

# Strategic Plan

2022-2024



**respond**  
building homes,  
improving lives

Respond is a company limited by guarantee and registered in Dublin, Ireland.

**Company Registration Number:** 90576

**Charity Number:** CHY 6629

**CRA Number:** 20012625

**Registered Office:** Airmount, Dominick Place, Waterford, Ireland.

**Auditors:** PricewaterhouseCoopers, Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditors Ballycar House, Newtown, Waterford, Ireland.

**Bankers:** Ulster Bank, 97/98 Custom House Quay, Waterford. Allied Irish Banks, Lisduggan, Waterford.

**Solicitors:** Beauchamps Solicitors (Dublin) Luke House Solicitors (Waterford)

Respond as a registered charity complies with the Governance Code for community, voluntary and charitable organisations in Ireland, and as an Approved Housing Body complies with the Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Act 2019 issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. In addition, Respond has adhered to the Governments Plan ‘Living with COVID-19’ with respect to all legislative requirements to help prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Respond Directors	Appointed	Resignation
John O’Connor (Chair)	13th December 2016	
Noel Kelly	26th July 2016	
Joseph O’Connor	26th July 2016	
Michael Dominick Anglim	13th June 2017	
Brendan Cummins (Vice Chair)	11th December 2018	
Cathleen Callanan	11th December 2018	
Daniel Vincent McCarthy	16th February 2018	
Eileen Fitzpatrick	27th April 2020	14th September 2021
Olivia McCann	05th June 2020	

**Company Secretary:** Jill Jackman

All of our work in 2021 was only possible with the support of our partners, which includes: Local Authorities around the country, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Housing Finance Agency, the Housing Agency, Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive, Tusla, Pobal, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

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Section 1 |

# Introduction





CEO Declan Dunne



Chair John O'Connor

## Message from the Chair and CEO

2022 marks 40 years since the foundation of Respond. The organisation began as a social housing provider but recognised early on that housing does not exist in isolation but as part of a wider community. We now provide Family Homeless Services, Early Learning and School-Age Care, Refugee Resettlement Services, Daycare for Older People and Family Support Services alongside our work as an Approved Housing Body, delivering homes and services all around the country.

Over the last 40 years, we have seen many changes, including successes and challenges. In the last two years, the world has changed considerably. In acknowledgement, we have undertaken a mid-term review of our Strategic Plan 2019-2023 to ensure we remain agile in responding to the changing external environment and have extended the period of the Strategic Plan out to 2024.

Our plan originally included the ambitious target of providing 2,500 homes from 2019 to 2023. The Board has agreed that we should now increase this target to deliver 1,000 social homes per year. We are strongly committed to increasing the national housing stock through direct construction.

Our Development team lead this work with a full skill set of qualified architects, planners, quantity surveyors, project managers, technicians and clerks of work and as a team we deliver in partnership with developers and contractors. An important goal in the Strategic Plan is to provide housing for the large segment of the population for whom the marketplace is too expensive and who do not qualify for social housing. We are pleased to be giving leadership in the provision of affordable, cost rental homes and will continue to work with Government to ensure we have a financially sustainable model for this tenure type into the future.

This is an exciting time for our organisation. Respond is partnering with the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) in Trinity College, collaborating to enhance the brain health of our tenants, service users and staff. Our Housing team has been working with the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to redesign how we deliver services to our tenants, creating an entirely new way of working which will mean greater involvement of our tenants. Our Development team is creating a new Design Guide that will support our delivery of quality housing.

We are aware that we are producing this Strategic Plan at a time when uncertainties and risks abound. Building on our years of achievement and experience, we are setting out the direction in which we want to go and where we will be focusing our efforts over the next three years. We realise that the implementation of the strategies we have set out, to be delivered through the annual business

“The Board has agreed that we should now increase this target to deliver 1,000 social homes per year. We are strongly committed to increasing the national housing stock through direct construction.”

planning process, will be challenging. We also recognise that some plans may evolve and change as the societal and economic context changes. We are especially encouraged by the unprecedented recognition given to the role of the Approved Housing Body (AHB) Sector in our housing system by the Government's *Housing for All* plan and the commitment to multiannual capital budgets for housing provision. We also welcome the increased resources and reforms in the childcare sector which will improve the life chances of many children across society.

Respond's raison d'être is to support people who are in need. It follows that we are determined to do everything we can – in terms of resources and competencies – to assist Ireland's response to the humanitarian crisis arising from the war in Ukraine, be it in relation to housing, childcare or other services.

Staff engagement was central in undertaking this review through departmental team meetings, staff Town Hall meetings and questionnaires. We are proud of the expertise and experience our staff bring to Respond.

We wish to thank the Directors of the organisation, all of whom give their time voluntarily in the interest of social justice and our excellent staff throughout the organisation for the considerable expertise and commitment that they bring to Respond. We would also like to thank the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Housing Agency, Local Authorities, the Housing Finance Agency, the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE), the Health Service Executive (HSE), Pobal, Tusla, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration fund for

their continued support, working with Respond to deliver additional social housing and homeless and community services. We also wish to acknowledge our development partners for their co-operation with us in delivering our building programme. Finally, and most importantly, we want to thank our tenants and service users who put their trust in us every day. We hope that we are serving that trust well. —

