

# Homeless Connect TRUSTEES' REPORT

The trustees, who are Directors for the purposes of company law, present the annual report together with the financial statements and auditors' report of the charitable company for the year ended 31 March 2023.

## Objectives and activities

Homeless Connect (previously CHNI) is an umbrella organisation, founded in 1983. We exist to prevent and alleviate homelessness in Northern Ireland. We represent the views of organisations within the homelessness sector to inform the design of homelessness services and the development of housing and homelessness policy and strategy locally. Working together with our members and service users we seek to shape government policy and public opinion towards securing greater support for preventative and responsive services.

We support the sector in the delivery of good quality services through being proactive in identifying the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and influencing and shaping services to meet those needs.

We work collaboratively to create a community of support by being the voice of the homelessness sector and by delivering direct assistance through our projects.

## Policy, advocacy and networking

Encourage and support stakeholders to work together to prevent and reduce the impact of homelessness by:

- Facilitating collaboration and interagency working.
- Influencing policy through advocacy and representation on behalf of members.
- Monitoring and contributing to policy development and keeping members informed of relevant policy, consultations, and practice changes.
- Promoting and facilitating service user involvement.

Services include:

- Providing networking opportunities for members to share experiences and to work with colleagues from other sectors.
- Providing training and events to support staff operating both at a senior level and on the frontline.
- Informing policy by responding to relevant public consultations.
- Providing information resources for the homelessness sector, and evidence on their behalf, to influence the planning and provision of services.
- Making presentations on behalf of the homelessness sector to representatives of political parties.

Measures of success:

- Improved cohesion and partnership between homelessness service providers and other relevant statutory, voluntary, and private organisations. Our policy and representation work is widely acknowledged by members, the statutory sector, and government departments.
- Statutory and voluntary sectors work together in highlighting issues around homelessness.
- Raised awareness of homelessness through events including the co-ordination and promotion of NI Homeless Awareness Week.
- Homeless Connect is a vital resource in providing information to and supporting members.

## Home Starter Pack Project

Basic starter packs provided for homeless people moving into permanent accommodation to help them to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness throughout NI.

Measures of success:

- Number of packs distributed / tenants in receipt of packs.
- Sustainability of tenancies.

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## Fareshare in Northern Ireland

Tackling food waste by diverting and redistributing high quality 'in date' food from industry to organisations and charities working to alleviate food poverty in communities throughout Northern Ireland.

Measures of success:

- Volume of food redistributed
- Reduction in food going to landfill.
- Recipient organisations saving money on food purchases which they are then able to use for other necessities.

## Regional Service User Network (RSUN)

Supporting a Northern Ireland wide network for people with lived experience of substance use, to ensure that service users are given a voice and meaningfully involved in the planning of services at a local/regional level. RSUN aims to develop strong, active links between service user groups and the individuals who are part of these, building capacity.

Measures of success:

- Level of service user engagement.
- Number of service user groups.
- Service users in regular attendance at Steering Groups for policy and planning of services, by statutory agencies.

## Northern Ireland Frontline Network

Supporting workers in the voluntary and statutory sectors working on the frontline with those experiencing homelessness. Northern Ireland Frontline Network works in partnership with the UK wide Frontline Network so that frontline workers can come together with others to share their experiences.

Measures of success:

- Number of registered members.
- Level of engagement with the network.
- Links between the frontline voice and decision-makers.

## Public Benefit

The activities currently carried out for the public benefit by Homeless Connect can be broadly categorised within our mission statement.

Our services:

- Policy and representation
- Membership support
- Home Starter Pack project
- FareShare NI food sharing network
- Regional Service User Network
- Northern Ireland Frontline Network

These broad categorisations of activities are currently carried out for the public benefit. Our vision is to see an end to homelessness in Northern Ireland.

- to relieve poverty, distress and sickness and improve the conditions of life for people within Northern Ireland and, in particular for people who are homeless and those vulnerable to becoming homeless, who are in necessitous circumstances, and to advance education on issues associated with homelessness for the public benefit, and in furtherance of these Objects:
- to promote and improve the effectiveness of charities, voluntary and community groups, and other agencies in their provision of services to people who are homeless and those vulnerable to becoming homeless, by the provision of conferences, training, information, advice and other facilities, services or support;

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- to act as a representative body for those engaged in work with people who are homeless in relation to government policies and legislation and bring together in Council or conference or otherwise representatives of voluntary agencies, statutory authorities and other agencies involved with people who are homeless and provide a focus for mutual contact and co-operation amongst organisations involved with people who are homeless.
- to prevent and relieve poverty amongst people in need, in particular the provision of supplies of goods and services.

