



Rural Stirling

Housing Association



Quality property
management services

GOVERNING BODY MEMBERS GUIDE

Rural Stirling Housing Association, Stirling Road, Doune, FK16 6AA	
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Guide provides information to help you in your role as a member of our Governing Body. It forms part of the Induction Framework for new Board members and it is also a useful reference for more experienced members. There is a list of additional sources of information at the end. You can also access information about us by visiting our [website](#) where you will find our Guide to Information which has links to our key planning and policy documents as well as publications, minutes, and accounts. Your fellow Board members and senior staff will also be happy to provide you with information and answer queries and questions. Being a Board member is a big responsibility and it takes a while to feel confident, so please don't be reluctant to ask for an explanation or more information.
- 1.2 The guide is based on the SFHA model Guide first introduced in 2014 and updated in June 2024. and forms part of SFHA's *Get Governance* series of governance resources, guides and good practice advice that is produced for members.

2. Rural Stirling Housing Association and the Rural Stirling Group

- 2.1 Rural Stirling Housing Association (RSHA) was established in 1990 with the support of Stirling Council, Scottish Homes, and local Community /Councils to develop new homes to meet an established shortfall of affordable housing. Nearly all of our homes have been developed directly by us and we remain the main provider of new affordable homes within the rural Stirling area with a healthy ongoing new build development programme.
- 2.2 In 2013, we established a wholly owned non-charitable trading subsidiary, Venachar Ltd., to carry out activities that deliver our objectives, but which we are unable to carry out ourselves. Together we form the Rural Stirling Group (RSG).
- 2.3 We currently have 700 properties fully owned for social rent. We also have 10 shared ownership houses and 6 homes are leased to our subsidiary Venachar Limited, for letting on a mid-market rent basis. We provide a factoring service to 35 homeowners within our area.
- 2.4 We currently employ 17 permanent staff members who are based in office premises in Doune. Our annual turnover is approximately £4.5m per annum.
- 2.5 The vision of the RSG is for ***strong and attractive rural communities*** and our mission statement is ***to provide affordable, high-quality housing and support community aspirations.***
- 2.6 We have developed a set of guiding values that will steer our behaviours and help us to achieve our mission. The values that we hold dear include being ***Accountable, Ambitious, Caring, Collaborative, Inclusive and Respectful.***

- 2.7 Building on the above values are RSG's four key strategic objectives. Our strategic objectives are a set of interlinked objectives, underpinned by a delivery plan for the coming year and include;
- *Delivering excellent services to our tenants*
 - *Working with our communities to provide homes that meet their needs*
 - *Providing safe, high quality energy efficient homes resilient to the impacts of climate change*
 - *Building organisational resilience*
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3. What do RSLs do?

3.1 The majority of housing associations were established in the last fifty years (following the Housing Act 1974). In 2024, the sector collectively owns and manages nearly 304,000 houses, account for 48% of the social sector stock in Scotland¹ their formal title is 'Registered Social Landlord'(RSL).

3.2 The sector is very varied – some housing associations own less than 500 houses whilst others are responsible for more than 15,000 (the biggest Scottish RSL owns and manages over 43,000 houses) and is part of a wider group of multiple RSLs that in total own around 95,000). All housing associations are independent organisations that are responsible for their own activities, funding, and performance. Some are part of a group structure – this means that they have a legal connection with other organisations that might also be landlords, or which might provide related services such as repairs and maintenance or training or advice and support.

3.3 Housing associations are part of the social rented sector (along with Councils) and provide homes for people who are in housing need; they are committed to supporting sustainable communities that people want to live in. Housing associations provide housing, mainly for rent, for people across Scotland. We let our houses through **Scottish Secure Tenancies** (SST) and our housing stock is expected to meet the **Scottish Housing Quality Standard** (SHQS) and the **Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing** (ESSH).

In 2024, the Scottish Government started consultation on a proposed Social Housing Net-Zero Standard (SHNZS), which is intended to drive the transition to renewable energy sources for housing. Housing associations are also required to meet the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The Scottish Housing Regulator consulted on proposed amendments to the Scottish Social Housing Charter during 2024.3.4 Some housing associations are active in a specific geographical area (e.g., part of a city or town or a rural area) whilst others specialise in providing housing for particular groups of people (such as older people or people with particular needs).

