

Business Strategy

2023-28



Providing exceptional community support services
and housing across Sussex enabling people to live well

Sussex-based not-for-profit care,
support and housing provider since 1972

Southdown

www.southdown.org

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Foreword



I'm Alice, a Peer Tutor at Southdown's Recovery College. I am autistic, and I co-developed and co-teach the Autism and Employment course.

My journey to working with Southdown has been anything but conventional. I began a BA in Primary and Early Years Education at the University of Sussex. Despite my enthusiasm and aptitude for teaching, my health took a turn. I was diagnosed with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, disrupting my plans to teach full-time.

At rock bottom emotionally, I sought guidance from my GP and was referred to Southdown's Supported Employment service, which marked a turning point. With their help, I explored different paths that aligned with my teaching aspirations and my health needs. Initially, I struggled to find somewhere where I fit in, and could balance my health and the demands of work.


Then Fiona, the Employment Specialist working with me, sent a link to a training programme for adults with autism. The idea was that I would be taught how to deliver lectures, and then would help develop and give lectures to other professionals about how they can best support the autistic people using their services. It was amazing to feel a sense of purpose again, and slowly my mental health began to improve.

I then got a call from Fiona. The Peer Tutor who normally delivered the Autism and Employment course at the Recovery College was no longer available, and would I be interested in stepping in? Of course, I instantly said yes.

This role not only allows me to help others but also aids in my own recovery. Through sharing my journey, I've found a way to turn challenges into positive outcomes, making a difference in the lives of both my students and me."



Introduction

 Southdown was established in 1972 to meet the needs of people with mental health issues discharged from long-stay hospitals to access and maintain housing. Additional personalised support was provided to enable people to develop independent living skills and have opportunities to lead fulfilling lives.

Over the past five decades, we have continued to put this mission into practice. And by expanding our business activities and models of housing and community support, have been able to increase the number of people across Sussex who are able to benefit from our services and live life well.

Today, we are the largest Sussex-based provider of social care and supported housing, with a turnover of £30 million, supporting 10,854 clients each year (2022/23) and employing over 750 staff. Our services spread along the South coast from Chichester to Hastings, as well as inland to Crawley, Horsham and Lewes.


Although a Housing Association, we are different from most others in that only a small proportion of our income is property related (16% in 2022/23 derived from rents and service charges). This contrasts with 84% of our income coming from care and support contract fees from local authorities and the NHS. Our support contracts are subject to scrutiny by local authorities, health authorities and other commissioners.”

- Neil Blanchard, Chief Executive



Message from Chair of the Board



 I am delighted to introduce you to our new strategy. In getting to this point, the Board and the Executive team have had a healthy debate on what we see as the risks and challenges, of which there are many. Perhaps, more importantly, we have spent time considering the opportunities and how, with decisive and bold action, we can continue to deliver our mission to provide exceptional community support services and housing across Sussex, enabling people to live well.

We are in unique times; a statement made many times in forewords such as this. What differentiates this time, is the perfect storm of external pressures that are impacting our clients and tenants, colleagues that work across Southdown, our partners and ultimately the organisation itself.

The pandemic has left a lasting impact not only on the economy through inflation and the overall cost of living, but also on people's mental and physical health. Across the country a lack of investment in existing homes is impacting on people's health and there is a real tension between investing in existing homes and building more to combat the growing homelessness problem.

Southdown must play its part but also must ensure that it continues to be resilient. I believe the four priorities we have committed to in this strategy reflect our desire to continue to be creative and make a difference but also ensure that Southdown is around for the future.

We are committed to ensuring our homes and services are the best they can possibly be. To do this, we will listen and learn from the experiences of our clients and tenants to shape service design and delivery. We also commit to continue to use Southdown's voice to stand up for current and future clients and tenants, making the case locally and nationally for positive change and investment.

I would like to thank our partners and the whole of the Southdown team who work tirelessly to deliver services, often in challenging circumstances, to enable clients and tenants to live well. I look forward to the journey ahead."

