

# **ABERTAY HOUSING ASSOCIATION** **INTERNAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019-2022**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Our Internal Management Plan (IMP) is set out as follows.

1. **Our Mission Statement-** which is our overall aim or vision
2. **Our Long Term Strategic Objectives-** give our general approach to achieving our mission. These aims do not normally change greatly from year to year.
3. **Our Present Position and Performance**
4. **Challenges and Opportunities ahead**
5. **Our Short to Medium Term Objectives** –which are the objectives, in general terms, which we aim to achieve over the next one to two years.
6. **Our Management Action Plan** – This sets out our detailed plans for the next year or so, towards achieving the strategic objectives above. The Management Action Plan gives an indication of the financial implications of each specific project. These are included in our main financial planning statements, which are our **Annual Budget** and **Thirty Year Financial Plan**.

The IMP is heavily influenced by our **Annual Risk Plan**. It also helps set our **Key Performance Indicators and Targets**, which we use to help monitor performance over the year.

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### **(Section 1) MISSION STATEMENT**

*“Abertay aims to enhance the quality of life in our communities.”*

Although this statement was agreed back in 2010, we believe it continues to sum up our overall aims and values.

This mission statement aims to sum up and enhance the legal statement of the Association’s Objects which are set out in its Rules as “to provide for the relief of those in need by reason of age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage through the provision, construction, improvement and management of land and accommodation and the provision of care”. These Objects also state “The Association shall not trade for profit and any profits shall only be applied for the purpose of furthering the Association’s objects...”

### **(Section 2) LONG TERM STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

#### **(2.1) Structure and Governance**

The Association’s structure should be whatever best serves the long term interests of its tenants and communities. As the Chief Executive has intimated his intention to retire at the end of March 2019, Abertay commissioned an options appraisal which was carried out in January. Committee decided that, given that there was sufficient financial capacity for Abertay to deliver its strategic objectives, with a sufficient margin for risk, and that the outstanding governance and operational issues referred to in the Scottish Housing Regulator’s Engagement Plan were being addressed by the Altair Action Plan,

and that the 'new' board were cognisant of the need to re-frame the corporate strategy and deliver a transformation programme there was no compelling reason for Abertay to seek a merger partner at this time. However the strategic development objective of '30-50 homes per year' was simply not sufficient to enable a strategically robust or resilient in-house development operation so the development function would be outsourced.

The Association is ultimately run by its Share Members. Its Rules set out three categories of share member-

(a) Tenants of the Association

(b) Service Users of the Association (normally these are home owners in our estates who receive factoring services from us, but others such as support agencies who receive services from us would also fall in this category), and

(c) Others persons who support the objects of the Association. These have typically been people with particular skills and expertise likely to be of value to the work of the Management Committee.

To succeed, we need to retain a strong, effective, Management Committee. It is therefore essential that we attract and retain a good mix of suitable members to contribute positively to the management of the organisation. We aim to have a full committee membership (15 members), with competition for places when vacancies arise.

We aim to ensure all Committee members have the skills and knowledge they need to understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities, through planned training, induction and committee member development.

## **(2.2) Financial**

It is an overriding objective that the Association remains financially viable into the long term future. This will be achieved through effective financial and treasury management. Our long term (30 year) financial forecasts give confidence that that the Association can afford to maintain its housing stock to meet all known future quality standards, while remaining financially viable.

## **(2.3) Risk Management**

Risk is an integral part of everything the Association does. We will seek to identify the risks we face and take a prudent approach to managing them. To this end, we maintain and update continuously a detailed Risk Map. This is considered by the Management Committee on a quarterly basis.

## **(2.4) Value for Money**

A focus on providing the best possible value for money is a key consideration for the Association, and always has been. Looking ahead, we aim to do more to show formally how value for money has been considered in our decision making, and report on how value for money is being achieved.

## **(2.5) Rent Levels**

Our key objectives in setting rent levels are as follows:

1. To keep rents as low as possible, without risking the Association's long term financial viability or ability to maintain its housing stock to a good standard.
2. To maintain rent affordability for tenants
3. To maintain stability and predictability from year to year, (i.e. to favour small steady rises each year, rather than having low rises one year with excessively high rises the following year).
4. To maintain our rents at levels which are reasonably in line with other social landlords in the local area.