¹Housing Statistics 2022 and 2023: key trends summary published by the Scottish Government 27 February (Scottish RSLs owned 303,782 properties at 31/03/2023)

A housing association's primary activity is providing good quality rented housing, although many also provide low-cost housing for sale via shared equity and some are developing homes for mid-market rent². Some combine their housing services with the provision of support, either by themselves or in partnership with other organisations. Most housing associations have developed services, either directly or in partnership with others, to support tenants dealing with the challenges associated with the cost-of-living crisis and rises in fuel/energy costs. Housing associations do more than just let and maintain houses: they are active in the communities that their tenants live in, providing and supporting a wide range of other activities such as:

- Welfare advice – helping people make sure they are accessing all the financial support they are entitled to; offering support and assistance in making claims for benefits and support with living costs; promoting financial inclusion through accessible banking and offering advice and support on dealing with debt.
- Energy advice – providing help and assistance to reduce energy costs for tenants and help tackle fuel poverty.
- Employment and training initiatives – for example, offering apprenticeships, training and '*ready for work*' initiatives both independently and in partnership with construction and maintenance companies.

Care and Repair – helping older and disabled people to remain independent in their own homes by providing schemes that help with repairs, maintenance, and adaptations

- Factoring – providing maintenance and repairs services to owners who live in flats in areas where the housing association is active.
- Green Initiatives – supporting sustainability and re-cycling initiatives within communities, such as community growing projects and allotments; renewable energy initiatives and furniture recycling projects.
- Digital Inclusion – helping people develop their skills and confidence to make on-line applications for benefits and work, reporting repairs and making rent payments and accessing important / useful information.

3.5 Effective partnerships are critical to the success of housing associations – key partners include the local authority, Scottish Government, banks, regulators, other landlords, local charities and, of course, our tenants and the communities in which we are active. Key partners for the RSG include Stirling Council, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and the StrathFor Alliance a non-strategic partnership with Forth and Ochil View Housing Associations.

² Aimed at people who do not meet the criteria for social rent housing but who cannot afford to buy.

- 3.6 RSLs are 'registered' with the **Scottish Housing Regulator** (SHR) which was established by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. Its objective is to safeguard and promote the interests of current and future tenants, homeless people and other people who use services provided by social landlords. We are required to meet the SHR's regulatory requirements (See section 8).
- 3.7 Housing associations do not trade for profit and all of the income that they generate is used to meet their running costs and invest in their current and future activities. Most housing associations are Registered Societies, although some are companies limited by guarantee; many are also Scottish Charities and those that provide support or care are registered with the Care Inspectorate. Housing associations that provide debt advice are registered with the Financial Conduct Authority. So, our sector is very heavily regulated, and we must demonstrate compliance with the requirements of all of our regulators as well as our funders.
- 3.8 RSHA is a registered Scottish Charity and a Registered Society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act. RSHA is an RSL registered with the SHR and a registered Property Factor. We have a wholly owned subsidiary organisation, Venachar Ltd. Together RSHA and Venachar form the Rural Stirling Group (RSG) There is an Independence Agreement and Service Sharing Agreement in place between RSHA (the '*parent body*') and Venachar. Venachar currently has a small portfolio of Mid-Market Rented (MMR) properties and both RSHA and Venachar are registered Letting Agents. The Board of Venachar is appointed in accordance with the Articles of the Association and all appointments including the Chair are approved by the parent, RSHA. This guide relates principally to being a governing body member of RSHA however the principles of the guide also extend to Board members of Venachar.
- 3.9 Our primary source of income is from tenants' rents. We aim to provide the highest possible standards of service whilst keeping rents affordable: this means that we are committed to delivering value for money across all of our business activities – keeping costs low through effective procurement and careful performance management and paying staff competitive salaries that attract and retain skilled and experienced people. As an RSL, we are required to manage our resources to ensure "...financial well-being, while maintaining rents at a level that tenants can afford to pay" SHR Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management Standard 3 (April 2024)
- 3.10 We report our activities to our members and tenants in **regular newsletters**, via our **website** and through our **Annual Performance Report** that is published in September. We are required to report our performance in meeting the Scottish Social Housing Charter to the SHR annually in May and we are required to confirm our compliance with the [Regulatory Framework](#) by October each year.

4. What the Governing Body does

4.1 We refer to our governing body as the Board of Management or Board. Board members are not paid for their contribution, although out of pocket expenses are reimbursed. The effectiveness of the contributions made by individual Board members is reviewed annually.

4.2 The Board is responsible for leading the organisation: setting policy and strategy, monitoring performance and ensuring legal and regulatory compliance. It operates at a strategic level and delegates responsibility for the day-to-day management and running of the organisation to the staff, through the CEO. The Board has agreed **Standing Orders** and a **Scheme of Delegation** that sets out the responsibilities that it retains and those that are delegated either to staff or to sub-committees.

The Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation also make provision for emergency arrangements and establishes a procedure for decision-taking between Board meetings.

4.3 Governance is the term used to describe the arrangements that a housing association has to lead the organisation, provide strategic direction and effective control. Good governance ensures that the organisation's objectives and standards are clear; that the organisation is well-run, and that performance is good and monitored effectively; it also means that a sensible approach to risk is adopted and that high ethical standards are applied.

