



MIDLANDS RURAL HOUSING

Business Plan

2018/19—2022/23

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MIDLANDS RURAL HOUSING AND VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

BUSINESS PLAN 2018/19 – 2022/23

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of this Plan is to set out the role of the Association and its objectives to the year 2022/23, as well as a framework for achieving them. It will also act as a benchmark for measuring progress.

- 1.2 The plan is a working document and will be subject to review to take into account the emerging issues that need to be addressed. In this context, it is anticipated the early years of the Plan will continue to cover a period of significant fiscal constraint. In particular, the plan will cover the period of UK exit from the European Union, which is dominating the current political and economic environment. This will present risks and opportunities for the sector, and remains difficult to say with any accuracy what the impact will be on the MRH business. As a consequence, this plan has concerned itself with the current focus of the business and addressing the anticipated challenges that will arise.

1.3 Background and Context

MRH was formed in 1997 and it is registered under the Co-operative and Communities Benefit Act 2014 with non-charitable Rules.

- 1.4 MRH does not, in its own right, own any homes. It assists with the provision of affordable homes in rural areas by providing a range of development and management services for the benefit of other organisations involved in meeting local housing needs in Midlands villages.
- 1.5 In particular, MRH is service provider, by way of formal Service Level and Procedure Agreements, to four rural Housing Associations. These are Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire and Peak District. Collectively they own or manage c. 1599 properties in villages throughout the Midlands. Leicestershire RHA, as an unregistered social landlord, acts in a management only capacity. The other RHAs have a commitment to develop more homes for local people in housing need in their areas of operation.
- 1.6 The staff of MRH are based at Coalville in Leicestershire. However, in order to deliver cost efficiencies in service provision, increased mobile working of key staff is being facilitated, particularly for those in customer facing roles.
- 1.7 Due to its expertise and specialisation, MRH currently acts as a “host” organisation for an externally funded enabling post, and carries out formally contracted enabling work for external partners. Such activity is primarily concerned with enabling rural housing

provision in the counties of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and the rural West Midlands.

- 1.8 MRH is a subsidiary of the emh group, one of the major providers of social housing in the region. MRH operates as a subsidiary to a Housing and Regeneration Registered Provider within the Group (emh homes). Under this arrangement MRH, and the RHAs, continue to secure access to services from emhg in the areas of finance, IT, human resources and Corporate support. This arrangement is defined within a formal Service Level Agreement. In turn the arrangement enables the wider Group, and emh homes, to enhance their activities from a rural perspective.
- 1.9 The Board of Management of MRH comprises representatives from the four Rural Housing Associations, and the Group parent.

2. BUSINESS PLAN SUMMARY

2.1 This Plan sets out the role of the Association, along with its objectives over the next five years. It will be subject to regular review, and will need to remain sensitive to the changing operating environment. The Plan establishes and defines how the Association will achieve its growth aspirations while providing high quality services to its partner organisations. In this context, the key operating principles will be as follows:

- MRH will continue to engage with rural housing policy and strategy development at the local, and national level to influence the operating environment.
- MRH will maintain and enhance its working relationship with others, particularly housing association partners, Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, combined authorities, strategic partnerships and networks, Government agencies, Homes England, the voluntary sector, private sector agencies and developers.
- We will continue to provide high quality support services to the partner Rural Housing Associations to ensure their legal, regulatory and governance requirements are met, and their Business Plan and financial targets are delivered.
- We will ensure that all new development proposals remain demand led, viable and subject to high levels of local consultation.
- We will continue to provide high quality housing management services that are sensitive to the needs of residents and rural communities, and meet the aspirations of our RHA partners and residents in the context of the current co-regulatory framework, or any new regulatory requirements.
- We will set clear measures of performance that are reviewed and reported regularly, and make a commitment to on going improvement in service delivery.
- MRH will ensure that its staff structure is fit for purpose and that its staff are well trained and motivated, and have clear targets that contribute directly to achieving RHA, MRH and Group business goals.
- We will ensure that the governance and decision-making processes within MRH are efficient and accountable, both in terms of the Group and the partner Rural Housing Associations.
- We will ensure the key risks to the MRH and RHA businesses are identified, monitored and managed effectively at a strategic and operational level.
- We will ensure that the business remains financially viable, and that MRH achieves modest surpluses in each year of the plan period.

3. AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND VALUES

3.1 Principal Aim

The principal aim of MRH is to ensure access to homes in rural communities for those who are unable to afford property on the open market.

3.2 Strategic Objectives

To achieve this aim MRH has the following objectives:

- (a) to provide high quality support services to the partner RHAs to ensure their business objectives are achieved, and their legal, regulatory, financial, and governance requirements are met.
- (b) to develop working relationships with other organisations and agencies, including the provision of consultancy and support services in connection with rural housing.
- (c) to act as a key point of contact and consultation on rural housing and planning issues at the neighbourhood, local, and national level, and to actively lobby on rural housing issues.
- (d) to complement the activities of the parent organisation, and contribute to achieving its objectives, from a rural housing perspective.

3.3 MRH Values

MRH will pursue its aims and objectives while adhering to specific values and principles. The principles have been adopted across the East Midlands Housing Group, and its subsidiaries, and can be summarised as follows:

<i>Integrity</i>	We work to the highest ethical standards
<i>Diversity</i>	We respect others for who they are
<i>Openness</i>	We are honest and straightforward
<i>Accountability</i>	We are accountable to and influenced by our customers
<i>Clarity</i>	We are clear about what we are here to do and why
<i>Excellence</i>	We strive to be the best in everything we do

4. THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Overview

We remain in a period of change for the sector, and it is anticipated that this will continue throughout the plan period. It is anticipated that austerity and business efficiency measures will continue to impact, particularly in the early years of the plan. Restrictions on capital subsidy, welfare reform implementation, on going rent reductions and Government housing and planning policy agendas will all directly impact on the business of the RHAs and MRH, and the implications will need to be addressed over the period of the Plan. Despite its “voluntary” nature, there are significant concerns over the extension of the Right to Buy to the Housing Association sector, and how this will work in practice from a rural perspective. This is particularly concerning given that at the point of preparing the plan, the Midlands had been identified as the pilot area for its implementation.

That said, the rural lobby remains strong both organisationally and politically, and as a result rural issues still remain a priority, and the Government has restated its support for rural-proofing of national policy making. MRH and its partner RHAs are well placed to take advantage of this situation. However, there are a whole range of issues and priorities that need to be addressed in the rural context, and it is vital that MRH, alongside other rural agencies and organisations, continues to promote the importance of affordable housing for rural communities, maintain pressure on policy makers and decision makers, and lobby for resources.

4.2 Key considerations

The following factors will affect the operation of MRH, and will need to be addressed over the plan period.

