

Social Housing Strategic Plan

2022 - 2026

Providing Homes for
people most in need
in our communities



SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL



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Foreword



...the Society considers the provision of social housing as one of the key pillars of the work of the overall organisation and is committed to the future delivery and management of housing nationally.

The Society, through its 40 years of delivering and managing housing has demonstrated innovation, resilience and strength across its volunteer membership. The commitment and dedication of our volunteers has translated into the Society providing homes for circa 918 tenants nationally in 2022, placing the organisation at the heart of communities providing accommodation for those most in need.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has again demonstrated the Society's ability to be resilient and overcome challenges in the midst of uncertainty and disruption. We have learned valuable lessons in terms of our operating model which will shape and inform how we manage our operations into the future.

The Society's involvement in housing has never been so important, as the provision of homes has continued to be a major issue as a result of the current

shortages in housing stock. Despite the changes and challenges we face, the Society considers the provision of social housing as one of the key pillars of the work of the overall organisation and is committed to the future delivery and management of housing nationally.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the hundreds of volunteers, past and present, supported by staff who, in the true spirit of our Society have given of their time and talent over the years in the provision and management of our housing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rose McGowan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rose McGowan
National President



About The Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Our focus is on a practical approach to dealing with poverty, alleviating its effects on individuals and families through working primarily in person to-person contact.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) was founded in Ireland in 1844. It is the largest voluntary charitable organisation in Ireland. During its history it has helped people in need through a Famine, a War of Independence, a Civil War, two World Wars and several economic recessions.

Our focus is on practical approach to dealing with poverty, alleviating its effects on individuals and families through working primarily in person to-person contact by a unique system of family visitation and seeking to achieve social justice and equality of opportunity for all citizens.

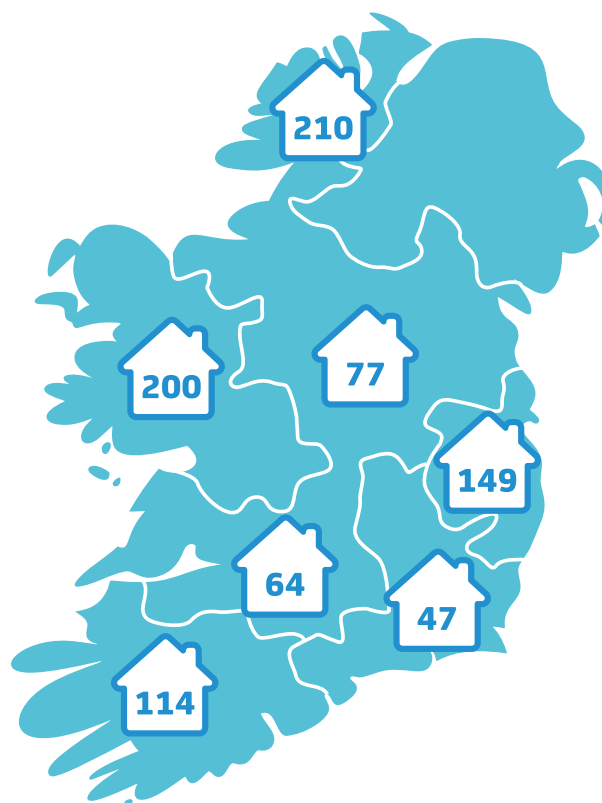
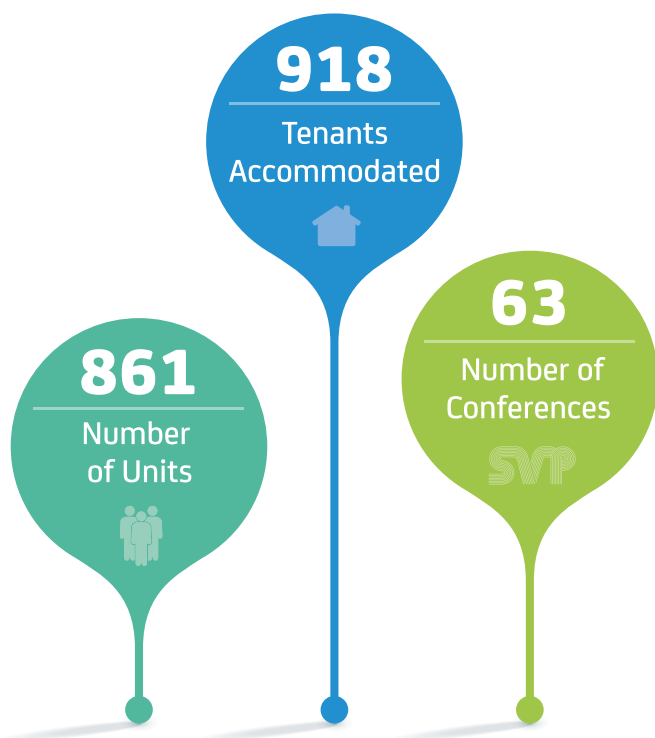
In addition to providing direct assistance to those in need, providing social housing, operating holiday homes and other social support activities, the Society promotes community self-sufficiency, enabling people to help themselves. Any assistance offered by the Society is given in a non-judgemental spirit, based on the needs of the individual or family seeking help. The Society respects the dignity of those who contact us, offering assistance and advice when sought, maintaining their dignity while assisting them towards long-term self-sufficiency in a relationship of friendship, trust and confidentiality.