### Values

Our values underpin everything we do and guide our work and behaviours.

- Collaboration - Working together for a common goal.
- Fairness - Treating people impartially.
- Inclusive - Welcoming diversity and promoting involvement.
- Integrity - Acting with honesty and transparency and being accountable.
- Respect - Treating people with dignity.
- Supportive - Helping people to achieve their potential.

The trustees confirm that they have complied with the requirements of section 4 of the Charities Act 2008 to have due regard to the public benefit guidance published by The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

### Achievements and Performance

The year 2022-23 has, once again, been extremely busy with significant demand for our services. Key achievements and activities are set out below.

### Policy, practice and representation

- Research, commissioned by Homeless Connect and funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), into staffing challenges in the NI homelessness sector was published in September and launched in the Long Gallery at NI Assembly Buildings.
- Developed our service to work with people who have experienced homelessness, culminating in six meetings to discuss key issues which subsequently impacted the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.
- Provided the Secretariat to the All Party Group on Homelessness and facilitated its reformation after the 2022 Assembly election. Eight meetings were held including participation by several member organisations; the Housing Executive; and the Department for Communities.
- Working with the Homeless Connect policy forum developed manifestos for the 2022 Assembly and 2023 Local Elections. Proposals were adopted by a number of political parties in their manifestos.
- Co-ordinated Homelessness Awareness Week 2022 with the theme of 'Have the Conversation' which included twenty events across Northern Ireland raising awareness of homelessness. Media coverage was estimated to have reached over 75,000 people with social media impressions running at a similar level.
- Responded to consultations on the Draft Supporting People Strategy, NIHE Corporate Plan and Electoral Office Equality Action Plan.

### Home Starter Pack

- Distributed 3970 home starter packs with 90% of tenancies sustained for 6 months+.
- Provided 2792 Getting Started Boxes containing food and hygiene items.
- Secured additional funding that enabled us to provide 333 children's bedding packs.
- Research into furniture poverty (completed in June) highlighted the need for furniture provision for people moving from homelessness into a new home.

### FareShare

- Distributed 677 tonnes of food, equivalent to 1.61 million meals, to 179 charities, community groups and schools throughout Northern Ireland. Approximately 35,040 individuals benefited.
- 303 tonnes (44.7%) of the food was chilled offering improved nutrition.
- Awarded Investment in Volunteers accreditation from Volunteer Now!
- 76 volunteers contributed a total of 14048 volunteer hours over the year, an average of 1,170 hours per month and 185 hours per volunteer.
- 20 new charitable partners were recruited.

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- Tesco food collection in NI recorded 12.7 tonnes of food donated over 3 public collection days, which surpassed the record collected to date and equated to 30,421 meals.
- Achieved 6 awards at the FareShare UK national award ceremony.

### Regional Service Users Network (RSUN)

- Following the closure of Andras House office, an RSUN office was established in the Twin Spires Complex Belfast.
- Members fed into a Cocaine dependency resource for the Royal College of Psychiatrists, London.
- Members and staff took part in the Harm Reduction Conference in Liverpool.
- Commenced a review of RSUN operating structures with a view to reconfiguring, in consultation with the Public Health Agency (PHA).

Despite achievements, however, there were ongoing issues with staffing the project. Following the review of the structure and activities of the project, the Trustees decided to end the contract in 2023/24 and entered discussions with PHA.

### Northern Ireland Frontline Network

- Held 2 events in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry on the Cost of Living Crisis in June attended by 43 participants from 21 organisations.
- Held a workshop on trauma informed care attended by over 30 frontline staff and an online training attended by 8 frontline staff on 'Understanding and Tackling Hoarding'.

### Financial review

The end of the year saw a good financial result for Homeless Connect based on strong financial management. Net incoming resources were £97,981 (2022: £63,033). The detailed trading results for the year and the financial position at the end of the year are shown on pages 15 to 25 of these financial statements.

The total incoming resources for the year amounted to £2,340,935 (2022: £2,739,608) with expenditure of £2,242,954 (2022: £2,676,575) resulting in a net increase in funds of £97,981 (2022: £63,033).

### Reserves Policy

The trustees have established a reserves policy that aims to ensure that Homeless Connect maintains an adequate level of reserves to achieve its stated aims and objectives while safeguarding, as far as possible, the continued financial sustainability of the organisation. The policy requires that a minimum level of cash-backed, unrestricted reserves equivalent to three months annual outgoing expenditure be maintained by the charity, which trustees feel provides a prudent level of insurance against short-term liabilities resulting from events of an unplanned nature outside our immediate control. In the event of a significant drop in funding, however, it would obviously be necessary to consider how the funding would be replaced, or activities curtailed. At March 2023 the unrestricted reserves stood at £303,808 equivalent to 12 months of annual outgoing expenditure.

