



HOUSING ASSOCIATION

**CORPORATE
STRATEGY 2025-2030**

CRAIGOWEN HOUSING ASSOCIATION
CORPORATE STRATEGY 2025-2030

Theme – ‘Consolidation and relationship building’

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1. Introduction

The Board of Craigowen Housing Association (CHA) is pleased to present this Corporate Strategy for the period 2025 to 2030. While a Strategy had previously been developed which covered 2024 to 2026, the Board considered that the time was right to engage in a more structured strategic planning process which would engage in a positive way with our key stakeholders.

The Board remains committed to determining how this unique Association - with a life sharing model at its core - can best deploy its assets to ensure that those who live in our accommodation continue to do so in homes that provide the comfort and standards that are appropriate to their needs. Our strategic approach to achieving this for the next 5 years is set out below.



Washing up!

2. Background

Craigowen Housing Association ('CHA') is an Industrial and Provident Society (IP174) and a Registered Housing Association, regulated by the Department for Communities. It is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (NIC106082). The Association was first established in 1977 to provide and maintain housing accommodation for people with learning difficulties and for those who care for them, along with their families. All of our services are provided within the spirit of the Camphill Community ethos.

The charitable objective of the Association is to:

'Carry on for the benefit of the community, in particular children and adults with learning difficulties as well as staff caring for such persons, and their dependants, the business of providing housing, accommodation and assistance to help house those persons, and associated facilities and amenities for those with learning disabilities'

We currently own or lease 40 properties with some 318 rooms providing bespoke accommodation for people with a learning disability and the co-workers who share their lives with them. Our properties are mainly located within three Camphill Communities in Northern Ireland – Glenraig, Mourne Grange and Clanabogan. We currently employ four members of staff to provide our services.

The Association is governed by a Board of Trustees, currently eleven members, who meet about nine times a year. There are three sub-committees – the Finance, Audit and Risk Sub-Committee, the Strategic Direction Sub-Committee, and the Staffing and Remuneration Sub-Committee.

3. Outline of our Strategic Planning & Consultation Process

The Board of CHA established the Strategic Direction Sub-Group in December 2023 and charged the group with the development of the 2025-2030 Corporate Strategy. The Terms of Reference for the Sub-Group, the broad process for the development of the Strategic Plan, and appropriate support were approved by the Board at its meeting in February 2024.

A SWOT analysis was conducted by the Strategic Direction Sub-Committee. The outcome of this analysis is contained in Appendix 1 and the key outcomes are reflected in Section 4 of this strategy.

A robust process of consultation was undertaken. The first part of the consultation process involved seeking and receiving written responses to a strategic planning questionnaire from the following partner organisations:

- Camphill Community Clanabogan
- Camphill Community Glencraig
- Camphill Community Holywood
- Camphill Community Mourne Grange
- Camphill Communities Trust

The responses to this consultation formed the basis of the subsequent work and, again, are reflected in Section 4 below.

The next part of the process involved seeking and receiving responses to a Strategic Planning questionnaire from the Manager and Board Members of Craigowen Housing Association. This was followed by a facilitated meeting with the Board of Craigowen Housing Association, the purpose of which was to discuss and further explore the findings from the questionnaires. All staff were consulted and had an opportunity to contribute to the Strategy.

This Corporate Strategy has been prepared taking account of all of this work.

4. The context for the Strategy

The last ten years have been very turbulent for CHA. As a small Association, providing niche services, there was pressure to consider a merger with a larger Housing Association. It was perceived that such a merger would provide economies of scale and a more professional maintenance function from a larger organisation.

CHA started detailed negotiations to merge with an Association which had been providing sub-contracted maintenance services, and was keen to pursue a merger. Unfortunately it became clear that the HA in question could not guarantee that CHA's objects would be respected, an outcome of critical importance, and the negotiations were halted.

Consultants were then commissioned to consider further opportunities for partnership and it was recommended that the best option would be to transfer all the assets of CHA to Camphill Communities Trust NI and de-register as a Housing Association. This would have the benefit of reducing the number of Camphill Community landlords from two to one and rectifying longstanding uncertainties of precise title and boundary issues. We began the necessary discussions to determine the legal, financial and practical steps required to deliver this outcome. As the various steps became clearer, the risks posed to CHA were becoming untenable. With great reluctance after so much effort and mounting legal costs, it was decided to halt the process. While the focus of the Board and staff was on achieving these broader long term objectives, which were always intended to provide more efficient services, they inevitably proved to be a considerable distraction from delivering the high aspirational standards of maintenance which had been outsourced during this period.

With those distractions behind us, over the last year or so we have been able to address the future of CHA in a much more positive way. The certainty has allowed us to build our maintenance team with the recruitment of two highly qualified maintenance officers and to put in place effective maintenance contracts.

