



*Making the difference*

# Trustees' Report

November 2020

## Vranch House

(The Devon & Exeter Spastics Society Limited)

### General Report of the Board of the Society for the year ended 31 March 2020

The Board of the Society presents its report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2020.

#### Reference and Administrative Information

Registered Charity Name: The Devon & Exeter Spastics Society  
(Working Title): Vranch House

Charity Registration Number: 1002700  
Company Registration Number: 02599511

Registered Office and  
Operational Address:

Vranch House School & Centre  
Pinhoe Road  
EXETER  
DEVON  
EX4 8AD

Auditors: Kirk Hills, 5 Barnfield Crescent, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1RF  
Bankers: NatWest, St Thomas Branch, Exeter, Devon, EX4 1DB  
Solicitors: Foot Anstey, Senate Court, Exeter, EX1 1NT

#### Board of the Society

Mrs J Tolman-May Chairman  
Mr A J Griffin Vice Chairman (until 10th December 2019, subsequently remained as a Trustee)  
Mrs R. Neary Vice Chairman (from 10th December 2019, previously a Trustee)  
Mrs M Williams  
Miss P Hale  
Mrs R Pavitt  
Mr C Rendle  
Dr R Tomlinson  
Miss S Williams

Col G Wheeler (Secretary, ex officio as Chief Executive with no vote)  
Mrs Kate Moss (ex officio as Head of Therapies with no vote)  
Mr I Norton (ex officio as Heads of Education)

#### Company Secretary & Chief Executive

Colonel G Wheeler

#### Board of Governors

Mrs J Tolman-May Chairman  
Mr A J Griffin Vice Chairman (until 24th September 2019, subsequently remained as a Governor)  
Mrs R Neary Vice Chairman (from 24th September 2019, previously a Parent Governor)  
Col G Wheeler Secretary  
Mr I Norton Head of Education  
Mrs K Moss Head of Therapies  
Mrs V Lye Staff member (re-elected January 2020)  
Miss S Tutinas Parent Governor  
Mrs S Atkinson Parent Governor (until 14th February 2020- moved away)  
Mr B Kambashi Parent Governor (until 25th November 2019- deceased)



## Management Committee

Mrs J Tolman-May      Chairman  
 Col G Wheeler  
 Mrs K Moss  
 Mr I Norton

## OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

### Objectives and aims

The charity's objects and principal activities continue to be those of:

- i Promoting and providing facilities for the care, education, training, treatment and welfare in their respective aspects of people with physical difficulties.
- ii Advising, helping or catering for the needs of the parents or others having the care of people with physical difficulties.

The core activities arising from these aims are the education of children with physical difficulties from the age of 2 to 19 at Vranth House School and the provision of paediatric therapies and clinical treatment to children as outpatients at locations throughout Devon. The charity has also developed Opportunity Technology, a not-for-profit service which designs, installs and maintains assisted mobility tracks and robotic vehicles throughout England and Wales.

## STRATEGIC REPORT

### Achievement and performance

#### Public Benefit - Aims and strategies

In order to direct the activities of the charity in such a way that Public Benefit can be identified clearly, the Trustees have set out the following Aims and Strategies;

**School Aim:** The school is to be organised, equipped, staffed, managed and operated to the highest national standards.

- **Strategy to Achieve Aim:** The Governing Body will monitor the established Continuous Improvement Programme and the School Audit Cycle with the intention of maintaining the high OFSTED gradings of "outstanding" or "good" achieved in 1996, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018.

**Clinic Aim:** The charity's clinical activities are to be organised, equipped, staffed, managed and operated to the highest national standards.

- **Strategy to Achieve Aim:** The Trustees will monitor clinical operations with the intention of maintaining its unbroken record of meeting the targets set by the NHS and for satisfying its clients. In order to do this, the Trustees will use tools such as reports and standards set by the National Service Framework, and quality audits conducted in alliance with our statutory partners.

