

# The United Welsh Group Strategy 2023-27



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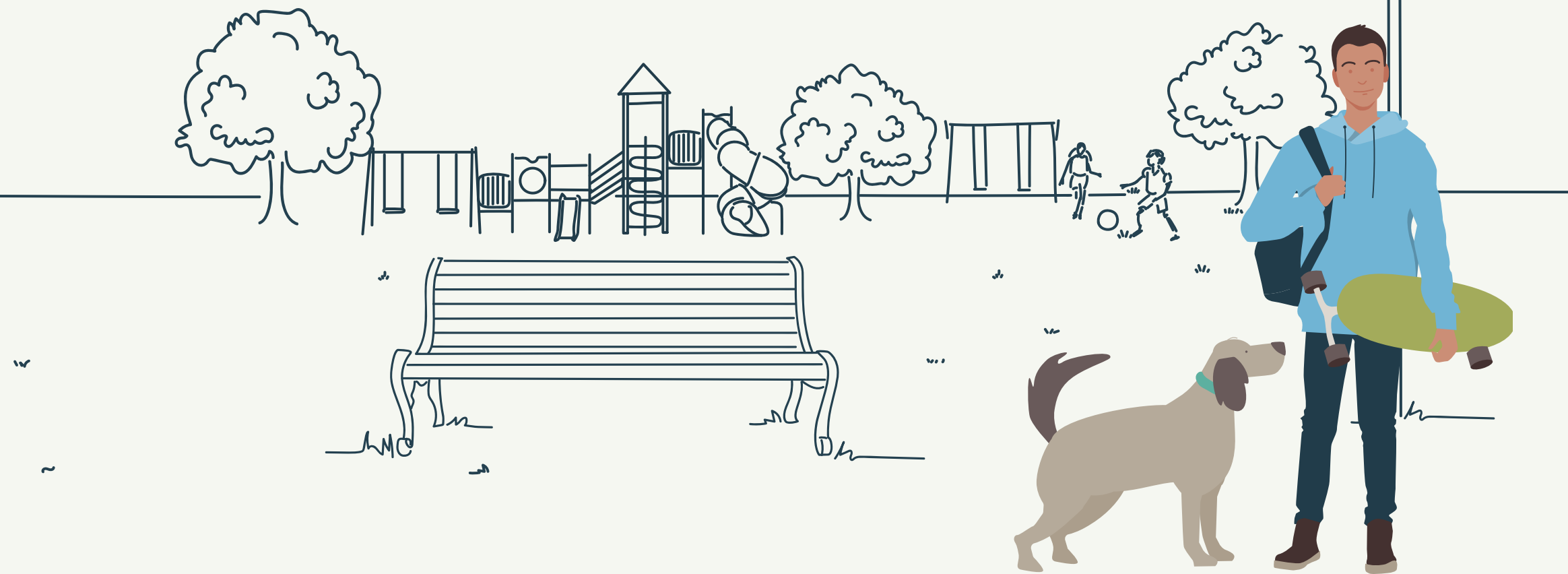


At the United Welsh Group, we **build** homes, **create** communities, and **transform** lives.

We provide almost **6,500 affordable homes for people across South Wales** to enjoy a warm, safe place to live, with support from us.

We work hard to make a difference and step up when our communities need us. Providing homes is just the start. We help people to live happily and independently. We tackle poverty, invest in greener communities, and challenge inequality at every turn.

The United Welsh Group is a not-for-profit organisation and employs over 400 people. The Group includes our repairs and maintenance service Celtic Horizons; timber frame home manufacturer Celtic Offsite and Harmoni Homes Ltd, which builds affordable homes and homes for sale.



HELP & ADVICE

HEALTH & WELLBEING

COMMUNITY SERVICES



# Our values

We work together in a spirit of trust and authenticity, confident to take measured risks in a culture that embraces new ideas and collaboration.

Our values were chosen by staff across our organisation. They connect and inspire us, guiding our strategies as well as the decisions we make day to day.



# Our guiding principles

These guiding principles govern the way we work, to do our best for our customers and communities.



## Listen and engage

We value our customers and our staff, listening to their experiences to adapt and make better decisions. We ensure the services we plan and deliver benefit their changing needs.



## Partnership

We work innovatively with Welsh Government, local councils, health boards and other community organisations to make the most of limited resources, sharing our experience to benefit everyone.



## Inclusion

We value the diversity of people we work with and the communities where we work. We recognise that everyone is different, and we treat people with respect.



## Affordability

Rent and service charges are set at affordable levels. We are focused on providing homes and services that represent value for money for our customers.



## Strong governance, financial resilience and risk management

We are well-governed to maintain our financial strength and resilience. We manage risks and minimise our exposure to loss, while maximising the benefits of our operations to work efficiently and effectively.