A number of experienced and competent Trustees have reached the end of their tenure but fortunately we have been able to attract new members who have already brought a fresh perspective. Thus the Board has been refreshed and now has a relatively stable membership. So, with a stable Board and staffing structure, and with a sound financial position, we can consolidate and plan for the future with confidence.

The introduction and agreement of the Joint Management Agreements (JMAs) has been seen as a significant step forward in developing the relationships with the Communities. It will be important to build on these agreements to continue to improve communication and relationships with our stakeholders.

Our housing stock has been identified as mainly in good condition and appropriately tailored to the life-sharing culture of the Camphill Community. However, some of the older buildings require work to bring them up to that standard. In addition, there is clearly work to be done to facilitate a greener, more sustainable estate.



Avalon House in Mourne Grange

In the context of CHA's more stable environment, the Board carefully considered whether that provided an opportunity to seek to become a developing Association, expanding our housing stock by creating new schemes. If achievable, that might allow the Association to diversify its customer base and provide funding streams outside the current base. We sought the views of the Communities who did not identify any significant latent funded customer demand. Their view was that CHA should concentrate on the maintenance, modernisation and replacement of existing properties. Bearing in mind our limited resources, the Board concurs with this view. However, the Board will work with communities where extra funded demand has been identified - to consider how the accommodation needs to fulfil that demand might be met and the role that CHA might play in facilitating that.

The consultation process has provided a very clear steer that Craigowen Housing Association should remain firmly within the Camphill Community ethos for the 2025-2030 period. The Board has also been very clear that CHA should maintain its very close and almost symbiotic relationship with Camphill – unless circumstances start to dictate otherwise. Structures therefore need to be put in place to ensure that the close relationship with the Camphill Communities works effectively. Over the next 5 years, redefining and reframing the foundations of the collaborative relationship with Camphill will be extremely important. This process has already begun with the JMAs and regular meetings between senior employees.

Finally, in looking at the context over the period of the plan, it is important to identify the financial uncertainties. We are heavily dependent on the financial viability of the Camphill Communities. The risk of public funding reductions and freezes is not insignificant and thus it is important that we have close relationships with the Communities to ensure that we have early warning of issues and can work together with them to seek appropriate solutions.

In summary, the Board is conscious of the period of upheaval in the Association's fairly recent past but is also proud of the work that has been done in the last couple of years to improve services and rebuild relationships. In that context, the Board has set as the key theme over the strategy period the need to consolidate that work and to continue to build relationships.

5. Our Mission Statement

Our mission is:

To provide high quality accommodation, consistent with the Camphill Community ethos, that is properly managed and fully meets the needs of our beneficiaries and their carers at affordable rents now and in the future.

Our approach is driven by our core values.

6. Our Core Values

The following core values are important to us and to the delivery of services to tenants. We believe they represent the values of our Board and Staff and underpin all the business of the Association.

Camphill Ethos: we fully subscribe to the ethos of the Camphill Communities and the concept of shared living. This underpins all our activities and we will act at all times in the interests of our beneficiaries.

Honest and Open: we are honest about the commitments and promises we make, open about our intentions to those to whom we provide services and accountable for the delivery of the commitments we make to them.

Customer focused: we will always strive to meet our tenants' needs to the best of our ability and ensure they are engaged in decisions about their accommodation.

We will **Value and Support** our staff and Trustees.

Professional: we will seek to deliver a value for money, professional, high quality housing management service responsive to need.

Equality: we will treat everyone with whom we have contact fairly and with dignity and respect.

7. Our Strategic Priorities for 2025 – 2030

Craigowen Housing Association's key strategic priorities for the period of this Corporate Plan are to:

- Provide good quality homes.
- Provide high quality services.
- Foster our partnership with the Camphill Community.
- Continue to build an effective and sustainable organization



Weavery workshop in Mourne Grange

Strategic Priority 1 - Provide Good Quality Homes

In line with the Camphill Community ethos, we will continue to provide and maintain high quality and sustainable homes for people with learning difficulties and for those who care for them, and, where required, their families.

In particular we will:

- Continue to undertake regular stock condition surveys and include in the next stock condition survey process an economic viability assessment of when properties might need to be rebuilt and replaced as opposed to being continually maintained and renovated.
- Take action to ensure that our properties are environmentally and economically sustainable.
- Establish a standard against which Craigowen Housing Association housing stock should be measured in assessing the quality and maintenance of its housing stock.
- During the course of this strategy we will develop a 5 year plan for each of our homes.
- Regularly review and update the Craigowen Housing Association Asset Management Policy on the maintenance and refurbishment of properties and the profile of accommodation.
- Work in partnership with the Camphill Communities in order to review our current housing stock, improve our housing stock, identify housing refurbishment priorities and funding opportunities in order to respond to unmet housing needs.
- As opportunities arise, consider requests from the Communities for the provision of new homes for tenants or their carers.

