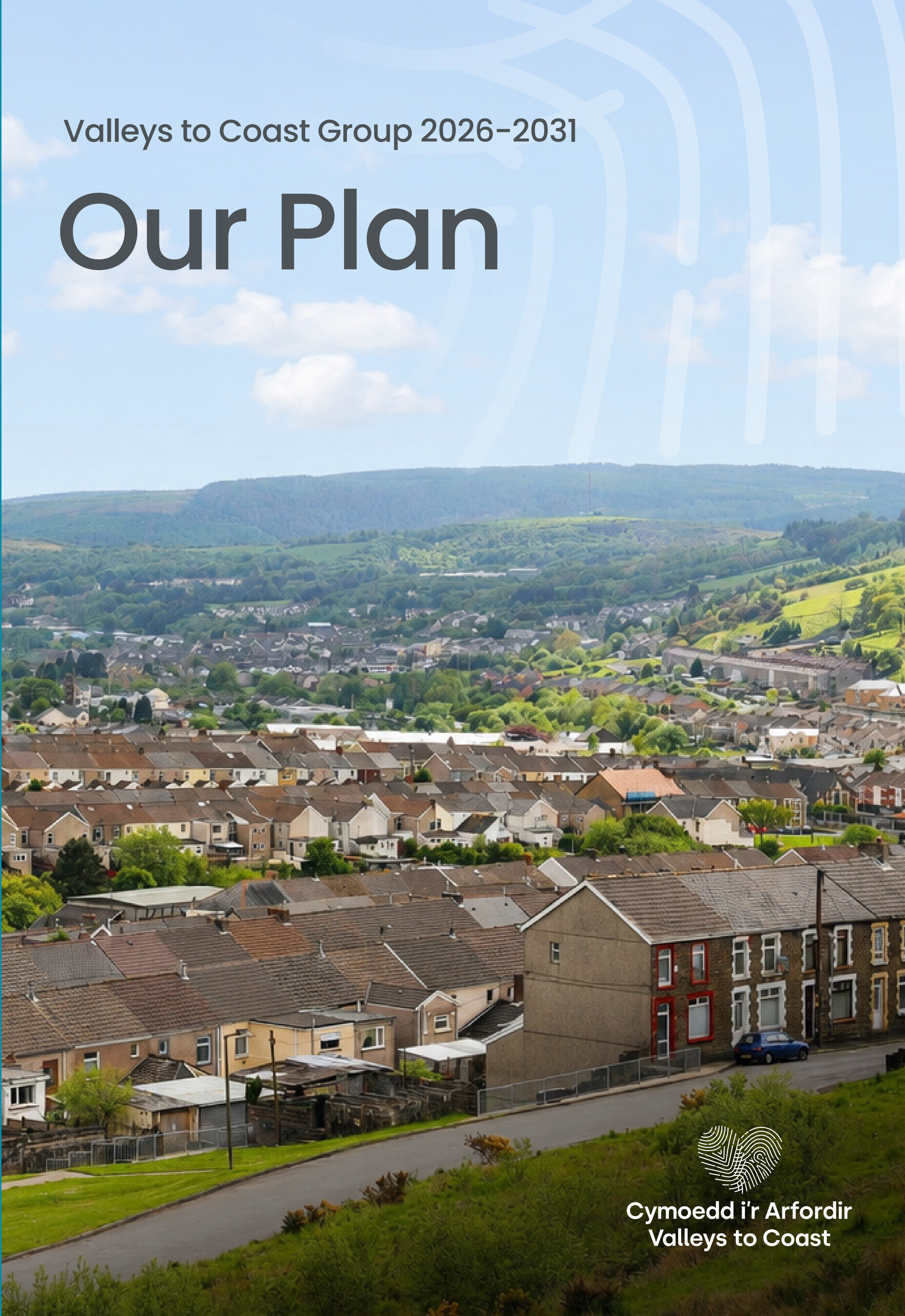
Valleys to Coast Group 2026-2031

Our Plan



Cymoedd i'r Arfordir
Valleys to Coast

Contents

Who we are, and what we do

We are a housing association rooted in communities and building for the future.

We provide homes, invest in places and deliver services that help people feel safe, supported and proud of where they live.

More than 20 years on since we were established as the first large scale voluntary transfer of local authority homes in Wales back in 2003, our role now goes beyond providing housing.

We help create the conditions for people, families and communities to move forward with confidence and opportunity.

Through our group structure we bring together development, maintenance and long-term responsibility - working together to provide homes and support communities for generations.

We're also a key player in regeneration and placemaking across the south Wales M4 corridor, working with partners to breathe new life into communities and proud to be at the heart of Bridgend town centre's transformation by creating our new Group home at the landmark Wyndham House.

As a matured company, we are ready to start a new chapter of growth but we will always remain rooted in Bridgend, with a strong social purpose, and a shared responsibility.

One group. One purpose. Shared responsibility.

Our vision

Building homes and strengthening communities — for today and for generations.

Our values

We value people

Seeing the potential in those we work with and serve

We think differently

trying new things to improve peoples' lives and careers

We have courage to see things through

speaking, working and acting with conviction, strength and determination.

Our purpose

To provide homes and invest in the places and communities we serve.

Our ambition

Our ambition is to grow our financial capacity, and grow our leadership and capability of our people so we can;

- **Grow** our service offering
- **Regenerate** our communities to enable us to
- **Drive** higher customer and colleague satisfaction

One group. One purpose. Shared responsibility.

We operate as a group with a shared purpose.

Each part of the organisation plays a distinct role in providing homes and supporting the communities we serve.

Together we bring development, maintenance and long-term responsibility into one coordinated system.

Cymoedd i'r Arfordir
Valleys to Coast

Valleys to Coast

The housing association — providing homes and holding long-term responsibility for the communities we serve.

Sylfaen

Sylfaen

Our development company — creating new homes for our communities.

Llanw

Llanw

Our maintenance company — maintains and improves the homes people live in today.

Together we build, maintain and take long-term responsibility for homes and communities.

Our next chapter

From service to impact

Providing safe, well-maintained homes remains essential. But our ambition is broader: ensuring every home is a platform for stability, opportunity and a thriving life.

- We will move beyond reactive maintenance toward a holistic 'whole-home' approach, using data to predict and prevent issues before they impact our customers.
- We will think differently to address legacy stock challenges, ensuring our homes are not just safe, warm and dry, but future-ready and carbon-neutral.
- We will listen to the customer voice to shape services that reflect what matters most to our communities, ensuring we work with causes, not just symptoms.

From traditional to progressive

We are strengthening our culture, capability and digital systems so we can respond faster, learn from insight and continually improve how we serve customers.

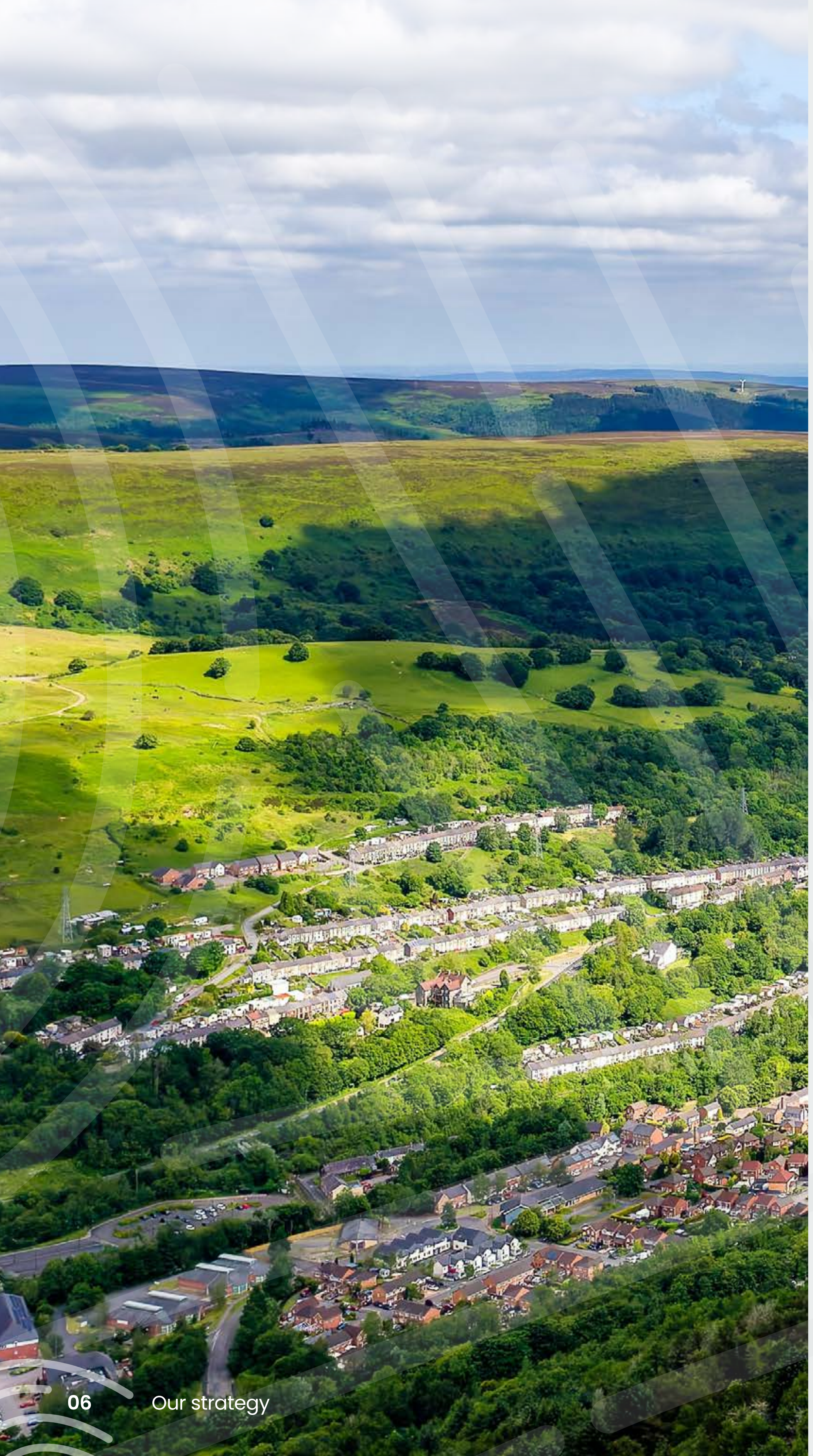
- We will adopt a 'no wrong door' approach, equipping every colleague with the confidence and tools to build relationships with customers regardless of their role.
- We will utilise AI and automation to take the effort out of administrative tasks, freeing our people to provide heartwarming moments and original thought.
- We will foster a culture of high trust and high accountability, where we celebrate innovation and are not afraid to 'fail fast' to learn and improve.

From local provider to regional partner

Rooted in Bridgend, we are extending our reach and applying our experience to support homes and communities across a wider geography.

- We will seek regional partnerships with local authorities and other housing associations to deliver more for Wales, playing a key role in regeneration and placemaking.
- We will adopt a development-led approach, building new net-zero carbon homes and strategically securing development sites to meet future housing needs.
- We will leverage our group structure to build, maintain, and take long-term responsibility for thriving places.

Our strategies



People & Culture

Our People & Culture Strategy aims to cultivate a healthy, inclusive, and positive workplace where colleagues thrive. It focuses on ensuring the right people are in the right roles to deliver excellent customer outcomes. Capacity, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Capability, Customer Focus, Accountability, Leadership & Management, and Wellbeing, all underpinned by a consistent group culture of kindness, inclusivity, and respect. This approach seeks to drive high colleague satisfaction and empower staff to make a difference for customers and communities.

Homes & Communities

Our Homes & Communities Strategy aims to deliver high-quality, safe, warm, and dry homes, regenerating communities to enhance customer and colleague satisfaction. By prioritising customer voice, leveraging data for smarter decision-making, and investing wisely in future-ready and carbon-neutral homes, the strategy seeks to optimise asset performance and move towards proactive, planned maintenance. This holistic approach will ensure desirable places to live and support a better Bridgend and Wales.

Customer Experience

Our Customer Experience Strategy centres on trust, kindness, and elevating the customer voice to deliver outstanding housing services and build resilient communities. The strategy focuses on delivering trusted, inclusive, bespoke, proactive, and community-led services. By actively listening to customers, fostering strong partnerships, and embracing innovation, Valleys to Coast aims to increase customer satisfaction and create positive, supportive living environments.

Digital & Technology

Our Digital & Technology Strategy aims to enhance customer lives and colleague experiences through strategic technology application and data exploitation. It focuses on building robust, secure, and accurate foundations, prioritising data-driven decisions and customer-centric digital solutions. The strategy emphasises automation, secure-by-design principles, and responsible use of AI to accelerate innovation while ensuring accessibility for all users. This approach seeks to unlock human capabilities, elevate experiences, and enable informed decision-making for organisational growth.

Financial Strength

Our Financial Strength Strategy aims to increase financial capacity to deliver improved and new homes, prioritising customer well-being and community regeneration. Facing legacy challenges, the strategy focuses on growing revenue through diversified income streams, adopting a development-led approach, enhancing financial efficiency via data-driven decisions and robust procurement, and securing diverse funding. This twin-track approach emphasises fiscal responsibility, innovation, and strategic partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability and deliver desirable homes.

People & Culture

We believe in people.
We believe in you.

People & Culture Strategy 2026-2031

Context

Our customers are at the centre of every decision we make as a business. To provide high quality services and an excellent customer experience we must listen to our customers and communities to ensure that we are working with them to develop and deliver the services they want and need, when they need them and in the places they need them.

Once we have that understanding we need to ensure we have the right number of colleagues with the right skillsets, experience, values and behaviours to deliver those services.

To do that we need to ensure we have high levels of colleague satisfaction as we know that colleagues who are safe and happy will strive to deliver better outcomes for customers. At the heart of that are colleagues who feel included, heard, valued and empowered.

"Our aim is to foster a culture of belonging, purpose and shared endeavour where colleagues can build a career and at the same time really make a difference in the lives of others."

As well as considering the internal context, consideration should also be given to the external factors which will impact our approach to developing a culture where colleagues can thrive, customers are at the heart of everything we do, and at the same time ensuring the organisation is financially stable and sustainable.