We are aware that our rent structure is, to some extent, the result of "historical accident". We do not, at present, have a consistent rent structure, which values in a structured way the facilities available in each property. While, in an ideal world, this would be desirable, there would be many problems changing the structure now. We do not see a revision to our rent strategy as being a priority at present, but will keep this under review in the light of developments such as Welfare Reform.

## **(2.6) Personnel**

Our salary strategy statement agreed in 2012 states *"Abertay Housing Association values its staff and recognises the critical importance they play in the Association's long term success. The Association therefore aims to set pay for each post at the level which is appropriate in attracting and retaining staff of the required calibre."*

To help ensure that the Association pays all staff appropriately and fairly, we have used external consultants, both to review Abertay salaries against the wider jobs market (salary benchmarking), and to compare the responsibilities and skills of different Abertay posts against each other (job evaluation). We will consider carrying out these exercises again (either for specific posts, or more widely) as the need arises.

Abertay took a decision in 2015 to pay all its employees at least the "living wage" as set by the Living Wage Foundation, and continues with this commitment.

We consider the culture we seek among those who work for Abertay can be summed up in the following statement- "Treating everyone with mutual respect and trust, we strive to provide exemplary service and improvement in all we do."

We also aim to have in place excellent management, training and HR systems to bring out the best in all our people for the benefit of the Association and its aims.

## **(2.7) Health & Safety**

We aim, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that the working environment of all employees is safe and without risks to health, that adequate provisions are made with regard to the facilities and arrangements for their welfare at work, and that sufficient instruction, training and supervision is provided to ensure their health and safety.

We will seek to ensure the safety of employees of our contractors by ensuring that we only engage contractors who can demonstrate that they comply with H&S legislation.

We will give a high priority to minimising H&S risks to our tenants and other residents, through ensuring our properties meet H&S standards and common areas are, as far as reasonably practical, free of any defects which could lead to accidents.

### **(2.8) Procurement**

Procurement encompasses the full range of activities that lead to the purchase of goods, services or works. The Association aims to ensure that it achieves, and can demonstrate that it achieves, best value for money, on a cost-measured quantitative basis. Our Procurement Policy and Strategy seeks to provide a framework to ensure that the procurement of goods and services follows a consistent and transparent process, while supporting the principles of being efficient, effective and social responsible.

The Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014, brought in a significantly tighter legislative requirements relating to procurement, and we aim to comply fully with the requirements of this and other legislation.

While the regulatory burden and administrative workload involved with procurement has grown greatly in recent years, this has brought about opportunities. Abertay (and other Housing Associations) can now tap into a wide range of pre-tendered “framework agreements” set up by other organisations, or purchasing “clubs”. (For example –Scotland Excel, a buying consortium set up by all the Scottish Local Authorities). These agreements offer the potential for us to avoid having to go through a long, risky and expensive tendering process ourselves, while allowing us to gain through the greater “buying power” these consortia have. We anticipate exploring opportunities for making greater use of framework agreements when appropriate in the future.

### **(2.9) Asset Management**

The Association owns around 1,800 homes. We aim to maintain and improve our properties to a standard which ensures they continue to make desirable homes, so long as it is cost effective over the long term to do so.

Other than a handful of “abeyances” where tenants or owners have not allowed us to carry out work, all our homes meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). We are now looking ahead to future standards including the proposed Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH), which will be mandatory from 2020. Achieving this objective as cost effectively as possible depends on excellent asset management planning, informed by detailed and up to date knowledge of our stock.

### **(2.10) Operations**

Abertay aims to deliver excellent, customer focussed, value for money services in all its core areas. This includes

- letting homes which are in good condition, to those in greatest need, as effectively as possible;
- supporting tenants to maintain their tenancies. We will do this through proactive, sensitive, and effective action to help tenants avoid falling into rent arrears, and dealing effectively with neighbourhood problems;
- providing a high quality, cost effective, repairs service;
- maintaining our neighbourhoods to a good standard; and
- providing a good quality factoring service to owners in communities.

We aim to provide high quality and effective services, in line with customer needs, and for this to be recognised by our regulators and other key decision makers in the sector.

