a certified Living Wage Employer and are proud to be so.
- **Belonging Project and staff forums**
Our Belonging workstream launched recently with a dedicated Belonging Project Manager. It has been established to drive forward a seismic cultural change in VoiceAbility, so that people can feel more valued, can bring their authentic selves to work, and can thrive personally and professionally. Our work on Belonging is building on our previous work creating thematic or issue-led staff forums and is establishing an all-staff forum which will include regional representation. This staff forum will meet every quarter, and will collaborate to continue to strengthen VoiceAbility's culture of inclusiveness, in practical ways and in response to what our colleagues express. Our staff forums are a space where staff can come together and discuss issues that matter to them, share expertise and experiences, and also make proposals to the organisation of things that could be improved or new ideas for us to explore. They are also a source of valuable information and feedback where we can seek staff views on new initiatives.
- **New HR system**
We worked on developing a new HR and payroll system, with increased Learning and Development functionality, to continue to meet our vision of delivering the best possible quality of support to our staff and clients. This system will roll out through 2022. We will work with managers and employees to guide and coach them with a particular focus on wellbeing and performance. This holistic approach contributes to a

central aim of all of us in VoiceAbility: that VoiceAbility is a great place to work, where people are valued and can be themselves and feel supported.

- **Recruitment and Organisation Design Lead**

This is a new role which focuses on advocacy recruitment, identifying how we can reach more candidates both at trainee and qualified level and how to appeal to and reach underrepresented groups. They will review our recruitment and onboarding processes, and ensure that we are focused on the behaviours, values and skills that our staff need in our approach to recruitment.

- **Exploring more diverse routes into advocacy**

We are working with others in the Advocacy Leadership Network to discuss opportunities to collaborate across the advocacy sector, to strengthen the case for a career in advocacy, and to explore apprenticeships.

Change in VoiceAbility: future plans

People are central to VoiceAbility. To make sure our people can be supported to thrive in work or volunteering, we will:

- Invest significant energy, time and resources in our Belonging workstream by putting a senior leadership role in to drive it forward and support the team to identity and embed culture change, while ensuring our approach is inclusive and the voices of everyone in VoiceAbility are heard
- Review our approach to internal communications and establishing a new role specifically to support a strong internal communications function and further support our work on Belonging
- Review our remuneration and benefits, including consulting staff where appropriate to make sure we are pay fairly and in recognition of the skills and expertise VoiceAbility staff bring with them to work every day
- Review our approach to staff reviews and appraisals to make sure they are person-centred, support people to do their best work and be their authentic selves, playing to their strengths in their role
- Roll out an improved self-service HR system to make it easier for our staff to focus on the most important parts of their job

Reference and administrative information

Trustees

Susan Douglas-Scott – Chair / Investment Committee Member
Susan Brown – Safeguarding Governance Committee Chair
Andrew Weston – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member
Louisa Whait – Audit & Risk Committee Member (resigned 10 July 2021)
Matthew Smith – Audit & Risk Committee Member
James Alistair Schofield – Audit & Risk Committee Chair / Investment Committee Chair
Viral Shah – Audit & Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member
Gavin Sumner – Safeguarding Governance Committee Member
Izaro Arbelaiz-Teresa
Anthony Osijo – Audit & Risk Committee Member / Investment Committee Member
Mahua Nandi - Audit & Risk Committee Member

Secretary

Richard Jones

Chief Executive Officer

Jonathan Senker

Registered Office

c/o Sayer Vincent
Invicta House
108-114 Golden Lane
London, EC1Y 0TL

Incorporated in United Kingdom, Company Number 03798884

Registered in England and Wales, Charity Number 1076630

Registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC050036

Auditors

Sayer Vincent LLP
Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane
London, EC1Y 0TL

Bankers

National Westminster Bank Plc
23 Market Street
Cambridge, CB2 3PA

Solicitors

Radar Limited
6 Beacon Way
Hull, HU3 4AE

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

Structure, governance and management (including Strategic Report)

