

# FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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The Trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's governing document, the Companies Act 2006 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019).

#### Objectives and activities

First Housing Aid and Support Services (FHASS) is a voluntary sector non-profit making organisation in operation since 1989 (formerly known as Foyle Homeless Action and Advice Service), which provides professional advice on housing in Northern Ireland and solutions to people who find themselves in housing difficulties.

First Housing is committed to providing and developing services that offer a meaningful response to the needs of all homeless people. It is our commitment to ensure that a decent home is within the reach of every family and single person. First Housing continues to play a key role in the much-needed provision of support and accommodation to people in severe housing difficulty throughout Northern Ireland.

First Housing believes that everyone has a fundamental right to a home that is safe, secure and affordable. First Housing responds to the needs of homeless people through initiatives focused towards providing quality accommodation and support. These services are based on preventing individuals and families from becoming homeless in the first place, and the provision of accommodation and support to help ensure individuals achieve the skills they need for them to live independently.

#### Primary Purpose

First Housing was established for the relief of poverty and sickness and the advancement of education, and to establish or promote the establishment within the area of Northern Ireland ('the area of benefit') of a specialist advice service providing information and support for homeless/vulnerable people.

Our **mission** is to respond effectively to the social needs of the community through the provision of high quality temporary accommodation, education and specialist services.

Our **values** are:

**Integrity** - We are ethical, honest and transparent in our decisions and actions.

**Respect** - We honour all people, acknowledge differences and always uphold dignity.

**Hope** - We are inspired by the possibilities for all people to find their strengths and take control of their life choices.

**Compassion** - We genuinely care for others.

**Courage** - We are willing to face challenges and be creative and imaginative in finding solutions.

**Excellence** - We strive to achieve excellence across all our programmes and services.

Our charitable activities are conducted through four main services. Our **Addiction Services** provides accommodation, floating support and specialist outreach services. Our **Floating Support and Resettlement Service** provides support for families, young people and those living independently who may experience difficulties with mental health. Our **Accommodation Services** supports families and young people whilst in temporary accommodation and **Smart Move** provides private rented sector accommodation and tenancy support.



# FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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### Primary Objectives for the Year 2022/23

- Continue to provide high quality supported accommodation with housing related support to people who are homeless across Northern Ireland. We will also ensure quality standards are in place across our projects and services in line with best practice and regulatory requirements.
- Secure funding to continue with refurbishment at Ardmoulin, Jefferson Court and Dillon Court accommodation projects.
- Work to further develop partnerships and working protocols with relevant agencies and organisations across the voluntary, community and statutory sectors.
- Continue to seek long term financial sustainability for our SmartMove Private Rented Sector Accommodation.
- Work to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Floating Support Service and consult with the Housing Executive and Supporting People to deliver models that suit the needs of our users.
- Ensure compliance with compulsory registration requirements of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council on an annual basis and continue with our commitment to Equal Opportunities.

Our long-term commitment is to provide quality services that offer value for money and choice to our service users. We will continue to evaluate our services in conjunction with our service users, offering them a voice and choice as to how services can meet their needs. We will also continue to work towards our strategic goals of **championing early intervention, tackling rough sleeping, supporting young people, promoting the private rented sector and improving the well-being of vulnerable people.**

### Public Benefit

The Trustees have considered the Charity legislation which sets out the requirements for charities to demonstrate the aims and activities are for public benefit. The Trustees confirm that they have had regard to the Charity Commission NI guidance on public benefit.

The direct benefits flowing from our purposes include reduced levels of homelessness and reduced risk of becoming homeless for people that use our services. First Housing responds to the needs of people that are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, through initiatives focused towards providing quality accommodation and support. The benefits to society include an increase in independent living within communities as individuals acquire the skills they need to do so. This is in line with the Strategic Direction of the new Strategy "Ending Homelessness Together 2022-2027".

