

# Grove Community Housing Association



**GROVE COMMUNITY**  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

## Strategic Plan 2020-2023

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HOUSING ASSOCIATION

We are delighted tenants voted for our new logo, the tree representing our Grove area history and the house and people to demonstrate great homes and community are central to all that we are about.

# Introduction

In presenting our Strategic Plan we do so with the intention that the goals we have agreed are ones that will further enhance the lives of those in the community we serve.

Safety, quality and sustainability are always at the forefront of our thinking and the goals agreed by the Board reflect the importance we place on these non-negotiable areas of performance.

Our goals are stretching, but nevertheless achievable.

We have delivered much over the past 40 years, but there is more we are determined to contribute to this growing and vibrant part of North Belfast.

The Board in agreeing the strategic plan is committed to making resources available to ensure goals are turned into deliverables.

As a small organisation the need to achieve value in all that we do is paramount to our success. Through the inspirational leadership of our General Manager we are confident that the staff team, supported by the Board, will overcome the undoubted challenges that lie ahead in delivering a combination of goals designed to make a lasting difference to young and old alike.

We aim to be professional in all that we do, holding ourselves accountable to our wide range of stakeholders. This strategic plan therefore goes beyond business targets alone. It sets out standards and ways of working, striking a balance between material outcomes we can measure and investments that demonstrate our commitment to enable caring, strong communities. To that end the importance of good governance and accountability features heavily in the plan.

Our size and purpose means that in some respects the content presented in this document is a mix between strategic growth and operational delivery. For this we make no apology. We believe this is the best way to ensure that what we say we will do, we do in practice. This is also how we will ensure we deliver meaningful differences to our community.

When we came together to develop our Strategic Plan, no-one could have foreseen the unprecedented world-wide pandemic that struck at the heart of all our daily lives.

It has undoubtedly challenged us as individuals and forced us to re-examine how we go about the very basic things core to our nature that make us thrive.

Popping in with a neighbour for a cup of tea and a chat, a hug from our grand-children, a laugh with colleagues in our offices, a trip to the shops, picking up our children from school...

As tragic events unfolded we understandably worried, we took stock, but we also often just got on the best we know how, with support from and to each other.

We acknowledge how much stronger we are when we pull together. As we look forward, it is fitting that we pay tribute to all those that care for us. We give our commitment back to not just invest in safe and secure homes for all, but to do what it takes to support the communities we serve.



Philip Oliver  
Chair  
June 2020



Agnes Crawford  
General Manager  
June 2020



# Who We Are

Grove Community Housing Association was established in 1977 when people were leaving this area of North Belfast due to the poor housing and environmental conditions.

Since then the Association has worked successfully to improve the area through renovating old dwellings and building new homes. As a small community-based organisation, we have a stock of 218 social housing units for rent, allocated through the Common Selection Scheme.

We are regulated by the DfC and FCA and registered with the Charity Commission of NI.

Grove CHA has demonstrated achievements in the regeneration of the Grove area, and we have plans to further increase the stock portfolio and develop 24 new general needs social housing units on the site of Grove School.

We employ 4 permanent staff and contribute to the local construction and service industry through contracts to provide maintenance works and associated services such as IT, accountancy and insurance.

The overall control and supervision of the work of the Association is provided by the Board of Management. Members of the Board serve in a voluntary capacity and they bring a range of skills and experience to the Association.

Along with the staff at the York Road office, they share a common commitment to improving housing conditions for all Grove residents.

The Association operates in a complex environment where challenges are varied. The issues facing all social housing providers around capacity and demand are increased in areas with sectarian interfaces, deprivation and disadvantage.

Regulatory standards must be improved and maintained, and there are ongoing government reviews in relation to structure, sector reclassification, procurement and rent policy.

Welfare reform also remains a big issue for the sector and area. As a small community organisation, we can be vulnerable to political change in housing policy, particularly in relation to rationalisation and efficiency.

Against this backdrop this strategic plan has been developed to meet our aspirations to grow, whilst providing great service through a skilled and enthusiastic Board and Staff team.

