Apex Housing Association

Corporate Strategy

2011/2014

Supporting You, Building Communities

A Team Approach

The Corporate Strategy for 2011-2014 will be implemented by Apex's excellent team of committed staff.

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i. Our Business

Apex - What We Do

Apex Housing Association (Apex) is a major housing association managing a stock of some 3,500 homes, which could grow to over 5,000 when its current planned programmes are completed. Its business is housing and associated care and support services and from tiny beginnings almost half-a-century ago in Derry city, it has grown into a substantive organisation which provides:

- General needs housing for families and single people
- Purpose-built accommodation for older people
- Supported housing for people with special needs, including those with mental health difficulties; learning disabilities; alcohol/drug addictions; and those who are physically disabled
- Support services for vulnerable groups under the Supporting People programme
- Community units under the management of local communities

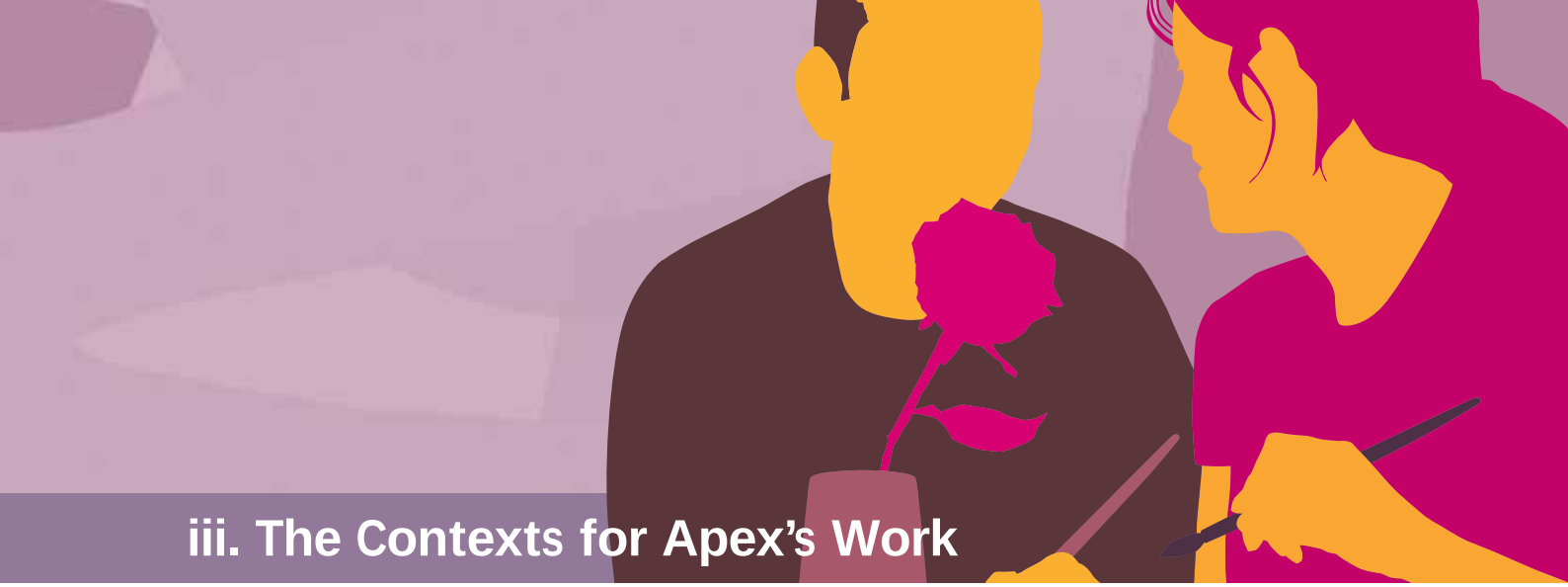
Apex works across Northern Ireland and in the Republic. It is a not-for-profit housing association, led by volunteers and works to social enterprise principles. It employs over 500 staff throughout the organisation. Through its group structure it can provide affordable housing both for rent and for sale.

