



ALBYN HOUSING GROUP

PEOPLE STRATEGY
2022-2027

‘Putting our People First’

Albyn Housing Group People Strategy

1. Introduction and Background

Albyn Housing Group is a Registered Social Landlord with subsidiaries of Highland Residential Ltd (HRIL) and Albyn Enterprises Ltd (AEL) operating within the Highlands of Scotland providing over 3,700 properties in ownership and management. The Group has properties across 70 communities, large and small including all the major towns of the area as well as a number in remote areas. We currently employ 90 Staff at our offices in Invergordon and Inverness, as well as those working remotely around Scotland.

To support the Group's vision, five Strategic Objectives have been agreed by the Group's Governing Bodies and Senior Staff. They are to:

- *Our Homes*
- *Our Customers*
- *Our People*
- *Our Finances*
- *Our Partnerships*

The purpose of this People Strategy is to facilitate the Albyn Housing Group in delivering all the above objectives, particularly focussing on 'Our People.'

Our working culture is respectful, effective, engaging, and inclusive and driven by our tenants' needs. We embrace agile and flexible working and the lessons we are learning from COVID 19, enabling cultural change, and driving the people agenda. This People Strategy is built on the Business Plan 2022-2027, the Albyn Housing Group's principal planning document.

The next period will be significant in terms of internal and external change and continuous improvement for the Albyn Housing Group and the aims of the People Strategy, as well as quantifying our achievements so far, are to:

- Equip the Group's people, both Board members and staff, to deliver the Strategic Plan commitments
- Albyn's main projects for 2022/23 include: Putting People First
- Support the process of organisational continuous improvement and change
- Deliver a best practice HR (Human Resource) Service to the organisation, at both strategic and transactional levels.

And to:

- Set out an action plan for achieving the strategic focus of 'Putting People First' by focusing on the following:
 - People matter
 - People feel heard
 - People can grow

2. People Matter

2.1 Achievements

To support Albyn following significant changes in 2021, sessions were undertaken by an external facilitator with the Board, Extended Leadership Team, and all staff, to encourage us to reconnect to our purpose. These sessions proved extremely positive and to allow Albyn colleagues to move forward with drive. These sessions led to the development of a refreshed set of vision and values.

The new vision for Albyn reflects our goal of maintaining our current stock to a high quality, providing affordable homes in the Highlands to those who need them and our aspiration to support people and communities.

Vision:

Maintain and build quality homes, providing excellent customer service, and giving opportunities for people and communities to flourish.

Values:

What makes Albyn different is that we genuinely put our customers at the heart of what we do. Our values drive us to do the best by them and to be there for our customers in the good times and the bad. We go that extra mile when we know our customers face challenges, and that passion is something special.

When we were asked why we do what we do and how we do it, our answers were consistent, and these have been consolidated into:

- Being Caring
- Being Adaptable
- Being Professional

We look after each other in our teams. One way we have shown our caring is by sourcing and sharing Health and Well-being information and activities with all staff by operational managers, in 1-1s, team meetings and through a SharePoint site.

Our Operational Management Team (OMT) and Leadership Team (LT) are working more closely together as the 'Extended Leadership Team' and have established clearer and better ways of communicating with monthly meetings and joint working on the introduction of the new business plan. With the support of external facilitation, we focus on working well, openly, and honestly together.

One of the key deliverables under the 'Putting People First' in our business change programme is the OMT is being supported in developing their roles as leaders in the organisation in 2022-23 with a leadership development programme – specifically on leading change and effective leadership. Our OMT is working more closely and collaboratively across teams, breaking down perceptions of silo working.

The working relationships between Board members and the current Leadership team have been evaluated as being constructive and robust.

Our Board and staff are demonstrating our value of 'Being Professional.' Skills Appraisals and feedback processes will be further enhanced to ensure that Board Members feel equipped and supported in meeting the challenges ahead. There has been a significant increase in all staff attending skills-based training, taking up qualifications, training in groups and as individuals and in attending housing sector conferences.

