

Chair's Report for AGM 2018

This has been another year of steady progress for Horizons, after some big changes in 2016. Our Horizons Management Team (HMT) is working very well and we have continued to deliver all our services at the same time as making further major improvements to our infrastructure.

Our activities on the water have continued to deliver exciting opportunities for over 1,000 individual Plymouth children to develop self-confidence and skills in our well-maintained fleet of boats. Both our Schools programme and Thursday/Saturday Club sessions have been delivered safely by the joint efforts of our professional Staff and extraordinary band of Volunteers. We have continued to offer a wide range of training for our Volunteers, both on the water and in the classroom.

This year we have benefitted from the use of a fourth Hawk 20 which has been loaned to Horizons by Rory Anderson. This has been especially useful when we have to get large numbers afloat. Another big step forward was made when Simon, Lois and myself obtained a Commercial Endorsement for operating 'Friendship'. This gives us more flexibility in the way we use her and it was a great experience again this year to be able to take four people in wheelchairs from the Dame Hannah Rogers Trust to see the National Fireworks Competition.

Plymouth University has been carrying out some research into how water-based activities can have beneficial effects for both children and adults -and Horizons was one of the organisations studied. Some of our children and their parents/carers took part in 'focus groups' which produced some great feedback. We can have confidence that the children who sail with us are developing social skills and self-confidence – and this does not go unnoticed by the adults!

We made another great showing in the Eddystone Pursuit with our Hawks putting in an excellent performance as always and winning lots of prize money. We also took to the water to help Plymouth celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the return home of Sir Francis Chichester's 'Gipsy Moth IV'. We are already in discussion about how we can play a role in the 'Mayflower 400' celebrations in 2020.

All this success on the water needs a lot of hard work behind the scenes. Some of the key elements in the Horizons infrastructure have been showing their age - and we have tackled some important tasks this year. A generous legacy left to Horizons provided the funds to replace our old portacabin offices at the Richmond Walk HQ. This was a major project which involved the demolition of the old structures – which were in a very bad state - and the installation of shipping container style replacements. This was successfully managed by Simon, supported by a sturdy gang of Volunteers and all on a planned budget which left enough over to also invest in some smart logoed uniform work clothing for our fantastic Staff.

Horizons costs over £100,000 per year to run and all the money going in and out has to be carefully monitored to meet legal/charity requirements -as well as enabling us to manage our funds properly. We also have to meet all employment law requirements, which now include having an auto-enrolment pension scheme. For many years our bookkeeping has been carried out externally and the old accounts system has not served us well. We have now taken everything in house and at the same time migrated the system itself to the cloud. This has been a great success and we can now see all the information we need with a few clicks online. None of this would have been possible without the skill and hard work of Annette, who has taken all this on board

alongside her other important tasks of fund-raising and managing all the records of sailing sessions etc.

In addition to all his other work on the water, Simon has overhauled our operational documentation and policies and worked with the Trustees to ensure we look after everyone who spends time with us, either by land or sea. We have been using a Quality Management System called PQASSO which is specially suited for use by small charities like ours. We should remember that it's all very well having lots of documents, but these are worthless unless we read them and take action. We have a good safety culture in Horizons that keeps every one safe – and we must keep it that way.

As the most recent recruit to the HMT, Lois has been extending her influence in Horizons and bringing lots of energy and new ideas. She has done a fantastic job with the 'Winter Project' finding some of exciting new activities for the children who stay in contact with us during the part of the year when we're not sailing. She has also been very busy selling lots of nautical bits and pieces to raise funds.

Having expertly steered us through changing times for the last two years, Rob Cooper has stepped down from the Chair to resume his well-earned retirement and do some international travelling with his wife. Having taken on the work of Treasurer when Rob took the Chair, I will be replacing Rob and Rory will progressively pick up the task of Treasurer, working alongside Annette. We are currently recruiting some new Trustees and will be able to announce some appointments soon.

As a new sailing season approaches, we can look forward with confidence to the future. Horizons is a great adventure, made possible by everyone working together – our Staff, our Volunteers, our Trustees and of course all the deserving young people who come sailing with us!

Andrew Eccleston
Chair of Trustees