- Pauline Ford, Chair of the Board

Our foundations - who we are and our ways of working

We believe:

Everybody has the right to live their life well.

Our mission:

To provide exceptional community support services and housing across Sussex which enable people to live well.

Our values:

Guiding how we do things, how we interact with the people we work with and the decisions we make, are our values:



Force for good

We're passionate about making a difference.



Brilliant with people

We're compassionate, inclusive and welcoming; our colleagues and local communities deserve nothing less.



United

Together, we can achieve so much more.



Trustworthy

We're knowledgeable and act with integrity.



Responsive

We listen, learn and adapt.



What we do:

We deliver specialist, person-centred support:

- 24-hour and community care and support (autism and learning disabilities).
- Mental and physical wellbeing community services.
- Peer support opportunities.
- Learning and employment.
- Homelessness prevention and support.
- Social landlord of supported housing.

In 2022-23, we supported 10,854 people (timelines of support rather than unique individuals) in the 63 services we provided across Sussex.



Our support model - The Southdown Beacon

In 2023, we launched a bespoke psychologically informed framework called the Southdown Beacon. This acts as a guide and training tool equipping colleagues with the skills and knowledge to recognise and respond to people's psychological needs.

The framework was co-produced and piloted over 18 months with input and support from colleagues and clients from across the organisation. It has been clinically reviewed by external psychologists, providing additional assurance and quality benchmarking.

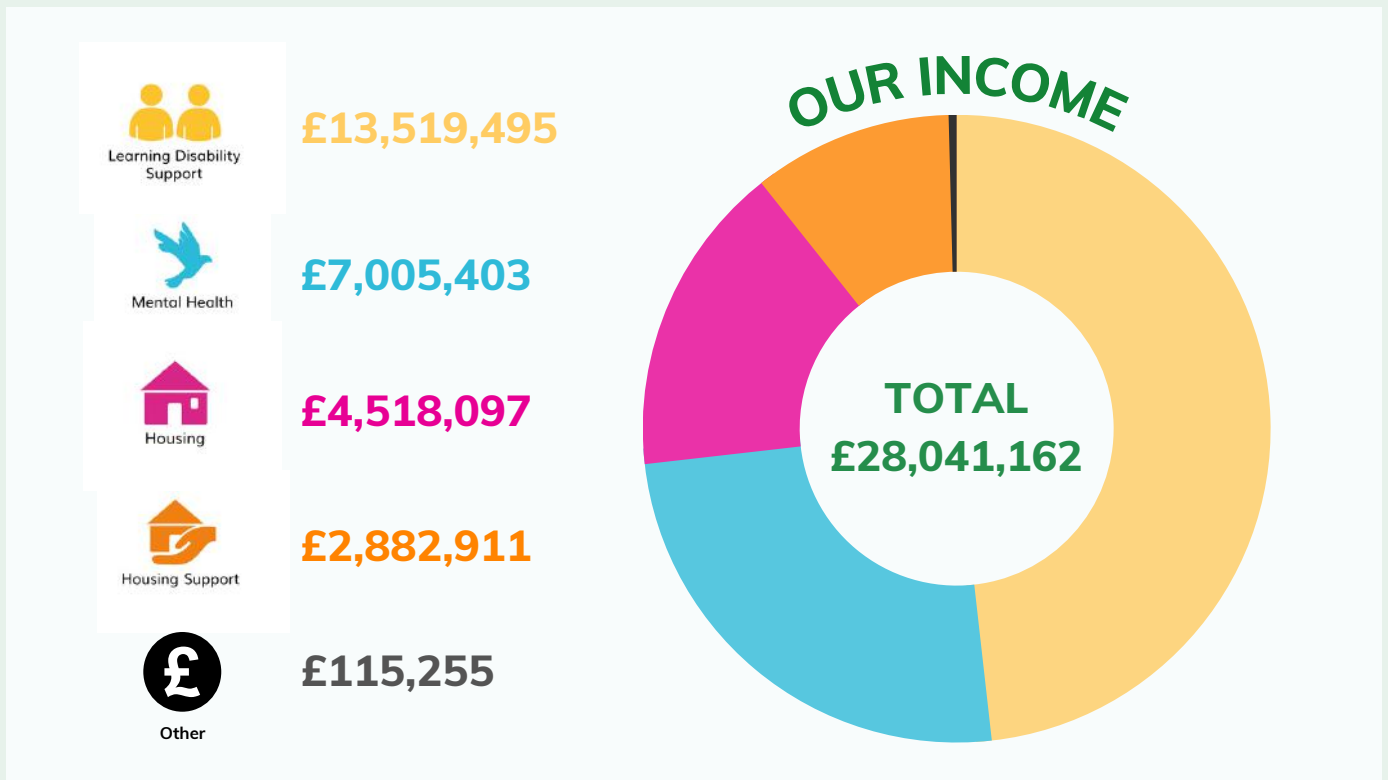
As shown opposite, the Beacon comprises of three domains: Environment, Relationships and Individual, and nine 'beams' each of which acts as a focus for specific training and team discussions as we embed the tool.