Social Housing Context

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is classified as a Tier 3 Approved Housing Body. The Society has 861 units of social housing delivered and managed by 63 individual volunteer led local housing Conferences across the country.

The development of social housing by the Society was initiated in the early 1980's by local individual Conference volunteer members identifying an unfulfilled local community housing need who worked with the support of local authorities in the acquisition and development of new build social

housing units. The commitment and dedication of the Society's volunteers on the ground locally over the past 40 years has translated into the Society providing homes to approximately 918 tenants nationally in 2022.



Members building Communities

At the heart of the work of St Vincent de Paul housing is our tenants and the Society prides itself in the added value that is brought through our volunteers in the support of our tenants.

The Society's strong presence across communities is reinforced through successful collaborative working across the wider community and with local authorities which provides support structures for

tenants and enhances tenant well being, fostering a strong sense of community.

Members organise various social events and gatherings on a regular basis to enhance tenant wellbeing. Through the support, care and friendship of members, tenancies have a greater capacity to sustain their tenancies, creating a sense of belonging and bringing certainty and security to many.



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Through the support, care and friendship of members, tenants have a greater capacity to sustain their tenancies.

Operating Environment

The operating environment for Approved Housing Bodies has changed in recent years with the introduction of the Approved Housing Body (AHB) voluntary regulation in 2013 and the establishment of the statutory AHB Regulatory Authority (AHBRA) on the 1st February 2021. The AHBRA has responsibility for overseeing the effective governance, financial management and performance of all voluntary and co-operative housing bodies, in accordance with the legal framework set out in the Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Act 2019.

Whilst the key principles of regulation have been developed during the voluntary environment, the introduction of the AHBRA brings legal obligations and requirements not previously in place, with the majority of the powers and functions of AHBRA to be phased in over 2022 with new regulatory standards to be rolled out.

