

Bridgewater Housing Association

Business Plan 2023 – 2028





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Welcome

This Business Plan sets our priorities for the next five years. Our strategy is ambitious, and our intentions are to achieve step changes in service delivery and redesign, growth, and continued strong financial performance. This will ensure we continue to modernise, innovate and continuously improve. We aim to build on our successes of the last 25 years and develop an organisation which will be fit for the future needs of our customers, our people and communities.

We have survived COVID-19 and the challenges that this brought, now being exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, which has worsened the social-economic inequalities that exist for our customers and across wider society. We must now focus our strategy to both build on what the pandemic has taught us about our resilience, capability and capacity as an organisation, but also help improve the ongoing financial struggles of our tenants we serve as a social landlord and other customers as care and repair agent and factor.

We want to create an agile staff structure and place true empowerment at the right level to allow quick and responsive service delivery as well as improving the local environment and our tenants' homes. We will embed innovation in our thinking to maximise both the efficiency and value of our services and streamline the ways in which our teams work to support this.

Our staff will deliver a consistent style and standard of service and we want to support them with the right tools, training, and growth opportunities. We will grow and retain our own talent to embed the values and behaviours of Bridgewater.

We are clear that we will not develop new homes at the risk of our existing tenants. In addition to our legal responsibilities to our tenants, we have an ethical duty to make sure that their homes are well managed and that the services they receive are effective and deliver excellent value for money.

All our people, board, customers, and staff, will have choice regarding how and when they use the channel of their preference to access and deliver a consistent and quality service. We want to improve the quality of our existing homes to move us towards net zero, and have set ourselves some ambitious targets to deliver, which will see the development of a Bridgewater standard for our homes going forward.





To deliver this plan we will need to work with our tenants and customers, colleagues, partners and other stakeholders. We will establish a Customer Experience Panel, who will bring honest and constructive feedback as we implement this plan and we will increase and improve the ways in which we engage and listen to our customers voice, to capture a wider and more diverse source of understanding.

Relationships with external stakeholder groups will be strengthened to support both our business and our communities – aligning ourselves to our partners in the Federation of Local Housing Associations in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire (FLAIR), Local Authorities, third sector partners, contractors, and funders to allow our strategic delivery to be maximised, whilst protecting Bridgewater and ensuring its core social purpose is delivered.

Lastly, we will always continue to protect the financial strength of the organisation and ensure it is stronger for the future at the end of this period than it was at the beginning, despite the challenges the current cost of living crisis and recession may present.

The realisation of our new Business Plan will help to make us the truly modern housing association we imagine today.

Andy Thomson
Chief Executive

Alastair Morris
Chairperson

SECTION 1: About Us

We were established in 1998 as a result of a stock transfer from Scottish Homes. As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we continue to demonstrate strong performance as a **Community Anchor Organisation** providing, high quality, affordable housing and services to our tenants and customers in Erskine and beyond.



We are one of 5 locally based Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in Renfrewshire, and the smallest of these is Ferguslie Park Housing Association which owns only a few less units than Bridgewater. The other 3 RSLs are Linstone, Paisley and Williamsburgh Housing Associations. Other national Associations have stock in Renfrewshire, usually of a more specialist nature.

Bridgewater is well respected and connected in the housing sector, through our membership and work with FLAIR, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum. This helps us to keep up to date with developments in the sector and enables us to ensure that our voice is heard.

Our geographic focus enables us to be part of the conversation in Erskine and Renfrewshire more widely, working closely with our tenants and residents, the wider community, stakeholders, and local businesses. The key features of this geography are:

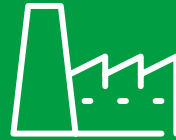
Geography

Renfrewshire is situated in the West of Scotland, and shares borders with five local authorities: the City of Glasgow; East Renfrewshire; Inverclyde; North Ayrshire; and West Dunbartonshire. The area incorporates attractions such as Braehead Shopping Centre on the banks of the River Clyde, Glasgow International Airport, the historical Paisley Abbey, and the University of the West of Scotland.



History

Renfrewshire has a strong manufacturing heritage with a large concentration of industries like transport and storage, health and social work. In recent years there has been growth to a more varied sector and economy involving the service sector, financial industry, leisure, and tourism. Originally a small village settlement, Erskine has expanded since the 1970s as a new town to be the commuter town it is today serving the wider Greater Glasgow conurbation.



Demographics

The number of people living in Erskine has increased by circa 15% in the last 30 years. The population of Renfrewshire has increased by 2.3% during the same period and is expected to increase by a further 2.5% to around 182,250 by 2028.



Economics

Renfrewshire has the fourth highest level of child poverty in Scotland, after housing costs. It is estimated that around 1 in 5 (18%) children and young people in Renfrewshire are living in poverty. However, Erskine is in the 2nd lowest ward within Renfrewshire affected by child poverty sitting slightly above the Bishopton, Bridge of Weir and Langbank ward. However, this is not to say that poverty does not exist within our customer base.



Deprivation

In 2019, the Renfrewshire Council area was rated as the 9th most deprived in Scotland by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, with Erskine being at the mid quintile of the most deprived communities in Scotland. The term 'deprivation' refers not only to low income but may also include fewer resources and opportunities, for example in health and education.



Housing Strategy

Renfrewshire's Local Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027 is looking to achieve 5 priorities over the 5 year period. These are:



Strategic Priority 1: The supply and delivery of housing is increased across all tenures to meet the housing needs of different groups and create attractive and sustainable places.

