

Annual Report from the Chair 2020 - 2021

Strategic Plan

It is important that we have a vision and an understanding of our strategic direction. Our progress with developing our Strategic Plan has been affected by the ongoing Covid pandemic, and the consequent change in the delivery of services particularly in the care and support of our most vulnerable tenants and residents. Undoubtedly these have been difficult times but as an organisation we have worked together to ensure we remain a strong organisation. Our current Strategic Plan, with links into business planning, strategic objectives and individual department plans, was published in March 2021, and clearly defines our objectives for this financial year. Our objectives are all interdependent with an overriding priority to ensure that our current properties and care homes are fit for purpose and that we deliver a customer focussed service. The current Strategic Plan, which is available on our website, sets out the objectives for this year with an indication of our intentions in the future. At a Board Away day in June this year each of the directorates presented the proposed draft strategy for their area of work for the coming three years and beyond. The work on the plan has brought a new focus to the whole organisation, giving each team clear direction and an understanding of what we need to do together to deliver our promises to tenants and residents. What we are striving for is corporate ownership throughout the whole organisation of what we need to achieve; what needs to be delivered whilst improving our customer focus.

Governance and the Scottish Housing Regulator

At the end of March the Scottish Housing Regulator published its Engagement plan for Viewpoint for the year 31 March 2021 to the 31 March 2022. This stated "Our current assessment is that Viewpoint is working towards compliance with the Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management." This was provoked by the findings of an investigation into an unsubstantiated allegation of malpractice from a former employee. The investigation showed up some weaknesses in internal financial controls and procurement processes. Throughout the last six months the Board set up a short life working group which has been supervising our Operational Governance Action Plan to address the identified issues. It is our intention that when Viewpoint supplies its Annual Assurance statement to the Regulator in October this year we will be able to demonstrate that Viewpoint complies with all the Regulatory Standards.

Assets and EESH2

We have many lovely old buildings in Viewpoint stock however some of these will be very hard to bring up to the energy efficiency requirements expected by the Scottish Government. With the COP26 conference coming to Glasgow we have all been made aware

of our responsibilities to improve not only energy efficiency but to consider the legislative requirements of the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH) alongside the demands of the Climate Change Plan. To do this we will need to understand fully the levels of investment required within some of our most challenging properties. We are currently commissioning a new stock condition survey to provide up to date information on the condition of all our buildings and the levels of investment that will be required to fulfil the legislative standards. In the coming year the Board will have some difficult decisions to consider about the future investment in our stock whilst trying to keep our rents affordable.

Financial Resilience

During the pandemic Viewpoint has had to respond rapidly as the public health constraints impact on our ability to let empty properties, move new residents into care homes, and generally manage the other aspects of our daily life. These things impact the financial bottom line, and the Board set up a Financial Resilience Working Group to provide monthly monitoring of the financial figures to scrutinise the implications of the pandemic and the particular areas of concern with a clear aim of ensuring longer term financial sustainability. This has been extremely valuable in monitoring key areas of concern such as the increasing number of void properties and the number of care home vacancies. We continue to have a strong balance sheet thanks to careful stewardship of our resources.

Care Homes and Housing Support

The pandemic has had a detrimental effect on many organisations and in particular some of the care homes across the country. Viewpoint are extremely fortunate that in the current environment our three care homes are still very much in high demand. They are regularly inspected and have had even more scrutiny throughout the pandemic and are all rated 5 by the Care Inspectorate. The pandemic has put a tremendous strain on all of our staff but particularly the care home staff. During the most challenging times in the care homes we have retained our extremely high standards and ensured that the health, well-being and safety of our residents has remained the main priority.

As well as our care homes we also provide housing support and care @home to our tenants across our area. In the past few months, due to the removal of local authority funding, we have undertaken a thorough review of how this service is provided and how it can continue in the future. It is intended that this will be concluded by 31 March 2022.

The housing support staff and the Care Home staff, in fact all our staff, have shown outstanding resilience and performed over and above the call of duty during this ongoing pandemic. They have all been amazing in their dedication to our tenants and residents whilst following the national guidelines, and will continue to do so as restrictions continue to ease over the coming months.

Tenant Participation

Tenant involvement plays an important part in formulating and agreeing the Association's aims and objectives. We can only improve what we do if we listen to our tenants and communicate with them effectively. The tenant groups are the representative bodies for all our tenants and are recognised by the Board and the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Despite the constraints of the Covid pandemic, tenants continue to be involved in the recruitment of new staff members, policy and service reviews, consultation, planning and editing our tenant newspaper, Newspoint, and how we can continue to improve our service delivery going forward. Connecting Scotland delivered 25 iPads which enabled 25 more tenants to become digitally connected. We are currently agreeing a timetable to restart regular tenant meetings, and we would like to hold a tenants conference later in the financial year. The Board continue to be pleased with the ongoing progress of the tenant participation strategy and the outstanding work of our TP Co-ordinator.

Another year of Covid

A report of the year at Viewpoint must include the impact the pandemic has had, and continues to have, on our work and our planned objectives. In common with other housing associations we have experienced slow take up of our empty properties, staff shortages and subsequent difficulties in recruitment across the whole business but particularly care, an inability to engage face to face with our customers as well as a reduced maintenance service due to the necessary restrictions to keep our tenants and residents as well as our staff safe. Our tenants and residents, many of whom are single and elderly, have been frustrated at not being able to socialise with their friends and family. At the same time the constraints imposed by Covid have forced Viewpoint to assess how much of what we do that can be done remotely through digital links. In the future we can take advantage of this experience to increase our use of digital technology in ways that makes life easier for staff and tenants. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the additional effort made by all our staff through this difficult period, and to thank them for embracing the changes.

Outlook for next year

As we gradually move out of pandemic constraints, we have ambitious plans to catch up on our building maintenance, recruit to fill our vacancies and transform our housing support services. We will publish our three year strategy and business plan and take advantage of being able to meet face to face once more to improve the level of communication within the organisation and more importantly with our tenants and residents. Viewpoint has an exciting year ahead!

Iain Thompson
Chair of the Board