### Principal funding sources

The main incoming resources of Homeless Connect remains Grant Funding, Community Food Member fees, Donations and Membership Subscriptions.

Homeless Connect greatly appreciates the backing it receives from all its grant funders, including NIHE, PHA, DFC, DAERA and Fareshare UK, without whose support the organisation would simply not be able to run a number of its activities.

### Plans for future periods

Over the coming year Homeless Connect will continue to deliver on its business plan and will develop a new 3-year strategy for 2024-2027. We will also:

- Further develop work with people who have lived experience of homelessness to help inform the Housing Executive's homelessness action plan and homelessness services more widely.
- Visit at least 4 member services to discuss policy, practice and wider issues around their work.
- Develop FareShare partnerships, recruiting at least 5 new suppliers.
- Work with our accountants to embed new financial management arrangements and recruit a Finance Officer.

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- Commence work on an organisational restructure to support the development of services to members/community food members, to strengthen our core infrastructure and to sustain our work through the development of an income generation strategy.
- Continue to support our staff and volunteers, promote integration and a cooperative team working environment.

### Going concern

The financial statements have been prepared on a going concern basis.

The Trustees assess whether the use of going concern is appropriate i.e., whether there are any material uncertainties related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the ability of the charity to continue as a going concern. The Trustees make this assessment in respect of a period of one year from the date of approval of the financial statements.

While the nature of the charity's core funding is such that trustees cannot be certain that projected future funding will materialise and, as such, are unable to provide a cast iron guarantee that the charity will continue as a going concern indefinitely, our judgement on the basis of the evidence currently available, is that it is reasonable to assume that it can continue operating for a further 12 months.

### Structure, governance and management

Homeless Connect is a company limited by guarantee which is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association.

### Recruitment and appointment of trustees

Homeless Connect Board members are nominated and elected annually by full members at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Existing committee members must stand down after 3 years in office but are eligible for re-election up to a maximum of 9 years' service after which they must stand down permanently. Only organisations and individuals who are full members are eligible for nomination or representation on the Board. Office Bearers are elected by the Board Members from among their number at the first full Board meeting after the AGM.

### Induction and training of trustees

Once elected new trustees undertake a Board induction and are invited to take part in governance training.

Decisions regarding strategic development and organisational outputs and outcomes are decided by the Board, on advice of senior staff. All expenditure is monitored and agreed in line with agreed and documented financial procedures. Operational issues and staff performance in line with Homeless Connect objectives are managed by staff in accordance with the handbook.

### Arrangements for setting key management personnel remuneration

Staff salaries are aligned to National Joint Council (NJC) Salary Scales. The Chairperson and trustees work wholly on a voluntary basis and receive no remuneration, bonuses, or benefits-in-kind or have any pension entitlements. Likewise, volunteers are not remunerated. Out-of-pocket expenses are paid in line with good practice.

The Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) remuneration is set by the Board of Trustees with reference to NJC scales.

### Organisational structure

The Board is responsible for the governance of the charity. The trustees delegate the running of the organisation to the CEO, within a framework of delegated authority. The Board meets approximately every quarter. There are two sub committees: (1) Finance Audit and Risk and (2) Human Resources. These sub-committees comprise members of the Board and meet quarterly.

### Relationships with related parties

#### • Trustees

During the year, some Homeless Connect trustees, through their professional capacities, had transactions with the charitable company, e.g., membership. These transactions were carried out on an arm's length basis on the same terms and conditions as available to other members.

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## Risk Management

Homeless Connect maintains a risk management system, which seeks to identify and prioritise any risks to its activities and the delivery of its objectives and puts in place measures proportionate to the management of those risks. The main risks are categorised as:

- **Reduction in funding**  
The risk of losing core funding, with the associated loss of expertise, experience and staff.
- **Lack of demand for our services**  
The risk that other organisations may offer the same services.
- **Failure to respond to changing environment**  
The risk that the organisation does not take a proactive approach to change.

Homeless Connect has put in place a risk register, which will be closely monitored by the senior staff and Board over the course of the next financial year to formally record the key risks and actions taken to minimise those risks.

