



# Role Description for a Trustee of Commonweal Housing

Version Dated September 2023

## About Commonweal

Commonweal Housing is a registered charity (Reg. No:1113331) and a company limited by guarantee registered with Companies House (Reg. No: 5319765). Commonweal is an independent charity working to investigate, pilot and champion housing based solutions to social injustice. Using our charitable resources, we provide experts and partner organisations with the opportunity to trial and test new approaches designed to enhance housing equality and justice. Independently evaluating each of our projects we share our experiences, using this learning to inspire new thinking. Through the replication of what works and the lessons from what doesn't, we influence changes in policy and practice.

Commonweal benefits from ongoing financial support from our principle benefactor and original founders, Grove End Housing Limited, a not for profit property company. This ongoing revenue support along with the rental income from our pilot projects and property portfolio means Commonweal does not rely on any costly fundraising campaigns, third party donations or grant applications having a significant degree of revenue certainty.

Commonweal supports projects in a range of ways – primarily by the housing for pilot projects and has so far allocated around £10million in capital funding. In addition, we provide revenue funding for early stage feasibility studies and research to explore the viability of new ideas and prospective solutions to different forms of social injustice. Commonweal will then use more of its charitable revenue funding to commission independent evaluation to capture the learning from initiatives – those we support directly and occasionally those delivered entirely by others. Finally, Commonweal will use its voice to highlight issues of concern ensuring lessons learnt, messages and solutions reach those that need to hear them.

Activity supported to date has included a project that enables women leaving prison to be reunited with their families; support for young adult carers; for women fleeing domestic violence and sexual exploitation or coercion; those trapped in the asylum and immigration system with no recourse to public funds and new models of providing supportive shared housing for different client groups.

More information about Commonweal , who we are and what we do can be found on our website: [Front page - Commonweal Housing](#) and specifically our latest [Annual Impact Review](#)

## Current Board Vacancy

The Board are looking to recruit one or up to two new Trustees who will further enhance the Charity. The Board welcomes applications from all sections of society but at the same time is aware of the diversity on the Board and especially the current gender balance and wishes to increase the number of women on the Board.

## Nature of the Appointment

Members of the Board are appointed as Trustees of the Charity and recorded as such with the Charity Commission and are also appointed as Directors of the Company and registered with Companies House. Anyone being appointed to the Board must be eligible for appointment both as a charity Trustee and company Director. Members of the Board are unremunerated but can receive out of pocket expenses.

## Time Commitment

There will be a commitment of attending 4 regular 2½ -hour Board meetings a year (currently held during the day on a Wednesday morning) plus a further ½ day Strategic Away Day session during the autumn. In addition, Trustees may be asked to sit on one of the two committees of the Board (Remuneration & Governance Committee or HR Committee which meet at least twice a year). Finally, Trustees are encouraged to engage as required with ad hoc working groups established by the Board and Trustees should be willing to engage in conversations with the CEO and other staff as appropriate outside of Board meetings.

Commonweal has a small but effective staff team based in the City near Liverpool Street station EC2M who deliver the day to day operations enabling Trustees to focus on the key areas of strategy and governance oversight.

### **Overall Job purpose**

To further the organisation, keeping within its charitable objectives and specifically to work with other Trustees, the Chief Executive and the staff to set, monitor and deliver the vision and objectives of the organisation.

### **Main tasks**

- To take part in formulating and regularly reviewing the strategic aims of the organisation.
- To oversee the delivery of strategic and business plans by the Chief Executive and staff team
- With other trustees to ensure that the policy and practices of the organisation are in keeping with its aims.
- With other trustees to ensure that the organisation functions within the legal and financial requirements of a charitable organisation and strives at all times to achieve best practice.

### **Main duties**

#### **1. Formulating strategic aims**

- Consider the organisation as a whole and its beneficiaries.
- Reflect the organisation's vision and principles, strategy and major policies at all times.
- Contribute specific skills, interests and contacts and support the organisation in fundraising activities.
- Meet on a one to one basis or in smaller groups with the Chief Executive on occasions outside of regular Board meeting

#### **2. Ensuring policies and practices are in keeping with aims**

- Follow the latest Charity Governance Code at all times, particularly when exercising the functions of the trustees.
- Attend meetings of the trustees.
- Reflect the trustees' policies on all its committees, sub-committees or groups.

#### **3. Ensuring best practice**

- Be an active member of the trustee body in exercising its responsibilities and functions.
- Maintain good relations with the Chief Executive and other staff.
- Take part in training sessions provided for the benefit of the trustees.
- Fulfil such other duties and assignments as may be required from time to time by the trustee body.

#### **4. Person Specification**

This sets out the qualities, skills and experience needed to be a Trustee of Commonweal.