These include but are not limited to:

- Geopolitical influences
- The development of AI and automation
- Increases in costs for employers, in particular increased employer National Insurance contributions from April 2025
- Expectations around remote and hybrid working and increases in return to office mandates
- Wholesale changes to employment laws and practices proposed by the Labour government in the Employment Rights Bill 2024
- Rising levels of long term sickness
- "Worrying skills shortages" and over a third of employers describing "hard to fill" vacancies (CIPD labour Market Outlook Autumn 2024)

Our ambition

The People & Culture Strategy sets out an ambition and approach to delivering high levels of colleague satisfaction and a healthy, inclusive and positive workplace culture which enables and empowers our people to deliver the best possible outcomes for our customers and communities.

To meet the challenges both internally and externally and to increase our customer and colleague satisfaction, Valleys to Coast needs to ensure that we have the right people, in the right roles, in the right numbers, doing the right things.

Our approach

Focusing on the strengths of our colleagues we will enable and empower them to provide excellence to customers, centred on kindness, empathy and respect, reducing discrimination and inequality.

We will support this by building a culture of customer-centred decisions and actions and developing a "no wrong door approach" where colleagues are equipped and confident to build relationships with customers irrespective of their roles.

We will focus on a culture which is grounded in our common purpose and our commitment to shared endeavour.

Our culture will centre on individual and team accountability where people take ownership and pride in delivering the best outcomes for our customers and communities and managers for their teams.

Our priorities

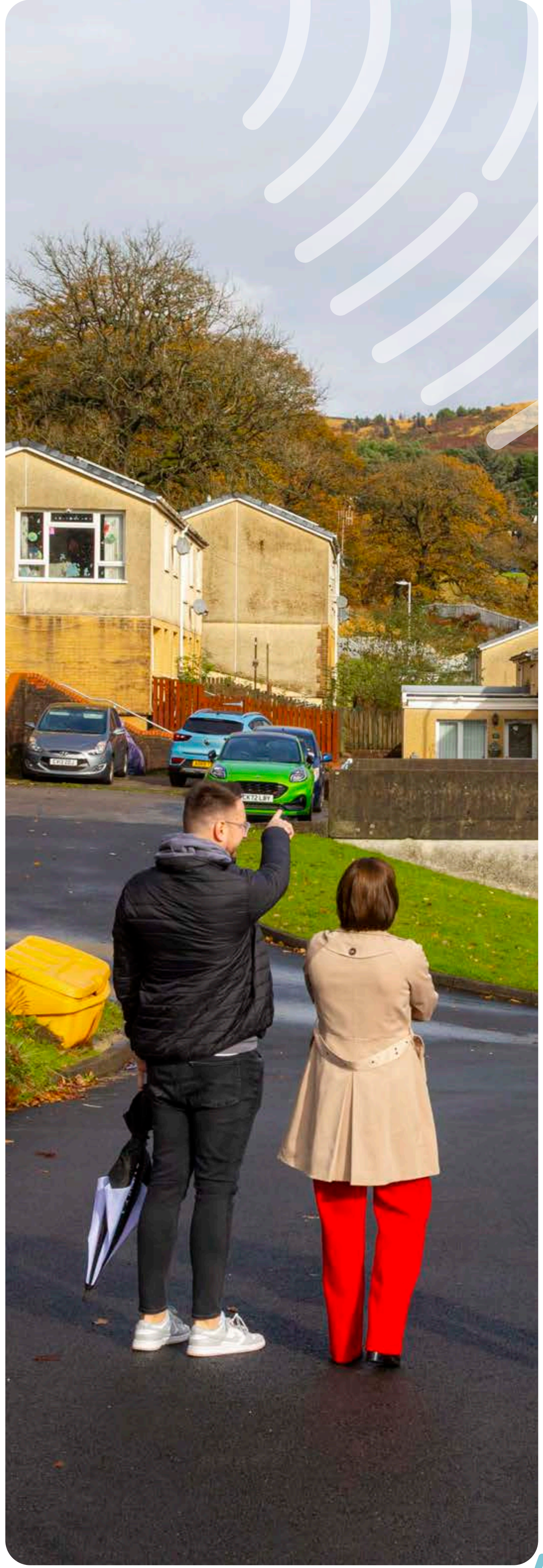
We will support our colleagues, and in turn our customers, by focusing on seven priorities, with the golden thread of our group culture being embedded throughout.

In doing so we will prepare ourselves to deliver on our ambitious plans for growth and ensure the best outcomes for our colleagues, customers and communities.

There are cross cutting themes through the strategy however for the sake of clarity our ambitions for People & Culture will be achieved through a focus on the following seven priorities:

- Capacity
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Capability
- Customer Focus
- Accountability
- Leadership and Management
- Wellbeing

Specific outcomes and deliverables will adapt as we grow.



Our golden thread: Our group culture

As we look to expand the group, creating further subsidiary companies, our group culture will be the golden thread which binds us together.

Through a period of growth our group culture will anchor the individual businesses, grounding us together in our shared purpose, values and behaviours.

We acknowledge there will be differences in approach while celebrating the strengths attached to each business identity and ensuring we take the necessary time to share learning and best practice.

Our group culture will be grounded in the non-negotiables of kindness, inclusivity and respect and our absolute commitment to improving outcomes for our customers and the wider communities.

CAPACITY
EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCL**U**SION
CAPABI**L**ITY
CUS**T**OMER FOCUS
ACCO**U**NTABILITY
LEADE**R**SHIP & MANAGEMENT
W**E**LLBEING

01: Capacity

"We will have the right number of people in the right roles to support us, not only now but as we prepare for and deliver growth."

We are able to attract and retain those colleagues by being an employer of choice. We will increase our focus on workforce planning to include current and future capacity. We are forward thinking around our people and skills needs and stay ahead of the curve, exploring options for systems improvement, automation, AI and shared services.

We will ensure our directorate and team structures are fit for purpose for now and to support us through the growth phase. We will focus on agility and responsiveness and providing opportunities for our colleagues to grow and develop.

We will be creative in our approaches to managing peaks and troughs in demand for people resources and offer secure and stable employment prospects for our colleagues.

What success looks like:

- A defined workforce plan
- Updated reward and recognition policy
- Ongoing review and improvement of our total reward offering
- Increased number of successful hires
- Ongoing recruitment of apprentices and graduates
- Reduction in the number of "hard to fill" vacancies
- Reduction in voluntary turnover and no higher than sector average

We are committed to:

- **Attracting and retaining high calibre colleagues by being an employer of choice –** We will develop an employer brand which sees us become the employer of choice in and around Bridgend and beyond. We will offer an attractive total reward package and build a reputation for delivering on colleague and customer satisfaction.
- **Developing a defined workforce plan which considers current and future capacity –** We will develop a workforce plan which looks ahead over a three-year period so that we can better plan for our people and skills needs, taking into account national skills shortages and an ageing workforce. We will work closely with leaders to anticipate demands and forge strategic partnerships with education and training providers building on our current apprenticeship and graduate programmes.
- **Ensuring our directorate and team structures are fit for purpose now and as we move through our growth phase –** We will work closely with leaders to ensure directorates and teams are well structured and able to deliver our growth ambition. We will support agility and responsiveness while offering colleagues opportunities to develop their skills and experience through secondments, project support and participation in other development opportunities.

02: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

"We will continue to develop a culture which has at its heart our shared endeavour and common purpose, grounded in kindness and respect, celebrating diversity and ensuring equal opportunities."

We will make sure that our approach to EDI for colleagues aligns to our plans for customers. We will use data effectively and strive to deliver personalised outcomes for colleagues while maintaining fairness and consistency across the group.

What success looks like:

- Continued evidence of progress against our EDI Roadmap
- Improved levels of EDI data collection from colleagues used to develop targeted improvement programmes around diversity
- Improved colleague satisfaction/ feedback on inclusion and belonging
- Increased colleague engagement with EDI initiatives e.g. Menopause Cafe, Inclusive Families Network etc.

We are committed to:

- **Improving colleague feelings of belonging and shared purpose –** We want each and every colleague to feel a sense of belonging to the organisation and to understand that each of us has a role to play in delivering on our purpose. We recognise individuality but at the same time celebrate the picture that is the sum of all the pieces.
- **Ensuring equity of opportunity but also celebrating differences –** We are committed to equity of opportunity and ensure that those who are disadvantaged are provided with the means to access opportunities open to others. We want to celebrate diversity and challenge stigma.

  We want everyone to understand and appreciate how diversity makes us stronger and that we can learn and benefit from each other's different backgrounds and experiences.
- **Embracing new ideas –** If our customers or colleagues identify areas where changes can be made to make our culture more inclusive, we will welcome and encourage these and will adopt an attitude of what's strong and not what's wrong. We understand that meaningful changes can only be made through trying new ideas and where we fail, we fail fast and learn to improve. We will create a psychologically safe culture where innovation can flourish.

03: Capability

"We will ensure our people have the skills and tools to enable them to deliver to their best."

In order to achieve our ambitions we need to ensure we have the required capability to deliver on our current corporate commitments as well as those we aim to deliver throughout the growth phase of our Corporate Plan.

We are committed to reducing and over time eradicating skills shortages; we will conduct effective gap analysis between our current and future needs and develop creative solutions to develop our people accordingly.

We will offer a range of opportunities for our people to develop and grow. We ensure skillsets are aligned to deliver on the five strategic pillars. We proactively identify single points of failure and ensure we support alternative provision of these key roles and responsibilities.

What success looks like:

- Personal development plans available to all colleagues
- Increased investment in colleague development
- Increased numbers of internal secondments and promotions
- Improved feedback on our learning and development opportunities
- More creative approaches to development outside of training courses e.g. shadowing, coaching, mentoring, communities of practice.

We are committed to:

- **Making sure people have the skills and tools to enable them to deliver to their best –** We will grow our learning and development provision and will offer a blend of mandatory and optional development opportunities through a variety of means and not just through traditional 'chalk and talk' methods or an overreliance on e-learning. We will think creatively and offer opportunities for job shadowing, coaching, mentoring, team building, project involvement, communities of practice and personal reflection.
- **Ensuring skillsets are aligned to deliver on the five strategic pillars –** We understand that resources are limited and so we will keep a focus on providing development opportunities which align with the five strategic pillars. We will not be afraid of making difficult decisions and will help colleagues to understand that the focus on the five strategic pillars will in turn deliver greater customer and colleague satisfaction.
- **Giving colleagues the resources, time and space to focus on their development –** We will work with leaders and managers to ensure that colleague development is given increased priority and that it is not seen as a "nice to have". We will look at creative solutions to give colleagues the time and space they need to focus on their development e.g. the introduction of designated 'learning days' or 'learning weeks'.

04: Customer Focus

"We develop a culture where colleagues can focus on providing excellence to our customers centred in kindness, empathy and respect."

We do this by building a culture of customer-centric decisions and actions and developing a "no wrong door approach" where colleagues are equipped and confident to build relationships with customers irrespective of role.

We give our colleagues a voice in decision-making which allows them to advocate for customers and communities. We create a culture where colleagues feel enabled and empowered, supporting effective decision-making and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy.

We are committed to:

- **Developing a culture of customer-centred decisions and actions –** We will ensure that we deliver customer focused services across our group including efficient and effective housing management and income services, customer centered asset management and responsive repairs services, community driven regeneration and estate services, and high quality developments in the right communities ensuring relationships with our customers are adult to adult with high support and high challenge.
- **Developing a "no wrong door approach" where colleagues are equipped and confident to build relationships with customers irrespective of role** – Colleagues are provided with the tools, skills and knowledge to engage with customers, develop effective relationships and build trust regardless of where they work within the group.
- **Implementing a Colleague Project Board which will amplify colleague voice –** We will develop a Colleague Project Board with appropriate representation to ensure colleagues have a voice in decision making which will in turn amplify our customer voice.

What success looks like:

- Improved colleague satisfaction/ feedback on ability to deliver first-class services to customers
- Continued evidence of progress against our Culture Roadmap
- Improved engagement with the Colleague Project Board
- Implementing a 'you said, we did' approach, in particular on suggestions for improving service delivery
- Increased customer satisfaction

05: Accountability

"Ensuring we drive a culture of high trust and high accountability."

We insist on individual and team accountability where people take ownership and pride in their performance and managers for their teams. Teams and colleagues have well defined objectives where outcomes are clear and support the Corporate Plan.

We tackle silo working and do not tolerate the "it's not my job" mindset.

What success looks like:

- All colleagues have clear objectives linked back to the five strategic pillars which are regularly monitored and reviewed
- Colleagues understand that with high trust comes high accountability and are able to describe what that means in their role
- Assurance that underperformance or deviation from our values and behaviours is being tackled consistently across the group
- Increased colleague satisfaction/ feedback
- Increased customer satisfaction

We are committed to:

- **Driving a culture of high trust and high accountability –** We will continue to develop a high trust culture where colleagues are encouraged and empowered to innovate, problem solve and make decisions.

  We create an environment where well-intended, healthy and respectful feedback or challenge is welcomed and we communicate in an open and transparent way.

  This works hand in hand with high accountability where colleagues take ownership of the decisions they have made, can always demonstrate that our customers and values are at the heart of those decisions and are comfortable with exchanging open and honest feedback with a focus on continuously improving.
- **Tackling underperformance and/ or deviation from our values and behaviours –** We want to be transparent, fair and kind in all of our interactions with our colleagues but we will not shy away from having difficult conversations when required. We will treat colleagues with kindness and respect and be solutions focused in our approach to supporting improvement.
- **Removing silos and delivering seamless services to customers –** We work to break down silos and will not accept a mindset of "it's not my job" or "that's someone else's job". We strive to look at it through a customer's eyes and treat them as we would like to be treated. Customers should not be put at detriment or inconvenienced by internal structures, process breakdowns or movement of work between teams and we will strive to make sure services are seamless.

06: Leadership & Management

"We create an organisation which effectively balances people leadership with technical skills."