**Financial Performance Aim:** The charity's financial affairs are to be conducted to the highest levels of public probity and according to the policies and procedures established for service and capital development consistent with the need to demonstrate Public Benefit.

- **Strategy to Achieve Aim:** The Trustees will consider financial Performance Indicators, other financial records and Risk Assessments at all their meetings, to ensure that all our financial processes meet the requirements of both the Statements of Recommended Practice of the Charity Commission and Companies House. The Trustees will look at the record of expenditure to ensure that public monies are used exclusively for the Public Benefit.

#### Public Benefit - Achievements and Performance

The Trustees are pleased to note that the record of operations for the year under review complied with the aims and strategies set out by the Board and, in all respects, have exceeded expectations. The Trustees approved an investment program for the year that will provide for normal maintenance and some improvement of the main Vranth House building. During July and August 2019 new access to the toilets/changing facilities in class three was developed from the old playroom in order that this could be used as a separate classroom. In total two toilets/changing facilities were upgraded at this time, and the school library was developed to provide a new clinical assessment space. In the secondary school the classroom doorways were widened to improve the ease of access for wheelchairs. In January 2020 building work started on a new extension to provide space for a dedicated Innowalk room, a two-storey equipment store and an atrium with space for seating and work stations (the build was timetabled to be completed in the summer of 2020).

The high quality of service delivery has been maintained despite significant increases in the number of out patient referrals, and in the number of school pupils placed in the school with complex needs. Towards the end of the financial year changes started to be made to the operational practices of the outpatient service to allow it to continue to function during the COVID-19 pandemic. Logistical and practical adaptations were also made within the school to protect the pupils and staff. There was an average of 33 children on the school roll and just over 2,000 children on the clinical list. Engagement with the range of outpatient services has continued to be positive, with growth in every area of activity particularly the Fun Fit and High Five training programmes which train school staff to recognise and use intervention techniques for Gross and Fine Motor Developmental Coordination Disorder. The Fun Fit and High Five programmes also contribute to the charity's income.

## STRATEGIC REPORT

### Achievement and performance

The Trustees are pleased to report the effectiveness of the charity's ongoing and significant investment in Continuous Professional Development for its staff. All the therapists, teachers and support staff are engaged in, or have access to, programmes of learning some of which will lead to first or second degrees. All of the staff with contact with children are trained to the very highest Safeguarding level (Level 3) and our two Safeguarding Leads are trained to level 6.

Optech is a non-profit making service run by the charity which designs, manufactures and installs guided mobility equipment throughout England and Wales. Whilst demand for the installation of the tracking system developed by Optech has fallen, the service continues to maintain and repair the current installations nationally. The contribution made by the Mobility Project Manager to many of the other Vbranch House projects is both invaluable and financially prudent as it avoids the requirement to engage the services of multiple specialist trades which would be very costly. In particular the Mobility Project Manager has taken on the technical development and subsequent management and operation of the hydrotherapy pool.

Median waiting times for this year across all services was 10.4 weeks against a national target of 18 weeks, all service development targets were met in the year under review. The charity's record of no formal complaints has continued, facilitated by the policy to allow and encourage families to speak directly to the Chief Executive, Head of Therapies and Head of Education if they wish. The thorough training of staff in how to interact with and support patients and their families also aids patient satisfaction and engagement with the service.

### Financial review

#### *Financial review*

The Statement of Financial Activities shows total income for the year ending the 31st of March 2020 of £2,386,253 (£2,106,554 in 2019), an increase of £279,699 largely due to the increased number of school pupils. The Society's Net Current Assets stand at £1,846,069 (£1,639,684 in 2019). This increase of £206,385 is the result of the corresponding increase in income in relation to expenditure. The Society has Net Assets amounting to £6,952,408 (£6,554,036 in 2019) - an increase mainly generated by higher capital spend.