Good governance depends on a constructive relationship between the Board and senior staff: each have their own distinct responsibilities that complement the other and the Board is responsible for ensuring that there is an effective relationship in place – the Chair is specifically responsible for maintaining an effective relationship with the CEO.

4.4 The Board is the employer of our staff. The Board's main responsibilities are to:

- Lead the association effectively
- Define, uphold, and promote the organisation's values
- Set our strategy and direction
- Agree the annual budget and ensure financial viability
- Take account of tenants' views in respect of rents and services
- Monitor performance
- Manage risk
- Ensure legal, constitutional, and regulatory compliance and submit and Annual Assurance Statement
- Promote and demonstrate good governance

- 4.5 All Board members must accept collective responsibility for the decisions that the Board takes and the actions and policies that it approves.

The Board is also responsible for ensuring that we maintain effective relationships with our partners, although day to day responsibility is delegated to staff. The Board is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of our **Codes of Conduct** for Board members and for staff are upheld. The Board must also ensure that it has the necessary range of skills, knowledge, and experience to fulfil its role and that our staff have the skills, qualifications, and expertise to deliver what is required of them. From time to time the Board will require external independent and/or professional advice e.g., from accountants, lawyers, surveyors etc.

- 4.6 Staff support the Board by providing professional advice and expertise: they are responsible for providing the Board with high quality information and advice to make decisions and for implementing the Board's decisions effectively. Staff are responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of the association – for implementing policies, making decisions, managing our relationship with tenants and service users, dealing with complaints and queries, liaison with partners, funders, and regulators. Staff are also responsible for consulting with tenants and for implementing our Customer Engagement, Participation and Scrutiny Strategy. The Board is responsible for ensuring that tenants' views are sought and that tenant feedback is taken into account when making decisions.
- 4.7 Our **Rules** set out the requirements of the Board and the duties of the Chair and Secretary. Our Board should not have less than 7 members and no more than 15. We review the range of skills, knowledge, and experience that the Board requires on an annual basis to ensure that we have access to the necessary expertise and experience to meet our objectives. Where gaps are identified, we try to address them through training and/or recruitment. We publicise the particular **skills** we need in advance of the AGM.
- 4.8 Our Board meets eight times a year and in addition holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM) and an annual Board Strategy Day to review the strategic direction and priorities. A Group Meeting Schedule of calendar dates and outline agendas is issued annually in September and reviewed and updated regularly throughout the Board calendar year. Papers are uploaded to the electronic board portal a week in advance, and you are encouraged to raise any queries you might have in advance through this portal or with the relevant officer to ensure that any additional information is available. New Board members have the opportunity to discuss the papers with the CEO or Board buddy or mentor in advance of the meeting.
- 4.9 In order to ensure that the Board operates as efficiently as possible, we have established an Audit and Risk Committee. This Committee has an agreed remit and meets three times a year to consider issues in more detail than is possible at Board meetings. The

remit for this committee describes the role and responsibilities and sets out any powers that it has to make decisions and commit expenditure. The Committee can only act in accordance with the responsibilities that are delegated to it by the Board and the remits form part of the Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation. Committee decisions must be reported to the next Board meeting. The Board may also establish working or task groups to progress specific issues such as new initiatives or a review of service delivery.

5. The Role of an RSG Board Member

- 5.1 Board members for RSHA are usually appointed for a three-year term following elections at the AGM. Board members appointed in this way must be **members** of the association. Members of the association are people who are interested in and support our activities; they may be tenants or residents in our communities.
- 5.2 Our Rules specify our membership criteria and our Membership Policy which is approved by the Board and describes how we apply these criteria to applications from prospective members. Up to one third of the number of elected members can be co-opted to the Board (up to the maximum of 15): co-opted Board members do not need to be members of the association and can only serve until the next AGM; then they must stand down but may, if they are a member, stand for election. Co-opted Board members do not count towards the establishment of a quorum for meetings.
- 5.3 As a member of the Board you must always act in the best interests of RSHA and you must not be influenced by any personal, business, financial or other interests. You are required to declare any such interests and manage them appropriately. In order to be a member of the Board, you must sign and agree to uphold our **Code of Conduct**. You must also accept collective responsibility for the decisions that the Board has taken (provided the decision has been taken properly and is in accordance with our rules, policies, and procedures).
- 5.4 All Board members are expected to use their skills, knowledge, and experience for the benefit of the association. Members will offer a variety of experience, knowledge, and backgrounds: it is essential that our Board has an appropriate range of skills, knowledge, and experience to support the organisation to achieve its aims.
- 5.5 Every Board member shares the same level of responsibility regardless of their background or of their position as an elected or co-opted member: a Board member who is a lawyer or accountant, for example, has the same level of responsibility as someone who has no professional qualifications or who is not in employment. These responsibilities are set out in a **role description**.
- 5.6 Board members are expected to:
 - Attend and be well prepared for meetings
 - Contribute effectively to discussions and decision making