More recently it has, via its management of the Apex Procurement Group, taken on a significant strategic role within the Northern Ireland social housing development sector.

ii. Mission & Values

Apex - What We Value

Apex Values	Which Means We ...
Quality Housing	Ensure quality designs, providing 'Lifetime Homes' which meet the particular needs of different client groups
Service	Deliver efficient and effective services by staff committed to continued improvement
Staff	Develop professionalism amongst staff, enabling them to meet challenges and attain organisational goals
Customer Focus	Ensure easy access to support, advice, information and services
Community Involvement	Facilitate and encourage tenant involvement through information, consultation, and empowerment, activities that encourage the development of community spirit and measure the impact of such activity to ensure it is effective
Life Enhancement	Encourage and facilitate independence, supported where appropriate, in homely and comfortable environments whilst treating residents with respect and dignity
Satisfaction	Obtain feedback and promote choice through consultation, participation and the service review process to ensure continued satisfaction with our service delivery
Diversity	Base everything we do on the principles of tolerance, understanding, and respect for everyone we engage with and the differences we may share
Sustainability	Make best use of our resources by implementing policies and technologies to assist the development of stable communities
Value for Money & Affordability	Invest in sound, value for money developments while maintaining rent levels within affordable limits
Robust Management	Apply sound economic principles to ensure effective management which will strive to improve service delivery, while maintaining the Association's financial integrity and the value of its assets
Accountability	Ensure that our policies demonstrate integrity, openness and fairness
Effective Procedures	Operate systems of monitoring, auditing and benchmarking and ensure that they are widely reported on



iii. The Contexts for Apex's Work

Apex does not operate in isolation but instead is influenced by and has to react effectively to a series of changing contexts. In the same way it must learn from its own recent past, using its experiences - both good and bad - to help it plan for what lies ahead.

The resultant summary strategic assessments are presented below under the headings of:

- Recent Performance
- The Policy Contexts
- Social & Community Changes
- The Housing Market
- The Care Market
- Governance

Recent Performance

Over the lifetime of its previous Corporate Strategy, 2008-2011, Apex has performed well. It has delivered on its plans and programmes and has successfully managed its growing housing stock and care and support portfolio. Among its specific achievements have been:

- Developed and delivered over 500 new homes
- Fostered the establishment of, and then successfully managed the Apex Procurement Group
- Secured a number of awards for specific schemes, programmes and initiatives
- Obtained Investors in People (Bronze award) re-accreditation
- Implemented the new standards introduced by DHSSPS in regard to the delivery of nursing, residential and domiciliary care services and by Supporting People for the delivery of housing support services
- Implemented a structured staff training programme
- Acquired and re-located to new office accommodation in Derry city

iii. The Contexts for Apex's Work *> Continued*

During that time Apex has also had to deal with:

- A sudden collapse in the housing and housing land markets: 2009 house prices across NI had fallen by 31% from their 2007 levels, though they were still 55% above what they had been in 2003
- Major difficulties within the banking and financial sectors curtailing the flow of private finance to housing associations
- Dramatic and ongoing growth in regulation affecting every part of its work
- Unilateral reductions in health and social care and housing support funding for much of the Association's core work
- Growing need for affordable housing

The Policy Contexts

At national government level, major changes in both central funding for social/affordable housing and in benefit support to households and individuals are being considered. Within Northern Ireland a strategic review of the Housing Executive is being progressed and significant realignments within planning and local government are being proposed under the Review of Public Administration.

Funding pressures are likely to continue within the health and social care sector, with a trend of passing these on to housing and care providers already apparent. At the same time, however, as funding is being reduced, increasing regulation consistently forces the cost of provision upwards. Finally, sustainability (social, economic and environmental) and the good relations/shared future agenda will become increasingly important.