Strategic Priority 2: People live in high quality, well-managed homes in sustainable neighbourhoods.

Strategic Priority 3: Address the challenges of the climate emergency, delivering homes that are warm, energy efficient and fuel poverty is minimised.

Strategic Priority 4: Preventing and addressing homelessness with vulnerable people getting the advice and support they need.

Strategic Priority 5: People can live independently for as long as possible in their own home and the different housing needs of people across Renfrewshire are being met.

SECTION 2: Operating Environment

At the time of launching this strategy, Scotland is in the depths of a cost of living crisis. Furthermore some tough policies around austerity, private sector rent controls, reduced capital investment and welfare reform have hit the sector, and our tenants, hard. At the same time, the country and Government are working through the implications of Brexit, and the cost of lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are in a period of political instability and potential Scottish Independence remains on the agenda. But despite all of this, there are reasons to be optimistic.....

Alongside the review of building and tenant safety coming from the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, there is a renewed interest and commitment to hearing residents' voices and allowing them to influence and make decisions about their housing. At Bridgewater, we pride ourselves on listening to and involving our residents. We will continue with our work in this area and welcome the ability to co-design services with tenants and customers going forward.

The Scottish Government has provided certainty around rent increases following a period of rent control during 2022/23. While we welcome a return to being able to set our own rent increases after a period of consultation with our tenants, we are acutely aware of the affordability challenges that this creates. Just because we can increase our rents, it does not necessarily follow that our residents will see a corresponding increase in their incomes or benefit entitlements.

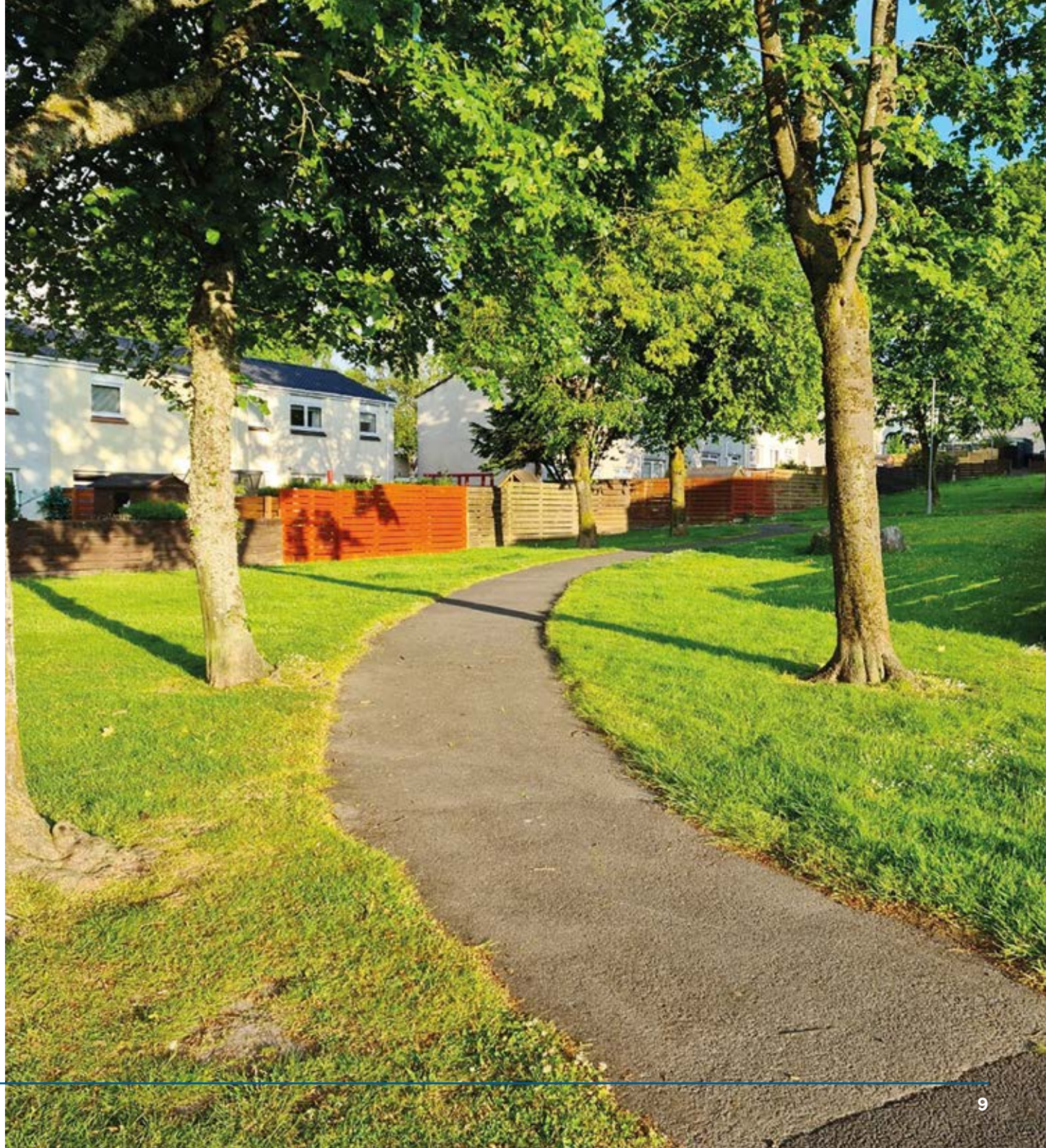
The Scottish Government's long-term national housing strategy to 2040 aims to provide everyone with a safe, high-quality home that is affordable and meets their needs in the place they want to be. This, along with slightly improved grant rates, means that we may be able to develop homes at rents that really are affordable to people on low incomes.