### **(2.11) Retirement Housing**

The Association has around 270 homes designated as retirement housing, in 7 schemes, each with its own common room and Retirement Housing Co-ordinator. Abertay was very successful over the years in creating happy, welcoming, and popular communities for elderly residents, through its sheltered housing service. In April 2017, with Supported People funding expected to end, we changed the service to a retirement housing model. This transition went very well, based on resident feedback. Ensuring that our housing for the elderly continues to be as successful and popular with residents into the future is of primary importance.

We expect the extra costs of our retirement housing service to be met by the tenants receiving the service. This has been achieved through the retirement housing service charge which tenants pay in addition to their rent. It would not be appropriate to have our tenants in retirement housing either subsidising, or being subsidised by, our other tenants.

### **(2.12) Factoring and Services to Owner Occupiers**

We provide factoring services to around 290 owner occupiers living in tenement blocks where at least one other flat is owned by Abertay. We also provide a more limited factoring service to 4-in-a-block properties where we own at least one flat, and we maintain common areas of estates on behalf of all the residents (where the common areas have not been adopted by the local authority). In total therefore we provide factoring services to around 2,200 owner occupiers, who are recharged for their share of the common costs. We aim to offer a high quality and responsive factoring service to owners. To achieve this, it is particularly important that we keep owners properly informed and fully consider their views. While recognising that, at times, the priorities of private owners will differ from Abertay's, our viewpoint must be "if we were the owner, would we be satisfied with the service and the bill?"

We expect the services we provide to owners to break even over time. We do not seek to make a profit from factoring, but the service we give to owners must not be subsidised by tenants.

### **(2.13) Wider Community Activities**

We define "wider community activities" as activities, such as the provision of services, which go beyond our "core" role as a social landlord.

Abertay aims to do as much as it can to improve the quality of life of the people living in our neighbourhoods. As our Mission Statement implies, we see our role as more than simply acting as a landlord, and believe we have a part to play in increasing opportunity, reducing poverty, and improving health among our tenants. In the right circumstances, investment in these activities can generate a valuable return to tenants on their rent money.

We consider that wider community activities can often be run most effectively by expanding what we see as our “core” activities. Where we wish to carry out activities to benefit our communities which are outside our core role and expertise, we will consider working in partnership with specialist organisations in that field, as an alternative to running the activity ourselves.

When considering investing in “wider” community activities, the key question is “is this a good use of our tenants’ rent money?” Whether or not this question can be answered in an exact financial calculation, if we are to go ahead, we must be satisfied that the answer is likely to be “yes”.

#### **(2.14) Partnership Working**

Abertay recognises that there are occasions when economies of scale and cost savings may be achieved by working jointly with other organisations. Situations of this type might include entering into a joint contract with a contractor, or setting up a shared service with another organisation. The Association will actively seek out opportunities for joint working (i.e. joint procurement - see section above) on any basis where the benefits from the arrangement to us and our customers are expected to outweigh any drawbacks.

#### **(2.15) Information Technology**

For the organisation to operate effectively, we need to make full use of the IT resources available to us. This requires well designed, integrated, systems, used by well trained staff. We recognise that IT is creating new opportunities to improve communication with our customers (for example - social media) and we will aim to adopt these where appropriate.

#### **(2.16) Development**

The Association desires to acquire new homes, to improve the quality and age profile of our stock, and increase our rental income. Ideally, we would wish to have a development programme of 30 – 50 new homes per year.

Over the past few years, the Scottish Government’s target of seeing 50,000 new homes built over the 5 year period to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, and a grant benchmark of £70,000 per new home, means building new homes has been relatively attractive for Housing Associations. The outlook from 2021 onwards is more uncertain however.

We recognise that development is a relatively high risk activity. We will therefore be selective in the opportunities we pursue and ensure that risk is fully taken into account. A range of other funding and tenure models (e.g. Shared Equity, Mid-Market Rent, etc.) are being promoted by the Scottish Government at present. While we see these as being peripheral to our core activities, we

will continue to monitor whether these represent worthwhile opportunities for Abertay.

We expect any development we invest in to be financially self-supporting. Any development opportunities will be subject to full financial appraisal and risk assessment before we commit to the project. We may, however, consider investing in new housing which does not generate a positive financial return where there are exceptional strategic or other benefits which outweigh the net cost.