### Main services provided to further the charity's purposes for public benefit

- Temporary accommodation and specialised housing projects for single person households and families who are homeless.
- Supported housing in the community for people living with mental health issues.
- Specialist accommodation projects for young people leaving care, young parents and people suffering alcohol abuse who are sleeping rough.
- Family Visitor Service in partnership with Western Trust to deliver vital services to Young Parents, especially those whose Children have links to the Trust.
- Deliver accommodation with support for clients waiting permanent public sector housing. Our focus is on safety and security and our temporary accommodation projects are staffed 24/7
- Resettlement and floating support services for young people, families and people with mental health difficulties living in the community.
- Private sector housing and 'Smart Move' Private Sector Access Schemes for people requiring immediate and permanent housing, inclusive of those excluded through legislative frameworks namely The Homeless Persons Order (NI) 1988 amended 2003
- Mediation and tenancy support services for tenants living in the private rented sector.
- Property management and landlord support services.
- Night Support Services and outreach support to rough sleepers and people with chronic alcohol issues in need of help and support.
- Services to provide young people that are homeless helping to target barriers to education, training, and employment.
- Support to those residing in Bed and Breakfast and other dispersed temporary accommodation where no other support is available.



# FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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These services are provided across Northern Ireland by approximately 128 staff members. To measure public benefit, we use a bespoke database system (PSOCC) that allows us to record the individual needs of our service users, the support provided and the outcomes that have been achieved. Our overall ethos is one of prevention and help and support to enable individuals to move successfully into their community of choice and avoid re-occurring homelessness.

#### Volunteers

As an organisation First Housing have valued the contribution made to our services by very dedicated volunteers which in turn enables us to add value to the work we do.

- 2 Volunteers in on an outdoor capacity to help with gardening and grounds maintenance, for a total of 156 hours (Dillon Court),
- 1 Health and Social Care Student Placement for approximately 100 hours (Dillon Court)
- 1 Social Work Placement for a period of 4 months (Shepherd's View)
- 1 Health and Social Care Placement for a period of 6 months (Ramona House)

#### Achievements and performance

##### *Front-Line Delivery*

- *Continue to provide high quality supported accommodation with housing related support to people who are homeless across Northern Ireland.*
- *Work to improve the quality and effectiveness of our Floating Support Service and consult with the Housing Executive and Supporting People to deliver models that suit the needs of our users.*

Throughout the year First Housing continued to provide high quality supported accommodation with housing related support to homeless people across Northern Ireland. We responded to the needs of 5273 individuals in crisis requiring either accommodation, floating support or advice and guidance. We are continuing to experience difficulties moving through our accommodation services. In the main this is due to complexity of need and the fact there is less available move on accommodation at present. Our service continues to support individuals with very complex needs related to benefit changes, mental ill health, and serious addiction issues. As a result of this we have found it necessary to increase the duration of support to people in crisis.

Within our supported accommodation units, we provided accommodation to 574 individuals and families. This allows us to work in partnership with the NIHE (Northern Ireland Housing Executive) to fulfil their statutory duty under The Homeless Persons (NI) Order 1988, as amended 2003.

We have eight accommodation projects:

- Three, based in Belfast, Derry City and Strabane, working with families with a particular focus on children who have been in, or are at risk of being taken into care.
- Two, based in Derry City and Omagh, working with people with drug and alcohol issues; the Derry City Project also has emergency beds and is closely linked to a street outreach service trying to ensure that no one is sleeping out.
- Two based in Derry City working with young people who have high support needs, again quite a number of these have recently left the care system.
- And one that provides a mix of permanent and temporary accommodation also in Strabane. In all, we have 145 units in management.

We have a variety of Floating Support Services based in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Strabane, Omagh, Enniskillen and Limavady. All our Floating Support Services are working over and above their capacity due to a marked increase in referrals. Floating Support Families (including support for those in dispersed accommodation) currently provide support to 299 families at any one time. In the last year, 1,873 families have received support from the service.



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## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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The Youth Accommodation Support Service has a capacity to support 81 young people at any given time. In the last year, the total number supported was 308.

The service for Older People has a capacity of 80 individuals and has dealt with 275 individuals in the past year.

The Floating Support Harm Reduction Team has a capacity of 8 individuals and has dealt with 29 individuals in the past year.

The B&B Floating Support/Complex Needs team has a capacity of 90 and has dealt with 186 cases in the past year.