- Use their experience and expertise effectively to inform the work of the Board
- Contribute to annual reviews of our performance, activities, and progress
- Take part in training and other learning opportunities
- Take part in an annual review of the effectiveness of our governance
- Participate in an annual review of your individual contribution to our governance
- Maintain and develop your knowledge of relevant issues and the wider housing sector
- Represent us positively and effectively
- Respect and maintain confidentiality of information
- Treat colleagues with respect and foster effective working relationships within the Board and between the Board and staff
- Be aware of and comply with the restrictions on Entitlements, Payments, and Benefits
- Register any relevant interests as soon as they arise and declare **conflicts of interest**

5.7 To support you in your role, new Board members are expected to take part in an Induction Programme which offers opportunities to meet staff and find out more about what we do as well as identifying an experienced member of the Board who can act as your buddy or mentor.

5.8 All Board members are expected to participate in training to keep their knowledge up to date: this might take the form of:

- Briefings provided by staff
- In-house training from an external source
- Attendance at conferences and events
- Reading publications and journals
- On-line research

5.9 Members of the Board elect the Chair of the association (who must be an elected Board member). The Chair has additional responsibilities which are described in the **Chair's Role Description**, and which include:

- Leading the Board and Committee constructively, providing direction and managing meetings effectively
- Developing and maintaining a constructive and positive working relationship between the Chair and CEO and between the Chair of Audit and Risk Committee and senior staff
- Upholding the Code of Conduct and promoting good governance; ensuring that any breaches are investigated appropriately
- Ensuring that our business is conducted effectively between meetings and that emergency decisions are taken appropriately when required

- Ensuring that the Board has access to the range of skills, knowledge, and experience necessary for the achievement of our aims and objectives and for the fulfilment of the Board’s responsibilities
 - Ensuring that the Board has access to the necessary advice, information, and support to fulfil its responsibilities and that, where appropriate, external and/or specialist advice is sought
 - Providing support to new and experienced Board members by promoting access to relevant induction, training, and development opportunities
- 5.10 All Board members are expected to contribute positively to our governance by being well prepared for meetings, attending regularly, being willing to contribute your views and opinions and ensuring that we are seen to operate to the highest standards of governance, integrity, and probity.
- 5.11 Each year, every Board member is expected to take part in a review of your individual contribution to our governance. This is usually carried out by the Chair and Vice Chair with external support and is used to inform the development of annual training and development programmes for the Board and its members. Our Rules and Code of Conduct require Board members to participate in this process, which is also a regulatory requirement. We also use this process to help us plan for the future by identifying the skills, knowledge, and experience that the Board has and those areas that we might want to strengthen, for example because experienced Board members are planning to end their involvement with us; we refer to this as ‘*Succession Planning*’.

6. The Responsibilities of Being a Board Member

- 6.1 Being a Board member is a voluntary role which carries legal responsibilities that are the same as those of a company director. These include:
- Using your skills, experience, and judgement to help make the business successful
 - Following the company’s rules and ensuring it meets its legal obligations
 - Making decisions for the benefit of the company, not yourself
 - Declaring any personal interests
 - Ensuring that the company keeps accurate records
 - Making sure the accounts presented are a ‘true and fair view’ of the company’s finances
 - Complying with the law (e.g., health and safety; employer responsibilities; data protection)
- 6.2 These responsibilities are reflected in the **role description** and in the **Code of Conduct** that you must sign annually.
- 6.3 We are also a Scottish Charity: this means that Board members are **Charity Trustees** with legal responsibilities which include:

- Acting in the charity's best interests at all times
- Ensuring that the charity's activities comply with its aims and objectives
- Acting with the same care and diligence that you would in managing your own, or someone else's affairs
- Complying with all relevant legislation
- Ensuring that the charity fulfils its reporting obligations to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), including the submission of an annual return and accounts

6.4 Our **Code of Conduct** is the framework that reflects these duties. It contains seven principles:

- **Selflessness:** You must act in our best interests at all times and must take decisions that support and promote our strategic plan, aims and objectives. Members of the governing body should not promote the interests of a particular group or body of opinion to the exclusion of others
- **Openness:** You must be transparent in all of your actions; you must declare and record all relevant personal and business interests and must be able to explain your actions
- **Honesty:** You must ensure that you always act in the best interests of the organisation and that all activities are transparent and accountable
- **Objectivity:** You must consider all matters on their merits; you must base your decisions on the information and advice available and reach your decision independently
- **Integrity:** You must actively support and promote our values; you must not be influenced by personal interest in exercising your role and responsibilities
- **Accountability:** You must take responsibility for and be able to explain your actions, and demonstrate that your contribution to our governance is effective
- **Leadership:** you must uphold our principles and commitment to delivering good outcomes for tenants and other service users and lead the organisation by example

6.5 It is a condition of being a Board member that you sign and uphold the terms of the **Code of Conduct**. You must be able to demonstrate that you receive no benefit or preferential treatment because of your involvement with us; this applies to our staff too.