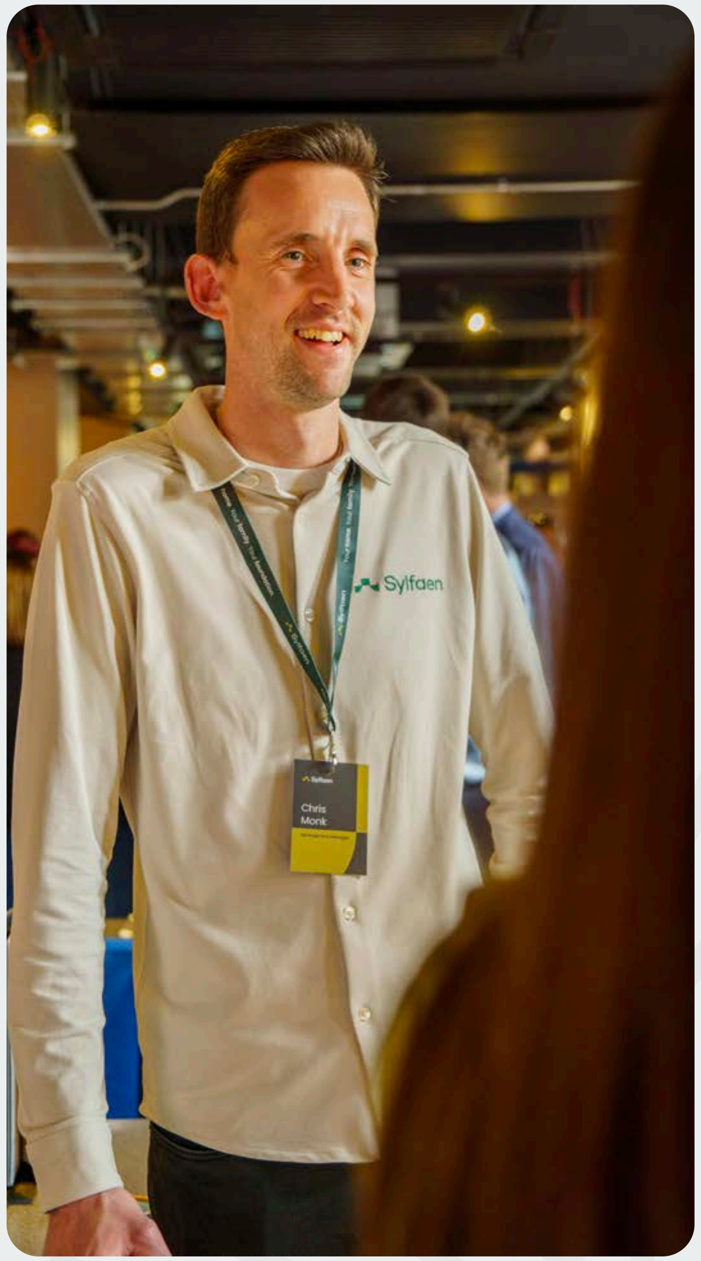
We have a 'laser focus' on leadership skills and capacity. We develop leaders who are able to take the organisation from brilliant basics through to the growth phase. We ensure consistent standards of leadership and management across the group so that colleagues have great leadership wherever they work in the business. There will be a commitment to compassionate leadership; tackling the tough stuff but with kindness and respect.

We are committed to:

- **Developing first class leadership capability and capacity –** We will invest in our leaders and managers and instil a sense of the privilege of being entrusted to lead and manage others. We will insist on the highest standards from our leaders and managers and equip them with the skills and knowledge to support them.
- **Ensuring consistent standards of leadership across the group –** We will strive to ensure colleagues have great leadership regardless of where they work in the business. We have a set of leadership and management 'non-negotiables' which include effective objective setting, conducting regular one to ones and team meetings.
- **Ensuring our leadership behaviours are embedded into the fabric of the organisation –** We expect our leaders to role model behaviours at all times, leading by example and setting the highest standards. In turn we will expect colleagues to model our colleague behaviours and when the two sets of behaviours align we will create a truly great place to work.

What success looks like:

- Assurance that colleagues have clear objectives, one to one and regular team meetings
- Clear progress against a leadership development programme
- Additional induction modules in place for any new leaders and managers joining the organisation
- Clear plan to embed leadership behaviours across the group
- Improved colleague feedback on organisational leadership



07: Wellbeing

We will foster a culture where the wellbeing of our people is integral to everything we do.

We will develop a culture of organisational, team and individual health, contentment and resilience where wellbeing is championed at all levels.

We promote a healthy work life balance by focusing on the right outcomes rather than hours worked.

We promote a holistic approach to wellbeing by focusing on physical, mental, social and financial wellbeing.

What success looks like:

- Clear progress against our Wellbeing Action Plan
- Improved wellbeing resources
- Improved colleague satisfaction/ feedback on wellbeing related matters
- Investors in People (IIP) Wellbeing accreditation achieved
- Reduced sickness absence levels

We are committed to:

- **Creating the right conditions to support colleague wellbeing and make sure it is integral to everything we do –** We will strive to develop a culture of open dialogue around all aspects of wellbeing, including those which are not freely spoken about such as mental health issues or financial concerns. We will develop communities of belonging to share experiences and create support networks.
- **Demonstrating our commitment to wellbeing and creating a culture where wellbeing is everyone's responsibility –** While the organisation, its leaders, managers and People Team will play key roles in supporting colleague wellbeing, it is important to understand that wellbeing does not start and end in the workplace. On that basis, the key to our success is educating and empowering colleagues to make informed choices and engage in positive wellbeing behaviours.
- **Providing meaningful and impactful wellbeing interventions and support based on the diverse needs of our people –** We understand that one size does not fit all and so we offer a range of wellbeing support and initiatives which span the four pillars of wellbeing – physical, emotional, social and financial. We recognise we are not the experts but where appropriate can signpost colleagues to other services or resources.

Strategy

Homes & Communities

Investing in our homes.
Sustaining our future.

Homes & Communities Strategy 2026-2031

Context

Valleys to Coast is the largest single social landlord within Bridgend County Borough, owning and managing over 6,000 homes and commercial assets.

Poverty, disability and poor health are experienced in high levels for all areas and the majority white, Christian nature of the communities leaves diverse individuals isolated and under catered. This strategy will allow for the different wants and needs in homes and communities to be accommodated.

The majority of Valleys to Coast's homes are terraced, flats and maisonettes built between 1945 – 1980 resulting in an ageing stock profile. Around 1,000 homes were built using non-traditional construction techniques i.e. not brick or stone.

Consequently, a large proportion of stock is expensive to maintain and difficult to bring to modern day standards.

Within the business there is a good understanding of stock condition and relative asset performance. However, little of this information is used to drive decision making in the day to day operations of the organisation and the business lacks the ability to turn data and information into intelligence.

Externally, there is a phase of rapid change within the sector and the economic environment. Volatile macro economics are adversely impacting costs for both Valleys to Coast and its supply chain.

The increasing standards around the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023, Health and Safety regulation and ambitious plans to improve the energy efficiency of our homes is driving the need for Valleys to Coast to do things differently.

Our ambition

In order to manage its challenges, Valleys to Coast will need to diversify its business and look for different models of delivery, it will need to become more efficient through:

- a reduction in failure demand
- better use of data to target resources
- more effective financial controls and oversight
- better use of technology
- better use of partnerships and shared services and
- a laser focus on what the customer wants.

This strategy will help move the business into smarter decision making and realising the efficiencies and increased satisfaction of data driven services.

Our approach

Valleys to Coast will improve its homes and communities to create places that are desirable, where people are proud to live. It will take a holistic approach to its homes and communities, ensuring the customer voice and robust use of data will lead all decision making. The approach will encompass all assets including green and grey spaces, commercial properties and future land opportunities.

It will take an uncompromising approach to safety and quality of service for customers ensuring all homes are safe, warm and dry. It will make the most of the money it spends through using data and the customer voice to target maintenance spend, deliver great procurement and contract management.

Responsive repairs are expensive for Valleys to Coast and disruptive to customers. We will move the business towards data led planned maintenance and component replacement programmes, achieved through proactive and whole home approaches, issue mapping, and a regeneration mind set. The benefits of the group structures will be maximised and the foundations laid for large scale regeneration through development, refurbishment, disposals and strategic partnerships.

This strategy will help deliver for a better Bridgend and a better Wales through socially responsible business practices that support the foundational economy as well as delivering good value for customers.

Our priorities

There are many cross cutting themes through the strategy however, for the sake of clarity, the vision will be achieved with the following five priorities:

- Using the voice of the customer to shape services.
- High quality safe warm and dry homes
- Improving the quality and use of data
- Investing wisely to provide 'future-ready' homes.
- Working towards carbon neutral homes.

Specific outcomes and deliverables will adapt as we grow.

01: Using the voice of the customer to shape services

"The voice of the customer will be at the centre of shaping our services to truly reflect what matters most to our communities and to accommodate individual needs."

In this way we can ensure all customers feel connected to Valleys to Coast and have a real say in what happens locally.

Customer consultation will be undertaken to identify customers' local priorities. This will help shape services and develop investment plans that truly reflect local views and priorities. The review of what customers want from their homes and communities will be undertaken through a variety of methods to ensure a diversity of customer voice is heard. The consultation will include what and how the services are delivered covering areas such as service standards, experience, convenience of and access to services.

Complaints and customer feedback are a real opportunity to learn and improve services. This strategy will try to reduce the number of upheld and repeated complaints arising but when things go wrong, complaints will be managed well and critically, the learning captured to improve for the future.

Communication will be open, honest and respectful and will include details about works, plans for homes and any changes to those plans.

We are committed to:

- **Conducting a review of what customers want from our services and shaping our services**
- **Undertaking an extensive customer consultation to better understand customers' priorities and using this to shape services to local priorities and different needs**
- **Improving our digital offer providing choice and making it easier for customers to contact us and access the services they need when they want**
- **Improving satisfaction with our services, safety and repair of homes, how well we listen and keep customers informed**
- **We want to work towards minimising upheld/repeat complaints and use the complaints we have to improve services**
- **Communicating effectively with customers in an open, honest and respectful way and providing useful information and updated on the things that matter to them**

What success looks like:

- Increased customer satisfaction
- Local representation and engagement on specific projects
- Customer approved standards and scrutiny of services
- Reduced upheld/ repeat complaints

02: High quality safe warm and dry homes

"This strategy will move Valleys to Coast from a reactive component led maintenance program to a more holistic approach."

It will deliver high quality, safe, warm and dry homes by using whole homes surveys, manifest issues with similar homes and geographical location. Up to date data trends and eventually real time data will be used to ensure we are achieving the right quality standards. Through the use of the diverse customer voice the standards set for our homes and our services will be inclusive and meet people's diverse needs.

This will allow both visible issues to be resolved along with underlying issues yet to be diagnosed. This will provide efficiency savings of programmes being in one place, limit disruptions for customers and make a visible and impactful difference with our spend. Through this approach the business will move from a reactive to a planned service that can predict issues before they become problems.

This means there may be works in some areas that are undertaken later than planned to make space for this new programme. Communication will be made with customers to manage expectations and essential works to keep homes safe, warm and dry will continue to be undertaken.

The focus of this holistic approach will be on the fabric of the building ensuring homes are safe water tight and easier to heat.

Valleys to Coast will ensure there is a robust approach to meeting all building safety, legal and regulatory compliance requirements so customers feel safe in their home. We will do this by having robust policies in places in areas such as gas, electrical and fire safety in addition to disrepair, damp and mould issues.

These will be underpinned by a robust performance management and assurance framework to ensure we deliver. Information will be shared with customers, so they know how we are performing. A plan to promote and embed a positive safety culture across Valleys to Coast will be developed. This means all colleagues and contractor partners proactively identify any safety issues, the presence of hazards and any problems with the general condition of homes' and neighbourhoods.

Through the five years of this strategy an optimised balance of delivery through contractors and the group structure will be developed. Good procurement and contractor management will underpin this approach to quality and Value for Money.

We will review the empty homes and cyclical maintenance programmes to ensure that they are data driven, value for money and have the customer at the heart of services.

We are committed to:

- **Investing sufficient resources in a timely manner** to ensure all homes are demonstrably safe and as a minimum meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023
- **Using data and business intelligence to shape services** and prevent avoidable problems arising
- **Developing plans to increase the proportion of investment** delivered in a planned rather than reactive way
- **Exploring the potential** to increase the level of delivery through Llanw
- **Ensuring we have the structures and skills to:** effectively manage our projects, contracts, and external contractor procurement
- **Strengthening our approach** to diagnosing and prioritising repairs
- **Undertaking a fundamental review** of the voids service
- **Putting in place robust cyclical maintenance programmes**
- **Embed a robust approach** to meeting all building safety, legal and regulatory compliance requirements and continuing to embed a positive safety culture across Valleys to Coast

What success looks like:

- Reduction in void costs and time
- 100% compliance
- Reduction in Disrepair and Damp and mould cases
- Contractors meeting KPI monitoring

03: Improve the quality and use of data

"Valleys to Coast is committed to collecting and using robust data about assets to drive our decision-making and ensuring Value for Money investments in our homes."

Investing in technology will enable homes to be digitally connected providing real time data, this will allow Valleys to Coast to take advantage of predictive and remote forms of property maintenance. The ultimate aim of using this technology is to positively impact issues such as damp and mould, condensation, energy efficiency and planned component replacements.

However this investment will need to be supported by the upskilling of colleagues and customers to ensure this technology is embraced and used to its maximum effect. Continuing to invest in our systems, processes and ways of working will ensure our colleagues have the knowledge and skills to produce the information and business intelligence to drive evidence-based asset management decisions.

All colleagues will understand that data quality is part of the day job and is everyone's responsibility, and a one version of the truth approach to business data and information will be developed.

A whole stock assessment will be undertaken to ensure we continue to hold accurate, up-to-date and robust data on the condition and energy performance. Our understanding of relative asset performance will be refreshed and we will use this to make evidence-based decisions on future investment.

Data led decision making will include customer data as details on vulnerabilities, socioeconomic status and diversity will impact the requirements of homes and communities.

Benchmarking is important in demonstrating that our services represent good value for money. Benchmarking will be used to develop a comprehensive understanding of how our costs and performance compare and we will use this to identify opportunities to drive continuous improvement.

