Charity registration number 1157070 (England and Wales)

VOICE: LOCAL

ANNUAL REPORT AND UNAUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

VOICE: LOCAL

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Trustees	A Schenk J Fawcett S Merchant U Badat K Syeda M Stubbs
Chief Officer	Julie Darbyshire
Charity number	1157070
Registered office	P O Box 822 Wigan WN1 9XF
Independent examiner	Mr D A Kay FCA AAB Carlyle House 78 Chorley New Road Bolton
Bankers	CAF Bank Ltd 25 Kings Hill Avenue Kings Hill West Maling Kent

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TRUSTEES' REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2026.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Charities Act 2011 and "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 2019)".
Voice: Local is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) delivering Healthwatch Bolton. The organisation exists to ensure that the views and experiences of local people influence the planning, delivery and improvement of health and social care services across Bolton.

Objectives and activities
The charity's objectives are:
The advancement of health and the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill health, disability or financial hardship. These objectives are achieved by:

a. Encouraging and supporting local people to share their experiences of health and social care services

b. Ensuring local people are involved in the commissioning, design, scrutiny, review and monitoring of services

c. Promoting transparency and accountability within the health and care system

d. Providing information and advice to the public about local health and social care services

The trustees have paid due regard to the Charity commission's guidance on public benefit in determining the charity's objectives and activities.

Public benefit

The charity’s work delivers public benefit by enabling residents of Bolton particularly those who may experience inequality, exclusion or poorer health outcomes to have their voices heard within the health and social care system. Through community engagement, information provision and representation in statutory forums, Voice: Local ensures that lived experience informs service design, commissioning decisions and quality improvement.

By gathering evidence directly from patients, carers and communities and presenting this insight to decision-makers, the charity contributes to more accessible, responsive and effective services. Information and advice provided to the public helps individuals navigate the health and care system, understand their options, and access appropriate support, thereby relieving need and reducing health inequalities.

Achievements and Performance
Priorities for the year 2025-26

Primary Care Priority – *Choosing Your Healthcare* (Phase II)

Working in partnership with NHS Bolton and Bolton CVS, this project focused on improving understanding of local primary and urgent care services in neighbourhoods experiencing high deprivation and high A&E attendance, including Breightmet, Little Lever, Farnworth and Kearsley.

Information resources were developed covering NHS 111, Pharmacy First, Urgent Dental Care, appropriate use of A&E, out-of-hours services (BARDOC), and the NHS App. These materials were shared through focus groups and community events and supported by multilingual infographics (Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati) and audio recordings.

The work has been well received and has been shared across a range of local and Greater Manchester system forums, including primary care commissioning and patient experience groups, supporting wider service improvement and consistency of messaging.

Mental Health Priority – *Living Well with Dementia*

The project received 166 survey responses, undertook six in-depth case studies and delivered eight outreach events exploring the experiences of people living with dementia, their carers, former carers and health and care professionals.

The findings from this work are being used to inform future actions within the Bolton Dementia Partnership during summer 2026. We also participate in the Greater Manchester Dementia Carers Expert Reference Group, contributing Bolton-specific insight to regional discussions. We have also been working on dementia information and support task and finish group under the Partnership.

Digital Access – Experiences of Using the NHS App

In response to a Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) consultation ahead of the development of NHS Online (planned for 2028), we gathered 71 survey responses exploring user experience, barriers to access and digital exclusion.

A full report was produced and submitted to DHSC, ensuring that local experiences informed national policy development and highlighting the ongoing need for alternative access routes and targeted digital support.

Condition-Specific Work – Prostate Cancer Information and Support

As part of the Greater Manchester Healthwatch Network, we contributed to work gathering feedback on diagnosis, information and support for people affected by prostate cancer. A full Greater Manchester report is expected in summer 2026.

Intelligence Reporting and Impact

Quarterly intelligence reports drawing on community engagement activity and the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service were shared with NHS Bolton, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust, Bolton Council, Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust and North West Ambulance Service.

These reports summarise public feedback, actions taken and provider responses, and are routinely used across quality and patient experience forums. Intelligence is also shared with Healthwatch England to contribute to national insight.

Targeted feedback regarding NHS complaints handling at Bolton Hospital resulted in a request for Healthwatch Bolton support to help improve processes and patient experience.

Greater Manchester Healthwatch Network

Following the October 2025 announcement of plans to abolish Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch organisations, the Greater Manchester Healthwatch Network has worked collaboratively to raise awareness, share a public petition and engage with system leaders on the future of public voice arrangements.

A bill is expected in May 2026, with Royal Assent anticipated in April 2027. Trustees have remained actively engaged in discussions to ensure that the voice of Bolton residents continues to be represented during this period of transition.