Governing document

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

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

Appointment of Trustees

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

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

Trustee induction and training

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

Organisational structure

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

VoiceAbility also has within its constitution an Audit and Risk Committee, known as ARC. The ARC members meet once per quarter in advance of the Board meetings to review and discuss matters such as management and statutory accounts, risk and governance. In addition to the Audit and Risk sub-committee, there is an Investment Committee. The Investment Committee convenes twice a year. The purpose of the committee is to ensure that the Charity is investing funds in line with the Investment Policy. There is also a Safeguarding Committee, the purpose of which is to ensure quality safeguarding practices and approaches are developed and implemented, and to support the Charity in discharging its statutory and good practice duties and responsibilities - as both an employer and a provider - in relation to safeguarding.

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

Risk management

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

- **IMPACT** – The desired impact of activities is not delivered or cannot be adequately evidenced
- **FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY** – Our ability to continue to make an impact in the medium to long term is threatened
- **COMPLIANCE** - The organisation fails to meet regulatory, legal or contract compliance requirements or expectations
- **REPUTATION** – We do not respond effectively to any incident that could result in damage to VoiceAbility's reputation
- **SAFEGUARDING** – We fail to adequately protect staff, volunteers or vulnerable people from harm or abuse

The steps to manage these risks are set out below.

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

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

The Executive Leadership Team, the Audit & Risk Committee, and the Board of Trustees, periodically review the risks and the risk management strategies to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the organisation.

Public benefit

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

Directors' liabilities

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

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

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

Fundraising

We are not a fundraising charity, with our income deriving primarily from local government, NHS and central government contracts. We do not solicit donations but do receive them from time to time and do approach grant giving bodies. We are therefore registered with the fundraising regulator and follow their guidance. VoiceAbility does not use any professional fundraisers and no fundraising is undertaken on our behalf by third parties.

Disabled employees

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

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

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

We are continuing to work to improve the experience of and contribution by all employees, including disabled employees. We have built on the guidance published in July 2016 and have been recognised as a Disability Confident employer.

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

Employee involvement

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

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

Cross sectional employee groups, who help to develop critical organisational policies and practices, ranging from our pay policy and salary benchmarking to our approach to learning and development. As part of VoiceAbility's strategy these groups are being formalised in the form of a Staff Forum.

Regular attendance of the Chief Executive and other members of the Executive Leadership Team at team meetings throughout the organisation, to discuss the organisation's direction and development and to seek, receive and act on feedback.

Weekly 'open phone' times publicised to all members of staff, at which the Chief Executive seeks and receives feedback and responds to issues of concern. An alternative of email contact at any time is also made available to all colleagues.

Regular internal communication updates and bulletins, including VoiceAbility News (a monthly e-update written by staff and distributed to all teams).

A well-maintained intranet site and on-line collaboration tools, including webinars and extensive use of Microsoft Teams.

Regular team and supervision meetings held throughout the organisation.

A Health, Safety and Wellbeing forum. The purpose of the forum is to represent, discuss and review how we keep everyone physically safe and mentally healthy at work. The forum meets every six weeks. In year there were a number of initiatives rolled out including a Wellbeing Activity Day where staff were given the time to get together with their colleagues to focus on wellbeing and discuss how best to support one another, as well as an additional half day's discretionary leave entitlement for all staff.

An Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) forum. The EDI forum brings together colleagues across the organisation with interest and experience in a wide variety of EDI issues such as ethnicity, cultural awareness, LGBTQ+ equality, domestic violence, veteran's issues, neurodiversity and more.

Pay policy

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

Although the Executive Leadership Team are covered by the banding pay, ultimately decisions regarding the remuneration of these roles, and that of the Chief Executive, are made by the Board.

Financial review

Overview

The Trustees are pleased that the Charity delivered a surplus of £685,441. This is after designated investment expenditure of £197,131. The net gain of £103,491 on investments held as fixed assets, brought the overall closing surplus to £788,932, significantly better than budget.