### **(Section 3) OUR PRESENT POSITION AND PERFORMANCE**

#### **Financial position**

The Association currently has about £30.5m in loans outstanding. This includes £9m which has been agreed with RBS, but has not yet been drawn down. This is to finance our new development and property improvement plans. Most of our housing stock was valued in February 2018 by JLL at £38m and the total value of our stock (including stock last valued in 2016) is around £43 million. (This will increase with the addition of the new build developments). The secured stock will be valued again for lending purposes in summer 2019.

The Association's borrowing capacity is largely set by the value of its properties. The Association's level of debt is comfortable in relation to the property value. We do not foresee the need for any new borrowing in the next few years, and levels of debt are expected to fall steadily as repayments are made.

The Association's long term financial position is heavily dependent on what we expect to spend each year on repairing and upgrading our homes. We purchased Asset Management software (Keystone) five years ago and have been striving to improve the quality of information we hold to help us predict and plan for future maintenance work. Overall, the work foreseen at present is affordable based on known property standards (although this cannot anticipate any higher property standards which may come into force in the future).

#### **Operational performance and customer satisfaction**

Our operational performance as shown by the figures published by the Scottish Housing Regulator for 2017-18 is good. In general, our performance in terms of "direct" measures (average repair times, rent arrear levels, etc) is very good with most measures being significantly better than the Scottish average. Our performance in terms of reported customer satisfaction survey results is below the Scottish Average however and reasons for this are discussed in the following paragraph.

We carry out satisfaction surveys of tenants and owners every three years, and these were last done in the summer of 2016. This was done by a postal survey, sent to all residents. We have carried out postal surveys in recent years (for reasons of cost and to ensure comparability with our previous surveys). Many other HAs carry out "face to face" surveys, and it is widely recognised that "face to face" surveys tend to produce higher satisfaction results. The relative costs and benefits of postal versus face to face surveys will need to be considered before carrying out the next three yearly survey in the summer of 2019.

We consistently spend significantly more on both reactive and planned maintenance than most HAs. This can be attributed to the fact that Abertay has a much higher proportion of older housing than most Associations. We carry out more reactive repairs per property than most social landlords. We also know that the quality of our reactive repairs service is very high (no other social landlord to our knowledge offers tenants such a customer focussed repairs service, for example). Continuing to review our service, and understanding the factors influencing Abertay's relatively high costs is therefore important.

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## **(Section 4) CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD**

The main **challenges** the Association is likely to face over the coming years are as follows:-

1. **Welfare Reform** –The Welfare Reform changes, and cuts in the Government's Welfare Budget, are having a negative impact on the ability of many tenants to pay their rent and maintain their tenancies. Universal Credit (UC), with Housing Benefit being paid to the tenant, rather than directly to us, is a particular concern. The full roll out of UC started in Dundee in November 2017 and as of March 2019 there are about 300 tenants on UC. This is having a substantial impact on both rent arrears and workload in rent collection, and will present a major challenge in the coming year and beyond.

The under occupancy surcharge (the "bedroom tax") is also still a concern, although the Scottish Government are at present providing funding to eliminate its effects on tenants. Cuts in Tax Credits will also have a significant impact over the coming year.

2. **Old and Hard to Let Stock** – A high proportion (40%) of Abertay's stock is tenement flats, which were built in the 1950s, most of "no fines" construction. Over time, as tenants expectations rise, and more new homes are built in the city, this stock is likely to become increasingly hard to let. In some neighbourhoods in particular, this is already starting to be a factor (e.g 3 bedroom tenement flats in Fintry). The investment we have made in recent years on upgrading work has minimised the impact we have seen so far, but these flats may become increasingly hard to let in the future.

**Opportunities** for the Association include-

1. **New Build**-The Scottish Government's commitment to build 50,000 new homes (including 35,000 for social rent) over the 5 years to March 2021, and increased grant rates, have created a more favourable environment for social housing development than has existed for years. Given the long timescales involved in new home development however, this window of opportunity is rapidly drawing to a close.
2. **Operational Effectiveness** – The Association has a highly skilled and dedicated staff team. We have a relatively low cost base, and are financially sound. Our area of operation is relatively compact, and we have strong links to our tenants and communities. These qualities,

when coupled with initiative, give us great scope to prosper as an organisation long into the future, while continuing to enhance the quality of life in our communities.