6.6 This restriction does not mean that you should be unfairly disadvantaged, however we apply specific procedures to any decision or transaction that a reasonable and objective person might think you have a personal interest in, but to which you are entitled. So, if you or someone you are close to has applied for one of our houses and you meet our allocations criteria, you will not be prevented from accepting a tenancy, as long as the allocations policy and procedures have been followed and you have played no part in

any of the consideration. You should be aware, however, that we cannot offer employment to anyone who is closely associated with a current or recent Board member.

6.7 If you, or someone you are close to, have any personal, financial, or business interests that are relevant to our activities, you must declare them and record them in our Register of Interests. If you or someone you are close to have any such interests that conflict with ours, you will be required to manage them appropriately – in some circumstances, this may mean that you cannot continue to be a Board member.

6.8 In the event that a matter is being discussed by the Board in which you have declared an interest, you may be asked to leave the meeting whilst the discussion is taking place and you must not play any part – or seek to play any part – in making the decision.

6.9 Table A below describes the people who are or might be considered to be closely associated with you, and our expectations in terms of declaring interests:

Table A

Group	Required Response
<p>1. Members of your household</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anyone who normally lives as part of your household (whether related to you or otherwise) • Those who are part of your household but work or study away from home 	<p>We expect you to be aware of and declare any relevant actions of all people in your household. You must take steps to identify, declare and manage these.</p>
<p>2. Partner, Relatives, and friends</p> <p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your partner (if not part of household) • Your relatives and their partners • Your partner’s close relatives (i.e., parent, child, brother, or sister) • Your close friends • Anyone you are dependent upon or who is dependent upon you • Acquaintances (such as neighbours, someone you know socially or business contacts/associates) 	<p>Where you have a close connection and are in regular contact with anyone within this group, we expect you to be aware of and declare any relevant actions. Under these circumstances, you must take steps to identify, declare and manage these actions.</p> <p>Where you do not have a close connection and regular contact with someone in this group, we do not expect you to be aware of or to go to unreasonable lengths to identify any relevant actions. However, if you happen to become aware of relevant actions by such individuals, then these should be declared and managed as soon as possible.</p>

6.10 The following are the relevant actions /involvement by those to whom you are closely connected that you should consider, declare, and manage as per our expectations outlined in Table A:

- A significant interest in a company or supplier that we do business with. A significant interest means ownership (whole or part) or a substantial shareholding in a business that distributes profits but does not include where an individual has shares in large companies such as banks, utility companies or national corporations, i.e., where owning shares would not give the individual any significant influence over the activities of that organisation and how it engages with us.
- Where the individual may benefit financially from a company with which we do business
- Involvement in the management of any company or supplier with which we do business
- Involvement in tendering for or the management of any contract for the provision of goods or services to us.
- Application for employment with us.
- Application to join our Board or any of its subsidiaries
- Application to be a tenant or service user of the organisation
- If they are an existing tenant or service user of the organisation

6.11 We have a policy that describes how you should respond to any offers of **gifts or hospitality**: you should decline any hospitality or gifts that exceed the value permitted in our policy and you should record all offers – whether accepted or not – in the appropriate register. Examples of hospitality that is permitted include attending, on behalf of the association, events associated with our business activities, conferences and training events, events hosted by our partners that are relevant to our business (in some cases the Board’s prior approval is required). Examples of hospitality that should be declined include invitations to sporting events or social occasions that have no relevance to our business. Where we receive gifts from suppliers or other partners (e.g., at Christmas) we usually place them in a raffle that staff and Board members are invited to participate in. We may also donate such items to selected charities. For the avoidance of doubt, we do permit the acceptance of small gifts as gestures of thanks or appreciation provided these are recorded in the register; we normally expect these to be shared with colleagues.

7. Engaging with Tenants and Other Customers

7.1 The Regulatory Framework requires the Board to lead and direct RSHA to achieve good outcomes for tenants and other service users and to seek out and take account of the needs, aspirations, views, concerns and priorities of tenants and other customers in reaching decisions and agreeing strategy. We are required to make information widely

available about our services, performance, and plans. the information that we publish is set out in our **Guide to Information**.

