

**Leadership
Group**
September 2023

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lives

GROUP BOARD
MEMBERS

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Joe Higgins

Group Chair

Chair of Finance Committee

Joe Higgins spent over 25 years in accountancy and financial services. He qualified as a Chartered Accountant with PWC, Dublin in 1990 before moving to Bank of Ireland, Belfast. After a short spell as Finance Director of an IT company, he established a Belfast office for part of Bank of Scotland in 1996.

He held a range of Corporate and Retail roles with the Group including responsibility for UK mortgages during the 2007/08 financial crisis. In early 2009, he was appointed CEO of Bank of Scotland (Ireland) ("BoSI") which was by then part of Lloyds Banking Group ("LBG"). As CEO, he instigated the merger of BoSI with Bank of Scotland, and then established Certus to take on the 850 staff and manage the run-off of the BoSI operations for LBG.

Since this work completed in 2016, he has served as a non-executive director with a number of charitable organisations, including Bowel Cancer UK, whilst also investing in a number of IT start-ups. He recently took up a position as a non-executive director of AIB (UK) Group plc.

Joe is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland, a Certified Bank Director and holds a BA Mod in Computer Science from Trinity College, Dublin.

He joined the Choice Group Board as a Non Executive Board Director in April 2016 and became Vice Chair in September 2020. He also Chair's the Finance Committee.



Ciaran McAreavey

Group Vice Chair

Ciaran McAreavey is currently Managing Director for Close Brothers Commercial Finance Ireland, a division of Close Brothers Group Plc. which is a provider of finance to SMEs in NI and ROI. Having qualified as a Chartered Accountant with Coopers & Lybrand specialising in the area of Corporate Finance, he then moved into the banking sector and has held a number of senior leadership roles in the banking and financial services sector based in the UK and Ireland. Ciaran has a degree in Law and Accounting and a postgraduate Diploma in Accounting from QUB, is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland and a member of the Institute of Bankers.

He joined the Choice Group Board as a Non Executive Board Director in April 2016 and became Chair in September 2020.



Jennie Donald

Group Board Member

Tenant & Client Services Committee Member

Jennie Donald is Assistant Director of Government Relations and Assurance at Homes England, government's housing accelerator. Prior to joining the Agency in 2019, she was Head of Strategic Partnerships with Cardiff University. Other recent roles include Deputy Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Association and Head of Policy and Public Affairs for Ireland at Chartered Institute of Housing.

Jennie also served as the Chair of the Interim Regulatory Committee in the Republic of Ireland from 2014 to 2017, an independent Committee tasked with developing and implementing regulation of the housing association sector and co-producing legislation with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to establish a statutory regulator.

In addition to her role with Choice, Jennie is a Trustee of Cardiff Women's Aid. Previous external appointments include: Trustee of Depaul Ireland; Board Member and Chair of Business Development Committee of Groundwork NI; Board Member, Company Secretary and Chair of Housing and Property Services Committee of Helm Housing.



Mary Donnelly

Group Board Member

Vice Chair of Audit & Risk Committee

Mary Donnelly is currently employed as an Independent HR Consultant. Mary has over 30 years experience in HR and previous positions include; HR Director Workforce planning at Bank of Ireland, Senior HR Programme and Operations Manager for Ulster Bank, HR Director for O2, Head of Leadership Development for BT and Vice President Human Resources for Bombardier Aerospace Shorts.

Previous external appointments include Board Member for NI Cancer Fund for Children, NI Labour Relations Agency and Civil Service Commissioner.

Mary has successfully obtained an MBA in Business Administration from Roffey Park Management College in Sussex.



Helen Harrison

Group Board Member

Vice Chair of Development & Assets Committee / Maple and May Board Member

Helen Harrison is Director of JUNO Planning & Environmental Ltd. With over 20 years in the industry, Helen was previously all-Ireland Director of Planning at BDP, Head of Planning at Ferguson McIlveen (now Aecom) and spent 4 years as a Senior Planner in local planning authorities in England.

Helen is currently a Board Member of the Chartered Institute of Housing, an Executive Committee Member (former Chair) of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and is highly respected in the planning industry acting as RTPI Professional Accreditation Advisor to Queen's University Planning School and External Examiner to Ulster University Planning School.