 John O'Connor

Section 2 |

# Progress made under the Strategic Plan

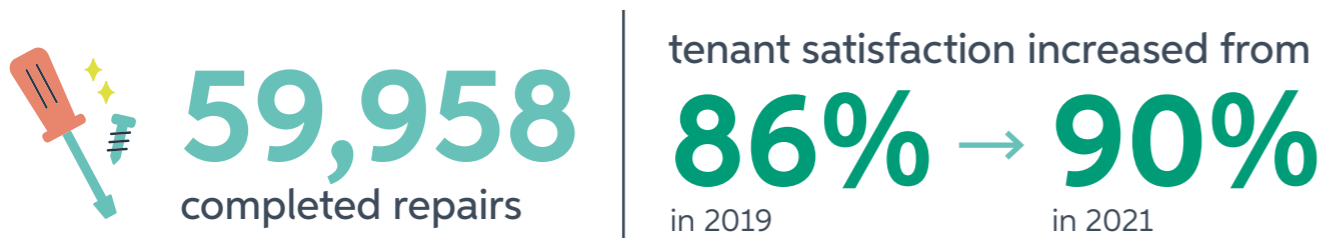
January 2019 to January 2022



# Development



# Housing





Homelessness



Early Learning and School Age Care



Services in the Community



Partnerships

€668,000 total CSR and grant funding



People

Employee growth from

158 → 318

in January 2018

in January 2022



# Other achievements

## Building Homes

- €669m invested in delivering social homes.
- Emergence as key partners of choice for both the public and private sectors.
- Working with Government to develop a cost rental model of housing provision in recognition of the need of an intermediate form of housing tenure.
- Working in partnership to deliver the first purpose-built cost rental homes in the State and additional cost rental homes as part of the Cost Rental Equity Loan scheme.
- Respond were the first AHB to use heat pumps and heat recovery and ventilation systems within our homes.
- Increased focus on creating sustainable, inclusive places to live and grow for diverse tenures and age groups.

## Organisation Improvement

- Two new departments were established—the Compliance Department and the Advocacy and Communications Department.
- Quality and performance roles embedded in Housing and Service teams.
- IQ quality accreditation standard is being progressed.
- Risk Management Framework implemented.
- Working towards becoming a trauma-informed organisation.
- Services adapted to continue supporting tenants and service users during Covid-19.
- A new partnership with the Global Brain Health Institute was established and three best practice seminars were delivered.

# Other achievements

“All of our work is only possible because of the support of all of our partners.”

## Service Improvement

- Staff supported to continue delivery of all frontline services throughout Covid-19.
- Families move on from our homeless services in 6 to 7 months on average, in line with targets.
- Work with the Centre for Effective Services has supported streamlining service delivery to tenants and users of our Family Support services.
- National and Regional Housing teams restructured, combining tenancy services and asset management into a single housing team.
- Respond's first Asset Management Strategy implemented.
- Continuous improvement across key areas of performance is evidenced through tenant satisfaction surveys.
- Secured grant and philanthropic funding to support additional activities such as introducing sensory rooms into our family homeless services.
- Research undertaken within our homeless services delivered evidence-based recommendations which have been implemented to support staff and service improvements.

## Investing in staff

- 'Investing in Staff Performance' management system introduced.
- Introduced a structured employee engagement programme utilising a new staff engagement tool and six Staff Town Hall meetings.



Section 3 |

# Mid Term Review



# Rationale for Mid Term Review

Since we prepared the Strategic Plan 2019-2022, there have been significant shifts in both our internal and external operating environments. It became clear over the course of 2020 that the context in which we were working was changing considerably, prompting this Mid Term Review.

## Internal Factors

### Scaling up our activities

The strong performance of our Development team in scaling up our delivery programme became clear. Our Strategic Plan originally included the ambitious target of providing 2,500 homes over the course of 2019-2023. It has now been agreed that we should aim to deliver up to 1,000 social homes and 250 cost rental homes per year.

Respond is one of Ireland's largest Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) with over 6,503 properties under management. Respond is committed to providing high-quality homes and services in communities that people want to live in. We are a not-for-profit organisation, but we operate in a commercially viable and sustainable way, which allows us to continue providing high quality, lifetime homes and support services.

Since the start of our Strategic Plan 2019-2023, Respond has built 1,553 homes and welcomed 5,633 tenants to homes we either own or manage. We now have 6,503 homes and 14,424 tenants and 1,452 homes are being built on site in various locations across the country. Respond focus on direct construction, developing our own schemes rather than purchasing from developers. We finance our developments through 30-year low-interest Government loans and we raise the balance commercially through the Housing Finance Agency. Government support de-risks private debt finance and enables us to negotiate more favourable terms.

### Merger with Respond Support

In January 2020, we reunited with our sister organisation, Respond Support. While the two organisations worked closely together, this has meant that the expertise of both organisations is now integrated, resulting in improved services and outcomes for our communities, along with gaining operational efficiencies. This also resulted in a strengthening of our offering including Early Learning and School Aged Care, Day Care Service for Older People, Refugee Resettlement and Family Support Services. It was important to adapt our Plan to reflect this wider, exciting range of services.

### Strengthening our team at Board, Executive Management Team and across the staff team

During the first years of our Strategic Plan, we enhanced our capacity to build and support communities around the country. Respond now employs 330 people. In the last three years, we have employed 158 additional staff.

We have also focused on building the knowledge, skill, and expertise at a senior level in the organisation and have been very fortunate to welcome Olivia McCann to our Board of Directors. We also welcomed Niamh Randall, Head of Advocacy and Communications, Louisa Carr, Head of Services, Neil Bolton, Head of Housing and Nessa Alymer, Head of Compliance. Felix McKenna, Deputy Head of Development, John O'Sullivan, Deputy Head of Housing (Communities) and Ciaran Andrews, Deputy Head of Housing (Asset Management) also joined us in newly created roles. All our staff share a strong sense of purpose in building homes and improving lives for the people we serve. —



# External Factors

## The economic outlook and impact of Covid-19

The immediate effects of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a rise in unemployment, affecting those mainly on the lowest incomes who worked in retail, hospitality, tourism, construction, arts and entertainment industries. A temporary increase in the availability of rental properties e.g. Airbnb properties and a temporary ban on evictions, rent freezes, and access to the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) helped ease an immediate income and housing crisis for many people. However, these temporary short-term responses will not ease the fundamental issues of access to housing and affordability.

Early predictions regarding the effects of the pandemic showed that rising unemployment and the unpredictable nature of the pandemic on incomes would cause falling house prices. However, the opposite effect is now in evidence. Those in middle to higher incomes could continue their employment by working from home, and lockdowns fueled an increase in savings. Housing supply has been constrained and delayed, because of the impact of the pandemic. Residential property prices grew by 14.8% in the 12 months up to January 2022, according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO). Inflation is at the highest level since the 1980s, with prices rising by 7.0% in the year to April 2022 according to the Consumer Price Index.

