

FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

The Trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2024.

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 2024**

Primary Objectives for the Year 2023/24

- 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 2024

These services are provided across Northern Ireland by approximately 131 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.

At Ramona House we have a student from Southwest College, Omagh. We also have a volunteer in our Gardening project, she is with us every Thursday for 3-4 hours. We also have visiting student nurses at varying times of the year.

We also have a student and volunteers at both Shepherds View and Dillon Court.

FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024**

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. We will also ensure quality standards are in place across our projects and services in line with best practice and regulatory requirements.
- 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 4903 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 487 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 321 families at any one time. In the last year, 3,042 families have received support from the service.

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 281.

The service for Older People has a capacity of 80 individuals and has dealt with 265 individuals in the past year.

The Floating Support Harm Reduction Team has a capacity of 8 individuals and has dealt with 27 individuals in the past year.

The B&B Floating Support/Complex Needs team has a capacity of 90 and has dealt with 194 cases in the past year.

FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

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

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

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 17 at present to 30 service users.

Challenges and Trends

- **Increased Referrals:** A marked year-on-year increase in referrals across all services.
- **Economic Factors:** The recession, cost of living rise, inflation, and increasing interest rates are contributing to the surge in demand.
- **Mental Health and Addiction:** A considerable number of referrals involve individuals with mental health and addiction issues.
- **Capacity Issues:** Services are operating above capacity due to the increased volume of referrals.
- **Specialist Support:** The Specialist Floating Support Service has supported 310 individuals, including rough sleepers and those with addiction and substance misuse issues.
- **The Homelessness Situation:** Each year new 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 2023/24 the total number of applicants to the NIHE in the waiting list for social housing was 47,312. Of this number 35,464 were deemed to be in 'housing stress'. This means they had 30 or more points under the social housing selection scheme.

Partnership Working

First Housing continues to work in partnership under the Public Health Agenda with Arc and De Paul, to deliver low threshold services to people in the community to individuals 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.

We are also active participants in the following groups specifically focused on homelessness and health

- Local area Drug and Alcohol Coordination Teams.
- NIHE Homelessness Strategy Forum.
- NIHE Regional Homelessness group.
- NIHE Client Reference Group.
- Jointly Commissioned Services Group led by the Western Trust and NIHE.
- Derry and Strabane Council Task Force on Temporary accommodation.
- Causeway Local Area Action Group led by NIHE.
- Western Trust Joint Commissioning Services Group.
- PHA (Public Health Agency) Joint Consortium.

Through these partnerships staff members continue to have input into advocating and influencing policy and practice as well as ensuring quality service delivery.

First Housing Aid & Support services continues to comply with compulsory registration for all relevant staff with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Significant Factors

First Housing Aid & Support Services remains steadfast in its mission to maintain and develop essential services for those in need. Despite reduction in Covid-19 infections, we remain vigilant, ensuring the safety and well-being of our service users and staff.

Undoubtedly, this year we have faced many difficulties. An economic climate marked by inflation and rising energy costs presented significant challenges. Collaboration among statutory agencies has been key in enabling us to provide comprehensive support. We welcome the intent from Department of Communities to progress towards multi-year budgets.

Progress and Collaboration

We have witnessed inspiring examples of progress and collaboration. Partnerships with local organisations have bolstered our efforts, and community support has been instrumental in navigating these trying times.

Staff Development

The complex needs of our service users demand that we remain committed to continuous staff development. This year, we will enhance our training programs to equip our team with the skills necessary to provide exceptional housing-related support.

Conclusion

As we look to the future, we are encouraged by the strength and adaptability demonstrated by our organisation. We are dedicated to exploring all opportunities to respond effectively and remain committed to the betterment of our service users' lives.

Support from our Partners

We are indebted to The Housing Executive, the Western Trust, the Public Health Agency, the Oak Foundation, the Department of Health and other voluntary partners in the community for their continued support.

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. We have also commenced our new project with funding from the Oak Foundation aimed at proving advice and homelessness prevention. This project began in January 2024 and will continue for three years. Funding was also secured from Department of Health to allow employees to enhance their training and complete Level 5 certifications.

In March 2024, Supporting People announced a non-recurring payment would be made in the amount of approximately 4.25% of 2023/2024 funding.. WHSCT (Western Health & Social Care Trust) also announced uplifts of 0.8% and 0.49% which was to be backdated to April 2023. Both the non-recurrent payment and uplifts were extremely welcomed and provided much needed reassurance in our services.

Total income for the year was £5,562,321 of which approximately 99% 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. Total expenditure by the charity was £5,227,823, all of which was expended on direct charitable activities. The balance on unrestricted funds and restricted funds at the period end was £646,995 and £663,291 respectively.

FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

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 2024 are £608,537. 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.

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.
- Continue with the development of our 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.

FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024**

Operational Changes

Some of the changes introduced during the pandemic 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.

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
Lucy Campfield
Sharon Williams
Gerry Burns

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

FIRST HOUSING AID & SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT) (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

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.

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

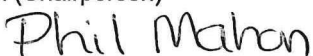
In accordance with the company's articles, a resolution proposing that Moore (NI) LLP be reappointed as auditor of the company will be put at a General Meeting.

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 

20 December 2024