(a) ***Local Policy and Strategy Development***

It is becoming increasingly important to maintain dialogue and engagement with a wide range of partners in order to influence strategy development and ensure rural matters remain a priority. Continued engagement will take place at Local Authority level to ensure that local strategies, and local housing needs assessments have direct reference to rural housing requirements, and how they are going to be addressed. Local communities play an increasing role in determining priorities for their areas, and as a result, there has been a significant number of communities in the operational area taking forward Neighbourhood Plans. As part of this process, it is important that local housing requirements are taken into account. MRH has an increasing role to play in these circumstances, and is working with Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Plan groups to promote the identification of local housing needs and opportunities for meeting them.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) continues to identify an on going role for strategic Housing Market Assessments in the context of local planning considerations, and confirms that housing priorities should continue to be determined locally. MRH, alongside its partners, will continue to contribute to the evidence base of rural housing needs, at whatever level, to ensure local strategies and plans give adequate consideration to rural housing requirements.

(b) ***The national context***

The current operating environment remains challenging, and continues to be impacted by Government announcements and policy approaches. MRH, and its RHA partners, have not been immune from this, and the businesses have had to respond. These have included increased consolidation of the business and overhead costs in response to the 1% rent reduction to ensure ongoing business efficiency; establishing the policy approach in relation to the Voluntary Right to Buy; assessing the impacts of, and responding to, the Welfare Reform implementation; and responding to changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and wider Government agendas.

However, following announcements by MHCLG, it is clear that the national context will evolve further. In particular, the Government is committing to increased housing supply, and is providing additional investment to enable affordable homes to be provided at a faster rate. This is welcome, particularly as it will enable more rented homes to be provided. However, with such investment comes expectation, and the Government will want to see the sector commit to, and demonstrate, delivery now that the resources are available. MRH and its RHA partners will need to play their part in this.

The Government continues to promote the devolution agenda and the role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Combined Authorities as investment vehicles for economic growth, which, in a number of cases, include a housing growth remit. It is vital that the rural element is promoted within such structures. Alongside this, a number of Combined Authority proposals are being progressed within the area of operation. The Government remains keen to devolve the powers and budgets of public bodies to the local level, and Combined Authorities are the favoured model for this. This will lead to increased integration of funding streams so that local priorities can be addressed, and will have implications for housing supply and the allocation of resources for delivery. Given this, we will look for opportunities to engage with any Combined Authority arrangements and associated networks supported by central government. These will undoubtedly have an increasing role as strategic influencers and funding bodies moving forward.

This is likely to have increased relevance in the West Midlands, where the West Midlands Combined Authority is well established, and a West Midlands Housing Partnership has been formed to act as the engagement point on affordable housing delivery.

The impact of all these changes should not be under-estimated. However, thus far, we have responded positively with key aims and objectives still being delivered, and there is no reason why the MRH and RHA businesses cannot continue to do so.

(c) ***Working relationships***

MRH and the RHAs continue to recognise the importance of partnership working with others and this will be vital to achieve our stated aims and objectives. In particular, the following are seen as integral to the business throughout the period of the plan:

- (i) Close working with Local Authority partners and emerging combined authorities with a view to engaging with housing and planning strategy development, needs assessments, neighbourhood planning, and raising the profile of affordable rural housing from this perspective.
 - (ii) “Joint-working” between the RHAs, MRH and emhg in the interests of achieving excellence in service provision, operational efficiency, and governance arrangements. To this end, the existing Procedure and Service Level Agreements will be subject to review during the plan period.
 - (iii) Maintaining links with a wide range of Registered Providers with development capacity in order to access development funding for RHA build programmes.
 - (iv) The maintenance and strengthening of ties with external agencies with a view to influencing future policy, strategy and decision-making. In particular points of engagement will be maintained and enhanced with LEPs, MHCLG, DEFRA, Homes England, RSN, CPRE, CLA, NFU, Rural Housing Alliance, NHF, local politicians and MPs.
 - (v) Ensuring local accountability and credibility by close working with County, District, and parish organisations. This encompasses not only elected authorities, but also Rural Community Councils (RCCs), ACRE, Local Strategic Partnerships, voluntary agencies, neighbourhood planning forums and local councillors.
 - (vi) Maintaining and expanding links with other organisations (developers and private sector providers in particular) with a view to identifying opportunities for expanding MRH consultancy services.
- (d) ***Service Provision to the RHAs and delivering cost efficiencies***

While the working arrangements between MRH and the RHAs are predicted on service delivery and growth, they need to respond to the requirements of the individual organisations. The positive reputation of the RHAs as providers of affordable rural housing, and their specialist status, has been achieved, in part, by the commitment, service and support given by MRH and its parent. The nature of MRH means the RHAs are provided with appropriate services by an organisation that is committed solely to rural housing, has directly comparable aims and objectives, has high level engagement with local and national rural networks, and a good reputation in the sector. This working relationship is further enhanced by the staff being jointly employed by MRH and the RHAs. This reinforces the commitment of all parties to deliver high quality services tailored to individual business needs.

It is recognised that the services provided by MRH will need to remain competitive and that the RHAs will need to examine cost efficiencies as a result of downward pressure on income from on going rent reductions and the implementation of welfare reform. As a consequence, the management and overhead costs of MRH will be subject to regular scrutiny to ensure efficiency of operation without a detrimental impact on RHA service provision.

In this regard, the Board of MRH identified that the income management function within the Housing Management Team was a service area that needed strengthening with increased resources to deal with the challenges presented by rent reductions and welfare reform. This was restructured during 2017 with any additional staffing requirements resourced by securing efficiencies on direct costs and additional consultancy income to ensure no detrimental impact in relation to RHA budgets.

(e) ***Development and growth***

The level of public investment targeted at new rural housing will remain limited. However, the partner Rural Housing Associations currently have healthy development pipelines, and will deliver on their current growth aspirations.

Few RHA bids were made as part of the “Shared Ownership Affordable Housing Programme” (SOAHP) for 2016-21 – although those that were made were successful. The RHAs are, however, engaging with Home Englands’ “Continuous Market Engagement (CME) Programme” to fund any rented homes, alongside the home ownership units

In addition, any new development opportunities are being progressed by the RHAs utilising the CME route

While the Homes England funding position is positive there will still be a reliance on other forms of funding to support the RHA development programmes. Primarily, this will be funding from local authority partners. However, fiscal constraints, and reduced opportunities to secure commuted sums, may result in less local authority finance being available in specific rural areas. Given this, it will be important to closely examine alternative funding solutions and models to maintain delivery (e.g. cross subsidy; community led funding; LEP and Combined Authority funding and increased use of assets). In this context, progress has been made in relation to cross-subsidy arrangements with a number of good practice examples already completed. It is also an option that is being increasingly embraced by local authorities, many of which now allow cross-subsidy from market homes on exception sites where it is seen as a necessary aid to delivering the affordable housing requirement. Such arrangements are supported within the Housing White Paper and the NPPF.