Commentators have signaled that this 'double precarity' within the labour market and in housing options will mean that 'pre-existing inequalities will be intensified' and potentially new ones created. Therefore, it is those on the lowest incomes, already at risk of poverty and finding it difficult to access suitable, secure, affordable housing that will be squeezed further.

There are early concerns that some gains are already unfolding, for example, in homelessness. Figures published in May 2022 showed that there were 10,049 people accessing emergency accommodation. This is an increase of 224 people since April 2022. There has also been an increase in the number of homeless families. In May 2021, there were 928 families accessing emergency accommodation, and this number has risen steadily every month to 1,308 families recorded in May 2022. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an international crisis that is affecting all our lives. This is a significant humanitarian crisis unfolding and getting worse as each day passes. It is also leading to higher inflation and disruption to financial and commodities markets. This will also likely affect oil and gas supply and experts predict that further disruptions to global supply chains will lead to higher energy and raw material costs.

An Taoiseach Michael Martin T.D. encapsulated this humanitarian crisis when speaking to BBC on 13.03.2022:

*"Our primary impulse is to assist those fleeing war...the Irish people are very seized by the series of atrocities that are going on, what we are witnessing on our screens every evening is really shocking people and there is huge human empathy."*

It is reported that the cost of providing humanitarian support for refugees from the Ukraine war is expected to reach €2.8 billion next year, citing internal Government figures. Under a 'Temporary Protection Directive', the State is providing people arriving here with documents that confirm they have a residence in Ireland, assisting with accessing accommodation and applying for social welfare. Under the directive, there is no requirement to apply for international protection (refugee status) and people can work and access services and benefits, including healthcare, education and social support. Permission to stay in Ireland is for one year initially and may extend.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of having a secure place to call 'home' and the crisis in Ukraine has intensified this further. We must consider how we use our homes and interact within our neighbourhoods and communities now and in the future. Our homes need to be more flexible. They will need to provide space for people to work and study from home and have access to green spaces, transport hubs, shopping, and leisure facilities. We need to develop and incorporate issues of affordability, quality of life, energy efficiency

and secure occupancy into future planning, design and development of sustainable communities. We also require continued investment, maintaining and increasing investment in social and affordable housing, so that the economy is more likely to recover quickly and we can therefore provide housing to those who need it, including responding to global communities in crisis. —



## Housing in Ireland

It is widely accepted that Ireland is amid a housing crisis. Population growth has far outstripped the supply of housing for several years.

The starkest disparity since then occurred between 2011 and 2016 when the population increased by 173,613 and the housing supply increased by 8,800 units. According to the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO Publication 34, 2021).

*“The chronic undersupply of accommodation over the last decade combined with rising wages and a growing population has resulted in a shift in demand for dwellings causing both house prices and rents to increase substantially. This surge in prices has made housing unaffordable for many, leading to a decline in homeownership rates from 78% in 2007 to 68.7% in 2020.”*

The nature and scale of how to resolve the crisis are much debated. The Government’s *Housing for All* - a New Housing Plan for Ireland sets out a path to deliver 33,000 per year until 2030. This is an overall target of 300,000 new build homes over the next eight years, including 90,000 social homes and 54,000 affordable homes. However, it has also been argued that the Government’s projections do not factor in years of underinvestment. Reports of the number of homes needed vary from 33,000 per year to 2040 (ESRI) to 47,000 per year (IPI).

A more recent report from the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO Publication 1, 2022) highlights that: *“homeownership has collapsed among adults of a prime working-age (25-54) partly caused by rising rents and surging house prices”*. The same report further states that rents have been rising at an average rate of 5.3% per year from 2011 to 2020 and quotes:

*“Demographic International Housing Affordability Survey price to income ratio classes anything over 5 as ‘severely unaffordable’. Nationally, the price to income ratio is 6.4.”*

This further shows that affordability is a key issue and therefore, social and affordable housing is a significant part of the response that is required to the housing crisis.

More people are now renting, with CSO statistics recording 30% of all occupied dwellings as rented at the time of the 2016 Census. The Census, which was delayed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, was undertaken in April 2022 and should have interesting updated data. Owner occupation rates are on the decline, specifically in urban areas. What has become more apparent in recent years is that Ireland needs a more viable rental sector that is affordable and secure and offers choice, ensuring that a decent home is within everyone’s reach. The development of cost rental housing as a new tenure is also a crucial part of the solution.

Major investment is required to ensure there is an adequate supply of social and affordable housing and the budget announcements supporting the targets set out in *Housing for All*, are an opportunity for AHB growth to deliver social and affordable housing.

However, the growth of the AHB sector also needs to be sustainable. It is important to explore compact growth at higher densities and undertake retrofitting and energy efficiency upgrades to properties. This will offer multiple benefits for our tenants and service users by lowering fuel costs, which eases fuel poverty, as well as meeting our climate action responsibilities. —



Housing for all

The Government published *Housing for All - A New Housing Plan for Ireland* on 02 September 2021, replacing *Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*, published in 2016. The overall aim of *Housing for All* is that:

*“Everyone in the State should have access to a home to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and in the right place, offering a high quality of life”*

This is a long-term plan which continues up to 2030, signalling that solving the housing issues will require a longer-term, strategic response and puts this as a priority for Government.

*Housing for All* contains 213 actions under four pathways. These are:

- Supporting homeownership and increasing affordability.
- Eradicating homelessness, increasing social housing delivery and supporting social inclusion.
- Increasing new housing supply.
- Addressing vacancy and efficient use of existing stock.

The Plan has a multiannual budget of €20 billion over a five-year period. A cross-departmental group based in the Department of the Taoiseach will monitor and oversee the Strategy. A Programme Delivery Office in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will support its implementation.

The overall targets set out in the Strategy provide for:

- 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable homes.
- 18,000 cost rental homes.
- 156,000 private homes.
- Specific to the AHB sector, the Plan anticipates that 45% of total delivery will be by the AHB sector with 50% in Dublin and Cork.
- Retrofit of 500,000 homes to BER2 or Cost Optimal BER standard by 2030.

