



# Executive Summary

Sustainable Northern Ireland (SNI) is a NI charity working with partners to advance the pursuit of sustainable development by district councils and others. We are committed to the principles of sustainable development; our work programmes encourage organisations to integrate these principles throughout their own operations and business planning functions. Sustainable Northern Ireland also established the Belfast Food Network, a project to develop initiatives that will make Belfast a Sustainable Food City.

We offer a range of services to subscribing partners:

- Sustainability Training
- Strategy & Policy Development
- Sustainability Reporting
- Sustainability within Community Planning
- Climate Change Planning
- Accessing Funding
- Forums & Networks

This Review covers the period 2017-2018. With introductory comments from the Chair of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director, this report summarises our work with councils and other agencies through the Sustainable Development Forum, the development of Community Plans, our projects and partnership initiatives, policy and advocacy work, as well as a governance update and financial summary.

Supported by:



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# Chair's Report

This year has seen a great deal of change for Sustainable Northern Ireland (SNI). I joined the Board in December along with five new Directors from across the private, public and voluntary sectors - keen to utilise our collective experience to guide Sustainable NI and help achieve its mission. The newly formed board set about undertaking a review of the organisation - its purpose, direction, funding and governance processes. As well as updating its brand, SNI has reviewed its governance arrangements and is in the process of developing a new long-term strategic plan. All of the changes have been overseen by SNI's new Executive Director Nichola Hughes, who joined in May.

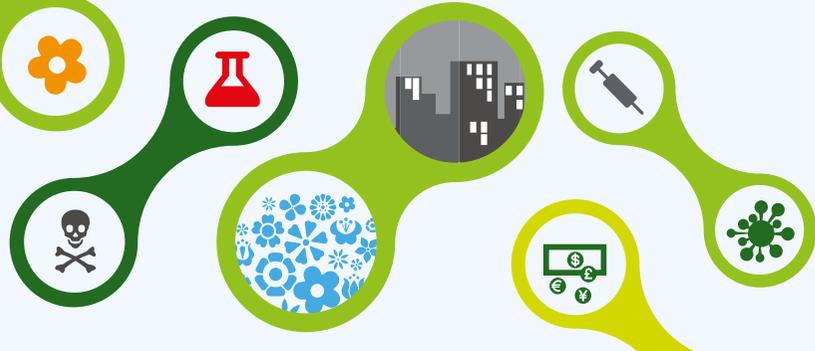
We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our public sector partners who fund our charity. Following the reorganisation of local government in 2015, securing continued funding from ten of the eleven new Councils in an austere financial environment has been a significant achievement. I do hope that this support can be maintained and expanded as I believe SNI has much to offer the sector in the future.

This report recognises the excellent work that has been undertaken at a time of considerable change for SNI. Our work this year has focussed on building capacity and knowledge within the local government and wider public sector; strengthening existing partnerships and formulating new partnerships to help embed sustainable development as a central principle in policy and practice in Northern Ireland.

As we enter this new chapter of Sustainable NI's delivery, in the face of challenges like Brexit and the current political impasse at Stormont, we will approach it with renewed energy and expertise, building on the foundation that local government funding has provided and taking our knowledge and enthusiasm to new partners and sectors.

**Andrew Cassells**

Chair





Grove Community  
Garden,  
Belfast

# Executive Director's Commentary

Communication is an essential life skill that has evolved rapidly in recent years following the digitisation of mainstream communication channels. At the same time, sustainability has become a major consideration for businesses, public authorities and civil society alike. Both of these trends came together in a perfect storm following BBC's Blue Planet 2 coverage of the issue of plastic pollution in the world's oceans. When David Attenborough speaks - people listen.

Both trends highlight the importance of effective sustainability communications. But there is no one-size-fits-all approach. From better reporting, to using social media, or utilising the universal global appeal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an organisation's sustainability story must be told in the right way, at the right time, to the right audience.

All too often we find that organisations are doing a lot to contribute to sustainable development, but aren't adequately equipped to communicate it to the outside world. Sustainable NI has put communication at the heart of its support service this year, finding new ways of sharing and exchanging knowledge and best practice within and between organisations.

