

More than a landlord
Placing our tenants
voice at the heart
of what we do

CORPORATE STRATEGY

2018 - 2023

“

To be more than just a landlord,
to put our tenants' voice at the
heart of what we do and to
deliver great homes and services,
supporting communities and
improving lives”

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Our Board and Executive Team



1. Foreword

What do we plan to do?

Colin McCusker
Chairman
South Ulster
Housing Association

South Ulster Housing Association (SUHA) has come a long way since we were formed in 1978. We now have more than 1,100 homes throughout South Ulster and beyond.

Our new five-year Corporate Strategy is informed by what we have achieved to date. It also reflects our desire to make a positive difference to our tenants and their local communities in these fast moving times.

Our new vision statement reflects this:

To be more than just a landlord, to put our tenants' voice at the heart of what we do and to deliver great homes and services, supporting communities and improving lives.

From this vision, we have developed five Strategic Objectives. These form our 'golden thread' running through the organisation and ensuring that we all work towards achieving the outcomes that are important to our tenants and partners.

Our operating environment is complex and we continue to experience rapid change and uncertainty. However, we are confident that our Board of Management and staff will continue

Our Strategic Objectives are:

1

Place our 'tenants' voice' at the heart of our organisation;

2

Demonstrate excellent governance and live our values in everything we do;

3

Build and maintain high-quality homes that meet the long-term needs of tenants;

4

Deliver great services that provide good value for money; and

5

Help to support vibrant and sustainable communities where people can build better lives.

to demonstrate our ability to adapt, deliver our plans for growth and deliver great services for our current and future tenants.

2. Introduction

Who are we and how we are organised?

SUHA was formed in 1978 as the Portadown Housing Association. **We have now grown to be one of the most important community-based housing associations in Northern Ireland.**



We are a medium-sized charitable Registered Social Housing Provider. We own and manage over 1,100 homes throughout South Ulster with larger concentrations of stock in the main towns of Portadown, Lurgan and Newry.

SUHA continues to grow with new homes in areas such as Newtownards and Lisburn.

Our head office is located at 18-22 Carleton St, Portadown, Co Armagh, where our 20 FTE staff are based.

The staff are organised in four teams (Finance, Property Services, Housing and Development) and managed by a senior management team led by Chief Executive, Kieran Matthews.

The senior management team report to a Management Board of 10 trustees under the chairship of Colin McCusker.

Details of Board and Senior Management Team membership are attached at Appendix A.

3.

Our Vision and Values

The consultation process with our Board of Management and staff that informed this strategy revealed a desire to maintain our focus on making a positive difference for our tenants. **Our Corporate Strategy and Business Plan 2013-18 set our corporate vision as 'Tenants first and foremost'.**

We want to make a lasting positive impact on our tenants' lives and the neighbourhoods in which they live. This approach is captured in our **Vision and Values**.

VISION

We know that being a great landlord is more than just providing the 'bricks and mortar' or providing a home to rent. We perform a much wider range of functions to support our mission including roles as developer, employer, partner and advocate.

To help us achieve our mission, therefore, we have developed the following vision for the future:



To be more than just a landlord, to put our tenants' voice at the heart of what we do and to deliver great homes and services, supporting communities and improving lives.

VALUES

Our values are very important to us; they are our guiding principles driving what we do and how we work. They set standards that our customers can expect from us. They also help us to manage performance, recruit new staff and recognise and reward good work. Our values are what will help us to achieve our strategic objectives.

Our Values are:

Caring

We care about our staff and tenants and will help and support them in achieving their goals.

Fair

We celebrate diversity and are committed to treating everyone fairly.

Honest

We are honest with ourselves and others and will keep our 'promises'.