We are committed to:

- **Ensuring all colleagues understand that data quality is everyone's responsibility** & relevant colleagues have the specialist knowledge and skills needed
- **Develop data quality policies and procedures** for producing performance information for decision-makers
- **Improving the quality and use of data** to inform how we shape services and proactively prevent problems
- **Undertaking a whole stock assessment every 5 years** to each of our homes and taking every opportunity to keep condition and energy performance data up-to-date
- **Using benchmarking to understand how costs and performance compare** and identifying opportunities for continuous improvement

What success looks like:

- Delivery and maintaining of a home grading process that is beyond component information
- Capture live performance data on high priority and poorly performing properties
- Create within the organisations structure where data is collected and utilised cross cutting across Valleys to Coast departments

04: Investing wisely to provide ‘future ready homes’

“A holistic view of investment will be taken targeting homes and places to maximise impact and enhance future sustainability.”

The aim is to ensure our homes are desirable and meet customer’s future needs, but all investment has an opportunity cost – when money is spent on one thing it is not spent somewhere else.

Valleys to Coast will develop longer-term investment plans that integrate all investment in homes and places. This includes all decarbonisation works. In this way impact will be maximised by ensuring all investment is co-ordinated and complementary, even if it takes place at different times.

Decision-making on future investment will be driven by robust data on our stock and its relative asset performance. Options appraisals on poor quality or poorly performing homes will be undertaken to explore the available courses of action.

The aim will be to improve performance and considerations will include remodelling, redevelopment, disposal or estate-based interventions.

A longer-term development and regeneration plan will be developed. Opportunities will be sought to develop new homes and regenerate areas through active management of our existing assets to enable high quality homes and places that are fit for future generations. Accommodating the diverse needs of current and future customers will promote inclusive communities of the future.

Valleys to Coast play an important role as placemakers, this requires us to work effectively with a range of partners and to engage with our local communities. Strong partnerships will be built with the aim of maximising the impact of our shared resources including external funding across the whole of Bridgend. All partners’ roles and responsibilities will be clearly defined and all investment and activities coordinated. The customer voice will be key to ensuring this approach delivers what matters most to communities.

Integral to improving the quality of our neighbourhoods include improving the usability of local green and grey spaces open for amenity or biodiversity value or other wider community benefits. Opportunities will be actively sought to create additional funding in this area.

In addition, where identified as a local priority we will work with partners to explore how we can better connect neighbourhoods to health, wellbeing, social and employment opportunities. This could include improvements to the transport infrastructure, digital connectivity, shops or community facilities.

Homes that are adaptable and accessible can support customers to remain living safely and independently for longer and reduce demands on other services, where possible adaptations will be undertaken quickly. Clear processes and policies will keep people informed with good information and advice.

We will make best use of our resources by maintaining an up-to-date property register. We will re-let adapted homes to households with similar needs or recycle equipment where possible.

Investment in our commercial portfolio will also be undertaken, maximising return on investment in both a commercial and social perspective.

We are committed to:

- **Taking a holistic approach by Integrating all investment** (including decarbonisation works) in homes and places
- **Using robust data on our stock** and relative asset performance to drive decision-making
- **Maximising opportunities to develop new homes** and regenerate areas through active management of our existing assets
- **Conducting option appraisals** on poor quality or poorly performing homes
- **Developing a longer-term development and regeneration plan**
- **Working with customers and partners** to improve the quality of our neighbourhoods
- **Meeting customers identified needs** for adaptations where possible

What success looks like:

- Improved customer satisfaction with the home
- Create an investment programme that maintains our homes prior to component failure.
- Publicise progress of regeneration plans
- Map and grade green and grey grey spaces
- Quantify and grade our commercial assets

05: Working towards carbon neutral homes

"Over the next five years there will be an improvement in sustainability performance and a reduction in the carbon footprint."

The drive to net zero has been laid out in the Welsh Government's Net Zero Wales plan and the integration of targets within WHQS2023. Welsh Government has set a target for all social housing to have an EPC rating of C by 31 March, 2030. At present, 50% of Valleys to cost homes are rated C, with 11% rated B; 11% D; 1% A and 0.5% E.

The immediate priority will be a combination of targeted deliverable projects and works to the worst performing properties while ensuring all significant investment represents good value for money. For homes where the costs are identified as prohibitive, we will undertake option appraisals to identify the best future option.

Valleys to Coast will develop a decarbonisation roadmap setting out our investment priorities for retrofit, energy efficient external works, future heating provision and the use of new renewable technologies for different property types. All future investment plans will integrate decarbonisation works into wider investment plans, aligning component replacement programmes wherever possible to help reduce costs and minimise disruption.

Our investment approach will be flexible, enabling us to take advantage of any funding or partnering opportunities.

Undertaking a Whole Stock Assessment is a prerequisite to the development of Target Energy Pathways (TEPs) to effectively plan we will need to consider data, software and analytical skills. We will continue to hold accurate, up-to-date and robust data on the condition and energy performance of our stock. More detailed energy data will be required and new technical and data management knowledge and skills across the organisation will need to be developed. The demand on contractors in this area will increase so work will need to be undertaken to secure local skills and train and develop our own staff.

Again customers are integral to the development of our plans but also in the use of new technologies in our homes. Customers will be involved in piloting and promoting the success of retrofit and new renewable technologies and approaches for example, heating and renewables as part of our decarbonisation work.

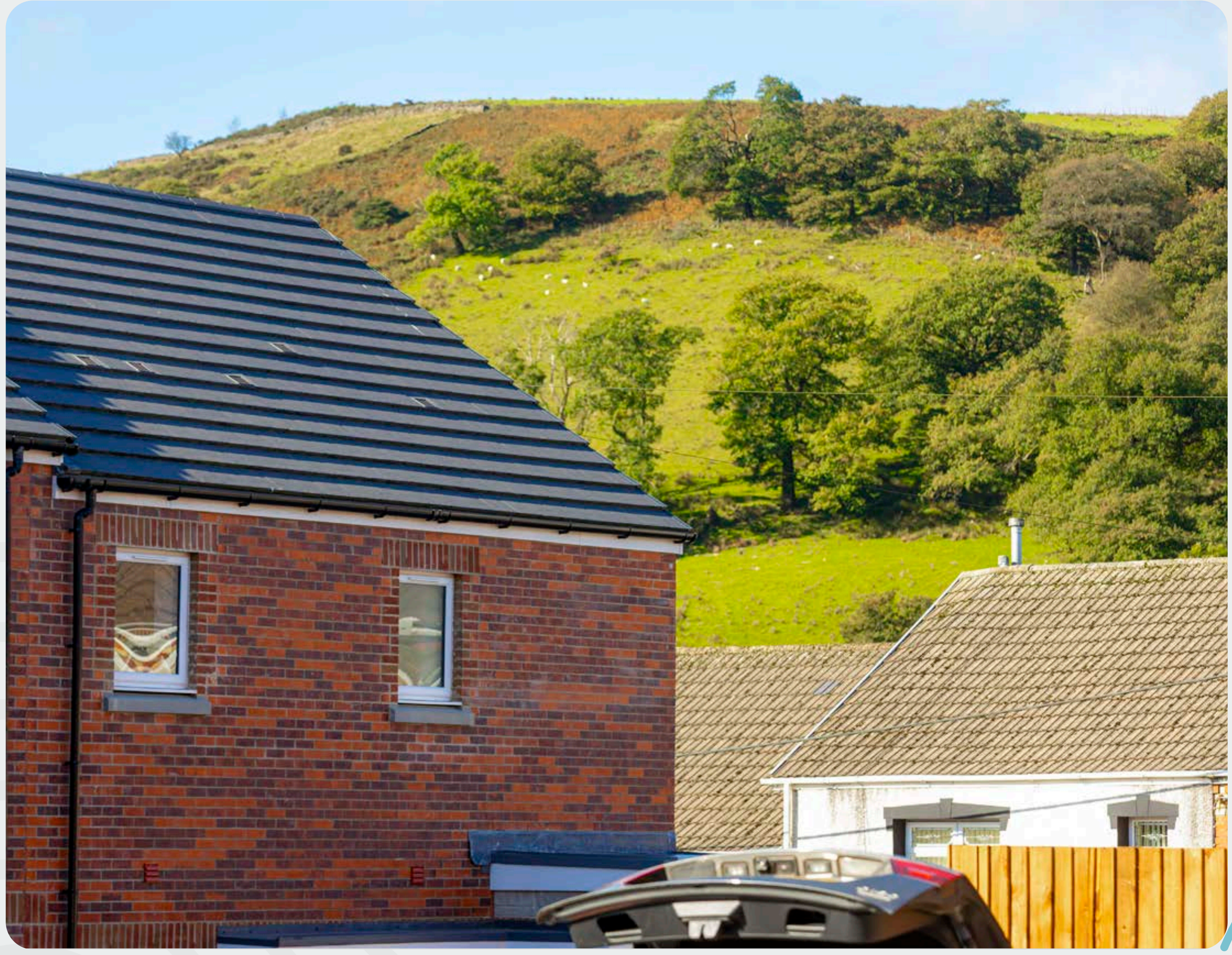
We will commit to exploring novel and new approaches working with Universities, delivery partners and key stakeholders to identify tested deliverable solutions. We will listen and follow at pace new approaches working towards decarbonisation.

We are committed to:

- **Undertaking a Whole Stock Assessment** every five years to keep condition and energy performance data up-to-date (applying good data quality processes)
- **Ensuring our investment and financial plans reflect the costs of decarbonisation** and organisations ambitions
- **Planning for and investing in a new team** to lead our retrofit and decarbonisation programme
- **Embedding new retrofit technical and data management skills** across the organisation
- **Exploring the potential to upskill and increase in-house capacity** through Llanw to though local supply chains
- **Working with customers to co-produce plans for a carbon neutral future**
- **Have on the shelf projects that can be mobilised quickly** in response to grant availability

What success looks like:

- Map of homes that can have improved efficiency to inform our future investment programme
- Measure our stock condition data
- Set targets which deliver both value for money for the organisation and tangible improvements for our customer



Strategy

Customer Experience

Building trust.
Empowering communities.
Delivering excellence.

Customer Experience Strategy 2026-2031

Context

Our customers are at the centre of every decision we make as a business. To provide high quality services and an excellent customer experience we must listen to our customers and communities to ensure that we are working with them to develop and deliver the services they want and need, when they need them and in the places they need them.

To increase the satisfaction of our customers we need to repair, build and maintain their trust by being open, transparent and inclusive. **Customers responding to our 2022 STAR Survey told us:**

- 63% trust Valleys to Coast
- 54% were satisfied with the opportunities provided to participate in the decision making process of Valleys to Coast, and;
- 53% were satisfied that we listened to their views and acted upon them.

This demonstrates that there is a significant proportion of our customers who feel disengaged. Our customers are the experts within their communities and through co-production and an elevation of the customer voice within Valleys to Coast we can ensure that the action we take continuously improves the quality of our customer's experience and deliver an excellent housing service.

In the wider external context of social housing, we recognise that as a sector we are facing some of the greatest challenges in recent years which are directly impacting our customers and communities.

The cost of living crisis continues to have a devastating impact on our communities, especially working households in receipt of Universal Credit. **The recent Trussell Trust report highlighted that:**

- 68% of working households in receipt of Universal Credit have gone without essentials in the last six months
- Almost half (48%) of people claiming Universal Credit ran out of food in the last month and did not have enough money to buy more
- The charity estimates that 1.6 million people claiming Universal Credit have needed to use a food bank in the last 12 months
- Just over two fifths (46%) of people claiming Universal Credit are either behind on bills and credit commitments or are finding it a constant struggle to keep up with them.

With the further rollout of Universal Credit next year to a significant number of our customers we anticipate seeing a greater number facing financial hardship. This further demonstrates the need to increase trust with our customers to ensure that we can work with them, which will also support our ambition of increasing customer satisfaction.

The Grenfell Tower disaster and subsequent inquiry highlighted the devastating consequences of landlords not listening to or trusting their customers. Furthermore the tragic death of Awaab Ishak in 2020 due to damp and mould within his home in Rochdale reinforced the seriousness of the failure to take concerns from residents seriously.

The Housing Ombudsman reported following Awaab's death that the housing association's residents had been treated in "dismissive, inappropriate or unsympathetic ways".

Our ambition

The Customer Strategy sets out an ambition and approach to deliver the best possible outcomes for our customers and communities and to deliver services that are embedded in kindness and trust.

To meet the challenges both internally and externally and to increase our customer satisfaction, Valleys to Coast needs to ensure that we listen to our customers and ensure that their voice is elevated across the Group.

Our approach

To improve customer satisfaction we must ensure that whatever the interaction with our customers throughout the group, we will ensure that a consistent approach is adopted which is strength based, kind and always seeking heartwarming moments.

Through understanding the needs, strengths and aspirations of our customers and communities we can develop resilient and empowered communities, developing proactive services and relationships with our customers outside periods of crisis.

By delivering our services with kindness we can break down barriers, promote understanding and build relationships based on empathy and respect. Demonstrating kindness can help create and maintain social connections and through showing kindness in our words and actions we can help reduce discrimination and inequality.

"We will never be too busy to deliver heartwarming moments for our customers and communities or forget that the best relationships are built in the good times."

By focussing on strengths and developing kind, positive relationships we can ensure that we seek to find heartwarming moments throughout our work with our customers and will celebrate these moments to elevate our customer voice and the positive contribution we can all make to developing strong, resilient communities.

Our priorities

Over the next five years we will deliver our services through five priorities to achieve our growth ambition, adopted across all areas of the Valleys to Coast Group to ensure a consistent experience for our customers, communities and stakeholders.

There are cross cutting themes through the strategy however for the sake of clarity our ambitions for customer excellence will be achieved through a focus on the following five priorities:

- Delivering Trusted Services
- Delivering Inclusive Services
- Developing Bespoke Services
- Proactive Services
- Community Led Services

Specific outcomes and deliverables will adapt as we grow.

01: Delivering Trusted Services

"We cannot achieve our ambitions if we do not have the trust of our customers."

Gaining and maintaining the trust of our customers must be our main priority to ensure we deliver an excellent customer experience and to ensure that we increase our customer satisfaction. We acknowledge that trust can be difficult to gain and easily lost, especially if we have failed our customers previously.