The cost-of-living crisis has also led to a marked increase in the focus on value for money (VfM) and we see this as positive. We have a good understanding of our costs and will endeavour to seek opportunities to reduce these while working to maintain our current high levels of tenant satisfaction – often the things that increase costs also lead to lower levels of satisfaction. Through improving our VfM we will create the financial capacity to improve our homes and provide better services to our customers.

Over the life of this strategy we will be seeking new ways of working which are more efficient, cost effective or more convenient to tenants and other customers. Demands for flexible, personalised, digital access to services continues to grow. While residents can access banking services, GP appointments, utility providers and police support online, the housing sector has often not kept up. Providing greater online access to services is an important challenge, but also an opportunity to increase both customer satisfaction and efficiency. The need for robust data protection arrangements will grow in importance as digital access to services expands. We will therefore continue to invest in ICT and utilise digital technology to create self-service options for our customers, pursuing a 'digital by desire' approach, supporting residents to use digital services where necessary whilst still supporting those who do not want to access services this way.

The pandemic had an immediate impact on our economy and there will be long-term implications, in terms of the economic downturn, recession and the cost-of-living crisis, which will shape the outlook for Renfrewshire, Erskine and ourselves. These issues will have implications on our ability to address issues including poverty and inequality; technological progress; and, net zero and climate change. Coronavirus and the cost of the pandemic has made tackling these challenges all the more difficult. For example, the funding needed to address climate change through net zero compliance may be utilised to get us through the economic downturn that we are in, whilst reviewing the affordability of our rents. Ultimately resources may be directed towards overcoming the current cost of living crisis over other aspects of our work. However, there are also opportunities. For example, joint working with FLAIR and other partners as well as implementing our value for money strategy.

This Business Plan will focus on these already vulnerable areas to ensure that we contribute to alleviating poverty and providing help where this is required. All this of course, is in addition to providing well maintained and affordable homes for those in need.



SECTION 3: Our Strategy

Our strategy provides an over-arching framework and guides all our activities. It helps us articulate our ambitions in a clear and consistent way, steer an agreed course towards achieving these, maintain our pace, and deliver the standards set by our Board. Our strategy comprises three core elements: our Vision, Values and Strategic Objectives.

Our Vision

Our vision is to be:

A customer focussed organisation that delivers the best affordable housing and services to people who need them most.

So what will this mean in practice and what will Bridgewater look like in 2028? What this means is this:

By 2028, we will be truly customer-focused with consistently high levels of tenant satisfaction and known in the community for our excellent customer service. We will have introduced new customer standards and monitoring systems and will have tenants and owner groups in place. We will have achieved customer service excellence accreditation.

Our Care and Repair service will be thriving, and we will be utilising the expertise within the staff base to achieve goals within our rented stock related to small repairs and adaptations. We will be providing repairs services in a more sustainable way.

Our homes will be instantly recognisable due to their superior quality. We will be known as a provider of excellent extra care and supported housing services. We will have completed a review of our sheltered housing and carried out reprovisioning as required, accessing newbuild where possible and appropriate.

Residents will be able to access the services they need from Bridgewater at a time and place that is convenient to them. Residents will be able to do this 24 hours a day, seven days a week, via our easy to use online offer. By embracing technology we will be transforming our service offer, saving time and money, and improving tenant and owner satisfaction. We will be reinvesting any efficiencies we make into improving homes and providing better services to customers.


Our team structure will have been reviewed and our front-line staff will be equipped with the technology to deliver quick and efficient services in residents' homes. Our use of predictive and smart building technology will transform the way we invest in and look after homes, ensuring they are maintained to a high quality, are safe and environmentally sustainable.

We will continue to be a financially stable organisation and will have a high-performing Board and Leadership Team and tenants will be well-represented on our board.

We will be visible in our communities, working collectively with residents and colleagues to deliver this vision. We know that by working together to solve everyday problems we are better able to co-design services that residents value and that can be adopted across the business.

Our Values

We have recently reviewed and updated our organisational values to reflect the positive, modern, progressive approach that our Board and Staff have towards our customer base and each other and help guide our actions. We put people first and are proud of our culture underpinned by our new BRIDGE values:



Be Customer focused

We take ownership and responsibility, are positive and engaging and put residents at the heart of everything we do.



Respect

We show empathy, consideration, treat everybody with fairness and value our customers and colleagues.



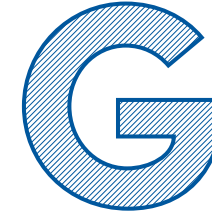
Integrity

Integrity is the foundation of Bridgewater. We will take responsibility for our actions and will display our moral conduct in every decision we make.




Doing what matters most, with and for, our customers

We are committed to providing quality - not just in the homes we build and maintain but also the services that we deliver, in partnership with our customers.



Getting it right first time

We will ensure a consistent approach to service delivery and strive to make sure that our customers experience a fast, reliable, and helpful service that aims to answer their query or sort out their problem, first time - however they choose to make contact.



