

Housing Rights

when everyone has a **home**



**Strategic Plan
2018 - 2023**

We are Housing Rights

We believe that prevention of homelessness is the best cure. We work tirelessly to keep people in their homes and help them with their housing problems.

We believe that everyone should have a *home*

Our Values

Our values guide the work of the organisation. They shape the standards of our conduct and behaviour, not only in our interaction with clients and external stakeholders, but also with each other.

Independence

we are a charity accountable to an independent Board

Equality

we treat people fairly and challenge inequality

Co-operation

we work together and with others to achieve shared goals

Quality

we strive for excellence in everything we do

Respect

we treat people with dignity

Our Commitment



“Good and stable housing can mitigate poverty and support life transitions.”

Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2018

Today, Housing Rights is the leading specialist provider of independent housing advice in Northern Ireland. The charity was established in Belfast over 50 years ago and was dedicated to “the relief of poverty .. and in particular to assist those persons with necessitous circumstances in relation to housing matters”

Intuitively, our founders understood that addressing the appalling housing difficulties associated with widespread slum clearance and helping people to find a decent home, would not only alleviate their immediate hardship, but would also provide them with a foundation which had the potential to change the lives of them and their families.

This same wisdom remains true today. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report published earlier this year, presents a persuasive analysis of the interaction between poverty and housing and, reiterates the important role which decent housing can play in breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage. Although the backdrop has changed dramatically from the Belfast of the 1960's, the links between poverty and housing remain strongly entwined. The physical condition of much of the local housing stock has improved, but the difficulties in finding and keeping a decent home continue.

Homelessness and housing problems remain a seemingly intractable part of our society today. These are being exacerbated by reduced public investment in the provision of social housing and the ongoing implementation of the Welfare Reform agenda which limits the help available to meet housing costs of those on lower incomes and undermining the ability of people to obtain and sustain a home. Official statistics confirm that problems of affordability, standards and supply exist.

A persons housing situation is intrinsic to their sense of well -being; a good quality affordable home can help to protect people against the worst excesses of poverty; it can provide a stable foundation from which they can be educated, gain employment, sustain family and social networks. Conversely the costs of housing and poor housing circumstances can drive poverty and being homeless is perhaps its most visible manifestation.

In Housing Rights, we remain convinced by the wisdom of our founders and committed to realising their vision. We believe passionately that no one should be without a home. Over the next 5 years we will continue, within the context of an ever constrained housing system, to work to help realise our goal that everyone should have a home.

Our Challenge

People are struggling to meet housing costs



370,000

people in Northern Ireland live in poverty



NI has the highest rate of poverty among homeowners in the UK



1 in 6

households in the private rented sector spend over 40% of income on household costs



21%

people in Northern Ireland are deeply in debt

Housing impacts negatively on health & wellbeing

£33 million per year

The cost of unfit dwellings on the NHS in Northern Ireland



42%

of people in Northern Ireland are in fuel poverty

41%

of homeless people

have a long term health problem compared to

28%

of the general population

Demand for social housing is increasing



37,611

applicants were on a waiting list for a home in 2017

63%

of those on the waiting list were in housing stress. The highest level since 1993



Supply of social housing is shrinking



119,000

homes were lost to social rented stock through the House Sales Scheme between 2003 to 2015