Robin Hawe

Group Board Member

Development & Assets Committee / Maple and May Board Member

Robin Hawe has 42 years' experience of working in social housing with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. This includes housing service delivery and the delivery of large scale and complex housing projects. During this period, Robin has developed his skills in innovative and strategic thinking concerning land asset management and the delivery of affordable and social housing in support of sustainable communities. He has considerable experience in planning and the legal and technical aspects of the assembly, acquisition and vesting of land.

Robin has detailed knowledge of affordable and social housing needs assessments, economic appraisal processes and housing regeneration strategies, including Estate Strategies, Urban Renewal Areas and Building Successful Communities Areas. In addition, Robin has been a Board member of Belfast Healthy Cities and Landmark East.



Paul Leonard

Group Board Member

Chair of Development & Assets Committee / Maple and May Board

Paul Leonard is a graduate of Queens University Belfast, holds a M.Sc. in Executive Leadership from the University of Ulster and qualified as a Chartered Accountant with KPMG Ireland. He is a former Chairman of the Ulster Society of Chartered Accountants.

He has commercial, property and financial experience gained over more than 35 years working in banking, venture capital, and corporate finance. Most of his career was spent with Bank of Ireland where, until recently, he was Chief Credit Officer, Commercial, with responsibility for credit risk oversight of the Bank's commercial lending activities across the whole of the UK.

He has regulatory, Board level and senior committee experience and has held non-executive director positions in a number of companies. He is currently non-executive chairman of the NI Committee of UK Finance, the banking trade association, and non-executive Director of Progressive Building Society. He is also a member of the disciplinary panel of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland.



Michael McKinstry

Group Board Member

Finance Committee Member

Michael McKinstry is a highly experienced executive with extensive knowledge and experience working at a senior board level within the regulated energy sector during a period of rapid development and change. He has unique experience in the development of a private sector led greenfield gas infrastructure investment with direct strategic and operational experience with regard to governance, under differing ownership structures, regulation and business support, finance and commercial management, retail and energy trading, corporate finance, reorganisation and change, ESG and human resource management.

Michael has recently retired as Group Chief Executive Officer (of the Phoenix Natural Gas Limited after 27 years within the business. He joined Phoenix in 1996 on its formation, initially as Group CFO before being appointed Group CEO in 2014. Throughout Michael's tenure in Phoenix he was a key member of the leadership team delivering strategic and operational direction to the business throughout a dynamic period of development, growth and change.

Prior to joining Phoenix, Michael undertook various financial management roles across a broad range of business sectors including heavy engineering at GEC in Larne, textiles with Ulster weavers in Belfast and power generation with Premier Power at Ballylumford.

Michael is a qualified accountant, a member of the Institute of Directors and holds various governance roles in the education and charitable sectors.



Caralyn Scales

Group Board Member

Chair of Audit & Risk Committee

Caralyn Scales is currently a Senior Manager within PwC and has recently moved across following her position as Head of Operational Risk - Group Transformation with Lloyds Banking Group. With over 20 years' experience in Financial services, she brings over 10 years' experience in managing risk (operational and compliance) within a Retail Banking Operational environment – laterally within the Digital Division.

Caralyn has been charged with building out the Operational Risk operation within PwC Belfast in order to deliver on behalf of clients throughout the UK. Bringing advanced knowledge from her last role as Head of Operational Risk – Digital & Transformation where she was responsible for the identification of current & future strategic risks within Retail and Digital areas of what is now the UK's largest Bank. Her new remit is to ensure Clients can safely operate their business with the clarity and management of all identified and realised risks i.e. recording, identifying a treatment solution (accept the risk, minimise it or close it) and to provide strategic recommendations to the Directorate.

Caralyn has a genuine interest in actively building additional skills through many ways including keeping involved in the local community, recently chairing the Board of Governors at a local school, setting up and running the local junior parkrun and regularly fundraising for various causes.



Damien Toner

Group Board Member

Chair of Choice Services Board

Damien joined Edinburgh University as Director of Estates in January 2023. Prior to joining Edinburgh University, Damien was Director of Estates at Queens University, and a senior Director for one of the UK's largest infrastructure support service companies and has worked in both the public and private sectors. Damien is a Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and a graduate of the University of Ulster with over twenty years' experience in the construction, estates and facilities management industries.



