

Covenanter Residential Association Ltd

Annual Report

2023-24

Covenanter Residential Association Limited (CRAL) was formed with a strong Christian ethos and continues to operate under that Christian ethos which is at the heart of the Association's commitment to residents and tenants.

The Association was set up out of love for Jesus Christ and as a practical demonstration of Christian concern for the community. The driving force behind everything the Association does is the desire to serve Jesus Christ in gratefulness for his love and in a demonstration of the love he calls his people to show.

The members of the Association, the sub-committees and the board devote their time and efforts as a practical demonstration of this love and are committed to putting residents first, to make a real and lasting difference to their lives.

We continue to pray that God will use the Association to His glory and that He will supply the wisdom and grace needed by everyone involved in its work so that the Association is a blessing and witness to each resident.

Financial Performance

The significant increase in inflation and energy costs that preceded and continued into this financial year made budgeting extremely difficult but I am pleased to report that the Association's accounts show a **turnover** of £284k (an increase of 10k on the previous year), **operating costs** of 239k (an increase of 14k on the previous year), leaving a **surplus** for the year of £45k (only 4k less than the previous year), with a year-end **cash balance** of £381k (an increase of 73k on the previous year).

The turnover of 284k was 4k above what was budgeted. The reason for this was due to an increase in rental income of 10k over what was budgeted as a result of higher-than-expected rental income from Renwick House over the summer months. Loss of income due to voids at Ballymoney (21k) being 6k over what was budgeted (15k) reduced this potential increase in income to 4k. There were 7 void flats at Ballymoney during the year, 5 were allocated and 2 remained void at 31st March.

Operating costs of 239k were 13k under what was budgeted (£252k).

The main causes of this variance from what was budgeted for operating costs was gas heating costs, electricity costs and maintenance costs.

The cost incurred in gas heating was 49k (£16k under the budget of £65k). This variance from the budget was due to gas usage at Ballymoney being less than expected and the price per kWh being less than budgeted.

Electricity costs of £21k were £4k over budget of £17k. This was due to the increase in energy prices generally.




Performance against KPIs






In the course of the year the board developed Key Performance Indicators to monitor the Association’s performance across 4 keys areas – Governance, Finance, Housing Management and Consumers/Tenants








A sample of the Key performance indicators is included below.

KPI Description	Key Performance Indicator	Target 2023-24	Actual 2023-24	Performance 2022-23	Trend Analysis
Governance					
Governance	DfC Regulatory Judgement – Governance Standard	Governance Standard met	RSAR Judgement 2022/23 – standard met.	RSAR Judgement 2021/22 – standard met.	😊
Board effectiveness	Board skills matrix	Key skills met	Key skills met	Key skills met	😊
Internal Audit	Audit actions completed on time	100%	100%	100%	😊
External Audit	Audit actions completed on time	100%	100%	100%	😊

KPI Description	Key Performance Indicator	Target 2023-24	Actual 2023-24	Performance 2022-23	Trend Analysis
Finance					
Financial Management	DfC Regulatory Judgement – Finance Standard	Finance Standard met	RSAR Judgement 2022/23 – standard met	RSAR Judgement 2021/22 – standard met.	😊
Rent Collection	Total rent received - rent for prior years rent arrears / Total rent receivable	98%	101%	100%	😊

Technical Rent Arrears % >4 weeks	Technical arrears >4 weeks outstanding at year end should not exceed 1% of the total technical arrears at year end.	<1%	0%	0%	
Non-technical arrears as % of Total Income	Total non-technical arrears / Total Income receivable less technical income	<5%	1%	1%	
Voids % of rental income		5.5% (as per budget)	7.5%	5.2%	

KPI Description	Key Performance Indicator	Target 2023-24	Actual 2023-24	Performance 2022-23	Trend Analysis
Housing Management					
Void Management	% of stock vacant and available for let	<4%	4.9%	4.9%	
EPC Rating Management	% of stock with EPC rating	100%	100%	100%	
Decent Homes Standard	% of Stock meeting the Decent Homes Standard	100%	100%	100%	
Gas Safety Checks	% of Stock with Gas Safety Checks completed	100%	100%	100%	
Fire-risk assessment	% of Stock with completed fire-risk assessment	100%	100%	100%	

