**Shropshire Rural Housing Association**

**The Strategic Plan 2017-2020:**

***A Vision of the Future***

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**Shropshire Rural Housing Association:**

***‘Providing homes that help Shropshire’s rural communities thrive’***

**Who we are, what we do and why it matters…**

**Who we are:** a long-established, Shropshire-focused registered provider of affordable housing.

**What we do:** develop and manage good quality, affordable housing; investing in properties and communities for the long term.

**Why it matters:** not everyone can afford home ownership or renting from a private landlord but many have good reason to need an affordable home in rural Shropshire. For those that need us, we’re a perfect match.

*To learn more about us and our plans for the future, read on…*

**Our strategic themes are:**

**Property: developing and managing more homes in rural Shropshire**

We want to help more people to be safe, secure and to thrive in Shropshire’s rural communities. We’ll do this by providing more affordable homes and managing them well.

**Places: helping to make, and keep, villages vibrant places**

We invest to maintain mixed communities and help to avoid people being ‘priced out’. Residents of our affordable homes work in their communities; provide support to and receive support from other family members, and; help to sustain rural services and amenities such as schools, shops and community centres.

**Public Relations: raising awareness, developing & promoting our distinctive identity**

We are the longest established and the only traditional housing association with a particular focus on rural Shropshire. We want to cement our position as the ‘go to’ organisation for affordable rural housing.

**People: having the best team in place to deliver our ambitions**

We have great people at Shropshire Rural. Staff and our voluntary Board Members are recruited, trained and developed with a clear purpose: to deliver the best possible service in all aspects of our work.

**We will achieve our strategic aims through:**

* **Strength and clarity of leadership**: giving both direction and support
* **Strategy and operational planning:** being clear about how, why and when things will be done and how they will be resourced
* **Transparency, accountability and performance management:** being open and accountable for our actions and measuring our performance

**Background**

**The Operating Context: the world in which we work**

*Preparation of the Strategic Plan coincides with a period of uncertainty in relation to the direction and detail of government policy for housing and related services: as matters become more certain, fine-tuning the Plan might become necessary.*

*Where the opportunity arises, Shropshire Rural will constructively challenge those policies which it believes do not serve the best interests of tenants or the effective operation of the Association.*

**The external policy environment:**

**Government controls on rents** mean the Association’s prime source of income will continue to reduce by 1% per annum for the life of this Plan. There is no certainty as to what will happen beyond 2020.

**Development of new housing** is significantly influenced by land availability and the government’s policy on capital grants. Capital grant is important to Shropshire Rural and every effort will be made to secure grant: without it, developing affordable homes is unlikely to be a viable prospect.

**The extension of the Right to Buy and other home ownership initiatives** have potential, the impact of which cannot easily be predicted. Early feedback to their policy proposals has caused the government to rethink its policy priorities; prompting a move towards a greater focus on supply and a lesser focus on tenure against the background of an acute housing shortage.

**The Operating Context (continued)**

**Planning policy, development control and land supply** are inter-related. For many years, Shropshire has been able to secure the development of affordable rural housing through ‘exception site’ policy and through obligations placed upon developers under planning consents. Recent undermining of these controls by planning case law seems likely to significantly jeopardise the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas and the situation will need to be closely monitored.

**Welfare reforms** have the potential to significantly and adversely affect housing associations and their tenants. The continuing ‘bedroom tax’; the introduction of a ‘benefit cap’ and the proposals for Local Housing Allowance to be extended to single person housing association households have the potential to impact not only on individual households but on the income stream of the Association.

**Funding of supported housing** is under threat. The need to properly fund support costs is widely documented and must be addressed if independent living is to be maintained and avoidable demand is not to be placed on the financially challenged health and care sectors.

**Other factors that influence our operations:**

**Demographic changes** influence both current tenancies and the patterns and levels of housing demand. An ageing population, living longer and increasing frailty, both physically and mentally, can, in rural areas, be even more demanding than in an urban context. This is due, at least in part, to the relative lack of locally based support services, general amenities and the difficulties of travel associated with the ageing process.

It is important to ensure the types and sizes of properties owned and managed by the Association continue to meet changing needs. In particular, demographic and social changes have given rise to an increasing number and proportion of smaller households.

**Technological changes** have implications for design, build, adaptation and maintenance of housing and for the services delivered. The future will, inevitably, also bring developments in fields including assistive technology and the potential of social media.

**Changes to financial markets** can influence the availability and cost of borrowing and impact related borrowing covenants. ‘Brexit’ has the potential to impact procurement costs across a broad spectrum; including labour, materials costs and services. The rural nature of Shropshire and the relative lack of diversity amongst the population might, however, insulate Shropshire from some of the impacts felt in areas with greater diversity and heavier reliance on migrant labour.

