The British Hen Welfare Trust

Annual Report 2024

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2024 in brief

Our mission
The British Hen Welfare Trust exists to improve the lives of laying hens by enabling safe retirement, advancing welfare standards, and supporting people to care for hens responsibly.

2024 in numbers

62,400 hens rehomed across the UK

Around 1,400 volunteers supporting delivery nationwide

Thousands of enquiries handled through the Hen Helpline

£1.11m total income

£1.11m total expenditure

£1.69m end of year funds

In 2024, the BHWT rehomed its one millionth hen, reflecting the sustained scale of its work. The charity continued its core work within a more constrained financial environment, with income returning to typical levels following an exceptional 2023.[1]

Activity remained nationally coordinated and welfare-led, supported by a large volunteer network and established relationships with farmers.

Alongside rehoming, the charity continued to provide practical advice and support to hen keepers, helping to improve long-term welfare outcomes beyond the point of

adoption. A continued focus on cost management and operational discipline ensured that services were maintained while responding to increased delivery costs.

Pressures affecting hens and rehoming

Commercial laying hens are typically considered “end of lay” at around 72–78 weeks (approximately 18 months), after which they are no longer economically viable within production systems. All laying hens are slaughtered at this point despite their potential lifespan of several more years.

In 2024, rehoming activity continued to operate within a challenging external environment. Avian Influenza controls, cost pressures across farming and transport, and changes in production systems all influenced the timing and scale of rehoming opportunities.

Within this context, the BHWT provides a structured and welfare-led route for hens to transition out of commercial systems and into safe homes, while also supporting keepers to ensure positive long-term outcomes.

From the Chair

2024 marked a year of consolidation for the British Hen Welfare Trust, following a period of growth and a return to a more typical funding environment.

The Board’s focus has been on maintaining financial resilience, supporting staff and volunteers, and ensuring the charity continues to operate with strong governance and clear oversight. Despite increased cost pressures, the charity sustained its core work, with rehoming activity continuing nationwide, supported by consistent welfare standards and a committed volunteer network.

The Trustees have prioritised careful stewardship of resources to ensure that the organisation remains stable and well placed for the future. This includes maintaining appropriate reserves and strengthening the systems that support effective decision-making and accountability.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to recognise the contribution of our staff, volunteers, supporters and partners. Their continued commitment makes it possible for the BHWT to deliver its work with consistency and care.

As the charity approaches its twentieth anniversary, the Board remains confident in its direction and its ability to navigate the challenges ahead while continuing to improve outcomes for hens and their keepers.

From our Founder & CEO

Jane Howorth MBE

When I founded the British Hen Welfare Trust, the aim was simple: to give hens the chance of a better life and to help people understand their value. That purpose continues to guide the organisation today.

What stands out in 2024 is not only the number of hens rehomed, including our very special millionth hen, but the commitment behind that work. Every rehoming, every call to the Hen Helpline, and every volunteer contribution reflects a shared belief that practical action can lead to meaningful improvements in welfare.

During the year, our focus has been on sustaining what matters most: safe and responsible rehoming, accessible advice for keepers, and maintaining the standards that underpin the charity's work. This has required careful decision-making and a clear emphasis on doing things well.

Alongside this, we are beginning to develop ways to extend our impact, particularly through work that connects hen welfare with education, wellbeing and community engagement. These developments build on the charity's established model while remaining grounded in its core purpose.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the BHWT over the past year. Your contribution ensures that this work continues and that more hens are given the opportunity to live well beyond their commercial lives.

1. Our impact in 2024

1.1. Rehoming and welfare

Rehoming remained central to the British Hen Welfare Trust's work in 2024, providing a structured and reliable route for commercial laying hens to move into safe, caring homes across the UK. Each rehoming was supported by clear processes designed to prioritise welfare, biosecurity and responsible adoption.

The UK laying flock consists of around 40 million hens at any one time.[2] Commercial laying hens are typically considered "end of lay" at around 72–78 weeks (approximately 18 months).[3] As a result, tens of millions of hens are removed from production each year despite remaining capable of living for several more years with appropriate care.[4]

In 2024, 62,000 hens were rehomed across the UK, contributing to more than one million hens rehomed by the charity since its founding. This reflects both the sustained demand for rehoming and the scale of the charity's operations in rescuing hens from slaughter and enabling them to live out their natural lives in caring homes as companion animals.

While overall activity is shaped by external factors, including disease controls and changes in farming practice, the charity's delivery model remained consistent. By maintaining a dependable national network and clear welfare standards, the BHWT provides a structured and welfare-led intervention that improves outcomes for hens at scale.

1.2. Advice and education

The BHWT provides practical, accessible guidance to hen keepers through its Hen Helpline and wider educational resources. Supported by the Pets Foundation's three-year grant (2024–2027), the Hen Helpline responded to thousands of enquiries in 2024, covering health, behaviour and husbandry.

The Helpline is available to both BHWT adopters and the wider hen-keeping community, reaching beyond the charity's direct rehoming activity. This work plays a preventative role in welfare by helping keepers to identify and manage issues early, reducing avoidable health problems and improving long-term outcomes.

