

Supporting Communities NI
Consolidated Group Accounts
Company Limited by Guarantee
Financial Statements
31 March 2024

Finegan Gibson Ltd
Chartered accountant & statutory auditor
Causeway Tower
9 James Street South
Belfast
BT2 8DN

Supporting Communities NI

Company Limited by Guarantee

Financial Statements

Year ended 31 March 2024

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Supporting Communities NI

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Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name	Supporting Communities NI
Charity registration number	NIC100005
Company registration number	NI026765
Principal office and registered office	The Hatchery NI Unit 19 Antrim Enterprise 58 Greystone Road Antrim BT41 1JZ

The trustees

Lorraine Campbell	
James Whitten	(Resigned 7 December 2023)
Basil Davidson	(Resigned 7 December 2023)
Siobhan Mullan	(Resigned 7 December 2023)
Linda Watson	(Resigned 7 December 2023)
Caroline Farrar	(Appointed 26 October 2023)
David Maher	(Appointed 26 October 2023)
Joanne Vance	(Appointed 21 March 2024)
Ivan Armstrong	
Ian McCrickard	(Appointed 21 March 2024)
Justin Cartwright	
Jillian Strain	(Resigned 21 July 2023)
Karen Rodgers	
Kathleen Foster	(Appointed 1 June 2023)
David Lamb	
Anthony Kerr	
James Ripley	

Company secretary Colm McDaid

Auditor Finegan Gibson Ltd
Chartered accountant & statutory auditor
Causeway Tower
9 James Street South
Belfast
BT2 8DN

Bankers Ulster Bank
49 Wellington Street
Ballymena
BT43 6AD

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Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2024.

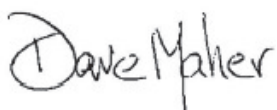
Chair's report

Introduction: A Message from Our Chair

As the newly appointed chair of Supporting Communities, I am pleased to present this annual report. Looking back on the past year, I would first like to thank all the staff and my fellow board members for welcoming me and supporting me in my new role, especially the outgoing Chair Lorraine Campbell, who has served this organisation faithfully for nine years. Lorraine deserves recognition for taking us through a transitional period to get us where we are today, a forward-looking organisation ready to grow and diversify to better meet the needs of our communities. Her mentorship has made it possible for me, a social housing tenant with no previous board experience, to step into this leadership position. I hope to emulate her example and take Supporting Communities to new levels of achievement.

Our current strategic plan (2022-25) says we will think bigger and better about the future. At the core of our work, we empower communities to create diverse and inclusive places where people are proud to live. This means continuing to drive our own performance and transformation to a thoroughly modern organisation fit for the future that cultivates talent to take on leadership roles both within SC and in community development and tenant participation all over Ireland. We want to be seen as leaders in this space throughout the island, and we will strive to build our offer through our trading arm (Empowering Communities Enterprise Ltd). This year has seen much progress on all those goals, as shown in the report below.

As I get to grips with my new role as Chair, I have been visiting our staff and the projects they work with around the province, and I am genuinely humbled to be part of such a fantastic team. Supporting Communities has continued to develop our range of services while building new and maintaining existing partnerships with other organisations, recognising that collaboration maximises our effectiveness. We have outperformed in many areas of our work. We are especially pleased to have maintained our accreditation for excellence in customer service because our relationship with our customers, supporting and empowering them, is why we do what we do.



Dave Maher
Chair

Supporting Communities NI

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Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Structure, governance and management

Nature of Governing Document

Supporting Communities NI is a company limited by guarantee and is also a registered charity. For the purposes of charity law, the Directors are Trustees of the Charity.

Organisations Structure

The company is governed by an Executive Board of up to a maximum of 15 members, which meets on a quarterly basis. It delegates certain matters to two sub-committees, namely the Finance, Audit and Risk Sub-Committee and the Governance, Remuneration and Disciplinary Sub-Committee, which also meet on a quarterly basis. A formal Planning Control Framework covering the Executive Board, the Sub-Committee and the Executive Officers of the company is in place.

The Directors of the company are appointed at the Annual General Meeting for a 3-year term of office with a third of Directors standing down each year in rotation. Members are eligible to stand for re-election.

The Executive Board undertook a comprehensive review of the company's activities going forward and developed a Strategic Plan 2022/25, which sets out its overall vision, mission, and values to inform its business development priorities for the next three years.

Our Mission, Values and Priorities

Supporting Communities NI overall vision is for 'empowered communities that are engaged, confident, sustainable, diverse and inclusive' and its mission is to 'deliver independent, high quality, flexible and innovative support to communities, stakeholders and public agencies'. In delivering these objectives Supporting Communities NI will be governed by values which promote Ambitions, Excellence, Inclusion, Openness and Understanding.