The net income and net movement in funds for the year is £398,372 (£205,525 in 2019). Adding back depreciation of £158,337 (a non-monetary expense) to this net income, the Society made a cash surplus in the year of £556,709 (£365,778 in 2019).

Total income from Charitable activities of £2,251,359 (£1,952,278 in 2019) includes the contract income from the combined contract for clinical and educational services. Total income from donations and all other sources is £114,668, which is slightly lower than the previous year's total of £135,199. The capital and revenue costs not charged to our contract partners remain in excess of £700,000 which forms a substantial part of our charitable benefit. The strong financial performance of the charity is remarkable considering that the contract sums for the original clinical work has not changed at all since 2008.

The Trustees are content that all expenditure made in the accounting period met with the Public Benefit aims and strategies as set out in an earlier section of this report.

#### *Investment policy*

The Memorandum and Articles provide the Trustees with the power to make investments as they choose but consonant with current Charity Commission advice. The charity's cash assets are invested in a state-owned Business Reserve but we would consider utilising opportunities for low-risk investment if interest rates improve.

#### *Reserves & going concern*

The Trustees have established a liquid reserves policy so that it is consonant with the revenue interests of a service charity. By setting the development of liquid reserves to the equivalent of annual operating costs, revenue will be developed from interest which will enable further development in our services. The forecast level of funding is such that an operating surplus is expected for the current year and the maintained reserve is such to provide a cushion in the event that either of the largest sources of income is threatened. The current fiscal retrenchment and unprecedented low

interest rates have proved the wisdom of establishing and maintaining this policy. The Trustees are unanimous in the opinion that the Charity remains a going concern.

## STRATEGIC REPORT

### Financial review

#### Pay and Emolument Policy for All Staff

The Trustees serve as volunteers and eschew reward and expenses.

The policy established by the Trustees for setting and reviewing the pay for all employed staff is;

1. As the charity exists to provide services and these services are delivered by trained personnel, expenditure on pay is the largest part of all revenue spending. The rates and costs of staff expenditure are thus reviewed and approved by the Trustees at all their meetings.
2. Pay rates for all staff are set on the principal that the rates must be competitive within the local charitable and statutory sectors so that the charity can continue to recruit high quality staff.
3. As the charity employs and relies on the services provided by a number of personnel without professional qualifications, pay at the lower level must exceed national benchmarks. The charity pays in excess of the national living wage to all staff.
4. The multiple between the lowest and the highest paid should not exceed a factor of five.
5. All staff must have access to appropriate pension schemes and these, again, must be competitive within the local charitable sector.
6. The Chief Executive is responsible for providing the Management Committee and the Board of Trustees with information on the annual pay and emoluments budget.

### Income & service risks

Notwithstanding the strategies for maintaining Public Benefit (q.v. Public Benefit Aims & Strategies above) the Trustees, having reviewed the strategic objectives of the charity in the light of possible obstructions to achieving them, have determined that;

1. **Income Growth:** The next five years are likely to include a period of between 2 and 3 years in which national fiscal disciplines and retrenchment in public service investment continues. Despite this the charity is in discussion with its statutory partners to develop income commensurate with the service improvements we have demonstrated over the last 12 years. We have defined a Core Offer for the school which reflects the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) process, allows for use of the Devon Assessment Framework and enables Educational, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). This has facilitated an adjustment of the education component of the Agreement to meet the needs of the children in the school. As a result of these initiatives the Trustees believe that the charity will avoid structural imbalances between its service commitments and the funding it receives for them.
2. **Income Security:** The combined contract is non-competitive because of the high amount of public benefit developed by it (now over 60% of the true costs of the statutory services provided by the charity is funded by the charity). The contract has a 25-year life (until 2036) and the only threat to it is a sustained or existential failure to meet the service quality standards. The charity contribution is largely met from the capital charges and revenue it waives, principally for the use of capital facilities which the charity owns and the running costs of these facilities; there is a very low risk of this not continuing.
3. **Quality Standards:** the Chief Executive is tasked with maintaining a continuous cycle of Risk Assessment reviews assisted and advised by the Heads of Department in the Senior Management Team (the Head of Therapies and the Head of Education). Principal amongst these are those relating to Safeguarding, Health & Safety and Financial Probity. The on-going review and development of these risk assessments and the policies and procedures that flow from them is of the highest priority as essential elements of the charity's strategic interest.

