



RIBBLE VALLEY JAZZ AND BLUES

Evaluation & recommendations

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MARCH 2026

Purpose and format of this report

This report, funded by Arts Council support, evaluates the current position of Ribble Valley Jazz and Blues Club Ltd (RVJ&B) as of March 2026 and recommends a practical way forward.

RVJ&B received a two-year Arts Council grant of £38,500 in 2023, later extended to June 2026 at the club's request. This report reviews festivals and events, audience and member feedback, and the organisation's internal operations, including trustees and staff. It assesses governance and organisational stability, highlights key strengths, and sets out recommendations for future development.

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History of RVJ&B

Ribble Valley Jazz and Blues was founded in 2007 after a meeting of people interested in both performing and listening to live music. As most attendees were listeners rather than players, the club began by presenting monthly gigs, mainly featuring bands from the North West. With support from Jazz North, it later broadened its programming to include artists from further afield.

In 2010, the club expanded its activities by launching an annual festival in May, which grew successfully over several years. It then increased its focus on developing musicians within the organisation, establishing the Ribble Valley Jazz Collective in 2012, now known as the Ribble Valley Jazz Big Band, followed by the Blue Funk Syndicate in 2013. In later years, this work continued with the creation of the Improvisation Group and the monthly Jazz Jam.

Elbow Room's origins lie in a workshop for women jazz players which was part of the 2019 Festival. A group continued to stay in contact under the banner Women in Jazz throughout the pandemic crisis. They have been learning and performing as a full band since 2021.

The Jackson Jazz and Blues annual award (JJB) was first made to Cats on Leads and each year a similar prize of recording time and promotions has highlighted several young performers under the age of 25 and working in the Ribble Valley area since.

Legal structure of RVJ&B

RVJ&B is a company limited by guarantee (company number 07325147), incorporated in 2010, and has been a registered charity (charity number 11380830) since 2017. The organisation operates under a written constitution and is accountable through annual reporting to both Companies House and the Charity Commission.

Its charitable objectives are:

- Promote and develop the cultural, economic and social benefits of jazz and blues in the North West.
- Create a thriving jazz and blues community.

- Prioritise opportunities for young people to perform, engage with, and appreciate jazz and blues.
- Facilitate enjoyment and appreciation of jazz and blues.
- Encourage the sharing of knowledge, information and skills.
- Work with organisations that share related interests and objectives.

Recent changes to the Directors/Trustees still need to be formally registered with Companies House and the Charity Commission, and this process is currently underway. Internal procedures should be reviewed to ensure such updates are completed promptly and efficiently in future.

In the longer term, the club may wish to consider whether its current legal status remains the best fit, including whether a social enterprise model such as a Community Interest Company would offer advantages. Any change would need careful consideration, including potential disadvantages such as the loss of Gift Aid on donations.

Current club

The club delivers a range of activities, each contributing to different aspects of its charitable aims:

- Ticketed gigs and live music presented at central venues
- Elbow Room
- Jazz Jam
- Ribble FM
- Small-scale gig promotion in partnership with specific venues, such as Maxwell's Sunday lunch sessions
- Jackson J&B Award, aimed specifically at supporting musicians under 25
- Ribble Valley Jazz Big Band
- Improvisation workshop

Taken individually these community sub-groups are successful: they attract regular audiences and, in most cases, make a consistent contribution to the club's income. The main exceptions are ticketed gigs, including the festival, and

additional creative projects such as extra workshop input from guest tutors or collaborations with external partners, which depend more heavily on fundraising or philanthropy. However, the ticketed gigs, whilst often needing financial subsidies, does raise awareness of the club and its music offers among the wider Ribble Valley community.

Financial Overview

RVJ&B's financial position has been supported by the Arts Council England Development Grant of £38,500 for 2024–26, which ends in June 2026. This funding has subsidised ongoing activity and enabled development work aimed at strengthening the club organisationally and financially.

The cost-of-living crisis has increased the expense of large gigs and festivals: artist and venue costs have risen, while audiences have less disposable income. As a result, ticket prices have had to increase at the same time as attendance has become more difficult to sustain. A review of operating finances suggests that the club can no longer absorb the level of losses seen over the last two years on festivals and headline concerts without external subsidy.