# The challenges we face

Over the next few years, our work is likely to be against a backdrop of continuing hardship for many of our customers as living costs continue to rise or remain at high levels.

There continues to be a lack of affordable housing in Wales, and the costs we incur in building new homes and maintaining and improving existing homes have increased significantly.

Homelessness is further exacerbated by rising poverty and inequality, so it is important we continue to work in partnership with Welsh Government and other

sectors to support people and make the best use of available resources.

Rising living costs also impact our staff, and their wellbeing continues to be a priority.

Our culture of flexible working encourages staff to make choices about how they work so that they can balance competing demands from home and work.

To develop this strategy, we asked our customers about their priorities as the cost of living increases. We also talked to staff about what great would look like for United Welsh in five years' time, and talked with stakeholders about how our plans align with their priorities and challenges.

To fulfil our mission of building homes, creating communities and transforming lives, our strategy will focus on:



Great Homes



Successful Services



Happy, Healthy People





# Great Homes

We will deliver **1,300 low carbon homes by 2027** that are warm, safe and happy places to live.

We will **invest in our existing homes** to make them more modern and energy-efficient.



## Where we are now



In the last five years we have built over 1,000 homes, for affordable rent and new homeowners.



We have focused on building stronger partnerships with local authorities, health boards and homelessness organisations to provide specialist homes that genuinely change the lives of residents in need of additional support.



We created Celtic Offsite, a social enterprise with manufacturing facilities to build timber frame structures for 250 homes per annum.



We launched our Towards Net Zero Carbon strategy, and we have progressed retrofit work at our existing homes to improve their energy efficiency and reduce our carbon footprint.

## Our approach

**Households are responsible for 26% of UK carbon emissions, and as a leading provider of homes in Wales, we are committed to playing our part in tackling the climate crisis.**

Currently, 43% of our homes have an energy rating of Band B or higher. We will continue to deliver our Towards Net Zero Carbon strategy, investing in better insulation at our existing homes and replacing gas boilers in the years ahead. Our new build homes will use green energy sources and zero carbon technologies, with access to electric vehicle charging points.

It is important that our homes remain in good condition, and as a community landlord, our homes must achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) outlined by Welsh Government. These standards are evolving to focus more on achieving Net Zero Carbon and we will implement the new measures as we progress our development and decarbonisation plans.

However, we recognise that simply building homes isn't enough. Some people need homes and support that are designed around their needs, easing pressure on families, health and social care and the criminal justice system.

We will build on our strong partnerships to offer more innovative housing solutions for when the traditional approach isn't the right

approach for people or public services, exploring funding models to reach our goals.

This means continuing to work innovatively with local authorities, health boards and other partners to change the lives of people experiencing homelessness, and people in need of additional support to live independently.



## Our aims

**1.**

Deliver 1,300 new energy-efficient homes for affordable rent, people seeking an affordable home ownership route, and people in need of specialist housing.

**2.**

Expand Celtic Offsite to help United Welsh and our partners to fulfil our development ambitions for providing low carbon homes.

**3.**

Grow Tai Ffres, a housing service for young people we are developing with homelessness charity Llamau. Tai Ffres will provide genuinely affordable homes for young people who are facing barriers with the design of existing homelessness and supported housing provision.

**4.**

Raise the standard of our existing homes in line with our Towards Net Zero Carbon strategy, exploring funding and technical expertise to continue our optimised retrofit programme.



## How we will measure progress



**Number of homes delivered overall**



**Delivery of at least 100 new homes for rent with Tai Ffres**



**Profit created by Celtic Offsite**



**Number of existing homes upgraded to an improved EPC rating**



**Customer satisfaction with our homes and retrofit work**





# Successful Services

We will **improve the experiences of our customers** by creating and revitalising services that listen to their perspectives and align with their needs.

We will adopt **user-centred design principles** throughout the organisation to use our resources efficiently and provide better value.



## Where we are now



In addition to providing homes, we also provide services to support people with finances, jobs and training, social isolation and wellbeing, community regeneration, and property leasing.



We have made process changes to comply with new housing legislation in line with the Renting Homes Wales Act. All our customers are receiving new contracts for renting a home with us.



78% of residents surveyed in 2021/22 were satisfied with the services United Welsh provides, and 73% were satisfied with the way United Welsh deals with repairs and maintenance.



In 2022, our Board approved a new customer involvement strategy for us to renew the way we work with customers living in our homes and using our services.



We have invested in our Business Transformation and Technology team to improve how we use technology and data.