## STRATEGIC REPORT

### Plans for future periods

The new Service Led Agreement with Devon County Council and NEW CCG has operated since the 1st of April 2011. The Agreement set a target for charitable investment in these statutory services of no more than 30% of the total cost. The total contract value has not increased for 12 years despite considerable inflation in both the numbers and complexity of referrals made to the charity so that our contribution is now more than 60%. We have defined a new Core Offer for the school which has been agreed by Devon County Council. It offers significant value for money for the authority, and yet will make the future of the school sustainable at the increased level of service provision required by the cohort of children educated in the school. A new contract with DCC has been negotiated to remove the educational component from the existing combined contract.

With developments to the Vranck House buildings we have increased capacity for pupil numbers, so we are discussing with Devon County Council the possibility of future expansion of the school.

With the completion of the new extension we aim to increase out patient activity and access to the revolutionary Innowalk equipment that we have invested in. Research has shown that regular Innowalk sessions can reduce hospital admissions and the requirement for surgical intervention.

The charity continues to establish benchmarks in clinical and educational practice in order to meet its goal of not just meeting but exceeding service delivery standards. Preparations for the new OFSTED regime have been implemented, and the continuous professional development of our clinical services is ongoing.

The Trustees have established a conservative policy for future capital spend, and for the revenue development of all the charity services. Whilst our statutory partners are actively engaged in establishing new ways of delivering services, in which this charity will play a significant part, there will be a continuation of the need for retrenchment and for adopting new methods of working in order to sustain current activity levels at less cost.

## **STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Governing document**

The organisation is a Company Limited by Guarantee (Registered Number 2599511), incorporated on the 9th of April 1991, and an independent charity (Registered Number 1002700) registered with the Charity Commission on the 15th of May 1991. It is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association and the Instrument of Management. Any person over the age of 18 can become a member of the charity on payment of an annual fee of £2 (for those not in work) or £5 (for those in employment). There are currently 66 members each of whom are liable to the extent of their membership fee in the event of the company being wound up. All members have the right to vote at General Meetings.

### **Appointment of trustees**

The number of Trustees can be set at any General Meeting but has rarely varied from a mean of 12 between the minimum of 8 and maximum of 16 stated in the Governing Document. Invitations to nominate Trustees are circulated every year to the membership and these nominations are ratified at the Annual General Meeting. The senior officers (Chairman and Vice Chairman) are elected every year and the Chief Executive acts as Company Secretary. Employees of the charity may be members of the charity and the four senior employees are ex officio members of the Board of Trustees but no employee is entitled to vote at any meeting of the Trustees. The Executive Committee of the charity is known as the Board of the Society and the Board may co-opt any member of the charity to fill a specialist role.

### **Organisation**

The Board of the Society has strategic oversight of the charity and meets three times a year. The Board establishes all policy for the general direction and operation of the charity and meets to review those policies and to hear a record of operations. The Board employs a Chief Executive to work with a Head of Therapies and a Head of Education to oversee, direct and drive forward the Board's policies for the Clinic and the School (the principal operations of the charity). The Chief Executive has delegated powers for the day-to-day operation of the Board's policies for employment, finance, contracts, legal compliance (including Equal Opportunities), buildings and acquisitions, risk assessment and mitigation, Health and Safety and business development. To assist the Head of Education and meet statutory obligations for maintained schools, the Board has established a Board of Governors for the school. The Board of Governors has direct control of those matters bearing on the delivery of educational services; matters relating to finance, employment and resources, if not within the competence of the Governors, are referred to the Board of Trustees. The Head of Therapies is responsible to the Trustees for the full delivery of the clinical contract which includes professional and service delivery standards. In this she is assisted by the Chief Executive who retains direct control of all matters relating to the contract.