In the context of future growth, it needs to be acknowledged that MRH and the RHAs operate in a high cost sector, with few economies of scale, and where efficiencies are hard to achieve. This, combined with limited subsidy, can result in RHA projects not being viable without significant injection of their own resources. This scenario is anticipated to continue. However, opportunities for growth of the MRH business in its own right will continue to be explored. This will include progressing opportunities for increasing the number of rural housing associations currently involved in the cost-sharing partnership. The existing arrangements are tried and tested, and can demonstrate efficiency of operation. They have the potential to be attractive to others that are seeking security of service supply alongside operational efficiencies.

(f) ***Market considerations***

The nature of the business undertaken by MRH and the RHAs means they operate in a restricted market (i.e. the provision of affordable housing in rural villages). As a specialist provider, it is vital that products remain in demand and marketable, and this needs on going assessment. This is particularly relevant with rents on grant funded developments currently being set at 80% of Local Market Rents capped at Local Housing Allowance levels. This will mean on going monitoring and assessment of new proposals to ensure the demand for homes is real and evidence based, and they can be afforded.

In addition, while shared ownership provision will continue the risks associated with such provision are greater. It also has to be recognised that each location is different, and demand for home ownership products will remain dispersed.

From a wider rural perspective, it also needs to be acknowledged that the contraction of rural services will impact on the desirability of some locations as places to live, work and invest. This, in turn, is likely to result in changing patterns of demand for housing. While evidence of this has not materialised as yet, it is a potential trend that will need to be kept under review throughout the plan period.

Given the above, and the specific local markets in which MRH and the RHAs operate, the following principles will continue to be applied in the development and procurement of any new homes.

- A market assessment of all tenures utilising a “Housing Needs Survey” approach will be carried out in each location.
- All projects will be constructed to the highest possible standards, and will meet the necessary environmental and sustainability requirements.
- Local consultation will be a pre-condition to any development taking place to ensure the local community is aware of the proposals, and housing opportunities are inclusive, and will be geared to fit any local engagement requirements.
- No “speculative” development proposals will be progressed, with shared ownership homes only being provided where sufficient demand exists and where they can be afforded.

(g) ***Access to private finance***

The borrowing environment remains challenging, and lenders continue to review their margins, or will look to renegotiate margins at periodic intervals. MRH will need to factor this into financial planning for the RHAs, with future plans based on cautious borrowing assumptions over the longer term. In this respect, MRH has supported the RHAs in reviewing their Treasury Management strategies and moving to more formalised borrowing facilities via refinancing of assets, and the use of unencumbered stock. This will continue throughout the plan period.

In addition, the mortgage market for purchasers of LCHO homes still remains restricted. While the position has eased with the introduction of the 100% staircasing for rural schemes, this issue, along with the high deposit

requirements, continues to pose a disincentive to develop shared ownership products. This will remain under review over the plan period to assess the potential impact on scheme marketability and viability.

(h) ***Revisions to Planning Policy***

The National Planning Policy Framework continues to impact on MRH and RHA development activities, much of which is positive. The maintenance of, and enhancements to, the existing “Exceptions” policy, and the ability for local planning authorities to utilise cross-subsidy arrangements are very beneficial. This mechanism is increasingly used to support the provision of rented homes in specific local authority areas.

While the issue is improving, concerns still exist in certain areas over the requirement of local planning authorities to identify 5 year land supply sites for housing provision. Where this has not happened, and core strategies remain absent, the granting of permissions on appeal has increased the “hope value” of land surrounding rural villages. This has made it increasingly difficult to negotiate exceptions sites in the short term. Positively, an increasing number of our local authority partners have reached a point where a five year land supply is identified which is resulting in increased “development” opportunities coming forward.

(i) ***Resident Involvement and Engagement***

While MRH is not a stock-holding organisation, it has a responsibility to ensure its partner rural housing associations are able to respond to the expectations in relation to resident involvement and engagement. In this context, MRH will need to ensure the RHA partners meet the relevant regulatory standards. We are actively looking to evolve innovative ways, in conjunction with the RHA partners, of involving residents in the co-regulation agenda. In particular, we will need to maintain focus on resident scrutiny in monitoring performance. This aspect of the business is likely to be impacted by the proposed Government Green Paper which is anticipated to consider the experience of residents and the decisions made in their interests. In this regard, revisions to the existing Tenancy Standard are likely to be introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). However, it is important to ensure that any engagement arrangements remain relevant and proportionate to the rural context.

(j) ***Welfare Reform***

The Government has continued implementing its programme of welfare reforms, which will impact residents, providers and housing authorities. This continues to be progressed as part of the Government’s “Welfare to Work” agenda, and as a direct result of curtailing public expenditure.

The number of RHA residents on either full or partial benefit is relatively low for the sector. As a consequence of this, and a pro-active approach taken by MRH on behalf of the RHAs, recent reforms have had little impact on the RHA businesses.

However, the on going roll out of Universal Credit is a concern and is anticipated to lead to increased rent arrears. MRH, in preparing the financial

plans for the RHAs, has reviewed the assumptions around this, and proposed a cautious approach. This, coupled with greater investment, and resources in the management and income recovery function, will ensure sufficient support is available to minimise any impact on RHA income streams. As part of the lead-in process, all tenants are being contacted to ensure they are aware of the proposals, and actions they should be taking in anticipation of direct payment via Universal Credit.

(k) ***Voluntary Right to Buy***

Despite indications to the contrary, the Government has continued to promote its previous manifesto commitment to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants via the launch of a pilot project across the Midlands. Agreements between Government and the NHF enable this to be progressed on a voluntary arrangement and will enable “discretion” on what homes providers will sell. In this context, MRH, with legal advice, will assist the RHAs in developing their policy approaches to VRTB. In developing the RHA policy position, it needs to be recognised that the majority of RHA stock is subject to Section 106 Planning Agreements with “in perpetuity” requirements. The voluntary deal acknowledges that rural locations present specific issues, and there would be no expectation to sell homes that have been provided on this basis.

Further elements of the VRTB scheme are to be tested via the Midlands pilot and this includes the application of portable discount, which will be a significant issue in the rural context.

The RHA Boards themselves will decide whether they will participate in the pilot project, and their policy positions will be published and communicated to tenants in due course.

4.3 **SWOT and PEST Analysis**

As part of the Business Planning process, it is necessary to identify the key strengths and weaknesses of the organisation and scan the operating environment.