The Mental Health Resettlement Service is currently in the process of a reconfiguration in consultation with Supporting People and the Trust to expand services to the community. This proposal will offer a hybrid service of Accommodation with support and resettlement support within the community aimed at prevention of homelessness and sustainability of accommodation. The new model would allow more capacity increasing from 18 at present to 30 service users.

The Floating Support Families have been able to deal with the majority of their cases within 2 to 6 months over the past year while the rest of the Floating Support services tend to be working with individuals for longer periods due to the complexity of cases. In some cases, support will be provided for up to 2 years.

There has been an increase in referrals for all services since 2019. There are varying reasons for this. The impact of the Pandemic, the recession, inflation and increasing interest rates, deteriorating mental and physical health within the community, and the pressures in the area of housing and homelessness have all contributed.

Each year 19,000 households present as homeless, requiring a response to their housing need. The statutory homeless acceptance rate is high compared to other areas on the mainland. In 2022 the total number of applicants to the NIHE on the waiting list for social housing was 44,426. Of this number 31,407 were deemed to be in 'housing stress'. This means they had 30 or more points under the social housing selection scheme.

- *Further develop partnerships and working protocols with relevant agencies and organisations across the voluntary, community and statutory sectors.*

First Housing continues to work in partnership under the Public Health Agenda with 2 agencies, Arc and De Paul, to deliver low threshold services to people in the community who are impacted by Alcohol and who have acute and complex needs. Our Harm Reduction Service continues to meet people "where they are at" to help them to reduce the harms associated with addiction.

Our staff are active members of the local area Drug and Alcohol Coordination Teams. First Housing is also represented on NIHE Homelessness Strategy Forum, NIHE Client Reference Group which looks at the needs of service users and service delivery and NIHE Operations Group led by Homeless Connect which lends itself to learning and achievement of good practice throughout the sector. Through these partnerships staff members continue to have a valued input into advocating and influencing policy and practice as well as ensuring quality service delivery.

- *Seek long term financial sustainability for our Smart Move Private Rented Sector Accommodation*

SmartMove had a total of 294 tenancies during the period 2019-2020. The existing stock of properties and new ones being added allow us to create an additional 60-70 tenancies each year.

We are grateful to the Oak Foundation for their continued support which has allowed us to move closer to a position in which this project is self-sustaining.

We were also delighted to win another award in 2023 from the Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) Award for Excellence in the Private Rented Sector to add to the award we won in 2022.



# FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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- *Ensure compliance with compulsory registration requirements of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council*

We continue to comply with compulsory registration for all relevant staff with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

### Significant Factors

We continue to concentrate on maintaining and developing our services. While the worst of the Covid-19 Pandemic is over; experts say, that in terms of the known strains of the virus, we can expect 'bad years' of Covid infections and, on average, everyone who has experience of the virus will catch it repeatedly every four or five years.

The continuing appearance of new strains of the virus suggest that we will need to stay on our guard for the foreseeable future and there is still a very real concern that it is exceedingly difficult to predict what may happen in the future.

Over the past few years, we have had to work very quickly to adapt to the changing circumstances to continue to meet the needs of our service users. Our staff and board of trustees have shown considerable flexibility and embraced modern technologies and ways of working in exceedingly difficult circumstances. We will continue to maintain a state of readiness and explore all opportunities to be as effective as possible with our response.

With the continuing pressures of inflation and energy costs predicted to continue for some time to come, we are facing many challenges. Our service users are facing many adversities - not only homelessness, but poverty, increase in mental ill health and addictions. This makes it more important than ever that Statutory agencies collaborate more on service delivery.

Our staff are now facing increasing complexity of need which they have not been skilled to deal with given our remit is housing related support. We will focus on our commitment to staff training this year to enhance their competency and skills to support and address the complex needs of those who need our help.

### Support from our Partners

We are indebted to The Housing Executive, the Western Trust, the Public Health Agency, the Big Lottery, and other voluntary partners in the community for their continued support. During the pandemic, they worked with the sector to put in place an extensive range of measures to mitigate immediate social, economic and well-being effects of the virus. A Strategic Operational Group was set up to meet regularly with the Sector which included The Housing Executive, Supporting People, and all Supported Housing Operational leads. This group, led by Housing Connect, meant we were flexible and agile in addressing needs as they emerged. The group will continue to meet in 2023/24 as necessary.