Community Engagement and Outreach

Community engagement remains a core strength. The engagement officer and volunteers continue to build relationships, share information and connect organisations across Bolton's voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

During 2025–26, we engaged with 1,455 members of the public, delivered surveys and focus groups involving 531 participants, and attended 61 community events. The Information, Advice and Guidance service recorded 263 enquiries and items of feedback.

Digital communications also continue to grow, with 4,435 newsletter subscribers and social media followers. Our website recorded 5,353 total users, including 941 new users during the year.

Volunteer Involvement

We are supported by three engagement volunteers and one IT support volunteer. Volunteers play an important role in extending the organisation's reach, supporting engagement activity and strengthening internal systems. We are also supported by our trustees who are also volunteers.

Partnership Working and Representation

Partnership working is central to achieving accessible and meaningful engagement. We collaborated closely with Bolton CVS, NHS Bolton, Bolton Council, and a wide range of community organisations.

We represent public voice across numerous strategic forums, including local and Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership groups, safeguarding boards, NHS trust quality forums, scrutiny committees and condition-specific partnerships such as the Bolton Dementia Partnership.

This representation ensures that local insight from residents is embedded across decision-making structures.

National Context and External Environment

Support has continued from Healthwatch England during the year, including website hosting, training and governance support. The planned abolition of Healthwatch nationally represents a significant change in the external environment, with statutory functions expected to transfer to Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities.

Trustees continue to monitor developments closely and are actively contributing to local and regional work to develop an effective and sustainable future model for patient and public voice.

Financial review

The organisation reported a net expenditure for the year of £5,446 and at year end had unrestricted funds carried forward of £84,427 (2025 £89,873).

Reserves Policy

Our reserves policy aims to ensure that the organisation can cover its liabilities and maintain free reserves equivalent to at least 3 months' operating costs. At the end of the 2025/26 financial year our free reserves of £84,261 satisfies these measures, which is reassuring as funding remains tight.

Risk review

The trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to those risks.

Future Plans (2026–27)

The coming year may be the final year for Healthwatch Bolton operating in its current form. Planned priorities include:

- Continuing the development of the *Living Well with Dementia* programme
- Reviewing GP practice websites to assess the quality and accessibility of complaints information
- Contributing to the development of an effective successor model for patient and public voice with a focus on independence.

Voice: Local begins a new contract with Bolton Council from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027, with a provisional six-month extension.

Structure, governance and management
Trustee Appointment, Training and Development

Voice: Local is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This means it has a board of trustees who oversee the governance and leadership of the organisation. The organisation continued to support active volunteers, with a total of 6 trustees and 5 volunteers. Where there is a vacancy for a trustee position, this role and skills specialty is advertised with CVS and through our own media channels. Anyone showing an interest is invited to come in and speak to the chair and other trustees and staff. New trustees complete an application form and if they meet the required skills needed for the role, they are co-opted into the organisation. They are formally appointed at the next Annual General Meeting. When new trustees are appointed, they undergo an induction session that covers the following:

Introduction to Healthwatch Bolton/VOICE Local

Charity Commission guide - The Essential Trustee

Annual reports/finance reports/strategic plan

Copies of board minutes

Copies of policies and procedures, Data protection processes, Training opportunities

Trustees also undertake development sessions in partnership with Bolton CVS. They are invited to attend the regular TGI Friday trustee sessions that are run by Bolton CVS to discuss any issues around trusteeship etc. Trustees are also invited to attend webinars and sessions run by Healthwatch England, Hempsons Solicitors and Peninsula HR.

Trustees have also taken part in the Healthwatch England Quality Framework review.

The trustees who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:
A Schenk
J Fawcett
S Merchant
U Badat
K Syeda
M Stubbs

The trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.

J Fawcett
J Fawcett
Trustee
Dated: 20 July 2026

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STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

The trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

The law applicable to charities in England and Wales 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 charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that year.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:
- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The trustees are responsible for keeping sufficient accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 and the provisions of the trust deed. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

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INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT

TO THE TRUSTEES OF VOICE: LOCAL

I report to the trustees on my examination of the financial statements of VOICE: Local (the charity) for the year ended 31 March 2026.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the trustees of the charity you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011.

I report in respect of my examination of the charity's financial statements carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act. In carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1 accounting records were not kept in respect of the charity as required by section 130 of the Charities Act 2011.

2 the financial statements do not accord with those records; or

3 the financial statements do not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of financial statements set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the financial statements give a true and fair view, which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the financial statements to be reached.

David Kay, FCA
AAB
Chartered Accountants
Carlyle House
78 Chorley New Road
Bolton

Dated: 20 July 2026

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STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

	Notes	Unrestricted funds 2026 £	Unrestricted funds 2025 £
Income from:			
Income from charitable activities	**2**	137,467	148,686
Expenditure on:			
Expenditure on charitable activities	**3**	142,913	137,108
Net (expenditure)/income for the year/ Net movement in funds		(5,446)	11,578
Fund balances at 1 April 2025		89,873	78,295
Fund balances at 31 March 2026		84,427	89,873

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year. All income and expenditure derives from continuing activities.