### **Induction and training of new trustees**

Trustees are briefed frequently on their obligations under charity and company law, the structure of the charity and its operating procedures as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association and in those changes in statute which bear directly on the work of the charity (principally legislation in the areas of Education and Health). A briefing document has been prepared alongside a more formal induction and training process. Trustees are usually appointed because of specialist skills but the charity will meet any identified need for specialist training.

## **STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Related parties**

The Society has formal and informal arrangements and relationships with many other statutory and voluntary bodies. Principal amongst these is the 25-year Strategic Partnership Agreement with NHS Devon and Devon County Council under which the charity is joint-funded for a proportion of the costs of the statutory educational and clinical services it provides. These services include the assessment of potential pupils, the education of pupils at Vranck House School, the review of pupil development and the delivery of clinical therapies at Vranck House and in the community all over Devon.

The network of national and local charities and voluntary bodies is too complex and numerous to describe fully but the Society retains active links with The Exeter Foundation, DreamAway, Whizz Kids, Children in Need, CEDA, A Brighter Tomorrow and a number of County and National grant-making Trusts. A similar network of local groups and individuals continues to assist the Society in raising funds for children at Vranck House and this incredibly generous and loyal support provides a much-needed and indispensable resource. The charity has also forged close links with the NHS funded Children's Specialist Children's Assessment Centre which it hosts in a purpose-built facility on the Vranck House site. It is worth noting that the children at Vranck House School raise money each year for other charities which have included Little Bridge House (the local children's hospice), Young Minds, Comic Relief and the Royal British Legion.

### **Risk management**

As a normal part of the annual business cycle the Society reviews its Risk Assessments. These include financial management, accounting, security of cash and removable assets, insurances, fire and Health & Safety. The outcome of these assessments is reported to the Trustees by the Chief Executive. The Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Cash Handling, Legionella and Fire Risk Assessments are translated into operating policies which are available to all employees, together with all the other policy documents, on the Charity's website. Employees at every level are encouraged to contribute to the continuous business of risk assessment through the Staff Meetings held every month.

### **Public Benefit - General Statement**

The Trustees have established a policy to review continuously all the charity's activities and the development of services to ensure that they remain consonant with the requirements of the 2006 Charities Act, and particularly with Section 4 of the Act, (the need to demonstrate Public Benefit). The charity operates in partnership with statutory bodies in order to provide expertise, treatment and enhanced services to children with physical disabilities. It does not charge fees but receives about 40% of the total cost of the services it provides to the North, East & West Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (NEW CCG) and approximately 80% of the service costs provided to Devon County Council. Referrals to the service are made by Local Authorities and all referrals are seen for assessment and the majority of assessed referrals are retained for treatment or given a place in the school. The referral process, whether as a therapy outpatient or potential school pupil, is not controlled by the charity but by NEW CCG and Devon County Council. A school placement or therapy intervention might be deemed inappropriate at the assessment stage but only for reasons that are cogent, demonstrable and compliant with benchmarked national practice. The charity is as public a body as its statutory partners and enters into no private arrangements for individual treatment. No member of the public is denied the services provided by the charity provided those services are assessed to be suitable and appropriate for the individual concerned.

### **REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS**

As shown on page 1.

### **STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES RESPONSIBILITIES**

The trustees (who are also the directors of Devon & Exeter Spastics Society for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

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

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the trustees are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditors are unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditors are aware of that information.

**AUDITORS**

The auditors, Kirk Hills, will be proposed for re-appointment at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting.

Report of the trustees, incorporating a strategic report, approved by order of the board of trustees, as the company directors, on ..... and signed on the board's behalf by:

.....  
J Tolman-May - Trustee