Enthusiastic

We go the extra mile, are passionate about achievement and eager to learn.

SECTION 3: Our Strategy

Our Strategic Objectives

We will deliver our 2028 vision through six strategic objectives:



1

Manage and maintain, safe, high-quality, sustainable, affordable homes.



2

Protect and enhance the value of the local environment.



3

Deliver a quality, value for money, customer service experience, in partnership with our customers.



4

Invest in our people.



5

Promote innovation and collaboration for improvement and growth.



6

Demonstrate strong, strategic governance and financial control.

Each strategic objective is supported by more detailed strategic priorities on which we will focus our efforts throughout the duration of this plan. We also have set out our desired outcomes where we have asked ourselves 'what will success look like?'. These are set out in section 4.

Strategic Options

As part of our business plan review process in 2019, we worked with an external consultant to explore how we should move forward to ensure we deliver on our vision, maintain our desired strategic direction and best serve the interest of our tenants and other customers. Our Board considered 5 strategic options:

- Remain independent;
- Remain independent and collaborate more;
- Join up with another RSL to form a group structure where Bridgewater becomes the parent;
- Join up with another RSL to form a group structure where Bridgewater becomes the subsidiary; and
- Merge into another RSL with a transfer of all engagements.

The Board's preferred option, having considered each option in detail, was to remain as an independent RSL but to seek opportunities to improve and widen partnership working.



This was tested at the time of the review when members of the Association were consulted on their view. They overwhelmingly agreed with the Board's view. The Board again "tested" this decision out when in January 2021, the Board carried out additional research to gauge tenants' views about the future direction

of the Association. The results of the survey confirmed the Board's view. The Board have reaffirmed its commitment to this decision during the business planning process for this new Business Plan. Nevertheless, the Board remains committed to continuously reviewing this position.



SECTION 4: Our Strategic Priorities

Under each strategic objective, we have identified a total of 43 business priorities for the next 5 years. These are set out below. Each strategic priority is underpinned by a key outcome. Progress against these outcomes, each with annual targets, will be monitored by our Board using the attached 5-year Strategic Delivery Plan.

Delivery will be organised through various strategies and operational plans covering relevant areas of our business. Some of these key strategies are set out in Section 7. Our Leadership Team will take day-to-day responsibility for driving progress and ensuring high quality delivery and performance outcomes.





STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:

1

Manage and maintain, safe, high-quality, sustainable, affordable homes

SECTION 4: Our Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Strengthen Tenant Safety

We will strengthen the culture of safety throughout the organisation, including embedding a systems thinking approach to reducing fire risk.

Key Outcome: Improved tenant safety

Priority 2: Strengthen our Approach to Asset Management

We will invest in our maintenance and improvement activity across our communities. In specific areas, we will adopt a project approach which will involve more extensive work being carried out and bringing investment forward where required. The long term nature of all our properties (homes and offices) will be considered to ensure that we obtain value for money in our investment.

Key Outcome: Our homes remain desirable.

Priority 3: Meet National Energy Efficiency Targets

We will ensure that all our properties meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing (EESHS) where possible. We are currently awaiting the review of EESHS2. Our approach will always be to ensure that our tenants live in warm homes and are helped to eradicate fuel poverty. In addition, our practices as a business will be focussed on an energy efficient approach in terms of procurement, materials, waste and recycling.

Key Outcome: Our homes meet EESHS2

Priority 4: Improve opportunities for those facing homelessness in Renfrewshire

Changing the offer to homeless households in Renfrewshire is vital by ensuring that the proper intensive support, assistance, and experience is improved. This will include working closely with our partners (e.g. Renfrewshire Council and Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership) to contribute to Housing First, Rapid Rehousing and supported and furnished tenancies being available.

Key Outcome: Improved opportunities for homeless households.

Priority 5: Review our Environmental Impact

We will future proof our organisation by reviewing how we can reduce the carbon footprint of our office buildings, care and repair vehicle fleet, construction and other activities. We will develop an Environmental Sustainability Strategy and will take a range of steps by 2028.

Key Outcome: Improved carbon footprint

Priority 6: Integrate Access to Skills within the Care and Repair Service

We will investigate the feasibility of utilising skills within the organisation from the Care and Repair service and use these throughout the Association's maintenance and supported housing services including utilising the small repairs and adaptations service in-house.

Key Outcome: Services delivered internally





STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:

2

Protect and enhance the value of the local environment

Priority 7: Improve the Environmental Appeal in our Communities

We will work with key partners to improve the areas in which our residents live, work and spend their leisure time. We will contribute practically and financially to improving estates and will focus also on how our properties look externally as well as internally.

Key Outcome: More tenants satisfied with how we manage their neighbourhood.

Priority 8: Enhance our “Wider Role” within the Community

We are about more than just providing housing. As a community anchor, managing agent for Care & Repair in three local authority areas and a provider of supported housing, we are involved and will continue to be involved in a range of activities in the community which are important to the area. Over the next 5 years, our Social Responsibility Strategy will focus on health, wellbeing, poverty (in terms of fuel, furniture, food and financial) and the environment.