KPI Description	Key Performance Indicator	Target 2023-24	Actual 2023-24	Performance 2022-23	Trend Analysis
Consumers / Tenants					
Consumer Standard	DfC Regulatory Judgement – Consumer Standard	Consumer Standard Met	RSAR Judgement 2022/23 – standard met.	RSAR Judgement 2021/22 – standard met.	
Tenant Satisfaction	% tenants satisfied that rent provides value for money	80%	88%	80%	
Tenant Satisfaction	% tenants satisfied that service charge provides value for money	80%	87%	90%	
Tenant Satisfaction	% tenants satisfied with the activities provided	85%	93%	85%	
Tenant Satisfaction	% tenants satisfied with the facilities provided	85%	93%	93%	
Tenant Satisfaction	% tenants dissatisfied with how complaints are dealt with	<10%	8%	5%	
Tenant Satisfaction	% tenants overall satisfied with the service provided	85%	87%	85%	

The KPI's indicate a satisfactory level of performance across the 4 key areas but highlight the need to work at reducing Void levels at Ballymoney.

Value for Money (VfM)

The Association seeks to embed and utilise a value-driven approach in order to achieve the best outcomes for the Association and our residents with VfM being a central tenet of our strategic and operational activities.

The Association defines VfM as the relationship between effectiveness, efficiency and economy through low costs, high productivity and successful outcomes.

As a small Housing Association with limited resources we are extremely conscious of the need to manage our activities in the most cost effective manner. We remain ambitious to provide residents with excellent quality services and understand that to achieve this we must ensure that we optimise the productivity from our finances, staff and contractors.

This continues to be a critical business requirement and we would much prefer to reduce costs where possible than cut staff or services. In our view, achieving VfM is about getting the right balance between the costs of delivering our services together with how efficient and effective we are as an organisation. However, it is not just about saving money. We consistently aim to get the most out of the money we have to spend. When we talk about our VfM achievements we refer not just to the cost savings that have been secured. We are also looking at the qualitative improvements, for example increasing/improving services with no increase in cost.

The Association has always benefitted from volunteerism, with all of our board and sub-committee members undertaking tasks on behalf of the Association as volunteers. This practical contribution by a large number of volunteers enables the Association to keep costs to a minimum.

Board meetings being held via zoom continues to minimise travel expenses. The total expenses paid to board and sub-committee members during 2023-2024 was only £107 as many board and sub-committee members chose not to claim expenses. This represents significant VfM, the contribution made by these volunteers to the association vastly exceeding the sum of £107.

Ongoing monitoring of costs and possibilities to reduce costs and increasing VfM is undertaken routinely as part of the budgetary and financial reporting process. Means of reducing costs such as reducing the services provided at the schemes have been considered but in consultation with residents it has become evident that the reduction in the services provided would be considered detrimental to the scheme by the tenants. In pursuance of our VfM objective to provide services that our customers want, at an appropriate cost, to a high standard, with high customer satisfaction these services have been continued for the enhancement and enjoyment of the scheme by the residents.

The Key Performance Indicators developed by the board will be an ongoing method of monitoring VfM by monitoring the standard of the housing stock provided by the Association, and the tenants' satisfaction with rent charges, service charges, activities provided, facilities provided, repairs, complaint handling, and their overall satisfaction of the service provided by the Association.

The KPI's highlight the need to work at reducing Void levels at Ballymoney in order to maximise income and spread the contribution to services across a wider tenant base.

I am pleased that the KPIs outlined above indicate that:

- 88% of tenants are satisfied that the rent provides value for money;
- 87% of tenants are satisfied that the service charge provides value for money;
- 93% of tenants are satisfied with the activities provided;
- 93% of tenants are satisfied with the facilities provided;
- 87% of tenants are satisfied overall with the service provided.

Regulatory Judgement

In the Association's most recent Regulatory Judgement Report 2021/2022, Housing Regulation Branch determined a judgement rating of 2 (Meets the requirements but needs to improve in some areas to ensure continued compliance). The Governance, Finance and Consumer standards were all met. The Housing Regulation Branch has made some recommendations to enhance the Association's compliance with the standards.

Tenant engagement and satisfaction

The Association continues to work hard at enhancing the lives of residents. To ensure we achieve this it is important that we understand the needs and views of our residents and we seek to achieve this through effective tenant engagement. This engagement remains a central focus of the board and our on-the-ground Housing Manager and Wardens. We continue to survey tenants and I am delighted to say that 87% of tenants were overall satisfied with the service provided by CRAL.