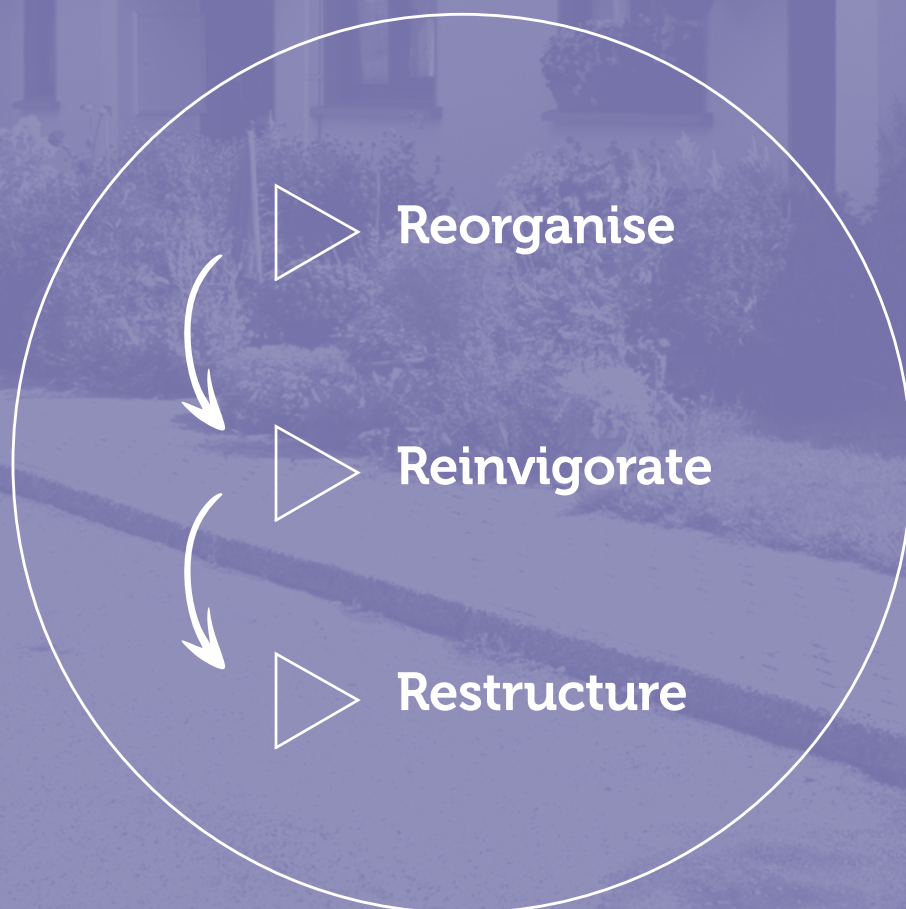
The introduction of the statutory Social Housing regulatory framework and the Charities Governance Code has had significant implications for the Society in the way we operate. Notwithstanding, the

Society's significant progress in meeting regulatory requirements since 2013, measures introduced to comply with the Voluntary Framework in the areas of Governance, Financial Stability and Performance Management will need to be further embedded and strengthened as the new standards are phased in.

The Society welcomes the statutory regulatory framework and the benefits that it will bring to the services we provide to our tenants. We recognise the challenges that this will bring and the further challenges faced by Social Housing including maintaining and recruiting members, the devolved organisation structures of the Conferences, governance standards within this structure, the position of finances and the physical condition of some properties. During the life of the plan we will engage with our members to review our operational model and build upon our progress to date to ensure the sustainability of social housing.

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A key focus will be on delivering and managing our housing and services more efficiently and effectively in each region. In doing so we will engage with our members to reorganise, restructure and reinvigorate the operating model in order to safeguard our homes and our tenants.





Over the life of the Plan the Society will continue to work at improving its social housing performance and tenant satisfaction.



Strategic Plan Process

Background

The Society has reviewed the progress made in its previous Strategic Plan and has recognised those areas that require ongoing focus. In working across the new core objectives, we recognise that over the next 5 years we will apply the lessons learned from our previous plan and utilise these learnings to continue to improve our services and performance.

The Society, in formulating its strategic objectives, was cognisant of the need to take account of the risks identified through the Social Housing Risk Management process. The mitigation of risks is reflected in each of the objectives outlined in this plan.

In order to take account of the views of Society membership and staff we carried out comprehensive consultation. A Social Housing questionnaire was issued nationally which provided a mechanism to ascertain current membership views across governance, rental policy, membership, and collaboration. Meetings were held with representatives from each Region. Conferences within each region

were asked to provide current data on their housing operations.