We generated a total income of £10,993,036 – 6.9% higher than last year (2021 - £10,285,603). The securing of the Scotland Social Security contract which went live 31 January 2022 contributed £572,200 to the 2021-22 income.

Total expenditure of £10,307,595 is 0.7% higher than last year (2021 – £10,240,122).

The easing and eventual lifting of covid-19 restrictions in 2021-22 meant that staff were able to resume more face to face meetings with clients. This resulted in significantly higher travel and subsistence costs of £247,684 (2021 - £98,307).

Strategic investment was almost half of that in 2020-21 due to substantial system development in the prior year.

In 2021-22 the Charity transitioned to remote working and a number of office spaces were returned, resulting in savings in rent and rates, partially offset by homeworking allowance costs.

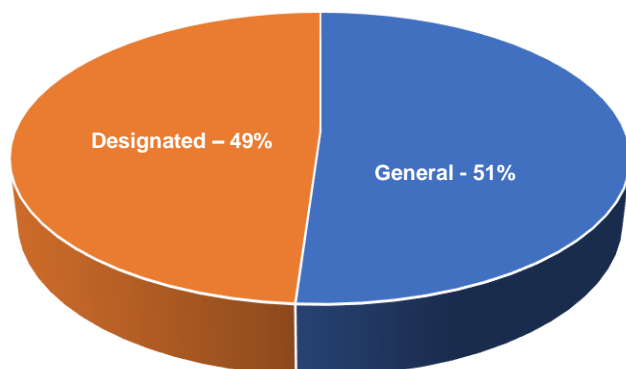
The increase in debtors from 2021 to 2022 is largely due to higher trade debtors. Over a third of the movement relates to one invoice which was settled in April 2022.

In 2021-22, VoiceAbility changed its annual leave entitlement period from financial to calendar year. The majority of staff not utilising a proportionate amount of their annual leave entitlement in the first quarter of the calendar year resulted in a higher holiday pay accrual.

Reserves

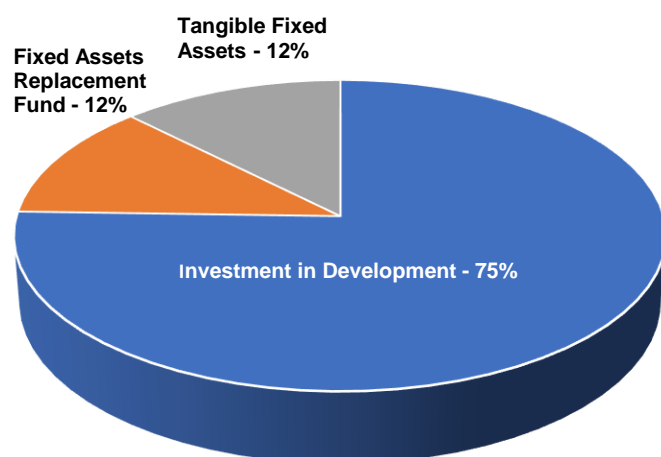
The reserves carried forward as at 31 March 2022 stand at £4,061,190:

Reserves as at



General	£2,073,987
Designated	£1,987,203
Restricted	nil
Total	£4,061,190

Designated



Investment in Development	£1,500,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	£240,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	£247,203
Total	£1,987,203

The Unrestricted Reserves are those funds that are available to be used on the charitable objects, to be spent as the Trustees see fit.

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

Funds designated to fulfil our **Investment in Development** now stand at £1,500,000. This is to fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments over the period 2022 to 2025. Themes include VoiceAbility's base operating model, belonging, business development, and policy and influencing.

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

The remainder of £247,203 is the balance of the **Tangible Fixed Assets** which are not liquid and therefore removed from the undesignated, unrestricted reserves in the interest of prudence when calculating our reserve cover requirements.

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

VoiceAbility uses two approaches to inform decision-making over the value of General Reserves required in any one year. One places a financial value on facing the key unmitigated risks identified in the Risk Register; the other provides a finite time-based cover for the committed expenditure faced by the organisation.