*Housing for All* also makes a commitment to work towards ending homelessness by 2030 in line with the Lisbon Declaration, which the Irish Government signed earlier in 2021. It also includes plans to expand Housing First and publishing an updated National Implementation Plan. Significantly, the plan recognises that AHBs are significant partners in social housing delivery and have played a key role in increasing the level of new social housing in recent years. It states the DHLGH will support the sector as it innovates to implement new models of “organisation, collaboration and management”. Under *Housing for All*, a multi-annual focus will be set out in the new “Local Authority Delivery Action Plans”. These local delivery plans are target driven and will cover the next 5 years, including plans to deliver housing, details of existing landholdings and land acquisition required to deliver targets. They must include an outline of planned delivery streams, including the role of AHBs and an assessment of housing types under need. —





The introduction of a cost rental model

In our original Strategic Plan, we had one goal focused on cost rental homes as we recognised the need for such tenure in Ireland for some time. We have been advocating for a sustainable and replicable Cost Rental model to provide much needed secure homes for those who don't qualify for social housing, won't be able to afford a mortgage and are often struggling to afford market rents. Respond was involved in building the first Cost Rental Pathfinder Project with our partners at Enniskerry Road (Woodside), comprising 50 Cost Rental and 105 social homes on the same site. This project was delivered in Quarter 1 2022.

A commitment to establish a cost rental model was included in the Programme for Government, published in June 2020. It received statutory footing with the passing of the Affordable Housing Act in July 2021. State funding for the new model was confirmed in the October 2020 Budget announcements, with €35 million ring-fenced under a Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) from the Department and €100 million from the Housing Finance Agency. In the first round of CREL 390 cost rental units were approved, to be delivered by three AHB's - Respond, Tuath and Clúid. We continue working with our key stakeholders to develop this as a sustainable tenure within the Irish housing spectrum.

Early learning and school age care services

Historically, the State has under-invested in Early Learning and School Age Care services and Ireland is in the lowest ranks of funding in early years of care and education in Europe. Funding streams have been complex in order to manage and parental fees have been the driving force for the sustainability of services, resulting in expensive fees for parents and guardians. The lack of funding has led to challenges in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff, as the average salary for a childcare worker is €11.07 gross per hour, 57% lower than the national average salary in Ireland.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the importance of early years and school-age care. It has also further highlighted the issues within the funding streams and sustainability. A bespoke version of the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme was introduced to support the sector to remain viable during the pandemic.

Respond currently provide 16 services with our 17th service due to open in the coming weeks. We situate our services in the heart of communities where we believe we can have the greatest impact. Early education provision, as an early intervention for children and families, can help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and provide a pathway out. It provides a daily intervention for children and families and helps identify and subsequently provides effective early supports to children and young people, enabling an improvement in their outcomes. Many of the children we work with have additional support needs and we link with the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM Programme) to ensure we can meet these needs in our settings.

Upcoming changes in the childcare sector

Budget 2022 childcare package introduced measures to address low pay, sector sustainability and affordability for families. The Government will introduce a new core funding stream in September 2022. This core funding will be worth €69 million to providers in 2022 and €207.3 million in a full year from 2023.

The new funding for Early Learning Care (ELC) and standalone School Age Services (SAC) will raise standards by enabling providers to attract and keep staff, including degree-qualified staff; establish career structures; determine minimum rates of pay for workers, as well as terms and conditions of employment. This will be a big step forward in ensuring better pay and conditions for our staff and will in fact be a form of 'staffing grant.'

The level of investment available for this measure is an acknowledgement that high-quality ELC and SAC costs more than the current income of the sector. The aim of the new funding stream is to allow providers' costs to increase, to improve quality, but to ensure they do not pass these costs onto parents in fees and that services do not become unsustainable.



### The National Childcare Scheme (NCS)

This universal subsidy will extend help for 0-3yr olds to include 0-15yr olds, allowing more families to access subsidies across all the early life cycle phases. It will also address some of the affordability barriers that many of our family's face, including changes to subsidised hours of entitlement. Currently, unemployed parents are

entitled to five subsidised hours per week, but the scheme will extend this to 20 hours a week. Those parents can only access our SAC services during school holidays, but once this new measure is implemented, they will be able to access our services for 50 weeks of the year. These changes will benefit up to 40% of children in some of Respond's services and should result in an increase in capacity of between 20-40% across our SAC services.