Open

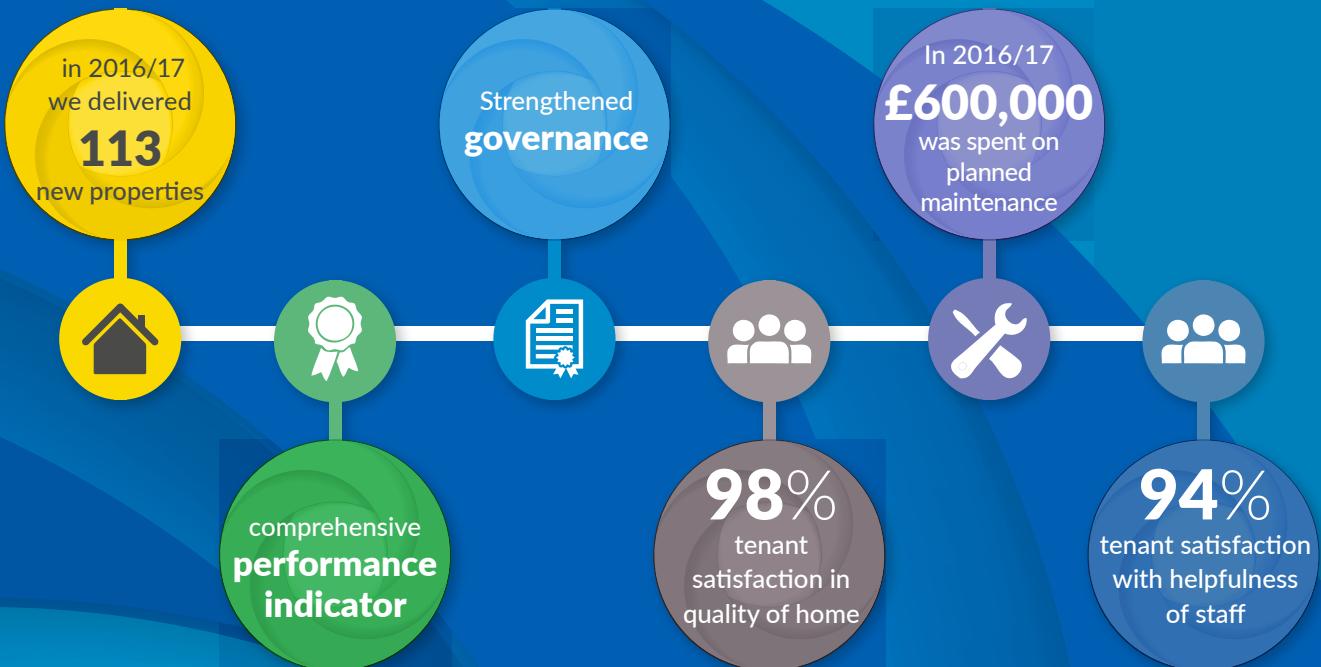
We are open with our staff, tenants and partners about what we do, how we work and our decision-making.

Professional

We demonstrate high standards of conduct and a 'can do' attitude – solving problems and continuously improving.

Respectful

We show others the respect we would wish to receive.



4. Our achievements

In our last five years, we have successfully delivered against the objectives set out in our previous Corporate Strategy.

The most important of these was the regaining of investment status with the Department for Communities and the delivery of a significant development programme. For instance, in 2016/17 we delivered 113 new properties – 26 new build (Newry and Lurgan), 60 off-the-shelf purchases (Lisburn, Bangor, Newtonards and Ballygowan) and 27 existing satisfactory properties (various locations). An additional 41 new build units will be delivered before the end of 2017/18 including further schemes in Newry, Lurgan and Belfast. This will be supplemented by a further 17 off-the-shelf and 24 existing satisfactory property purchases.

We have strengthened our governance arrangements linked to an appropriate schedule of delegations supported by a detailed set of policies and procedures.

We have also implemented a comprehensive suite of performance indicators so that we can monitor the quality and performance of our services and benchmark against other providers. These have shown strong and improving performance throughout the last five years.

We have successfully delivered our repairs and maintenance programmes and are able to report full Decent Homes compliance. This included a total planned maintenance spend in 2016/17 of over £600,000 – including 62 kitchen replacements, 21 major internal upgrades and 25 heating upgrades – and a projected spend in 2017/18 of almost £750,000.