9,458

social homes were allocated to in 2017 - the lowest level for nine years

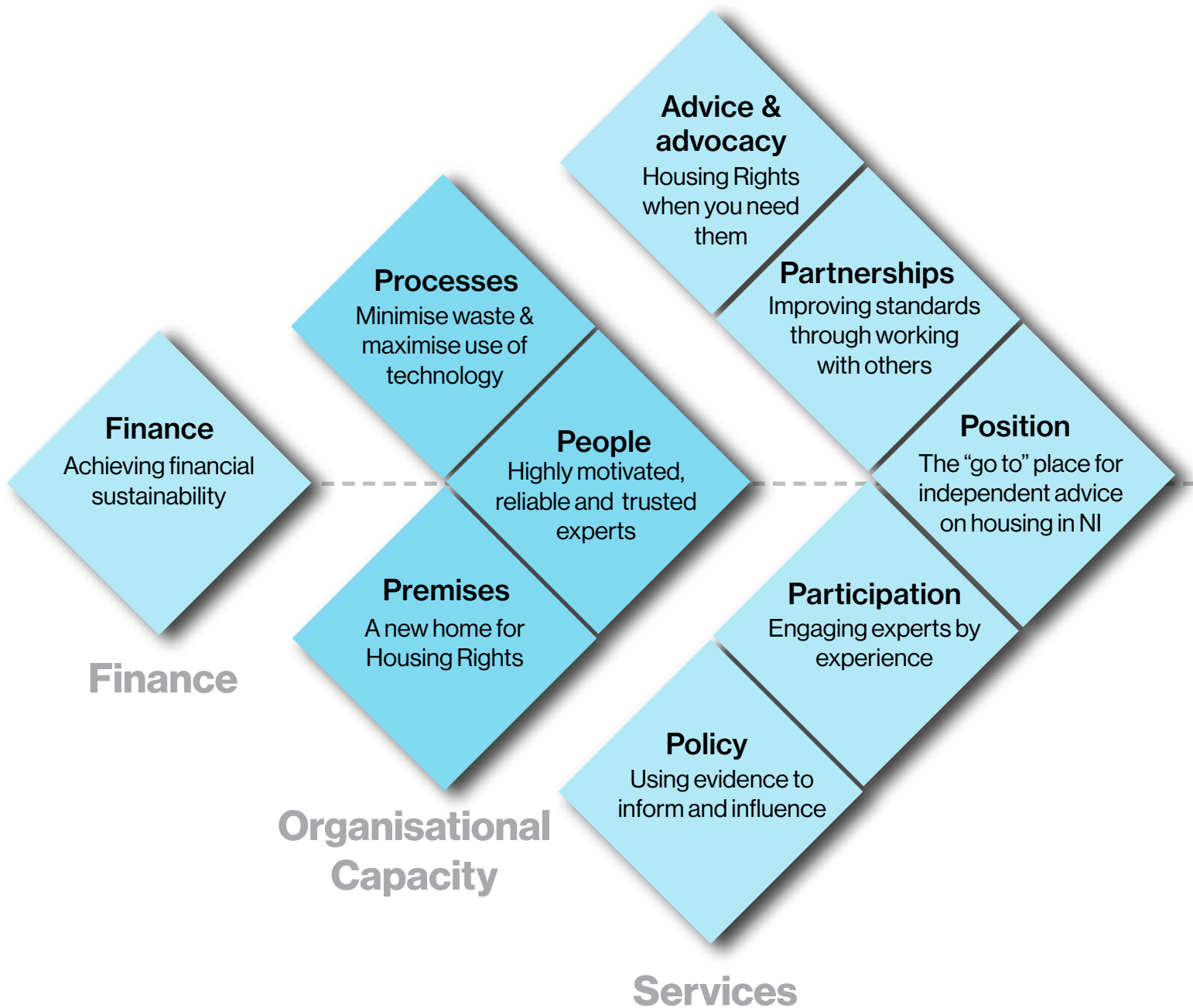
Lack of security leads to homelessness

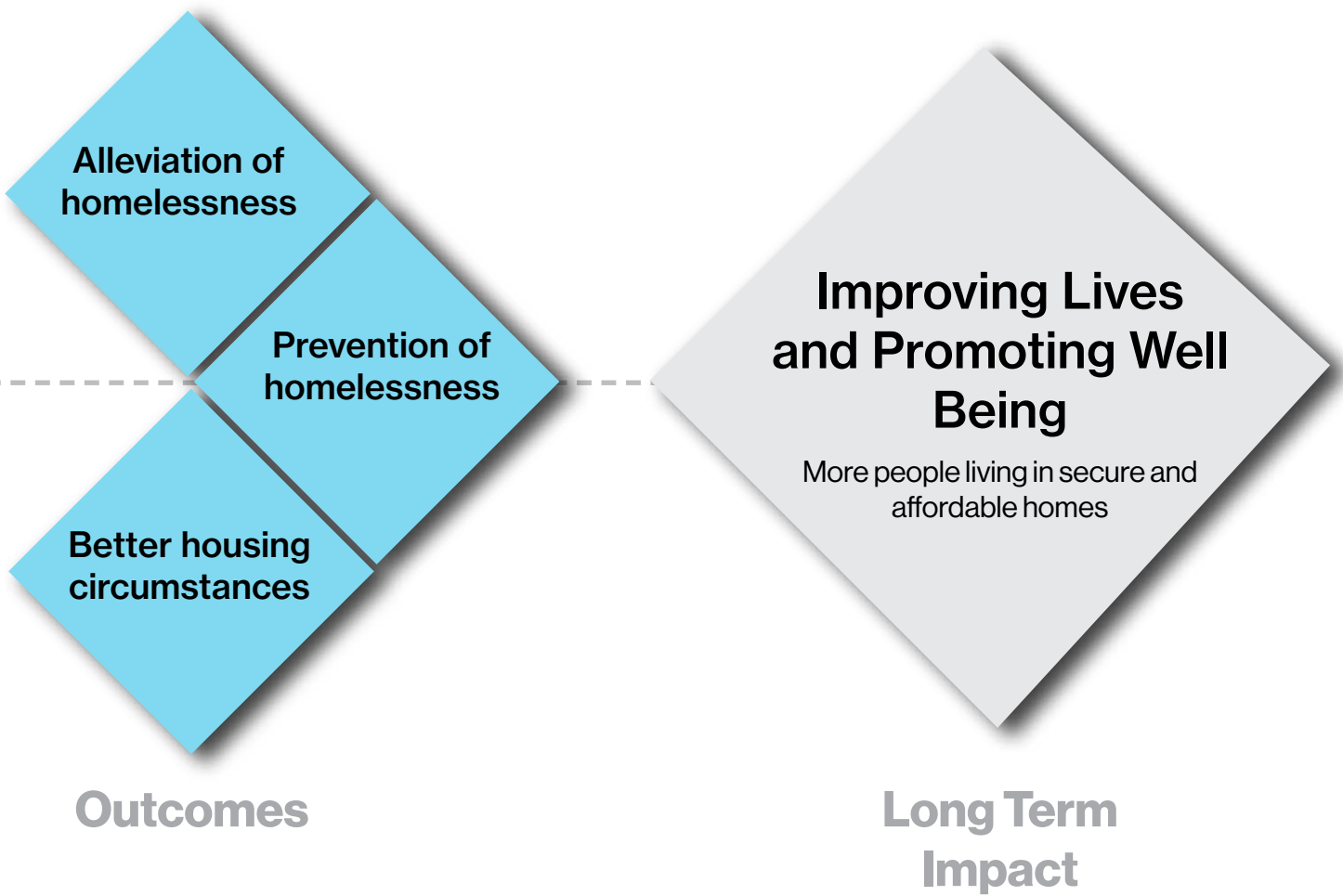


Loss of rented accommodation

is in the top three reasons for homelessness in 16/17, behind 'accommodation not reasonable' and 'sharing breakdown / family dispute'

Our Priorities





Our Impact and Outcomes



“I am so happy that I contacted you, I thought I was going to lose my home. I don’t know where I would be now without your help and patience.”

