

CARE AND LEARNING ALLIANCE - REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
for the year ended 31 March 2021

The trustees, who are also the directors, of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006, present their report with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2021. The trustees have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard for Smaller Entities (the FRSSE) (effective 1 January 2015).

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Principal Activities and Objectives

The activities of CALA are to promote, maintain, improve and advance the educational and social development of children and their families working with settings providing early learning and childcare (ELC) and or school age childcare and through family services support to parents and communities.

The Charity's values guide our work:

- Play is the right of every child and we ensure respect and integrity in all that we do;
- Inter professional practice - effective partnerships;
- Individual accomplishment; supporting all stakeholders to realise their full potential;
- Accessible and responsive services for all;
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a commitment to quality.

Our core activities and work centred around three main themes which were at the heart of our 2017 – 2020 CALA Strategic Plan which, due to uncertainty and impacts of Covid 19 crisis, was then extended with an interim 1 year plan. Work is ongoing on the 2021-2024 Strategic Plan to be launched in Sept 2021.

STRATEGIC REPORT – COVID 19 OVERVIEW

The Covid 19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown overshadowed and dictated all our work in 2020-21 period and the impacts continue to be felt. During the first lockdown of March to June 2020, most of CALA staff continued to work and provide quality and valued services, the majority from home in a virtual capacity as well as in one of our 6 Keyworker Hubs which we provided in partnership with Highland Council. During that time, staff also ensured strong engagement and support for families even if the rest of our settings and services were closed. This was through direct contact in the shape of phone calls, emails or social media as well as through dedicated Family Information and Support pages of our website. The statistics for these pages show incredible engagement as well as the value parents placed on this support.

While most of our staff continued to work from home, we did furlough the majority of our School Aged Childcare (SAC) staff as well as some of our Main Company employees as their posts were not covered by public funding. We also furloughed our temporary relief practitioners on our Staffbank until August 2020.

As restrictions started to ease, we were able to re-open our settings and provide the quality ELC services albeit in a restricted way. This was due to the changing guidance which restricted blended placements and staff moving between settings. Our Staffbank staff were also limited to one setting per day, while SAC continued to be further restricted due to the limits on mixing of school pupils.

Our senior management has also been restructured and works effectively as a team leading an ethos of collaboration and a collegiate approach for the whole organisation.

Our online eLearning zone (www.calaelearning.co.uk) experienced a marked increase in activity over the lockdown period which highlighted the need and importance of this resource not just in Highland but nationally across Scotland. This increased use has continued even after many restrictions were lifted.

The impact on children and families has been huge with the sheer unpredictability of a global pandemic, the uncertainty of peoples work and the disruption to everyone's lives causing anxiety and stress.

CALA ran 6 keyworkers hubs focussing on supporting the children, some of whom had not previously attended our setting, as well as the parents. For those children who were not able to attend their usual setting, we felt it was essential we maintained contact and the relationship with the child and their family. We created a new area on our website so each setting could have their own space and the practitioners uploaded activity ideas, updates about the settings and their own lives, shared photos of the other children and ensured a strong and active engagement. Families were also phoned on a regular basis providing a quick check in, a listening ear or a more in depth support for parents who were struggling due to the pandemic. Many parents said it was a lifeline with a common being *"thank goodness you guys are here, don't know how I would of coped"*.

The relationship with the children was also vital for the child to stay connected to their setting and the staff and this helped with the transition back into the setting when restrictions eased. The children shared news and updates from their lives with the practitioners who responded and encouraged, praised and supported them and also used it to provide additional play and learning suggestions for them and the rest of the children. For instance a child wrote *"I got a lovely surprise in the post from my Auntie in Aberdeen – I got jigsaws, games and clothes and this has kept me busy in the horrible weather."* The practitioners replied *"Wow, what a lucky girl, maybe you can send us a photo of your completed jigsaw and tell us about the picture and also how many pieces it has?"*

In the Keyworker Hubs, the staff talked to the children at about what they were looking forward to when Covid is over - *" seeing my friends again" " going back to school", " going back to the park", " going to the ice cream shop", " have a party" - as well as why they were at the Hub rather than their usual setting or school - "because of the virus", " my mum has to work"*. And also checked in with them to find out what was good about the hub - *" everything ", " Playing outside and dancing with staff", " Arts and crafts", " Staff are fun and its better than being at home"*

The Keyworker Hubs not only provided a safe, secure and happy place for the children to be while their key worker parents had to work, they also sometimes introduced the child and parent to our setting - as one of the Hub managers said *"From first lockdown we have kept two of the babies that joined us in the keyworker hub - which speaks for itself, both these parents were so happy how their child settled."*

ADD PHOTO??