Supporting Communities NI strategic priorities are;

- Diversify and deliver professional, high-quality services for communities and for stakeholders
- Grow and sustain the organisation
- Market services and gain recognition for the critical work of the organisation
- Provide independent support to all tenures (including PRS)
- Empower staff to empower communities
- Establish a profitable subsidiary

Alongside these Strategic Priorities and Annual Business Plan a related Action Plan has been developed, smart targets identified and the Board undertakes regular review of the progress towards achieving these objectives.

Supporting Communities NI

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Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Objectives and activities

The principal activities of the charity are the relief of hardship and the advancement of community development, education and skills of members of socially and economically disadvantaged communities in Northern Ireland.

Supporting Communities is an independent charitable organisation that champions tenant and community participation by developing groups, supporting active citizenship, and building cohesive communities.

We promote best practice in community participation in Northern Ireland through a grassroots approach to community development, providing tailored support, advice, information, and training to new and existing community groups, statutory and voluntary organisations.

We work to empower society through engaged, confident, sustainable, and inclusive communities.

Our team of 26 staff members work throughout Northern Ireland.

Our Community Development Officers based throughout the province work directly with individuals and groups to enable their full participation in their communities.

Our Corporate Services team provides specialist help to groups and other third-sector organisations through funding support and advice, training on a range of community development topics and building digital skills and confidence.

The Administrative Team keeps everything running smoothly for our staff and the groups we serve through PAYE support, surveys, and other correspondence.

Public Benefit

The Trustees confirm that they have complied with the requirements of section 4 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 to have due regard to the public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Supporting Communities NI has a long history of championing community participation by developing community groups, supporting active citizenship and building cohesive communities at a grassroots level across Northern Ireland. We see our primary role as helping to establish, train and support those community groups who are most in need of our help and support.

As the only independent tenant engagement body in the social housing sector operating on the island of Ireland, Supporting Communities NI delivers essential services to all sectors of the community at the highest level without prejudice. Supporting Communities NI is also the Independent Tenant Organisation for Northern Ireland, as appointed by the Department for Communities in February 2017, to assist in the delivery of the Department's TP Strategy for NI 2015-2020.

As a community development organisation, Supporting Communities NI has a portfolio of over 500 community groups which are supported in various ways across Northern Ireland. This support role ensures communities play a vital role in their own communities, making sure their voices are heard.

Supporting Communities NI

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Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance

Grassroots Community Development

We work directly with community and resident groups throughout Northern Ireland to ensure they can fully participate in matters which affect their lives and build the future they want to see. In practice, this is a range of services, including helping new groups form, constitute themselves, and become self-sufficient, sustainable and productive for the betterment of their local area.

This year, we provided support to 557 community groups, including 29 new groups in under-represented areas.

Improving Quality of Life: Inter-agency Working

Supporting Communities helps residents' groups take an inter-agency approach to identify problems and find solutions in a co-ordinated way.

In 2023-24, we facilitated and supported 108 Inter-Agency meetings between community groups, the Housing Executive, the PSNI, Councils, the Department for Infrastructure, and any other body that needed to be included to make the changes needed at a local community and estate level.

We also facilitated 125 Estate Inspections across all 13 Housing Executive Areas, supporting residents to ensure their communities are well maintained and looked after.

The Housing Community Network

Supporting Communities continued facilitating the Housing Executive's hugely important engagement framework at all tiers of the HCN throughout 2023-24.

The HCN is the largest tenant engagement structure in Northern Ireland, comprising approximately 500+ community groups across Northern Ireland and representative tenant involvement panels in each of the Housing Executive Areas of housing management.

Last year, we convened 197 meetings of the Housing Community Network, including Central, Regional and Area level meetings.

HCN Online Members Forum

The Online Members Forum is the new digital home for the Housing Community Network, where members can access meeting agendas, minutes, and other documents. We have been working with groups across the country to support them to use the forum and make it their own.

The Housing Executive created it to streamline the network's resource sharing and meeting management, ensuring a secure and dedicated space for our community.

Our Digital Inclusion Officer held 34 registration and learning sessions with 249 attendees in the past year, ensuring everyone can navigate the new system opening the door to cross-borough collaboration. There are now 350 people using online forums.

Supporting Communities NI

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Year ended 31 March 2024

Good Governance: Charity Commission Support

Supporting Communities is a member of the Developing Governance Group, a group of charity sector support organisations dedicated to helping voluntary and community organisations comply with best practice and their statutory obligations.