Housing Rights client, 2018

• Improving lives and promoting well-being by helping more people in NI to live in secure and affordable homes

Housing Rights wants to break the link between poor housing and other forms of disadvantage. We work to tackle homelessness and combat poor housing in all sectors of the housing market. Our services aim to improve lives by having a positive impact on the housing circumstances of people. In NI over the next 5 years we will seek to achieve the following:

To prevent homelessness.

We will work to help those individuals and families who, if problems are unresolved, would be in danger of losing their home. We will help them either to remain in their current home or to obtain alternative suitable accommodation.

To alleviate homelessness.

We will work to help those already without a home to find a new home. This may include securing a temporary housing solution until a suitable permanent one can be found.

To improve the housing circumstances of people who are in need.

We will work to help those who need to secure improvements to the physical condition of their homes; to enhance people's ability to meet their housing costs; to address poor management practice; or to resolve disputes between landlords/tenants or lenders/borrowers.

To effectively demonstrate the impact of our work.

We are committed to further developing the understanding of the value of our work. We will produce an annual impact report which provides credible evidence of the difference which our interventions have made to the lives of people in housing need in NI.

Our Services



“Housing Rights is an excellent organisation doing some very valuable and innovative work with a range of partners.”

Diversity and Inclusion Award Assessor, 2018

- **Housing Rights when you need them**
- **Improving standards through working with others**
- **Engaging with experts by experience**
- **Using evidence and experience to inform and influence**

Housing Rights wishes to consolidate our position as the “go to” place for independent advice on housing and homelessness issues in NI for members of the public and for the many other agencies who have a role to play in tackling the problems of homelessness and poor housing. To help achieve this we have identified the following objectives:

To provide a reliable and independent housing advice service for the people of NI.

We know there is real value in extending the availability of housing advice beyond homelessness and those who are in crisis. We will offer a broad range of interventions which are quality assured, tenure neutral, client focused, timely and effective. They will encompass web based self- help options; a Housing Helpline; advocacy, negotiation and legal work including court representation.

To expand the reach of our services by enhancing our digital offering.

We will be developing our digital offering to improve accessibility to our services. We will be increasing our use of digital technologies to provide advice, information, tools and support to help more people make informed choices and resolve their own housing issues. For digital users who need additional support, we will provide a gateway to our Housing Helpline and face to face services.

To work collaboratively and develop effective partnerships with other voluntary, statutory and private agencies to provide the best outcomes for clients.

We will continue to work closely with our colleagues in frontline advice agencies to support them to develop and maintain the skills and knowledge to provide housing advice within their own community. We will agree and implement effective inter-agency referral processes for clients who need additional services. We will actively explore opportunities for partnership working which will recognise the unique contribution of each organisation towards achieving our shared goals.

Our Services



“I wasn’t really listening until the peer adviser started...it never even crossed my mind he was a prisoner but when he explained he was, and had been trained by Housing Rights, we started listening because he was one of us.”

Housing Rights prisons peer advice service client, 2018

- **Housing Rights when you need them**
- **Improving standards through working with others**
- **Engaging with experts by experience**
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To promote good practice and encourage statutory compliance across all tenures.

Housing Rights recognises the important role which other stakeholders such as landlords and lenders can also play in preventing homelessness and improving housing standards in NI. We will work proactively to raise awareness amongst landlords in the social and private rented sector of their respective rights and responsibilities. We will also seek to engage with landlords and lenders to explore alternative means of providing support and resolving issues which will prevent problems from escalating to crisis point.

To improve our reach to those in greatest need by involving them in the design and delivery of our services.

We will look for opportunities to develop peer advocates particularly within groups which are often overlooked or marginalised such as ethnic minority communities, young people and those who are chronically homeless. We will actively seek to ensure their voice is heard in the policy debate by facilitating direct engagement between those who live in poor housing and those responsible for the policy decisions which could directly improve their lives.

To secure positive change where existing laws/policy are negatively impacting on those living in poor or inadequate housing circumstances.