7.2 Our performance in respect of complying with these requirements is measured, in part by our performance in meeting the expectations of the **Tenants' Charter**. The Scottish Social Housing Charter is a statement by Scottish Ministers of the standards that tenants, and other service users can expect from their social landlords. It is used by the SHR to assess and report on social landlords' performance in providing housing services.

7.3 All RSLs are required to meet the requirements of the Charter, which was introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. The Charter is reviewed regularly with the most recent Charter having been published in November 2022.

Landlords are required to monitor and report on their performance against the Charter. All RSLs must submit an Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) to the SHR by 31 May each year. The ARC contains statistical and performance information about the standards and outcomes that the charter contains. These fall into seven categories:

- **Equalities:** making sure that all customers' needs are met, and that people are treated fairly
- **Customer and Landlord Relationship:** ensuring that customers find it easy to communicate with us and to participate in decisions about services
- **Housing Quality and Maintenance:** our compliance with the Scottish housing Quality standard (SHQS) and other standards such as EESSH and fire safety, ensuring that houses are in good condition when allocated and that repairs are carried out well at times that suit customers
- **Neighbourhood and Community:** ensuring that neighbourhoods are well maintained, and tenants feel safe living in them
- **Access to Housing and Support:** the availability of information about housing options, allocations, and progress of applications; the ease of applying for a house and the availability of information and support to sustain tenancies; the role of councils in meeting the needs of homeless people
- **Getting Good Value from Rent and Service Charges:** providing services that customers believe deliver continually improving value for money; affordability and the provision of information about how rent is spent
- **Services to Other Customers** (this applies mainly to local authorities and their services to gypsy travellers)

7.4 The SHR publishes information on individual landlords' performance against the Charter in August each year; landlords are required to publish reports for tenants that show their performance by October. We consulted with tenants on the format of our **Annual Performance Report** on the Charter and took account of their views in developing its style and content (which must meet regulatory requirements too). Our **annual performance report** to tenants is published on our website. The SHR publishes

individual Landlord Reports for every RSL on its website which also has a tool which can be used to compare performance with a small number of others.

- 7.5 A key expectation of the Charter is that landlords compare their performance with that of other landlords: consequently, many housing associations carry out benchmarking either by being members of a formal benchmarking club or through less formal groups of similar organisations which share information. All RSLs are expected to carry out **regular tenant satisfaction surveys** which include specific questions relating to the landlord's performance against the Charter. These surveys are carried out every three years. Our last satisfaction survey was carried out in February 2023.
- 7.6 We are making increasing use of digital communication methods to engage with our tenants, and we aim to ensure that we adopt different approaches to suit the needs and preferences of all our tenants. We seek feedback from tenants about their experience of the range of services that we provide, including repairs and maintenance services – their satisfaction with the process for reporting a repair and the availability of information about what would happen as well as satisfaction with the quality of work carried out and the courtesy of tradespeople. This information is reported to the Board every quarter. Annually, we consult with tenants on the proposed rent review.
- 7.7 We are required to consult with our tenants about specific matters relating to service delivery. We have an unregistered Tenants Forum which is currently being reviewed as part of our Customer Engagement, Participation and Scrutiny Strategy. We also have a Joint Scrutiny Panel with Forth Housing Association.
- 7.8 We maintain a comprehensive **website** which we promote as the first point of contact with anyone who wants to find out about us or the services we offer. Our website includes information about our policies and procedures and is where we publish the minutes of Board and Committee meetings.

In May 2024, we launched My Rural an online tenant portal area of the website. **My Rural gives tenants 24/7 access to check their rent account, make payments, report a repair or update contact and tenancy details.**

- 7.9 We publish a tenants' newsletter **Rural Matters** three times a year which is available to download from the website. We also provide our newsletter in hard copy to those that request it. Feedback from our customers has told us that this is their preferred way of communicating with us. We use the newsletters to tell customers how their views have influenced our services and how we provide them.
- 7.10 Anyone who is dissatisfied about any aspect of our service can make a complaint – our **complaints policy** meets the requirements of the model produced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Board and Senior Management Team receive reports about complaints and their outcomes every quarter and we publish an Annual Complaints Report which is made available on our Website.