# What's Important - How We Do Things

## What's Important - How We Do Things

The way our Board and staff team deliver is defined by our Mission Statement and underpinned by our Values and Behaviours below.

### Our Mission & Purpose

**To provide quality homes and services for our tenants and wider community.**



## Our Values

Our values are central to all that we do and guide decision making, behaviours and the way in which we act collaborate with partners within the community in which we work:

- **Approachability** – we continually consider the best way to provide access to our organisation in a way that is friendly and centred on the individual needs of everyone.
- **Service Focused** – we strive to continually improve the beneficial impact for those who access our service range.
- **Honesty & Integrity** - we do the right thing, in the right way, irrespective of the potential for adverse consequence.
- **Accountability** – we take ownership for our individual and collective actions with a willingness to change where that is the right thing to do.
- **Compassion** – we approach all situations with human kindness and a willingness to help.



## How We Work Together

The way in which we collaborate and work as a team is a strength and test of our resolve to commit to a common purpose. We therefore aim to practice in whatever circumstances we find ourselves a way of working together that maximises our collective talents:



**Listen** – we 'hear' what others say and consider views before finalising our own



**Treat everyone fairly** – we give everyone equal consideration and ensure everyone feels valued in what they do.



**Develop ourselves and others** – our personal best is always just out of reach, so we aim to improve in all we do and support others in that personal goal too.



**Work as a team** – we value difference, promote collaboration and selflessly work towards our common purpose



**Take ownership** – we do what is right and own what we do.



# What We Have Achieved

Grove Community Housing Association is a small and proudly independent organisation based in inner City North Belfast. By continuing to preserve our autonomy, it has enabled total focus to remain on providing services in the heart of our local community. This has allowed us to ensure investment remains local, and through retaining a strong financially independent position, secures our commitments to the community.

Not only have we improved the Grove area and provided homes for many over the years but by stretching our ambitions we have gone on to achieve award winning homes. Our development at Loughview Terrace won the Regeneration Award in the Royal Society of Ulster Architects Design Awards, turning a disused waste ground area into stunning homes. Through our commitment to the environment and to provide economically run homes, a terrace at St. Vincent Street won UK Domestic Retrofit Project of the Year and certification as the first retrofit "Active House" in Europe.

We aim to be an 'Employer of Choice'. We have a new 'Employee Assistance Programme' in place and offer family friendly policies and competitive and fair salaries. We believe investment in growing and developing our dedicated staff team delivers results to support our strategic goals. Through dedicating time and resources we have provided opportunities for others to develop, learn and engage in our work. We are delighted to support fellow social enterprises, such as the NOW Group, and provide trainee job placements. This has inspired us to support a 'Grow with Grove' year long placement opportunity and the rewards have been multiple for all involved.

Through working in partnership we have enabled members of our communities to receive expert advice on benefits, money and employment. This has been achieved through provision of complimentary office space and facilities to North Belfast Advice Partnership. The friendly and experienced staff hold Advice Clinics twice a week and the positive outcomes achieved for many are immeasurable. We share their ethos of making a real difference where it matters.

We are a registered Charity and a registered Housing Association with the Department for Communities. We have committed significant time and additional financial resources in the past twelve months to enable us to continue to build on these existing achievements; to grow and strengthen in both our governance and operational deliverables. We have produced a new 'Governance Handbook' and provide opportunities and training to our new and existing Board members in their important and valued voluntary roles.

We have developed exciting plans for our future. We have purchased a new building site at the former Grove Primary school and are excited about our plans to deliver a minimum of 24 environmentally innovative new homes for social housing rent. This significant investment of over £4M in our local economy at a time of unprecedented challenge is very welcome news and will undoubtedly improve the standards of life for many through quality homes.



# SWOT Analysis

The Board and staff team spent time examining how Grove operates and the wider economic/political environment it works within.