**Making the most of available resources:**

**Financial resources,** loan covenants and the availability of assets which can be used as security for borrowing will combine to determine the extent to which there is capacity for growth.

**Human Resources** are key to the delivery of the Association’s ambition: both in terms of the governance provided by Board and Committees and through the management and customer service provided by the paid staff and by associated consultants, contractors and suppliers working on the Association’s behalf.

Keeping under review the staff establishment; balancing cost, capacity and capability in support of strategic priorities and reflecting the inevitable changes in requirement over time will also be important.

**Management costs** have, historically, been kept low. Whilst this is helpful in many respects it does, inevitably, limit overall capacity and the range and depth of capability within the Association: a balance needs to be struck in achieving strategic priorities.

**Asset Management** must be at the heart of the Association’s activities. Making good use of the housing stock and other assets must provide a return on investment. The Strategic Plan will be informed by proposals for investment in current assets and selective disposal of assets, where this is practicable and serves the best interests of the Association.

**Investment in ‘Affordable Warmth’ -** ensuring tenants’ enjoyment of warm homes at an affordable cost will continue to inform investment decisions for both new and existing homes. Gas is often considered to be the ‘default’ affordable option but often isn’t available in rural locations. Shropshire Rural has invested significantly in renewable energy technology: both ground and air source heat pumps are being used which, together with effective controls and high levels of insulation, are enabling the delivery of affordable warmth to tenants whose homes don’t have access to mains gas.

**Facing the Future:**

**Leadership and the delivery of our strategic themes**

**Shropshire Rural will achieve its strategic aims through:**

* **Strength and clarity of leadership:** giving both direction and support.

Leadership, direction and support derives from Board and Committees, supervision and management provided by senior staff, self-motivation of all staff and a commitment to doing the best possible job.

* **Strategy and operational planning:** being clear about how, why and when things will be done and how they will be resourced. The underpinning Delivery Plan provides guidance on what is to be done, why, by when and by whom. All staff have a part to play and this investment of their time, effort and insight helps to build a shared ownership of the aims and objectives and a shared commitment to delivering the best possible outcomes.
* **Transparency, accountability and performance management:** being open and accountable for our actions and measuring our performance. Ensuring that our actions are in support of the strategic aims and our performance is open to scrutiny and constructive challenge can help us to do still better.

**The Delivery Plan: implementing the strategic themes**

**Property: developing and managing more homes in rural Shropshire**

We will do this by:

* reviewing our capacity for investment in new homes
* identifying opportunities to develop new homes; finding land, securing planning consents and establishing effective delivery arrangements
* securing loan finance, grant aid and other forms of subsidy to ensure the financial viability of development proposals
* protecting our investment by managing our homes well

**Places: helping to make, and keep, villages vibrant places**

We will do this by:

* investing in places that encourage mixed communities; ensuring there are affordable housing options for those who live in Shropshire’s rural communities but might otherwise be ‘priced out’
* enabling more people to be safe, secure and to thrive in Shropshire’s rural communities by providing more affordable homes and managing them well

**The Delivery Plan (continued)**

**Public Relations: raising awareness, developing & promoting our distinctive identity**

We will do this by:

* building on our position and reputation as the longest established and the only traditional housing association with a distinctive focus on rural Shropshire
* aiming to cement our position as the ‘go to’ organisation for affordable rural housing
* ensuring an attractive, accessible and relevant website for our tenants and other users
* maintaining a contemporary identity whilst not losing sight of our heritage
* sustaining our commitment to ‘affordable warmth’

**People: having the best team in place to deliver our ambitions**

We will do this by:

* having great people at Shropshire Rural.
* providing effective leadership and management
* valuing the work our people do so that they remain with us and are inspired to achieve still more
* making investment in technology that supports business efficiency and improved performance.

**Achieving and reviewing what we plan to do:**

**A Delivery Plan underpins this Strategic Plan**; identifying the things we will to do in support of the strategic themes: Property, Places, Public Relations and People

**This Strategic Plan and the Delivery Plan** **will be reviewed** at least annually

**Resources will be aligned to support delivery** of what we intend to do

**Our achievements will be highlighted** in future Annual Reports and through other media.

**We will also work with wide-ranging people and organisations** **who are able to help us:**

* ***develop and manage more homes in rural Shropshire***
* ***make, and keep, villages vibrant places***
* ***retain, develop and promote our distinctive identity***
* ***have in place the best people to deliver on our ambitions***

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