Whitehall Choir Chair's report – 2026 AGM: Tuesday 30 June 2026 (Philip Pratley)

The two continuing characteristics of our Choir on which people remark time and again whenever and wherever I speak with them are first, the quality of our performance, our choral presence, the excellence of our sound. The second is no less important, the warmth of our choir, the friendliness, the greeting for our audiences. That comes from meticulous preparation, and it comes from each of us, from each of you our members. Everyone, however long ago or recently you joined, brings something unique.

All of us will look back on so many thrilling moments in such a varied season. Our 4 concerts were ambitious for all the right reasons, and I hope you feel, as I certainly do, that we met our ambitions in full measure, in musical performance and in our audience sales. Jo will say more about the concerts. It was great to release in March the contrasting pieces in our recording made last November, consolidating and now raising our profile in the music industry.

For the full house of our January choral workshop, using the Verdi for our spring term concert, we welcomed singers from across London and well beyond, a tremendous success simultaneously for the music

performance and the brilliance of Jacky plus the entire organising team. I haven't even attempted a precise count, heading for four figures, of the number of individual scores and sheet music which Marianne has handled for us his year.

Looking back to the beginning of such a varied season, after we had been one of 10 choirs involved in the individual premiere performances of the Living Voices poetry settings by Russell Hepplewhite, as you all now know, we were asked if we would give the first full performance this summer.

I'd like to spend a moment on what went on behind the performance to adapt and reconfigure our plans for this season. We were able to do so because of the strategy which we had put in place last season, being able to move some plans to summer 2027 thereby creating space for the Living Voices concert.

And I really do mean creating space, organising a new concert venue – never straightforward in central London – and replanning our financial provision for the year. It was humbling to receive such generous donations, and as we intended in new approach to strategic planning, with your support across the Choir, we were able to integrate the Jubilee Fund into more closely into our financial planning.

Immediately ahead, we have the weekend recording the whole of Living Voices. Again, I would emphasise how immensely fortunate we are in those whose months of meticulous and tenacious preparation makes this demanding recording possible.

I spoke last year about our new strategy, which gave us the basis to adapt our plans for this season and to set in hand future seasons. We'll say more about this in later in this AGM.

What I would be keen to reiterate here, as in previous years, is our good fortune in the abilities of such a dedicated Committee who handle the many demands with unfailing professionalism. It gives us new opportunities. Not many choirs can work with the arranger of one concert and the composer of our next, as we did with Richard Blackford and Russell Hepplewhite, both of them genuinely blown away by the, or more accurately your, performances. We'll continue that theme with Michael Higgins next term.

And perhaps more than anything else in my report, I would emphasise how massively fortunate we are in the phenomenal contribution which Jo and Ian make to every aspect of our Choir. Their intense commitment is evident so many ways.

Our annual report and accounts, which Lloyd, Anne and I submit to the Charity Commission is also a specific aspect of our reporting to you, our members. The requirements of the reporting timetable, plus it being more appropriate to bring that to you as a General Meeting we convene in person, during a rehearsal break, gave us the opportunity to bring the details to you recently.

I would, though, as at that recent meeting, particularly bring attention on the record to Lloyd's stewardship and the diligence with which he compiled our full report. Our balanced financial position means that we consider we can hold our subscriptions at the same level next season as we have had this season and are not proposing any increase.

As part of our strategy, we have extended the role of Communications Manager and you may be aware of the expansion of our online presence, in our website and through our social media channels. There's more detail as part of the Committee role description summary, circulated with the agenda, which also shows the wide range of non Committee roles, on which are also vital. As we mentioned in the covering email to this AGM calling notice, do let us know either directly or through your part rep, if the Comms Manager role looks one in which you might be placed to offer something of particular interest.

You may have seen from the agenda one particular dimension of our new strategy, that of planning for handovers. We've identified 4 such roles in particular which will require a handover period whenever the individuals hand over: Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and Concert Manager. In taking advantage of the flexibility in our Constitution, two of the elected seats at the Committee can be filled by designate appointments, to facilitate that handover process.

I plan to hand over at the AGM this time next year, after 9 years, so one of those seats at this AGM is for a designate Chair. And the delightful news of Anne's wedding next May creates the second, that of designate Secretary for which we'll convene a General Meeting during the new season - many congratulations Anne and we will miss your extraordinary foresight in every aspect of our planning.

We'll be concluding our 2025 – 26 season with a riverside pub social on Sunday 12 July, when we would be delighted to welcome everyone who has been part of our Choir this year. As we've said at rehearsals, do please sign up. Particularly this is an occasion to relax, to celebrate the commitment everyone brings and has brought, especially those who are stepping down from Committee, the years of membership from those leaving us and to mark the work of the whole team whose work brings such vitality to our performances.

I hope too you feel a sense of fulfilment and shared commitment from our rehearsals our concerts and our recordings. And now it's my privilege to hand across to Jo for her report.

(Ends)