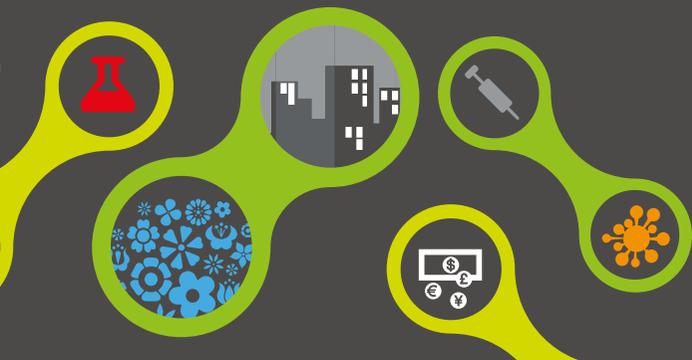
The establishment of our eBulletin and twitter account, along with running a series of networking and learning events are just some of the ways we have been helping partners share their sustainability success stories. We

also updated our policies and procedures, putting data protection front and centre of our campaigns.

2017/18 has been another busy year for SNI and this report serves as just a brief summary of some of the activities we have been involved in.

**Nichola Hughes**

Executive Director



# The NI Sustainable Development Forum



Now five years since it was first established, the Sustainable Development Forum continues to grow from strength to strength. The Forum represents a network of officers responsible for the implementation of sustainable development in Northern Ireland. Its most significant value has been in providing an environment in which officers are able to share their experience and intelligence in an atmosphere of trust and mutual support.

Quarterly network meetings help stimulate good practice on sustainable development among councils and other public sector organisations, especially important in the face of a diminished role undertaken by central government.

Sustainable NI has been able to draw upon the expertise of a comprehensive network of external specialists to share their knowledge with the Forum. This year, the Forum heard from

government departments and industry experts on topics ranging from climate change to electric vehicles, and from sustainable food partnerships to sustainable drainage solutions. Forum members have also shared their experiences implementing a range of sustainability projects including a low-emission car club and

Northern Ireland's first local authority climate change adaptation plan.

In partnership with Derry City & Strabane District Council, we offered members study visits to a selection of sustainable energy facilities in the North West including: a combined heat and power plant at Foyle Arena; a biomass heating plant at Hollybush Primary School and a landfill gas power plant at Culmore Country Park.

To ensure the Forum continues to meet its members' needs, we conducted a survey in March; the results were overwhelmingly positive. Participants praised the networking opportunities, the sharing of good practice and the potential to provide some degree of consistency on sustainable development policies and practices across all eleven councils.

We have continued to expand the Forum's membership inviting participation from a range of organisations including Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, DAERA, Queen's University and Business in the Community. In the next year, we will seek to add even more cross sector representation to further enhance the membership of the Forum.

Communicating the work of the Forum is an essential component of its success. SNI has facilitated this through the dissemination of news, member updates and best practice sustainability case studies in our monthly eBulletin and website. We also engaged in a presentation to the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE NI) to demonstrate the value of the Forum and its work.

In the year ahead, we will continue to utilise the Forum as a platform to raise the profile of sustainable development in all sectors; provide practical support to foster the organisational integration of sustainability principles and celebrate the achievements of our members. In so doing, we are confident that the Forum will continue to prosper, supplying its unique professional service to its members.





Cuilcagh Boardwalk,  
Co. Fermanagh

# Projects & Partnerships



## Social Value & Procurement

By creating demand for environmentally and socially responsible products and services through procurement, public sector organisations can help build a more sustainable society. This year, Sustainable NI has worked closely with Social Enterprise NI to promote the use of social value approaches in public procurement.

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public authorities in England and Wales to take a social value approach when procuring goods and services. Although the legislation does not extend to Northern Ireland, by adopting a similar approach, authorities here can meet their needs for goods, works and services in a way that achieves value for money whilst generating benefits to society and the environment.

Although the creation of a Northern Ireland Social Value Act is on hold until a legislative assembly is in place, Sustainable NI is committed to supporting voluntary action in this area by encouraging public authorities to embed responsible procurement as a central principle in their procurement policies and strategies through the provision of training, toolkits and sharing of good practice.

In 2017, we organised a training event 'Responsible Procurement - Practical Steps'. A panel of experts delivered talks on social enterprise, human rights, and Buy Social. The panel Q&A was then followed by practical training facilitated by a local government procurement expert on how to embed social value into every day procurement exercises.