Our tenants are given full opportunity to be involved in the running of the organisation and the services provided. Tenant surveys have shown increasing levels of satisfaction – in 2016/17 98% were satisfied with the quality of their home, 94% with the helpfulness of staff and 95% with the area they lived in. 94% felt the organisation kept them well informed and 92% that their views were taken into account. Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance and with the quality of repair work done is slightly lower at 89% and 88% respectively.

5.

Our operating environment

The housing market

In 2011 the Northern Ireland housing stock totalled some 760,000 homes of which 66% were owner-occupied, 19% were privately rented and 15% were social dwellings.

In 2014 a total of 26 housing associations were registered as providing housing throughout Northern Ireland managing some 30,000 homes. Of these only nine managed more than 1,000 homes making us one of the larger associations in the country.

For the last 13 years or so housing associations have been solely responsible for the delivery of new social housing and in 2016 the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) identified South Ulster as one of the areas where there is a particular need for new homes. For instance, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has a need for 302 new social homes in the period to 2021 with Armagh City and Lurgan each having a need for 100 units and Banbridge 50 units.

Our Assets

As at 1 April 2017 we owned and managed 1,104 homes. The large majority of these were family-sized properties including 548 (49.6%) two bedroomed units and 389 (35.2%) three bedroomed units. There are only 7 (0.6%) bedsit units in the total. Supported housing accounts for 0.5% (50 units) of our stock.

Turnover during 2016/17 was in excess of £6.2 million generating a surplus of almost £795,000 on ordinary activities (12.7%).

The Regulatory framework

The Regulatory Framework for Registered Social Housing Providers (RSHPs) in Northern Ireland sets out the expectation that Boards ensure standards are met in three key areas:



Governance – including robust risk management processes;



Financial – including the mechanisms in place to protect assets and public funds, financial planning and assumptions;



Consumer – focuses on tenants, considering tenant involvement, complaints, services, and understanding tenants' needs.

Our Strategic Objectives are deliberately aligned to the regulatory framework. This provides positive assurance that our day-to-day approach to managing the organisation will also ensure compliance with all seven regulatory standards. These are outlined on the following page.



GOVERNANCE

Governance Standard 1 – Social housing providers shall ensure effective governance arrangements that deliver their aims, objectives and intended outcomes for tenants and potential tenants in an effective, transparent and accountable manner.

Governance Standard 2 – Social housing providers shall adopt a robust approach to the assessment and management of risk and demonstrate informed and transparent decision-making processes.

FINANCIAL

Financial Standard 1 – Social housing providers shall manage their resources effectively to ensure financial viability is maintained in the short, medium and longer term.

Financial Standard 2 – Social housing providers shall articulate and deliver a comprehensive and strategic approach to achieving value for money in meeting their organisation's objectives.

CONSUMER

Consumer Standard 1 – Social housing providers manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Consumer Standard 2 – Social housing providers shall provide 'Decent Homes' standard accommodation with good service quality choices appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants.

Consumer Standard 3 – Social housing providers shall concentrate their efforts to support vibrant communities that encourages tenant opportunities and promotes well-being.

Value for money

Value for money is one of our strategic objectives and a key requirement of the regulatory framework. We are aware that this has, in the past, been an area for improvement for SUHA. We will therefore, as a priority, develop a Value for Money Strategy and action plan which will examine all aspects of the business with a view to delivering cashable and non-cashable improvements in value for money (see **strategic objective 4** on page 13).

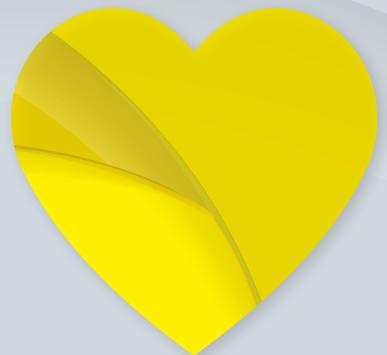
Gearing

We recognise the vital importance of not exceeding our loan covenants in relation to interest, asset cover and debt per unit. We will identify minimum cover limits and maximum debt per property limits to allow for a safety margin and report performance against these on a six monthly basis to Board.

6.