The first approach used is to aggregate the assessed financial impact of the key unmitigated risks identified in the VoiceAbility Risk Register and assume that these risks occur either concurrently or sequentially over a timeframe that does not allow recovery between events. The quantification of those risks is assessed by the Senior Management Team and the Executive Management Team and validated by the Audit & Risk Committee alongside the annual review of the Risk Register.

For the second approach, the Trustees require a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 6 months' worth of fixed costs cover to be held in General Reserves. The Trustees consider these periods a reasonable and realistic amount of time to curtail, change or serve notice on contractual agreements with suppliers or staff.

Fixed costs are defined in this context as those that VoiceAbility are legally obliged to pay for a period of time regardless of delivery levels and income streams. These costs comprise Influenceable Costs (Insurances, Premises, Communications & Software, and Contact Centre) and Support Function Costs. Due to the predominantly contract-based nature of the income streams, it is assumed that operational staff are subject to TUPE legislation and as such are not included in these calculations.

Utilising the outcomes of these two approaches, the Audit & Risk Committee will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees on the required value of the General Reserves for each financial year as part of the approval of the annual budget.

Employing the first method, the level of reserves required is £1,050,000.

As a cross check and employing the second method, to cover monthly fixed costs of £311,000 the Charity would look to hold between £1,244,000 and £1,866,000 (4-6 months) in undesignated, unrestricted reserves. Taking the undesignated, unrestricted reserves as at 31 March 2021, VoiceAbility are able to cover their monthly fixed costs for just over 6.5 months.

Investments and bank accounts

VoiceAbility's Investment Committee manages its investment portfolio with the support of management company CCLA. In 2021-22 the fair value of the investment continued to recover from the impact of covid-19. This reflects the composition of the CCLA portfolios and the emphasis on assets with sustainable underlying real returns and robust growth prospects independent of the general economic trend. As at 31 March 2022 £849,500 had been invested. Below shows the results of our investment over the last 7 years:-

2015-16	1,385
2016-17	87,877
2017-18	15,681
2018-19	71,848
2019-20	(32,497)
2020-21	205,362
2021-22	103,490
Total	453,146

Events since the balance sheet date

There are no significant post balance sheet events to note.

Going concern

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

Statement of Trustees' responsibilities

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

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

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

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Disclosure of information to the auditors

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

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

26 July 2022

and signed on their behalf by:

James Alistair Schofield – Audit & Risk Committee Chair

Independent Auditor's Report to the Members of VoiceAbility Advocacy

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of VoiceAbility Advocacy (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2022 which comprise the statement of financial activities, balance sheet, statement of cash flows and notes to the financial statements, including significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 *The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- Give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2022 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure for the year then ended
- Have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- Have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006

Basis for opinion

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

Conclusions relating to going concern

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

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

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

Other Information

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

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

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

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

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' annual report including the strategic report. We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

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

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the statement of trustees' responsibilities set out in the trustees' annual report, the trustees (who are also the directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements

and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

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

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

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

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

Capability of the audit in detecting irregularities

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

- We enquired of management, which included obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation, concerning the charity's policies and procedures relating to:
 - Identifying, evaluating, and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - Detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected, or alleged fraud;
 - The internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- We inspected the minutes of meetings of those charged with governance.
- We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory framework that the charity operates in, focusing on those laws and regulations that had a material effect on the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of the charity from our professional and sector experience.
- We communicated applicable laws and regulations throughout the audit team and remained alert to any indications of non-compliance throughout the audit.
- We reviewed any reports made to regulators.