However to provide a trusted service to our customers we must listen to and understand the customer voice to encourage, promote and increase customer involvement to influence service delivery throughout the Valleys to Coast Group. We must be transparent and open with our customers, acknowledge, explain why and apologise when things go wrong, and provide them with sufficient information on the services we deliver and when we will deliver them.

We will ensure that we deliver customer focused services across our Group structure including but not exclusive to efficient and effective housing management and income services, customer centred asset management and responsive repairs services, community driven regeneration and estate services, and high quality developments in the right communities ensuring that relationships with our customers are adult-to-adult with high support and high challenge.

This can be achieved through a variety of methods such as analysis of customer complaints, listening to feedback that we receive to understand where things have gone wrong and ensuring that lessons are learned. We will utilise the Customer Excellence Project Board to ensure that learning is shared across the Group.

We are committed to:

- **Agreed Service Standards across the Group –** We will work with our customers and colleagues to agree service standards so that no matter where the contact is across the Group the approach will be consistent and reliable with services that are accessible and easy to use. Where we fall short of these standards we will be open and transparent as to why and apologise and continually seek to improve.
- **Elevating the customer voice to improve and shape services –** Through the Customer Excellence Project Board we will use the feedback we receive from our customers through our surveys and complaints to seek opportunities where we can improve our services and we will communicate this to our customers.
- **Celebrating the heartwarming moments –** Trusted relationships are built during positive times and we will take every opportunity to celebrate the everyday heartwarming moments through our work with customers and communities to inspire and build trust.

What success looks like:

- Increased Customer Satisfaction
- Increase in compliments
- Reduction of repeated complaints
- Increased number of customers engaged in our services
- Reduction in property non access cases

02: Delivering Inclusive Services

"We will work with our customers, communities and partners to create great inclusive services and continue our approach of a shared endeavour."

Our customers are the experts of their communities and through creating opportunities to develop positive relationships with our customers we can look at the wider issues impacting them and our communities to work with causes not symptoms.

We will ensure that the customer voice is heard throughout all service areas of Valleys to Coast to influence and inform decisions and can elevate the community voice through co-production of services.

This will be delivered by ensuring that our Housing, Customers and Communities colleagues are truly embedded within their communities and continue to work restoratively.

Through positive interactions we will create resilient communities with a strong sense of belonging.

We will provide customers opportunities to become more involved in service delivery in areas such as but not exclusive to recruitment, procurement, development of service standards, and scrutiny of policies and procedures in ways that work for them.

Through our Customer and Community Voice Commitment and I'm In campaign we will offer a variety of methods in which our customers can meaningfully and positively contribute to the future success of the Group which will include creating community ambassadors, focus groups, and community action groups.

We will utilise knowledge of services offered by our partners within our communities to ensure that we are not acting alone and are inclusive in the services that we offer and we will seek to be innovative and develop services in house where there are gaps and there is a need.

We are committed to:

- **Increasing opportunities for customers to be involved –** We will develop our Customer and Community Voice Commitment and I'm In campaign with our customers to ensure that those that wish to be involved in service delivery and service improvement of the Group have every available opportunity according to their interests.
- **Strengthening our partnerships within the community –** By ensuring that our Housing, Customers and Communities colleagues are embedded within the community we will understand what partnerships are available within the community and become a partner of choice to ensure collaboration with partners to provide a greater service offering. We must not forget our internal partnerships across the Group and through our project boards we will co-ordinate our internal services to ensure that we have strong and collaborative internal and external partnerships.
- **Embracing new ideas –** If our customers or our colleagues identify areas where changes can be made to make our services more inclusive, whether at a very local level or Group wide, we will always welcome and encourage these and will adopt an attitude of what's strong and not what's wrong. We understand that meaningful changes can only be made through trying new ideas and where we fail we fail fast and learn to improve. We will create a safe culture for innovation to flourish.

What success looks like:

- More engaged customers
- Greater collaboration with partners
- Increased community initiatives

03: Developing Bespoke Services

"We understand that our customers are diverse individuals who create homes and lives within our communities."

We need to develop our understanding of what our communities need and develop and grow partnerships to deliver these services. Continuing with our EDI roadmap we will ensure that there is a sense of fairness and inclusion for our customers and will celebrate diversity and challenge stigma.

Currently we are able to bespoke our services around individual needs as they present themselves to us, however we need to develop our identification of unconscious bias, automating mass contact for specific needs and normalising conversations around diversity within the Group.

Through effective use of our data we will be able to identify those customers who do not contact us either through not reporting a repair or engaging with any services. We will seek to investigate these silences and understand why these customers do not make contact and whether or not this is due to a lack of trust, a feeling of exclusion or that they feel that we cannot meet their needs.

We will strengthen our approach to safeguarding across the Group to ensure that our customers remain safe and our support is bespoke to their needs. We will demonstrate our commitment to safeguarding through our partnership working and through accreditation where necessary.

We will use our data intelligently to understand the differences across our communities and will seek our customers' views on how we can bespoke our services. Through ensuring frequent EDI data collection across the Group we can adapt more quickly in areas where it is required. Using our customer data will help us to identify needs, set priorities and identify hidden biases.

Understanding when our customers need services delivered will help to explore where we may need to alter our service provision, especially in relation to our repairs and maintenance and our statutory compliance checks.

We are committed to:

- **Ensuring that digital exclusion is not a barrier –** We understand that digital exclusion can be an issue for many customers and therefore we will seek innovative solutions to ensure that no one is left behind and that there are opportunities to ensure that those that wish to be digitally included are supported.
- **Developing Community Action Plans –** As our communities are diverse we understand that there will be different needs within them. Our Community Housing Partners along with other colleagues, customers and partners will develop and lead on Community Action Plans to deliver what their communities need and want. We will devolve budgets to operational colleagues to enable this.
- **Normalise conversations around diversity –** To remove stigma we must normalise our conversations around diversity and ensure that our customers with protected characteristics feel confident that they will be treated fairly and with kindness and respect when they interact with any colleague of the Valleys to Coast Group.

What success looks like:

- Continued evidenced progress of our EDI roadmap
- Developed Community Action Plans with impact analysis
- Increased engagement from underrepresented groups
- Increased customer satisfaction
- Greater uptake of digital services

04: Proactive Services

"We must ensure that we develop relationships with our customers outside of periods of crisis or need to develop capacity for the future."

The needs of our customers are ever changing and we must ensure that we are creating and delivering services that meet these needs and priorities and are able to quickly adapt when required without compromising on delivering an excellent service.

Through actively listening to our customers we can identify where changes may be required and will use our Regeneration Project Board and Customer Excellence Project Board as a mechanism for this change.

To ensure that we are working proactively we must ensure that our services are easily accessible and that we develop a "no wrong door approach" so that all colleagues are equipped and confident to build relationships with our customers, irrespective of their role.

Through demonstrating our commitment to becoming a trusted partner we will actively seek opportunities to become the partner of choice for developing new services, particularly in relation to health and housing alliances, increasing the provision of housing related support for our customers and identifying where we can support our local authority partners in the provision of additional accommodation which focuses on the right home, in the right place with the right support.

The Group will also actively seek opportunities where we can be proactive in our approach to support our customers into education and volunteering opportunities and pathways to success in employment.

Communication with our customers is key throughout the strategy, however we will be proactive in our approach, especially when communicating our planned programme of works and our regeneration plans along with celebrating heartwarming moments.

We are committed to:

- **Adopting a no wrong door approach –** Investing in our colleagues to ensure we can deliver an excellent service to our customers but to also ensure that our colleagues feel confident and supported.
- **Proactive communication across the Group –** We will proactively publicise our plans across the group, particularly in areas such as planned programmes of work, regeneration works and our development programmes. Where plans need to be changed we will be open, honest and respectful.
- **Actively listening to our customers –** Through our Customer Experience Project Board we will ensure that we do not wait for moments of crisis to listen to our customers and adapt our services when required.

What success looks like:

- Reduction in disrepair cases
- Increased colleague satisfaction
- Increased customer satisfaction
- Increased partnership opportunities

05: Community Led Services

"To successfully regenerate our communities we must work with all community members and hear their voice."

As the largest social landlord within Bridgend we play a vital role in placemaking and ensuring that we not only develop resilient communities but through our approach we are supporting our customers to contribute to the environmental sustainability of our communities.

Through embedding our colleagues within their communities our housing colleagues will take the lead in developing Community Action Plans which will feed into both the Regeneration Project Board and the Customer Experience Project Board to make meaningful changes within our communities.

By listening to all voices within our community we will build upon our placemaking initiatives seeking further opportunities to secure grant funding to support our community led projects ensuring that we are committed to contributing to the foundational economy.

Adopting a strengths based approach we will focus on how we can positively contribute to our communities focusing on utilising the strengths of our customers, our partners and our colleagues. We recognise that our communities include those that are not direct customers of the Group but we will ensure that all voices are heard within our communities to co-produce our services.

We will ensure that we collaborate with like-minded partners who can add value to our communities to ensure that our customers feel safe, happy and connected to their communities and that we are regarded as a valued partner by our customers to help deliver and drive positive and meaningful change.

Where difficult decisions have to be made regarding our homes and communities we will be transparent, respectful and kind to our customers and communities and will be front and centre at delivering those messages.

We are committed to:

- **Adopting a strengths-based approach with our communities –** Focusing on the strengths of our communities and working with them during positive times to build trust and foster a sense of belonging. Helping our communities connect with each other, share experiences and feedback to valleys to Coast.
- **Collaborating with the right partners for our communities –** Through working with our customers we will identify who we need to collaborate with in the wider community to drive forward our services. As we move into new different areas we will seek opportunities to create new partnerships.
- **Tackling difficult conversations with kindness –** We want to be transparent, fair and socially responsible in all our conversations with our customers and we will not shy away from having difficult conversations with our customers and communities when changes need to be made. We will treat our communities with kindness and respect and will ensure that we actively listen to their opinions and include them where possible in our decision making processes.

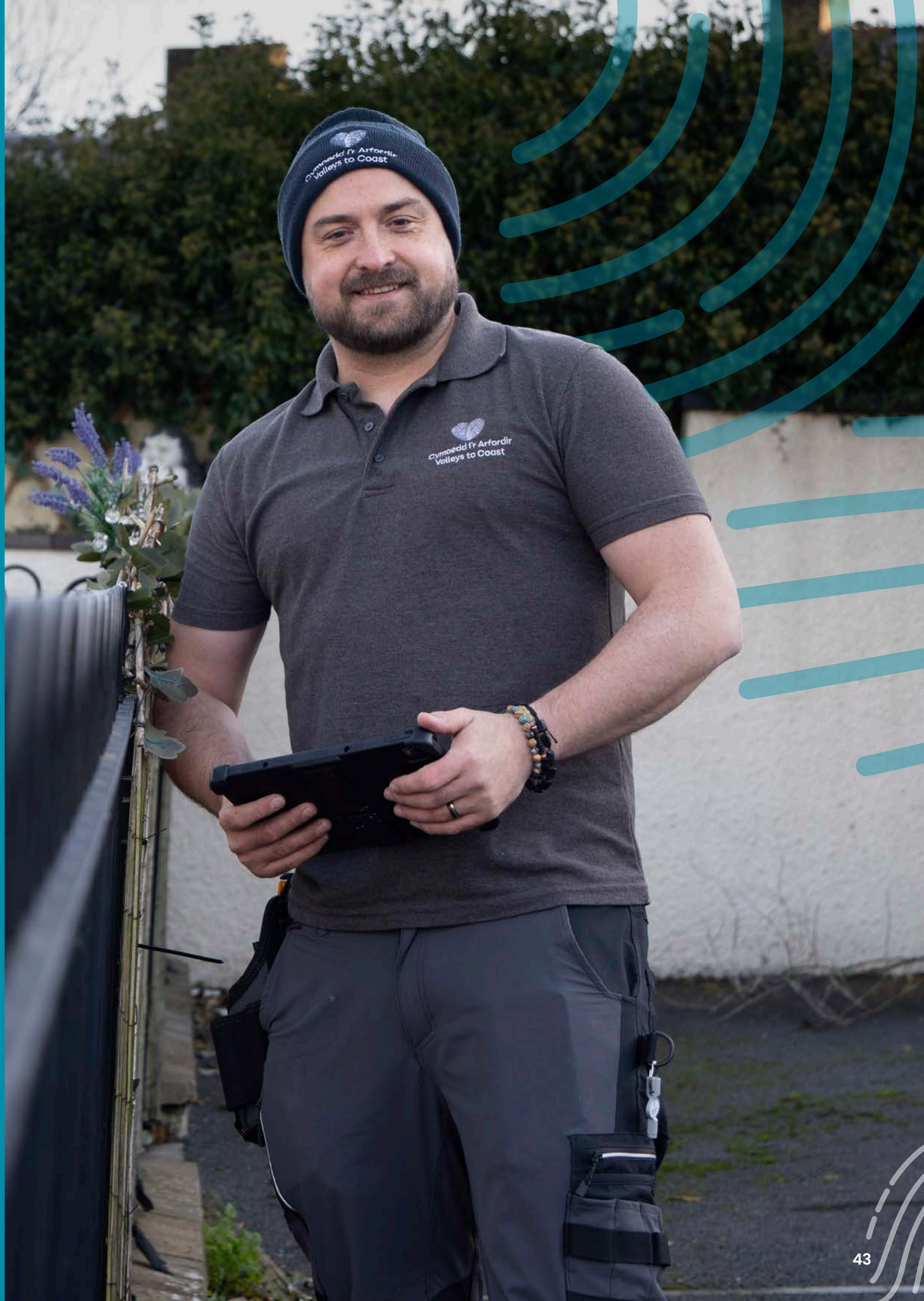
What success looks like:

- Increased customer satisfaction (specifically neighbourhood as a place to live)
- Greater collaboration with partners

Strategy

Digital & Technology

Powering people.
Enhancing services.
Smart solutions.



Digital & Technology Strategy 2026-2031

Context

The core purpose of the Digital & Technology Strategy is to enable our colleagues to do their jobs and offer them opportunities to add even greater value, and to improve our customers' lives through the application of technology and the exploitation of data.