Governance/Training

RVJ&B is governed by a Board of Directors, who also serve as Trustees, and supported by a membership of around 100 people who pay a small annual subscription. The Board has created a number of operational committees, each chaired by a Trustee and supported, where appropriate, by volunteers.

Policies are in place for safeguarding, inclusivity, equality, diversity, health and safety, and GDPR. However, these were last reviewed in 2022. At that time, RVJ&B also had a partnership with Burnley CVS for training and DBS checks; that arrangement has now lapsed, and it would be beneficial to establish a similar partnership with a suitable organisation.

Work is already underway to refresh the club's equality, diversity and inclusion, health and safety, and GDPR policies.

As a matter of good practice, the club should maintain an up-to-date Trustee statement and induction pack for new trustees, volunteers and freelance staff, so that everyone clearly understands their roles and responsibilities.

Volunteers

Volunteers are essential to the delivery of the club's work. Most concerts and community music groups are organised and run by volunteers, and festival periods are supported through targeted volunteer recruitment. In the past, the club has benefited from around 50 regular volunteers.

The Jazz Jam also relies on a core group of regular volunteers.

A consolidated volunteer list is essential, and regular benefits such as training opportunities would help keep volunteers engaged and connected to the club.

Membership and associates:

RVJ&B has around 100 members who pay a small annual subscription, giving them discounted concert prices and the right to attend the AGM. In addition, around 1,000 people receive the club's newsletter.

Digital Presence

A review of the club's social media presence was undertaken in early 2026. Work has since been carried out to streamline domain names, reduce costs, create a single website covering both club and festival activity, and refresh the club's branding across its website and social media channels. At the time of writing, this work is still in progress and will continue to develop.

A monthly email newsletter is sent out to over 1,000 people via Mailchimp. A number of people hold different mailing lists for club – volunteers, marketing, membership – there is an opportunity for these to be consolidated and streamlined.

There is a Facebook page which links to an Instagram feed. This is used as a marketing tool. Other social media routes could be considered.

Technical Equipment & other Assets

Over the years RVJ&B club has accumulated a large amount of technical equipment for use at gigs and events. These are spread across various locations and no one has a definitive list of equipment. Some equipment was PAT tested recently.

A consolidated list of equipment would be useful to the club and a system put in place for borrowing and returning any items. A standardized PAT testing system would be useful.

Branded assets i.e. banners, collection buckets etc need identifying and storing.

Key successes in recent years

- Arts Council-funded trials, including mentoring, masterclasses and work with young people, have demonstrated clear potential for further development.
- Headline gigs, including performances by artists such as Ruby Turner, have brought major acts to the area.
- Low-cost and free events, supported by donations, have proved both popular and well attended.
- The Trustee away day created space for more open discussion and the development of new ideas.
- Since moving to The Old School Rooms, Jazz Jam has attracted larger monthly audiences of players and listeners, consistently drawing around 80 to 90 attendees.
- Maxwell's Jazz Lunches have become a valued part of the programme.
- Stereopress has supported productive work with young people.
- The Jackson Award has helped launch young musicians and support the early stages of their careers.

Smaller gigs in local hospitality venues, which have generally been managed to break even without subsidy, should provide the foundation for future programme development.

Unrestricted reserves of around £11,000, maintained over the past two years, are expected to provide a workable financial base for continued operations if the proposed strategic changes are implemented.

During 2025/26, the club also secured several smaller external grants, including £500 from Tesco and £3,500 through SpaceHive crowdfunding. These funds have helped subsidise club activity and minimise losses on events.

Findings from questionnaires and research

The following research activities were carried out:

- **Audience evaluation following the 2025 festival**
- **Mailing list questionnaire**
- **Market research in Clitheroe Market**
- **Participation evaluation following events**

Key findings include:

There is strong awareness of the club in Clitheroe, with 43% of the general public reporting that they know of it. This appears to be due largely to earlier festivals that included free live performances on the high street.

Among the general public, the word 'jazz' can create resistance, with some people perceiving it as elitist or inaccessible. By contrast, festival audiences expressed concern that the club may be moving too far away from jazz by programming a broader range of music.

The festival has the highest public awareness, while regular gigs, Jazz Jam and Sunday Jazz Lunches each reach awareness levels of over 30%. However, awareness of some other activities remains low, and responses suggest that the club's overall purpose can appear unclear. Many people engage with the club through one route only and have limited awareness of its wider programme.