The following sections for achievements, performance and finance form the strategic report of the charity.

ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

As a major funding partner, the Highland Council (THC) continues to work closely with CALA ensuring that shared key outcomes and targets are met in relation to the outcomes identified. Due to the pandemic, the proposed review of the 2020-21 Service Level Agreement (SLA) was postponed and we once again had a one year variation to our updated SLA that reflects our shared outcomes as well as our own and THC's strategic plans.

However, we were disappointed when THC decided without consultation to withdraw their funding support for our Staffbank in their budget decisions for 2021-22. Consequently the sustainability of this vital and valued service is under review.

1. Membership Services

As a membership organisation, our support to our membership is particularly important to us and we ended the year with 204 members from across the sector – down 50 from last year. However we recognise that the Covid crisis had meant some services closed temporarily or even permanently. We processed a total of 68 PVGs (down by over 100 from the last year due to Covid) of which 40 were for members, ensuring staff across the sector conform to safeguarding legislation.

Members have expressed their gratitude for the range of support and information they received from CALA over Covid which was extremely challenging and at times stressful time for the sector. Not only did our knowledge and expertise help them navigate through ever changing restrictions and guidance, but the friendly and personal way it was done was also highly praised.

“CALA have kept us informed of government guidelines and helped us to have online meeting and meet outdoors which has helped keep our group connected which is important . .definitely recommend CALA membership” Parent, Gaelic Parent, Baby and Toddler group

The CALA team have been very helpful over Covid and kept in touch to see how me and the children are coping. Highly recommend becoming a CALA member as CALA Team are always there to answer my queries or concerns . .and are lovely to chat to as well which I think is really important as I am working alone as a childminder” Childminding member

Over the course of the year, approx. 2340 payslips were processed and issued to CALA staff and 1406 to our Member Groups, which is part of our member support services to the sector. The Covid pandemic meant this service was even more vital and supporting members with their Furlough applications was extremely welcomed, due to the complex nature of this new process.

We use CALA for all our payroll and PVG applications, it just makes life so much easier. We also access CALA induction and courses for all new staff and they are invaluable” Private Daycare provider

“Simply the best – better than all the rest! What more can I say – service with a smile/prompt/sorts out all the problems – all done at a sensible price!” 3rd sector organisation who uses CALA for their payroll.

“The payroll service provided by CALA (previously from the Dingwall office and now from Inverness) is absolutely invaluable. I really couldn't manage without it.” 3rd sector member

CALA Human Resources section is also a very busy department supporting employees, managing vacancies and recruitment and we had 138 employees including 80 Relief Childcare Practitioners on CALA Staffbank by end March 2021. Our Staffbank was of course closed completely for 4 full months over the first lockdown and the restrictions, that continue, of 1 setting per day have impacted heavily on availability and supply. The total number of staff furloughed in CALA during Covid was 110 – 39 across our main and sub companies and 71 from Staffbank.

Ongoing appreciation of the range and breadth of CALA membership support is recognised and remarked on by our members and our friendly approach is very welcomed.

“Positivity and support resonates and reflects the overall feel of CALA as a whole – incredibly friendly and supportive” 3rd sector daycare provider

Despite the Covid pandemic, we successfully completed the move into our new office at Longman Drive, Inverness which allowed us to bring together our admin, Finance, HR and Staffbank teams, creating greater links and co-production across all CALA companies, ensuring a collaborative ethos and boosting cross company working. This will allow our positive culture of innovation and development to continue to flourish and benefit the charity by bringing new ideas and partnerships to the mix. The office also serves as the training hub and learning centre for our Foundation Apprentices.

2. Grow and strengthen the early learning and childcare (ELC) workforce

Developing and supporting our professional and dedicated workforce is key in meeting our aims and objectives of providing high quality childcare and we have had to adapt that support to meet the Covid restrictions. Supporting staff health and wellbeing has been vital and we quickly ensured all staff who could work from home did so and were supported with regular contact with their managers and teams as well as providing detailed virtual CPD and training opportunities as appropriate. Even though they were home working, staff went *‘above and beyond’* working tirelessly to adapt to new ways of working and ensure processes and procedures were quickly amended to meet changing restrictions and guidelines.

