



Abingdon Carousel: Report to Abingdon Town Council: April 2026

Abingdon Carousel Family Centre is a charity which was set up to run services in the former county council funded South Abingdon Children's Centre. Carousel was incorporated as a charity in 2017, following OCC's withdrawal of funding.

Carousel offers a variety of recreational, care, educational and adult development services both directly to the public using paid employees and volunteers and through making the building available to community focussed partner organisations. All Carousel activities are free to families although we encourage small donations where these can be afforded.

Service priorities are those which benefit families with children aged 0-5 years although other family and community services are also offered under an umbrella approach that aims to be relevant to the community as a whole. Carousel is an inclusive organisation that aims to reflect the views and needs of our families.

Specifically, Carousel aims to:

- Provide a range of facilities and programmes, through the provision of a safe and stimulating space, for children to socialise, learn and play and for parents / carers to receive guidance and support.
- Support parents / carers in developing skills and strategies for effective parenting.
- Enable parents / carers to engage in a range of opportunities to meet other families, undertake personal development activities and become active members of the community, so reducing isolation.
- Provide a community hub from which partner organisations can offer their services.
- Provide information and signposting so that families can access services across the wider community.

Improvement and Expansion

We reported last year that we were in negotiation with Oxfordshire County Council to renew our lease and take responsibility for the whole building, that is including those rooms which were previously part of Caldecott School's early years provision. After a long drawn out process, we took possession of the additional rooms last spring. This has been an exciting year in Carousel's development, a year of development and expansion. The extra space includes a second large playroom with its own garden and adjacent rooms as well as an additional meeting space. Our two playrooms are interconnecting and enable us to offer sessions in a larger space, much appreciated by all who attend.

Drop-in 'Stay and Play' sessions are held on five days of the week (including the very popular Saturday Club and monthly SEND Club). Parents and Carers can attend our highly regarded Family Links parenting workshops. We have recently expanded our offer to include Sensory Play for Babies which has proved very popular. We have plans to further develop our new rear garden so that we can provide dedicated outdoor play sessions.

We reported last year that around 500 families were registered with Carousel. This figure has since risen to 850. Typically, around 100 families attend our Stay and Play sessions each term time week. Around 80% come from within the town and the remainder from nearby postcodes.

Expansion has necessitated expanding our team. As well as our Director and three Assistant Managers, we have four further playworkers. We are fortunate in having a small, committed band of volunteers, without whom it would be impossible to run sessions. Recruiting further volunteers is an ongoing priority.

In addition to our own sessions, we work with a range of partners, and this extends the use of the centre. The Health Visitors are regular users. Many parents come to weigh their babies and then drop into one of our Stay and Play sessions. Social Services use our welcoming, child friendly spaces for supervised contact. We have been happy to host Holiday Play Schemes for young people with disabilities. Other hirers include Beezee, who provide health and well-being sessions for families and OXPIP who offer therapeutic services. A German speaking playgroup uses our premises on Sundays.

As important as the specific sessions on offer are the extent to which staff have worked with individual families and County Council and community teams to advise and support, especially in times of crisis. We call this the invisible strand of our work and many local families have benefited from our team's sensitive and knowledgeable support.

Carousel's 3-year Improvement Plan (2025 - 2028) focuses on three priority areas:

1. Sustainability and Growth

Ensure that successful fundraising and efficient financial management lead to a balanced budget and robust reserves so that we can grow our services and programmes.

2. Leadership and Management

Ensure that efficient leadership and management from Carousel's Director and Assistant Managers, supported by Trustees, contributes to consistency of good practice, growth and stability.

3. Programmes and services

Ensure a consistently high quality of core programmes and services, and work with partners to ensure that services provided by others meet Carousel's high standards and benefit our community. Further develop core and partner services to ensure that Carousel's premises are effectively and efficiently used.

This year has not been without its challenges. Our newly appointed manager required maternity leave and is due back very shortly. The Assistant Managers and other new members of staff have risen to the challenge of taking on operational day to day management. We are very fortunate in having skilled and knowledgeable trustees who willingly give up their time to steer leadership and support management. We currently have one vacancy on our Board of Trustees and would be very interested in hearing from anyone who can lead on premises, health and safety.

Financial Summary

We are very fortunate in having several sources of funds from those such as Abingdon Town Council and Sovereign Network Group who donate significant sums to the many others who offer smaller amounts and fund specific groups and projects. We also raise income from room hire and from the small donations that many families make when attending a session.

Our total income for the year ending July 2025 was £110,894. The total expenditure was £91,725. The unrestricted surplus in July 2025 was £29,300, partly due to salary savings in the interim between managers. The Trustees are pleased that, given cost-of-living and salary increases, the charity has been able to maintain robust reserves and forecasts a small surplus for July 2026. We aim to maintain reserves around the equivalent of six months running costs.

Sharron Jenkinson: Chair of Trustees

1 April 2026



Front playroom 0-4 year's play session ready



Garden in use



Baby Group



0-5 Stay and Play session with a musical volunteer