3. Retiral of Chief Executive – This gives the Association the opportunity to consider its future direction and ensure the way forwards is strategically best for the organisation.

## **(Section 5) SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM OBJECTIVES (over next 1-2 years)**

### **(5.1) COMMITTEE AND GOVERNANCE**

Having carried out a thorough strategic options appraisal in the light of the retiral of the current Chief Executive, the Management Committee decided that the interests of tenants would be best served by the Association remaining as an autonomous organisation. Committee recognise however that further work is required to ensure a sustainable management board, with the numbers and mix of skills required, is in place.

At present (March 2019), we have 12 Committee members, including 3 co-optees. We recently advertised for new members and have identified three individuals with relevant skills who are interested. Further recruitment and induction activities will take place over the coming months. Induction and training provision for new and existing members will also be continued.

A review of the Association's governance and financial management arrangements were carried out in late 2018 by Altair. The Improvement Plan agreed from that review included five recommendations relating to governance and these are being implemented as a priority. The most far reaching of these recommendations is the design and implementation of an Assurance Framework. While this framework is expected to be formally introduced in March 2019, it is likely that further work will be needed to ensure all members fully understand the framework, so that it can quickly become a key part of the Association's governance toolkit.

### **(5.2) FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

We aim to have a robust system of internal procedures and controls in place within Abertay to ensure that we receive good quality, reliable, financial information. The work of our own staff is supported and reviewed by an annual programme of internal audit reviews carried out by outside consultants, and a statutory audit of our financial statements carried out by external auditors.

We also have strong treasury management procedures to ensure our borrowing and surplus funds are managed appropriately.

Our objective over the coming years is to ensure our present procedures and controls continue, and are reviewed and strengthened as appropriate to ensure they meet the Association's needs.

Consultants have been engaged to carry out an independent review of our budget and 30 year financial plans and their finding as likely to be reported to the Management Committee in April 2019.

### **(5.3) PERSONNEL**

We consider our present staffing structure largely meets our needs. There is however a “gap” in relation to development work and this is discussed in the section on Development at 5.15 below.

An Employee Wellbeing Group”, led by our Corporate Services Director, is looking at initiatives to take forward staff relations and morale. At present, the group is working to maintain our Healthy Working Lives Bronze Award and work towards the Silver Award.

Good staff / management consultation is important to the Association. Staff ideas and suggestions, and staff feedback on changes proposed by management, are channelled through a “Staff Focus Group”. This group is made up of staff representatives excluding senior management. The group considers the issues and, if appropriate, puts them forward to the Chief Executive for a decision or comment. If a decision on the matter is outwith the Chief Executive’s authority, he will refer it to the Management Committee. This mechanism seems to be working well in dealing with matters within the CE’s authority. On matters which require Committee approval, such as the annual pay review, Committee have formed an HR Sub Committee which will consult with staff representatives and report to the Management Committee as necessary.

Staff can currently join the Local Government Pension Scheme which is a defined benefit scheme. This is valued by staff, but can be more expensive than a defined contribution scheme. It is a number of years since we last reviewed this. That review showed that remaining in the current scheme was the best option. We plan to carry out an updated review in 2019/20.

### **(5.4) HEALTH & SAFETY**

The staff H&S Working Group, led by our H&S Administrator will continue to meet to ensure H&S risks are identified and action is taken to mitigate them. Attendance at these meetings by a member of the Management Committee has been very valuable in underlining the importance the Management Committee gives to the health and safety of its staff and customers. Our objective is to ensure the good work the group has been doing continues.

### **(5.5) PROCUREMENT**

We have made substantial changes to our procurement policy and procedures in the past few months, to ensure they are in line with current requirements and best practice. This has included a new Procurement Policy, new Committee reporting requirements and staff training.

The recent review by Altair made 8 improvement recommendations relating to procurement, and these are all being implemented as a priority. While the new “Procurement Toolkit”, and details of other work done to complete the recommendations will be presented to the Management Committee in March,

further monitoring and follow up work will be required over the coming months to ensure the new procedures become fully embedded within the Association.

#### **(5.6) ASSET MANAGEMENT**

Our asset management action plan is reviewed annually in November.

As stated at 2.8, all our homes (other than a handful where tenants have not allowed us access to carry out work) meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. The work we have planned over the coming years aims to ensure that (as far as it is reasonable to do so) all our homes meet EESSH (Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing) by March 2020.