Key Outcome: More wider action projects are supported, and our social value is measured

Priority 9: Utilise External Funding to Help Owners Maintain and Improve their Homes

We will continue to work with Renfrewshire Council and the Scottish Government to attract funding for owners in our communities to help keep their homes energy efficient. We have a track record of securing HEEPS funds and expect to see similar funds open as the Government seeks to deliver its new Housing to 2040 strategy. We will identify new funding opportunities as they arise and will signpost our factored owners and Care & Repair clients to these as a matter of course.

Key Outcome: Owners are supported

Priority 10: Improving Local Visibility

We will solidify our community anchor status by improving our brand and reach within the local community. We will review our internal communications strategy and ensure that the Association, and its staff, are more visible within the community as a modern, innovative, community partner.

Key Outcome: Increased satisfaction with opportunities to participate



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:

3

Deliver a quality, value for money, customer service experience, in partnership with our customers

Priority 11: Encourage Tenant Involvement on our Board

It is important that we have a range of skills, knowledge, and experience on our Board. The important thing for our governance is making sure we have the right blend of people focussed on the strategic direction of the Association. The role of our tenants is vital to ensuring that we retain a community and service user perspective at the very highest level in our business. We will work towards ensuring there is always tenant involvement on our Board.

Key Outcome: Tenant representation on our Board at all times

Priority 12: Getting it Right First Time

We will give our people the tools to provide a positive experience when our residents contact us. We aim to resolve 90% of queries at first point of contact and will review our structure and customer standards to support this aim.

Key Outcome: Improved customer satisfaction.

Priority 13: Develop Care and Repair Accreditation

We will ensure that our service is awarded the Scottish Quality Mark Accreditation from Care & Repair Scotland.

Key Outcome: Achieve Care and Repair accreditation

Priority 14: Introduce Initiatives to Enhance Customer and Community Involvement

In addition to tackling the challenges of health, wellbeing, poverty and the environment, our Social Responsibility Strategy will also demonstrate our commitment to supporting activities which help with community engagement, cohesion, and development. Over the next 5 years, we will continue to seek opportunities to involve our customers and communities. These will include continuing to work with local schools, supporting and participating in local community events, offering local apprenticeships and conducting regular surveys to gauge interest and determine priorities. This will be detailed in our revised Customer Engagement Strategy.

Key Outcome: Increased customer & community involvement

Priority 15: Strengthen our Digital Services to Support Participation

We have recently adopted digital services through the use of our MyBHA portal which allows our customers to engage with us and conduct business electronically. Our plans are to develop this further and push more online services out to our customers making their interactions with us and management of their tenancies or factoring accounts available 24/7 and easy to use. We will also look for opportunities to gather views and assess satisfaction levels from our customers and engage with them in a more immediate way. We will also automate repetitive processing tasks undertaken by colleagues and reallocate resource to support residents who are vulnerable or have complex needs. This will contribute to increased satisfaction.

Key Outcome: Increased take up of digital services

Priority 16: Strengthen our Use of Market Information and Customer Insight

We will develop a robust system to gather information on our communities' needs, expectations, and concerns. We will undertake our next tenant satisfaction

survey in 2025/26. We will use this insight to inform our investment decisions and to shape improvements in our assets and services at the mid-point of the business plan. We will establish a Customer Experience Panel, who will bring honest and constructive input as we implement this plan and we will increase and improve the ways in which we engage and listen to our customers voice, to capture a wider and more diverse source of understanding

Key Outcome: Improved market information & customer insight.

Priority 17: Strengthen our Income Collection and Advice Services

We will deliver a unified approach to income collection and service, reducing arrears and support and signpost residents to access services that maximise their income and help them to avoid debt. We will continue to support tenants through our welfare rights provision.

Key Outcome: Reduced customer debt – tenant and owner.

Priority 18: Modernise our Application Process

We will maximise opportunities for our residents to apply to move to a home that

best suits their needs, and strengthening our approach to mutual exchange

Key Outcome: Implement digital application process

Priority 19: Review our Factoring and Land Management Processes

We will carry out a comprehensive review of the factoring and land management services we provide to ensure that the service is resourced correctly and is providing value to our owner-occupiers. This will include modernisation of the systems and a review of the written statement and fee structure.

Key Outcome: Improved efficiencies within our factoring service

Priority 20: Investigate Customer Service Accreditation

We will investigate the feasibility of Bridgewater adopting an appropriate customer service accreditation such as Customer Service Excellence or similar

Key Outcome: Achieve customer service accreditation



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:

4

Invest
in our
people

Priority 21: Deliver a New, Modern Structure for our Services

Through our people, we will deliver an efficient and streamlined organisational design. We will be an agile organisation, with workplaces and ways of working that balance our business, environmental sustainability and people's needs; We will define and agree sustainable organisation design principles aligned to operational excellence and apply these to ensure we are the right size and shape to deliver value for money and continuous improvement. We will support and develop team effectiveness through targeted interventions which drive service, productivity and continuous improvement. We will review the utilisation of offices and make recommendations for future efficiencies to support Bridgewater's financial position and the development of agile working

Key Outcome: Implement new staffing structure and modern office space

Priority 22: Explore Employability and Training Opportunities

We will explore the feasibility of introducing a Modern Apprentice and Graduate Apprentice programme to support our new

staff structure. Through our membership of I-FLAIR (a consortium of local RSL's who procure jointly), we will also continue to make good use of community benefit clauses and seek to create employment and training opportunities for the people of Renfrewshire through our procurement activity.

Key Outcome: Local training and employment opportunities are created.