## Our approach

We will implement our new customer involvement strategy. Practically, this means we recognise our customers are the subject matter experts in their lives and are the best placed people to advise us on how to deliver excellent services that matter to them. We will ensure there are mechanisms in place so customers can shape, influence and change the services we deliver. We will evidence how we have used their feedback to inform decisions.

Community development starts with recognising the talents and strengths of the customers living within our communities and removing barriers to ensure they can make the social, economic and environmental differences that are important to them and the areas where they live.

We also want our customers to have clarity about what services we can provide, while making sure they can feedback in timely, convenient ways.

We will improve how we use technology and data to seek this feedback and look after our homes. This will include conducting annual

Staff across the business will be kept informed of the day-to-day reality experienced by our customers.



Healthy Homes visits that are mutually beneficial – meeting customers' needs, improving communication and reducing complaints.

## Our aims

1.

Increase overall customer satisfaction in the services we provide, benchmarking ourselves against other housing providers and performing within at least the second quartile of Welsh Government's annual social landlord's tenants' satisfaction survey.

2.

Increase customer satisfaction with the way we deal with repairs and maintenance.

3.

Create customer service quality standards for key business areas using a user-centred design approach, improving how we listen and act on customer perspectives when we plan and provide our services.

4.

Develop our digital offer so our staff and customers can deliver and use online services more efficiently.

## How we will measure progress



Customer satisfaction with United Welsh services and repairs delivered by Celtic Horizons



Delivery of Technology and Transformation projects



Customer and staff satisfaction about how we listen and act on their views



Monitoring customer complaints about our services



Delivery of Customer Service quality standards





# Happy, Healthy People

We will support our customers and staff to **live more fulfilled lives.**

We will focus on using our resources to **improve their quality of life and wellbeing**, while making the most of opportunities to become a more diverse, accessible organisation.



## Where we are now



We became a Real Living Wage employer in 2021 and we have retained Investors in People (IIP) Gold status for the past six years.



To support customers with the rising cost-of-living, we launched a customer hardship fund and subsidised some service charges. To support staff, we launched a staff hardship fund and provided an additional in-year non-consolidated pay award



We monitor and manage health and safety risks from ground level through to the Board table, keeping customers and staff safe while they live in our homes and work with us.



We deliver numerous community wellbeing and mental health services for people living in our homes and in the wider community. We have seen particular success in our work with older people, and services we provide with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board to support people with complex mental health challenges.



We have used our expertise in mental health and wellbeing to invest in additional in-house support for our staff.



We have redesigned our recruitment practice to offer a more inclusive experience for staff, applicants and candidates who aspire to work with us.

## Our approach

Maintaining affordability of our services is integral to our work as a community landlord. In the coming years, we will continue to prioritise how we provide affordable rent and service charge levels for customers, seeking their feedback and working innovatively with the resources we have.

We will also expand the wellbeing and mental health services we deliver, making sure the outcomes of these services continue to be measurable and focused on customer needs.

To encourage a good sense of wellbeing among our staff, we will support them to meet the challenges of modern work and home life. This means focusing on their financial wellbeing as the cost-of-living crisis continues,

and providing continuous learning, development and engagement opportunities so our people are motivated to deliver, wherever they work.

Our culture centres around trust and integrity, and we regularly have open conversations as staff to discuss ideas, consider views and hear feedback. The Partnership Group will continue to champion the collective voice of our staff, making sure everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the strategic decisions that affect our people.

Diversity of our staff group is improving, and we will be proactive in seeking diverse, talented people to join our organisation so that we reflect the communities we work with.

Health and safety will be of paramount importance across all our operations, as well as the safety and security of the data we hold.

Equality, diversity and inclusion needs to be rooted in our policies and practice, so our business processes and services remove accessibility barriers. Promoting EDI will be an integral part of our user-centred design approach to service planning and provision.

We will also improve how we collect and use demographic data about our customers to better inform how we target our resources and make decisions.



## Our aims

**1.** Maintain rent and service charges at affordable levels for customers.

**2.** Deliver more wellbeing and mental health services for different customer groups, promoting our services and progress.

**3.** Attract and retain diverse, talented people to work for United Welsh, identifying skills gaps and providing opportunities for training and employment.

**4.** Promote our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, including open reporting about our progress and how we are tackling discrimination.

**5.** Redesign and embed how we collect and use customer demographic data to inform user-centred services.

**6.** Make sure people feel safe and secure, either in their homes or as they work with us.



## How we will measure progress



**Monitoring arrears levels**



**Customer satisfaction with the safety and security of their homes and communities**



**Monitoring the outcomes of new services, including customer feedback**



**Staff feedback about our in-house wellbeing initiatives**



**Monitoring customer complaints about accessibility, health and safety**



**Monitoring the diversity of our staff group and customers**

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