Suzanne Wylie

Group Board Member

Suzanne Wylie became the CEO of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce in August 2023.

Previous to that she has held significant leadership roles in public services for over 15 years, most recently as the CEO to the Jersey Government, and prior to that, as CEO of Belfast City Council. Suzanne has led these organisations to focus on improving services to customers and also to implement a number of game-changing programmes to transform the future prosperity and sustainability of the places she represented.

In Jersey this involved supporting the Government in the delivery of a mini-budget to address cost of living increases; development of new housing affordability programmes; and oversight of a number of arms length bodies, including Andium Homes. The Public Services that she had responsibility for included health services, education, skills, social security, children's social care, economic development, infrastructure and international relations.

In Northern Ireland, Suzanne was instrumental in securing the £1bn Belfast City Region Deal, which is leveraging public and private finance to boost business capability in innovation and technology, as well as enhancing a range of tourism assets. She also oversaw the delivery of a comprehensive regeneration strategy for Belfast, presenting NI as a place for investment in offices, hotels, visitor attractions, housing and jobs.

Suzanne is passionate about carbon reduction and has worked in both jurisdictions on the development of Carbon Reduction Road Maps. She has also worked on many programmes aimed at addressing inequalities and deprivation.

She was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Jubilee Honours, received an honorary doctorate from Queens earlier this summer, where she also completed her MBA, and is a fellow of the Institute of Directors.



Caroline Young

Group Board Member

Chair of Tenant & Client Services Committee

Caroline is Director of Student Plus at Queen's University Belfast. Her role involves the leadership of various services which deliver much of the Campus Life and the Student Experience, including the University's Staff and Student Accommodation, Campus Food and Drink, Events and Conferencing, Culture and Arts, Childcare, Sport and the Students' Union. Since joining Queen's in 2005 she has overseen the growth of student accommodation at Queen's from 1,600 – 3,500 rooms and investment of over £100m.

Caroline previously worked in Sales, Marketing and Business Development with a variety of Hotel Companies and Golf Resorts throughout the UK, Ireland and in Europe. She has extensive senior management experience in the hospitality, service and leisure industry within both commercial and Higher Education sectors.

Caroline is also a Board Member of Visit Belfast and a Governor of Victoria College Belfast.

COMMITTEE & SUBSIDIARY BOARD MEMBERS

Together
we enrich
lives

- Audit and Risk Committee
- Choice Services Board
- Development and Assets Committee
- Finance Committee
- Maple and May Board
- Tenant and Client Services Committee

choice 

choice 
services

+Maple
May



Mark Adrain

Choice Services Board Member

As Group Property Director at Henderson Group, Mark Adrain operates at board level and is a key driver of growth in one of Northern Ireland's most successful local companies with an annual turnover of over £1bn. With over 26 years' experience in the Northern Ireland property sector, he has built up a wide network of relationships across the business and public sectors.

He leads all elements of the capital investment approval process for the Group, manages robust assessments of all investment returns, oversees research and assessment of new and developing property income streams and manages expansion of multiple income streams to augment and support the core business.

As Group Acquisition Strategy lead, he developed a strategically focussed acquisition and site expansion programme to achieve the Henderson Retail's 2026 vision for expansion and spearheads the growth strategy for Henderson Group Property successfully delivering on growth KPIs, goals and objectives set by the shareholders over the past 15 years. He heads up a multi-functional team which is responsible for procurement, construction, maintenance, energy management, retail proposition development and rates.



Karen Bailey

Tenant & Client Services Committee Member

Karen is the Chief Executive (Acting) of the Business Services Organisation (BSO), one of the major Health & Social Care organisations delivering a complex mix of support services to Health & Social Care.

BSO employs approximately 1500 staff with an annual core budget of more than £176m and is a unique Arms-Length Body in that only 20% of income is derived directly from the Department of Health, the remainder is secured through contracts with HSC customer organisations.

She is the Accountable Officer (AO) for BSO reporting to the Permanent Secretary and has a close working relationship with the Chair and a team of five Non-executives Directors. She reports to the Board monthly and ensures strong systems of control, quality management, risk and assurance are in place.