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BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31 MARCH 2026

	Notes	2026 £	£	2025 £	£
Fixed assets					
Tangible assets	**9**		284		1,693
Current assets					
Debtors	**10**	1,020		16,231	
Cash at bank and in hand		85,748		86,281	
		86,768		102,512	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	**11**	(2,625)		(14,332)	
Net current assets			84,143		88,180
Total assets less current liabilities			84,427		89,873
Income funds					
Unrestricted funds			84,427		89,873
			84,427		89,873

The financial statements were approved by the Trustees on 20 July 2026

J Fawcett

J Fawcett
Trustee

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NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

1 Accounting policies

Charity information

VOICE: Local is a CIO constitued in its own right and registered with the Charity Commissioner. The registered charity number is 1157070. The charity was previously called Healthwatch Bolton.

1.1 Accounting convention

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the charity's trust deed, the Charities Act 2011 and "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 2019)". The charity is a Public Benefit Entity as defined by FRS 102.

The charity has taken advantage of the provisions in the SORP for charities applying FRS 102 Update Bulletin 1 not to prepare a Statement of Cash Flows.

The financial statements have departed from the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 only to the extent required to provide a true and fair view. This departure has involved following the Statement of Recommended Practice for charities applying FRS 102 rather than the version of the Statement of Recommended Practice which is referred to in the Regulations but which has since been withdrawn.

The financial statements are prepared in sterling, which is the functional currency of the charity. Monetary amounts in these financial statements are rounded to the nearest £.

The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention. The principal accounting policies adopted are set out below.

1.2 Going concern

2026/27 is likely to be the charity's last year due to the government removing the Healthwatch concept across the country. At the time of approving the financial statements, the trustees have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Thus the trustees continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the financial statements.

1.3 Charitable funds

Unrestricted funds are available for use at the discretion of the trustees in furtherance of their charitable objectives.

1.4 Income

Income is recognised when the charity is legally entitled to it after any performance conditions have been met, the amounts can be measured reliably, and it is probable that income will be received.

1.5 Expenditure

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to transfer economic benefit to a third party, it is probable that a transfer of economic benefits will be required in settlement, and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably.

Charitable expenditure comprises those costs incurred by the charity in the delivery of its activities. It includes both costs that can be directly allocated to such activities and those costs of an indirect nature necessary to support them. It also includes costs associated with meeting the constitutional and statutory requirements of the charity, the professional fees and costs linked to the strategic management of the charity and costs associated with the staffing and the general running of the charity.

1 Accounting policies **(Continued)**

1.6 Tangible fixed assets

Tangible fixed assets are initially measured at cost and subsequently measured at cost or valuation, net of depreciation and any impairment losses.

Depreciation is recognised so as to write off the cost or valuation of assets less their residual values over their useful lives on the following bases:

Computers	25% straight line

1.7 Impairment of fixed assets

At each reporting end date, the charity reviews the carrying amounts of its tangible assets to determine whether there is any indication that those assets have suffered an impairment loss. If any such indication exists, the recoverable amount of the asset is estimated in order to determine the extent of the impairment loss (if any).

1.8 Cash and cash equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents include cash at bank and in hand.

1.9 Financial instruments

The charity has elected to apply the provisions of Section 11 ‘Basic Financial Instruments’ and Section 12 ‘Other Financial Instruments Issues’ of FRS 102 to all of its financial instruments.

Financial instruments are recognised in the charity's balance sheet when the charity becomes party to the contractual provisions of the instrument.

Financial assets and liabilities are offset, with the net amounts presented in the financial statements, when there is a legally enforceable right to set off the recognised amounts and there is an intention to settle on a net basis or to realise the asset and settle the liability simultaneously.

Basic financial assets

Basic financial assets, which include debtors and cash and bank balances, are initially measured at transaction price including transaction costs and are subsequently carried at amortised cost using the effective interest method unless the arrangement constitutes a financing transaction, where the transaction is measured at the present value of the future receipts discounted at a market rate of interest. Financial assets classified as receivable within one year are not amortised.

Impairment of financial assets

Financial assets, other than those held at fair value through income and expenditure, are assessed for indicators of impairment at each reporting date. Financial assets are impaired where there is objective evidence that, as a result of one or more events that occurred after the initial recognition of the financial asset, the estimated future cash flows have been affected.

Basic financial liabilities

Basic financial liabilities, including creditors are initially recognised at transaction price unless the arrangement constitutes a financing transaction, where the debt instrument is measured at the present value of the future payments discounted at a market rate of interest. Financial liabilities classified as payable within one year are not amortised.