Strategic Priority 2 - Provide High Quality Services

We will provide high quality services to our tenants, ensuring that we take full account of their needs and views as we develop those services.

In particular we will:

- Provide high quality and timely repair services, monitoring our actual response times against our performance targets.
- Develop and deliver our agreed planned maintenance programme.
- Promote effective tenant participation so that the voices of the tenants informs all our work and services – and build on our Tenant Participation Strategy.
- Regularly review and update our Joint Management Agreements to ensure that they continue to reflect best practice.



Sunrise House in Clanabogan

Strategic Priority 3 – Build our Partnership with the Camphill Community

Craigowen Housing Association is part of the Camphill Community family of organisations. We will consolidate and strengthen the relationship with the Camphill Communities and with the Camphill Community Trust.

In particular we will:

- Support the Camphill Communities in developing safe, diverse and thriving communities for people with learning difficulties, their families, and those who support them, in line with the Camphill Community ethos.
- Promote and celebrate all our tenants and their communities.
- Seek to develop structured and meaningful collaborative relationships with Camphill as a group and with each of the individual Communities and the Trust. Our aspiration will be to establish effective collaborative relationships at staff level, Board level and between the Chairs – relationships based on trust, openness and good communication.
- Explore structures to enhance collaboration and partnership working.
- Where possible and appropriate, participate in the social and community aspects of the Camphill Community – such as taking part in resident group meetings, celebrations and other social events.
- Establish systems and processes to ensure that Craigowen Housing Association is kept fully informed (as far as it is possible) of any threats or risks to CHA which may be developing within one or more of the Camphill organisations. For example – threats to income streams or properties standing empty.

Strategic Priority 4 - Continue to Build an Effective and Sustainable Organisation

We will continue to build an efficient, effective and sustainable organisation.

In particular we will:

- Continue to invest in the development of our people, including our staff and our Board to ensure that we have the necessary skills to deliver our strategy.
- Maintain a robust financial management regime ensuring value for money in everything we do.
- Maintain best practice in relation to compliance, financial management and sustainability.
- Enhance our public profile as appropriate including establishing a website.
- Comply with departmental regulatory standards and strive to maintain the highest possible DfC governance rating.
- Continue to apply best practice in Board governance.
- Maintain a Board recruitment and succession plan so as to ensure that there is a broad mix of skills and experience around the Board table.
- As the strategy progresses, consider how we might seek to grow the organisation in a positive way.

8. How we will take this Corporate Strategy forward

It is important that this strategy is backed up by robust plans to ensure that the strategic priorities and high level actions are taken forward in a timely manner.

Accordingly, Annual Business Plans including priority actions from this strategy will be produced (starting with the plan for 2025/26) to assist in delivering the strategy over its lifetime. The plans will set out detailed actions under each of the Strategic Priorities, key performance indicators, and resources to be allocated. Annual Business Plans will be developed following engagement with our stakeholders and will be monitored regularly by the Board.



View from Craigowen House towards Belfast Lough

Appendix One – SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic direction is now clear – The period of considering merger & asset transfers is over.• Autonomous and independent organisation• Size – as a small Housing Association, CHA is lean and flexible• Stable structure – sound legal structure and good governance is in place• Strong, highly skilled and effective board• Strong, highly skilled and effective staff team• Housing stock is mainly in good condition• CHA owns the majority of the residential properties outright with no mortgage or outstanding loans• CHA has no outstanding debt• Configuration and size of the properties in each of the Communities is a real benefit for people with learning difficulties and autism (and is very suitable for the life-sharing culture of Camphill)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to improve communication with and relationship with Camphill Communities and Camphill Communities Trust (NI)• Lack of understanding among stakeholders as to why Craigowen Housing Association exists as a separate legal entity• Size – as a small Housing Association, fewer benefits of economies of scale• No new house building for many years - not seen as a 'developing housing association'• Tenants and families are not included enough• Legal title to properties is not as clear as it should be• Mix of land ownership on the Camphill sites – boundaries not clear

Opportunities

- Period of considering merger is over – we now have stability and can plan long-term
- Close, purposeful, symbiotic relationship with Camphill
- Develop our own in-house property maintenance team
- Align to the wider green agenda and develop the sustainability of our properties
- Review the energy efficiency of our homes

Threats

- Financial viability – risk of funding freezes and reductions in the Communities, and the consequent reduced income from rent
- Department for Communities thinks CHA is too small
- Disconnected, fractured relationships with some key stakeholders
- Close, purposeful and symbiotic relationship with Camphill involves potential threats:-
 - Financial viability of the Camphill Communities;
 - Reputational risk from safeguarding/health & safety/security failures on the Camphill Community sites