Following the success of the training, Sustainable NI went on to develop a toolkit to provide practical advice and suggestions on how social value can be integrated into public procurement.

The Toolkit offers guidance on:

- how to prepare for future social value legislation
- example social value outcomes for use in contracts
- example questions for use in tenders
- example indicators to measure and track social value in contracts
- case studies demonstrating how social value has been achieved through contract delivery

With support from Social Enterprise NI, we published the toolkit and launched it at the NI Social Economy Stakeholder Group. Copies were circulated to procurement teams in local government and partner public sector authorities.

Sustainable NI will continue to work in partnership with Social Enterprise NI to support its social value campaign to raise the profile of social value and promote its implementation at government and local government level.



# Projects & Partnerships

## National Energy Action NI

As part of our ongoing learning and development programme, Sustainable NI organised a half day training event to develop local government awareness and understanding of energy efficiency and fuel poverty policy and practice, including strategic links with sustainable development.

Many people in Northern Ireland struggle with low incomes and high energy bills, pushing them into fuel poverty. The training, facilitated by National Energy Action NI, provided local government officials and councillors with an overview of the current fuel poverty and domestic energy efficiency policy landscape as well as practical steps to help reduce fuel poverty, including a best practice affordable warmth project case study.

Sustainable NI and National Energy Action NI will continue to work closely together to explore synergies between the clean growth and fuel poverty agendas to ensure that policy at local and national level is socially just so that everyone can enjoy access to clean, affordable and reliable energy.



Climate  
Northern Ireland

## Climate NI

During 2017, Sustainable NI organised a series of workshops to develop local government understanding of and contribution to the development of the next Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2019-24, in partnership with Climate NI.

Sustainable NI lead internal workshops to help council officers identify and map current climate resilience activities against the recent NI Climate Change Risk Assessment. The evidence was collated and submitted to DAERA on behalf of the local government sector to inform drafting of the NI Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

Council activities centre around emergency planning and resilience measures for the natural and built environment through planning and biodiversity functions. Sustainable NI will continue to support DAERA / Climate NI in the development of the non-government section of the Adaptation Plan, and will ensure that councils are fully engaged in this process.

## SEUPB

Sustainable NI joined forces with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to organise a workshop in March 2018 for prospective applicants to EU funding programmes. The event was designed to brief delegates on the range of funds still available

for sustainable development.

The workshop was facilitated by Sustainable NI, with input from a range of EU funding experts. The programme included a world café session to generate project ideas and identify potential partnership opportunities. Delegates were primarily from the local government sector, with some representatives from government and academia in attendance.

## NILGA

In 2017, NILGA invited SNI to become a Strategic Partner to facilitate closer working with the Association to help develop and inform practical and policy ideas for strengthening local government in Northern Ireland.

This relationship is thriving with SNI now regularly liaising with and supporting NILGA on a range of policy issues and events over the year, including the development of the 2018 NILGA conference, which is themed around sustainable communities.



# Community Planning



In April 2015, the reform of Local Government resulted in the creation of 11 new councils. The new councils were given a range of new responsibilities including leading the community planning process for their district. This required councils, along with statutory partners, agencies and the wider community, to identify long-term priorities for improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of their districts and the people who live there.

Sustainable NI worked closely with councils in the planning stage to embed sustainability objectives within their community plans. Many councils mirrored their designs to the three pillars of sustainability, whilst others have decided to integrate sustainable development as a crosscutting theme throughout their plan.

While all councils will respect their legislative mandate, the design of the community plans are distinctive, reflecting the individuality of each council partnership. Ards and North Down selected five outcomes for its 'Big Plan', as has the

'Belfast Agenda'. By contrast, Mid-Ulster chose 15 outcomes under five themes; Mid & East Antrim has 19.

The publication of the plans in 2017 was the result of 2 years of complex collaborative exercises, which has laid the foundation for strong partnerships, vital to the implementation of the plans. The final Community Plans will be of paramount importance in determining how councils make strategic policy decisions, how they control land use through local development plans, how they allocate expenditure.