"Technology should seamlessly enable without being felt, and data must be clean, accurate and secure."

Together this will allow Valleys to Coast leadership and colleagues to make fast, accurate, informed decisions and leverage those decisions without technological impedance, and with technological acceleration.

We have an obligation to become ever more proactive, leveraging technology and data to intervene as early as possible in deteriorating situations, and where possible, avoid deterioration. In particular, technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) present numerous opportunities around event prediction and customer environment visibility.

Increasing our depth of expertise, and thus success in leveraging both technology and data, must be supported by skills advancement and strategic hires, bringing in missing knowledge whilst investing in team development and developing group-wide understanding of the art of the possible.

The exponential growth in capability of Artificial Intelligence represents both opportunities and threats. Within the next few years, effective use of AI is likely to be 'table stakes', without which an organisation cannot hope to compete, and risks being left behind as the wider industry surges ahead. Furthermore, AI-enabled cyber attacks are growing rapidly in sophistication, and the lack of an equivalent AI-based defence will leave Valleys to Coast almost completely vulnerable.

Even more dramatically it is becoming increasingly likely that AI will, within the next five to seven years (by ~2032), fundamentally disrupt economies and societies with unpredictable outcomes. This is set against a backdrop of increasingly unstable geopolitics with unpredictable actors wielding considerable influence over the governance, direction and use of AI. Our ability to plan pragmatically for such extremes of outcome is therefore limited and thus a focus on agility and fleetness-of-foot at both an organisational and technical level are key.

On a more positive note and in the short-to-medium term (<3 years) AI represents an opportunity to understand, exploit and leverage our data ever more quickly and effectively, delivering leaps in capability to dramatically improve the lives of our customers and colleagues.

All these points considered, AI will become a pivotal cornerstone of Valleys to Coast's technology estate, and clean, accurate data must underpin that. However the potential for positive value is mirrored by the potential for damage, so establishing AI ethics/use-case/tool choice governance will be key.

In respect of our people, the skills that Valleys to Coast will need over the coming five years are already in high demand, particularly for Cloud, AI and Automation, and whilst availability of specific capabilities waxes and wanes, the rising national tide of digital and data maturity will likely mean that demand continues to outstrip supply across many of these roles.

Valleys to Coast faces challenges in competing for high-demand roles through our geographical location and our ability to compete on salaries, particularly in comparison to the Private Sector, which may drive artificial salary inflation. However, we also face opportunities with, for example, the reduced cost of living west of Cardiff, the attractiveness of our positive organisational culture and social value-add, and our more digitally-focused strategy in comparison to local peer organisations. We must therefore concentrate on a hybrid approach merging the appropriate and rapid upskilling of internal staff, leveraging schemes such as graduate programmes, schemes aimed at drawing from non-typical pools (women in tech, return-to-work etc), and buying in external skills, whether through partnering or recruiting.

With the ongoing exponential growth in AI capabilities, it is likely that many technical skills previously only available through years of study and practice will become more widely available to the workforce, driving a shift towards generic AI engagement skills over specific learned technology skills (for example, it is considered realistic to assume that within 3-5 years, AI will be able to write software code more efficiently and with fewer bugs than the best software developers on the planet, and thus familiarity with leveraging AI will become a preferred capability over software development).

Finally, it is important to recognise that not all of our customers are digitally familiar or capable and thus we must tailor our ambitions to support them, retaining non-digital pathways for customers that nevertheless result in the same outcomes via the same decisions.

Customer expectations of their digital interactions with value providers are increasingly set by services such as Amazon, DHL and Netflix: digitally native, mobile-friendly, intuitive and increasingly elegant, but with accurate, up to date customer data, present whenever the customer looks for it. This is the minimum standard to which Valleys to Coast must aspire in an industry in which functional but utilitarian and non-intuitive applications are the norm.

Our ambition

Our vision is to deliver technology solutions that enhance customers' lives and colleague experience, built upon robust, secure, accurate foundations, evolving and innovating rapidly to continuously enhance value. Valleys to Coast is in its growth phase and thus this innovation alongside investment in data and technology are crucial to delivering its ambitions. We must be bold and ambitious.

The true purpose of all technology is to unlock human capabilities and elevate the human experience and human safety. Consequently, our technology and data must be purposefully aligned with these goals, ensuring they are catalysts, not impediments. The golden thread, therefore, is that everything we do in respect of data and technology is aimed at removing impediment, unlocking capabilities and enhancing human experience and safety, and all actions serve those goals.

Digital & Technology Strategy 2026-2031

Our approach

To most successfully deliver our services, Valleys to Coast will engage and interact with customers in ways that are most familiar to them and take them the least amount of time and effort.

Whilst purely digital interactions are not suitable for all our customers (or indeed, all interactions) it will still be necessary to leverage our data and our understanding of our customers and their environments to build intuitive, elegant and robust digital services, based on the needs of those customers, tailored for our scale and budget, while preserving parallel, non-digital journeys for those customers unfamiliar, uncomfortable or unable to use technology.

We must also do so in a way that retains the greatest level of control over our own digital future, and the greatest degree of interoperability and avoidance of vendor lock-in for core functionality to facilitate a digital future that can be rapidly, effectively and efficiently adjusted to suit different technologies, systems and vendors without disruption.

The ability to do that requires solid, robust foundations, modularity, and a deep understanding of our customers and their lived environments.

Our priorities

There are cross cutting themes throughout the strategy, however for the sake of clarity our ambitions for digital, data and technology will be achieved through a focus on the following eight priorities, adopted across all areas of the Valleys to Coast Group to ensure a consistent experience for our customers, communities and stakeholders:

1. Foundations first
2. Data driven
3. Customer centricity
4. Actively automate
5. Secure by design
6. Accelerate and innovate
7. Human in the loop AI
8. Digital by default

Specific outcomes and deliverables will adapt as we grow.

01: Foundations First

"We build and regularly return to reinforce solid foundations, recognising that without them we cannot deliver true value to our customers."

That means we build and procure technology solutions that match industry best practice (cloud-first, open-source or de-facto standard, modular and API enabled), are customised to the smallest degree possible and are as simple as possible to achieve the desired requirements. It also means we test regularly and constantly, prioritising automation of tests for speed, coverage and repeatability and we ensure maintenance activities and technical debt remediation are suitably prioritised to ensure our technology estate runs smoothly and efficiently.

We build high performing teams through empathy, trust, empowerment and accountability, pulling in the same direction with mutual support and recognition, in an environment of psychological safety where mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn.

What success looks like:

- Increased stability – greater system uptime (Service Availability), fewer incidents raised per system
- Customer satisfaction surveys report improved satisfaction
- Staff satisfaction surveys report improved satisfaction
- Fewer software development defects raised
- Increased software development velocity
- Speed and subjective ease of recovery from disaster improved

We are committed to:

- **Standardising and simplifying our technology stack –** We will identify and rationalise our existing systems, ensuring we have a lean, efficient technology environment. We will prioritise cloud-based, SaaS solutions where possible, reducing the complexity and overhead of our infrastructure, with off-the-shelf solutions customised as little as possible, or where we build our own, keeping them simple, industry-standard and robust.
- **Investing in proactive maintenance and technical debt remediation –** We will establish a regular schedule for addressing technical debt, ensuring our systems are stable and performant. We will proactively monitor our infrastructure and applications, addressing potential issues before hey become critical problems, and regularly reviewing our systems to ensure they remain fit for purpose and aligned with best practices.
- **Regularly testing and practicing our disaster recovery processes and technologies –** We establish a clear Recovery Time Objective and Recovery Point Objective for each system over which we have disaster recovery control based on business requirements and hold minimum six-monthly disaster recovery exercises alongside quarterly managed backup and restore tests.
- **Developing and implementing clear, effective processes and governance** – We will review and document our processes, ensuring they are efficient and support our goals. We will establish governance where needed, but actively seek to remove it when it becomes an obstacle. We will build a culture of continuous improvement, where we regularly revisit and refine our processes based on feedback and changing needs.

02: Data Driven

"We build feedback loops into everything we do so we can course-correct early."

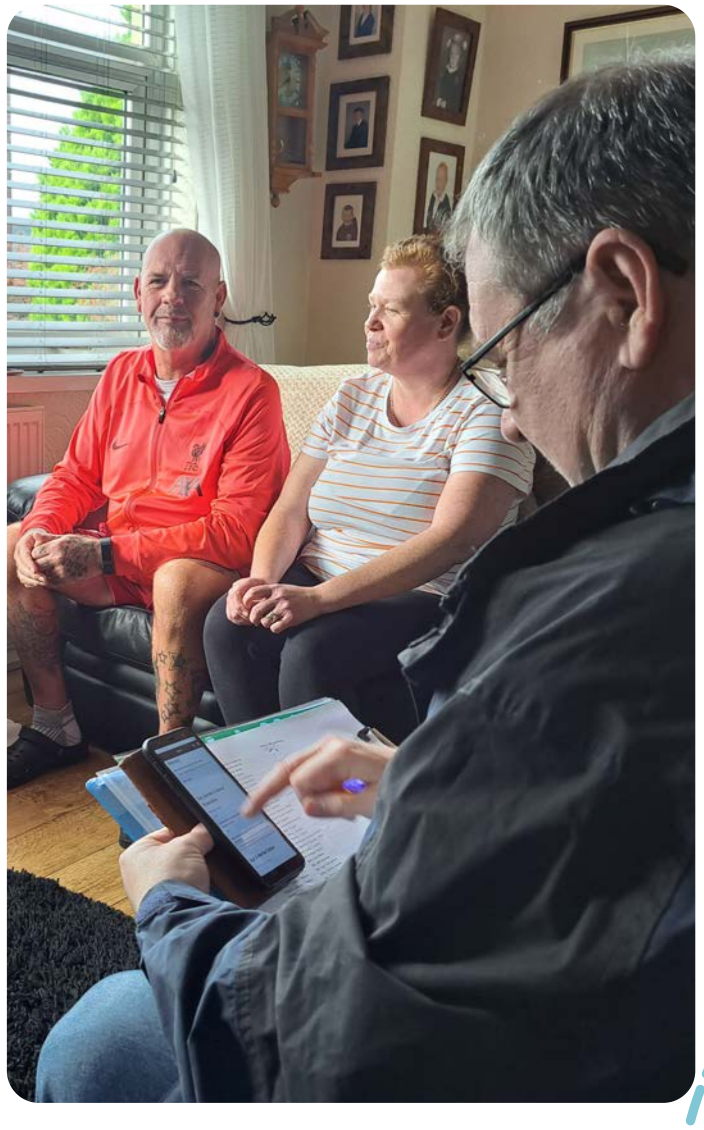
We use data to inform our decisions, measuring our success against pre-determined criteria and returning over time to build trends. We will ensure that our data is accurate, clean, secure and represented where possible by a single source, allowing us to leverage that data to make accurate, informed decisions across the organisation and meet our legal and moral obligations to protect the data of our customers.

We are committed to:

- **Establishing a robust data governance framework –** We will implement clear data ownership, quality control processes, and security measures to ensure our data is reliable, accurate, and protected. This will include defining data standards as well as conducting regular audits and assessments of our data management practices.
- **Improving data accessibility and usability –** We will invest in tools and technologies that make our data easier to access, understand, use and update. This means providing training, creating data dictionaries and documentation, and building intuitive dashboards and reports that provide actionable insights. We will also actively integrate our data sources, reducing data silos and pan-organisational views of our operations and customers.
- **Fostering a data-driven culture –** We will empower our colleagues to use data in their day-to-day work, providing them with the tools, training, and support they need to make data-informed decisions. We will also celebrate successes and share best practices to encourage a culture of continuous learning and improvement around data.

What success looks like:

- Trend of improving Data Maturity vs baseline using industry-standard metrics
- Trend of improving Data Accuracy – taking regular random data samples and measuring their frequency of deviation from the truth.
- Trend of improving Data Cleanliness – taking regular random data samples from multiple sources and measuring their degree of mismatch.
- Improving ratio of single-sourced duplicate data (data held in multiple places but updated from one source) vs true duplicates.
- Increased frequency of data usage in decision-making.



03: Customer Centricity

"We keep our customers at the heart of everything we do"

All effort is aimed at creating value for our customers and delivering our Safe and Happy strategy. Digital interactions are built alongside our customers, ensuring their needs are met by what we deliver and seeking regular feedback to course-correct.

What success looks like:

- Customers involved in designing, testing and refining our customer-facing solutions
- Customer satisfaction surveys (if possible built into the platforms being measured) demonstrating increasing satisfaction
- Increased number of customer suggestions implemented and reported back to customers in "You said, we did".

We are committed to:

- **Actively involving customers in the design and testing of our digital solutions –** We will establish mechanisms for customer feedback, user testing, and co-creation throughout the development lifecycle of our digital platforms. This may include creating user groups, conducting surveys, and running pilot programs to gather insights and ensure that our solutions truly meet customer needs.
- **Making our digital services accessible and user-friendly for all customer demographics –** We will adhere to accessibility standards and best practices to ensure that our digital platforms are usable by all customers, regardless of their technical skills or abilities. We will work with partner organisations to help lift the digital literacy of our customers who need help navigating our digital services whilst ensuring that parallel, non-digital pathways remain available.
- **Regularly seeking, analysing, and acting on customer feedback to improve our services –** We will create feedback loops within our digital platforms and conduct regular surveys and interviews to understand customer satisfaction levels. We will analyse this feedback and use it to inform our decisions about service improvements, new features, and overall customer experience. We will also communicate changes and improvements back to our customers, demonstrating that we value their input and are actively working to address their concerns.

04: Actively Automate

"We seek to remove humans from robot-like processes, getting machines to talk to machines so information moves fast and accurately, leaving humans to add original thought and social value."

Technology continuously moves from being an unwieldy tool towards being an invisible interface between humans and information.

We lean into technologies such as Robotic Process Automation, Intelligent Automation, Artificial Intelligence and low and no-code development platforms. We aim to allow colleagues and customers to access information and achieve objectives in the format and medium that suits them best using natural language and human-like interactions.