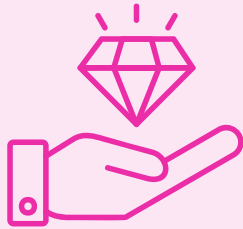


OUR INCOME SOURCES



As a not-for-profit organisation, we reinvest any surpluses into service delivery and development.





Our value proposition (what we do best):

- Big enough to be taken seriously, small and local enough to care (approachable and accessible).
- Renowned for consistency, quality, reliability and professionalism.
- Unique capability to act as an inclusive VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) Lead Provider.
- Being a psychologically informed organisation.
- We influence and innovate.
- We believe in and stand up for our people (clients and colleagues).



Our commitment to Sussex

Being Sussex focused and based, we know that it is the personal relationships we develop and maintain over the long-term that can be the most effective way to help shape and influence how our sector operates and protects the best interests of our local communities.

As one of the largest Sussex based providers, we are committed to playing an active and leading role to shape and support the continued viability and development of the wider supported housing, care, and support sectors to enable those most in need in our communities to live well.

“ Southdown is a great example of an ‘anchor organisation’ because they are physically rooted across Sussex and use their assets in partnership with local health and care providers to strengthen communities. SPFT have partnered with Southdown on a range of initiatives that are improving the lives of people in Sussex who have mental health issues and learning disabilities.”

- Chris Harris, Associate Director of Housing at the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SPFT)

Sector leadership and support



We're proud of the relationships and networks we have developed since we were established over 50 years ago. However, we know there is always more we can do to work together to best support the local communities we serve across Sussex.

As such, in June 2023, we commissioned research with commissioners of our services, our partners and the wider VCSE sector to ask for feedback on how we do things. We have since analysed feedback and identified the following key insights:

- Southdown is known as a **big, professional, reliable, caring** VCSE Lead Provider.
- Southdown has a high level of visibility in the sector (with a lot of this down to Neil Blanchard, our Chief Executive), through our involvement in VCSE alliances, networks and acting as a sector representative.
- Southdown is seen as a great partner who people like to be associated with – but people know less about employee and client experience.
- Strategy and operations could be more connected and consistent – particularly when considering new and transformational ways of working.
- There's a gulf with smaller VCSE providers that's about mission and culture, as well as size.
- Clients and tenants need more of a voice.
- Some people want to see Southdown speak up more and take a stronger position to lobby and campaign for issues impacting the VCSE sector and our local communities.

We then considered what we can do in response and identified five actionable opportunities:

1. Make the most of the common ground we share with other, smaller VCSE organisations to bridge the gap that sometimes exists – Southdown acting as a generous and inclusive partner, using its scale and resources to support the wider VCSE sector.
2. Support Neil (our Chief Executive) to continue to act as a sector leader, but with increased involvement and visibility from other Southdown colleagues.
3. Pinpoint the reasons why and where strategy and operations disconnect so that we can make them more connected, consistent, and innovative.
4. Give our clients and tenants more of a voice and a visible presence.
5. Explore and build on our campaign voice.