Undoubtedly, one of the key strengths of MRH is its reputation as a key player and contact within the rural network. It has also demonstrated an ability to deliver high quality services to its customers that have fully met the requirements of the regulatory standards. That said, opportunities for, and threats to, the business do exist and these are highlighted in the following PEST and SWOT analysis:

(i) **PEST**

POLITICAL	ECONOMICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government investment priorities • Voluntary Right to Buy pilot • Welfare Reform Agenda • Sector Reputation • Evolving Planning Frameworks • Devolution agenda • New regulator and review of regulatory framework • Exit from European Union • Adult social care • GDPR requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural deficit/reduced public investment • Economic uncertainty • Restructure of, and reduction in, public services • Inflation/deflation • Interest rates, borrowing margins, and availability of finance • Access to mortgages • Future rent control/ rent reductions • Pensions deficit • Unemployment
SOCIOLOGICAL	TECHNOLOGICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased homelessness • Demographical changes and changes in demand • Scarcity of rented housing • Work/life balance • Social exclusion • Increasing care and support needs • Social cohesion • Community empowerment • Rising customer expectations • Ageing population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote/mobile working • Data security/integrity • Technology/Broadband exclusion • Business continuity • Renewable energy/carbon reduction • Sustainable/Eco/Passivhaus Homes • Social networking/media • Modern methods of construction (MMC)

ii) **SWOT**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good track record and reputation • Highly regarded unique specialist • Strong partnership ethos • Flexibility/ability to respond to change • Unique selling position • Local knowledge and accountability • High quality service provision to RHAs and other customers • Experienced/committed staff • Ability to access/lobby policy/strategy makers at local, sub-regional, and national level • Cost effective provision of central and support services • Access to experience and skills/expertise within the wider group • Flexible staff structure • Streamlined governance arrangements • Well informed and engaged Board • Increasingly positive attitude being shown by government to affordable housing • Operational model recognised as a good practice example 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliant on support of RHAs • Reliant on others to achieve outputs • Small organisation reliant on key staff covering wide-ranging tasks • Restricted ability to build financial surpluses • Effective governance reliant on specific board representatives

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing demand for homes • Growth from new business expansion • Operational area expansion • Developer partnerships • Host organisation for external posts • Increased commercialism in sector • Evolving planning mechanisms • Engagement with new delivery mechanisms (Community Land Trusts, cross-subsidy, social enterprise) • Engaging with new structures to influence local priorities (LEPs, Rural Networks, Homes England, combined authorities) • Engaging with new partners (private sector management and institutional investment) • Devolution agenda • Attractive structure to others (NHF merger code) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary Right to Buy Midlands Pilot • Compliance with efficiency agenda • Restricted public subsidy for affordable homes • Reputational damage from service delivery failure • Increased consolidation around large, financially robust RPs and consortia • Inconsistency of demand for external/consultancy services, particularly from private sector developers • RHA compliance with regulatory framework and performance measures • Implications of Welfare Reforms • Change in Government priorities • Data security and cyber attack • Changing patterns of housing demand

5. STRATEGIC FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

5.1 In order for MRH to achieve its operational objectives, it is necessary to concentrate its activities in the areas that will deliver the required results. This section of the plan identifies those areas.

In addition to the organisational objectives that MRH has set itself, the Board have agreed that the following principles will continue to apply to the business:

- It will remain focused on the core business of rural housing provision across the Midlands
- While consolidation of the existing business is a priority, MRH should explore the potential for expansion of proven products and services within existing resources
- The continued provision of high quality services to the RHAs will remain critical

5.2 Business Growth and Development

The growth of MRH will continue be linked to the growth of the RHAs, and it is anticipated RHA unit growth will continue to be achieved organically over the period of the plan, and be directly related to the increase in unit numbers predicted in the RHA Business Plans. As a consequence, modest growth is anticipated throughout the life of the plan, and the financial assumptions have been formulated on this basis.

In addition, there will be an increased focus on the expansion of consultancy and support services, and securing contracted work while ensuring existing contract commitments are delivered. In this regard, MRH has been successful in securing the Leicestershire Rural Housing Enabling contract for a further 12 month period, and time will be invested in the latter part of 2018/19 to source additional consultancy work, and establish new partnerships.

Alongside this, MRH will continue to consolidate its position as a key lobbying organisation in relation to affordable rural housing. It has a clear role to play in ensuring that developing policies and strategies create the right environment for investment and growth, and with a direct benefit for its RHA partners.

In summary, to achieve the desired business growth over the plan period, MRH will:

- Provide support to its partner RHAs to enable approximately 216 homes to be bought into management over the plan period.
- Explore opportunities, initiatives, partnerships, and other funding sources that are relevant to the aims and objectives of MRH and the RHAs.
- Continue its close working relationships with Local Authorities, Registered Providers and others, and identify opportunities for engagement with other organisations, including LEPs, Combined Authorities, DEFRA, Rural Services Network, CLA, CPRE, ACRE, and Rural Community Councils.
- Continue to meet specifically identified local needs for which a clear demand is demonstrated.
- Promote the Sustainable Development agenda; ensure RHA compliance with the necessary environmental design standards; and promote exemplar projects.
- Promote the benefit of MRH and RHAs involvement in the Neighbourhood Planning process.

- Input to National, and local debates, consultations and reports to maintain the priority of rural housing and business profile of MRH and the RHAs.
- Expand the customer base for consultancy and support work. Secure additional contracted work and ensure existing contracted work is delivered.
- Identify opportunities to act as managing agents for others, including private providers and landed estates.
- Explore the potential for other rural providers to engage with the MRH and RHA partnership structure.
- Continue to assess the market needs and demand for the products of MRH and the RHAs.
- Ensure robust engagement with relevant events and forums in order to influence the operating environment and policy development for the benefit of MRH and RHA business objectives.

5.3 Customer Service and Performance

As a provider of specialist management services, MRH is acutely aware of the need to achieve excellence in this area. The RHAs pride themselves in providing a flexible, quality service that is sensitive to the needs of their residents and rural communities, and MRH will need to deliver against this expectation.

The RHAs have set themselves clear targets against which Housing Management performance is measured. These indicators will be used not only as a tool to measure effective management, but also to assess where improvements can be made. In this context, the MRH and RHA Boards are mindful of best practice, and, as a consequence, the suite of Performance Indicators attached at Appendix C will be utilised in reviewing performance and service delivery.

In terms of external partners, MRH will strive to deliver its consultancy and support services in a professional manner that meets clients and stakeholder expectations, and enhances its reputation.

In delivering its management and customer service MRH will:

- Maintain a structure that prioritises the customer care approach to the business, and monitor the delivery of services accordingly
- Implement the adopted Customer Care Strategy
- Strive to meet the Performance Targets set by the RHAs and any external partners in relation to contracted work.
- Enhance, in conjunction with the RHAs, the membership, operations, and remit of the existing Resident Involvement Board to enable greater resident input to monitoring and scrutiny of service delivery.
- Measure resident and customer satisfaction across a range of service areas, and report on the outcomes to MRH, the RHAs and their customers, as part of co-regulation activity.
- Ensure compliance with the regulatory requirements for smaller housing associations with regard to housing management activity, and comply with best practice.
- Ensure the RHAs deliver, and monitor, their obligations in relation to resident health and safety.
- Ensure the RHAs' commitments in respect of Equality and Diversity are met, with particular emphasis on the Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing.

- Ensure individual staff targets and goals are defined and set, and aligned to delivering high quality management and customer care standards, and primary business outcomes.

5.4 **Business Improvement**

MRH will ensure that the provision of services to the RHAs and external partners are regularly reviewed and areas for improvement identified.

We will engage with the business improvement processes for emh group and build on the adopted excellence framework. Alongside this, we will embed the culture of performance and risk management within the organisation which will be reflected in the development of operational and strategic risk maps, individual reviews for staff, and the setting of individual operational targets.