We are committed to:

- **Identifying and automating repetitive, manual processes where possible –** We will engage with departments across the business to identify workflows that are time-consuming and prone to error, prioritise them by time saved vs effort to automate and implement automation solutions to streamline these processes, freeing up colleague time for more complex and value-added activities.
- **Striving for technology as an invisible interface, where automation enables seamless access to information and services –** We will focus on building and implementing automation solutions that reduce user friction and make technology feel less like a tool and more like seamless access to information without technological impedance.

What success looks like:

- Increased number of automated processes.
- Improving trend of time saved through automation.
- Positive feedback on automated systems from colleagues and customers.
- Cost savings achieved through automation.
- Increasing count of objectives that can be delivered through natural language requests of technology.
- Increasing percentage of time spent on tasks requiring human judgement and interaction versus robot-like administrative activities.

05: Secure by Design

"Security is at the core of all our technology."

Everything new is built with security in mind, and we push security continually to the left (earlier) in our delivery lifecycle rather than retrofitting later. We embed security into our procedures and behaviours, delivering training and a rising tide of security consciousness in our colleagues and customers.

What success looks like:

- Increasing cyber maturity using industry-standard metrics.
- Decreasing trend in number of security incidents (note: as visibility increases we expect to see an early uptick in incidents, followed by a gradual decrease).
- Improving performance in resolving security vulnerabilities. Shorter resolution times represent an improvement.
- Security audits and penetration tests demonstrate decreasing numbers of defects (and/or decreasing overall severity of defects).

We are committed to:

- **Implementing security by default in all our technology products –** We will ensure security is an integral part of the planning, design, and implementation of every new system and technology. This means thoroughly assessing new products (including those we build) for security, implementing secure coding practices, and building robust authentication, access controls and encryption from the outset rather than adding them as an afterthought.
- **Providing ongoing security training and awareness programs for all colleagues and customers –** We will equip our colleagues and customers with the knowledge and skills they need to protect themselves and our organisation from security threats. This includes regular training sessions, phishing simulations, and clear guidelines on how to identify and report suspicious activity, aiming to develop a habitual awareness of security.
- **Continuously monitoring, testing, and improving our security posture –** We will proactively scan for vulnerabilities, perform regular penetration tests, and conduct security audits to ensure our systems remain secure against emerging threats. We will also stay up-to-date with the latest security trends and best practices, adapting our security approaches accordingly.

06: Accelerate & Innovate

"We search for and seize opportunities to accelerate by removing blockers, reducing friction and increasing flow."

If necessary we slow down to speed up – we always make time to stop and replace square wheels with round ones. We actively experiment, rapidly discarding what doesn't work and adopting what does.

We swarm problems with a diversity of capabilities to resolve them faster and find innovative solutions, iterating rapidly with an agile mindset. We bring partners in where practical to add focused expertise to leap forward, adopting novel technologies with a risk-appropriate mindset where they accelerate us towards our strategic goals.

What success looks like:

- Reduced cycle time (period from ideation to delivery) and improved cycle efficiency (time spent doing nothing vs time spent productively).
- Cross-functional teams formed to solve problems.
- Positive feedback from team members and partners on the effectiveness of collaboration and problem solving.
- Positive feedback from customers on the effectiveness of new customer-facing capabilities.

We are committed to:

- **Establishing dedicated experimentation periods –** We will allocate specific time and resources for teams to test new ideas, technologies, and processes. This will involve setting clear objectives, building prototypes or proofs of concept, and gathering data to assess the success of each experiment. We will create a safe space for failure, recognizing that not all experiments will succeed, but even failures provide learning opportunities.
- **Fostering a culture of collaboration to deliver innovative solutions –** We will actively encourage collaboration between different teams and departments, bringing together diverse perspectives and skills to tackle complex problems. This includes creating opportunities for colleagues to work on projects outside of their usual roles, hosting innovation workshops, and establishing online groups for sharing ideas and best practices.
- **Actively exploring the supplier and peer landscape for innovative opportunities –** We will actively scour the IT and Housing industries for developments that we can leverage to leap forward. This includes attending industry events, exploring emerging technologies, and evaluating potential partners based on their ability to support our strategic goals and add value to our services.

07: Human in the Loop AI

"We explore and leverage Artificial Intelligence to facilitate and enhance interactions between humans and machines and to expedite our decision-making and delivery processes."

AI tools are vetted for security, compliance, commercial integrity (our data is never available outside of our walled garden, including prompt history, responses and data sources), transparency and bias.

We will create an AI ethics/safety/use case/adoption governance function to regularly scrutinise AI developments for emergent risks and assess the continued safe and ethical use and we educate colleagues to understand both the risks and any opportunities presented by such tools.

Most importantly, all decisions that may impact our customers, their environments, our colleagues and the business must be reserved for humans until AI tools achieve proven super-human capabilities in all relevant regard with human-equivalent levels of transparency. Until then (and beyond if we choose) we will never outsource human-affecting decisions to machines, and any advice or support we receive from AI tools will remain just that.

We are committed to:

- **Rigorous vetting and approval of all AI tools before deployment –** We will implement a thorough evaluation process for all AI technologies, ensuring they meet our standards for security, data privacy, ethical considerations, and bias mitigation. This includes ongoing monitoring to address any emerging risks.
- **Establishing governance that prioritises human oversight –** We will develop clear guidelines and policies for the ethical use of AI, ensuring human decisions on AI-generated outputs that could impact customers, colleagues, or the organisation.
- **Providing comprehensive training to colleagues on using AI tools responsibly and effectively –** We will offer training programs that cover the capabilities and limitations of AI, the risks associated with AI bias, and the importance of maintaining human judgment in decision-making. This training will enable colleagues to leverage AI as a tool to enhance their work, while also understanding their responsibilities around ethical and appropriate use.

What success looks like:

- Colleagues report improved understanding of and comfort with AI tools.
- Increased usage of AI tools across the Group (frequency of use in an average day).
- Improving trend of time saved using AI tools.

08: Digital by Default

"Our goal is to ensure that, where it is sensible and appropriate to do so, all interactions between customers and the organisation, and colleagues and internal systems, are available digitally by default."

We continue to offer offline interactions for when digital access is not possible, appropriate or relevant, and retain offline interactions to parallel digital ones to achieve the same outcomes through non-digital routes.

We are committed to:

- **Developing and deploying intuitive, user-friendly digital platforms for all customer interactions –** We will prioritise the creation of digital interfaces that are easy to navigate, accessible to a wide range of users, and designed with the user experience in mind. We will leverage user research and feedback to continuously refine our digital offerings, ensuring they meet the needs of all our stakeholders.
- **Providing support and resources to customers and colleagues in transitioning to digital-first interactions –** We will offer training, tutorials, and help documentation to guide customers and colleagues through our digital platforms. We will also ensure that support channels are readily available for those who need assistance, and that alternative, non-digital options remain available for those unable to use or access our digital systems.
- **Ensuring parity of service between digital and non-digital interaction pathways –** We will design both our digital and non-digital interactions to achieve the same outcomes following the same decision trees. This means ensuring that all information and services available through digital channels are also accessible via alternative means, and vice versa, to provide customers and colleagues with choice and flexibility, so they can do what they need to do, in the way they want to do it.

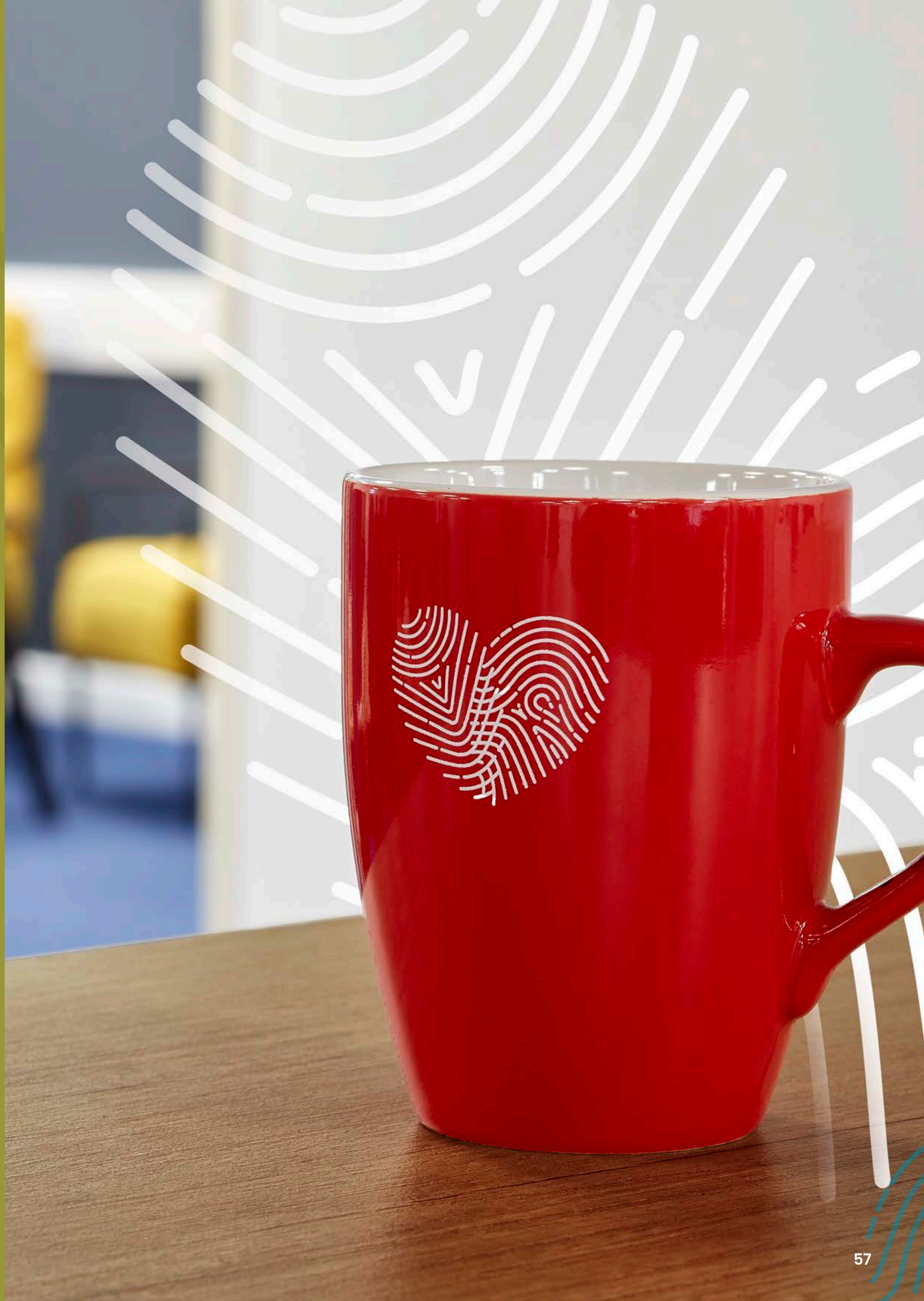
What success looks like:

- Number of natively digital routes available to customers to achieve outcomes.
- 90% of non-digital routes for customers to achieve outcomes have a digital twin (where that is pragmatic and achievable).

Strategy

Financial Strength

Driving growth.
Building futures.



Financial Strength Strategy 2026-2031

Context

Historically, Valleys to Coast has faced a challenge in the investment required to its diverse portfolio of around 6,000 homes.

We are a stock transfer organisation, where the quality of homes transferred from the local authority presented a challenge – over a third of our homes are built in terraces reflecting the post-war drive to economically increase numbers of family homes.

It is forecast that some £25million of investment is required to address these legacy issues. The lack of dowry funding relating to the transfer, along with parity of funding streams further increases the pressure in relation to funding the improvements required to our homes.

"We need to ensure that we're investing in the right areas and making the right decisions around our homes to ensure that we make the most of our investment to deliver for our customers and communities."

It is important that we invest in a way that delivers benefits to our customers – providing homes and places where customers are safe, warm and dry, and feel that they belong. We need to invest in such a way that our homes are desirable and to position Valleys to Coast as the landlord of choice.

Our ambition

Our Financial Strength Strategy sets out an ambition and approach to grow our financial capacity so that we can deliver more for our customers and colleagues.

By having increased financial capacity we will be able to invest more in our customer's homes, and develop new homes which will make Valleys to Coast homes the choice for all our customers in Bridgend and beyond.

We will build our financial capacity by creating a growth-led, financially robust, vision that is:

- Growth focussed
- Development led
- Operationally efficient
- Appropriately funded

In order to achieve our ambition of growing our financial capacity we will need to adopt a twin track approach. We will need to focus on both growing our revenues, increasing the income to Valleys to Coast, whilst at the same time ensuring that we are operating efficiently, and ensuring we are more profitable, allowing us to reinvest profit and cash generated into our existing and new homes.

We want to deliver the best possible outcomes for our customers and colleagues, and by placing customers and colleagues at the centre of our decision making, we have set an ambitious target for our growth and development to increase financial returns to re-invest in our communities.

This begins with listening to our customers and investing in priorities that will deliver real change and benefit to our communities.

Our approach

We will ensure that our existing homes are well maintained by having forward-looking plans for our investment in our existing homes; ensuring that our assets are considered for the longer-term whilst looking at opportunities for regeneration, and also where appropriate disinvestment.

We want to be a 'challenger organisation' in the sector which does things differently and is innovative and leads with thought management.

It is imperative that we are open to business and think seriously about collaboration and the opportunities this provides. We will need to think about how we can develop and expand outside of our area and develop a presence in wider areas. Valleys to Coast is ambitious to deliver more services in-house and help build local skills.

Innovation and investment in data and technology will be key to our development as an organisation. We will need to be bold to ensure this supports our growth aspirations.