### Allocation of the new core funding stream for ELC and SAC

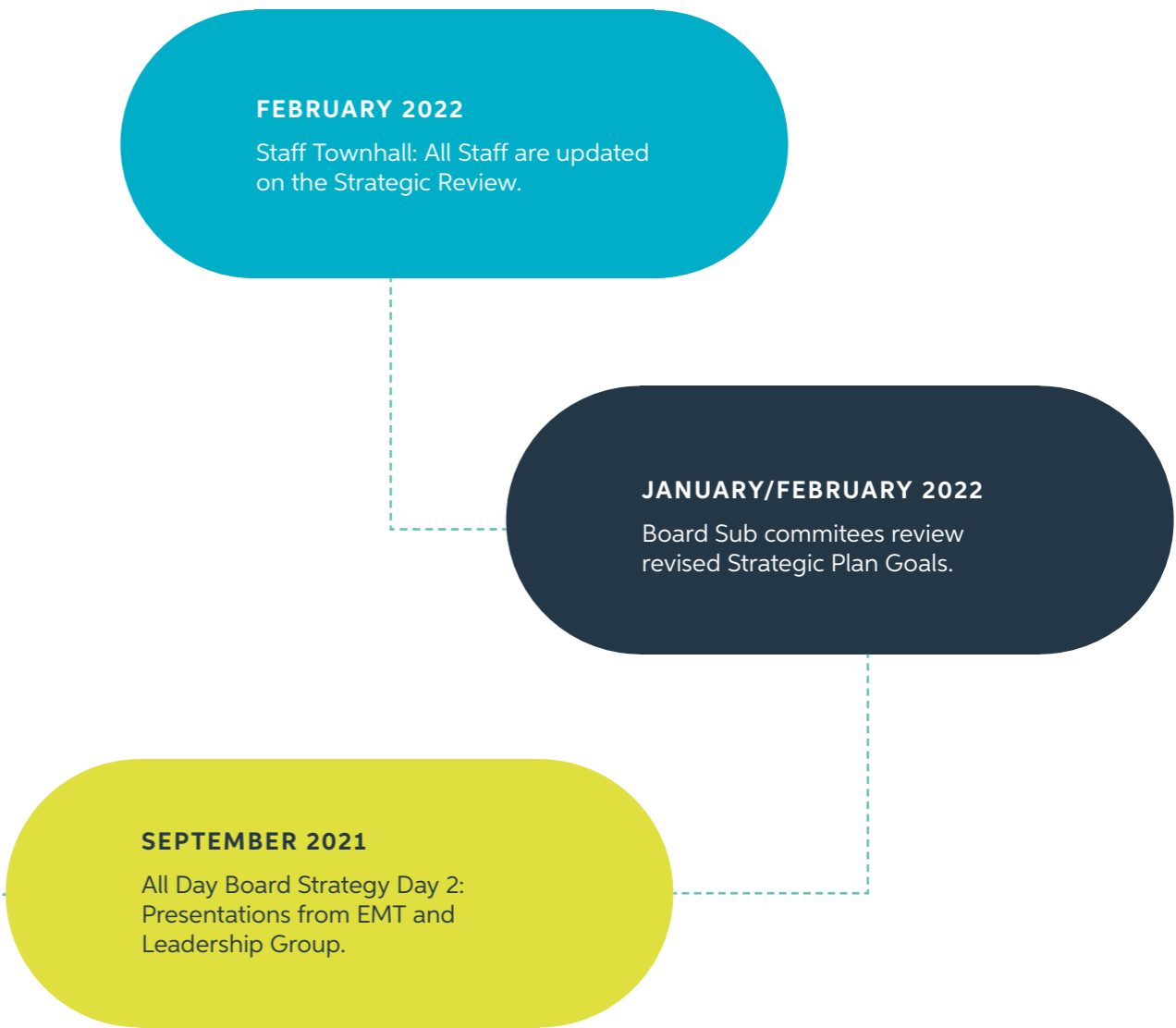
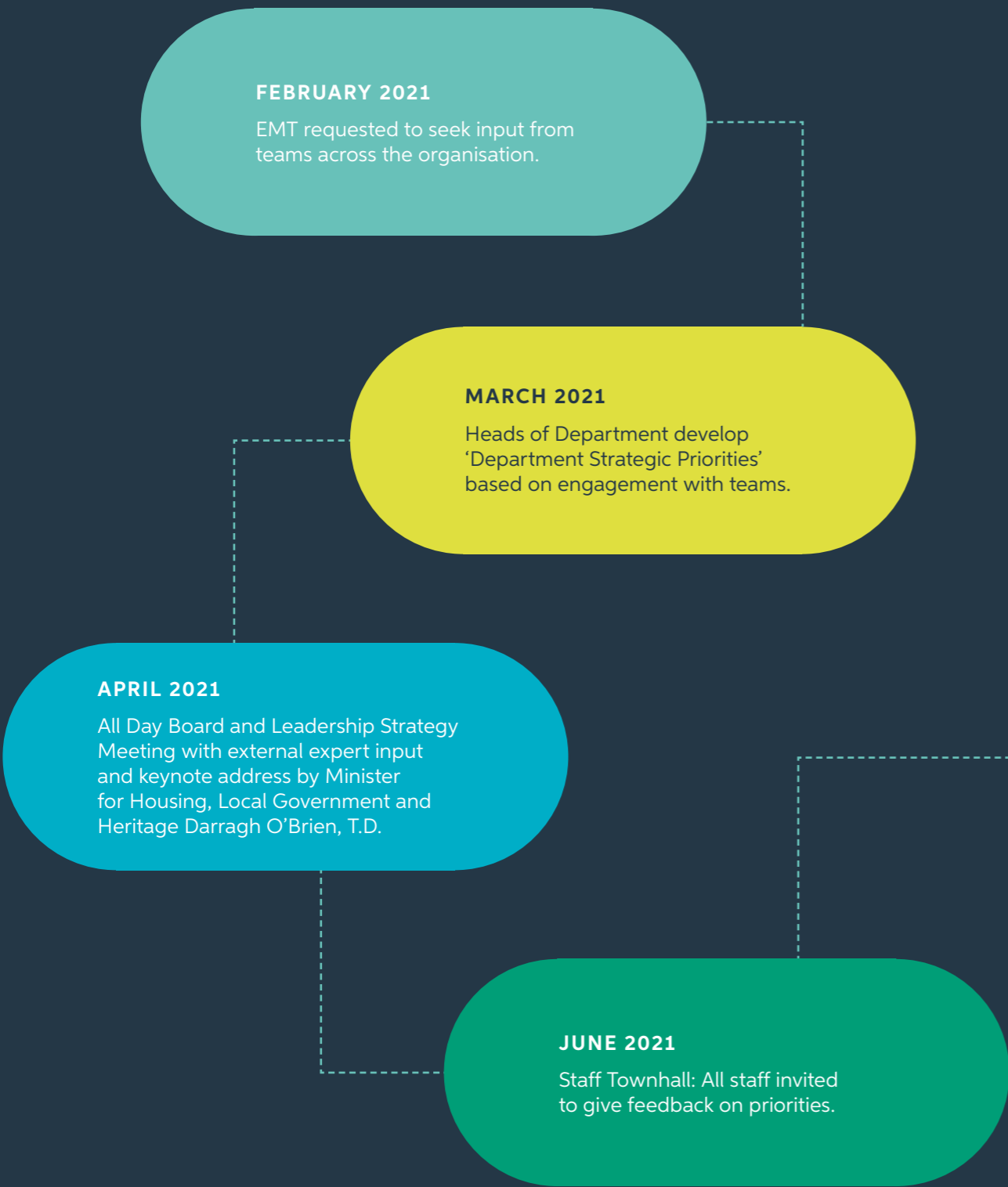
The value of the new funding stream for ELC and SAC to each provider will depend on several points, including the number of children; the hours available; and the number of weeks per year the service is open. Larger services, and those operating longer hours, will receive higher funding. Higher levels of funding will also be available for capacity

for younger children, to support the higher operating costs of ELC for these children arising from the higher staff ratio requirements.