Working with emh group, we will focus on improving performance and meeting customer needs in a manner that is aligned to emh group's values. This will include engagement with the leadership development programme; the Investors in People accreditation review, the HR vision, and implementation of ICT systems to enhance increased customer engagement via mobile working.

5.5 **Human Resources and organisational effectiveness**

MRH recognises that a well motivated and trained workforce is crucial to the achievement of business goals.

In this respect, MRH will provide each member of staff with clear Terms and Conditions of Service, which will be set out in the joint Employment Contract. Each member will benefit from individual training opportunities for on-the-job training and career development within the context of organisational requirements and resources. In this regard, MRH will engage with the wider Group to develop a people strategy that aligns with its HR vision.

This will incorporate the following:

- Enable flexible working practices to meet the needs of its workforce. Such measures will include increased use of mobile working where it meets business needs; flexible hours, time off in lieu, flexible benefits, and compliance with occupational health and safety requirements.
- Conduct staff appraisals carry out 1:1 meetings to review performance against targets, identify training requirements, and produce individual development plans, and address staff issues / concerns.
- In conjunction with the Group, ensure that pay, salary levels and benefits are competitive, commensurate with levels of responsibility, and constructively contribute to any review of pay and remuneration.
- Incentivise, and recognise, good performance of individual staff members via the adopted reward mechanism.
- Ensure Governance arrangements remain efficient and maintain focus on MRH business opportunities and growth.
- Engage with the wider Staff Consultative Framework; leadership development programme; health and wellbeing initiatives; and apprenticeship scheme.

In terms of the structure of MRH, cost-effectiveness and maintaining delivery will be the priority and keys to future growth. Details of the staffing structure are given at Appendix B.

Moving forward, the following principles will be applied:

- Sufficient staff resources will be secured in order to efficiently and effectively to meet the service standards and growth requirements of its own, and partner RHAs, business plans.
- Costs will be contained, and, where feasible, any increase in staff resources should be covered by either a redistribution of current income, savings on direct costs or growth in income from increased numbers of homes in management.
- Clear lines of responsibility and reporting will be maintained, with distinctions between development and maintenance, housing management and income recovery, new business and project development, and customer care, whilst being sensitive to customer service obligations.
- It will ensure efficiency of operation under the current MRH/RHA relationship, but it is flexible enough to respond to future changes.
- It will allow sufficient resources to explore and deliver new initiatives, consultancy services to others, and new partnerships for growth, alongside an ability to deliver the key services

It has been acknowledged that MRH will require sufficient resources to service the RHA businesses, and there are operational impacts arising from RHA stock growth, and income management. Consequently, the re-structuring of existing service areas, alongside additional staff resources, are to be anticipated. During 2017, a re-structure of the Housing and Income Management function was undertaken. As a consequence, this activity has been strengthened. This now provides sufficient resource to service the RHA business from an income management perspective, with the associated costs offset by budget savings elsewhere so that the impact on the RHAs is cost-neutral.

Moving forward, and in recognition of the strategic vision for Customer Care, it is anticipated that enhancements to this function will materialise. In particular, to deliver the adopted Customer Care Strategy, there will be a need to enhance the role and remit of the Customer Care Team; personalise the service to residents; increase the use of technology, and upskill existing staff. The timing of this is to be determined with any structural change and cost implications agreed by the MRH Board.

5.6 Governance and Board Control

The primary functions of the MRH Board have been defined as:

- Ensuring satisfactory delivery of services to the RHAs.
- Overseeing the strategic direction of MRH.
- Ensuring MRH external consultancy work is aligned to key business objectives.
- Reviewing the key risks to the RHA and MRH businesses.
- Reviewing and monitoring the financial position of MRH.
- Reviewing internal audit outcomes.
- Reviewing, in conjunction with the MD, the staff resources required to effectively run the business.

- Ensuring, as a non-registered subsidiary of the wider emh group, its activities are aligned to Group objectives.

Alongside this, the respective Boards of MRH and the RHAs will ensure accountability in their activities, and that the revised NHF “Code of Governance – promoting Board excellence” is adhered to. There will be periodic reviews of Board Membership, skills, experience, effectiveness, and succession arrangements, alongside an appraisal process, to ensure members are able to discharge their responsibilities appropriately.

The plan also recognises that there has been significant change in relation to MRH board membership, and there will be a requirement for more intensive board member learning and development, and briefing on activities while the changes bed in.

5.7 Public Relations, Media and Promotion

In order to deliver on its operational objectives, MRH increasingly recognises the need to promote its activities, and those of the RHAs.

Feedback from partners and stakeholders suggests that MRH has a positive reputation, but this still remains limited to the rural housing sector. Consequently, in the wider public arena there remains scope to raise the profile further by promoting the business and the benefits this brings to local communities. This is being tackled in a number of ways, with emphasis placed on promoting our activities and achievements more widely, and beyond the immediate business network. This is being approached utilising a range of mechanisms (e.g. press releases, articles, websites, “e-zines” events and publications). In addition, a higher level of “in house” support will be sought from the Group Communications Team. This particular issue is also recognised at a national level with the Rural Housing Alliance looking to raise the wider profile of its membership, which includes MRH. Working with the NHF, the Rural Housing Alliance will be developing a wide ranging work plan which includes increased dissemination of the social and economic benefits of rural housing provision. This will form part of a programme of national lobbying activity. As an active member of the Rural Housing Alliance and Rural Services Network, MRH will continue to input to national consultations in order to influence Government thinking and policy development. MRH will also actively look for opportunities to engage politicians, and decision makers, particularly MPs, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authorities in order to promote a positive operating environment for the business.

5.8 Diversity

We will ensure that MRH reflects diversity in its role as a service provider, employer and partner. Specifically, we are committed to:

- Participating in the Group-wide diversity initiatives and structures.
- Monitoring performance in relation to diversity commitments with regard to the Housing Service and reporting to the RHA Boards in this context.
- Ensuring that in selecting partners to work with, they have a commitment to diversity issues.
- We will, in conjunction with our RHA partners, adopt a zero tolerance approach to diversity issues, and expect to work with groups or individuals that tackle any incidences of inappropriate behaviour or harassment.

5.9 Risk Management

Both MRH and the RHAs recognise the importance of establishing risk management frameworks for their businesses, and formal 'Risk Maps' have been developed in this context.

Given that a number of the key risks are common to all the RHAs, an annual Operational Risk Map will be developed for regular review by the MRH Board.

In addition, the primary risks facing MRH have been established and incorporated into a separate Strategic Risk Map (details of such risks are given at Appendix D). This will also be produced on an annual basis, and will be regularly reviewed by the Board, and scrutinised by the Group Risk Panel and the Business Assurance function.