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

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

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

Use of our report

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

Judith Miller (Senior statutory auditor)

21 September 2022

for and on behalf of Sayer Vincent LLP, Statutory Auditor

Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane, LONDON, EC1Y 0TL

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

For the year ended 31 March 2022

	Note	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2022 Total £	General £	Designated £	Restricted £	2021 Total £
Income from:									
Donations and legacies	2	4,834	–	–	4,834	4,938	–	–	4,938
Charitable activities	3	10,857,302	–	94,275	10,951,577	10,192,750	–	51,775	10,244,525
Investments		36,625	–	–	36,625	36,140	–	–	36,140
Total income		10,898,761	–	94,275	10,993,036	10,233,829	–	51,775	10,285,603
Expenditure on:									
Charitable activities	4a	10,016,189	197,131	94,275	10,307,595	9,803,311	385,036	51,775	10,240,122
Total expenditure	4	10,016,189	197,131	94,275	10,307,595	9,803,311	385,036	51,775	10,240,122
Net income before net gains on investments		882,572	(197,131)	–	685,441	430,518	(385,036)	–	45,481
Net gains on investments		103,491	–	–	103,491	205,363	–	–	205,363
Net income for the year	5	986,063	(197,131)	–	788,932	635,881	(385,036)	–	250,844
Transfers between funds		(1,361,188)	1,361,188	–	–	(163,184)	163,184	–	–
Net movement in funds		(375,125)	1,164,057	–	788,932	472,697	(221,853)	–	250,844
Reconciliation of funds:									
Total funds brought forward		2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258	1,976,414	1,045,000	–	3,021,414
Total funds carried forward		2,073,986	1,987,204	–	4,061,190	2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258

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

Balance sheet

Company no. 03798884

As at 31 March 2022

	Note	2022 £	2021 £
Fixed assets:			
Tangible assets	10	247,204	283,147
Investments	11	1,302,646	1,199,156
		1,549,850	1,482,303
Current assets:			
Debtors	12	1,643,887	1,013,168
Cash at bank and in hand		1,581,214	1,334,492
		3,225,101	2,347,660
Liabilities:			
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	13	(634,918)	(371,483)
Net current assets		2,590,183	1,976,177
Total assets less current liabilities		4,140,033	3,458,481
Provision for liabilities	15	(78,843)	(186,223)
Net assets		4,061,190	3,272,258
Funds:	16a		
Restricted income funds		-	-
Unrestricted income funds:			
Designated funds		1,987,204	823,147
General funds		2,073,986	2,449,111
Total unrestricted funds		4,061,190	3,272,258
Total funds		4,061,190	3,272,258

Approved by the trustees on 26 July 2022 and signed on their behalf by

James Alistair Schofield
Trustee

Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 31 March 2022

	2022 £	£	2021 £	£
Cash flows from operating activities				
Net income / (expenditure) for the reporting period (as per the statement of financial activities)	685,441		45,481	
Depreciation charges	109,505		116,955	
(Gains)/losses on investments	-		-	
Dividends and interest from investments	(36,625)		(36,140)	
Increase/(decrease) in provisions	(107,380)		70,148	
(Increase)/decrease in debtors	(630,718)		(25,271)	
Increase/(decrease) in creditors	263,435		(457,272)	
Net cash provided by / (used in) operating activities		283,658		(285,829)
Cash flows from investing activities:				
Dividends and interest from investments	36,625		36,140	
Purchase of fixed assets	(73,561)		(47,356)	
Net cash provided by / (used in) investing activities		(36,936)		(11,215)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		246,722		(297,044)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		1,334,492		1,631,536
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year		1,581,214		1,334,492

1 Accounting policies

a) Statutory information

VoiceAbility Advocacy is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is incorporated in England & Wales. The registered office address is The Old Granary, Westwick, Oakington, Cambridge, CB24 3AR.

b) Basis of preparation

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

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

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

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

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

c) Public benefit entity

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

d) Going concern

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

The trustees have specifically considered the impact of covid-19 on the charity and do not consider there to be an material uncertainty as a result. Further discussion on the impact of and response to covid-19 by the charity can be found in the trustees' annual report.

e) Income

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

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

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

f) Interest receivable

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

g) Fund accounting

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

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

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

h) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT

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

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

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

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

i) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT (continued)