Priority 23: Developing our Culture

We will nurture a motivated and committed workforce who understand and share our charitable purpose, vision and values, and who demonstrate our organisational behaviours. We will embed our values and behavioural framework into our recruitment practices ensuring we are able to recruit diverse talent with the right behaviours to complement our organisational culture. We will adopt 'Employee Engagement' as an approach which will result in the right environment for all colleagues to give their best each day. We will investigate the feasibility of adopting an appropriate quality model to support the organisation culture.

Key Outcome: Our people feel supported and encouraged

Priority 24: Embrace Change and Encourage Diversity

Change is inevitable, and in our business, we have chosen to embrace change. We will continue to explore new things, provide new services and question whether we can improve by working differently. We consider everyone as is an individual and that approach is extended in all aspects of our service delivery. Through effective action planning across our business, we will encourage, support and protect diversity and this is underpinned by our values.

Key Outcome: A diverse and inclusive culture

Priority 25: Strengthen our Role as an Employer

We will build on our reputation as an employer of choice, attracting and retaining the right people with the right skills and behaviours and developing their potential and skills for those we need in the future. We will create an inclusive environment, embracing our differences where our people feel that Bridgewater genuinely cares about them, contributing to mental and physical wellbeing. We will develop our people to reach their

potential by providing blended learning opportunities and digital solutions. We will seek to develop future managers and leaders through accredited development programmes which support succession pathways. We will support early talent through apprentice and graduate programmes focusing on areas which are difficult to recruit to, ensuring we are able to develop the skills that are in short supply that we need in the future

Key Outcome: Our people feel supported and encouraged

Priority 26: Develop a People Strategy

We will deliver an ambitious People Strategy to change the way we support our colleagues and take a much more proactive approach to inclusion. The strategic themes of the new strategy will include: Employee and Candidate Experience, Be a great place to work, Inclusion and Wellbeing, Value difference and the contributions of all.

Key Outcome: Our people feel supported and encouraged

Priority 27: Develop our Social Value

We will review the way in which we measure social value ensuring that we do so in a way that is recognised in the housing sector and allows for benchmarking with our peers. We will use our measurement of social value to ensure that we are targeting our resources to the areas which create the most value for our residents and communities as part of our Social Responsibility Strategy.

Key Outcome: We are a socially responsible organisation



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:

5

Promote innovation and collaboration for improvement and growth

Priority 28: Review Existing Tenancy Support and Provision

Our approach to tenancy support and sustainment has been significant in recent years and we plan to develop this further over the next 5 years. We review our existing welfare rights provision together with exploring opportunities to enhance our supported accommodation and general needs tenancies.

Key Outcome: Tenancies are sustained.

Priority 29: Review our Supported Accommodation Projects

We already provide properties for tenants who receive various levels of support, ranging from small scale ad hoc support through to 24hr support, depending on the needs of the individual. We provide services and have formal partnerships with various support providers and these work well. During this Business Plan, we will review our provision of managed and sheltered properties and seek to extend our supported accommodation provision through potential newbuild projects, increased support from our current partners, as well as establishing

new projects and partnerships. All of this will be aligned to the priorities of Renfrewshire Council and Health & Social Care Partnership and delivered through effective partnership and collaboration.

Key Outcome: Review and improve supported accommodation provision

Priority 30: Explore Cloud-based, Office365 Windows 1st Approach & Blended Approach to Working

Our current IT systems use both cloud and on-premises server backups. We will carry out a full review of our existing systems and explore the value and feasibility of full integration with Office 365. It will be our objective to ensure that while innovation is key to shaping our working practices and services for the future, we will also expect real value for money with enhanced efficiencies and a reduction in capital investment. Within year 1 of the plan we will have developed an options appraisal on current system usage.

Key Outcome: Improved working practices.

Priority 31: Continue to Adopt Modern Working Practices

Using modern practices and systems helps our staff and our services work more efficiently and effectively. For example, our MyBHA portal allows staff to work from tenants' homes using tablets. We will continue to explore innovation and our people will be encouraged to try new things, with any subsequent roll out based on research, consultation and training. We are committed to sharing experiences, successes and problems to ensure we learn as a team. We will also continue to engage with benchmarking groups to build capacity and understanding and to seize the opportunity to highlight our own areas of good practice and excellence.

Key Outcome: Our people have all the tools they need to do their job effectively

Priority 32: Investigate the Internet of Things

We will carry out feasibility into making use of the "Internet of Things" to provide a pro-active housing support and maintenance service. Our buildings - and key components like lifts, alarms and boilers - could be digitally connected. This will allow our buildings to alert Bridgewater's contractors automatically when parts need replacing and tell them which parts to bring along. Repairs and maintenance will be quicker and We will fix more issues on a first visit. Our supported tenants will also feel safer in their homes in the knowledge that their welfare is paramount.

Key Outcome: Improved working practices

Priority 33: Develop Virtual Housing Assistance

We will investigate and pilot chat bots on our online services, a virtual housing assistant which will provide 24/7 customer service access for straightforward transactions.

Key Outcome: Improved working practices





STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:

6

Demonstrate strong, strategic governance and financial control

Priority 34: Demonstrate Value for Money in Delivering Maintenance Services

Over the next 5 years, we will spend in excess of £8m on repairs and maintenance activities. With that amount of spend, it is crucial that we are satisfied this is being delivered in the most effective way and provides value for money. For this reason, we intend to undertake a review of our current approach and explore alternative models of providing these services assessing their relative benefits in terms of service delivery, value for money, employment opportunities, procurement approach and minimising the impact of rising costs.