We implemented a Board self-assessment process which resulted in the development of a compliance spreadsheet detailing all the evidence of how we are working towards fully complying to the SHR (Scottish Housing Regulator) Regulatory Standards.

2.2 Ambitions

A key aim is to create identities within teams, departments, and the organisation as a whole. This will increase a feeling of ownership and pride in the Albyn Housing Group. However, we will aim to ensure we avoid silo working and include all our people equally.

The Group will develop and implement a staff engagement plan to ensure that all staff feel heard, and we have the mechanisms in place to ensure that we listen to each other, and there is two-way feedback.

We will hold all-staff events, regular pulse surveys, and conduct a comprehensive Staff Survey every twelve months initially then bi-annually thereafter, to measure levels of motivation and satisfaction. An action plan will be drawn up to address the main issues of concern. This will be an aspect of our corporate communications plan.

We will seek to understand better what motivates us and strengthen our connections between our business plan and each person's role and objectives.

We aim to strengthen the culture of the Albyn Housing Group, particularly the skills in Leadership and Management with our Operational Management Team

The Group will also continue to promote joint engagement and learning events with Leadership Team, Operational Managers and Staff.

We must fully comply with the SHR (Scottish Housing Regulator) Regulatory framework as outlined in our Strategic Action Plan.

We will continue to develop Health & Well-being initiatives to share with everyone.

We will continue our ongoing annual programme of development of Board Members' skills and experience to assist us in planning skills development, succession planning and recruitment of board members.

We aim to better meet our requirements to "act in a manner which encourages equal opportunities and in particular the observance of the requirements of the law...relating to equal opportunities."

We have reintroduced anonymous equality data collection for applicants for employment and as Board members at Albyn Housing Group.

We aim to collect anonymous equality data for our existing staff and Board to:

- ensure we meet our legal and regulatory requirements and to
- ensure that we have adequate and accurate equality evidence, properly understood and analysed, so as to
- ensure our processes and practices are advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between our people.

We will address recruitment challenges and skills gaps by working across the sector and in partnership to develop apprenticeships, student work placements, and secondments to ensure we get the right people, in the right place, with the right tools and skills in the right job to deliver the service our customers need and want.

3. People Feel Heard

3.1 Achievements

The pandemic forced a move to remote working. This in turn meant a move towards being paperless and mobile working. While some staff have struggled with this, the majority have expressed an interest in continuing to work on a hybrid basis.

We are seeking out information from our customers on the services that they need and want from us, review those services provided to our customers within our business model and practices, and look for ways of offering flexible ways of working to staff while we meet those needs.

We are trialling a 'Hub, Home and Roam' hybrid working pilot to evidence the impact on our tenants, customers, business, and staff.

3.2 Ambitions

We are introducing a People Strategy and plan which prioritises putting 'People First.' This will mean prioritising staff engagement in taking forward our plans for the future and our Change programme.

We will develop and introduce a Staff Engagement plan to set out how we ensure that there is effective participation and listening across the business; we will develop more working group settings, so all colleagues input and learn on projects. We accept that more and better communication and engagement is required to rebuild trust and meet our value of 'Be Caring.'

4. People Can Grow

4.1 Achievements

To ensure that colleagues and Board members new to Albyn feel part of our community and effective in their roles we reviewed and have introduced a new induction programme.

To support the continuous improvement of the business, we have introduced and are embedding the Performance Management Review Programme, linking individual performance objectives to the organisational and team business plans. In its pilot year, everyone has been engaged in the pilot and the programme has been adapted following our feedback. Staff lead on objective setting with their line manager and have ownership with support and oversight of their personal development plans.

Albyn Housing Group has invested significantly in training and developing staff and Board members and will continue to do so. We employ colleagues across a range of occupations each requiring their own specific qualifications, training and skills set.

We are being encouraged to learn and share more across the RSL sector. To enable our value of 'Be Professional' we have reintroduced payment of professional subscriptions to encourage and support CPD. We are particularly working closely with Chartered Institute of Housing to develop training initiatives linked to our job roles.

The Training and Development policy was reviewed and agreed in 2021 to meet the challenges of an ever-changing skills set.