As well as the ongoing review of the Risk Map, and regular assessment of new and emerging risks at MRH and RHA level, the following actions are taken to ensure that a risk management culture is embedded throughout the business:

- MRH will be represented on the emhg Risk Panel which will monitor and review the approach to risk across the Group.
- Demonstration to the Board, and Group Chief Executive, through annual Internal Controls Assurance, that adequate measures are in place to manage and mitigate risk.
- A rolling programme of Internal Audit will take place annually, directly related to the activities of MRH and the RHAs, to look at key operational areas, with the outcomes reported to the MRH and RHA Boards and implementation of recommendations where appropriate.
- Individual managers will take responsibility for the primary risks relating to their functional area. These will be regularly reviewed and monitored to further embed the risk management culture across the organisation.
- The Board will engage in setting the risk appetite for the organisation.
- MRH will be represented on the Group's Operational and Strategic Health and Safety Governance structures, and related training for staff will be provided aligned to their responsibilities.

In terms of its current risk appetite, which can be described as "moderate", MRH will undertake business growth or diversification projects where these meet our main objectives, and do not threaten the organisation's financial viability. Actions will be taken to mitigate all risks identified in such circumstances.

5.11 Value for Money and Efficiency

Downward pressure on RHA income stream resulting from rent reductions and Welfare Reform implementation means a focused approach to Value for Money and Cost Efficiency is required. Moving forward, the management and overhead costs of MRH will need to be incorporated into RHA financial plans at a level that does not undermine their viability or delivery objectives. As a consequence, servicing costs will be closely scrutinised on an individual RHA basis throughout the plan period to ensure they do not adversely impact on surpluses or covenant requirements.

In addition, MRH will ensure the RHA Treasury strategies are reviewed and refinancing programmes are implemented to improve borrowing efficiency and

capacity. It will also support the RHAs to competitively procure key elements of planned and cyclical maintenance in conjunction with larger providers to achieve increased economies of scale and cost efficiencies.

The principle of cost sharing across partner Rural Housing Associations in relation to staff support will continue. This approach has already demonstrated its value from a cost efficiency perspective while enabling the full range of skills to be secured for the effective running of the RHA businesses. Such arrangements continue to be promoted as best practice, and are directly referred to in the “NHF Code on Mergers, Group Structures and Partnerships” as an option for generating operational and cost efficiencies.

Value for Money statements will also be included in the annual accounts for MRH and the RHAs, in accordance with the revised Value for Money standard introduced by the Regulator for Social Housing in relation to smaller providers.

MRH will also engage with the emhg procurement arrangements to secure additional cost efficiencies where appropriate for RHA operations.

6. FINANCIAL PLAN FOR THE PERIOD

MIDLANDS RURAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION FINANCIAL PLAN 2018/19 – 2022/23

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	£'s	£'s	£'s	£'s	£'s
Income					
Rural Recharges					
Employment Recharges	809,508	847,914	881,323	909,159	937,881
EMHG/EMH Homes					
Recharges	212,809	217,597	222,493	227,499	232,618
Other Overhead					
Recharges	98,371	100,584	102,847	105,162	107,528
Rural Recharges Total	1,120,688	1,166,095	1,206,663	1,241,820	1,278,027
TVP Grant	22,500	23,175	23,812	24,467	25,140
Other Income	74,000	75,665	77,367	79,108	80,888
Total Income	1,217,188	1,264,935	1,307,842	1,345,395	1,384,055
Expenditure					
Management Costs					
Employment Costs	787,109	826,526	860,531	888,498	917,374
Other Staff Costs	81,675	83,513	85,392	87,313	89,278
Premises	34,260	35,031	35,819	36,625	37,449
Office Overheads	56,534	57,806	59,107	60,437	61,796
Training	4,080	4,172	4,266	4,362	4,460
Professional &					
Consultants Fees	8,208	8,393	8,582	8,775	8,972
Inter Company Recharges	234,338	239,673	245,108	250,666	256,351
Depreciation	1,503	877	299	299	299
Total Expenditure	1,207,707	1,255,991	1,299,104	1,336,975	1,375,979
Interest Payable (SHPS Pension)	3,200	3,200	3,200	3,200	3,200
Surplus	6,281	5,744	5,538	5,220	4,876

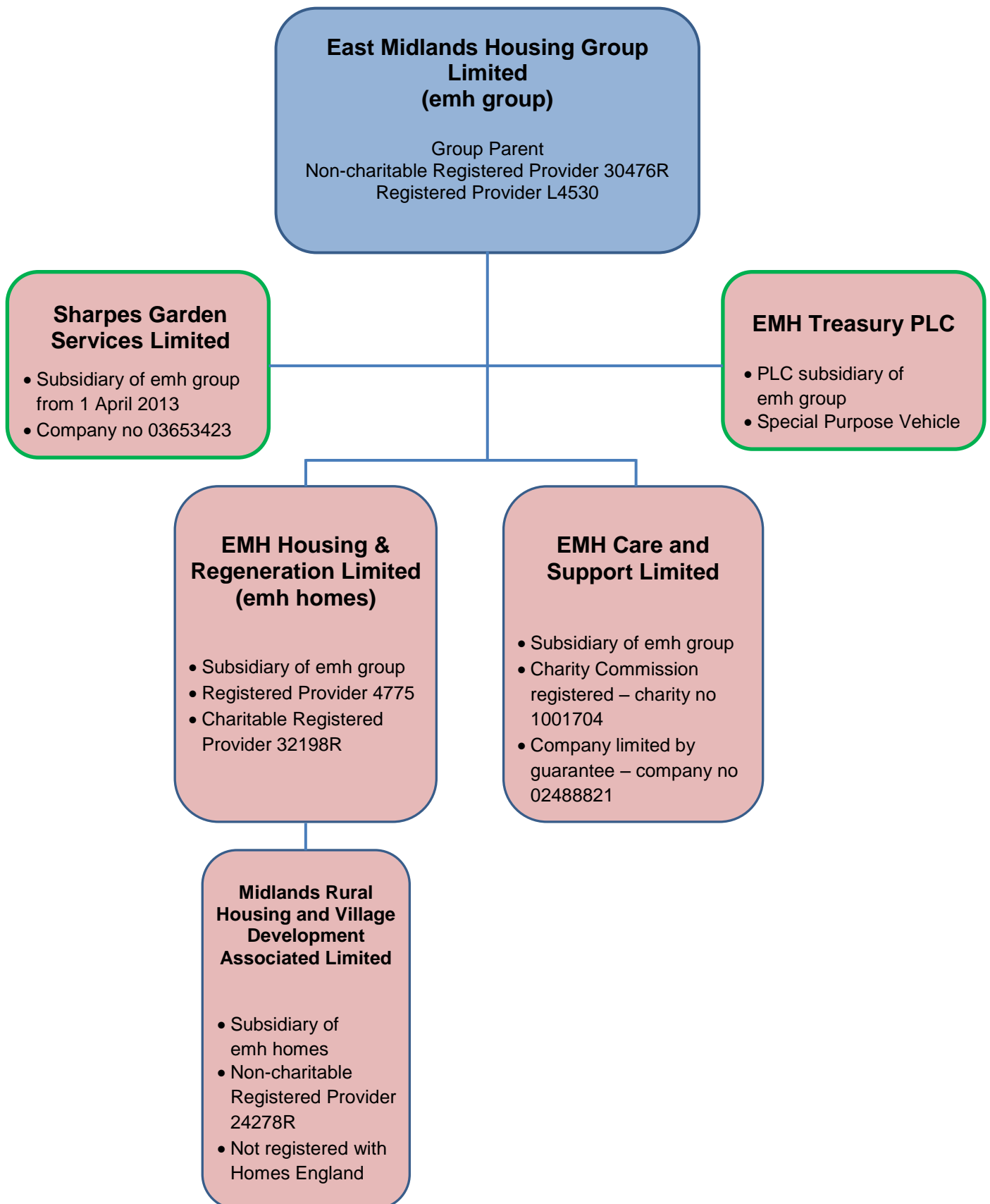
**MIDLANDS RURAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION
BALANCE SHEET 2018/19 – 2022/23**