8. Funding

- 8.1 The Board is responsible for ensuring that the housing association is financially viable and that our financial affairs are conducted in accordance with the law and regulatory requirements. To carry out this responsibility, the Board receives regular reports and has established an **Audit and Risk Committee** to oversee and monitor our financial affairs. Amongst other responsibilities, the audit committee reviews the auditors' reports, monitors internal financial controls and risk assessment, oversees the internal audit programme, and makes recommendations to the Board.
- 8.2 The main source of income for housing associations is the rent paid by tenants. The majority of our annual budget is met by rent. The remainder comes from grants that we receive for specific projects and initiatives and income from factoring services that we provide to owners.
- 8.3 We review our rents annually and are required to consult with tenants on any proposed increase: our **rent policy** and budget planning processes anticipate that rents will rise by inflation plus 2%. However, our last increase was 7.7% for 2024/25. The Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management require us to ensure that we manage the association's financial affairs effectively while maintaining rents at a level that tenants can afford to pay. This means that we must pay careful attention to rent affordability when setting budgets and strategy and plans and that we take account of the feedback from our annual rent consultation exercises with our tenants.
- 8.4 Just over 47% of our tenants rely on some form of help to pay their rent. The economic climate and cost-of-living crisis have had an impact on our ability to maintain rent affordability and has increased the work that we have to do to ensure that we collect all the rent that is payable. We aim to support tenants by providing **information** and **advice** as well as practical assistance in an effort to make sure that paying rent is regarded as a priority. We offer help and support to our tenants to ensure that they maximise their income and sustain their tenancies. We make information available to tenants about the impact that rising arrears caused by non-payment will have on our ability to maintain services at their current level. We are carefully controlling costs and monitoring the impact of inflation, particularly in respect of employment and component costs, to maintain rent affordability and financial resilience.
- 8.5 We have been successful in accessing other sources of funding for specific projects to improve the quality of our houses and their neighbourhoods. In order to address fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency, we have been successful in obtaining funding from the Scottish Government to insulate homes and modernise fuel and heating systems. The current Scottish Government consultation relating to Heat in Buildings and a sustainable transition to net-zero will lead to the Social Housing Net-Zero Standard (SHNZS) being introduced however, funding arrangements for the sector are uncertain.

8.6 We provide factoring services to a small number of owners who live in neighbourhoods where we are the landlord. We generate sufficient income to cover the costs of providing this service which contributes to maintaining neighbourhoods as places where our tenants feel safe and want to live.

8.7 As well as funding our annual programme of repairs, cyclical, and planned maintenance, we have to repay loans that we took out to fund the building and improvement of our housing stock. We have a loan portfolio which identifies our total borrowings and the lenders, and we report to the Board on our compliance with the terms of these loans on a quarterly basis.

8.8 A Treasury Management review is carried out and reported annually to the Board and we are also required to make an annual Loan Portfolio return to the SHR. It is essential that we meet the terms of these loans to avoid any penalties or breaches that could have a serious impact on our financial strength. These conditions are known as 'loan covenants and our compliance is monitored on an ongoing basis by our Director of Finance and Corporate Services who reports to the Board and to our funders.

9. Regulatory Requirements

9.1 We are required to comply with the SHR's Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management¹. There are seven regulatory standards:

- *The Governing Body leads and directs the RSL to achieve good outcomes for its tenants and other service users.*
- *The RSL is open and accountable for what it does. It understands and takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants, service users and stakeholders. And its primary focus is the sustainable achievement of these priorities.*
- *The RSL manages its resources to ensure its financial well-being, while maintaining rents at a level that tenants can afford to pay.*
- *The governing body bases its decisions on good quality information and advice and identifies and mitigates risks to the organisation's purpose.*
- *The RSL conducts its affairs with honesty and integrity*
- *The governing body and senior officers have the skills and knowledge they need to be effective.*
- *The RSL ensures that any organisational changes or disposals it makes safeguard the interests of, and benefit, current and future tenants.*

9.2 In addition to these standards of governance and financial management, the SHR has established constitutional standards: these set out what must be included in our rules. Amongst other things, they describe the duties of the Chair and eligibility for membership; establish requirements to have a Code of Conduct in place and specify that Board members must participate in annual reviews of their individual effectiveness.

¹ Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management 2024
<https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/for-landlords/regulatory-framework/>

Additionally, the SHR's standards require that any Board member who is seeking to continue as a member having already been a Board member for nine years or more must have their nomination for re-election approved by the Board. Our Chair cannot hold office for more than five years. All of these requirements are reflected in our **Rules and Standing Orders**.

9.3 In addition to the statistical, performance and financial returns which RSLs are required to submit, the Board must also prepare and submit an Annual Assurance Statement (AAS) to the SHR. This Statement must confirm the Board's assurance, on the basis of evidence, that we comply with all of the requirements of the [Regulatory Framework](#). This includes specific statements about compliance with specific requirements, such as tenant and resident safety.

The AAS must either confirm compliance or identify any issues of non-compliance which are material to the RSL's ability to meet statutory and/or regulatory requirements. It must be submitted to the SHR by 31 October each year.

The Evidence Bank which supports the Board's assurance is maintained throughout the year and includes reports, plans, policies, performance information, advice, and other documents. The Annual Assurance Statement is published on our website and by the SHR.

