

Songbirds Ladies Choir
Members Handbook



Welcome

Hello and welcome to Songbirds Ladies Choir.

There is plenty of information on our website to give you a good idea about our history, our range of music, the charities we support and the extra-curricular activities. However, probably the very best way of finding out more would be to come along to a rehearsal or two to try us out.

Our rehearsals are held on Thursdays at 7.30pm at the Methodist Church on Northampton Road. We perform 2 concerts a year, in the summer and at Christmas.

You can find more information on our website

<https://harboroughsongbird.wixsite.com/my-site-4>

New members are sometimes not quite sure which section of the choir will be best suited to their vocal range. This is not a problem as there is no expectation of prior musical knowledge or choir experience. You may find, with time and a bit of experience, that the section you thought you might belong to and tried out first is, in fact not the best option for you - don't worry, you will be welcomed by whichever section fits your voice best!

Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide a welcoming and supportive group for the development of singing skills and repertoire leading to performances and fundraising in and for the community.

Membership Agreement

1. Members should try to attend rehearsals weekly in order to maximise the performance of the choir. (Obviously holidays and other commitments will arise with all members at times, so if this is the case then it would be helpful to contact the Chair so that she is aware of your absence.)
2. The Musical Director and the Committee will select the music which the choir will perform. We have a large music library to access and new pieces will be added as appropriate.
3. Members are responsible for keeping music folders up to date and having all pieces ready to start singing at 7.30 on rehearsal nights.
4. Members are respectfully asked to listen attentively and remain quiet when other sections are practising, and to use this time to look at their own parts.

Looking After Songbirds Music

Two of Songbirds key resources are its members (and, of course, their voices) and the sheet music we use for our concerts. We need both of these elements if we are to successfully perform for audiences....

Sheet music is expensive and getting scarce and so we must do our utmost to look after it. The cost of a song for our choir is between £100 and £400, a considerable amount when we perform twice a year and need to refresh our repertoire regularly - for our own motivation and for our audience's enjoyment.

The committee asks therefore that you look after the pieces of music that we hand out to you as carefully as possible.

1. Members are equipped with concert folders in which to place their music for performances but for rehearsals the committee asks the following:

Please put your sheet music in a plastic wallet (one piece of music per pouch)

Keep the plastic wallet in a ring folder -

- to stop the music creasing,
- to keep it generally clean
- to protect it from spillages (coffee, tea or even red wine?!)
- to make it easier to find a specific piece of music and
- to prevent us from handling it unnecessarily.

2. Our choir leader often wants to highlight or emphasize specific things in the music which requires us to write or mark something on the sheet music. This must only be done in soft pencil. The ideal soft pencil is a 2B, 3B or 4B and please also use a soft eraser that won't scratch the surface off the paper.

3. Members keep the music for a particular concert until the first rehearsal after that concert (either January or August) and, before they hand it in, members are asked to erase any pencil markings they have made on any of the sheet music in their care. Please do your very best to take care of our music. Obviously, even with careful use, music that is used regularly will eventually show signs of wear and the committee makes allowances for that and will purchase new copies as needed. However, if a copy is returned damaged, even accidentally, you may be asked to replace it.

Policies & Procedures

Privacy Policy

In applying to become a member, or renewing your membership, of Songbirds Ladies Choir you are agreeing to us (the elected committee) holding the following information:

- Name, telephone number, email address and postal address - so that we can contact you.
- Choir section.
- Emergency contact - so we can contact someone should you become ill or indisposed.

We hold these details securely for as long as you are a member and may, at times, use them to send out specific and relevant information but we do not pass on your details to any third party organisation.

Safeguarding Vulnerable People Policy

Songbirds Ladies Choir

Ensuring Safety, Respect, and Inclusion

Introduction

Songbirds is dedicated to fostering a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment where all members and visitors are treated with dignity and respect. This policy outlines our commitment and standards for safeguarding vulnerable people, including children, young people, and adults at risk, ensuring that our choir is a place where everyone can safely enjoy music and community.

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy aims to:

- Protect vulnerable people from harm, abuse, or neglect within the choir setting
- Promote best practices in safeguarding for all members and volunteers
- Ensure all members understand their responsibilities regarding safeguarding
- Provide clear procedures for reporting and responding to concerns

This policy applies to all choir members, volunteers, committee members, musical directors, and anyone involved in choir activities.