Social & Community Changes

Social change affects, and is in turn affected by the policy context. By 2023 the population of Northern Ireland is projected to grow by 8% (or almost 145,000), with the highest rates of growth in the south and west. At the same time household sizes will continue to fall (from 2.7 now, to 2.4 in 2021) - a parallel increase in the number of households (projected to increase by 20% by 2021) will significantly drive up the demand for new housing.

Family and kinship structures continue to shift, with, for example lone pensioner and lone parent households now accounting for one-in-five of all households in Northern Ireland. In the same way there is now a sizeable migrant worker population, though it is not evenly distributed with some areas (for instance east Tyrone) home to major concentrations of migrant households. All the while, anti-social behaviour is seen to be a growing concern.

Deprivation and disadvantage persist as core issues across Northern Ireland with major concentrations in a number of urban and rural communities. Well over a third of 16-74 year-old adults are economically inactive and in many communities significant numbers of people are dependent on benefits, have poor levels of educational achievement, and/or work in low-paid, often unskilled jobs.

iii. The Contexts for Apex's Work *> Continued*

The Housing Market

The housing market and financial collapses in Ireland, north and south, continue to have major impacts. Among them are:

- Falling land and house prices and minimal new private house-building
- Significant numbers of new but empty properties
- Many people in negative equity and many others experiencing major difficulties in obtaining mortgages

The Housing Executive's 2010-13 Housing Market Review sets out a clear analytical context for much of the Association's work. Among its key strategic pointers are:

- Demand for social housing will remain high with some 2,500 new homes required each year for the next three years
- The significance of private-rented housing is increasing, partly as a legacy of the building boom of the mid-2000s and partly because many would-be first-time buyers cannot now afford the cost of purchasing a home
- Housing unfitness across NI now stands at just 2.4% (compared with 25% in the mid-1970s)
- Much work remains to be done to make housing fit for purpose in terms of energy efficiency/fuel poverty and in meeting the specific needs of households

Apex believes that over the coming years the main strategic housing issues it will face will include:

- Helping, through new-build and other means, meet the substantial need for social housing
- Improving the energy efficiency of its stock, thereby addressing fuel poverty
- Providing and managing housing stock which meets the needs of an ageing society

The Care Market

The UK government is making it clear that it intends to reduce the breadth and depth of many welfare supports. Reductions in funding and increasing regulation now mean that many of the Association's care and support schemes are of a size where further economies of scale are not possible. The freeze on funding and probable changes to Supporting People will also impact on many Apex tenants and schemes.

Across Northern Ireland, levels of need and demand remain strong with one-person-in-five having a limiting long-term illness and one-in-nine providing unpaid care to someone. The population is also ageing, with the over-65 cohort projected to increase by 37% to some 356,000 by 2023.

For new supported housing projects, funding and regulatory pressures may result in Apex having to concentrate more and more on providing the bricks-and-mortar of affordable housing and increasingly relying on joint-management arrangements for delivering the care and support elements.

Governance

Apex has consistently invested significant time and effort in its governance and is confident its many positive audits and inspections, its awards and accreditations, and its strong performance against core DSD measures prove its robustness here. The Association has very effective staff in place, top quality office accommodation, and works to a range of efficient systems, processes and procedures.

Like many voluntary groups, Apex faces issues at Board level. Board renewal is essential in any organisation but increasing regulation and questions of risk and liability make voluntary effort less and less attractive to people who would otherwise be well-disposed to help.

iv. A Strategic Framework for Apex

The Association's analysis of the issues has led it to believe that its work over the next three years can continue to be usefully segmented under four themes. These provide a strategic framework for Apex and are set out as follows:

1.0 Managing & Maintaining The Stock

Rationale

Apex is responsible for the homes of 3,500 households or some 9,000 people in Northern Ireland which could grow to 5,000 homes and over 13,000 people. These homes also represent a huge capital investment, much of it public money but much of it borrowed privately. The people who live in these homes and the homes themselves are important to Apex. Good housing management and good housing maintenance are central to the well-being of the tenants and the Association's asset base. With such a large proposed increase in stock over the next three years, allocation and management of these new homes need to be planned now.