Based on the information received and feedback from the consultation process the objectives of the Strategy were developed.

In order to achieve these objectives each Region/ Conference will be reviewed to establish the critical areas to be addressed. Following consultation and review, a detailed set of actions will be agreed to be carried out within a specific timeframe. The implementation plan will place emphasis on appropriate implementation strategies for regions with different needs.

Our Statement of Strategy provides an outline of our vision, mission and values and the key objectives to be achieved over the next five years.

Statement of Strategy

OUR VISION

Providing Homes for people most in need in our communities.

MISSION

Guided by the ethos of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and within the volunteer led structure, to ensure effective housing operations through good governance, high standards of performance and financial sustainability.

Values for Social Housing



Care & Compassion



Respect



Friendship



Quality of Housing & Service



Empathy

Benefits to Tenants



Home for Life | Quality of Life | Comfort | Safety | Security | Hope | Choices



Key Strategic Objectives

1 Governance & Organisational Efficiency

Objective: The Society will work to ensure that its housing operations are properly managed, resourced, and fit for purpose with appropriate governance structures providing oversight.

The key focus of the plan will be on the restructuring, re-organising and re-invigorating of social housing operations across each region.

This will involve a Regional review of all Conferences, the number of members involved and the number of units managed in their area. Following on from this where required and through a process of recruitment, collaboration, co-operation and merger, refresh the Conferences with adequate numbers of members to share the work with a manageable number of properties for each Conference within each region.

There will, where required, be a focus on local Conferences engaging in housing specific/targeted recruitment of new members to bring an additional level of motivation, capacity and expertise.

It is recognised that there is a need to support Conferences in some areas and the Implementation Plan will look at aligning staff resources with service needs across local, regional and national levels to ensure appropriately qualified professional staff are in place.

Key Actions

- 1 Reorganisation and restructuring of Social Housing Conferences and the reallocation of their properties.
- 2 Establishment of a nationwide volunteer recruitment drive.
- 3 Continue training of members and staff across the Society's Social Housing policies and procedures.
- 4 Undertake review of current staffing allocation and qualifications.
- 5 Identify the requirements for professional staffing.
- 6 Continue to develop and enhance governance structures at National and Regional levels.

Strengthening of Local Governace

The Society throughout the Plan period will work to recruit new volunteers to bring enhanced benefit to our operations:



2 Our Service & Performance

Objective: The Society will seek continuous improvement in its housing service delivery.

The Society is committed to the continuous improvement of its housing service in order to safeguard its tenants and its social housing assets. Over the life of the plan the Society will continue to work at improving its social housing performance and tenant satisfaction. This will be achieved by working with Conferences to instil a strong performance management culture.

The Society aims to ensure that there is effective communication and engagement between our Conference members and tenants. The Society values the opinions of its tenants and will continue

to ascertain feedback relating to its housing service by undertaking independent tenant surveys and will work at improving its service having regard to survey outputs. In meeting the Society's legal obligations in addition to ensuring tenant safety, wellbeing and satisfaction, the Society will provide appropriate support locally to ensure its housing assets are of an appropriate standard and are fit for purpose for existing and future tenants. In order to bring greater levels of effectiveness, efficiency and economy in the management and delivery of social housing the Society will develop and implement a housing management information system.

Key Actions

- 1 Roll out of Housing Performance training across Social Housing Conferences at Regional Social Housing committee meetings.
- 2 Undertake Tenant Satisfaction surveys on a regular basis.
- 3 Conferences to review the out of hours service needs.
- 4 Consolidate the system of annual property inspections.
- 5 Implementation of a housing management information system.





The Plan will aim to strengthen the Society's housing provision nationally with additional housing delivery through construction and acquisition.

3 Asset Management

Objective: To ensure effective asset management in order to provide and develop the highest quality accommodation for present and future tenants.

The Society takes great pride in maintaining its properties to a high standard and making our homes and schemes attractive and pleasant places in which to live.