Each Trustee is expected to have:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A commitment to the Charity</li><li>• A willingness and ability to devote the necessary time and effort to performing the role to a high standard</li><li>• A strategic vision</li><li>• Good independent judgement</li><li>• An ability to think creatively,</li><li>• A willingness to speak his / her mind</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities of trusteeship.</li><li>• An ability to work effectively as a member of a team</li><li>• A commitment to Nolan's seven principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership [for further details go to <a href="http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/">http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/</a> ]</li></ul> |
|---|---|

In addition, the Board have identified the following key areas, skills and experiences needed collectively amongst Trustees to support the work of Commonweal and provide appropriate support and Governance control:

	<b>Key Skill / Experience area</b>	<b>Descriptor / example</b>
1.	<b>Charity Governance and oversight</b>	Understanding of the legal and regulatory framework and requirements pertaining to Commonweal as a UK registered charity. Understanding of the different roles of Non-Executive Trustees and the paid executive staff
2.	<b>Operational management</b> (incl. HR, equal opportunities and diversity)	Experience to assist and guide CEO and others on good practice including appropriate metrics for monitoring of activities and delivery of plans
3.	<b>Strategic partnerships</b> and understanding of the type and nature of contractual and other relationships	Ability to help guide Commonweal on issues to consider in different strategic and contractual relationships, joint ventures, supplier / contractor contracts, research agreements, consortium proposals etc.
4.	<b>Confidence at reading and understanding legal contracts</b> and documents	Experience of reading and interpreting contracts and legal documents including seeking appropriate assurances from lawyers and understanding legal advice and options
5.	<b>Financial management</b> – incl. confidence in reading and understanding budgets, accounts and treasury management	Ability to interpret, understand and question financial data being clear on what it means for Commonweal’s activities.
6.	<b>Social investment / entrepreneurship</b> incl. growth opportunities, franchise models and achieving impact	Experience of different or imaginative funding or replication approaches
7.	<b>Policy and Communications</b> incl. marketing and lobbying	Ability to help guide Commonweal staff team in achieving core ambition of achieving impact with the learning captured from projects. Ability to suggest (and if appropriate) access opportunities for Commonweal to get messages in front of key opinion makers and deliverers. Policy and communications to achieve change.
8.	<b>Housing market awareness</b> incl. property ownership and asset management	At its core Commonweal are a housing based charity and bring housing and property knowledge and expertise to our project relationships – therefore expertise and understanding of key issues around the housing and property market per se especially the social housing (housing association and local authority sectors – networks and relationships) but also the charity’s responsibilities as a property owner / landlord.
9.	<b>Evaluation and research</b>	Experience of commissioning, interpreting and maximising the use of independent research and evaluation.
10.	<b>Knowledge and understanding of the policy area(s)</b> we operate in incl. social injustice, housing & homelessness, marginalised groups	Broad knowledge of and ongoing curiosity to explore issues of social injustice. Ability and willingness, where appropriate, to open up networks and professional contacts to assist Commonweal achieve impact and deliver its charitable aims and objectives.



## Three Year Strategy: Jan 2023 – Dec 2025 SUMMARY

**We are Commonweal Housing, a social injustice housing-based action learning charity. We work with partners to investigate, test and share housing solutions to social injustice.**

### **Introduction**

Since being established in 2006, Commonweal Housing has had impact across a vast range of issues. By applying action-learning expertise; testing and reflecting on how housing can alleviate social injustice, we have helped to support some of the most vulnerable people in society. We ensure any lessons learnt are shared to maximise their benefits to society.

We increasingly recognise the value our support brings to partners giving them the opportunity and permission to reflect on their activity, be honest about weaknesses and justify and celebrate success. Commonweal's primary role is ensuring the results of that reflection are shared widely, are used by others to shape future policy and practice. We continue to develop how best we do this.

We have been a supportive, flexible and versatile partner to organisations doing fantastic work, across issues that are sometimes overlooked, with groups of people who are often undervalued.

Our stable and independent funding gives us the opportunity to be adventurous, targeting insidious and often seemingly intractable forms of social injustice that may be problematic for others to address relying on public or state funding as they may be considered unattractive, controversial or unsympathetic.

Our support takes several forms; financial, housing and action learning expertise. We are confident in what we can bring and how we add value to project partnerships. Our flexibility, versatility and financial independence has allowed us to support research into and development of housing solutions for varying injustices with groups at the margins of society.

### **2023-25 Business Strategy – final messages**

Following discussions at the recent Awayday and subsequent reflection on those by staff the shape of the priorities for Commonweal's 2023-25 Strategy are clear:

- To simplify Commonweal's project map, achieving a positive 'walking away' from finished projects to enable concentration on new ideas, injustices and learning
- To be willing as a charity to take calculated and understood risks to ensure we are achieving impact and supporting ideas and partners others may not be willing to help.
- To speed up the rate of new property-based project development / delivery – to include new approaches to securing social investment funding
- To repeat a Call For Ideas (or similar) programme reaching out to attract new project and feasibility study proposals – these to be done against core themes.
- To utilise the enhanced research funding programme to inform Commonweal of new and emerging areas of injustice and to grow learning and understanding per se with no direct project expectation at the outset.
- To remain alive to new injustices or areas where housing has a role to play and to use our resources as appropriate to explore, support or campaign to highlight such issues.