Karen is highly qualified, educated to Master's Level (MBA and MSc), has completed levels 1 and 2 of the Institute of Director's Chartered Director Programme, and the CIPFA Certified NQF Level 3 in Governance among other professional development.



Paul Convery

Tenant & Client Services Committee Member

Paul Convery is Head of BT Business Enterprise in Northern Ireland and is responsible for BT's Private Sector business operation across all industry sectors in NI. He has led his team to drive significant digital transformation programmes with some of NI's largest corporate organisations. Paul represents BT on the regional Ofcom steering committee for service providers.

Paul has held a number of senior positions within BT, several with an all-island remit. He holds a BSc in Economics from QUB and an MA in Marketing from UU. Most recently he served as President and Chair of the Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade (2017-2019), and during this period he also acted as Chair of the Greater Newry Vision Partnership. Paul has been a Council member both of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Derry/Londonderry Chamber of Commerce. He has been Chair & Head Coach of Poyntzpass Basketball Club since 2016.



Stephen Elliott

Finance Committee Member

Stephen Elliott is a very experienced and accomplished Finance Director with over 35 years' experience in manufacturing, construction and development and the food and drink industry. Throughout all of his roles he has supported and led finance teams, with constructive challenge, to deliver more relevant and timely information for decision making. Stephen has recently retired from the role of Group Finance Director with Dale Farm, one of Northern Ireland's most recognised businesses. In that role he was responsible for all the financial affairs of the Dale Farm Cooperative group which is the largest cooperative in the UK processing over 1 billion litres of its members milk and employing 1250 staff.

Between 2000 and 2013, Stephen was Group Finance Director of the Mivan Group which was a privately owned group operating in interior fit-outs, property development, construction, theming and ship outfitting. Prior to that, between 1985 and 2000, Stephen was a key member of the senior management team of Boxmore Group, a large group of packaging companies, quoted on both the London and Irish Stock Exchanges. He ultimately became Group Finance Director, reporting directly to the Group Chief Executive, and was responsible for the financial affairs of a Group which had 19 operating units in Ireland, England, Wales, France, Germany, Belgium, South Africa and China.



Roy Hamill

Tenant & Client Services Committee Member

Roy has over 38 years' experience working across a range of public sector organisations in health and social care. He is currently operationally responsible for the delivery of a range of core community-based services such as community integrated teams (social work, occupational therapy, and district nursing) and treatment room services. In addition, he has responsibility for a number of Trust wide services such as Wheelchair services, continence services, community equipment services and podiatry.

He also provides the interface to acute services in the delivery of acute OT services and intermediate care services through Trust Recovery services and community discharge coordination.

Roy provides leadership to the development of E-Health in areas of telemonitoring, telecare and assistive technology. Alongside this, he participates in the development and implementation of IT solutions to support professional practice.

He is Director of Community Care and a member of the Trust's Operational Management Team, advising the Trust Board and Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive on all issues relating to policy, statutory requirements, professional practice, and workforce requirements pertaining to the development and delivery of a range of high quality, safe, effective, and patient-centred services within the Northern Trust area. As a member of the Senior Management Team, he shares corporate responsibility for the achievement of the Trust's corporate objectives.



Elaine Hartin

Finance Committee Member

Elaine has 20 years' experience working in senior management roles in the public and private sector. She is a qualified Chartered Accountant having completed her training with Deloitte, where she progressed through to a Director Role before leaving to take up an appointment with Belfast Met in 2011.

She is currently Director of Corporate Services with Belfast Metropolitan College, reporting directly to the College Board on all aspects relating to Finance, Audit, IT & Estate. Belfast Met is the largest FE College with over 12,000 learners, 1,000 plus staff and a turnover in excess of £60m. The College is a Non-Departmental Public Body and a registered Charity.

Elaine also served as the NI Member of the Prison Service Pay Review Body from 2013 to 2016. A Prime Ministerial appointment, this body provides independent advice to Government on Pay for Prison Officers in England, Wales and NI.

These experiences have provided her with a thorough, and up to date understanding of corporate governance, risk management and the role of the Board in ensuring effective governance of the organisation.