In doing so it collectively spent time challenging itself and analysing all aspects of its operating environment. Part of those focused discussions centred on a SWOT analysis, the outcome of which was influential in going through a longer-term process to shape objectives meaningful to its purpose. For that reason, a summary of that SWOT is presented below.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locally based office with good local and tenant knowledge</li> <li>History in the area</li> <li>Strong financial position</li> <li>Good performance across arrears management, voids control and tenant satisfaction.</li> <li>Low anti-social behaviour within housing stock</li> <li>Dedicated staff team</li> <li>Active and involved Board – new Board Members filling skills gaps</li> <li>Appointment of new General Manager</li> <li>Development of new homes</li> <li>Staff wellbeing focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff ratio costs high due to low stock numbers</li> <li>Overstretched and small staff team - operations and budgets impacted by absences and skills shortages</li> <li>Lack of clear targets and KPI's for individuals</li> <li>Health and Safety Compliance issues</li> <li>Governance issues</li> <li>Regulatory judgement</li> <li>Some property standards are low</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of new homes</li> <li>Innovation in new build social housing that could set us apart e.g. 1st passive housing development in N.I.</li> <li>Skills development of Board members</li> <li>Increased use of technology – internally and externally</li> <li>Working in partnership with external bodies and organisations</li> <li>Raise awareness of Grove Community HA through social media, news sheets, information sharing, news blasts</li> <li>Green agenda and access to funding – including recycling, energy efficiency, fuel consumption etc</li> <li>Increase engagement with tenants - community clean ups, welcome packs, 'do's and don'ts' etc</li> </ul>	<p><b>Political</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear of unrest – e.g. Bonfire site – last in area.</li> <li>Threatened changes to demographics in area.</li> </ul> <p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unemployment</li> <li>Rent arrears</li> <li>Welfare reform - Bedroom tax</li> <li>Tenant's expectations</li> </ul> <p><b>Sector/Regulatory</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grading affects loan rates and availability.</li> <li>Potential of further regulation</li> <li>Health and Safety standards must be met</li> </ul> <p><b>Stock</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ageing stock</li> <li>Higher land acquisition costs and land availability</li> <li>Cost of delivery</li> </ul>



# Our Six Strategic Pillars

The core of the strategic plan is driven by six areas of fundamental importance to what Grove Community Housing Association is about and its drive to continually reform and improve. We refer to these as our six pillars of strategic success:

- Our Customers
- Our People
- Governance & Regulation
- Finance & Economic
- Great Homes
- Working in Partnership



What we commit to achieve by March 2023 is set out under each of the six pillars below:

## Our Customers

- Introduce and implement the:  
Grove Tenant Participation Strategy 2020-23
- Carry out a biannual customer satisfaction survey and implement action promptly
- Achieve 90% customer satisfaction rating
- Increase information sharing with customers via social media, and news 'blasts' etc
- Increase the use of technology and digitalisation to improve customer service delivery
- Involve customers in the development and delivery of services and new homes
- Develop and maintain effective relationships with local resident groups
- Support community and tenant financial inclusion





# Our People

## Our Staff

- Training to upskill staff to provide organisational resilience and increased service standards and role satisfaction
- Motivate and manage team and individual performance through the setting of targets and annual appraisal and review
- Reward staff competitively through regular review of salaries and wider benefits
- Introduce and implement an Employee Assistance Programme for staff



## Our Board

- Ensure appropriate skillset on the Board through effective skills map, succession planning and recruitment
- Conduct individual appraisals on all Board members and the Chair on an annual basis
- Implement and review annually the Board Training Strategy - encompassing sector and regulatory knowledge, alongside wider skills.
- Attendance at conferences and events for external focus and Board up-skilling.