You will see that these themes have been incorporated into our Business Plan Priorities for the years ahead and we will keep our stakeholders updated and involved.

Operating environment - challenges and opportunities

As a not-for-profit business specialising in the delivery of care, support, and housing services, we operate in a complex and challenging environment. As most of our activities are directly commissioned and contracted by the public sector, we are susceptible to changes in local and national government strategic policies and funding commitments. Since 2022, we have also had to contend with the negative impact of the global economic situation, most acutely felt in inflationary and cost-of-living pressures.

Our business context is challenging in that it is high risk and low margin. We provide invaluable services to the people most in need within our communities, but with growing demand, increasing complexity of needs, national and global economic and social factors and with acutely stretched public funding, we work in a sector that is required to balance multiple priorities with fixed or reducing resources. This requires us to effectively manage and plan all our activities to ensure continued financial viability and to protect our social housing assets.

As evidenced in our Statutory Annual Report and Financial Accounts, Southdown is very experienced and skilled in navigating the challenges we face. Alongside adoption of robust business practices, we attribute our continued success to holding excellent knowledge and expertise of our operating environment.

Through investing time and energy in taking a leading role in local and national networks, as well as maintaining effective personal relationships with our peers and commissioners, we are not only able to respond to issues but also help shape and improve the sector.

Current issues and themes that continue to have the greatest impact include:

- Viability of the Adult Social Care sector.
- NHS pressures.
- Inflation.
- Building and Fire Safety.
- Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight.

See our Statutory Annual Report and Financial Accounts for 2022-23 on our website - www.southdown.org - for more details on the challenges and opportunities we face in our operating environment.

Business Strategy - ambitions and priorities

To respond to challenges and opportunities in our operating environment, and to deliver on our core mission, Southdown operates a five-year Business Strategy model. This establishes both our longer-term strategic priorities (taking Southdown forward), and our business objectives (how we will deliver our business now).

Strategic priorities

Following a review in 2023 we have agreed four longer-term strategic priorities for 2023-2028:

1. Voice (clients, colleagues and sector)

Create opportunities to express opinion, respond and influence.

2. Growth in partnership

Expand the role of Southdown as a sector leader in delivery of community support services and housing.

3. Income generation

Develop profitable income streams to enable us to have greater autonomy in achieving our mission.

4. Digitally enabled care and support services

Modernise ways of working to improve systems, data insight, integration, connectivity and client experience.



Delivering our objectives and priorities

Our strategic priorities and business objectives are enabled through clear functional strategies which outline the initiatives and activities (over and above business as usual) required to deliver our ambitions. Some of these activities have been defined as projects and will be managed in accordance with our project governance structure.

Business objectives

These describe how we should deliver our business:

Area	Objective	KPIs
People (Colleagues)	Be an exceptional employer, maximising pay and development opportunities	Colleague overall engagement
		Colleague satisfaction with pay
		Colleague compassion satisfaction
		Roles filled through internal promotion
		Colleague establishment vacancy rate
		Colleague turnover annual equivalent
People (Clients & Tenants)	Provide exceptional and responsive services to our clients and tenants	Support making positive difference
		Satisfaction with support service
		Client complaints relative to size
		% of tenants maintaining tenancy
		Aggregate TSM satisfaction score
		Tenant complaints relative to size
Assurance	Operate safely and meet regulatory standards	Care Quality Commission 'Good' or above ratings
		Decent Homes Standard
		All repairs completed in target
		Gas safety checks in date
		Fire risk assessments overdue actions
		All other property compliance servicing
Growth	Managing our capacity and market position	Clients per annum
		Homes in management
		Contracts retained
		New business gained £
Finance	Maintain long-term financial security	Organisational margin %
		Housing Support margin %
		Mental Health margin %
		Learning Disability margin %
		Housing margin %
		Learning Disability Services' void placements income loss %
Efficiency	Modernise ways of working to reduce overheads and improve experience	Central costs as % of income
		Procurement savings in year
		Selling corporate services income
		Onboarding – time to recruit