Catriona Gibson

Vice Chair of Tenant & Client Services Committee

Catriona Gibson is Managing Partner and Head of the Dispute Resolution practice for leading law firm Arthur Cox in Northern Ireland. She specialises in Litigation and deals with all aspects of contracts, construction and planning dispute resolution.

The first woman to be appointed Managing Partner of a leading law firm in Northern Ireland, Catriona is unparalleled within professional services locally for the strength of her capabilities and the international locus that she has brought right to the heart of Northern Ireland's professional service community.

A passionate advocate for good governance and leadership, Catriona serves on the Institute of Directors' Northern Ireland Committee.



Martin Gillespie

Choice Services Board Member

Martin Gillespie is Director of Facilities Management at McLaughlin & Harvey Ltd. He has gained over 23 years' experience in the Facilities Management industry (including Hard, Soft FM & Compliance Services), specialising in best-in-class service delivery to both the Public and Private sectors and providing strategic direction at Operational Board Level. His key focus is on business growth, risk & governance, contract performance, P&L and discussing new potential service offerings.

During his career, he has been responsible for a variety of Public Finance Initiative projects (c.210m) in terms of bidding, reaching financial close through to operational delivery. Martin has successfully managed over 250 personnel (including Contract Directors) across the UK and Ireland in a range of sectors such as Blue Light, Educational, Health, Legal and professional services.

Martin is a member of the Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management (IWFM) and Institute of Directors.



Siobhan Lynch

Choice Services Board Member

Siobhan has over 30 years' experience in the hospitality and tourism sector and is currently Director of Operations at Titanic Belfast, a World Leading Attraction which opened in 2012 and to date has welcomed over 7 million visitors from 145 countries across the world. She has direct responsibility for Visitor Attraction, Facilities Management, Hospitality and the Operational management areas of the business with a strong focus on customer service.

As a member of the Senior Management Team, Siobhan has responsibility for setting the strategic direction of the organisation; developing, reviewing and monitoring company policy; developing business opportunities; approving and overseeing capital investment programmes; reviewing business results and monitoring KPI's; setting and monitoring financial budgets; providing gap analysis across all areas of the operation and working with the TB and MBT (Maritime Belfast Trust) Boards and other stakeholders.

Prior to joining Titanic Belfast, Siobhan undertook various leadership roles for both independently owned and global companies including G4S Facilities Management, The Mount Charles Group and Mooney Hotel Group.



Donal MacAteer

Vice Chair of Finance Committee

Donal McAteer is currently Group CFO with Devenish Nutrition Group and has been in that role from 2014. During his time, the Group turnover increased from £100m to £225m, with 4 new manufacturing sites opened and organic growth was complemented by several business acquisitions and joint venture investments in UK, US, Europe and Africa. His role included structuring and leading the delivery of a £100m+ debt refinancing, which was an important enabler of business growth, and which included EIB funding for innovation, the first of its kind within the industry, executed during Brexit uncertainty. His role incorporates Corporate Planning, Financial & Risk Management, Management of treasury, credit and other risk exposure, Budgeting, Capital Fund Raising and Investor Relations, Corporate Governance & Compliance and the Development of a high performing Finance team, including identifying and overseeing changes necessary within structures, developing talent and introducing new skills and experience where required.

Prior to his experience in Devenish Nutrition, Donal was Director of Corporate Banking NI for 6 years, had 6 years in Corporate Banking in Northern Bank (Danske) and two years in the Corporate Finance and Restructuring Division of Invest NI.



Rory McConnell

Development & Assets Committee / Maple and May Board Member

Rory McConnell is a Qualified Chartered Surveyor and a Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (MRICS). He has 48 years' property experience working in private practice, based in and around Belfast and across Northern Ireland. He started work with Alexander Reid & Frazer in Belfast in 1975, joining his father in McConnell Martin in November 1976, and becoming a Partner in 1986. In 2010 he was instrumental in bringing the two sides of the of the family firm, McConnell Martin, and Brown McConnell Clark McKee, back together to form McConnell Chartered Surveyors. In early 2021 he retired as a Director at McConnells (remaining as a Consultant until 2022) to form his own company RDR NI Ltd., taking over the management of Kilroot Business Park, Carrickfergus.

