

Supporting Communities NI
Consolidated Group Accounts
Company Limited by Guarantee
Financial Statements
31 March 2025

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 2025

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

Year ended 31 March 2025

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 2025.

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	(Resigned 5 December 2025)
Bronagh Magee	(Appointed 13 November 2025)
Caroline Farrar	
David Maher	(Resigned 20 March 2025)
Joanne Vance	
Ivan Armstrong	
Ian McCrickard	
Sean O'Connor	(Appointed 13 November 2024, (Resigned 10 September 2025)
Justin Cartwright	
Karen Rodgers	
Kathleen Foster	
David Lamb	(Resigned 27 February 2025)
Anthony Kerr	(Resigned 5 December 2025)
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

Supporting Communities NI

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

Year ended 31 March 2025

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 2025.

Chair's report

Introduction: A Message from Our Chair

As the new Chair of Supporting Communities, I am pleased to present this annual report.

This has been a busy and productive year for the charity, and I am pleased to be part of an organisation making such a tangible difference. The dedication of our staff and the impact of their work in communities continues to impress me. It is, therefore, particularly pleasing to see this recognised both through the excellent feedback provided from our CSE re-accreditation and pleasing results from our user surveys.

One statistic that particularly stands out to me is our success in helping community groups secure over £1.2 million in funding for various projects across N Ireland. This demonstrates the very real value we bring to the communities we serve, and the trust placed in us by the groups we support.

Special thanks to our funders, particularly the Housing Executive, who have committed to a three-year funding cycle from 2025/26. The certainty this provides ensures we, as a Board and senior staff team, can plan effectively for the future.

I would also like to thank my fellow Board members for their continued commitment over the last year, with special thanks to our previous Chair, Dave Maher. I'm proud to support the vital work of Supporting Communities and look forward to the opportunities ahead as we embark on our new strategic plan.



Ian McCrickard,
Chair of the Board

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Year ended 31 March 2025

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 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. No person may serve more than 9 continuous terms of office as a Director.

The Executive Board undertook a comprehensive review of the company's activities going forward and has developed a Strategic Plan 2025/2030 which sets out its overall vision, mission and values to inform its business development priorities for the next five years.

Supporting Communities NI's vision; is for 'thriving, inclusive, sustainable communities' and its mission is to 'provide hands-on support and expertise to local communities, enabling them to bring about positive change in their neighbourhoods'.

In delivering these objectives Supporting Communities NI will be governed by values which promote Participation, Inclusiveness, Empowerment, Sustainability, Independence and Agility.

Supporting Communities NI strategic themes are.

- Strengthened and Valued Community Voices
- Support Sustainable Communities
- A Sustainable and Resilient Organisation

Alongside these Strategic themes, an Annual Business Plan has been developed, smart targets identified. The Board undertakes regular review of the progress towards achieving these objectives.

The Supporting Communities Team

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.

The staff

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

The Corporate Services team provides specialist help to groups and other third-sector organisations

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Year ended 31 March 2025

Structure, governance and management *(continued)*

through the provision of funding support and advice, training on a range of community development topics as well as building digital skills and confidence within the communities we serve and support. The Finance and Administrative Team manages the organisation's financial resources and governance whilst supporting the staff team internally.

Customer Service Standards

We are pleased to report that our ongoing survey of customer service standards has yielded excellent results. A random sample of contacts each month report that they are extremely happy with the standard of service they received from our staff.

- out of a possible 5 stars, we received a 4.88 rating for helpfulness, respect, and courtesy
- 97% of respondents said their message was answered promptly
- When asked if they would recommend us to a friend or colleague, 90% of survey respondents said 'yes'.

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.

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 NI. 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 the Independent Tenant Organisation for Northern Ireland, appointed by the Department for Communities in February 2017 and has regularly convened the Housing Policy Panel (HPP), working with the members to develop their capacity to engage with decision-makers.

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.

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Year ended 31 March 2025

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 respective communities.

This year, we provided support to 566 community groups, including 39 new groups identified and developed in previously 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 2024-25, we facilitated and supported 154 Inter-Agency/Housing Forum meetings between community groups, the Housing Executive, the PSNI, Councils, the Department for Infrastructure, and any other body required to make the changes needed at a local community and estate level, improving housing and environmental issues in estates, leading to a sense of pride, well-being and increased ownership among the residents

We also facilitated 135 Estate Inspections across all 13 Housing Executive Areas, supporting residents to ensure their communities are well maintained and looked after.

The Housing Community Network

The Housing Community Network is the key community engagement structure that we facilitate in collaboration with our partner, the Housing Executive and some 566 community groups throughout Northern Ireland.

Last year, we convened 208 meetings of the Housing Community Network, including Central, Regional and Area level meetings resulting in 383 sets of minutes.

The HCN Online Members Forum

The Online Members Forum serves as the digital hub for the Housing Community Network, where members can access meeting agendas, minutes, and other relevant documents. We have been working with groups across the country to support them to use the forum and make it their own. In 2024-25 we trained 256 members to use this online resource.