Now that the plans are finalised and published, the real work begins. Sustainable NI has been working closely with several councils in 2017/18 to support the development of the associated Delivery Plans which stipulate how outcomes in the Community Plans will be achieved. In the case of Mid and East Antrim District Council, this has entailed chairing the working group tasked with developing detailed action plans under the Environment Theme of the Community Plan.

In the case of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Sustainable NI carried out a comprehensive review of 'Living Well Together' to assess how well the composite delivery plans meet the sustainability objectives set out in the Plan.

Some councils have set their plans for the next ten years; others are looking forward to 2030 and beyond.



Living Well Together

What they all have in common is a desire to improve the quality of life for their residents

- to give young people the best possible start in life
- to build their economies, creating employment and opportunities
- to improve physical health and mental wellbeing
- to foster inclusive, safe and resilient communities
- to protect and enhance the natural and built environment

Such outcomes are the very stuff of sustainable development and councils should be looking at their Community Plans as the primary mechanism for delivering their statutory duty on sustainable development. Sustainable NI will be ready to advise on how this opportunity can best be utilised as they embark on the implementation phase of the community planning process.



# Policy Development

Advancing the pursuit of sustainable development has been a longstanding goal of the Northern Ireland Government. In 2006, Northern Ireland's first Sustainable Development Strategy was launched and a year later a Statutory Duty for Sustainable Development was introduced conferring a legislative duty on public authorities to adopt the principles outlined in the strategy. The strategy and statutory duty sent a strong signal about the need to tackle global warming and highlighted the responsibility of public bodies to advance this agenda.

It has always been the intention of the NI Executive that the Programme for Government would be the main vehicle for delivering sustainable development in the region. As such, the draft Programme for Government (2016-21) was constructed around economic, social and environmental outcomes, in an attempt to further mainstream sustainable development into the work of government. However, the programme laid a significant emphasis on growing the economy as a platform for improving the quality of life for everyone but, as most economists will attest to, economic growth that destroys the environment is not sustainable.

The UN's global goals for sustainable development or 'SDGs' – launched in 2015, acknowledge the importance of the natural environment while, at the same time, putting people first. The 17 high-level goals and their 169 targets seek to guide all of the UN treaty's signatory countries in tackling issues as diverse and deep-seated as gender inequality, climate change, the

eradication of poverty and hunger and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

The draft PfG had a strong correlation with the SDGs and before the collapse of the Assembly in January 2017, it was envisaged that the Programme for Government would be the primary mechanism used to measure Northern Ireland's progression towards the SDGs.

However, until a government is restored, no new major legislative, policy or spending decisions in Northern Ireland can be made - including defining government's approach to delivery of the SDGs. Despite the political impasse, Sustainable NI has been influencing policy in other ways e.g. responding to government consultations considered relevant to long-term sustainability objectives. This included providing commentary on a Department of Finance briefing paper on the broad options for

## THE GLOBAL GOALS For Sustainable Development



setting a Budget for Northern Ireland for 2018-2020. The paper featured three scenarios, all of which included cuts to environmental programmes.

Sustainable NI urged the government to rethink its proposals, arguing that in order to retain investment levels in the environment, government should be progressing new revenue raising schemes, such as additional levies on plastics and deposit return schemes, as a matter of urgency. Other policy work this year included a response to a Department of Communities consultation on proposed changes to the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

## **Brexit**

On 23rd June 2016 the UK voted to leave the European Union. As the politicians negotiate an 'orderly Brexit,' policy makers are planning the UK's post-Brexit future - navigating the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead with regard to environmental regulation, governance and enforcement.

Nature Matters NI is a coalition of eNGOs campaigning for better environmental protection for Northern Ireland post-Brexit. Sustainable NI has been engaging with Nature Matters NI through our membership with Northern Ireland Environment Link and we intend to use this as a mechanism to contribute our views on policy decisions in relation to farming, land use, marine and environmental protection to ensure that sustainable development principles continue to underpin all future environmental decisions when the UK leaves the EU.

## **Climate Change Adaptation**

The Climate Change Act 2008 placed a duty on the Northern Ireland Executive to develop a programme for climate change adaptation following the latest Climate

Change Risk Assessment (CCRA). The Northern Ireland Adaptation Programme (2019-24) will set out government's long-term plans to increase the resilience of our economy, environment and society in response to the changing climate.