Rory has a wealth of experience across the board, from Commercial and Investment Agency, through Development Appraisal & Consultancy, Valuation, and Property Management. At McConnell Martin he negotiated an Alliance Partnership with King Sturge, which ultimately resulted in McConnell's Global Alliance with JLL. In February 2021 Kilroot Business Park, a 60 acre / 700,000 sq ft mixed use facility in Carrickfergus, was acquired by an English JV Partnership, and the opportunity arose to take the management, letting and development of the Park in-house. Including Rent, Service Charge, and Electricity income, Kilroot has a turnover in excess of £4m pa, and by May 2023 the Park was fully let, with Net Operating Income having almost doubled since acquisition.



Gerry Millar

Development & Assets Committee / Maple and May Board Member

Gerry Millar is the Belfast City Council's Director of Property and Projects and he previously worked as the Director of Improvement.

During his time with the Council Mr Millar has gained experience in Building Control, CCT, Change Management and in Strategic Management within the Chief Executive's Department before moving to Development.

Mr Millar is a chartered surveyor by profession and was Chairman of the RICS (NI) 2007/2008, he was also a Board Member of the RICS UK World Regional Board. Gerry has previous experience in public sector housing and private sector commercial property and construction and holds an MBA from the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. He is also a graduate of the Belfast Common Purpose programme.



Rita Murray

Tenant representative on Tenant & Client Services Committee

Rita Murray has been an active member of Choice Tenants' Forum for the last 11 years and is currently the Chair of the Tenants' Forum. Rita is an avid volunteer for the last 65 years and is a member of the Greater Belfast Seniors and the 50+ Group. Outside of Rita's busy volunteering, she is a cat enthusiast!



Tim Nelson

Choice Services Board Member

Tim Nelson is a Chartered Surveyor with over 15 years experience developing and implementing strategic asset management programmes for various local and central government agencies. Formerly a Regional Head of Estates for a central government department Tim is currently working as Head of Asset Management for a large multinational firm within their property professional services consultancy.

Tim is currently undertaking an MSc in Construction Management at Ulster University. He is also a trustee of Mutual Energy Ltd who oversee the management and development of critical utility infrastructure connecting Northern Ireland with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.



Trevor Rea

Choice Services Board Member

For approximately 20 years Trevor was the nominated Service Manager on the Pan Government Property Management Contract which delivered a comprehensive property maintenance service to an Estate of 2200 properties. As Deputy Director of Property Services Division (PSD) he was responsible for the management of the planned maintenance to both the DoF Office Estate and wider public sector assets in Northern Ireland. PSD manages an estate of approximately 1200 sites consisting of offices, educational facilities, laboratories, emergency services and historic monuments as well as some public attractions such as the Crumlin Road Gaol and the Armagh Observatory.

In PSD he managed a cohort of over one hundred staff including Architects, Quantity Surveyors, M&E Engineers, Building Surveyors, Fire Services Engineers and Supplies and Stores staff all supported by a Central Administrative Team. He contributed to the CPD Senior Management Team and helped develop the procurement strategy for several iterations of the Pan Government Property Management Frameworks 2003 – 2019. He also revised the QA Management processes and successfully retained ISO 9001 accreditation through each independent annual review.

For many years, Trevor was a member of the finance team which managed the budget for the maintenance of the DoF office estate, which demanded continuous monitoring of expenditure, (including accrual reporting) to ensure that the budget was spent in accordance with the fiscal guidelines and associated policies.



John Roden

Development & Assets Committee / Maple and May Board Member

John Roden is a chartered construction professional with over 25 years' industry experience and has worked on a wide variety of both public and private projects throughout Northern Ireland and the UK. His experience includes working with multi-discipline integrated design teams and multi-faceted clients across the public and private sectors.

As a Member of the Chartered Institute of Building and the Association for Project Management, John has delivered many multimillion-pound healthcare, education, and commercial schemes throughout his career. He is currently Director and owner at PURE Construction Management Limited which provides services to developers, clients, contractors, and suppliers.