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

With our support, the number of members on the HCN online digital forum has increased to 420 registered users.

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.

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Year ended 31 March 2025

We support community organisations in developing good governance and complying with the Charity Commission's regulations. In 2024-25, we provided 36 support sessions to help groups register with the Charity Commission NI.

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 NI. 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.

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 53 learners with a 98% satisfaction rating
- 60 training courses delivered to 622 participants

Digital Inclusion

Older people living in rural areas are at risk of lacking the basic digital skills necessary to stay connected, informed, and independent. With limited access to in-person services, digital literacy enables them to manage online banking, book medical appointments, stay in touch with family and friends, and participate fully in life!

Through our partnership with GoON NI, we continue to support people throughout Northern Ireland to develop their digital skills, ensuring they are not left behind in an increasingly digital world.

We offer basic digital skills courses to individuals and community groups, with a focus on older people and rural communities in Northern Ireland. We have trained 4,448 people since the project started.

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

Funding Support and Social Value

Supporting Communities' Funding Support Service informs groups of the most up-to-date and relevant

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Year ended 31 March 2025

funding sources and guides them through the overall fundraising process.

The Funding and Social Value Officer, along with Community Development Officers, helped groups access a total of just over £1.2 million in funding last year.

We supported 182 funding applications, of which 172 were successful at a 94.5% success rate. We also held or attended five 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.

Four exceptional young people were able to attend university to pursue STEM degrees last year, thanks to these scholarship opportunities. We are delighted to be continuing both programmes in 2025.

BT Digital Voice Project

We have been working with BT to help inform residents about the upcoming digital switchover. Our digital team has been on the road, visiting libraries and community groups throughout Northern Ireland, to raise awareness about the change and ensure that older and vulnerable people know where to turn for assistance should they need it.

By the end of March 2025, our team had successfully delivered 101 sessions, reaching over 1,200 participants at various community events and gathered insights from more than 800 surveyed participants.

Elevate Programme

We took part in the Community Development & Health Network's (CDHN) Elevate programme for 2024-2025, providing mentoring support to organisations tackling health inequalities.

Our CDO's worked closely with CDHN to support five groups: Breastival, Flourish NI, Here NI, iassistni, and Swift Hearers Ministries.

Each group received funding to support their projects and attended mentoring sessions and 3 very well-received joint networking events.

Our mentoring sessions helped these groups to develop individual action plans and identify ways that Supporting Communities could support their growth, such as further networking opportunities, signposting, engagement with local networks, and support in reaching 'hard-to-reach' clients.

Housing Policy Panel

The Housing Policy Panel has continued to act in a consultative forum to the Department for Communities focusing on social housing related matters. The Panel has grown their influence at a strategic level which is demonstrated by participation in meetings with Ministers and the Department for Communities.

The panel continues to advocate for an updated version of the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland, one that will help move tenant engagement to the 'next level' for all social housing tenants in Northern Ireland for the next 10 years.

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Year ended 31 March 2025

In our role as the Independent Tenant Organisation for Northern Ireland, Supporting Communities convenes regular meetings with the HPP, working with the members to develop their capacity to engage with decision-makers, particularly Department for Communities colleagues.

SC Publications

Our popular E-Zine newsletter, curated by our staff team, provided 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 online twice during the year, highlighting our work, and our monthly Funding Bulletin continues to be a much-anticipated dispatch.

Raising the Standard of Tenant Participation in Northern Ireland

Empowering Communities currently has 24 member organisations from across the island of Ireland, north and south.

The Tenant Participation Practitioners Network (TPPN) provided housing professionals across Ireland from both Housing Associations and Approved Housing Bodies, involved in tenant engagement, an Exclusive networking opportunity to come together to share good practice on a regular basis. It also presented peer learning and collaboration opportunities. The group also shared resources and materials online in an exclusive 'member only' section of our website.

Tenant Participation Accreditation is one of the tools we offer to raise the standard of engagement for tenants across the island of Ireland.

Our assessment framework is designed to provide social landlords with an objective measurement of their Tenant Participation activities.

TP Accreditation provides quality assurance to the Department for Communities and its Regulatory Branch that the Social Landlord's Tenant Participation Strategy is relevant, fit for purpose and aligns with the 10 Principles for Tenant Participation as outlined in the TPS NI (2015-2020).

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 £1,455,913 compared to (2024:£1,306,068). There was a net surplus of £1,425,241 on operating activities. The revaluation of the pension fund liabilities produced a surplus of £2,509 in the year giving a total net surplus of £33,181. The overall funds at 31 March 2025 were £565,173 with £2,713 held as restricted funds and £562,460 as unrestricted funds.

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

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

Year ended 31 March 2025

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 2025 is £712,620.

As shown on the Balance Sheet Reserves are £565,173 after accounting for the deficit on the pension fund of £176,938 (2024: £194,393) 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 2025 are £862,734 (2024: £583,550).

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 notice 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 2025/26. 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 2026.

Pay Policy

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

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Year ended 31 March 2025

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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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 11 December 2025 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:



Ian McCrickard
Trustee