



**Helm Housing Association
40th AGM**

Chairperson's Report

29 June 2017

Welcome

You are all very welcome to the 2017 Annual General Meeting of Helm Housing Limited.

This is 40th AGM of Helm and the last, as Helm and Fold merged to form Radius Housing on 3rd April 2017.

Although Helm ceased to exist as a separate legal entity on our merger with Fold, we still have a duty as shareholders to approve the final accounts and this short report covers the activities and performance of the association in its last year of business.

Business Performance

Our Business Plan for the year to 31st March 2017 was titled 'Making a Difference.' This is more than a simple aspiration – at Helm we have always taken pride in being passionate about what we do and how we do it, and we believe that this commitment to making a difference has underpinned our business for the past 40 years.

In retrospect we were too ambitious on a number of our targets that we set for the year, particularly in light of the fact that we underestimated the amount of time and effort required to deliver on the merger ambition with Fold.

That said, we performed generally well throughout the year and it is pleasing to report that the great majority of our business plan targets for the 2016-17 year were met, as were the majority of our formal key performance indicators.

Our tenants are at the heart of what we do and we strive to do the right thing for them and for the communities in which they live.

Given the importance of the maintenance service I am delighted to report that more than 92% of tenants with direct experience of maintenance are

satisfied with the service that they received, an improvement on the previous year's figure of 91%.

Performance in terms of maintenance response times was also very good, with 95% of emergency work completed on time and more than 90% of other repair work also completed on time.

However, performance in terms of voids and arrears was lower than we had hoped. That said, good progress was made especially in the second half of the year in respect of both these areas of the business and we are confident that this improvement will continue into 2017-18.

Our vision is to build neighbourhoods and create thriving and empowered communities, which means we recognise that housing not just about the provision of new homes – although that is undoubtedly important. Helm started 75 new homes last year and completed 175 dwellings, our best completion performance since being reinstated to the Social Housing Development Programme in 2013.

However in pursuit of our vision, the provision of new housing may well be a necessary condition, but is not a sufficient condition in itself. That is why during the past year we continue to develop and broaden our service offering in what we call the 'Bricks and More' approach.

'Bricks and More' is our Board's explicit recognition that building neighbourhoods and thriving and empowered communities requires a commitment to push the boundaries beyond simply providing a home, and into areas such as tenancy sustainment, financial inclusion, and employability training.

Our Journey2Jobs scheme is an example of this type of work. This is a partnership project with Bryson FutureSkills. The project was designed to provide an opportunity for participants, including some of our tenants, to gain both a recognised qualification and realistic work experience.

I am delighted to report that 3 of the 6 participants in the pilot programme gained full time employment as a direct result of the programme. We believe that there are opportunities to mainstream this type of activity as part of Radius Housing.

Finances

Of course none of these things would be possible if Helm Housing was not run on an efficient and an effective basis, because it is only by delivering a surplus that is reinvested in our services that we can continue to make a difference to the communities that we serve.

I am pleased to report that our turnover is up by about £1m or 3% against the previous year's figures.

However, a growth in operating costs, particularly due to increased staff and merger costs, exceeded the growth in turnover, which means that we recorded a reduction in surpluses.

Our operating surplus reduced from £9.6m in 2015-16 to £8.5m in the year ending March 2017. Similarly, our net surplus reduced from £5.8m to £5.1m over the same period.

However, after adjustments for pension losses our total comprehensive income for the year stood at an acceptable £4.5m, or 14% of turnover.

We had loans outstanding of c£82m at 31st March 2017 and our total capital and reserves position remains strong.

Helm's interest cover ratio for 2017 was 2.32 times, almost identical to the figure for the previous year.

Our gearing ratio was 28.6% at the year-end, up from 25% at 31st March 2016. Both of these measures fall comfortably within the limits agreed with our lenders.

Accreditations and Awards

It is always rewarding when the efforts and achievements of an organisation are recognised by others.