Bernie Rooney

Audit & Risk Committee Member

Bernie Rooney is a retired Senior Civil Servant with a wide range of experience spanning a number of NI Government Departments including: Department for Communities; Department for the Economy; Department for Infrastructure; the Department of the Environment; and The Executive Office. She has extensive experience of working for NI Executive Ministers and Direct Rule Ministers with a comprehensive understanding, knowledge and experience of the Machinery of Government in Northern Ireland and of working in collaboration across jurisdictions. Bernie has undertaken a variety of roles during her career, covering policy, operational delivery, service transformation, oversight of arm's length bodies (including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive) and programme management. Bernie has a strong track record of leading large operational public sector organisations to reach their goals and was awarded a national Civil Service Leadership Award in recognition of her achievements.



Claire Staple

Audit & Risk Committee Member

Claire Staple has over 20 years of post-qualification experience as a lawyer. She joined Elliott Duffy Garrett as a trainee solicitor in 1998 and ultimately progressed to the position of Partner in the Corporate and Commercial Department. During this time she worked across a number of Housing Association matters including tenant disputes, organisation restructuring and lending/security.

Claire then joined Business Services Organisation (BSO) in 2014 as Solicitor Consultant in the Directorate of Legal Services. BSO provides regional business support functions and specialist professional services to the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland. It is an 'Arm's Length Body' of the Department for Health and employs c1,400 people. Claire currently specialises in BSO in the provision of legal advice and support to ICT and digital health procurement and contracts.

She recently attained a Post Graduate Diploma in Digital Health Leadership from Imperial College, London and continues to hold a practising certificate with the Law Society of Northern Ireland and is a member of the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal. Claire is also a governor of Victoria College Belfast.



David Tate

Audit & Risk Committee Member

David is currently a Consultant with Grant Thornton, a Chartered Accountant and accomplished senior credit risk executive with expertise in the strategic management of Corporate and Retail banking portfolios. He has held various senior positions in Danske since 1999 in Credit Risk Management and Head of Credit. He also has a 15-year consulting career with KPMG (2½ years in Melbourne, Australia) focused on Corporate Finance and in Corporate Recovery with Goldblatt McGuigan. David's career to date has allowed him to develop strong skills in the management of transformational change. He has significant Risk Management experience, including the establishment, monitoring and maintenance of a Risk Appetite Framework.

David is comfortable operating in a heavily regulated industry with a strong focus on compliance with regulatory guidelines, legislation, and international operating frameworks. He also has expertise in Policy & Strategy Implementation.



Gráinne Walsh

Audit & Risk Committee Member

Gráinne has been supporting organisations to shape the political and policy landscape in Northern Ireland for over eighteen years. A native of Dublin, she has worked across all government departments and with every party over the lifetime of five assemblies, as well as extensive engagement at Westminster, Whitehall and at local government level.

Gráinne provides strategic communications and government relations advice to leaders across business, VCSE and public sectors in Northern Ireland. She brings insight to politics and public policy drawing on her most recent experience of supporting businesses and charities to navigate the UK's exit from the EU as well as responding to the challenges of COVID-19.

Gráinne is a member of the Public Affairs Board of the PRCA, Housing Rights and the IoD Northern Ireland Regional Committee. Other roles include Advisory Panel Member Collaboration in Training and Innovation for Growing, Evolving and Networked Societies (CITI-GENS); Expert witness to the UK Citizens' Assembly on Democracy; and Advisory Panel Member JRF Ulster University research into Universal Credit in Northern Ireland.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Together
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choice 

choice 
services

+Maple
May



Michael McDonnell

Group Chief Executive

Michael McDonnell qualified as a Chartered Accountant with KPMG in 1989 and worked for many years as a partner in BDO, a leading global professional services firm. He has worked in leadership roles within both the private and not-for-profit sectors across the British Isles, including time with PA Consulting Group and G4S plc. He joined Choice in January 2016 having been Chief Executive of Helm Housing.

Michael has a First Class Honours degree in Accounting & Financial Analysis from the University of Warwick, and a Post-graduate Diploma from Queen's University Belfast. He has attended a number of leading business schools across Europe and North America. Michael is also a CIH Chartered Member.



Jon Anderson

Group Director of Development

Jon Anderson is Group Director of Development within Choice. He joined the organisation in January 2017 with a remit to expand our operations into both the private rental sector and within the residential development market. He qualified as a Chartered Surveyor in 2004 and worked for many years as a Director in Colliers International, a leading global property consultancy. He has primarily worked within the private sector with roles including commercial and residential property management, development consultancy, investment appraisal and land acquisition. Latterly, he has acted as property / investment advisor to a number of global financial institutions and investment firms.