We collate a wealth of data based on the experiences of our clients. We will use this to identify areas of concern, and to offer independent input and analysis to inform the housing policy agenda in NI. We will undertake targeted research to improve understanding of issues, and to identify potential solutions. We will engage in strategic casework, which, if successful, can make life better not just for the individual client but also for a wider group of people in similar circumstances.

Organisational Capacity



“I would highly recommend the help I got from Housing Rights staff, very professional and compassionate in all dealings with myself.”

Housing Rights client, 2018

- **Highly motivated, reliable and trusted experts**
- **Minimise waste and maximise use of emerging technology**
- **A new home for Housing Rights**

In Housing Rights, we know our people are, without doubt, our most important resource. We will aim to create a positive, well-resourced, socially responsible and sustainable working environment which is motivational for them and welcoming for our service users.

To build a passionate and engaged staff team who are recognised as experts in their field.

We will focus on getting the right people with the right skills in the right roles. We will establish an internal Learning & Development Academy to ensure our people embrace the values of the organisation and have the skills and knowledge they need to excel in their job. We will have confident and competent leaders and we will grow internal talent to ensure that a high level of institutional knowledge and expertise is maintained.

To develop our volunteer base and provide excellent opportunities for them to contribute to our work.

We will continue to expand the number of volunteers engaged in all areas of our work. In particular, we will seek to identify opportunities for previous service users or individuals from those groups typically considered harder to reach to become involved. We are committed to investing in our volunteers to ensure the experience is positive and mutually beneficial for both parties.

To have in place excellent systems and practices which minimise waste, ensure effective governance and maximise the use of emerging technology.

We will ensure that we have in place robust systems to assure compliance and the quality of our services. We will review our work processes to: ensure they are operating effectively; minimise waste and eliminate any duplication of resources. We are committed to improving our business support functions, in line with emerging technology, maximising digital solutions and reducing our reliance on paper based systems.

To find accommodation which provides a positive environment for staff, volunteers and service users.

We want to find a new workplace which can offer our staff and our volunteers a good working environment, closely located to other complementary community services. We will continue to provide a public presence in a city centre location to make it easy for those clients who need face to face help to access our service.

Our Finances

strategic priority

- **Achieving financial sustainability**

We are operating in an increasingly challenging financial environment and expect to face continuing financial pressures over the period of this Plan. In this context, the following strategic objectives have been identified to ensure our continued viability, enable services to be delivered and, longer term, our outcomes and impact to be realised.

strategic objectives

To diversify our funding base and secure adequate money to deliver our services.

We aim to attract funding from a range of sources. We will seek to obtain financial support on a full cost recovery basis from statutory agencies to provide those services which help fulfil statutory duties or achieve their strategic priorities. We will actively explore philanthropic, corporate and other funding opportunities to meet the costs of providing other much needed services.

To be innovative and enterprising in our approach to generating additional income.

We will create an enabling environment to allow good ideas to flourish. We will fully explore the potential to develop new markets and products which will also help us to achieve our mission. We will put in place the necessary structures and ensure we have the skills we need to enable viable opportunities for additional income generation to be realised.

To demonstrate value for money.

We want to be absolutely sure that our services are providing excellent value for money. To achieve this we need to understand fully not only what our services cost but also what works well and the benefits which are being delivered. We will continue to explore options to make the most effective use of resources and remain committed to engaging in meaningful benchmarking activity with comparable providers.



“Advice reduces dependence on services further down the line and provides cost savings that no government can afford to ignore.”

Report of the Low Commission on the future of advice and legal support, 2014.

Making it Happen

This plan contains the strategic priorities and objectives which will guide the direction of Housing Rights over the next 5 years. To support this we will produce an annual Business Plan containing performance indicators, targets and the key actions which will help more people to live in a safe and affordable home. Regular updates on our progress will be published on our website www.housingrights.org.uk.

If you would like more information on the work of Housing Rights, contact us:

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