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

j) Operating leases

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

k) Tangible fixed assets

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

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

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

l) Listed investments

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

Investments in subsidiaries

Investments in subsidiaries are at cost.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

m) Debtors

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

n) Cash at bank and in hand

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

o) Creditors and provisions

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

p) Financial instruments

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

q) Pensions

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

2 Income from donations and legacies

	2022	2021
	Total	Total
	£	£
Donations (unrestricted)	4,834	5,214

3 Income from charitable activities

	2022			2021		
	Grants	Earned	Total	Grants	Earned	Total
	£	income	£	£	contracts	£
		contracts			£	
		£			£	
Advocacy Services:						
Connections	30,000	699,089	729,089	31,775	631,933	663,708
London	–	1,345,554	1,345,554	–	1,212,781	1,212,781
Midlands & South East	2,000	3,250,314	3,252,314	–	3,192,772	3,192,772
North East	–	2,429,588	2,429,588	–	2,315,930	2,315,930
North West	19,500	1,255,309	1,274,809	–	1,440,905	1,440,905
Scotland	–	572,200	572,200	–	–	–
South West	20,000	1,302,129	1,322,129	–	1,381,310	1,381,310
	71,500	10,854,183	10,925,683	31,775	10,175,631	10,207,406
Support Services	22,775	3,119	25,894	20,000	17,120	37,120
Total income from charitable activities	94,275	10,857,302	10,951,577	51,775	10,192,750	10,244,525

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

4a Analysis of expenditure (current year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2022 Total £	2021 Total £
Direct staff costs	6,307,390	-	-	-	6,307,390	6,252,050
Indirect staff costs	-	91,158	-	1,364,367	1,455,525	1,378,416
Total staff costs (note 6)	6,307,390	91,158	-	1,364,367	7,762,915	7,630,465
Sub contractor Costs	803,563	-	-	-	803,563	866,084
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	143,777	8,228	-	-	152,005	169,740
Travel & Subsistence	247,684	-	-	-	247,684	98,307
Rent & Rates	103,650	-	-	-	103,650	157,145
Professional	295	85,876	-	-	86,171	227,128
Other direct costs	804,858	11,869	-	-	816,727	764,407
Business Development	-	-	-	184,528	184,528	104,012
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	18,667	18,667	11,674
Finance	-	-	-	58,475	58,475	92,984
Human resources	-	-	-	35,587	35,587	58,544
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	23,638	23,638	15,294
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	185	-	185	31,078
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	13,800	-	13,800	13,260
	8,411,217	197,131	13,985	1,685,262	10,307,595	10,240,123
Support costs	1,685,262		-	(1,685,262)	-	-
Governance costs	13,985		(13,985)	-	-	-
Investment costs	197,131	(197,131)				-
Total expenditure 2022	10,307,595	-	-	-	10,307,595	-
Total expenditure 2021	10,240,123		-	-	-	10,240,123

4b Analysis of expenditure (prior year)

	Advocacy Services £	Strategic Investment costs £	Governance costs £	Support costs £	2021 Total £
Direct staff costs	6,252,050	-	-	-	6,252,050
Indirect staff costs	-	125,455	138	1,252,823	1,378,416
Total staff costs (note 7)	6,252,050	125,455	138	1,252,823	7,630,465
Sub contractor Costs	866,084	-	-	-	866,084
Recruitment, Training and Welfare	168,244	1,496	-	-	169,740
Travel & Subsistence	98,296	11	-	-	98,307
Rent & Rates	157,145	-	-	-	157,145
Professional	3,604	223,523	-	-	227,128
Other direct costs	729,855	34,551	-	-	764,407
Business Development	-	-	-	104,012	104,012
CEO and related expenses	-	-	-	11,674	11,674
Finance	-	-	-	92,984	92,984
Human resources	-	-	-	58,544	58,544
IT and Office Admin	-	-	-	15,294	15,294
Trustee and AGM costs	-	-	31,078	-	31,078
Audit and accountancy costs	-	-	13,260	-	13,260
	8,275,279	385,036	44,476	1,535,331	10,240,123
Support costs	1,535,331		-	(1,535,331)	-
Governance costs	44,476		(44,476)	-	-
Investment costs	385,036	(385,036)			
Total expenditure 2021	10,240,123		-	-	10,240,123