Measuring and reporting on progress

To monitor and report on the achievements we make in pursuit of delivery of our Business Strategy and Priorities we have established key performance indicators. These are monitored monthly, with quarterly reports to our Board. We report against these KPIs in our Annual Report and Statutory Accounts.



Transparency and accountability

Southdown is committed to accounting for its actions and performance in an open and transparent manner. This commitment is to our tenants, clients, local communities, partners, regulators, and other stakeholders. We publish information about how we perform, what we spend and how we are governed, so that anyone who has an interest in our work can find out about the services we provide and our effectiveness.

For our tenants, in addition to our Tenants' Annual Report, we publish monthly repairs, rent collection and property health and safety compliance performance.

All our plans and reports are shared on our website: www.southdown.org

Financial Strategy

To support delivery of our business strategy and priorities for 2023-28, our Board have approved a Financial Strategy to ensure our continued long-term financial strength and viability.

Principles underlying the Financial Strategy are:

- Be financially sustainable, enabling us to invest in staffing, pay and benefits because we want all our clients and colleagues to live well as part of the Southdown community.
- Be competitive (as a contracted delivery partner and employer) through operating efficient and simple processes which enable us to have proportionate central cost overheads.
- Pursue sustainable and managed growth, with an annual target of £300k (new contracts)
- Achieve and evidence effective Value for Money benchmarking.
- Make best use of our property assets through implementation of recommendations in a bi-annually approved Housing and Asset Management Strategy.
- Re-invest surplus funds into service delivery improvements for clients and colleagues, and capital investment opportunities to increase homes in management.
- Review our Treasury Management and Investment Strategy to maximise returns on cash within acceptable levels of risk.

Five-year financial planning

Southdown undertakes several different business activities, each subject to external and internal factors that impact on the annual financial performance for that area. The diversity of activities does increase complexity, but also provides a level of financial robustness, with some capacity to balance out short-term financial and operational risks for a particular activity across the organisation.

To aid long-term financial planning, Southdown agrees a financial five-year plan, subject to annual Board review and approval, alongside the annual budget setting process. In this plan, based on key financial assumptions (e.g., growth, CPI inflation, fee increases, pay awards, rents, voids, capital investments), we project the five-year performance for the organisation.

The five-year plan sets financial performance targets for each business area, which contribute to the organisational margin target of >2.3% over the five-year period up to 2028.

Based on the five-year plan set in 2023, Southdown projects that it's income will increase from £28.6m (2022/23) to £34.2m (2027/28).

As part of the five-year plan, we have set a target to reduce central costs as a % of income.

Risk management

As has been recognised in the Regulator of Social Housing's Sector Risk Profile 2022, providers operating in supported housing and care and support activities face specific additional risks and challenges. It is a low margin, high-risk sector. When operating at such tight margins, the need for effective and proactive risk planning and management is vital.

Southdown is expert in managing this challenging operating environment, with a strong track record of being reactive to live issues, but also using market intelligence and insight to plan ahead.

Business risks, where current controls are assessed as not adequately mitigating or treating the issue, are recorded on a Live Strategic Risk Register. This system, cross referenced against issues identified in the Sector Risk Profile, and subject to an internal audit review during 2022/23, provides a 'dynamic' register of the most significant risks that are impacting the ability of Southdown to achieve its Business Priorities and Strategic Objectives. Each risk has specific detailed mitigation and controls in place, receiving increased scrutiny by our Executive Team, Audit and Risk Committee and Board.