Away Day

After the questionnaire and research findings were shared, trustees held an away day to discuss the results and consider their implications.

The following areas were identified as priorities for further discussion:

- Review the club's legal structure to determine whether it remains fit for purpose.

- Refresh the trustee structure to encourage wider participation, particularly from younger members.
- Create meaningful ways for members of community music groups to contribute, even if they do not wish to become Trustees.
- Improve volunteer management and support through clearer communication and better access to training.
- Rationalise membership and mailing lists so communications are clearer, more coordinated and easier to manage.
- Overhaul the website so it reflects current activity more accurately and supports functions such as payments and digital engagement.
- Strengthen the club's digital presence by making better use of platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Spotify.
- Carry out a full review of concerts and other gigs to create a viable and sustainable programme.
- Place headline gigs on temporary hold until a re-evaluation has been completed.
- Evaluate the June Jazz Weekend once it has been completed.
- Continue with Sunday Jazz Lunches and other smaller-scale gigs.
- Develop educational opportunities and partnerships that bring more young people into the club.

Recommendations and rationale

Reset and regroup

In 2026 and 2027, the club should focus on activities that are both successful and financially sustainable, such as Jazz Jam, Sunday lunches, smaller events, workshops, masterclasses and improvisation sessions. Larger and less cost-effective activity, including the festival and jazz weekend, should be temporarily held and reviewed regularly. This would give trustees time to reflect, regroup, recruit new board members from the community and reduce further financial strain. Framed positively, this is an opportunity to strengthen the club and attract new members.

The club should also review its legal structure, refresh its constitution if needed, review individual policies, rationalise mailing lists and ensure continued GDPR compliance.

Beyond 2027, the club will need to revisit a wider strategic question: is it primarily a club for players, listeners, or both? A revitalised Trustee Board, grounded in the strengths of the sub-groups, would be better placed to shape that discussion.

A Creative Forum should be established, drawing representatives from each sub-group and from the wider membership. Meeting regularly, this forum could discuss club-wide issues, share developments, generate ideas and strengthen connections across the organisation.

The club may also wish to identify a patron or figurehead who can help promote its work and add profile and credibility.

Education

The club should strengthen its educational offer. Doing so would help attract younger people and deepen local understanding and appreciation of jazz and blues.

This could build on existing masterclasses and workshops to inspire and train players of all ages. It could also include expanded opportunities for work with young people, development of the JJB Awards model, stronger

links with nearby music conservatoires and mentoring relationships between experienced musicians and those at the start of their careers.

Board and Trustees

A Trustee Board shaped by community input through the Creative Forum is more likely to include people who are actively engaged with activities such as Jazz Jam, Elbow Room and Maxwell's Sunday Lunches, and who therefore have a strong stake in the club's future.

A review of the club's legal structure is recommended. Operating as both a charity and a limited company creates additional reporting requirements and may restrict some funding options. However, any change must be considered carefully: losing charitable status could affect corporation tax, Gift Aid and access to philanthropy, while losing limited status could increase trustee liability.

Policies and procedures should be reviewed in line with current government guidance and best practice.

Safeguarding training is needed for trustees, officers and volunteers. A Safeguarding Officer should be appointed to oversee this work and to identify safeguarding leads for future activities.

First aid training for lead volunteers would also be beneficial. Where no qualified first aider is present at gigs or events, an emergencies policy should be in place for volunteers and team members.

Risk assessments for gigs and events should become a standard part of operational practice.

Mailing lists should be reviewed and consolidated.

An updated volunteer list and a more structured volunteer management system are needed, supported by training and ongoing development opportunities to maintain engagement.

The club should also make a sustained effort to increase grant applications so that reserves are protected and event losses are minimised.

Equipment should be catalogued and regularly tested.

Conclusion

Ribble Valley Jazz and Blues is at an important point in its development. The organisation already has significant strengths on which to build, including the potential to nurture new artists and deepen engagement within the local community. It also has many complexities in structure and governance due to the way it has organically evolved and expanded over the years which would benefit from detailed reviewing and streamlining.

It now has a real opportunity to refresh its identity and strengthen its offer for both music-makers and audiences. Change will not happen over night and personnel and priorities may continue to evolve but the outlook is positive and exciting.