Additional funding will be available for provision led by a staff member with a degree-level qualification. Inadequate terms and conditions are one of the biggest barriers to the recruitment and retention of ECCE staff across the sector. This will support our vision for establishing graduate-led service provision across all Respond services.

# The Mid Term Review Process

We engaged on a comprehensive mid-term review of our Strategic Plan commencing in 2021. This involved engagement with key stakeholders and consultation with staff and external experts.



## Project Management

- Weekly Project Management Meetings: Declan Dunne (CEO), Niamh Randall (Head of Advocacy and Communications and Project Lead), Helen McCormack (Communications Manager) and Susan Goulding (Executive Assistant to the CEO).
- Regular meetings with the Chair of the Board, CEO and Project Lead: John O'Connor, Declan Dunne and Niamh Randall.
- Regular updates to the EMT and the Board.

# Challenges to delivering on our Strategic Plan commitments

We are committed to delivering on our ambitious Strategic Plan goals. However, the remarkable events of the last two years have shown how quickly the world can change with significant impacts. Ongoing monitoring of internal and external factors is critical to the success of this Strategic Plan, along with the ability to be agile to respond effectively to issues, as and when they arise. The major threats to Respond's ability to deliver the Strategic Plan, as with all similar organisations, stem from some of the key features of the current global economic situation.

The organisation has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of these challenges, which we will continue to monitor along with our Risk Register. In summary, these include uncertainty around new waves of Covid-19, persistent labour market challenges, lingering supply-chain constraints and rising inflationary pressures. The challenges could include but are not limited to:

- High inflation for a sustained period (12 - 15 months) along with a shortage of skilled workforce and material supply chain issues that will cause increases not limited to construction costs, but also overall development costs.
- Competition in the overall construction and development sector.
- Any delays or restrictions in funding through *Housing for All*.
- The requirement of equity funding (permanent and temporary) will limit and/or curtail our development programme as it relates to the cost of rental and social housing.
- High inflation may also put pressure on the sustainability of State funding for Respond services, including Family Homeless services, Early Learning and School Aged Care, and Day Care for Older People and Refugee Resettlement Services.
- Competing demands on financial resources and pressures on operational - budgets may affect our ability to fund and deliver some of our planned activities.
- The rising living costs for tenants may cause increased rent arrears and other financial pressures for tenants and service users.
- There may be an impact on our ability to recruit and retain experienced staff to deliver high-quality services within rapidly growing and competitive sectors.
- There are ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on staff and front-line staff, with staff moving out of the sector because of fatigue or burnout or the desire or a role where remote work is an option for them. This is particularly the case in Homeless Services and Early Learning and School Aged Care services.





# Implementation of the Strategic Plan

Implementation of the Strategic Plan will adapt the successful approach used to date to capture learnings. Here, the focus will be on turning the goals and strategies into actions to achieve desired outcomes and identifying key roles, responsibilities, and interdependencies. It will prioritise specific actions and strategies annually with associated

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track progress and performance. In addition, there will be ongoing monitoring of internal and external factors critical to the success of this Strategic Plan, facilitating agility, flexibility and change where necessary. There will be regular reporting on progress to the Board using a traffic light system with a focus on exception reporting.



Section 4 |

# Mission, Vision, Values and Guiding Principles



# Our Vision

**That every family and individual in Ireland will have high-quality housing as part of a vibrant and caring community.**



# Our Mission

Respond will play an enhanced role in effectively addressing the specific housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland by expanding and improving the housing services we provide.

We will significantly increase our housing stock, all the while seeking to maintain our focus on the alleviation of poverty. Respond estates will be well-designed, vibrant communities with new developments prioritising mixed tenure to ensure true social integration and inclusion.

We will strive to contribute to an Ireland, where everyone can have a home to call their own and where individuals, families and communities are empowered to reach their full potential.



# Our Guiding Principles



## A Human Right to Housing

Respond believes that every human being is equal in rights and dignity and has the right to a secure, affordable home that meets their needs throughout their lifetime. Respond will strive to ensure that the services we provide are inclusive, empowering and value the human rights of the people we work with and support.

## Social Justice

All our initiatives will focus on creating a more just and equal society. We will seek to identify the root cause of social problems and seek to address these through the deployment of our resources, expertise and energies. As a not-for-profit organisation, Respond will be measured by the positive impact we have on the lives of the individuals, families, and communities we serve and our wider contribution to the well-being of Irish society.



# Our Core Values



## Listening

We will consult with and listen to our tenants, service users, and staff. We will reflect on their opinions in the planning, design and delivery of housing and housing support services.



## Trust

We will aim to be a trusted and dependable social landlord to our tenants and service users, a trusted partner for those with whom we collaborate and a trustworthy employer for Respond employees.



## Sustainability

All our developments will endeavour to enhance the natural world around us and not adversely impact the environment without redress. Through the design of our housing and communities, we will be mindful of our ethical obligations to pursue national goals of sustainable development through energy efficiency and the reduction of carbon emissions.



## Empathy

In all our work, we will try to see the situation from the point of view of the tenant or the community with which we are engaging; we will be non-judgmental, regardless of past or current difficulties. We will listen to and value their stories and experiences and endeavour to have a positive influence on their lives.



## Integrity

Honesty, truthfulness and transparency of purpose and method will be our constant watchwords.



## Quality design

All our developments will be based on principles of place-making and creating sustainable and safe living environments. We will seek to follow best practices to deliver integrated housing developments designed to high-quality standards capable of being used by all, including those with specific needs.



## Value for Money

Conscious at all times that we utilise state-backed loans and tenants' rental income to finance our building and service delivery programme, we ensure that all our expenditure and investment provides a clear value for money with evidence-based, testable outcomes.

Section 5 |

# Programmes for Continuous Improvement across Respond



Section 5 | Programmes for Continuous Improvement

We are progressing several programmes for continuous improvement across Respond which embody our Mission, Vision, Guiding Principles and Values.

These are cross-cutting areas of work that cut across several goals and themes.



Section 6 |

# Strategic Goals



# 1. Building social housing

Respond will aim to deliver up to 1,000 new social homes each year with support from Government and other partners.