## Financial risks

The charity's activities also expose it to several financial risks including cash flow risk, credit risk and liquidity risk. The use of financial derivatives is governed by the charity's policies approved by the board of trustees, which provide written principles on the use of financial derivatives to manage these risks. The charity does not use derivative financial instruments for speculative purposes.

### Cash flow risk

The charity's activities rely principally on funding from external sources. Cash flow risk is managed by ensuring appropriate funding is in place before committing to any relevant expenditure and close monitoring of available resources.

### Credit risk

The charity's principal financial assets are bank balances and cash, trade and other receivables. The charity's credit risk is primarily attributable to its trade receivables. The amounts presented in the balance sheet are net of allowances for doubtful receivables. An allowance for impairment is made where there is an identified loss event which, based on previous experience, is evidence of a reduction in the recoverability of the cash flows.

### Liquidity risk

The charity's liquidity risk is managed by ensuring that an adequate level of reserves is maintained in accordance with the Reserves Policy established by the Trustees.

### Creditor payment policy

We support a prompt payment strategy and targets payment for goods and services to be made within agreed payment terms or within 30 days following month of receipt of invoices not in dispute.

## Fair Employment

Homeless Connect is an equal opportunity employer. The aim of our policy is to ensure that no job applicant or staff member receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of age, disability, marital status, political opinion, race, religious beliefs, sex or sexual orientation. They should not be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which are not objectively justifiable or which can be accommodated through making reasonable adjustments, where persons are disabled (as defined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995) or which are not relevant to the job. Selection criteria and personnel procedures will be reviewed regularly to ensure that individuals are recruited, promoted and treated in all other ways purely on the basis of merit and ability to do the job for which they have applied.

To ensure that the talent and resources of staff members are utilised to the full and that no job applicant or staff member received less favourable treatment on the grounds of his or her age, disability, marital status, political opinion, race, religious beliefs, sex or sexual orientation. Neither should conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be relevant to performance disadvantage him/her. To this end, Homeless Connect will:

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- Fulfil its social responsibility towards its staff members and the community in which it operates.
- Comply with the legal obligations imposed by the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Acts.
- Review at least once every three years its employment composition and practices to determine where members of each community are enjoying, and are likely to continue to enjoy, fair participation in employment.
- Seek to give all staff members equal opportunity and encouragement to progress within the organisation by implementing an affirmative action programme, where appropriate.
- Provide facilities for any staff member who believes that inequitable treatment has been applied to him / her within the scope of this policy and to raise the matter through the appropriate grievance procedures.

All staff members have a responsibility to accept their personal involvement in the practical application of this policy but specific responsibility falls upon the CEO, Line Managers and staff professionally involved in recruitment, staff member administration and training.

All staff members are required to comply with the organisation's policy of not permitting the display of flags, emblems, posters, graffiti, or the circulation of materials, or the deliberate articulation of slogans or songs, which are likely to cause offence to, or cause apprehension among, existing or potential staff members. Breaches of the policy will be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedures.

### **Disability Discrimination**

Homeless Connect does not discriminate against persons with disabilities when recruiting staff. Moreover, we do not discriminate against staff members with disabilities:

- In terms of employment.
- In the opportunities afforded him/her for promotion, transfer, training or any other benefit.
- By refusing to afford him/her or deliberating not affording him/her, any such opportunity; or
- By dismissing him/her or subjecting him/her to any detriment.

Where any arrangements made by or on behalf of us, or any physical feature of premises occupied by us, place the person with a disability at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled, we will take reasonable steps (considering the circumstances of the case) in order to prevent the arrangements or feature having a detrimental impact.

### **Staff Appraisal Policy**

We have a formalised performance management system. This system comprises objective setting, planning, one to one supervision, and yearly appraisals. It provides staff members with an opportunity to be involved in the setting of objectives and contributing to our ongoing development.

### **Statement of Trustees Responsibilities**

The trustees (who are also the directors of Homeless Connect for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under company law the trustees must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

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The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charitable company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

## Disclosure of information to auditor

Each trustee has taken steps that they ought to have taken as a trustee in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditor is aware of that information. The trustees confirm that there is no relevant information that they know of and of which they know the auditor is unaware.

## Small companies provision statement

This report has been prepared in accordance with the small companies regime under the Companies Act 2006.

## Appointment of auditor

Following a tendering exercise, Muldoon and Company have been appointed as auditors at the AGM held on 24 November 2022 for an initial 3-year period commencing financial year 2022/23

Approved by the Board of Trustees on 4 October 2023 and signed on its behalf by:

DocuSigned by:  
  
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**Liam Miligan**  
Director and Trustee

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**Eddie Magowan**  
Director and Trustee