Stock condition surveys will continue to form a basis to inform Conferences over the next five years

of the need to plan and budget any upgrade or refurbishment works. The Society aims to enhance the comfort of our tenants by improving the energy effectiveness, and efficiency of our homes through energy upgrades. Grant assistance for these energy upgrades will be accessed from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and other sources.



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Training on Health and Safety will continue to have a strong focus across housing operations nationally.

As part of the restructuring and reorganisation the Plan will look at the viability of current properties. In addition, the Plan will aim to strengthen the Society's housing provision nationally with additional housing delivery through construction and acquisition. Members wishing to explore housing delivery will be supported through the Regional and National structures on the process and procedures including funding mechanisms relating to construction and acquisition projects.

The health and safety of our tenants is at the very heart of the Society's social housing and we will continue to provide a safe and healthy environment for all our tenants. The Society will ensure compliance with Health and Safety regulations and obligations as outlined in the Housing (Standards for Rented Housing) Regulations 2019 and the applicable Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act and associated health and safety regulations. Accordingly, training on Health and Safety will continue to have a strong focus across housing operations nationally.

Key Actions

- 1 As part of the restructuring and reorganisation the Plan will look at
 - a the viability of current properties
 - b new delivery through construction or acquisition.
- 2 Identify stock requiring refurbishment, energy upgrades and retrofits and prioritise requirements on an annual basis.
- 3 Undertake training for Social Housing Conference members on Health & Safety legislative & regulatory requirements.

The Society will ensure compliance with Health and Safety regulations and obligations.



4 Sustainable & Viable Social Housing Provision

Objective: To ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of Social Housing provision

Social Housing provision, now and into the future, must be on a sustainable and viable basis. This means having adequate resources to meet short, medium and long term obligations. Rental income is part of this, as the most important source of funding to support sustainability and viability of social housing provision.

How this Strategic Objective will be achieved

A key element of supporting tenants with rental difficulties is accessing assistance through state support schemes for tenants. Eligible tenants are to be encouraged and assisted in making an application under the scheme where this assistance is required. Continuing to access state funding assistance is a main contributor to maximising rental income and implementation of the National Minimum Rent Policy across the Society's housing remains a priority.

In order to meet longer term commitments for property maintenance, refurbishment, energy upgrades and retrofitting, rental income arising from social housing tenants will be designated for social housing purposes only. The establishment and management of sinking funds by Conferences will determine the overall sustainability and viability of the social housing activity.

The development or expansion of any new social housing schemes will be based on statutory funding support including schemes such as the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). The Society would expect development or expansion proposals to have statutory funding support greater than 95% of the total cost.

Key Actions

- 1 Conferences to achieve rent levels in accordance with National Minimum Rent Policy.
- 2 Conferences to support tenants in accessing state tenancy support funding.
- 3 Conferences who have upgrade or development proposals will engage with state funders to access capital support funds.
- 4 Conferences to ensure funds are available to meet short, medium, and long term obligations for social housing provision and property sustainability.



It is recognised that there is a need to support Conferences in some areas and the Implementation Plan will look at aligning staff resources with service needs across local, regional and national levels.

Next Steps - Implementing our Strategy

In order to achieve the objectives of this Plan, each region/Conference will be reviewed to establish the critical areas to be addressed. Following consultation and review with the regions/Conferences a detailed set of actions will be agreed to be carried out within a specific timeframe.

The National Implementation Plan will place emphasis on appropriate implementation strategies for regions with different needs.

Implementation Plan Process

- 1 Review Regional data
- 2 In consultation with the Regions/Conferences establish specific actions
- 3 Apply ownership and timelines for actions
- 4 Monitor progress
- 5 Set new Regional/Conference specific actions





National Office, SVP House
91-91 Sean Mac Dermott Street
Dublin 1, Ireland
D01 WV38
P: +353 1 8848200
E: Socialhousing@svp.ie