Despite the pandemic we successfully moved all but one of our settings to delivery of 1140 funded hours despite the challenges from guidance such as social distancing, cohorts and restrictions on blended placements. Unfortunately, the past year also saw the closure of 9 of our services mainly due to sustainability challenges. In April 2020 we had 35 ELC/SAC settings but only 26 by March 2021.

Our Foundation Apprentices (FAs) continued with their course work albeit online for part of the year and all 7 have successfully completed their first year of the 2 year programme. We have started recruitment for a new cohort to start in September 2021. The inability to visit settings or take up placements has been difficult for not only our FAs but also for any of our usual student placements. We have created innovative ways for our FAs to observe the children and also provide play and learning outdoors in the community.

Our CALA Staffbank of trained, quality temporary Relief Childcare Practitioners (RCP) provided 5462 hrs of childcare cover, which is a significant decrease on last year of 16,184 hrs – due of course to the closure of Staffbank for 4 months and then the ongoing restrictions once the sector reopened slowly. However, positive signs were seen from November 2020 (before the second lockdown announcement) and then into March 2021 where we provided more hours than we did in the same months in 2019 showing that we are getting back to a positive position and the trend continues to be upward.

The vital role of Staffbank in supporting people entering the ELC and providing a positive pathway into the sector is also illustrated by one former RCP who said

"I just wanted to say a big thank you for taking a chance on me during my interview all those years ago, without which I wouldn't be in the job I love as a qualified EYP. Thank you for all your advice and words of encouragement. Truly means a lot"

The pandemic made our online e-learning modules even more popular with a significant increase in on-line learning from across the nation. Supported by Scottish Government Children and Young People Early Intervention Fund (CYPEIF), 3383 new users registered and a total of 22,457 modules were accessed. We are particularly proud that 3293/13,037 of these were Child Protection, 6747 were children's health related and 2410 were Supporting Young Children's Behaviour across all 32 local authorities at a time when children and families were particularly vulnerable.

"I would just like to pass on to yourself and your team what a great benefit it has been [to be] able to take part in all of the [e learning] CALA courses– it has been particularly useful this year throughout the pandemic when so many young people have had a year of disrupted learning." Partner's feedback

Also supported by the CYPEIF, our professional learning provision nationally had a few set backs due to enforced cancellation of face to face learning. Ever responsive, we developed new courses and converted others for virtual delivery including Children's Rights and Gender Equal Play. We worked hard to hone our IT and online delivery techniques and despite a few 'testing' moments we successfully delivered 16 courses to 311 learners for clients in West Lothian, Argyll & Bute and Moray.

". .CALA are doing sterling work as ever and good to see that - it is really good that you at CALA have pioneered online training and communication as this will be much needed in the new future. To you and all of CALA thanks for what you are doing . ." National 3rd sector organisation

Our training offer to our Highland Council partner moved on-line with a new module on Allergens accessed by 90 users. 219 learners accessed our two new courses 'Setting the Table' supporting implementation of 1140 hours and 'Play into Practice' for practitioners providing valuable play and learning in School Age Childcare settings.

Quality Improvement (QI) visits were paused, resuming in November in a new virtual format to 21 settings and 5 actual visits. These QI reports informed development of tailored Continuous Professional Learning (CPL), with 19 sessions delivered to 369 practitioners/members, helping to keep everyone involved, motivated and connected. Good Practice Guides for ELC & SAC were published. Managers and Team Leads accessed two weekly professional Q&A's and a Friday phone-in service. QI visits have now resumed and we have a very busy schedule ahead of us assessing quality and supporting our practitioner teams to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and ensure a quality service for the children and families.

Communication was prioritised keeping staff, children and families connected. Over 1,200 calls were made to families over lockdowns. Website enhancements included dedicated news / information areas for each setting. A new online Family Handy Guide and Good Practice Guides were created along with areas for information, play ideas, videos and download for different ages to support families during the lockdowns. Our dedicated Practitioner Portal, includes a dedicated Team CALA page as well as our new e-books empowering practitioners to access learning anytime. Website and social media interactions significantly increased over the year with 110,295 hits on the website alone. An IT audit has been used to inform the trial and gradual roll out of tablets to all our settings in support of effective communication with parents.