Sustainable NI have been working closely with Climate NI to develop the local government response to the latest set of climate change risks, including working to increase awareness and knowledge of climate change risks and opportunities across the 11 councils and ensure adaptation planning is embedded into council decision making processes.

We have collated information on council activities to promote climate resilience and this information will feed into the non-government section of the Adaptation Programme. Sustainable NI will continue to work with Climate NI in 2018/19 to co-ordinate local government's involvement in the national climate change adaptation programme.

## **Local Government**

In 2017/18, Sustainable NI was invited to contribute to the development of a range of local government policies and strategies including: Belfast's Circular Economy Strategy; a Climate Change Adaptation Plan

*“good  
environmental  
policy is good  
economic policy.”*

Bernie Sanders,  
US Senator

for Derry City & Strabane District, as well as several Local Development Plans and Community Plans. This policy work will continue into 2018/19 as councils launch their LDPs and begin to report on and review their Community Plans.

# Governance

## Staff

Sustainable NI appointed Nichola Hughes as its Executive Director in May 2017, following the retirement of Professor Jim Kitchen.

Nichola joins us with 10 years of experience designing and implementing local government solutions on sustainable development and in her most recent role, as a scientific advisor to the Irish Government on climate change policy.

In 2017/18, Sustainable NI hosted several student and graduate placements.

Sustainable NI is grateful to the following students for their assistance with various projects throughout the year:

- Leigh Gould
- Simon Watson

We are also extremely grateful to Luis Arina who joined us from the Basque Region's Global Training Programme and led on SNI communication activities between December 2017 to July 2018.

We wish Luis and all the students who joined us this year success in their future career paths.

## Board of Directors

The SNI Board of Directors met on the following dates this year:

- 20th June 2017
- 19th September 2017
- 19th December
- 6th March 2018 (AGM)

The following members were appointed in 2017/18:

- Andrew Cassells
- Adrian Davis
- Dr Aoife Foley
- Dr Nuala Flood
- Dr Ian Garner
- Gillian McKee

The following members resigned during 2017/18:

- Graham Bannister

## Policies & Procedures

Following NICVA Governance Training for the Board, Sustainable NI set about updating its governing document and corporate policies and procedures.

A suite of new policies/measures were put in place to comply with charity legislation and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

## Finances

Sustainable NI relies on partner subscriptions to support the projects and activities delivered by the organisation. In 2017/18 the following organisations subscribed to Sustainable NI's services:

- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Belfast City Council
- Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
- Mid Ulster District Council
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- Northern Ireland Assembly
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive

An annual budget is approved by the Board of Directors in March. Accounts are prepared at quarterly intervals and expenditure is monitored against budgets.



# Financial Summary

## 31 March 2018

### Directors' statement on the summary financial statement

The Board of Directors / Trustees present herewith the summary financial statement of Sustainable Northern Ireland for the year ended 31st March 2018 and confirm the following:

- the summary financial statement is not the statutory financial accounts but is a summary of information relating to both the Statement of Financial Activities and the balance sheet;
- the full financial statements from which the summary is derived have been externally examined by an independent auditor; and he has provided an unqualified report;
- the full annual accounts, the external examiners report and the trustees'/directors' report can be obtained on application to Sustainable Northern Ireland;
- the annual accounts were approved by the Board on 12th December 2018

This directors' statement was approved by the Board of Directors on 12th December 2018 and signed on its behalf by:

Nichola Hoehn / Company Secretary

### Independent examiner's statement to the members of Sustainable Northern Ireland

I have examined the summary financial statement of Sustainable Northern Ireland.

Respective responsibilities of director/trustees and auditors

The director/trustees are responsible for preparing the summary financial statement in accordance with applicable law. My responsibility is to report to you my opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statement with the full annual accounts and Director/Trustees' Report, and its compliance with the relevant requirements of Section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and the regulations made thereunder. I also read the other information contained in the summary financial statement and consider the implications for my report if I become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summary financial statement.

### Basis of opinion

I conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 1999/6 "The auditors' statement on the summary financial statement" issued by the Auditing Practices Board for use in the United Kingdom.