Volunteers, Staff and Stakeholders

CRAL activities are delivered through the practical assistance of volunteers on our board and sub-committees, and their efforts complement the hard work of a small number of dedicated staff, most of whom are part time. The Association is indebted to each group for their valuable contribution. I offer thanks for the ongoing input from our external partners in the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA). I want to thank my colleagues on the board and all the members of the sub-committees for the time they devote on so willingly and sacrificially for the work of the Association. I also want to express my thanks and appreciation to all the Association's staff for all their help, dedication and effort.

We continue to look to the Lord for His help and provision for the running of the Association in this current year and trust that it will continue to be a blessing to all those who live in our schemes.

Nathan Hawthorne, Chairperson, 2nd September 2024

Board Report 2023/24

The Association seeks to provide, at Covenanters Flats, affordable secure accommodation within a Christian environment for elderly and retired people who are capable of looking after themselves with minimum interference but with security, freedom of association, companionship and minimal concern about property upkeep and services.

The Association also seeks to provide, at Renwick House, safe, short-term, serviced accommodation at economic rents with reasonable privacy and at the same time freedom of association within a Christian environment for students and young people, coming to Belfast for the first time for work or study.

The board's objective is that the Association will continue to provide affordable, secure, comfortable accommodation with facilities and services for independent living, for residents within the Covenanter Flats and Renwick House housing schemes, in accordance with the Association's values.

As always, we look back over the past year with gratefulness to God in His provision for the residents, staff, volunteers, sub-committee members and board members.

During the year the Board was comprised of the following members:

- Nathan Hawthorne, Board chair
- Sarah Galway, Board member and secretary
- Joel Loughridge, Board member
- Roger Sloan, Board member
- Matthew Sampson, Board member
- Gareth Hughes, Board member
- Irwin McNeill, Board member

Covenanter Flats sub-committee

The Flats sub-committee continues to be chaired by Peter McConaghie and met throughout the 2023-2024 financial year.

The sub-committee puts in much work outside of committee meetings. The chairperson liaises with the housing manager, accountant and residents and oversees maintenance and staff. Amy Morrison has stepped down from the committee, we thank her for her diligent service on the committee and wish her well as she starts married life and moves to a new area.

The main business of the Flat's sub-committee involves around day-to-day maintenance issues, liaising with the residents' representative and the housing manager to make the Flats a safe and welcoming environment for those who make it their home.

Significant pieces of work have included beginning the refurbishment of the bathroom in the Housing Manager's Flat, seeking to increase the provision of social activities within the scheme, liaising with residents regarding rent, maintenance of the grounds and gardens, managing the maintenance contract with Triangle Housing Association and providing the annual Christmas lunch for residents. Residents also enjoy a weekly lunch provided by Mrs Francis McNeill.

We note the encouraging results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey, and put on record our thanks to our Housing Manager for her diligence and personal care towards the residents. We also note the great work she has done in managing the voids this year, a part of the work that is essential but not easy.

We thank too those who have volunteered throughout the year to provide activities for the residents, and also our chaplain Rev Edward McCollum for his leading of the monthly service and pastoral visits to the residents.

During the year the Flats sub-committee was comprised of the following members:

- Peter McConaghie, Chairperson
- Joel Loughridge (also a board member)
- Ian McCluggage
- Hugh McCluggage (sub-committee treasurer)
- Victoria Scott
- David Knox
- Margaret Knox
- Amy Russell (née Morrison)

Renwick House sub-committee

The Renwick House sub-committee met 7 times during the year. At the meetings reports are provided by the Resident-in-Charge, who has a liaison role between the tenants and the committee. Josiah Burke carried out this role well, organising a weekly communal meal and Bible study for the residents in Renwick House.

We want to thank him for his diligence and hard work as he moves on from this position. Throughout the year, a programme of routine response and cyclical maintenance was undertaken. A full cleaning programme was also carried out during

the summer to ensure high standards in all rooms before re-let to the new residents in the autumn term.

The sub-committee expressed a deep sense of gratitude for Julia Heggarty's dedicated, conscientious and efficient service over more than 10 years on the Renwick sub-committee.

The Renwick sub-committee members are grateful to God for His care and protection of residents throughout the year and put on record their appreciation to the wider church family and to friends for their prayerful support.

During the year the Renwick House sub-committee was comprised of the following members:

- Diane Wright, Chairperson
- Priscilla Drennan
- David Galway
- Andrew Graham
- Julia Heggarty
- Matthew Sampson (also a board member)