

# Poetry Whitchurch Annual Report 2023-24



**Registered charity no: 1187755**

## Foreword

Welcome to our annual report covering the period 4 February 2023 - 3 February 2024.

During year we continued to develop and sustain our core activities and began a series of new creative activities to develop our strategic reach.

We held our first poetry slam. We added additional poetry development groups. We held our first workshop, hosted by a TS Eliot prize shortlisted poet. We advanced our work with schools. We established a partnership with the Arvon Foundation. We agreed our first 3 year plan.

We want to thank everyone that has played a part in the journey so far and we can't wait for the next 12 months.

The Trustees  
**Poetry Whitchurch**

## **Section 1 Governance**

### **Trustees**

1.1 At the start of the reporting period the following Trustees were in place (by surname in alphabetical order):

- Prof Mark Barrow
- Carol Finch
- Simon Hamlyn
- Helen Kay
- Ruth Shepherd
- Harvey Vasey
- Gareth Von Dinther

1.2 Additions and departures from the Trustee Board during the reporting period:

#### **Departures**

- Prof Mark Barrow (Nov 2023)
- Ruth Shepherd (Jan 2024)

1.3 The Chair of Trustees was Harvey Vasey until expiry of his first term in January 2024 and re-election in February 2024. The Secretary throughout was Gareth Von Dinther and Treasurer was Carol Finch.

1.4 The following Associate Members were in place:

- Therese Hickland (departed December 2023)

### **Trustee meetings**

1.5 Trustee meetings were held in person or remotely on a quarterly basis, supported by a subcommittee structure to carry out agreed delegated functions.

### **Annual report and accounts**

1.6 Annual reports and accounts are filed with the Charity Commission and available on our website at [www.poetrywhitchurch.com](http://www.poetrywhitchurch.com).

### **Registered address**

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

## Section 2: Objectives, activities and performance for the year

### Objectives

2.1 At the start of this reporting year Poetry Whitchurch trustees had agreed five main operational activities, each overseen by a lead trustee.

- Poetry open mics
- Poetry seminars
- Poetry development groups
- Poetry workshops
- Poetry slams

Details of the performance on these five activities follows from 2.4 to 2.20.

2.2 The Trustees agreed during this period that working with young people would also be a key strategic objective and that work would be undertaken to develop this area in partnership with relevant local organisations.

2.3 A three year plan was agreed in June 2023 to provide a strategic framework for the charity's development from June 2023 - Jun 2026. Progress against the 3 year plan will regularly monitored by Trustees.

### Poetry Open Mics

2.4 Open mics continued to be a key focus, providing a platform for local poets to perform their work. We continued to alternate online open mic and “in-person” events on a monthly basis building on remote access work from the Covid period.

### “In person” open mics

2.5 For various reasons we made use of several venues in this reporting period including the Old Music Hall, Whitchurch Civic Centre and Bargates Hall. As in previous years we regularly featured quality guest poets to ensure an interesting offer for audiences in the area and for local poets to work alongside.

2.6 Our guest poets provided a diverse and impactful programme. They included:

Joy Frances  
 Mark Pajak  
 Priyanka Joshi  
 Gareth Culshaw  
 Charlotte Baldwin  
 Jon Woodall  
 Sandra Bond

Siân Hughes

2.7 Audience numbers fluctuated in this period due to venue moves, but always represented a healthy sustainable audience base.

2.8 A growing team of dedicated volunteers underpinned the “in person” open mic activities and were integral to programming, planning and delivery. We are grateful for their time, skills and dedication.

### Online open mics

2.9 Online open mic continued to allow ongoing accessible access to open mics events for those who were not able to attend in person.

2.10 Throughout the year the online open mic began to become a growing platform for brand new poets attending development groups (see 2.17) who were able to read their work in an environment that is less daunting than standing up at a live open mic event.

2.11 As with many online activities in the post-Covid period numbers adjusted as many mainstream audiences and performers gravitated back toward the immediacy of live in person events. We are actively exploring the opportunities that online events provide for our new stable of developing poets and potential to collaborate with increased geographical reach.

### Poetry Seminars

2.12 Our bi-monthly seminars continued to be successful. We changed format during the year from a traditional seminar style to a more dynamic ‘deep dive’ format of published poets with close reading of a series of selected works chosen by each seminar’s lead.

2.13 The approach has continued to be democratic curation with the selection of published poets and works. Sessions were led by an encouraging number of local people and poets studied such as Tony Harrison, George Herbert, Liz Berry and Caroline Bird.

2.14 The seminar activity works best with smaller groups (no more than 8 people attending) and attendee numbers varied depending on the poets studied.

2.15 We would like to thank everyone who put in research time in leading the seminars and to Sainsbury’s for use of the Barn facility. We would particularly like to thank Therese Hickman, Deborah Spiers and Hrlen Dunshea for their efforts coordinating events.

### Poetry development groups

2.16 The development groups play a key role in encouraging local poets to write regularly and to develop confidence and technical abilities. The groups are a hugely important part of what we do.

2.17 Each group is a cluster of 4-5 poets, meeting on a monthly basis under the guidance of a carefully chosen tutor. Our first group began in April 2022, the second in January 2023 and a third group is scheduled to start in April 2024.

### Poetry workshops

2.18 Our first public workshop took place in April 2023 hosted by TS Eliot shortlisted poet Mark Pajak at Whitchurch Civic Centre.

### Poetry Slams

2.19 Our first poetry slam was held in August 2023 at Percys live music venue in Whitchurch.

2.20 15 poets competed in front of a packed and diverse audience to win the slam crown. Participants came from around the country and the event was won by Wolverhampton Laureate Jon Woodall.

2.21 This event was particularly helpful as it brought a new audience to our activities and continued the cross pollination of poetry genres in the town and surrounding area.

## Section 3: Strategic development

### Young People

3.1 We worked with our main local education provider Sir John Talbot's School in Whitchurch to establish an ongoing plan to engage the students in writing and understanding poetry.

### Partnerships

3.2 We are pleased to have begun work with the Arvon Foundation and have begun discussions with other poetry organisations of national standing and key policy and funding organisations such as Arts Council England amongst others.

3.3 Our first activity with the Arvon Foundation is scheduled to take place in late February 2024 where two classes of year 9 students from Sir John Talbot's School in Whitchurch will undertake poetry and personal development workshops at The Hurst.

### Organisational development

3.4 There was considerable work on the charity's capacity and capability including structural development, new Trustees, subcommittees, building volunteer teams and policy development.

3.5 There was also considerable work building the organisation's policy base. More details can be found on our website.

### Three year plan

3.6 Our first three year plan was agreed in June 2023 and will run to June 2026. Details can be found on our website.

## **Section 4: Financial**

4.1 During the year the Trustees regularly reviewed the financial position across all workstreams. The Trustees are supported by our new Finance and Fundraising Committee.

4.2 End year accounts for the 2023-2024 financial year have been registered with the Charity Commission and will be available on the Charity Commission website.