## Strategies

To achieve this goal, Respond will:

- Aim to increase the number of new social homes owned and managed by up to 1,000 each year by 2024.
- Add to the national housing stock across Ireland by building new social homes.
- Explore sustainable models that would enable cost-effective and efficient delivery of new homes, at scale, through the refurbishment of existing properties and associated land.
- Prioritise the provision of housing for people and groups who have difficulties in accessing housing and/or have a specific housing need. In particular, the housing needs of older people, including age-friendly developments, universal design and ways to support ageing in place.
- Make optimal use of Government schemes and programmes established to increase the supply of social housing in Ireland.
- Continue effective and meaningful partnerships with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Local Authorities, developers, landowners and other stakeholders.
- Consider emerging opportunities to deliver integrated housing at scale, either through joint venture structures or other forms of collaboration.
- Develop and maintain partnerships with religious congregations and other landowners who can collaborate with us to deliver homes.
- Work with LAs and developers to ensure that Part V of the Planning and Development Act is implemented to the best effect to deliver social and affordable housing.
- Give particular attention to the benefits of brownfield developments to avail of existing infrastructure services, amenities and communities structures.
- Strive to keep construction costs as low as possible without affecting quality.
- Set out Respond's vision for place-making and sustainability through the development of a Design Guide with a particular emphasis on aspects such as accessible environments, lifetime homes and zero-carbon initiatives, etc.

## 2. Tenants at the centre of our work

In seeking to improve lives, Respond will place our tenants at the centre of our work, focusing on proactive tenant engagement, tenancy management and asset management to ensure positive outcomes and tenant satisfaction.



### Strategies

To achieve this goal, Respond will:

- As a learning organisation, we will value and use regular feedback from tenants through satisfaction surveys, consultation, communication, complaints and compliments, and by learning from our mistakes.
- Develop and deliver a Tenant Engagement Strategy, working with tenants as partners and co-creators.
- Deliver a new, evidence-based approach to housing management, with services tailored to meet individual community needs and to meet Respond's vision of high-quality housing, as part of a vibrant and caring community.
- Work to enhance the well-being of tenants through the development of local partnerships and access to support services provided by Respond or others, creating a sense of community and connection.
- Provide a high-quality service to all of our tenants with a focus on delivering and continuously improving cost-effective services with positive outcomes for tenants.
- Develop and implement a new Asset Management Strategy, proofed by tenants, with clear priorities and a rolling three year 'planned programme' investment plan.
- Develop a framework for understanding the long-term performance of our homes and community buildings to assess value for money, their social impact on our tenants and our options to address any low-performing homes and community buildings.
- Establish Respond's carbon footprint and develop a prioritised and costed net-zero plan.
- Develop a means of measuring the 'social value' of all housing services provided including benefits to individual tenants, Respond and wider communities.
- Capture evidence and good practice from each of the above strategies to help inform the work of our Development Team and ensure we reflect this in the Design Guide.

# 3. Homeless services

Respond will work to prevent and ease homelessness and to support families and individuals who are homeless on their path back to independent living through the provision of emergency accommodation with 24/7 wrap-around support.

## Strategies

To achieve this goal, Respond will:

- Prevent homelessness by providing lifetime social and affordable homes in areas of high demand.
- Proactively work to ensure that families and individuals stay in homeless services for the shortest possible period of time, prior to moving on to more permanent housing.
- Explore the potential of piloting a Housing First service for families who have additional support needs (as distinct from individuals) in conjunction with key stakeholders and service users.
- Seek to provide own door emergency accommodation with support for people and families living in homeless services.
- Provide high-quality emergency accommodation with 24/7 wrap-around support based on need with a focus on positive outcomes for families, children, and young people.
- Progress towards becoming a Trauma-Informed organisation by being responsive to the impact of trauma on those using our services, which might be a causal factor in families becoming homeless or a consequence of the experience of being homeless.
- Enhance our supports for families with complex support needs and minimise the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) by continuing to reassess and improve our supports to the children and young people living in our services.
- Consult, communicate and engage regularly with service users on an individual and collective basis to get their views, feedback and concerns about the services they receive from Respond.
- Pilot the use of the Outcomes Star with services users, an evidence-based tool that measures and supports change to demonstrate the effectiveness of the supports provided.
- Continue to explore the need for further services with key stakeholders, Approved Housing Bodies and homelessness organisations in terms of the future needs for services working with people who are homeless in major urban areas.



# 4. Services in the community

Respond will provide high-quality services in the heart of the community, including Family Support, Early Learning and School-Age Care, Day Care for Older People and Refugee Resettlement Services. We will work with partners to explore the future provision of services that address identified needs.



## Strategies

To achieve this goal, Respond will:

- Provide high-quality services in the heart of the community with a focus on positive outcomes for families, children, young people and older people with wrap-around and progressive supports based on need.
- Explore the future provision of services that address identified needs, focusing on early intervention, addressing inequalities and promoting inclusion, and working in collaboration with key stakeholders and other organisations.
- Provide support and essential services for families and individuals who, for whatever reason, fall through the net, typified by our Family Support Service.
- Deliver an evidenced-based approach to service provision, with services tailored to meet individual and community needs, realising Respond's vision of vibrant and caring communities, working in partnership with other service providers as appropriate.
- Expand our Trauma-Informed approach across all of our services.
- Embrace life cycle and life-wide approaches in our work to support the development of healthy, diverse, intergenerational, and mixed tenure communities based on good practice and evidence, for example, our partnership with the Global Brain Health Institute.
- Become a learning organisation by valuing and using regular feedback from service users through consulting, communicating and engaging regularly with service users on an individual and collective basis to get their views, feedback and concerns about the services they receive from Respond.
- Develop and deliver a Service User Engagement Strategy.
- Develop and create a sense of community and connection in Respond housing estates through the optimum utilisation of community buildings.

# 5. Affordable cost rental homes

Respond will aim to deliver up to 250 affordable cost rental homes annually for those for whom the market rents are too high.