9.4 The Statement is approved by the Board and the detailed scrutiny of the standards and evidence is undertaken by the Audit and Risk Committee.

9.5 The SHR uses the AAS, statistical and performance information that all RSLs are required to submit annually to determine the Regulatory Status for each individual RSL. This is shown in the annual Engagement Plan which is published annually by the SHR in March each year. We are also required to publish our current engagement plan on our website.

9.6 Individual RSL Engagement Plans set out the information the SHR requires from each landlord; the reasons the SHR is engaging with the landlord; and how the SHR will engage with the landlord. Escalations in the level of regulatory engagement can constitute a breach of a RSL loan covenant.

9.7 Our regulatory status is compliant. Where an issue of regulatory non-compliance is identified (either in the AAS or by the SHR), an Improvement Plan is required, which the SHR will monitor the RSL's progress in achieving its outcomes and targets. All Engagement Plans can be accessed on the SHR website.

9.8 All RSLs are required to notify the SHR about specific events that may involve some risk to tenants and/or its financial well-being and/or its reputation or that of the wider sector. These **notifiable events** include:

- Breach of the Code of Conduct
- Resignation of the Chair/CEO or other senior staff

- Fraud or attempted fraud
- Serious complaint, allegation, or investigation
- Serious incidents (such as a fire)
- Major organisational change
- Breach of legislation (e.g., health and safety) or regulatory standards
- Breach of financial covenants
- Failure of governance

9.9 The SHR requires to be notified at the earliest opportunity of any notifiable events; those involving governance or organisational issues must be notified by the Chair and those involving performance and service delivery issues are reported by the CEO. All notifiable events must be reported to the Board. The SHR has published guidance on [Notifiable Events](#) on its website.

9.10 The SHR can take action in the event of an RSL failing to meet required standards or where it believes there is a threat or risk to the interests of tenants and service users. Information about the SHR's statutory powers and how it will use them are included in Section 6 of the Regulatory Framework 2024. Intervention can take several forms, including:

- Requiring a Performance Improvement Plan
- Serving an Enforcement Notice
- Requirement to appoint individuals to the Board
- Requirement to appoint a statutory manager
- Suspension or removal of Board members or agents
- Restrictions on the activities of a RSL pending or following Inquiries
- Inquiries
- Direction to transfer assets to another RSL

10. Policies and Governance Documents

10.1 As a member of the Board, you are responsible for approving the policies that we work to and other key governance documents. Some of these policies are specifically important to our governance. These are:

- Rules
- Group Strategic Plan and Annual Business Plan
- Group Risk Management Policy
- Group Financial Regulations
- Group Treasury Management Policy
- Group Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation
- Group Roles and Responsibilities of Board members and Office Bearers
- Group Remits for the Board, Audit and Risk Committee and short life Working Groups

- Group Code(s) of Conduct for Board and Staff
- Group Entitlements, Payments, and Benefits Policy
- Group Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policy
- Induction Framework for new Board members
- Framework for annual review of the Board’s collective skills, knowledge, experience, and individual Board members’ effectiveness
- Group Management, Appraisal, Support and Remuneration of the Senior Officer Policy
- Group Staff and Board Development Policy
- Annual statement of recruitment priorities for elections at AGM
- Group Complaints Policy
- Group Whistleblowing Policy
- Group Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy and Policy
- Policies relating to tenant and resident safety.

10.2 These policies can be found on the Document Library of Decision Time or can be made available on request.

11. More Information

11.1 If there is anything that you want to know more about, please ask our CEO or Corporate Services Officer (Governance).

11.2 Key Facts about RSHA

Constitutional status	Registered Social Landlord in Scotland (registered number 232), Registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 (registered number 2376RS) A charity registered in Scotland (registered number SC037849) and a registered property factor under the Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011 (registered number PF000330) Registered Letting Agent Registration Number: LARN1907004
Regulatory Status	Compliant
Number of properties owned and managed	665 social rent 7 shared ownership 6 homes leased to our subsidiary Venachar Limited, for letting on a mid-market rent basis Factoring service provided to 36 homeowners
Geographical area(s) of operation	Our area of operation is defined as north and west rural Stirling Council area, stretching from

	Tyndrum in the north, to Strathblane and Killearn in the west and Doune in the south. The two Multi Member Wards, Trossachs & Teith and Forth & Endrick cover much of the area, with a large part falling within the boundary of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park (LL&TNP).
Tenures	Social rent, shared ownership, Mid-Market Rent
Main activities	Management and maintenance of social housing and new build development
Development plans	Active new build development programme
Number of GBMs	Up to 15
Number of staff	17

11.3 Venachar Limited, is a wholly owned subsidiary of RSHA and is a Private Limited Company Registered Number SC447415. Venachar is a Registered Letting Agent Registration Number: LARN1904083.