The charity also shares evidence-based information more widely and works with veterinary, farming, education and policy stakeholders, ensuring that frontline experience contributes to improved understanding of hen welfare beyond individual homes.

1.3. Volunteers and supporters

The charity's national delivery model is supported by around 50 collection hubs and over 1,400 volunteers. Volunteers play a significant role in rehoming activity, coordination and welfare support across the UK. Their involvement enables the charity to operate at a national scale that would not be achievable through staff resources alone. This model allows the charity to combine consistency in welfare standards with local delivery across the UK.

Volunteering often involves considerable practical commitment, particularly during rehoming activity, and many volunteers continue over several years. Their experience and reliability are central to the effective delivery of the charity's work.

Alongside volunteers, individual donors, trusts and foundations provided vital financial support. Together, these contributions underpin the charity's ability to sustain its services and respond to changing needs.

2. Looking ahead: 2025 and beyond

2.1. Priorities and new projects

As the British Hen Welfare Trust moves into 2025, its focus is on sustaining rehoming activity while strengthening the organisation to support long-term impact.

Priorities for the year ahead include maintaining rehoming activity within a changing external environment, continuing to provide high-quality welfare advice and education, and supporting the volunteers and staff who make this work possible.

The charity will also strengthen its organisational foundations, including introducing a small set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to support effective governance, improve consistency in reporting, and provide clearer insight into performance over time.

External factors, including avian influenza, cost pressures and changes in farming practice, continue to shape the operating context. The Trustees and senior team will respond with a focus on stability, adaptability and maintaining high standards of welfare.

As the charity approaches its twentieth anniversary, there is also an opportunity to build on its established model and extend its impact, particularly through work that connects hen welfare with education, wellbeing and community engagement.

2.2. Developing our four-year strategy

Alongside its core work, the BHWT is beginning to develop a four-year strategy to support long-term impact and organisational sustainability. This will bring greater clarity to priorities, partnerships and resourcing as the charity continues to grow its work, including new areas of development.

To support delivery and accountability over time, this work is being shaped through a clear framework, including:

• Outcomes (Year 4)
What measurable change the BHWT aims to achieve for hens, communities and the wider sector.

• Prioritisation
The alignment of staffing, partnerships and financial resources to deliver work effectively.

• Phasing and delivery (Years 1–4)
A sequenced approach to implementation, ensuring that new initiatives are developed in line with organisational capacity.

• Success measures
A small set of key performance indicators to track progress, impact and learning over time.

This approach will also support the charity's fundraising, ensuring that projects are clearly defined, appropriately resourced and aligned with funder and donor priorities.

3. Financial review

3.1. Overview

Total income for the year ended 31 December 2024 was £1.11m (2023: £1.20m), reflecting a return to more typical income levels following an exceptional prior year. Total expenditure was £1.11m (2023: £1.02m), with increased costs associated with rehoming activity, volunteer coordination, education and fundraising.

After investment gains, the charity recorded a small net surplus for the year. Total funds at 31 December 2024 stood at £1.69m, providing a stable financial base while reflecting a tighter operating margin than in 2023.

Expenditure was actively managed in line with income, ensuring that core services were maintained despite increased delivery costs.

3.2. Income and expenditure

Income continued to be generated from a mix of donations, legacies, trading activity and investment income. The reduction in total income compared to 2023 reflects the absence of one-off gains in the previous year rather than a change in underlying support.

Expenditure remained focused on charitable activities, with the majority of resources directed towards rehoming, welfare support and education. Costs increased during the year particularly in relation to fundraising and marketing, volunteer management and service delivery, reflecting investment in sustaining and strengthening operations.

Governance and support costs remained proportionate to the size and complexity of the organisation.

3.3. Reserves and managing risk

The Trustees consider it prudent to maintain a General Reserve equivalent to up to twelve months of support costs. This reflects the charity's exposure to external factors, including disease outbreaks such as avian influenza, which can temporarily disrupt rehoming activity.

At 31 December 2024 the General Reserve amounted to £136,492. The charity also held designated funds for specific purposes, including employee commitments, capital equipment, property development, education and hen health. While the General Reserve remains below the charity's target level of up to twelve months' support costs, the Trustees continue to manage reserves carefully to balance financial resilience with the ongoing delivery of frontline charitable activities.

4. Governance and compliance

The British Hen Welfare Trust is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. It is governed by a Board of Trustees who set strategy, oversee risk, and ensure that the charity operates in line with its charitable objectives.

The Trustees confirm that they have had due regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and are satisfied that the charity's activities continue to deliver clear benefit to both hens and the wider public.

The statutory accounts for the year ended 31 December 2024, together with the Independent Auditor's Report and Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities, form part of this Annual Report.

Data sources

[1] The British Hen Welfare Trust, Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024, Charity Commission for England and Wales.
[2] Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), *United Kingdom Poultry Population Statistics*, latest available data. Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), *United Kingdom Poultry Population Statistics*, latest available data.
[3] Defra; British Hen Welfare Trust (BHWT), *Hen lifecycle and production guidance.*
[4] BHWT *hen health and lifespan guidance.*