Trade creditors are obligations to pay for goods or services that have been acquired in the ordinary course of operations from suppliers. Amounts payable are classified as current liabilities if payment is due within one year or less. If not, they are presented as non-current liabilities. Trade creditors are recognised initially at transaction price and subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method.

1 Accounting policies **(Continued)**

1.10 Employee benefits

The cost of any unused holiday entitlement is recognised in the period in which the employee's services are received.

Termination benefits are recognised immediately as an expense when the charity is demonstrably committed to terminate the employment of an employee or to provide termination benefits.

1.11 Retirement benefits

Payments to defined contribution retirement benefit schemes are charged as an expense as they fall due.

2 Income from charitable activities

	2026	2025
	£	£
Bolton MBC	125,000	125,000
Other income	12,467	23,686
	137,467	148,686

3 Expenditure on charitable activities

	2026	2025
	£	£
Staff costs and benefits	118,025	115,908
Travel and accommodation	2,843	2,102
Telephone and internet	1,391	1,382
IT support and other computer costs	7,133	6,573
Legal and professional fees	3,019	2,334
Property rents, running costs and repairs	1,194	1,161
Advertising, photocopying, postage and stationery	4,914	2,616
Sundry running costs	585	938
	139,104	133,014
Share of support costs (see note 4)	1,409	1,790
Share of governance costs (see note 4)	2,400	2,304
	142,913	137,108
Analysis by fund		
Unrestricted funds	142,913	137,108

4 Support and governance costs

	Support costs	Governance costs	2026	2025	Basis of allocation
	£	£	£	£	
Depreciation	1,409	-	1,409	1,790	Usage
Accounts/examination	-	2,400	2,400	2,304	Governance
	1,409	2,400	3,809	4,094	
Analysed between					
Charitable activities	1,409	2,400	3,809	4,094	

5 Net movement in funds

	2026	2025
	£	£
The net movement in funds is stated after charging:		
Fees payable for the independent examination of the charity's financial statements	2,400	2,304
Depreciation of owned tangible fixed assets	1,409	1,790

6 Trustees

None of the trustees (or any persons connected with them) received any remuneration, reimbursed expenses or benefits from the charity during the year. No trustee expenses have been incurred.

7 Employees

The average monthly number of employees during the year was:

	2026	2025
	Number	Number
Management and service	3	3

Employment costs	2026	2025
	£	£
Wages and salaries	110,268	106,363
Social security costs	3,332	5,316
Other pension costs	4,425	4,229
	118,025	115,908

There were no employees paid more than £60,000. The remuneration cost, including employer's national insurance, of key management personnel (comprising the Trustees and the Chief Officer) was £49,152 (2025 £44,630),

8 Taxation

The charity is exempt from tax on income and gains falling within section 505 of the Taxes Act 1988 or section 252 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 to the extent that these are applied to its charitable objects.

9 Tangible fixed assets

	Computers
	£
Cost	
At 1 April 2025	7,161
At 31 March 2026	7,161
Depreciation and impairment	
At 1 April 2025	5,468
Depreciation charged in the year	1,409
At 31 March 2026	6,877
Carrying amount	
At 31 March 2026	284
At 31 March 2025	1,693

10 Debtors

	2026	2025
Amounts falling due within one year:	£	£
Trade debtors	50	15,380
Other debtors	-	173
Prepayments and accrued income	970	678
	1,020	16,231

11 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	Notes	2026	2025
		£	£
Deferred income		-	10,220
Trade creditors		223	43
Other creditors		2	465
Accruals		2,400	3,604
		2,625	14,332

Deferred income is in relation to income received before the year end for commissioned work not completed until the next financial year.

12 Retirement benefit schemes

	2026	2025
Defined contribution schemes	**£**	**£**
Charge to profit or loss in respect of defined contribution schemes	4,425	4,229

The charity operates a defined contribution pension scheme for all qualifying employees. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the charity in an independently administered fund.

13 Unrestricted funds

The unrestricted funds of the charity comprise the unexpended balances of donations and grants which are not subject to specific conditions by donors and grantors as to how they may be used. These include designated funds which have been set aside out of unrestricted funds by the trustees for specific purposes.

Current year	**At 1 April 2025**	**Incoming resources**	**Resources expended**	**At 31 March 2026**
	£	**£**	**£**	**£**
General funds	89,873	137,467	(142,913)	84,427

Previous year:	**At 1 April 2024**	**Incoming resources**	**Resources expended**	**At 31 March 2025**
	£	**£**	**£**	**£**
General funds	78,295	148,686	(137,108)	89,873

14 Related party transactions

There were no disclosable related party transactions during the year (2025 - none).