

Homeless Connect

(A company limited by guarantee, not having a share capital)

TRUSTEES ANNUAL 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 2024.

Objectives and activities

Homeless Connect 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 front line.
- 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.
- Facilitating the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness to inform policy and practice.

Measures of success:

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

Home Starter Pack Service

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

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.

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 Service
- FareShare in NI food sharing network
- Northern Ireland Frontline Network
- Lived experience of homelessness.

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.

The company's charitable purposes are specifically restricted to the following

- to relieve poverty, distress, sickness and improve the conditions of life for people within Northern Ireland particularly for those that are homeless or vulnerable to becoming homeless.
 - to better educate on issues associated with homelessness for the public benefit, in furtherance of these objectives,
 - 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.
 - 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
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- 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 all, by providing a range of goods and services.

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Values

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

- Collaboration - Working together for a common goal.
- Fairness - Treating people equally.
- Inclusive - Meaningful involvement.
- Integrity - Acting with honesty and transparency.
- 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 2023-24 has, once again, been extremely busy with significant demand for our services. Key achievements and activities are set out below.

Policy, practice and representation

- Co-ordinated Homelessness Awareness Week 2023 under the theme 'Turning the Tide'. 25 events were held across Northern Ireland including an event with All Party Group on Homelessness and another to mark the 40th anniversary of Homeless Connect.
- Responded to Department for Communities (DfC) consultations on the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on Budget Allocation, EQIA for the Discretionary Support Allocation. DfC Intermediate Rent Scheme Housing Market Exercise, Anti-Social Behavior and Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Framework Consultation.
- Meetings were held with Lived Experience Groups which help to inform policy including input into Perion Products (Free Provision) Act consultation.
- We are founding coalition partners for NI with The Royal Foundation on launch of the new Homewards Project.
- Member of Northern Ireland Housing Executive Research Steering Group on Housing First, attended several meetings in relation to this.
- Participated in meetings of the Central Homeless Forum, Housing Strategy Steering Group, Complex Lives and Fundamental Review of Allocations Steering group.

Home Starter Pack Service

- Distributed 3,598 home starter packs with 94% of tenancies sustained for over 6 months.
- Secured £56K funding for 4,000 Getting Started Boxes containing food and hygiene items, 2,188 were delivered by March 31, plus a donation from a leading Housing Association for £7,500.
- Progressed the strategy for future supply of furniture for people moving from homelessness into a new home.

FareShare

- Distributed 726.63 tonnes of food, equivalent to 1.73 million meals, to 172 charities, community groups and schools throughout Northern Ireland.
- 303 tonnes (44.7%) of the food was chilled offering improved nutrition.
- 72 volunteers contributed a total of 14,735 volunteer hours over the year, an average of 1,227 hours per month and 204 hours per volunteer annually.
- Additionally, 47 employees from corporate partners volunteered.
- Over 3 days Tesco food collection in NI received food donations which equated to 17,321 meals.
- 21 new charitable partners were recruited.
- Received funding from Department for Communities for Social Supermarkets, and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Belfast City Council provided funds to cover Community Food Member (CFM) fees to help with cost of living crisis.

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Regional Service Users Network (RSUN)

RSUN project was closed off with the Public Health Agency in September 23/24, all final reports were submitted and monies received.

Northern Ireland Frontline Network

- Frontline staff in the homelessness sector had the opportunity to brief the Assembly All Party on Homelessness on the issues facing the homelessness sector.
- Submitted a consultation response to the Executive Office on Free Period products.
- Held a Frontline Network meetup in Belfast, which focused on the results of the 2022 Frontline Network survey and was attended by 21 staff across a wide range of organisations.
- Held two events in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry entitled *Compassionate Conversations*
- Held a training Session on Trauma-Informed Practice.
- Held a workshop on hoarding in Belfast, which was attended by 16 frontline staff and an Advanced Care Planning Workshop in Derry/Londonderry.

Financial review

The end of the year saw a negative financial result for Homeless Connect based primarily on reduced income. Net incoming resources were £(8,114) (2023: £97,981). The detailed trading results for the year and the financial position at the end of the year are shown on pages 15 to 24 of these financial statements.

The total incoming resources for the year amounted to £2,231,387 (2023: £2,340,935) with expenditure of £2,239,501 (2023: £2,242,954) resulting in a net decrease in funds of £(8,114) (2023: increase £97,981).

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 2024 the unrestricted reserves stood at £368,505 equivalent to 13 months of annual outgoing expenditure.

Principal funding sources

The main incoming resources of Homeless Connect remain 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, 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 develop a new 3-year strategy for 2024-2027 and a new 2-year operational plan 2024-2026. 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, whilst undertaking a review of Homeless Connect's Policy Forum and implementing improvements.
- Develop new partnerships for FareShare with celebrity chefs and donors.
- Develop furniture project to work along with Home Starter Packs.
- Continue with organisational restructure to support the development of services to strengthen our core infrastructure and to sustain our work through the development of an income generation strategy.

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- Continue to support our staff and volunteers, promote integration and a cooperative team working environment.

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.

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's Board members are nominated and elected annually by full members at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), Board members can also be co-opted through external selection process. Existing Board members must stand down after 3 years in office but are eligible for reelection up to a maximum of 9 years' service after which they must stand down permanently.

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 the 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, subject to security of funding. 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 referral 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.

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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.

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 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.

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.

Homeless Connect will aim to provide equality of opportunity in employment to all persons and not discriminate unlawfully against job applicants or employees on any of the protected equality grounds, which are:-

- gender, including gender reassignment, and those who identify as non-binary and gender-neutral,

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- pregnancy or maternity,
- having or not having dependants
- marital or civil partnership status,
- religious or similar philosophical belief
- political opinion
- racial group (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, Irish Traveller community)
- sexual orientation
- disability
- age

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.

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, leading to the potential loss of key staff with vital expertise and experience

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 is closely monitored continuously by the senior staff and Board 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 detailed in note 1 of the Financial statements 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.

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STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

for the financial year ended 31 March 2024

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.

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 were appointed as auditors at the AGM in 2022 for an initial 3-year period therefore are now in their 2nd year of contract.

Approved by the Board of Trustees' and authorised for issue on 18th September 2024 and signed on its behalf by

DocuSigned by:

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Maria Jennings
Director and Trustee

Signed by:

BE7286575E8F475

Eddie Magowan
Director and Trustee