Operational group meetings regularly addressed the numerous and compounding factors affecting our homeless community. Our service users faced unique challenges that affected their susceptibility to Covid-19 and are still overcoming legacy issues.



# **FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD**

## **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)**

### **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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#### **Financial review**

The Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA) shows gross income from all sources and the split of activity between restricted and unrestricted funds.

#### **Incoming Resources**

First Housing enjoys long standing relationships with several key funders, in the main the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Supporting People Programme and the Western Health & Social Care Trust. Our services are funded either by contract agreements, grant aid funding, or service level agreements. Initial funding is awarded after a competitive tender process. Assuming the services successfully operate within agreed parameters, Contract agreements are renewed on a yearly basis with Service Level agreements generally running for three-year cycles. We are extremely proud of these long-term associations and work tirelessly to attain the quality standards required by these core funding bodies.

Additionally, we have received support from the NIHE Project Improvement Fund our Floating Support Enniskillen service and our SmartMove service have received funding from the NIHE Homelessness Prevention Fund for each of the past three years for which we are extremely grateful.

In December 2022, Supporting People announced an inflationary Uplift of 4.6% effective from November 2021 and an additional uplift of 1.2% effective from April 2022. WHSCT (Western Health & Social Care Trust) also announced an uplift of 4.6% which was to be backdated to November 2021. Both uplifts were extremely welcomed and provided much needed reassurance in our services. In the case of the Supporting People, this was the first uplift we had received for several years, and we hope that further increases will be made in the future.

Additional to all the above the news in September 2023 we had a successful application to Oak Foundation for a new Housing and Homelessness Programme for Homelessness Prevention in Northern Ireland. This will enable us to address a great many additional clients in Northern Ireland. The project will commence in January 2024.

Total income for the year was £5,165,315 of which approximately 98% was generated from charitable activities including receipt of grant aid funding. The balance of income was generated from donations and legacies received and other income, which includes £15,167 received in respect of Special Recognition Award from the Department of Health regarding services provided during COVID. Total expenditure by the charity was £5,069,656, all of which was expended on direct charitable activities. The balance on unrestricted funds and restricted funds at the period end was £457,832 and £631,442 respectively.

#### **Reserves Policy**

The Trustees consider it prudent to hold monies in reserve in the event that unforeseen circumstances should lead to financial difficulties which might put the future of the aims and objectives of the charity in doubt.

Free reserves are defined by the Trustees as unrestricted income funds freely available for use as the charity so determines and thereby excludes any funds committed, invested in tangible fixed assets held by the charity and restricted or designated funds.

The Trustees have established a formal policy which stipulates that free reserves be maintained at a level based on the costs required to cease the charity's activities in an orderly fashion in the event that a significant drop of funding does not allow the continuation of services. At the reporting date, the Trustees have calculated the level of reserves required in such a scenario to be in the region of £600,000. Free reserves as at 31st March 2023 are £410,441. The Trustees continue to strive to build a general level of reserves in accordance with their policy.

#### **Risk Management**

The Trustees, in conjunction with the senior management team, are aware of the major risks to which the charity is exposed. Where appropriate, systems or procedures have been established to mitigate the risks the charity faces. Internal control risks are minimised through the procedures for authorisation of all transactions and projects. Procedures are periodically reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the group. Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations and are reviewed periodically to ensure that they meet the needs of the charity.