Key Outcome: Maintenance service delivers value for money

Priority 35: Develop a Post-COVID Legacy

The events of the pandemic and the subsequent cost of living crisis will forever be seen as a challenging and difficult period. From a business perspective, and as a direct consequence of the pandemic, we have, and will continue to, encounter new challenges to our service delivery, operational planning and financial arrangements. We will now build on our new models of working and

service delivery which have been adapted during the last few years (e.g. flexible working, video conferencing, self-service via our portal). These have already resulted in a mindset shift and show of resilience among staff and customers alike, and we are keen to foster this as we enhance our support of the health and wellbeing of our staff, customers, and community.

Key Outcome: New models of working & service delivery are embedded.

Priority 36: Demonstrate Effective Governance

Having been subject to change within the Board and leadership team, we will carry out an external review of our governance arrangements. This will ensure we have the best possible governance, assurance, and audit systems in place to support and steer the organisation forward through the course of this Business Plan.

Key Outcome: We meet the Regulatory Standards of Governance & Financial Management

Priority 37: Maintain Robust Disaster Recovery & Business Continuity Systems

We will continue to review our IT systems

on an ongoing basis. Our IT Strategy will ensure that our data and services are protected and utilised in as efficient a manner as possible and ensure that we are as strong and resilient as we can be. It is also crucial that we continue to review and test our disaster planning and emergency planning protocols to prepare the business for all potential emergencies.

Key Outcome: Effective disaster recovery plans are in place.

Priority 38: Embed a Value for Money Approach

We will focus on value for money in all our activities, through procurement, resource planning and investment. We will develop a Value for Money Strategy which identifies the outputs from these principles demonstrating an efficient and effective way of managing our resources. We are also keen to understand our social value to Renfrewshire and will explore different methodologies for measuring this.

Key Outcome: We deliver value for money.

Priority 39: Develop our Policy and Risk Strategy

We will develop a holistic approach to the development of policy and undertake

regular risk-based assurance reviews. We will reengineer our risk management approach to properly support business decision making and direction

Key Outcome: Effective risk and policy reviews are in place

Priority 40: Review our Performance Framework

We will deliver operational excellence and achieve a sustainable performance monitoring framework, benchmarking ourselves against others within the housing sector. We will develop metrics to enable this and that allow us to benchmark and compare performance in relation to our peers

Key Outcome: We deliver high quality services

Priority 41: Diversify the Care and Repair Business

We shall review processes within Care & Repair, including submission of tenders for 2023 and beyond. Review resource requirements within financial constraints as part of this process. Seek to increase the Care and Repair reach where possible.

Key Outcome: We continue to manage the local Care & Repair services

Priority 42: Strengthen our Procurement Processes

We will set out to achieve a business wide supply chain and procurement approach that delivers best long-term value and efficiencies We will establish strategic and risk-based thinking in all procurement efforts. We will develop and embed new approaches to procurement and contract management that deliver value for money.

Key Outcome: We have established and efficient procurement process

Priority 43: Develop our Financial Resilience

We will further streamline financial processes and enhance financial control to aid effective, joined up, data-based decision making and improve the quality of strategic financial information. We will maintain financial discipline through rigorous financial controls, systems, accurate financial records, and reporting financial performance. We will manage risk through regular stress testing of our financial plans against potential risk scenarios.

Key Outcome: We have robust, joined up financial systems in place

SECTION 5: Governance and Risk

Governance

Bridgewater is not only a landlord or factor, but we are also an employer, strategic partner, and active community anchor. The daily operation of the business is managed by our employees who work towards our goals and objectives, including those laid out in this Business Plan.

Those who use our services are encouraged to become share members of the Association, which provides them with the opportunity to join our Board of Management and attend our Annual General Meetings where we report on our financial and operational performance and decisions are made about Board composition. We have Board Members coming from a host of backgrounds and sectors, including, but not restricted to, our tenants and other customers.

As a registered social landlord and registered charity, our Board and staff must ensure compliance with a range of legislation and regulatory standards. This ranges from housing, employment, care sector and health and safety legislation through to regulatory standards from the Scottish Housing Regulator, OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charity Register) and the Financial Conduct Authority.

Risk Management

Our Board is responsible for overseeing risk management. It is charged with monitoring the management of high-level strategic risks, reviewing Bridgewater's risk appetite, ensuring certain controls are in place and reviewing our approach to risk management.

We take a comprehensive approach to risk management to ensure that we:

- are versatile and responsive to new internal and external demands;
- are ready to make informed decisions;
- can give assurance to our Board and the Scottish Housing Regulator;
- reduce incidents and control failures; and
- can achieve our key targets and priorities.

As part of our proposed Governance Review, we will take the opportunity to review and improve our risk management framework and will embed a robust process in which risks are identified, assessed, controlled, monitored and reviewed. Our new framework will be designed to:

- embed risk management into our culture.
- raise awareness of the requirement for risk management;
- encourage a positive approach to risk management;
- support improved decision-making, innovation and performance through a good understanding of risks and their likely impact; and
- manage risk in accordance with guidance and good practice.

SECTION 6: Resource Planning

Our Board have clear oversight of the short, medium and long term financial plans of the organisation. Our business is on a sound financial footing and has a strong financial plan in place, based on sound assumptions.