Business Objectives

1.1 Continue to deliver effective housing management, ensuring quality, compliance, continuous improvement, value for money and effective community involvement

1.2 Further develop responses to ensure stable communities

1.3 Maintain the stock condition database and roll out responding maintenance programmes

1.4 Raise the energy efficiency of Apex's housing stock

1.5 Ensure the efficiency of the maintenance service

1.6 Improve performance through achievement of key performance indicators

1.7 Ensure services reflect tenant and resident needs and expectations

2.0 Developing and Delivering Care & Support

Rationale

Apex has traditionally married the bricks-and-mortar aspect of housing with the provision of appropriate care and support to the residents of that housing. Whilst the demand for such care and support is likely to grow, funding for it has begun to fall. Apex is committed to, and believes in this work, but like everything else, can only take it forward in sustainable ways.

Business Objectives

2.1 Maintain and develop the Association's existing care and support portfolio in sustainable and affordable ways

2.2 Examine peripatetic care and support delivery models from elsewhere

2.3 Continue to enhance the quality of life of service users

iv. A Strategic Framework for Apex > *Continued*

3.0 The Development Agenda

Rationale

Apex has a social housing development programme in place which, subject to funding, could increase its stock by some 50% or 1,700 homes over the next three years. This programme involves the delivery of nearly 70 schemes spread right across Northern Ireland which will require a huge project management input. The Association's 'building for sale' subsidiary, Apex Homes, is actively looking for opportunities to deliver affordable housing including offering shared equity to home buyers. At the same time, Apex is responsible for managing and developing the Apex Procurement Group.

Business Objectives

3.1 Deliver the Association's Development Programme, with an increased focus on improving sustainability

3.2 Build energy conservation, energy efficiency and thermal comfort into all Apex projects

3.3 Look at innovative and effective ways of delivering good quality, value for money social and affordable housing

3.4 Develop Apex Homes into a going concern

3.5 Continue to manage the Apex Procurement Group to the best advantage of the Group's member associations

4.0 Governance: Being the Housing Association of Choice

Rationale

Good governance provides good accountability, ensures the best possible use of resources, and above all, delivers good results. Governance is about more than just the strategic level and must cascade down to the Association's operational levels. As the financial contexts for social housing are likely to become much tighter over the next few years, good financial and contingency planning will similarly become more and more important for Apex.

Business Objectives

4.1 Continue to seek sustainable, long-term funding support

4.2 Manage the Association's financial and other resources to best effect, using performance measures which help Apex manage its business