Our Strategic Objectives

– the golden thread



1

Place our 'tenants' voice' at the heart of our organisation

SUHA are committed to making a positive difference to our tenants and their local communities – being more than just a landlord.

To do this we need to improve our understanding of what is important to our tenants. By delivering better and more responsive services we will reduce waste and drive higher tenant satisfaction.

We want to develop new ways to ensure tenants can make their voices heard and have a real say in the running of their association.

We will adopt a tenant participation strategy which will provide the road map to achieve our objectives and meet regulatory expectations.

We want to create a representative tenant 'voice' through the recruitment of tenant Board members and developing the role of Tenants Panel. In future, the Panel will become more directly involved in scrutiny of service performance and scheme inspections.

We want to develop the capacity and capability of tenants to drive service development and delivery. To this end, the Tenants Panel will have ongoing support and training in organising meetings and delivery of scrutiny work including value for money efficiency reviews.

We will embed tenant involvement in our governance for example, by ensuring regular reports from Tenants Panel to Board. This will ensure that tenants' views are always taken into account when considering changes to strategies, policies and plans.

When we review our services, we will include tenants in the review itself and seek to take their views into account when reshaping services.

Our service delivery will be subject to tenant satisfaction monitoring, mystery shopping and complaints monitoring so that we can be alerted in a timely way to problems of either quality or performance.

SUHA also will work to improve our understanding of our tenants. We will routinely collect information about our tenants so that we can shape our services to meet tenants' needs and ensure everyone is treated fairly

We also want to improve communication to ensure all tenants know how we are performing and can provide feedback. This will include improvements to our website, social media presence and branding.



2

Demonstrate excellent governance and live our values in everything we do

Governance is key to our future success. Our Board of Management has worked collaboratively with the senior management team to set the strategic direction for SUHA laid out in this plan.

The Board of Management and the senior management team will work together to establish stronger performance and risk management arrangements.

Going forwards, we will ensure that we demonstrate excellence in governance through the recruitment, training and development of a high calibre Board of Management, supported by an effective senior management team.

The roles and responsibilities of Board, Chair, Committees and Chief Executive will be clearly identified and maintained.

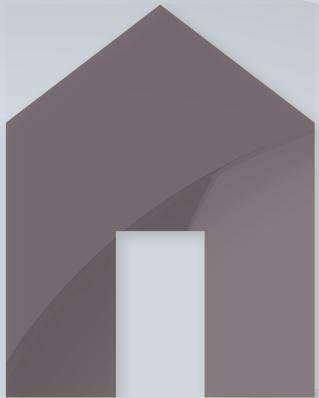
In the past, we recognise that the Board of Management has at times spent too much time on operational rather than strategic issues. To drive improvement in our governance we will undertake annual skills audits and appraisals of all Board members. In this way we can ensure that all have the necessary understanding and skills to deliver appropriate scrutiny and demonstrate good governance.

The Board is supported by three Committees – a Finance and Corporate Performance Committee, a Property Services Committee and an Audit and Risk Committee. They are tasked with ensuring that there is full oversight of financial viability, operational effectiveness and risk management. Of particular importance will be a detailed, rolling programme of internal audit.

The Board will be supported by an experienced senior management team led by the Chief Executive.

We will continue to demonstrate our governance credentials through regulatory returns to the Department for Communities that are accurate and delivered in a timely manner.

As stated earlier our values are very important to us. We want our values to inform what and how we do things at every level at SUHA. From how we are led and governed to how we manage performance and recruit new staff.



3

Build and maintain **high-quality homes** that meet the **long-term needs** of tenants

We will continue to grow through our current and future development pipeline, including acquisition opportunities across Northern Ireland.

We will identify suitable development sites and build/acquire through off-the-shelf-purchase a minimum of 50 new homes for rent per annum over the next five years.

The way we propose to do this will be laid out in our Development Strategy that will identify the preferred locations for new housing based on an assessment of housing need.

We will also define our design standards. To ensure future sustainability we will incorporate where appropriate the Lifetime Homes standard and enhanced environmental standards.