2. Definitions

- **Vulnerable Adults:** Anyone aged 18 or over who, because of disability, age, illness, or circumstances, may be unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation.
- **Children and Young People:** Anyone under the age of 18.
- **Abuse:** Any kind of mistreatment, including physical, emotional, sexual, or financial harm, neglect, or discriminatory behaviour.

3. Key Principles

- Empowerment: Vulnerable people will be encouraged to make their own decisions and be involved as much as possible in matters that affect them.
- Prevention: We will take proactive measures to prevent harm from occurring, including awareness-raising and risk assessments.
- Proportionality: Our responses to concerns will be appropriate to the level of risk and seriousness of the situation.
- Partnership: We will work with families, carers, external organisations, and authorities as needed to safeguard vulnerable people.
- Accountability: Everyone involved in the choir is responsible for upholding this policy and contributing to a safe environment.
- The Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO), (appointed by the committee), will act as the first point of contact for safeguarding concerns, maintain records, and liaise with statutory agencies.

4. Safe Environment and Code of Conduct

- Choir rehearsals, performances, and events must be held in safe, accessible venues with appropriate supervision.
- Members should treat one another with courtesy and respect at all times.
- Members must report any concerns, disclosures, or allegations of abuse immediately to the DSO.

5. Identifying and Responding to Concerns

- Be alert to signs of abuse or neglect, such as unexplained injuries, frequent absences, changes in behaviour, or withdrawal.
- If a vulnerable person discloses information about abuse:
 - Listen calmly and take them seriously.

- Do not promise confidentiality; make clear you may need to share information to protect them.
- Record what is said in their own words, including dates, times, and witnesses if applicable.
- Report the concern to the DSO immediately.

Never attempt to investigate allegations yourself.

All concerns or suspected abuse must be recorded and reported, even if the incident seems minor.

6. Record Keeping and Confidentiality

- Records of safeguarding concerns will be kept securely and confidentially by the DSO.
- Information will only be shared with those who need to know, in accordance with data protection laws.
- Records will be retained for as long as necessary in line with legal requirements.

7. Working with External Organisations

- If a safeguarding concern is raised that may require statutory intervention, the DSO will refer the case to relevant agencies (e.g., social services, police).
- We will cooperate fully with investigations and support affected individuals throughout any process.

8. Support for Victims

- Any vulnerable person affected by abuse or neglect will be supported with compassion and sensitivity.
- We will signpost individuals to specialist services as appropriate, such as counselling or advocacy groups.
- The choir will make reasonable adjustments to support continued participation, if desired, while ensuring safety.

9. Review of Policy

- This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner in the event of legislative or organisational changes.
- Feedback from members will be actively sought and incorporated into policy reviews.

10. Contacts and Further Information

The DSO's contact information will be made known to all members.

Additional information and resources about safeguarding can be found via local authorities, national helplines, and specialist charities.

Conclusion

Safeguarding vulnerable people is a collective responsibility. By adhering to this policy, Songbirds affirms its commitment to providing an environment where every voice is heard, valued, and protected. Members are encouraged to remain vigilant, speak up about concerns, and work together to ensure the choir remains a safe and welcoming space for all.

The Constitution

1. Name

The name of the organisation is Songbirds Ladies Choir, referred to as 'Songbirds' in this Constitution.

2. Aim

To run a community choir accessible to the community and for the community with the following objectives.

3. Objectives

- To promote the development of singing skills and the wellbeing of participants through the enjoyment of singing.
- To provide performances for the entertainment of the local community.
- To take part in local community events.
- Raise money for local charities.

4. Management

To elect committee members to take responsibility for the following,

- To collect and manage funds to support the achievement of the aims and objectives of Songbirds.
- To appoint a Musical Director.
- To book and hire premises
- To undertake any other enterprise that may further the work and enjoyment of Songbirds.

6. Membership and Subscriptions

- Membership is open to any women over the age of 18.
- Musical experience is not necessary and there are no auditions. However, members must be able to hold a tune and sing in harmony.