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

5 Net income for the year

This is stated after crediting / (charging):

	2022 £	2021 £
Depreciation	109,505	116,955
Operating lease rentals:		
Property	79,474	172,199
Auditor's remuneration (excluding VAT):		
Audit	11,500	11,000
	<u>109,505</u>	<u>116,955</u>

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

Staff costs were as follows:

	2022 £	2021 £
Salaries and wages	6,643,637	6,547,123
Redundancy and termination costs	10,833	9,921
Social security costs	530,677	505,596
Employer's contribution to defined contribution pension schemes	469,414	496,287
Other staff costs	108,354	71,539
	<u>7,762,915</u>	<u>7,630,465</u>

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

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

	2022 No.	2021 No.
£60,000 – £69,999	–	2
£70,000 – £79,999	2	1
£80,000 – £89,999	1	1
	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>

The total employee benefits (including pension contributions and employer's national insurance) of the key management personnel were £333,301 (2021: £332,157).

The charity trustees were neither paid nor received any other benefits from employment with the charity in the year (2021: £nil). No charity trustee received payment for professional or other services supplied to the charity (2021: £nil).

Trustees' expenses represents the payment or reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs totalling £185 (2021: £nil) incurred by 11 (2021: 0) members relating to attendance at meetings of the trustees.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

7 Staff numbers

The average number of employees (head count based on number of staff employed) during the year was 298 (2021: 310) and based on full-time equivalent was 254 (2021: 215).

8 Related party transactions

There are no related party transactions to disclose for 2022 (2021: none).

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

9 Taxation

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

10 Tangible fixed assets

	Fixtures & Fittings £	Computer Equipment £	Telephones £	Software & Systems £	Total £
Cost					
At the start of the year	26,505	333,519	76,589	29,281	465,894
Additions in year			–	73,561	73,561
Disposals in year	(8,907)				(8,907)
At the end of the year	17,598	333,519	76,589	102,842	530,548
Depreciation					
At the start of the year	20,020	106,035	48,883	7,808	182,746
Charge for the year	6,485	62,561	25,493	14,966	109,505
Eliminated on disposal	(8,907)	–	–	–	(8,907)
At the end of the year	17,598	168,596	74,376	22,774	283,344
Net book value					
At the end of the year	–	164,923	2,213	80,068	247,204
At the start of the year	6,485	227,484	27,706	21,473	283,148

All of the above assets are used for charitable purposes.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

11 Investments held as fixed assets

	2022 £	2021 £
Fair value at the start of the year	1,199,156	993,794
Net gain / (loss) on change in fair value	103,490	205,362
	1,302,646	1,199,156
Cash held by investment broker pending reinvestment	-	-
Fair value at the end of the year	1,302,646	1,199,156
	2022 £	2021 £
Investments comprise:		
COIF Charities Investment Fund	1,302,646	1,199,156

12 Debtors

	2022 £	2021 £
Trade debtors	1,121,154	584,584
Other debtors	65,973	41,758
Prepayments	312,498	215,322
Accrued income	144,262	171,504
	1,643,887	1,013,168

13 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2022 £	2021 £
Trade creditors	122,784	126,658
Taxation and social security	145,831	129,512
Other creditors	235,066	70,497
Accruals	61,592	43,311
Deferred income (note 14)	69,645	1,506
	634,918	371,483

14 Deferred income

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

	2022 £	2021 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	1,506	119,883
Amount released to income in the year	(1,506)	(119,883)
Amount deferred in the year	69,645	1,506
Balance at the end of the year	69,645	1,506

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

15 Provisions for liabilities

Provisions for liabilities comprises

	2022 £	2021 £
Balance at the beginning of the year	186,223	115,805
Increase/(decrease) in provision in the year	(107,380)	70,418
Balance at the end of the year	78,843	186,223
Dilapidations provision	14,500	11,500
Customer refund provision	7,282	136,241
Staffing provision	57,061	38,482
	78,843	186,223

Dilapidations Provision

To provide for the refurbishment of our Cambridge office at the end of our tenancy as required by our lease agreement. The likely cost of this is calculated and charged to projects as an additional accommodation cost on an annual basis.