In that regard it is pleasing to note that during 2016-17 Helm retained accreditations in respect of:

- Investors In People;
- The Living Wage;
- The EFQM Gold Star Service Excellence framework; and
- The ISO 18001 Health and Safety Standard.

In addition, during 2016-17, Helm successfully acquired:

- ISO 27001:13 Information and Security Management accreditation, the first Northern Ireland housing association to achieve this on an organisation-wide basis;
- ISO 9001:15 Quality Systems accreditation for all property and development functions
- NICEIC accreditation for electrical installations.

I am also pleased to report that Helm was recognised in the annual Chartered Institute of Housing Awards for 2016-17:

- Winner of the CIH Young Professional of the Year
- Highly Commended in the Housing Hero category

In addition, for our work on racial and ethnic diversity Helm won the inaugural Legal Island Equality Award for the Charity Sector.

Taken together, these various accreditations and awards signal Helm Housing's commitment to providing a working environment for our staff that is safe, secure, supportive and rewarding.

Merger with Fold

One of the most significant events of the year was the successful completion of our merger with the Fold Group to create Radius Housing with effect from 3 April 2017.

Like Helm, Fold had a long history of delivering high quality housing and housing related services and it shared both our values and our commitment to making a difference for the tenants and communities we both serve. It was primarily for these reasons that we selected Fold as a merger partner.

When I look back over the past 12 months and see the commitment and professionalism shown by the staff and the board members of both organisations in pursuit of this merger I am both awed and proud of what we have collectively achieved.

As standalone entities, Fold and Helm were the second and third largest housing associations in Northern Ireland and, on this basis, we approached the merger as a coming together of equals, seeking out the best of both organisations to build a new organisation with the capacity and desire to innovate such that we will, together, be greater than the sum of our parts.

This was a lofty goal but I can honestly say that both organisations have remained true to this goal, and we have been supported throughout by our shareholders, many of whom are here today; to our shareholders, I want to say a big thank you for your confidence and encouragement throughout the past year.

I am genuinely optimistic about our future as part of Radius. The early signs are very good but we all recognise that merger is simply a step

along the path of delivering on our joint ambitions; an important, indeed, a momentous step; but a step nonetheless. The merger is not an end in itself; but it is, very clearly, a means to an end whereby we can collectively better meet the needs of our tenants and the communities that we serve.

Closing Remarks

In closing I want to pay tribute Helm's senior management team who worked tirelessly with their counterparts at Fold to make the merger a success.

However, there is one person to whom I must pay special tribute and extend our depth of gratitude and sincere thanks - and that is our Interim Chief Executive, John McPeake. He has shown drive, commitment, passion and outstanding leadership. His 'can do' attitude and collaborative approach have been instrumental in not only delivering the merger but in also addressing the emergent issues whilst at the same time ensuring Helm provided an excellent service to its tenants. John - you are held in the highest regard by all not only in Helm and Fold but also across the sector. I thank you for everything you have done and wish you every success in the future.

I also want to thank John McLean, the CEO at Fold for his positivity and personal commitment throughout this important joint venture. I have enjoyed getting to know you over this past 18 months and, with you as CEO, I am convinced that Radius is in safe hands!

And I also want to say a special word of thanks to my counterpart, Diana Fitzsimons, Chair of Fold, for her unfailing support and encouragement. I want to wish her well in her new role as Chair of Radius.

I have reserved my final words for my fellow board members at Helm, many of whom are here today.

We should never forget that our board members are volunteers; they attend board and committee meetings, scheme openings, training events and conferences on their own time, and often at significant cost to their professional and family lives.

They don't do it to be recognised, or for any form of remuneration or even for fun – they do it because they have a strong sense of giving something back and of making a difference. For this we are truly grateful.

I am very pleased that Hilary, Danny, Jonathon and Kathleen have been able to join me on the board of Radius, but we would not have achieved all that we have without the contributions also of Patrick, Craig, Conor, Emma and Paul.

Thank you all for everything that you have done; you can be proud of what we have achieved together, and I am proud of having had the opportunity of working with each and every one of you.

Liz Cuddy
Chair
Helm Housing