The Financial Strength Strategy is underpinned by robust governance and performance reporting arrangements. We will:

- Use the voice of the customer to develop places and communities
- Focus on growth and the development of revenues from diversifying our income and thinking differently
- Be a development lead organisation which works in collaboration with others, but looks to lead in its endeavours
- Being commercial and financially efficient – have the core of Value for Money, Social Value and strong Procurement at the heart of all we do.
- Ensure that we have the right sort of funding available to meet our aspirations for both growth, sustainability and decarbonisation

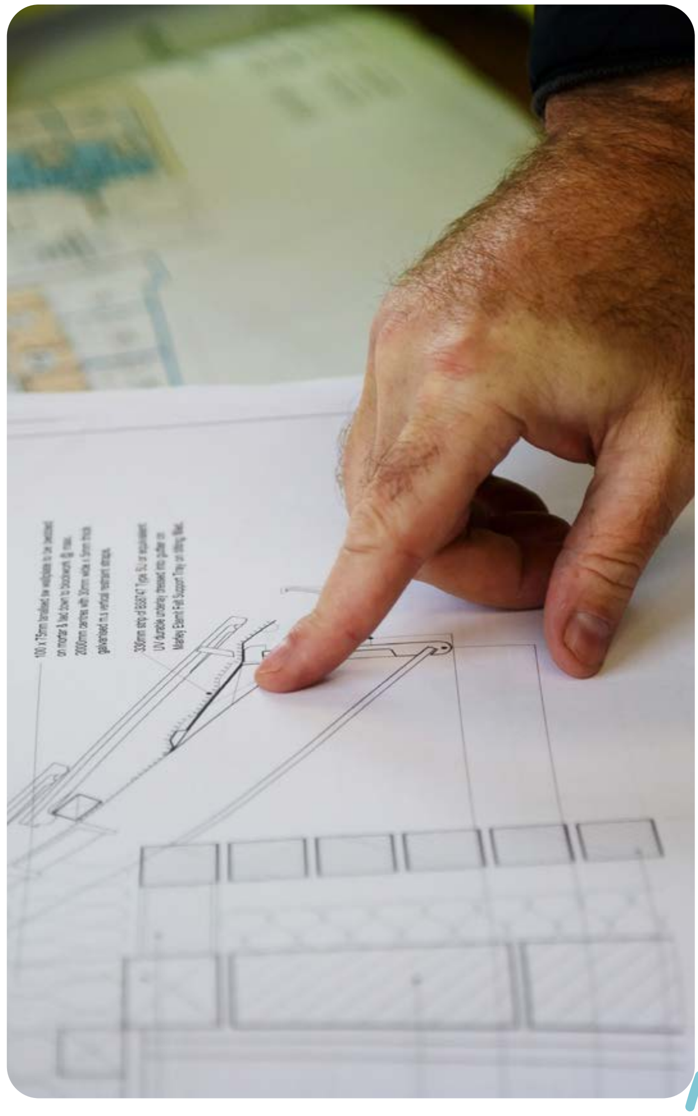
Our priorities

Over the next five years we will deliver our services through four priorities to achieve our growth ambition, adopted across all areas of the Valleys to Coast Group to ensure a consistent experience for our customers, communities and stakeholders.

There are cross cutting themes through the strategy however for the sake of clarity our ambitions for customer excellence will be achieved through a focus on the following four priorities:

- Growing our Revenue
- A Development lead approach
- Financial Efficiency
- Funding

Specific outcomes and deliverables will adapt as we grow.



01: Growing our revenue

"In order to grow we have to increase the number of quality homes that we have for our customers and diversify our income streams."

We are constrained in our capacity to increase our revenue through regulation of rents.

Therefore any ambition to increase our financial capacity has to be undertaken by fiscally responsible growth and development. We will need to increase our ambition over and above the number of homes we currently have in the pipeline.

Where we need to disinvest, we need to ensure that over the lifetime of our strategy, we do not enter a net deficit in our homes.

We will need to look at other opportunities to do this through partnerships, collaborations and joint ventures.

What success looks like:

- Increased total turnover – %'age target inflation adjusted
- Increased revenue streams – number of different streams
- Return on investment for creation of new revenue streams
- Partnership opportunities delivered for positive return
- Shared services customers achieved and revenue target

We are committed to:

- **Diversifying and increasing our revenues –** We will explore opportunities for additional revenue generation, by varying our revenue streams. We will look at where we can increase our returns from investments and look at commercial opportunities where appropriate.

  We will need to break with the traditional and be innovative, addressing external opportunities with an open mind and being open for business.

- **Being commercial –** Where we have commercial properties we will need to ensure that we are taking a truly commercial approach to the value that can be generated from such properties.

  This needs to be implicit within our decision-making for any new developments we enter into, or regeneration. We need to re-enforce that we are commercial with a social heart.

  We will maximise commerciality to cross subsidise foundational economy businesses, to support and grow our communities.

- **Exploring partnerships –** To generate growth we will look at how we can leverage our assets and operations with partners to generate revenue. Our repair and maintenance company, Llanw, has the capability to undertake work for third parties. It may be appropriate for us to work with other RSLs to explore opportunities where we can generate income either from supplying services or looking at collaboration.

  We will look for the right kind of partnerships:

  – With Local Authorities: Working closely with local governments to align housing developments with broader community goals, such as tackling homelessness and regenerating neighbourhoods;

  – With Housing Associations: Working collaboratively to deliver benefit to each party whilst minimising risk and delivering benefits to our communities;

  – Through community engagement: Forging partnerships with community groups to design housing solutions that cater to local needs, improving social cohesion and ensuring developments are embedded in the fabric of the community;

  – Through joint venture opportunities: Seeking collaboration with other entities to explore opportunities where it is appropriate to share risk and reward;

  – Through innovation: Collaborating with parties across the sector and outside of the sector to deliver wider benefit to the communities we serve.

- **Delivering shared services –** We have the capability to grow our revenues by delivering shared services to other entities, or by being one of the beneficial partners in the delivery of shared services corporate entities.

  We have in-house expertise in both legal and payroll (as simple examples), where Valleys to Coast could and can take the lead in the provision of shared services to the sector in Wales.

- **Exploring mergers and acquisitions –** In order to further our growth ambitions it may be appropriate for Valleys to Coast to consider merging with another organisation. We want to remain open to opportunities and take the lead if this is the right direction for our organisation to deliver clear benefits in our growth strategy.

02: A development led approach

"To grow our revenues we will need to take a development lead approach. "

This will take a longer-term approach to activating the pipeline so to achieve this growth we need to look at starting this acceleration now.

We are committed to:

- **Delivering an appropriate return on investment –** We need to enter into all our developments with a benchmark of what we will accept as an appropriate return. We will think creatively to ensure that this delivers the best value for the organisation as well as the community benefits for our customers.

  We need to be prepared to make the tough decision to not proceed if the return is not right, but we will look to balance our portfolio, some strategic opportunities may not deliver what we would consider to be a high enough return, but we will ensure that whole programmes continue to add value to the business.

What success looks like:

- New development opportunities converted
- Monitored pipeline
- Greater NPV of development sites on line
- New partnerships entered into
- Increased unit lets/sales/conversions
- Increased percentage of properties meeting sustainability targets

- **Aligning with our regeneration ambitions –** We will align closely with our Homes & Communities Strategy to ensure that we maximise the benefit of the assets that we currently own and make the right decision to deliver the best quality homes, whilst ensuring we are making the right commercial decisions along the way.

  In doing so we will have customer requirements, value for money and financial return as key considerations. Most of all we will need to be commercial with a social heart.
- **Utilising the appropriate corporate vehicles –** We will incorporate a development subsidiary to enable a cost efficient approach to development as well as providing additional opportunities for us to offer homes to our customers.
- **Building land holdings –** We will identify and acquire land for future housing projects, with a focus on strategically land-banking sites that offer the potential for new homes and ensure we are well-positioned to meet future housing needs.
- **Taking a diversified approach to development –** We will consider all aspects of development in growing our portfolio of customers:
  - New builds: Building new affordable housing to meet increasing demand. These properties will also be developed with sustainability in mind;
  - Renovation and remodelling: Improving existing properties to enhance their value and livability;
  - Acquisition: Purchasing existing properties, especially those in high-need areas, to expand the portfolio;
  - Mixed tenure – pathway to housing, housing for sale: Increasing the desirability for our communities and raising the benefits to our customers from having a greater sense of place and community;
  - Regeneration: Looking at our existing properties and where it is right to regenerate these areas. This could be from investment in our existing homes to demolish and replace.
- **Developing outside of our locality –** If we want to grow and are passionate about making a difference to social housing customers in Wales, we will need to think bigger than our current locality, our heartland of Bridgend.
- **Developing for the future –** Looking at future investment in our developments to understand how by investing up front we can reduce the whole life cost of property management, by investing in technology within our homes and looking at each development from a future sustainability perspective.

  We will consider:
  - Building net-zero carbon homes: Aspiring to build all new developments as net-zero carbon homes, using sustainable construction methods, renewable energy systems, and low-carbon building materials;
  - Sustainable building innovation: Investing in energy-efficient housing solutions, green building materials, and technologies such as solar power, rainwater harvesting, and smart thermostats to reduce the environmental footprint;
  - Smart housing initiatives: Exploring smart home technologies, such as 'Internet of Things' (IoT) sensors, predictive maintenance systems, and energy optimisation platforms that offer improved living experiences and cost savings for residents;
  - Pilot projects: Not being afraid to test and challenge models and taking calculated investment risks to be innovative.
- **Being open For Business –** We want to be known as an organisation that delivers – be identified by partners who are capable of delivering both to our customers and financially. We will offer and consider all aspects of investment provided that it makes both commercial sense and is right for our customers.

03: Financial efficiency

"To grow our financial capacity we will have to improve our financial efficiency."

Simply this means two things – increasing our operating surplus and being more cash generative.

By improving our operating surplus it provides us with the opportunity to both re-invest in our existing homes and have the funds to service additional borrowings required to fund our growth.

The generation of more cash allows us to again invest in additional capital works, whether that be to existing homes or to service the borrowings or our new investments.

What success looks like:

- Growth in operating margin
- Contractor savings
- Having productivity measures in place – i.e how many roofs have been installed this year vs prior and cost per roof
- Price reduction
- Increased social value generation
- Specific targets for VFM met, depending on key sub-contractors
- Improvement in SLA targets for specific contractors

We are committed to:

- **Data Driven Decision making –** We will use data analytics to optimise resource allocation, identify inefficiencies, and predict future trends. Data should drive decisions in property maintenance, customer service, and development planning.
- **Being commercial –** All our decisions should be underpinned that we act like a commercial organisation with a social heart. We need to ensure that we are driving commercial outcomes and measuring how we deliver. We need to set clear targets for delivery which we both measure ourselves and suppliers against.
- **Creating value for money –** The first change we must take is to increase our financial efficiency. This does not mean doing things cheaply but ensuring that we have the correct value for money principles to ensure that we are delivering the best. This means getting our processes correct to ensure that we operate efficiently. We need to ensure that our value for money has a view to deliver social value.
- **Having a clear procurement plan –** We need to have a clear procurement plan to ensure that we are delivering the best value and outcomes from our suppliers and partners. We will look to balance local procurement with the delivery of value for money. Where it makes commercial sense we will look to procure from our local communities and benefiting the circular economy.
- **Developing a long term asset management plan –** By developing a comprehensive asset management plan that ensures the longevity and profitability of housing stock. This includes timely maintenance, refurbishments, and strategic disposals of underperforming assets.

  We will take a longer term view of our asset management to ensure that we are making the right strategic decisions and delivering value for the long term.
- **Robust contractor management –** We need to manage our procurement and contractors in a more effective way to deliver real value. With this we should have a strong core value around how we leverage social value.
- **Process excellence and continuous improvement –** Investing in getting our systems and processes right to deliver efficiency benefits. Ensuring that lean methodology is applied where possible and ensuring that the Valleys to Coast's way of doing business has excellence at its heart.
- **Investing in digitisation, automation and AI –** Investing in solutions to reduce repetitive processes and allowing our colleagues to add more value to our customers – through utilisation of smart technology and AI, automating processes.

  We will also digitally transform where we invest in digitising processes to streamline operations, reduce administrative costs, and improve customer service response times.

04: Funding

"To deliver all the ambition that we have as a business we will require funding."

We need to be attractive to our lenders so we need to ensure that we have a compelling proposition. This means that we have a strong growth story but also consider how we look to deliver an income statement that is attractive. Therefore the components of development lead, revenue growth and financial efficiency are key to demonstrating our positive position to lenders.

We are an asset rich business. We have lots of assets so securing funding does make us an attractive proposition to lenders.

But we need to be proactive in working with the Government to find solutions to our funding challenges. Whether that be through grants, low cost loans or off balance sheet finance, we need to work with the Welsh Government to understand and leverage available funding sources.

We also need to plan ahead to be ready when funding solutions come at short notice.

We are committed to:

- **Innovative solutions –** We need to think about innovative solutions to finance. There may be opportunities to partner with other organisations to share risk and exploit opportunities. The mantra of being open to business has to form part of our funding plans.
- **Being prepared to disinvest –** We will be prepared to divest if it is not benefiting our longer term plans for customers and communities. This will have the double benefit of freeing up investment cash that would be spent on homes and the inflow of cash from sale proceeds to invest in new development. This will need to be done in a carefully planned manner to ensure that we are not eroding our revenue or impacting our communities.
- **Investing in sustainability –** We will need to think about funding investment into sustainability, which is going to require significant investment if we are to meet the requisite targets set out for 2030 in terms of net zero. Valleys to Coast will work across the sector to find the appropriate solutions which will benefit and not place additional burdens on our customers. This is a huge challenge facing the sector and will require a different approach to what the sector is used too.

  We will work with the Welsh Government to understand how we can develop funding capability which allows investment in homes for sustainability that works for both the customer and Valleys to Coast. We will need to think of new financial vehicles, which are off balance sheet. We will need to enter into partnerships within the sector and beyond to ensure that we have capacity to deliver.
- **Careful financial planning –** In order to develop further our investment strategy we will need to reflect the key priorities in a mid-term financial plan, outlining the impact and requirements of the next five year period. We will need to model the revenue, margin, capital and borrowing requirements, not only the investment strategy, but including all the key strategies.

What success looks like:

- Better covenant ratios – Gearing, Golden rules, EBITDA Interest cover
- Minimising our total cost of finance
- Maximised use of low cost finance (e.g. Grants) vs interest bearing debt (bank finance)
- Improved Interest cover
- New (appropriate) sources of finance in place
- Increased percentage of homes funded for retrofit.

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Cymoedd i'r Arfordir
Valleys to Coast