As at March 2023, the Live Strategic Risk Register identified:

- Inability to recruit and retain staff.
- Income lost through voids.
- Landlord Health and Safety.
- High supported housing voids.
- Agency spend above target.
- High inflation rates.
- Loss of supported housing designation for homes.
- High cost of living.
- Losing existing support contracts that are more than 5% of turnover.
- Development and delivery of major change programmes.
- Delivery of organisational annual budget.

Environmental sustainability

Southdown remains committed to addressing the climate emergency as well as maximising the quality of life for our tenants and clients by proactively addressing issues of energy poverty and affordability. Southdown continues to invest capital and people resource into efforts to improve the energy efficiency and environmental sustainability of our stock.

Much of the focus in the 2022-23 year has been in modelling the energy efficiency of our property portfolio and improving our confidence in the data we hold through site visits and, in some cases, intrusive surveys. Modelling of our stock suggests a total investment cost of £315k to achieve EPC C (SAP 69) with £1,945k investment needed to reach EPC B (SAP 81).

The improved data set and modelling capabilities proved essential in our pursuit of funding through wave 2.1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Joining a consortium led by Clarion, Southdown were successful in securing co-funding for works to improve the energy efficiency of 20 of our homes.

Over the year we have operated a number of small pilots for energy efficiency, focusing upon fabric-first measures, improving insulation and the thermal performance of our stock. We continue to learn from these experiences and refine our specification. Our Director of Housing and Business Services chairs the Climate and Net Zero sub-group of the East Sussex Housing Partnership Board – seeking to build collaboration across East Sussex in addressing the challenge of decarbonisation at scale in terms of data, skills, developing shared supply chains and technologies.



Appreciation of our partners and colleagues

We would like to share our appreciation for the ongoing support of our commissioning partners: the local authorities and NHS organisations who procure our services. We firmly believe that developing credible and long-lasting relationships with these partners, enables us to work collaboratively for the benefit of our clients. Our main commissioning partners include:

- East Sussex County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Brighton & Hove City Council
- Sussex Health and Care Integrated Care System
- Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Primary Care Networks across Sussex
- NHS England

If you would like to discuss how we can work together on mutual areas of interest, please get in touch (email us at info@southdown.org)



A big thank you to all our Southdown employees. The continued success of Southdown is only possible due to their amazing commitment and efforts. We believe that there is something very special about the Southdown community, where people are truly committed to want to make a real difference to the lives of our clients and tenants, and, in turn, make a real and sustained difference to our local Sussex communities and wider society.

Together, every single day, our employees put into practice our value to be a force for good. We never take for granted the contributions that every individual provides. In return, we are committed to providing a culture that is compassionate, inclusive and welcoming, where we enable each individual to live well and fulfil their personal ambitions and career goals.



I love my job because I am passionate about supporting people to live their lives to the full, for them to achieve the maximum that they are able to.

The best thing about support work is the feedback that you get from clients. The fact that at the end of the day, you can go home and feel that you've done a good job and made a difference to the clients. It's good for your mental wellbeing.

Working for Southdown means that you are working for an organisation that is committed to sustainability, whose senior leadership team is accessible, and where the training you get equips you well for your role."

– Chris, Support Worker
for our learning disability services



We are registered and regulated by a number of organisations, including:

RSH (Regulator of Social Housing - registration number L1829):

Southdown is fully compliant the RSH's Governance and Financial Viability standards and Consumer standards as they relate to Registered Providers with under 1000 units.

FCA (Financial Conduct Authority):

As a Co-operative and Community Benefit Society we are registered with the Financial Conduct Authority and are a non-registered (exempt) charity (registration number 20755R).

CQC (Care Quality Commission):

We're registered, monitored by and work to best practice standards for the registered care and supported living services we operate. 100% of our 24 services are assessed as 'Good'.

NHF (National Housing Federation):

We're a member (number 2469) and work to their best practice standards, also holding positions on a number of regional and national supported housing and health groups.

ICO (Information Commissioner's Office):

We're registered and work to their best practice standards.

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Southdown

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