We support community organisations in developing good governance and complying with the Charity Commission's regulations. In 2023/24, we supported 45 groups to register with the Charity Commission.

Supporting Communities are also part of the Charity Commission NI Stakeholder Forum, along with a range of other Charities from across NI.

The Charity Commission Stakeholder Engagement Forum is an important avenue through which the charity sector can engage directly with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. The forum enables the Commission to regularly communicate with a representative group of charity stakeholders to ensure the sector's views are considered in developing the Commission's work.

Training Courses

Supporting Communities offers a range of training both in person and online to suit the needs of community groups and organisations that we support and serve.

We specialise in topics that help groups to sustain and improve their work in the community, such as:

- Good Governance
- Impact Measurement
- Completing Funding Applications
- Effective Meetings
- Reporting to the Charity Commission NI
- Tenant Participation

We also deliver OCN NI-accredited courses at various levels, including Community Capacity Building and Community Development.

Some numbers from our training programme for the year included:

- 6 OCN courses were delivered to 42 learners with a 98% satisfaction rating
- 81 training courses delivered to 733 participants

Digital Inclusion: Essential Skills

We provide basic digital skills courses to individuals and community groups, focusing on older people and rural communities in Northern Ireland. We have trained almost 4,000 people since the project started.

Supporting Communities also assisted with Safer Internet Day and Get Online Week events in partnership with Go ON NI and the Department of Finance.

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Year ended 31 March 2024

Funding Support and Social Value

Supporting Communities' Funding Service informs groups of the most up-to-date and relevant funding sources and guides them through the overall fundraising process.

Our Funding and Social Value Officer and our Community Development Officers helped groups access just over £1million in funding in 2023-24.

We supported 142 funding applications, of which 130 were successful, a success rate of 92%, impressive by anyone's standards.

We also held 10 funding fairs across the country where groups could meet the funders and discuss their projects face-to-face.

Scholarships

We are proud to have facilitated four scholarship opportunities last year through partnerships with both The Gallaher Trust and The James Kane Foundation.

These four exceptional young people were able to go to university to pursue STEM degrees last year, thanks to these scholarship opportunities.

We are thrilled to be continuing both programmes in 2024 and hopefully beyond.

New Tenant Advocate Appointed

Supporting Communities, as the Independent Tenant Organisation, has regularly convened the Housing Policy Panel since its inception, working with the members to develop their capacity to engage with decision-makers. We will continue to support them as they advocate for a new, more robust Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The Housing Policy Panel (HPP) made positive progress and news this year by taking their message to the All-Party Working Group on Housing in September 2023.

Patricia McQuillan, the new Chair of the HPP and Tenant Advocate for Northern Ireland, presented an overview of the Panel's work since its creation in 2017. She spoke about her new role and the importance of having a representative of the Tenants' voice at the table where decisions that affect them are being made.

Net Zero

This past year, we brought on board an Ulster University student placement into our staff team to kick-start our Net Zero journey by developing a long-term plan for our organisation to become net zero, as well as educating our board and staff on what that means for us moving forward, including the drafting of a new Net Zero Policy for the organisation.

Raising the Standard of Tenant Participation in Northern Ireland

In 2023-24 our trading subsidiary, Empowering Communities, added new members now totalling 24 member organisations across the island of Ireland.

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Year ended 31 March 2024

We held our first All-Ireland Tenant Engagement Conference, held on 13th June in the Carrickdale Hotel, which brought together tenant participation experts, social housing providers and involved tenants and community members from all over Ireland and further afield to discuss ways to empower tenants and build stronger communities.

The Tenant Participation Practitioners Network (TPPN) provided staff from Housing Associations and Approved Housing Bodies, involved in tenant engagement work, to come together to share good practice. The group also shared resources and materials online in an exclusive 'member only' section of our website.

We delivered training to 372 participants across the island of Ireland with a satisfaction rate of 99%. 49 of these participants gained an OCN NI accreditation.

We took our consultancy services to the next level this past year by stepping in to fill a staffing gap working alongside the Rural Housing Association on their Shared Housing Programme (Housing for All) in Sion Mills.

SC Publications

Our popular E-Zine newsletter, curated by our staff team, with relevant news and information from across the sector specifically for our core audience of community and resident groups was published fortnightly and distributed to over 1600 recipients and reached even more in its online form.

SCENE Magazine was published twice during the year, highlighting our work, and our monthly Funding Bulletin continues to be a hotly anticipated dispatch.