The ambitious two year programme to refurbish our 80+ steel houses in Craigebank was completed in early 2018.

We started a major programme of external work to homes in Fintry in early 2017. The work includes replacement of roofs (and removal of chimneys), and windows (although not all work will be needed at all properties). This will make up the bulk of Abertay's planned maintenance expenditure over the next 5 or more years. As the tenement blocks include a large number of flats which are privately owned, winning the agreement of owners to share the costs of the work will be a major challenge in this project.

The Association has an Acquisitions and Disposals Policy which allows us to consider purchasing individual properties when they become vacant, and disposing of others, on the open market, (subject to certain criteria). We will continue to use this policy to help eliminate the problems of mixed ownership tenements. (For example, by selling the last Abertay flat in a tenement when it becomes vacant, and seeking to purchase flats which come up for sale where we own all the others in the close.)

EESSH (the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing) will come into force in April 2020, and we are required to report each year to SHR on progress towards meeting the standard in all our stock. Work will be required during the coming year to improve the energy efficiency data we hold on our stock. We are confident however that the costs of property upgrading work to meet EESSH are sufficiently contained within our planned maintenance budgets.

The Association use Keystone Asset Management Software to hold its main property information. We will seek to increase the number of users familiar with this system over the coming year. To enhance our stock condition information, we have introduced the objective of visiting every property to carry out a full survey once every five years.

#### **(5.7) OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

The plan for the coming year and beyond includes the following.

##### **Welfare Reform**

At present, about two thirds of our tenants receive some help towards their rent costs through the Welfare system. The new Universal Credit (UC) system was rolled out to all tenants in Dundee receiving benefits from November 2017.

(Tenants are changed to UC when there is a change in their benefits claim.) Under UC, the housing element of a tenant's benefits are paid to the tenant, rather than direct to their landlord. Since November 2017 the number of tenants on UC has risen steadily to around 300 in March 2019, and is likely to rise to 800-900. Our experience (and the experience of every other social landlord) is that levels of rent arrears rise, and ensuring rent payments are maintained is extremely time consuming. While we have seen rent arrears levels rise, they remain under tight control. We will continue to monitor rent arrears, and workloads, as the UC roll-out progresses and take any further actions which may become needed.

### **Housing Allocations**

Abertay joined Dundee City Council's Common Housing Register (CHR) in November 2014. Other HA members are Hillcrest, Caledonia, and the Home Group. This enables applicants to apply for housing with all these landlords using a single form. The CHR is working well for our staff and applicants.

### **Voids and Relets**

We took a decision in 2012 to increase the standard of homes provided to new tenants. We have reviewed and adjusted this "Void Standard" several times since then, as we try to find the best balance between cost and quality. We also, as a matter of policy, aim to repair any underlying problems during the void period, to avoid disturbing (and in some cases decanting) existing tenants. The repair work which can take place during the void period can therefore be considerable. Despite this, the average time taken to re-let properties is low in comparison with most other social landlords, which is of great credit to all the staff involved.

Our focus ahead will be to ensure that costs of working to our current void standard are well managed and demonstrate value for money, and re-let times remain good.

### **Tenant Participation**

Our focus over the past year has been to try to increase the number and range of tenants who have an input into our decision making. We have done this by moving away from a formally constituted tenants group holding regular meetings (eg Abertay Residents Organisation-ARO), to more informal and flexible consultation arrangements.

We have set up a "**Register of Interested Residents**", which is a register of residents who have indicated that they are willing to contribute their views by taking part in occasional surveys (3-4 per year) and focus group meetings. At present we have around 80 residents on this Register. We have consulted with them on matters such as the style of our Annual Report, and the new Tenant's Handbook, and the feedback we have received has been valuable.

To improve communication with our younger residents (a group with whom we have had limited engagement in the past), in 2016 we launched an Abertay Facebook page. We are pleased to see this continuing to build interest, and increase in importance as a means of engaging with residents.

In 2014, we introduced “Estate Walkabouts”, to give residents the opportunity to review their neighbourhood on a regular basis alongside our staff. These have been worthwhile in identifying improvements to our estates, and satisfaction surveys indicate that they are appreciated by residents. We will continue these, by carrying out two ‘Walkabouts’ in each estate over the coming year.