### Opinion

In my opinion the summary financial statement is consistent with the full annual accounts and directors' report of Sustainable Northern Ireland for the year ended 31st March 2018 and complies with the applicable requirements of Section 427 of the Companies Act 2006, and the regulations made thereunder.

Nigel V Skillen FCA

Diamond & Skillen Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditor Sinclair House 89/101 Royal Avenue Belfast BT1 1FE

12th December 2018

## Extracted Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31st March 2018



	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted funds £	Totals 2018 £	Totals 2017 £
<b>Income</b>					
<i>from donations and legacies</i>					
• Donations	3	-	-	0	-
• Grants	3	53,000	-	53,000	80,905
<i>from charitable activities</i>					
• Business income and sponsorship	3	-	-	0	14,983
<i>from other activities</i>					
• Investment income	3	77	-	77	105
<b>Total income</b>		<b>53,077</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>53,077</b>	<b>95,993</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>					
<i>on raising funds</i>					
• Promotional costs	4	-	-	0	-
<i>on charitable activities</i>					
• Employee costs	4	31,004	-	31,004	51,482
• Premises costs	4	577	-	577	2,544
• Travel & training costs	4	2,147	-	2,147	-
• General administration costs	4	2,307	-	2,307	3,995
• Programme costs	4	13,047	-	13,047	10,771
<i>On other items</i>					
• Legal & professional fees	4	2,405	-	2,405	3,395
• Other expenses	4	266	-	266	25,786
• Depreciation of assets	4	-	-	0	-
<b>Total expenditure</b>		<b>51,753</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>51,753</b>	<b>97,973</b>
<b>Net (expenditure) / income for the year</b>		<b>1,324</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,324</b>	<b>(1,980)</b>
Transfers between funds	10	-	-	0	-
<b>Net movement in funds for the year</b>		<b>1,324</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,324</b>	<b>(1,980)</b>
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>					
• Fund balances brought fwd at 1st April		37,585	-	37,585	39,565
• <b>Fund balances carried fwd at 31st March</b>		<b>38,909</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>38,909</b>	<b>37,585</b>

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities.

All gains and losses recognised in the year are included above.

# Statement of Financial Position as at 31st March 2018

	Notes	2018 £	2017 £
<b>Fixed Assets</b>			
• Tangible assets	11	-	-
		<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Current Assets</b>			
• Debtors	12	-	-
• Cash at bank and in hand		<b>42,285</b>	<b>39,780</b>
		<b>42,285</b>	<b>39,780</b>
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	13	<b>(3,376)</b>	<b>(2,195)</b>
<b>Net current assets</b>		<b>38,909</b>	<b>37,585</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		<b>38,909</b>	<b>37,585</b>
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>		-	-
<b>Net assets</b>		<b>38,909</b>	<b>37,585</b>
<b>The funds of the charity</b>			
<i>Unrestricted income funds:</i>			
• General funds	16	<b>38,909</b>	<b>37,585</b>
		<b>38,909</b>	<b>37,585</b>
<i>Restricted income funds:</i>			
• No restricted funds	16	-	-
<b>Total funds</b>		<b>38,909</b>	<b>37,585</b>

The summary financial statement was approved by the Board of Directors on 12th December 2018 and signed on their behalf by:

**Mr Andrew Cassells**  
Chairman of Directors

**Dr Sue Christie**  
Treasurer



Gobbins Cliff Path,  
Islandmagee

# Board of Directors & Staff

The Board of Directors meets four times a year to determine the strategic direction of the organisation, to provide guidance, facilitate networking, help to secure funding and to support the delivery of the charity's objectives. Directors have a broad swathe of experience, including local government, environmental health, academia, public health, community development, business and the environment.

Chair	Andrew Cassells
Vice Chair	Leo Strawbridge
Treasurer	Adrian Davis
Directors	John Barry
	Sue Christie
	Nuala Flood
	Aoife Foley
	Ian Garner
	Patricia Mackey
	Gary McFarlane
	Gillian McKee
	Elizabeth Mitchell
	Karen Smyth
	Murray Watt

Staff	
Executive Director	Nichola Hughes
Communications Officer	Luis Arina



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Sustainable Northern Ireland is a Company limited  
by guarantee No NI038784 and a Charity registered  
with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland  
No NIC103426