Increased Reach & Raised Profile

We have continued to grow our social media presence organically with no paid advertising. In a world of fickle algorithms, we are pleased to report a growth across social media channels, especially on LinkedIn, where cross-border interest is continuing to flourish.

Financial review

The total turnover for the year was £1,306,068 compared to (2023: £1,361,600). There was a net deficit of £16,676 on operating activities. The revaluation of the pension fund liabilities produced a deficit of £184,418 in the year giving a total net deficit of £201,094. The overall funds at 31 March 2024 were £535,803 with £15,449 held as restricted funds and £520,354 as unrestricted funds.

As a registered charity no taxation is payable on the activities undertaken in the year.

Supporting Communities NI

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Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Financial review *(continued)*

Policy on Reserves

In formulating an assessment on the level of reserves the following guidelines provided by the Charity Commission have been used:

- Current and anticipated income and expenditure levels
- The organisations lack of any other tangible assets (such as a building)
- Current and projected funding patterns
- The notice and redundancy requirements associated with the employees
- The programmes/services that the organisation plans to deliver in the period covered by the Strategic Plan

Based on the above guidelines the directors therefore aim to have an operating reserve equal to six months operating cost which based on year ended 31st March 2024 is £611,323.

As shown on the Balance Sheet Reserves are £512,081 after accounting for the deficit on the pension fund of £184,418 (2023: £4,960) which represents the current value of the annual payments into the fund over the recovery period of 8 years.

Given the changing pension fund position on an annual basis as a result of various factors including actuarial assumptions, market conditions etc the Trustees also consider the level of cash reserves against their target operating reserve. The cash reserves as at 31 March 2024 are £518,386 (2023: £506,056).

While Supporting Communities NI Trustees believe that this level of cash reserves provides sufficient confidence that the company is a going concern, and the accounts have been prepared on that basis, the Trustees are also conscious that the level of cash reserve held at the end of this reporting period is below the Charity's Reserve Policy of holding a cash reserve of at least six months operating cost.

Acknowledging the current cash reserve position, the Trustees feel it important to make clear that the Charity does indeed hold the necessary cash reserve to meet, first and foremost, any employee contractual requirements should notices to terminate employment need to be served along with meeting any other service contracts which the Charity currently holds.

It is also worth noting that Supporting Communities NI Trustees will be looking to its trading subsidiary (Empowering Communities) to help supplement the cash reserve amount held at the end of the next financial reporting period through the use of gift aid of any profits generated by Empowering Communities in 2023/24. Coupled with any other unrestricted income that the Charity can generate in the year ahead, it is the expressed intention of Trustees to move ever closer to the Charity's Reserve Policy guideline figure of six months operation cost amount by 31st March 2025.

Pay Policy

The pay of Supporting Communities NI staff is reviewed annually in accordance with National Joint Council Awards.

Supporting Communities NI

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Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

Plans for future periods

Aims and key objectives for future periods

The company plans to continue developing its services in line with its Strategic Priorities outlined above and it will seek to develop collaborative partnerships with a range of external agencies, including fellow VCSE sector organisations, statutory and private sector as well. Fund arrangements will be kept under review in relation to demand for service improvements and constraints on public expenditure.

Risk Management

The Executive Board has conducted an ongoing review of the major risks to which the company is exposed, and a Risk Management policy is in place to identify, monitor and control those risks. A Business Continuity Plan along with Cyber Security procedures are incorporated in the risk management process. External risks to funding the organisation are addressed within the strategic business plan and are kept under review on an ongoing basis through reports to both the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Sub-Committee and to the full Supporting Communities Board.

The liability related to the Northern Ireland Charities Pension Scheme is subject to an actuarial valuation on a triennial basis. The valuation undertaken in September 2022 showed a deficit of £3.2m (for the scheme as a whole). The Trustees of Supporting Communities are confident that the Reserve policy set out above provides sufficient assurance that the pension deficit recovery payments can be met as they fall due on an annual basis.

An independent audit of the company's financial statements has been carried out and an unqualified audit opinion has been given in respect of those statements.

Trustees' responsibilities statement

The trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the charity trustees to prepare financial statements for each year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the applicable Charities SORP;
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

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Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Auditor

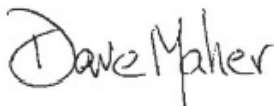
Each of the persons who is a trustee at the date of approval of this report confirms that:

- so far as they are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditor is unaware; and
- they have taken all steps that they ought to have taken as a trustee to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditor is aware of that information.

Small company provisions

This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies entitled to the small companies exemption.

The trustees' annual report was approved on 5th December 2024 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:



Dave Maher
Trustee



David Lamb
Trustee