### **Customer Service**

We aim for our customer service staff to be able to handle a very high proportion of customer enquiries and requests “one stop”, when the customer first contacts. Not only is this best for the customer (which is confirmed by high customer satisfaction with how their call was handled), it also minimises interruptions for other staff.

We recently introduced automated text messaging software and this is proving extremely effective for sending rent payment reminders, reminders of repair visits, etc.

### **(5.8) RETIREMENT HOUSING**

We changed the service we provide from sheltered housing to retirement housing in April 2017. A survey of residents carried out 6 months after the change showed a large majority of residents have been happy with the changes. A further survey of residents will be carried out in spring 2019. We aim to ensure that the changes in the service continue to bed in, and residents continue to enjoy and make use of the services we offer.

### **(5.9) FACTORING SERVICES**

Our property maintenance plans for the next few years include a large amount of work to common parts of our tenement flats (re-roofing etc). This makes our factoring services particularly important, as getting owners to agree to, and pay for the work will be critical. We recently reviewed and revised our procedures for liaising with owners to assist with this.

### **(5.10) WIDER COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES**

Activities we currently undertake are as follows.

Families House at 20 Grampian Gardens – We lease this building for a nominal rent to One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS), who run a range of child care and family related activities from it for the benefit of the local community.

Aspiring Community Fund Project – we were awarded funding last year to create two full time posts, for a Digital Participation Officer, and an Energy Efficiency Advisor. These posts are providing real benefit by helping tenants manage their Universal Credit claims and minimise their fuel costs, both increasing their ability to pay their rent on time. This funding runs until June 2019. We are currently trying to source funding to enable this good work to continue, and Committee recently agreed to a temporary extension of these posts.

### **(5.11) INFORMATION AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY**

Abertay uses SDM software for its housing management. We are generally happy with this. SDM has the ability to allow tenants to log into their account to carry out transactions like finding out their balance, booking a repair, updating their details. We will investigate the effectiveness of this system with a view to introducing it in the future.

We use Keystone software for asset management purposes. Over the coming year we aim to continue to improve the quality of the stock condition information held through a programme of inspections by our Maintenance Officers. We also aim to improve the energy efficiency data we hold on our stock through targeted EPC surveys, and by making Keystone's ability to generate estimated energy efficiency ratings operational.

We will continue to assess developments in technology.

### **(5.12) DATA PROTECTION**

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force in the UK on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. This greatly increases the responsibility on Abertay to ensure we only hold essential personal data, with potentially very heavy penalties for any data breaches. This puts a significant administrative burden on the Association, both to put in place the necessary procedures before GDPR comes into force, and to ensure the procedures are followed thereafter. This will continue to be a very important area of work for us over the coming year.

### **(5.13) FREEDOM OF INFORMATION**

The provisions of the Freedom of Information Act have been extended to apply to RSLs from 11 November 2019. Services to owners are, however, exempt. We will need to prepare for the implementation over the coming months.

### **(5.14) VALUE FOR MONEY**

While ensuring value for money has always been central to our decision making, it is being increasingly discussed by the Housing Regulator as a subject in its own right. We wish to be at the forefront in this field, and have participated in Scotland's Housing Network's Value for Money benchmarking service. This has been helpful in enabling us to benchmark our performance against our peers. During the coming year regular reporting to the Management Committee on value for money will be introduced.

### **(5.15) DEVELOPMENT**

The Association completed a 16 home development in Forfar during the year, and will have completed the 56 home development at Finavon Street by the summer.

We have planning consent, and funding in place, for the development of 43 homes on the site of Charleston Primary School. We are currently recruiting a development consultant to manage this project to completion. We hope to be in a position to have a contractor start on site in the autumn of 2019, to enable the homes to be completed in line with Scottish Government targets.

Other “pipeline” development opportunities are further into the future and much less certain. Our development of the site of Mossgeil Primary School is in DCC’s SHIP for 2021-22 for 40 units. We have also had discussions with DCC over the development of land in Finavon Terrace and Pitkerro Road. These would be for around 12 and 28 homes respectively.

The Management Committee will need to decide in the near future whether it wishes to continue to progress these “pipeline” development opportunities, and seek to identify new opportunities. If it does, it will need to decide how to resource these activities.