

GCLT – the Board of Trustees

The Gillingham Community and Leisure Trust Ltd. (GCLT) is a community-owned business and registered charity which runs on a 'not for profit' basis, operating leisure facilities to benefit Gillingham and the surrounding area.

The Board of Trustees

The Board of trustees of GCLT are responsible for the strategic direction and commercial viability of the business. All trustees are volunteers and unpaid. The role of the Board is to provide critical oversight and support to the General Manager and his leadership team; the Board carries the ultimate responsibility for the strategic direction, staff team, assets, activities and reputation of GCLT.

The GCLT Board support the General Manager and his leadership team in promoting an inclusive culture which views high professional standards as non-negotiable, seeking to provide i) a high quality and enjoyable experience for our customers, ii) appropriate opportunities for staff training and professional development, iii) a safe working environment, iv) the best pay and working conditions that the organisation can afford (with protection from inappropriate or bullying behaviour from colleagues and customers).

As a corporate body, we work hard to secure the future of the organisation in a sustainable manner, using the sum of our individual experience and expertise. In this way, we expect GCLT to continue to make a unique and valuable contribution to the local community for years to come. We recognise that, as a Board of trustees, we are stewards of an important legacy.

Phil Silvester CBE – Chair

Phil joined the GCLT Board in August 2022. He is a retired Head teacher and International Education Consultant. In 2008, Phil was awarded a CBE by HM the Queen for his services to SEND regionally and nationally. After managing the expansion of Dorset's largest special school, Westfield Arts College in Weymouth for 16 years (including building a £6M sports hall with a climbing wall and gym), Phil emigrated to France where he and his wife established a successful tourism business (2008-18). Since 2000, Phil has worked extensively in the UK and abroad as an education consultant, training inspectors and headteachers, school governors and trustees. He has worked with several national charities.



Phil is looking forward to using his leadership, organisational and commercial expertise to support the continued development of RiversMeet. Since 2018, Phil has been a regular gym user and Glyn (his wife) a regular pilates and fitness class user at RiversMeet. Outside of RiversMeet, Phil enjoys his four grandchildren and appreciates foreign travel with his wife and dog (Mya – a black lab). His three children live in Dorset and Devon.

Simon Ward – Vice Chair

Simon Ward joined the GCLT board in April 2023. Simon moved to Gillingham from Surrey at the end of 2022 and is an active user of the RiversMeet gym and regularly attends spin class on Saturday.

Simon has an extensive background in customer experience improvement and loyalty, having worked extensively for large national organisations including BT, Centrica and Tesco.



In addition to his role with GCLT as Vice Chair, he regularly volunteers with Cranborne Chase - an AONB, leading walks and carrying out wildlife surveys in Wiltshire. Simon lives with his wife and daughter who has recently qualified as a lifeguard at RiversMeet.

Bob Messer

Bob is a retired secondary school teacher who worked mainly in UK comprehensives and also abroad in Sudan, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania and the Netherlands. He has lived in Gillingham for 23 years and been a member of RiversMeet gym for twelve years. Bob was a founder member and Chairman of Gillingham Town Meadow Group, turning a piece of waste land in the centre of town into a park. He is a member and now Chairman of Gillingham Action For Nature Group, a local environmental group. Bob coordinates *The Green Gang*, folk recovering their mental health while working in the environment.



Prior to RiversMeet opening in 2010, Bob was a fundraiser for the project and has been a 3RP trustee since 2013 concentrating on giving advice and support, particularly to new groups in Gillingham and the surrounding parishes. Along with all 3RP trustees he became a trustee of GCLT (which is responsible for RiversMeet) in June 2021 and joined the new GCLT Board in October 2022.

Bob is married to Sheila who has been going to fitness classes at RiversMeet since it opened in 2010. Their son lives in Manchester and their daughter in Bournemouth.

Simon Chase

Simon became a GCLT trustee in April 2025. Simon went to Gillingham School and even swam in the open-air pool before what is now RiversMeet was built over it! Then he moved away; to university at Reading, spent five and a half years teaching History and other things at a comprehensive there, and then a change of course. He became assistant to the Pastor of a large evangelical Baptist church in Reading and subsequently Pastor of an inner London church for seven years.



Simon and his family moved back to Gillingham in 1994. For 19 years, he worked in various non-clinical roles within the NHS at Yeovil District Hospital. For the last ten years Simon has pastored Gillingham Baptist Church. Simon and his family have strong ties to Gillingham and have seen how RiversMeet has developed and flourished. This facility, this centre and community asset with all its activities, contributes a great deal to our town's life. As a trustee, Simon is pleased to be able to support and develop this in the years ahead. He hopes his varied experience and knowledge will be a helpful contribution as part of an impressive group of trustees.

Garrath Pledger

Garrath is an FE lecturer with a background of over 20 years in sport, fitness and coaching. Originally a Professional Golfer before switching to fitness and roles in gym management, education and working as a Strength & Conditioning coaching for multiple national governing body pathway squads including, at present, two England Disability Cricket squads.



Having recently joined as a GCLT trustee in April 2023, Garrath brings a background of knowledge from grassroots to elite level sport and fitness to support the development of GCLT and help with ideas to ensure the best and most inclusive offer is being provided for the community.

Garrath's free time is spent staying fit and healthy in the RiversMeet gym and also outdoors in the beautiful Dorset countryside with his wife Lynsey and their two children, Aimee-Mae and Archie.

Laura Day

Laura became a GCLT trustee in January 2024. She is a Chartered Management Accountant and runs her own business supporting small to medium companies in understanding and realising their goals.



Laura currently lives in Buckhorn Weston; she has always been a resident in the local area. Sport and exercise have always been a central part of her life. Laura enjoyed swimming lessons and learnt to swim in the RiversMeet building long before it became RiversMeet! She has recently got involved in triathlon, meaning Laura spends lots of time on the roads either running or on the bike, as well as plenty of time swimming in the pool or in open water.

Laura also has the role of double checking the accounts for the Wincanton Wheelers Cycle club. A 'Pets as Therapy' volunteer, Laura enjoys taking her spaniel Alfie into different care homes each week.