Treasury Management

Our current financial plan shows £5.006m of outstanding loan funding as at 1/4/2022; we may procure additional funding throughout the course of this new business plan should we agree to implement a development programme for new build housing.

Treasury management is reviewed annually and loan interest rates as 31 March 2022 averaged 0.41% with 67% of the Nationwide loan funding fixed. The Association has two other loans which are interest free, one from Energy Savings Trust and the other from the Scottish Government. Around 75% of our properties are secured against the Nationwide loan funding.



SECTION 6: Resource Planning

Continued Financial Strength

Since 2017, there has been a significant improvement in our financial strength when comparing our latest Annual Accounts (2021/22) to previous years, for example:

- Net current assets improving from £2.4m in March 2013 to £4.85m as at March 2022.
- Current ratio, which measures how many times we can repay debts due in one year from current assets has improved from 2.08 in March 2013 to 2.82 by March 2022..
- Cash held has improved from £3.26m in March 2013 to £5.92m by March 2022.
- The loan value outstanding, (*due in more than 1 year*), has reduced from £11.1m in March 2013 to £5.006m by March 2022 and the gearing percentage has also reduced from 107.6% to 0.76%.
- Our net worth has grown, increasing from £7.8m in March 2013 to £15m by March 2022 – a 92% increase.

These improvements were achieved by a range of activities including:

- Enhanced financial management and budgetary control;
- Fixing the £3.5m loan and achieving low borrowing rates of 1.15% and 1.5%. Splitting this loan and fixing into two separate portions for different terms ie 3 and 5 year period.
- Securing loan funding in the form of two interest free loans with the Scottish Government and the Energy Savings Trust to allow the Association to spread costs in relation to energy efficiency and fire safety over a number of years.
- Securing savings from I-FLAIR joint contract procurement and other efficiencies; and
- Improving the Factoring debt recovery processes.

Benchmarking our current financial performance against the Scottish Housing Regulator’s Scottish average ratios for 2021/22, (which is the latest available information), highlights:

- Solid financial strength, evidenced by the interest cover and gearing ratios;
- Solid financial performance, evidenced by the profitability ratios; and
- Good performance in terms of operational efficiency, evidenced by the arrears, low bad debt, staff cost ratios.

Financial Planning

Our focus and objective is to outperform the financial plan assumptions, for example, through effective cost control, void, arrears and bad debt management. When actual performance outperforms the financial plan assumption, this will then feed through to the rent uplift decision. Due to our robust financial plan we were able to apply a voluntary rent freeze during 2020/2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our future annual rent uplifts within the 30-year plan are:

- Less than inflation for 2023/24 of 6% and this uplift is being applied from 29 April 2023 following feedback from our tenant consultation and the impact of the cost of living crisis on our tenants' finances;
- From the years' 2024/25 to 2050/51 the rent uplift assumption is based on inflation only.



SECTION 7: Supporting Strategies

To achieve the objectives outlined in this Business Plan, there are several key plans and strategies (and a policy schedule) that support the core Business Plan in delivering our business objectives. The supporting documents go into the detail of each area and examine the impact each will have on the business.

- **Asset Management Strategy & Environmental Sustainability Strategy** – It is crucial that our assets are managed in a structured and comprehensive way to ensure they are maintained properly, and we have detailed information to make strategic decisions on investment in individual properties and groups of properties. During this Business Plan, millions of pounds will be invested in our assets and having a strategic approach to that management and investment is pivotal for communities and Value for Money.
- **Customer Engagement Strategy** – Our Customer Engagement Strategy (Tenant Participation Strategy) considers our customer interaction to ensure that our engagement is inclusive and representative to maximise our customer insight and feedback which will allow us to co-design and tailor our services.
- **Equalities and Diversity Strategy** – our approach to Equalities and Diversity is outlined in this Strategy highlighting our approach to developing an inclusive and diverse culture within the organisation and the communities we operate in.
- **IT Strategy** – Our investment in and use of IT and digital platforms are paramount to our success as a growing, innovative and forward-thinking organisation. This strategy outlines our plans for IT development considering the demands of the business and our service users.
- **People Strategy** – our new People Strategy will outline the areas of focus for Bridgewater in terms of how we support and manage our people and activities planned to help us implement our Business Plan over the next 5 years.
- **Value for Money Strategy** – It remains one of our main objectives at Bridgewater to keep rents as low as we can and reduce the impact of spiralling inflationary costs on our tenants. This new Strategy highlights how we do that and what measures are taken to ensure that our decisions and procurement are based on value for money (VfM) principles.
- **Social Responsibility Strategy** – Many of our activities are non-housing related and focus on areas such as employability, health and wellbeing or environmental initiatives, for example. This strategy contains details of our activities in wider role activities throughout the duration of the Business Plan.
- **Financial Analysis** – this analysis is updated annually outlining the financial strength of the business and detailing how we will fund our business plan moving forward.
- **Performance Framework & Departmental Plans** – Our detailed departmental plans look at the specific actions to be carried out within each area of the Business to meet our business strategies and targets, and ensuring corporate and legislative compliance.





Bridgewater Housing Association Ltd
First Floor Bridgewater Shopping Centre,
Erskine PA8 7AA
Tel: 0141 812 2237
Email: admin@bridgewaterha.org.uk
www.bridgewaterha.org.uk

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