- The Secretary and Treasurer will keep a full record of all members and subscriptions paid.
- Choir members' personal information will be recorded and kept secure. It will not be shared without permission
- Prospective members can attend up to 3 sessions before committing to membership.
- The Committee will decide the subscription fees each year and share these with choir members.
- Fees to be made via BACs (bank transfer) in blocks throughout the year.
- If members are to be absent for a long period, a short break in payment may be negotiated.
- Only members who have paid their membership will be allowed to vote at the AGM or any other general meeting.
- Any member who has had their membership terminated by the Committee shall have a right of appeal at the next AGM or general meeting, whichever is sooner.
- The Committee will produce information that outlines the Roles and Responsibilities of each Committee Member. This will be made available to choir members through the website.
- Any serious breach of the Constitution or any behaviour which conflicts with the values of Songbirds will be put in writing to those concerned. A second verbal request will be followed by another written request. If there is no change in behaviour or the problem persists, the Committee can take a vote of no confidence in that member and ask them to leave the Committee or the Choir.

Where the behaviour or problems are such that there is no alternative but to act immediately, the Committee may convene an emergency meeting for the express purpose of determining whether a vote of no confidence should be taken, and the person asked to leave the Committee or the Choir.

The meeting will be carefully recorded and available to all members of the choir except where any personal matters are discussed. The

meeting will need 5 Committee members for it to be quorate and these five people need to agree by vote on the appropriate action to be taken.

7. Meetings

Any proposed changes to the Constitution will be emailed to Committee members at least 14 days prior to the meeting where the issue is to be discussed.

- Any proposed changes will need to be voted for and agreed by 51% of Songbirds to be passed.
- Any other matters will be put to the vote at any meeting and decided by a simple majority of those present and eligible to vote unless there has been a proposal to have a secret ballot.
- The Chair will have the casting vote wherever there is a tied vote.
- The AGM will be held in the Autumn term. The Secretary will ensure all choir members have written notice of the meeting no less than 14 days before it is due.
- The business of the AGM will have standing items which will include:
 - Election of Committee members
 - Financial report
 - Chairs Report
- A written notice of any Extraordinary General Meeting(EGM) that is to be held, together with an agenda, will be emailed to all members no less than 14 days before the date of the meeting.
- For General Meetings to be quorate, including the AGM, there should be one quarter of the membership present.
- A General Meeting can be called by the Secretary at the request of the Committee or by at least five choir members.
- Committee Meetings can be called by the Chair or at least 3 Committee members. The quorum for a committee meeting is 3 members, 2 of which need to be Officers.

8. Committee Meetings and Officers

- Officers and Committee members will be elected at the AGM. Where Committee members have not been elected, voting can take place during allocated time at the weekly rehearsal. All Committee members will be nominated and seconded before moving to a vote.
- Including 3 officers (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) there can be up to 7 committee members.
- Any member of Songbirds can volunteer to serve as a committee member.
- From time to time all members will be expected to help with the running of Songbirds.
- If necessary, the Committee can co-opt any member to fill an Officer vacancy until the next AGM.
- The Committee can establish working groups and sub-committees to deal with specific aspects of the running of the choir.
- Any working group must consist of at least two members. Any proposals made by the working group shall be subject to approval by the Committee.
- The Committee can invite any non-member with special expertise to attend meetings, but they may not have voting rights.
- In the event of an Officer or Committee member losing the confidence of the Committee or the Choir membership, the problem must be discussed with the individual in question.

9. Finance

- Songbirds will have a bank account in its name which will be maintained by the elected officer. All monies will be paid into that account.
- Transactions will be detailed on the bank statement for records purposes.

- Any Committee member who carries out an activity agreed by the Committee will not be liable for any debts and will be reimbursed from Songbirds funds.
- Any activity not agreed by the Committee may not be reimbursed.
- Songbirds financial year will run from 1st August to 31st July.
- Each AGM will receive a financial statement for the preceding year audited by a person chosen by the Committee, but not a member of the Committee.
- Each year the choir will support a local charity and undertake fund raising activities

10. Changes to the Constitution

Changes to the constitution can be made at the AGM or a general meeting called specifically for the purpose.

Any member of Songbirds can propose and second a change to any part of the constitution by writing to the Secretary, at least 21 days before the meeting at which the proposal is to be discussed.

11. Winding Up

Songbirds can only be wound up by a vote at a general meeting.

If the proposal to wind up Songbirds is passed, after settling all proper debts and obligations, such as rent and fees, the disposal of any remaining assets shall be decided by the meeting which moves the resolution.