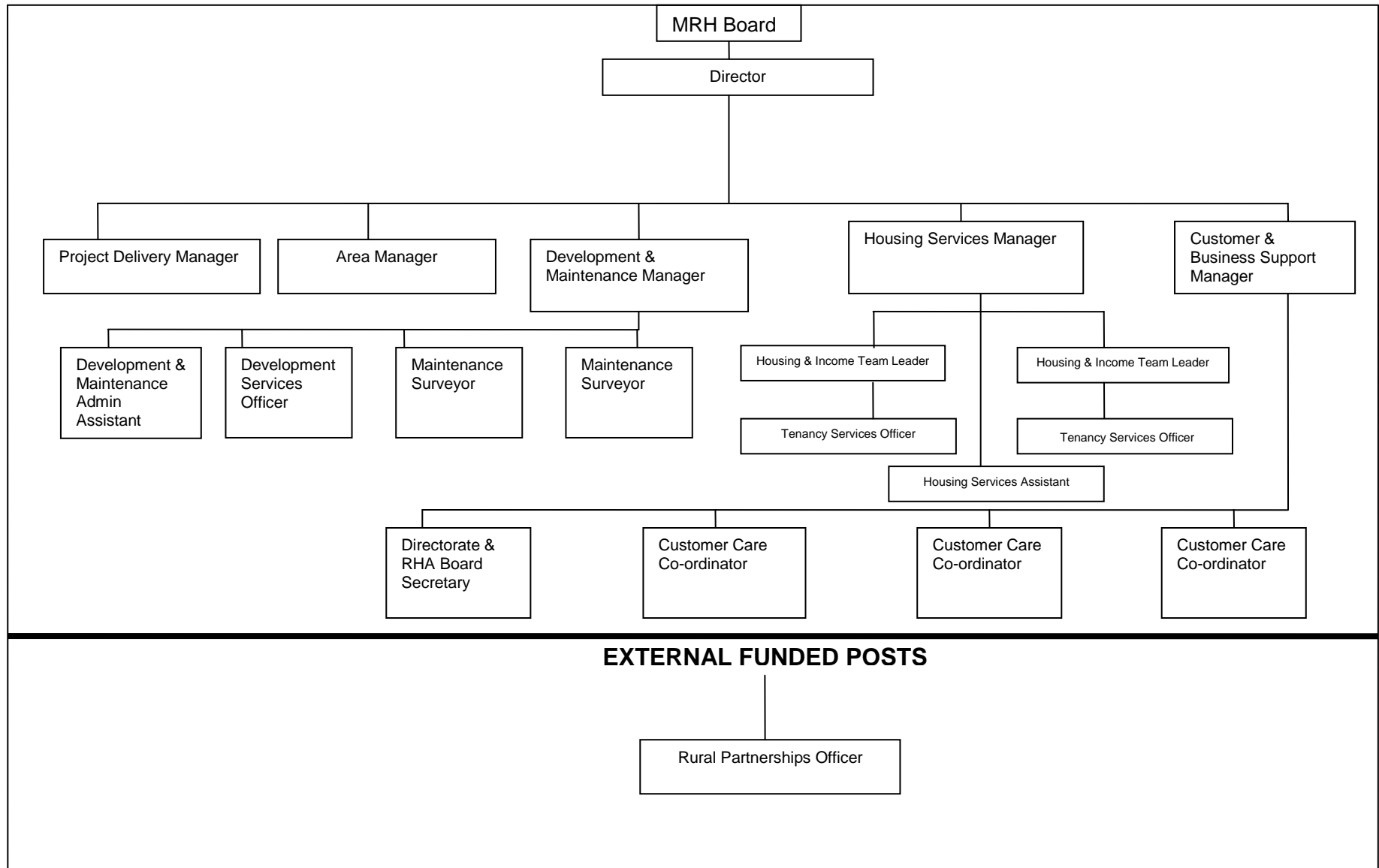
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	£ 's	£ 's	£ 's	£ 's	£ 's
FIXED ASSETS					
Other Fixed Assets					
Tangible	3,430	2,553	2,254	1,955	1,656
Total Fixed Assets	3,430	2,553	2,254	1,955	1,656
Current Assets					
Cash	400,543	410,365	419,406	428,126	436,500
Debtors	240,939	240,939	240,939	240,939	240,939
	641,482	651,304	660,345	669,065	677,439
	-	-	-	-	-
Current Liabilities	473,673	473,673	473,673	473,673	473,673
Net Current Assets	167,809	177,631	186,672	195,392	203,766
Total Assets Less Current Liabilities	171,239	180,184	188,926	197,347	205,422
LONG TERM LIABILITIES					
Pension Liabilities	58,189	61,389	64,589	67,789	70,989
NET ASSETS	113,050	118,795	124,337	129,558	134,433
Share Capital and Reserves					
Share Capital	5	5	5	5	5
Retained Surplus	113,045	118,790	124,332	129,553	134,428
	113,050	118,795	124,337	129,558	134,433

APPENDICES

- A. Group Structure Chart
- B. Staff Structure Chart
- C. Performance Indicators
- D. MRH Strategic Risks
- E. Glossary