We have introduced a monthly half day for dedicated learning and development across the Group. This will be protected time for individuals and teams to undertake development opportunities, such as shadowing colleagues external training, all-staff development, or joint team learning.

4.2 Ambitions

We are building on our value of 'Be Professional' by developing a structured training and development plan on the housing sector for all staff as part of our competency framework. We are actively working with CIH, SHARE and the SFHA to build a framework that will ensure the opportunity to build on confidence, capability, and professionalism in our roles in the housing sector.

The Performance Management Review Programme introduced in 2021, is based on staff empowerment, and will continue to be reviewed to ensure more effective and joint objective setting, and management of, and accountability for, performance during the 2022-2023 cycle. We will learn from the pilot year and continue to embed good practice. Personal Development Plans arising from the introduction of the Performance Management Review Programme, will support individual training aspirations as well as inform a Competency Framework established for each post in the Group to ensure we get the right people, in the right place, with the right skills to deliver the service our customers need and want.

Albyn Housing Group, seeks to attract, identify, develop, engage, retain, and deploy individual staff and Board members to the fulfilment of their potential. By engaging all of us in objective setting and performance management, and supporting through coaching, mentoring, work shadowing and training, we intend to continue to build a high-performance workplace, develop into a listening and learning organisation, add value to our reputation, contribute to our communities and achieve our strategic plan to 'Put our People First'.

We will introduce CIH level 2 training to staff new to the housing sector as part of their induction to ensure they understand how our sector works.

We will introduce training and development on equalities in order to meet our obligations, foster good relations, and create allies so that we can be the best advocates for our diverse tenants and customers.

We will support all our people to fulfil their potential - we have an obligation to enable everyone to achieve the best in their careers that they can and to support our Board members in any way we can. This is a conscious decision on Albyn Housing Group's part to nurture and facilitate the continuous development of all our people. This benefits our tenants and customers as we develop a workforce who embrace continuous development, organisational and cultural change and meets our value of 'Be Adaptable'

Some colleagues may find the drive for continuous improvement in our services and practices unsettling and care will be taken in how we implement changes to bring everyone onboard.

As part of our developing Performance Management Review Programme, we will develop succession planning to ensure skill sets and careers are developed to grow future housing leaders. This will also support alternative working arrangements for staff as they consider retirement.

5. HR Responses

5.1 Achievements

At an operational level, the focus of the HR team will continue to be in creating and establishing the foundations of good HR practice in the Albyn group across the employee lifecycle.

We have developed a staff induction programme to support new colleagues into Albyn as effectively as possible.

As part of our best practice HR policy review, we found the majority of staffing policies to be significantly out of date with legislation and best practice. In the last two years, every policy has been reviewed under a 'RAG' status and all HR policies are now 'Green'. We will continue this review on a three yearly cycle and changes to updated policies are communicated across the business to ensure that all employees are treated fairly and consistently.

All HR policies are consulted on with our trade union colleagues in GMB. We take seriously our partnership with them to ensure that we embed best practice in our ambitions and practice.

We have seen a significant decrease in formal conflict resolution – we need to keep talking as informal resolution of concerns and issues is good for us all.

5.2 Ambitions

Like other organisations around the country, we will learn lessons from responses to the pandemic by listening to feedback from colleagues and trade union representatives and look to embed them in a safe way that meets our tenants and business needs, and our employees' wishes, following our trial of the 'Hub, Home and Roam' hybrid working model.

With the Extended Leadership Team, we are developing a core competency framework to underpin our values, contribute to team performance and productivity and to support each role in the business.

As part of the Change Programme – Priorities of continuous business improvement, HR is actively working with leaders and staff in Albyn to continue to grow and support a culture that is linked to our values of:

- Being Caring
- Being Adaptable
- Being Professional.

We plan to better meet our organisational requirements for the appropriate collection, analysis, and handling of equalities data for our people with the support of the Trade Union.

We plan to introduce training in equality diversity and inclusion to support intent in the People Strategy and to Albyn Housing Society.

We aim to more effectively support colleagues and managers through use of HR systems and data recording and reporting.