4.3 Ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the Board of Management

4.4 Continue to develop the workforce to meet the Association's business objectives

4.5 Look at the issue of 'people succession' at all levels and in all areas within Apex

4.6 Ensure diversity is valued

4.7 Further improve the Association's IT/ICT capacity

4.8 Continue to improve communication within and beyond Apex, in particular using IT/ICT-based methods

4.9 Ensure Apex has a sustainable management presence which reflects the geographic spread of its operations

4.10 Assess the risks and different scenarios which face Apex and put appropriate responses in place

4.11 Continue to develop partnerships to deliver effective services

4.12 Continue to develop Apex's corporate social responsibility in meaningful and sustainable ways

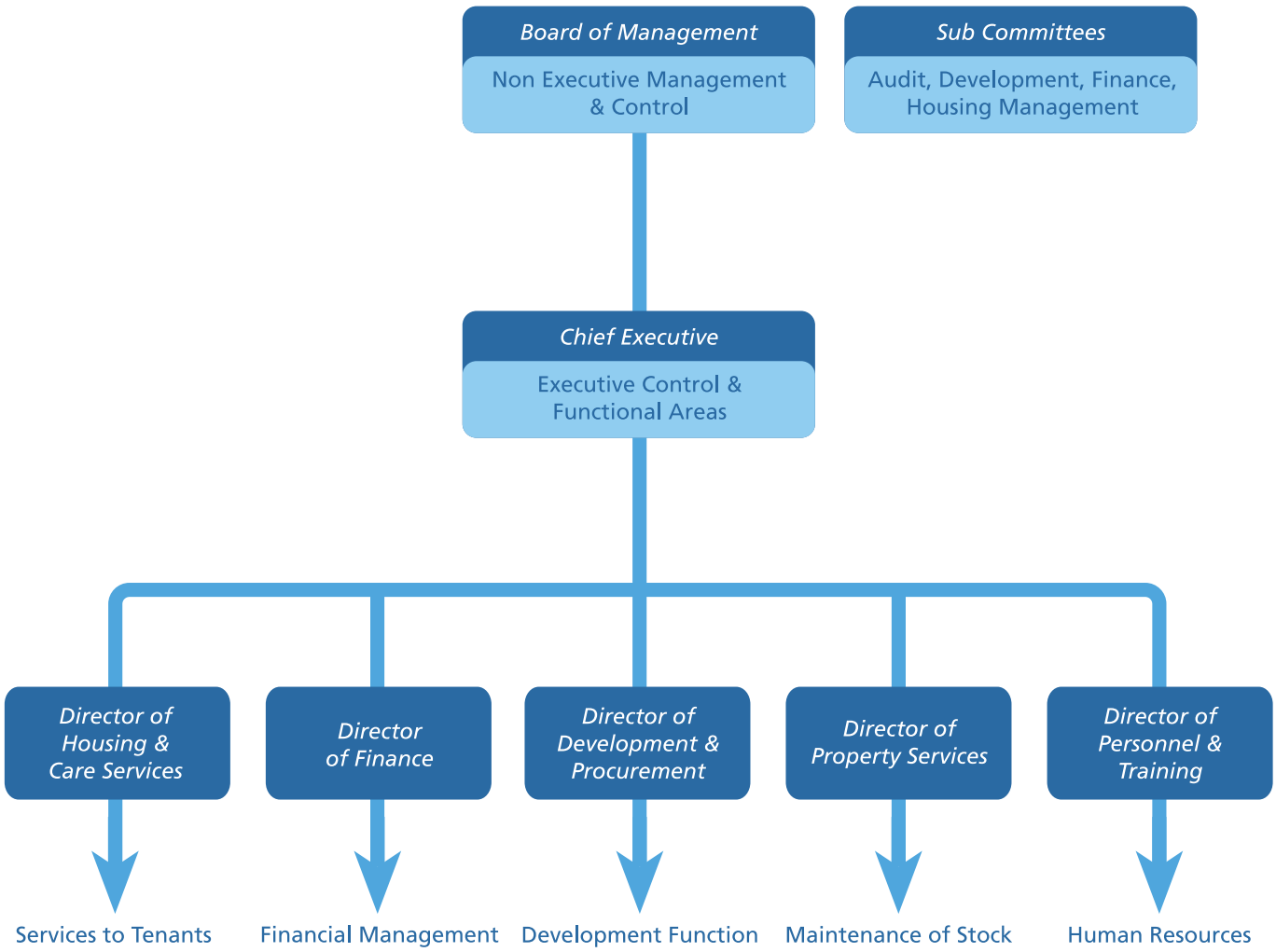
v. Implementing The Strategy

Implementing The Strategy

This document provides a strategic framework for Apex and its work over the next three years. To bring life to the framework at the operational level, each Directorate will draw up and work to an annual Business Plan. Each Plan will:

- Highlight the main performance issues facing the Directorate
- Outline what the Directorate will do over the next twelve months to bring life to the Association's agreed business objectives
- Set a number of measurable targets for the year
- Ensure the resources and arrangements needed to deliver the business plan are in place
- Be reported on at Board level, providing the necessary monitoring and adjustment of the overall corporate strategy

Senior Management Structure



Our Mission

Working to build communities by providing quality and affordable accommodation, care and support

The Apex Voluntary Housing Group comprises:
Apex Housing Association Limited
Apex Housing Association (Ireland) Limited
Apex Homes (NI) Limited
Apex Charitable Trust (NI) Limited

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