Maple and May, a wholly owned subsidiary of Choice was launched in February 2018 and is exploring opportunities to expand its private rental and sales portfolio throughout Northern Ireland.



Carol Ervine

Group Director of Tenant & Client Services

Carol Ervine has 26 years' experience in the social housing arena and holds an MBA and BA (Hons) from the Ulster University.

Starting her housing career with Ulidia Housing Association in 1992, Carol held various positions within the organisation as her responsibilities grew.

As a member of the Senior Management Team, Carol held the post of Director of Corporate Services & Finance for over 15 years, until the organisation merged with Oaklee Trinity in June 2015. Carol's current position is Group Director of Tenant & Client Services which encompasses Property Services, Housing Management, Services Centre and the Tenants' Forum.



Wilton Farrelly

Group Director of Asset Services

Wilton Farrelly is an experienced property and services professional. With a BSc in Estate Management he subsequently qualified as a Chartered Surveyor and following a career in the Facilities Management industry, is a Fellow of the Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management (IWFM). In his previous role he developed a services business in H&J Martin, which over 15 years grew to an annual turnover of £35m and a team of 250+ staff. He has worked in both the public and private sectors as well as having spent four years self-employed. In 2017 he helped set up Choice Services and is focused on developing it in to the leading Direct Services Organisation in Ireland. Wilton has experience of servicing clients in the public, commercial and private sectors and has a strong commercial and customer focus.



Lawrence Jackson

Group Director of Corporate Services

Lawrence Jackson is a HR Professional with over 22 years experience gained both in consultancy and in-house positions. He has held senior HR roles within multi-site, blue chip private, public and semi-state organisations in Ireland including the BBC, Bank of Ireland, Guinness and Harland and Wolff.

He joined Choice in July 2016 after running his own consultancy business for a number of years. Lawrence attained a PhD in Psychology from Queen's University Belfast.



Michael Rafferty

Group Director of Finance & Resources

Michael Rafferty has over 25 years experience of working in senior finance positions across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. He holds an accountancy degree and postgraduate diploma in accounting from Queen's University. He qualified as a Chartered Accountant with PWC in 1990 and was awarded the Northern Bank prize as the top Northern Ireland student. He also holds an MBA from Queen's University, Belfast. He worked as a senior consultant for both PWC and Deloitte where he specialised in financial management, financial systems and PPP/PFI projects.

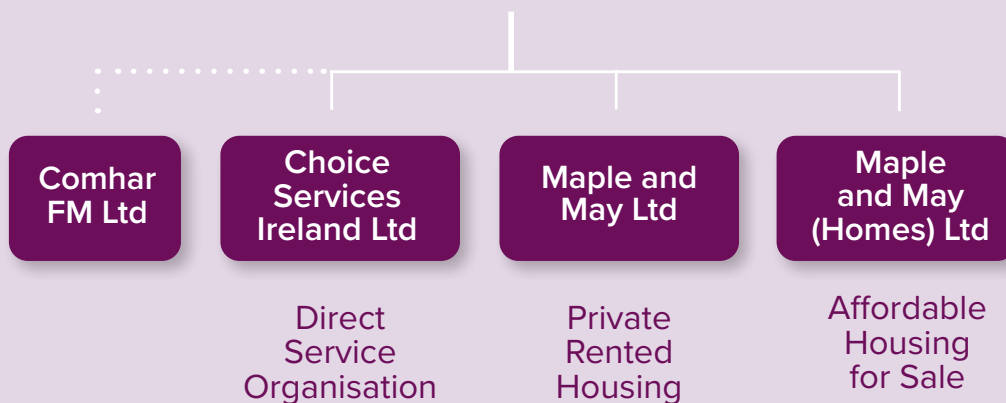
He has supported many large organisations through significant change processes, with particular emphasis on improving value for money. Since 2003 he has been Finance Director for Choice (and its predecessors) where he has played a key role in leading change through introducing innovative funding, improving systems and developing a strategy based on organisational change.

Choice Group Corporate Governance Structure

Group Board

Choice Housing Ireland Limited

Group Companies



Group Board

Choice Housing Ireland Limited

Committees





Choice

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