## Governance and Regulation

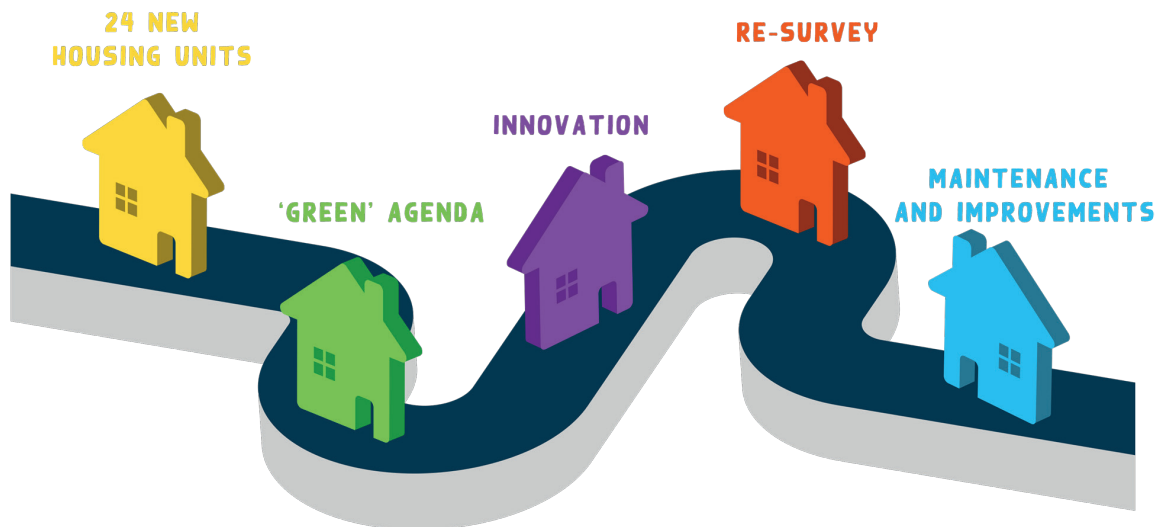
- Introduce and implement Governance Handbook to ensure good practice in Board activity
- Board approved 3-year strategic plan and annual business plan in place and reviewed on an annual basis
- Board Committees and full Board Meeting structure and timetables in place
- Compliance with regulatory requirements through achievement of 'One' standard in annual DfC Regulatory assessment. Action plan in place with full Board oversight and review where standard not met
- Manage risk through risk assessment and regular review of Risk Map by Committee and Board and annual appraisal and review
- GDPR Audit and action plan in place to ensure compliance
- Timely review of Disaster Recovery and Contingency plans



## Finance and Economic

- Secure HA Grant and private funding as required to deliver on social housing development programme
- Effective Treasury Management to obtain best value for money invested
- Effective arrears processes to maintain arrears at < 5% performance
- Maintain best value and cost control in maintenance and housing services through appropriate contracts

## Great Homes



- Delivery of 24+ newbuild social housing units by 2021/22
- Research and implement 'Green' agenda and access to funding – including recycling, energy efficiency, fuel consumption etc
- Aim for innovation in new build social housing that could set Grove apart e.g. first passive housing development in N.I.
- Re-survey all existing stock in 2020/21 period
- Complete planned maintenance and improvements annually as identified in stock condition survey and outlined in planned maintenance programs

## Working in Partnership

- Continue to build on strong partnerships that serve all sections of our community e.g provision of free office space to North Belfast advice partnership for drop in advice clinics in the community
- Raise awareness of Grove Community HA with potential partners through social media, newssheets, information sharing, news blasts etc
- Build partnerships to achieve growth targets or efficiencies required by DfC
- Ensure the Association is represented in the Housing sector - e.g NIFHA Forums, CIH Events, and Wider Working Groups

# Measuring Success

In this section of our plan we set out how success will be measured, and specific targets determined. Accountability is split between the operational arm of our organisation and the Board to ensure performance and risk is managed where it is best placed. It is this 'measurement' framework that will provide year 1, 2 , 3 progress goals enabling flexibility/agility to react to changing circumstances which require the sequencing of deliverables to be changed whilst still ensure each of the 'pledges' within the strategic pillars is delivered within the lifetime of this plan.