We will also ensure that all homes, new and existing, are properly maintained, providing efficient and effective solutions for:

- **Responsive maintenance** – day-to-day and void repairs;
- **Cyclical maintenance** – gas, electrical and external decoration maintenance;
- **Planned maintenance** – programmed replacements to ensure that all homes retain decent homes standards.

We will ensure that the maintenance needs of the stock are addressed strategically through our Asset Management Strategy. This will identify the maintenance needs of the stock based on robust stock condition survey data.

We will also look at the quality and financial performance of all our assets on a regular basis to ensure that they remain fit-for-purpose and meet the future needs of tenants based on projected demographic changes.

We will take action to address any shortcomings for example, through additional investment, changes to management arrangements, remodelling, demolition and redevelopment or disposal.



4

Deliver great services that provide good value for money

SUHA, like others in our sector, need to demonstrate to our tenants and regulator that we are delivering great services that provide good value for money.

We know that to deliver against this objective we need to continuously improve what and how we do things.

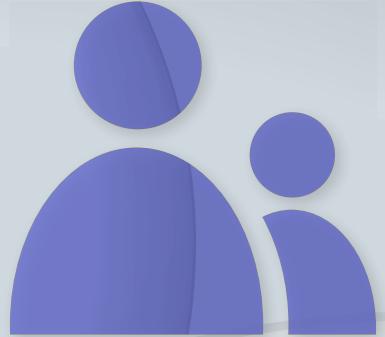
Over the life of this strategy we will look at how we can improve the way we deliver services, focussing on achieving the optimum balance between costs and quality including customer satisfaction.

Our approach will be set out in our value for money plan but in principle will focus on areas where costs and outcomes including levels of tenant satisfaction vary from our own service standards or peer benchmarks.

We will conduct efficiency reviews to demonstrate value for money from services and identify ways we can improve service efficiency and quality.

Our plan will set targets for cashable and non-cashable savings. Performance will be scrutinised by the Finance and Corporate Performance Committee with an annual report to the Board.

We will continue our membership of the Abacus Procurement Group so that we can take advantage of volume discounts in our purchasing decisions. We will also look positively at other ways to improve value for money through partnership working.



5

Help to support vibrant and sustainable communities where people can build better lives.

SUHA play an important role in ‘place-shaping’. We are committed to ensuring that all our homes and neighbourhoods continue to be safe and well maintained.

However, we want to go further – to create places that feel welcoming and where people want and feel proud to live.

We recognise that SUHA cannot deliver our ambitions alone. Our investment in homes and neighbourhoods can make a difference. However, to build communities where people want to live and work can only be addressed by working with partners with whom we share common objectives.

We need to work with others both at a strategic and operational level drawing on their knowledge, experience and capacity to deliver more together.

Foremost in our current partnership arrangements are those with our contractors, the regulator and our lenders.

SUHA will also continue to work positively with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. We also want to work with the councils and in particular Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

We will also ensure that existing relationships with our Joint Managing Partners, Praxis Care and Northern Ireland Inspire Wellbeing, for supported housing are maintained.

Similarly, we will continue to develop our partnership arrangements with Wade Training (provision of training for tenants), APAC (for vulnerable families) and BCM Housing Support (for older tenants) and Citizens Advice (for debt advice).

8.

Our Corporate Plan 2018-23

This strategy will be delivered through a five year Corporate Plan which will be linked to the association's business plan and which will deliver our golden thread objectives.

The plan will be an active document which will be reviewed each year alongside the Business Plan so that it can be used to track delivery as well as reflecting the need for change in a rapidly changing business environment.

Appendix A - **Our Board and Executive Team**

Board of Management

Colin McCusker (Chair) *

Faye Aiken	Jim Haslam
Sam Bryans**	Rory McClelland
Angela Clarke	John Nevin
Pauline Flynn**	Richard Redman

Alan Whitten
*The role Chair rotates
every 3 years

**Co-Opted

Senior Management Team

Kieran Matthews (Chief Executive)

John Conlon, Head of Finance
Joanne Coyle, Head of Housing
Joe Donnelly, Head of Property Services
James Wright, Head of Development



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Charity Commission NI Registration Number NIC102344