Commonweal's priority themes for new feasibility funding support from January 2023 to be:

- **Criminal justice system** – focussed on specific groups such as: youth justice, over-representation of BAME individuals, mental health issues
- **Young adults and those facing difficult transitions to adulthood**
- **Migration and Trafficking** – incorporating areas of work around asylum, migration, modern-day slavery as well as human trafficking

These themes will guide proactive activity by the staff team i.e. future call for new ideas programmes, engagement with specialist experts and individual organisations; but will not be exclusive or an exhaustive list of areas we may explore. Commonweal will remain flexible, willing and able to pick up new or off-theme project ideas. "Sometimes things just seem to be 'very Commonweal' and we should be able to follow up on that".

## COMMONWEAL HOUSING'S VISION, PURPOSE, VALUES, AND AMBITIONS

### 2.1 Vision:

'By 2025 Commonweal will be widely viewed as a *'go to'* organisation for innovative and deliverable housing-based solutions to social injustice – at the forefront of imaginative thinking.'

### 2.2 Purpose:

'A housing charity established to continue a family philanthropic legacy that aims to work in partnership with others as a test bed, innovator, researcher and campaigner for new models and new ways of working to find housing-based solutions to different forms of social injustice.'

### 2.3 Values & associated behaviours – reviewed and revised 2022:

Value	Behaviour
<b>Collaboration &amp; Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively seeking new partnerships;</li> <li>• working with partners for change;</li> <li>• ensuring service users are involved in design;</li> <li>• working as a team; everyone has a voice;</li> <li>• open to criticism;</li> <li>• not afraid to ask questions or be questioned;</li> <li>• Growth and progression;</li> <li>• sharing knowledge;</li> <li>• using feedback to change how we work;</li> <li>• using learning to create change;</li> <li>• adapts style of working to meet the needs of others;</li> <li>• creating networks and actively seeking to join others;</li> </ul>
<b>Imagination and challenge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging the status quo;</li> <li>• thinking differently;</li> <li>• being self-aware;</li> <li>• assertiveness;</li> <li>• getting outside of our comfort zone;</li> <li>• encouraging others to think differently;</li> <li>• continually asking ourselves and others questions;</li> <li>• always thinking 'why?';</li> <li>• holding space for others to challenge themselves;</li> <li>• enable others to be imaginative;</li> <li>• supportive;</li> <li>• encouraging</li> </ul>
<b>Trust and integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence in our voice and knowledge;</li> <li>• openly talk about things that don't go to plan or haven't worked out as we thought;</li> <li>• carry out thorough due diligence;</li> <li>• learn about how our partners do their work;</li> <li>• actively talk with partners about process;</li> <li>• tell others why we work the way we do;</li> <li>• be open to criticism;</li> <li>• able to give criticism;</li> <li>• follow through on what we say we want to do;</li> <li>• have more than one line of open communication;</li> <li>• regularly talk to staff as a team and individually;</li> <li>• have clear policies and processes in place;</li> <li>• don't show bias; calling out and highlighting issues such as sexism, racism and homophobia;</li> </ul>

## **2.4 Ambition:**

'Achieving policy and operational change with lessons learnt from supported projects – *securing positive and enduring benefits for those experiencing social injustice.*'

## **2.5 What do we offer as a charity?**

**Housing** – The flexibility to target and acquire bespoke housing options specifically for projects rather than trying to fit new housing schemes and projects in to an existing property portfolio.

**Experience** – Over 14 years of experience supporting and enabling pilot projects. Evidence of a self-learning culture, adapting future actions to ensure best outcomes.

**Passion** – A genuine sense as an organization and a Board of Trustees that demonstrably 'want to do good' and are determined to do just that.

**Focus** – Small portfolio of projects; where possible seeking to maintain a balanced portfolio of projects especially in terms of areas of social injustice being addressed.

**Innovation and Ideas** – A willingness to identify and accept new and challenging ideas where it is felt they can deliver solutions.

**Independence** – The charity does not normally seek to deliver the solutions or replication itself and can therefore lobby and campaign for policy change or future replication funding from a position that does not impact upon (or could be seen as conflicted by) its own future business plans or income streams. We are ***an invested partner not a vested interest.***

**Learning and Evaluation** – Commissioning of independent evaluation of all our projects as well as documenting learning from our partners as projects progress

**Promotion** – An expectation of sharing our learning, positive or negative, to aid replication of successes and to inform future policy and operations where our projects have failed.

**Funding** – Generous ongoing funding from our principle benefactor and a growing track record in successfully attracting and utilising external social investment

**Self-awareness** – we take time to review our strengths and weaknesses and will actively encourage project partners to do the same.