*These targets will be reviewed annually and in the event of any significant material events (including external factors such as COVID-19's impact).*

## Board KPI's

Goals		Board KPI	Target 20/21	Target 21/22	Target 22/23
Company	Great Homes	Homes with planning/ project approval	24	-	-
		New homes on site	-	24	-
		Homes completed	-	-	24
		Planned Maintenance Investment against budget	80%	90%	90%
		Repair costs per home	498	601	872
	Governance & Regulation	Regulatory returns/ compliance standards	Grade 2	Grade 1	Grade 1
		Gas Boiler Servicing	100%	100%	100%
		Asbestos Register & Management	100%	100%	100%
		Electrical Inspections (Periodic and C.O.T.S)	100%	100%	100%
		Fire Safety	100%	100%	100%
		Legionella	100%	100%	100%
		Risk Assessments	100%	100%	100%
		Regulatory Action Plan	✓		
		Risk Register Review	As needed Bi-monthly	As needed Bi-monthly	As needed Bi-monthly
		Internal Audit & Recommendations	✓	✓	✓
	Our People	Board Annual Appraisals	100%	100%	100%
		Meeting & Training Attendance	80%	80%	80%
	Finance & Economic	Gearing	13.63%	11.17%	10.18%
		Operating Margin	395,904	392,666	418,802
		Net Margin	315,287	318,722	347,443

## General Manager & Operations Team KPI's

Goals	Board KPI	Target 20/21	Target 21/22	Target 22/23
Finance & Economic	Void loss	<5%	<3%	<1%
	Net operating surplus	£315,795	£315,795	£315,795
	Interest cover	4.84	5.18	5.88
	Liquidity	5.07	4.44	1.32
	Stress Testing and Treasury Management - Base rate variance	0.5% - 4.0%	0.5% - 4.0%	0.5% - 4.0%
	Value for Money - Service contracts (e.g. prof. services)	£21,760	£22,200	£22,644
	Rent arrears	<5%	<5%	<5%
	Relet days	28	21	14
Great Homes	% annual stock survey (100% within 3 yrs)	↑ 50%	↑ +25%	↑ +25%
	Repairs completion	85%	85%	85%
	Repairs satisfaction	85%	90%	90%
Our Customers	Complaints to working days	20	15	10
	Calls resolved on 1st contact	90%	90%	90%
	Overall tenant satisfaction (Annual survey)	80%	85%	90%
	'Tenant Voice' Engagement Initiatives/Projects	Min. 4 per year	Min. 4 per year	Min. 4 per year
	• 'Good Morning' service	✓	✓	✓
	• Text Message service	✓	-	-
	• 'Tenant Voice' forum	✓	2 meetings	2 meetings
	• 'Tenant Voice' section website	✓	2 blogs	2 blogs
	• New Tenant Satisfaction Survey	✓	-	-
	• Improved Community Satisfaction	70%	80%	85%
	• Tenant Events/Competitions	✓	✓	✓
	• 'Tenant Voice' Approval Logo	✓	-	-
	• 'Tenant Participation' 3 yr Strategy & Delivery	✓	✓	✓



## General Manager & Operations Team KPI's (Cont'd)

Goals	Board KPI	Target 20/21	Target 21/22	Target 22/23
Our People	L&D investment	90% as PDR	90% as PDR	90% as PDR
	Staff absenteeism	<5%	<5%	<5%
	% of PDRs completed	100%	100%	100%
Working in Partnership	Rep. on Sector Forums, Working Groups, Consultations, Conferences	80%	80%	80%
	Service Level/ Partnership Agreements	+1	+1	+1
	Good News Story/ Achievement	↑ 4	↑ 2	↑ 2
	Organisation Brand awareness initiatives	4 per year	4 per year	4 per year
	Social media engagement increases Year on Year	↑ +50%	↑ +10%	↑ +10%
	<b>Transformational Project Design &amp; Delivery</b>			
Our People	• Virtual Viewings	✓		
	• Head Office Renovations	✓		
	• Re-brand & PR Launch	✓		
	• Covid-19 Crisis & Recovery Project	✓		
Our Customers	• Gas Tag - 'Go Live' Launch	✓		
	• 'Safe Homes, Happy Homes' Launch	✓		
	• 'Go Green, Get Clean' - Launch		✓	
	• 'Grow with Grove'	✓	✓	✓
	• 'Thrive with Grove' Launch			✓
	• Community Food-store/Breakfast Clubs Launch			✓
	• 'Learn with Grove' Housing Academy Launch			✓



**GROVE COMMUNITY**  
**HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

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Dept. for Communities registered: R14 | Registered Society: IP000173 | Registered Charity No: NIC 104573