# **FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD**

## **TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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### **Plans for future periods**

- Continue to provide high quality supported accommodation with housing related support to people who are homeless across Northern Ireland. This will involve working closely with our current funding bodies to ensure financial sustainability.
- Continue to develop partnerships and working protocols with relevant agencies and organisations across the voluntary, community and statutory sectors.
- Continue to build future financial sustainability for our SmartMove Private Rented Sector Accommodation
- Further develop the quality and effectiveness of our alcohol and addiction services.
- Further develop the quality and effectiveness of our Floating Support Service.
- Ensure compliance with compulsory registration requirements of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council on an annual basis.
- Focus on initiatives to address isolation amongst young people. Due to the success of programmes currently running in Jefferson Court and throughout the Dispersed Outreach Programme, we will continue to build on the provision of diversionary activities that provide valuable life skills, build confidence, self-esteem, and motivation amongst our young people.
- Continue with our commitment to Equal Opportunities.
- Review, revise and update our information and publicity materials for the organisation. We will review, revise, and update our company website.
- Ensure quality standards are maintained across our projects and services in line with best practice and regulatory requirements.
- Focus on continued service user involvement.
- Develop a new housing advice service from bases in Enniskillen, Omagh, Limavady, Derry City, Belfast/Antrim, and Armagh/Lurgan covering a wide range of housing and housing related issues to 4,500 clients annually.

### **Operational Changes**

The introduction of several measures designed to limit the spread of COVID-19 either continue to be maintained or could be reintroduced quickly within our Accommodation and Floating Support Services.

Some of the changes increased our overall efficiency and have been retained for that reason alone. These include working from home for some staff, particularly the Floating Support staff, the use of laptops and smartphones rather than desktops and landlines and making better use of video conferences to reduce the amount of time we spend travelling to and from meetings.

The challenging environment in which we delivered services during the Pandemic demonstrated the importance of good employee relations, a highly experienced and dedicated staff team and our commitment to training and development. All will be maintained in the future.

We actively encourage service user involvement to shape the delivery of our services. The development of user groups in certain projects, in which clients who have benefited from our services continue to meet to provide support for each other, is another welcome new development we plan to continue.

### **Structure, governance and management**

#### **Governing Document**

First Housing Aid and Support Services is a company limited by guarantee and does not have a shared capital. A memorandum and Articles of Association govern it and the liability of each member is limited to an amount not exceeding £1.

The Trustees have ultimate legal and financial responsibility for the affairs of First Housing, although the management of the organisation has generally been delegated to staff, through the Chief Officer.

The Trustees of the company, all of whom have been Trustees for a full year unless otherwise stated, are listed on the first page of this document.



# FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

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The Trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year were:

Phil Mahon (Chairperson)

Stephen Connolly

Patrick Gray

Deborah Lamberton

Liam Milligan

(Resigned 23 May 2022)

Lucy Campfield

Sharon Williams

Gerry Burns

(Appointed 4 July 2022)

### Method of Appointment of Trustees

The Board of Trustees manages the process of recruitment and appointment of Trustees, and may admit to membership any person interested in promoting the objects (primary purpose) of the company.

### Governance Review

The Trustees remain satisfied that First Housing Aid & Support Services is compliant with good governance practices in line with the requirements of the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland.

### Organisational Structure

Chief Officer

Mr. Kevin Wright

#### Senior Management Team

Director of Operations

Mrs Eileen Best

Head of Finance

Mrs. Gemma Mc Whirter

Head of HR & Training

Mrs Sinead Mc Fadden

Head of Floating Support & Resettlement

Mrs Lorraine Lambert

The Board of Trustees has overall legal responsibility for the charity. The Senior Management Team provides a 6 weekly report to the Board in writing and every Board is attended by the Chief Officer, the Director of Operations, the Head of Finance and the Head of Human Resources. Each Project/Service has a Manager/ Co-ordinator and a Deputy Manager, where appropriate. There are robust reporting structures in place throughout the organisation.



# FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED)

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

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### Statement of Trustees' responsibilities

The Trustees, who are also the directors of First Housing Aid & Support Services Ltd for the purpose 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 Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that year.

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 Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that 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.

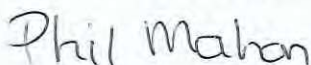
### Auditor

In accordance with the company's articles, a resolution proposing that Moore (NI) LLP be reappointed as auditor of the company will be put at a General Meeting.

### Disclosure of information to auditor

Each of the Trustees has confirmed that there is no information of which they are aware which is relevant to the audit, but of which the auditor is unaware. They have further confirmed that they have taken appropriate steps to identify such relevant information and to establish that the auditor is aware of such information.

The Trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.



Phil Mahon (Chairperson)  
Trustee

9 November 2023