Customer Refund Provision

To provide for a potential refund to a customer.

Staffing Provision

To provide for HR issues identified pre 31st March 2022.

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

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	247,204	–	247,204
Investments	1,302,646	–	–	1,302,646
Net current assets	850,183	1,740,000	–	2,590,183
Provisions	(78,843)	–	–	(78,843)
Net assets at 31 March 2022	2,073,986	1,987,204	–	4,061,190

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

	General unrestricted £	Designated funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
* Tangible fixed assets	–	283,147	–	283,147
Investments	1,199,156	–	–	1,199,156
Net current assets	1,436,178	540,000	–	1,976,178
Provisions	(186,223)	–	–	(186,223)
Net assets at 31 March 2021	2,449,111	823,147	–	3,272,258

* Prior year tangible fixed assets of £170,905 have been reclassified as designated funds.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

17a Movements in funds (current year)

	At 1 April 2021 £	Income & gains £	Expenditure & losses £	Transfers £	At 31 March 2022 £
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	22,775	(22,775)	-	-
** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	30,000	(30,000)	-	-
*** Infection control grants (various)	-	41,500	(41,500)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	94,275	(94,275)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	400,000	-	(197,131)	1,297,131	1,500,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	140,000	-	-	100,000	240,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	283,147	-	-	(35,943)	247,204
Total designated funds	823,147	-	(197,131)	1,361,188	1,987,204
General funds	2,449,111	11,096,527	(10,110,464)	(1,361,188)	2,073,986
Total unrestricted funds	3,272,258	11,096,527	(10,307,595)	-	4,061,190
Total funds	3,272,258	11,190,802	(10,401,870)	-	4,061,190

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

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

*** Covid-19 infection control receipts.

Investment in Development has been reviewed and now stands at £1,500,000. This will fund a programme of changes, improvements and developments over the period 2022 to 2025.

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

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

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 March 2022

17b Movements in funds (prior year)

	At 31 March 2020	Income & gains	Expenditure & losses	Transfers	At 31 March 2021
	£	£	£	£	£
Restricted funds:					
* Department of Health (via National Autistic Society)	-	20,000	(20,000)	-	-
** Cambridgeshire County Council	-	1,775	(1,775)	-	-
*** NHS Nene and Corby CCG	-	30,000	(30,000)	-	-
Total restricted funds	-	51,775	(51,775)	-	-
Unrestricted funds:					
Designated funds:					
Investment in Development	695,000	-	(385,036)	90,036	400,000
Fixed Assets Replacement	350,000	-	-	(210,000)	140,000
Tangible Fixed Assets	-	-	-	283,147	283,147
Total designated funds	1,045,000	-	(385,036)	163,184	823,147
General funds	1,976,414	10,490,966	(9,855,086)	(163,184)	2,449,111
Total unrestricted funds	3,021,414	10,490,966	(10,240,123)	-	3,272,258
Total funds	3,021,414	10,542,741	(10,291,898)	-	3,272,258

* Complex Needs Consortium Grant.

** Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Police and Crime Commissioner's Youth and Community Fund. Grant for membership to the Safe Places National Network

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

Designated funds Change Programme **Investment in Development** has been reviewed and now stands at £695,000. This will fund VoiceAbility's Change Programme 5 year objectives as outlined in the annual report.

A **Fixed Assets Replacement** designated fund of £350,000 has been introduced to ensure that VoiceAbility has fit for purpose equipment and systems on a long term basis.

18 Operating lease commitments payable as a lessee

The group and charity's total future minimum lease payments under non-cancellable operating leases is as follows for each of the following periods:

	Land and Buildings	
	2022	2021
	£	£
Less than one year	24,070	98,120
One to five years	12,675	36,745
Over five years	-	-
	36,745	134,865