GROUP STRUCTURE





PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

	CATEGORY	INDICATOR/MEASURE	TARGET	REPORTED TO	FREQUENCY
1	Allocating Property	Average general needs re-let time in days	Less than 28	RHA Boards MRH Board	Quarterly
		Void rent loss for owned and managed stock	Less than 1.6%	RHA Boards	Quarterly
		Customer satisfaction with allocations process	90%	RHA Boards	Annually
2	Maintaining Property	Response repairs completed within target time	More than 99%	RHA Boards MRH Board	Quarterly
		Satisfaction with repair service	Over 90%	RHA Boards MRH Board	Quarterly
3	Income Recovery	Gross rent arrears as a percentage of overall rent receivable	Below 2%	RHA Boards MRH Board	Quarterly
		Gross shared ownership arrears as a percentage of overall rent receivable	Below 2%	RHA Boards MRH Board	Quarterly
4	Sustaining Tenancies	No of NSPs issued	Information purposes only and trend analysis	RHA Boards	Quarterly
		No of court proceedings commenced			
		Warrant for possession acted upon			
		Tenancy Turnover	Less than 8%	RHA Boards MRH Board	Quarterly
5	Anti-social Behaviour	No of ASB incidents recorded	Information purposes only and trend analysis	RHA Boards MRH Board	Annually
		No of ASB incidents resolved			
		Categories of ASB reported			
6	Gas Servicing	Percentage of properties with valid Gas Safety Certificate	Not less than 100%	RHA Boards MRH Board	Quarterly
		No of properties without a valid Gas Safety Certificate and actions taken to recover position	Information purposes only and trend analysis		
7	Customer Satisfaction	No of formal and informal complaints received	Information purposes only and trend analysis	RHA Boards MRH Board	Annually
		No of complaints satisfactorily resolved			
		Activity/operational areas generating the complaints			
		Compliments received	Not less than 100%	RHA Boards MRH Board	Annually
Complaints responded to within target times as a proportion of complaints received					

	CATEGORY	INDICATOR/MEASURE	TARGET	REPORTED TO	FREQUENCY
8	Customer Care and Service Standards	Answering incoming calls within required timeframe	90% within 20 seconds	MRH Board	Annually
		Calls matured at first point of contact	More than 85%		
		Satisfaction with call handling	More than 90%		
		Responding to emails within required timeframe	3 working days target		
		Provide a telephone service to customers between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday, to ensure minimum abandonment rate	Abandonment rate not to exceed 5% of incoming calls during the hours of 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday		
		ID to be requested / confirmed with residents when providing rent account details in accordance with Data Protection requirements	100% of cases		
		Plain language to be used for publications issued	95% of time		
9	Diversity Commitments	Lettings made by ethnic group in comparison to ethnicity of local population as defined by census data	Information purposes, and to monitor that the Allocation processes are inclusive and proportionate	RHA Boards	Annually
10	Staffing	Staff turnover	Information purposes only and trend analysis	MRH Board	Annually

MIDLANDS RURAL HOUSING – STRATEGIC RISKS

The Board undertakes an annual exercise to identify the key strategic risks across all of its operations. Those risks are scored at pre- and post-control level and action plans are developed to mitigate the effects of the residual risks.

This is an extract from the MRH Strategic Risk Map.

	RISK	CAUSE	EFFECT
1	Governance : Risk of inadequate Board control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities of MRH Board representatives - Lack of Board focus on key strategic issues and risks for the MRH business - Loss of long standing and knowledgeable Board members resulting from NHF Board success requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of control - Financial loss - Damage to reputation - Lack of direction/leadership - Insufficient focus on business of MRH (Rather than individual RHAs) - Duplicating activity of RHA Boards - Ineffective assurance to wider Group Board that MRH activities are aligned to those of the Group - Loss of skills and knowledge from the Board, with potential issues for replacing RHA representatives
2	Customer Service: Loss of RHA Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failure to deliver RHA business plan objectives - Failure to deliver cost effective services that achieve required levels of performance - Ability of RHA partner to remain viable in current operating environment - Merger options progressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of income to MRH - Damage to MRH reputation - Negative impact on new business development - Staffing implications (redundancies) - Negative effect on MRH viability

	RISK	CAUSE	EFFECT
3	Performance : Failure to deliver KPI targets, SLA requirements and Regulatory compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failure to deliver against adopted KPI targets - Ineffective monitoring systems - Lack of clear performance targets for operational staff - Non-compliance with GDPR requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Underperformance on KPI and SLA targets - Poor opinion from key partners - Damage to MRH reputation - Financial loss/fines - Loss of new business opportunities
4	Reduced demand for new business/ consultancy services/CDM service supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in development activity and capacity of partners as result of reducing incomes - Economic conditions affecting development activity - Poor performance on delivery of new business/consultancy projects/contracts - Lack of priority being attached to rural products - Lack of funding from agencies and partners to support consultancy work - Reduced public funding leading to lack of demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of income to MRH - Detrimental impact on surpluses - Loss of reputation/standing - Staffing implications
5	Legislative change – loss of planning mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NPPF changes/Ministerial statements - Resistance from Local Planning Authorities - Government policy changes and initiatives undermining “exceptions” and similar development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unable to deliver growth plans of RHAs - Lack of new business opportunities - Loss of income to MRH - Enabling role becomes difficult to deliver - Lack of engagement from rural communities

	RISK	CAUSE	EFFECT
6	Staffing: Inability to recruit and retain staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequate recognition and reward policies - Lack of commitment to learning and development - Inadequate salary levels - Roles that do not engage staff and are disempowering - Lack of opportunity to progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of key staff - Staff not engaged with the organisation - Demotivated staff and low levels of commitment
7	Efficiencies: Failure to address the Efficiency Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure on income as rent reductions impact RHA partners - Failure to deliver services within budgeted costs - Failure to deliver against Business Plan expectations - Insufficient monitoring and benchmarking of costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inability to deliver long term financial plan - Inability to demonstrate on going Value for Money - MRH business becomes uncompetitive
8	Loss of, or reduction in, Rural Housing Enabling Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enabling services do not meet delivery expectations of funding parties - Loss of priority from strategic perspective - Funding cuts within LA and RSL sector - Reduced AHP funding and capacity leading to reduced development (purpose diminished) - Functions carried out by others - Absence of Core strategies leading to lack of development opportunities for RSL partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of Rural Partnership Officer post - Loss of income to MRH - Reduced enabling activity/development opportunities in affected Counties and LA areas - Increased focus on securing new income streams

	RISK	CAUSE	EFFECT
9	Non-compliance with Health and Safety obligations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Failure to comply with legislation- Inadequate monitoring procedures- Lack of knowledge/training- Insufficient focus/priority in organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Increased risk of injury- Legal liability- Regulatory intervention- Reputational damage

GLOSSARY

ACRE	Action for Communities in Rural England
AHP	Affordable Housing Programme
CLA	Community, Land and Business Association
CME	Continuous Market Engagement
CPRE	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
DEFRA	Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
emhg	East Midlands Housing Group
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
HR	Human Resources
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LCHO	Low Cost Home Ownership
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LA	Local Authority
LRHA	Leicestershire Rural Housing Association
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
MMC	Modern Methods of Construction
MRH	Midlands Rural Housing
NFU	National Farmers Union
NHF	National Housing Federation
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NSPs	Notice Seeking Possession
NRHA	Northamptonshire Rural Housing Association
PDRHA	Peak District Rural Housing Association
PEST	Political, Economical, Sociological, Technological
RCC	Rural Community Council
RHA	Rural Housing Association
RSH	Regulator of Social Housing
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
RSN	Rural Services Network
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SOAHP	Shared Ownership Affordable Housing Programme
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TVP	Trent Valley Partnership
VRTB	Voluntary Right to Buy
WRHA	Warwickshire Rural Housing Association

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