## Strategies

To achieve this goal, Respond will:

- Aim to deliver up to 250 affordable cost rental homes annually, owned and managed by Respond, accessing Government schemes and programmes.
- Address need by delivering high-quality cost rental homes in areas of high demand with access to amenities.
- Research and contribute to the development of a financially sustainable and replicable model for affordable rental housing.
- Establish a robust financial model to monitor ongoing operational performance and accurately measure costs, including re-letting costs and void periods.
- Continue effective and meaningful engagement with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Local Authorities, Housing Finance Agency, the Housing Agency, builders, developers, landowners and other stakeholders on the evolution of the cost of the rental model in Ireland.
- Co-operate and collaborate with other Approved Housing Bodies in devising schemes for affordable rental homes.
- Seek to put in place housing schemes and projects that have an integrated mix of social housing, affordable rental and cost rental housing and private housing.
- Take an inclusive approach to managing all our schemes, giving opportunities for all tenants to have a voice and engage in their communities as part of our Tenant Engagement Strategy. —



# 6. Financial sustainability

Respond will maintain a sufficient level of financial health to grow, develop and sustain our planned housing and other services and activities.

## Strategies

To achieve this goal, Respond will:

- Carry out due diligence and comprehensive assessments of financial sustainability for any new developments that are being explored by Respond.
- Make appropriate provision within annual budgets for costs relating to asset management and the maintenance and upgrading of current housing stock within prudent financial parameters.

- Collaborate and maintain excellent relationships with the Housing Finance Agency and other private funders to ensure optimum terms and conditions for funding facilities are available to enable the organisation to achieve its goals.
- Optimise our use of the Housing Finance Agency funding whilst also continuing to explore other financial options.
- Explore new funding options and opportunities (especially in relation to private finance) and, in conjunction with other relevant Approved Housing Bodies, develop new funding models that may involve a multiplicity of different funders.
- Ensure that we achieve the high standards of performance expected of large AHBs by undertaking analysis, e.g., Peer Group Analysis, in order to evidence our performance and benchmark it against good practice.
- Continue to operate a risk-based approach in business planning and decision making by implementing a risk management framework to include a risk register and appetite statement as part of Respond's process for the identification, evaluation, mitigation and management of risk.
- Comply with financial requirements set out by the Approved Housing Body Regulator, Charities Regulator, and other regulatory and auditing authorities.
- Be open and transparent in the ways Respond presents and shares information about its financial performance.
- Embed Value for Money principles in all we do, ensuring our approach includes the social impact of our work.
- Continue to monitor and report on the competing demands on our cash reserves in terms of; the requirement for long- and short-term equity contributions to aid the delivery of our Capital Development Programme, assessment of the provision for cost over-runs or potential failure of developers, the requirement to sustain and fund our planned maintenance programme for our existing portfolio into the future, and our work and engagement with tenants and service users.
- Explore opportunities to assist in the consolidation and strengthening of the AHB sector.



# 7. Organisational excellence and accountability

In pursuit of social justice, Respond will be a high-performing, compliant, results-driven and accountable organisation that values our staff and those we work with.

## Strategies

To achieve this goal, Respond will:

- Continuously work towards improving and enhancing communication and information flows across the organisation, engaging with our staff team about Respond's objectives, purpose and journey as an organisation.
- Implement succession planning to identify and develop potential future leaders and senior managers, as well as individuals, to fill business-critical roles and board and board subcommittee members.
- Encourage and develop leaders at every level in the organisation.

- Develop a strong sense of organisational purpose, camaraderie and pride within the staff team in Respond.
- Implement an organisation-wide Learning and Development Programme following a comprehensive needs analysis.
- Operate best practice employment policies and procedures for staff and a salary and performance system that is fair, objective, and transparent to help attract and retain high-quality employees.
- Continue to implement an effective performance management system to support and enhance staff development across the organisation.
- Design and implement a flexible working policy to attract new staff and retain existing staff, responding to the changing work context.
- Develop and implement an organisation diversity and inclusion strategy to apply best practice principles and procedures on inclusion throughout the organisation, ensuring that we benefit from a strong and diverse workforce.
- Deploy the highest level of digitalisation, IT systems, platforms, and capabilities appropriate for all of our operations throughout the organisation.

- Enable the harvesting of information through data analytics, developing insights and supporting management implementation plans.
- Continue to embed a robust governance structure with effective leadership and high ethical standards, which we will do in accordance with the Risk Management Policy which has been approved by the Board.
- Deliver quality assured services to our tenants and services users with a particular focus on tenant and service user engagement, continuous and the achievement of best practice standards.
- Monitor, anticipate and comply with all legal, regulatory and contractual obligations of our regulators and funders, to ensure openness and transparency and instil confidence in our stakeholders.
- Support and resource the organisation to deliver on this ambitious plan. —



# 8. Advocates for change

Respond will be an effective voice with, and for, people in housing need, people who are homeless and those using our services in the community to effect positive change in their lives.



## Strategies

To achieve this goal, Respond will:

- Monitor and assess the implications of economic and social trends, legislation and policy changes for Respond, our tenants and service users, and wider society with particular emphasis on housing policy, addressing homelessness, and supporting communities.
- Undertake purposeful research and policy analysis with a focus on outcomes, best practice and 'what works.'
- Play a strong role in advocating for the provision of adequate housing, supports and services in the community for those who need them, developing solutions where appropriate informed by our experience, expertise and the best available evidence.
- Develop relationships with key influencers and decision-makers, including Ministers' Offices, Departmental Officials, Local Authorities, Government Agencies, and the NGO sector.
- Collaborate with relevant organisations and partners in the sectors we work to bring about positive change, for example, the Global Brain Health Institute, the Housing Alliance, the Irish Council for Social Housing and the Homeless Network.
- Communicate about the work of Respond and effective solutions to a broad range of audiences to contribute to policy and service development.
- Work across all departments to promote positive perceptions and strengthen the good reputation of Respond.
- Collaborate in sharing the stories of the people we work with to influence change.
- Provide thought leadership and contribute to discussions and debates taking place at national and local levels and support spokespersons to speak publicly about our work through all media.
- Explore partnership opportunities and develop relationships with potential philanthropic grant funders, companies, and donors.

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# Notes





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