"CALA did a great job of maintaining contact with families during lockdown" Professional working with children and families

"I know from early contact that CALA did a great job of maintaining contact with families during lockdown" 3rd sector partner

The Keeping Children Safe Reference Group continues to report to the Highland Child Protection Committee, promoting third sector experiences, awareness of safeguarding and related information updates with our dedicated web pages and termly bulletin. Our Child Protection Designated Officer's advice, refresher training and learning reviews supported our practitioners in liaising with agencies and keeping children safe.

NHS Highland continued to fund the Active Play programme. Planned for delivery in schools, our Active Play practitioners responded dynamically to Covid restrictions and ongoing changes, eventually delivering to 6 ELC settings, 5 Parent and Toddler Groups and 3 schools with the quality outdoor physical play experiences having a highly positive impact on children.

Our High 5 admin post continues with NHS Highland, co-ordinating resources and collation of information from schools on behalf on NHS Highland.

Policy review featured strongly over the year, with an overhaul of several key policies in response to circumstances including our Safeguarding Policy.. This has been a substantial piece of work which is ongoing and includes a children's rights and wellbeing impact assessment.

3. Strengthen partnerships

CALA continue to develop our partnerships with Highland Council as well as other agencies, while our relationship with parents/carers is of key significance to us and this has been especially important over the Covid pandemic. We consistently see high satisfaction from parents about our services and support.

The Family Team provides very welcome support to Parent, Baby and Toddler groups – this was especially important over Covid when sessions and activities were quickly moved online and outdoors.

Our Family Practitioners provided 77 sessions either virtually or outdoors of Bookbug, Play@Home and Baby Massage as well as play ideas, songs and stories. 313 families and 372 children were supported through English, Gaelic or Polish.

This support was seen to be incredibly important especially in remote and rural areas and over Covid when many parents felt isolated and in need of peer support and advice. CALA staff also provided online PEEP sessions including 'Antenatal PEEP' while all Family Practitioner staff were trained in 'Buggy Walks' which have proved popular with parents/carers getting out and about to meet others in a safe and fun way.

One practitioner said after an online group *"One mum had not spoken to anyone in over 6 months before starting the sessions and commented they were a 'lifeline' to her and her kids"*

Partnerships with other services is also key so we can work together to provide support and advice as and when it is needed and again the Covid crisis showed us how valuable this was in supporting families in a joined up holistic way.

One Health Visitor commented about a PEEP parenting session *"Really appreciate all the work [CALA] put into each session, the clients are really benefiting from the programme. The weekly update received following each sessions is great and I add this to their maternity notes."*

"A couple of our regular parents, whom we had telephone contact with were just happy to hear a voice who could relate to the stress of having the children at home and working, we actually found that for them it was a bit of relief mentally to have a voice at the end of the phone who knew their child and what they were experiencing when it was tough times." CALA setting manager

The Family Team also supports Gaelic Toddler Groups which can often be an introduction for both children and parents to the language and encourages parents to consider Gaelic medium education as well. Our dedicated staff support the Gaelic language from an early age and over Covid sessions were held outdoors to provide the same play and language opportunities whilst adhering to regulations.

“Really enjoyed Gaelic being encouraged and spoken and the help for parents to learn.” Parent comment

FUTURE PLANS

The impact of Covid on all our lives and work cannot be underestimated and CALA as an organisation has changed hugely in past year. Many positive changes have taken place including the moving to a more joined up approach which our improved IT systems has supported. Our systems, policies and processes have been reviewed, streamlined and updated so reporting and tracking is simpler but more efficient and purposeful. All this contributes to our key aim of providing high quality services that support the best outcomes for children.

Plans for a new ELC service at Beechwood Campus illustrate our commitment to new partnerships and services moving forward. Our aim is for this setting to become a centre for excellence as well as supporting our training services for a strong ELC workforce. We look forward to working closely with the staff and students at Inverness College UHI in considering new ideas for innovation and skills for work and life.

The coming year will see us focussing on the development of a new Strategic Plan that builds on our understanding of the ‘new normal’ and ensures we can meet and adapt to the changing needs of children and families as well as for funding bodies and of course CALA into the future. As we recognise the challenges the post-Covid world brings, we must also look to the opportunities of new partnerships, business growth and services while ensuring we focus on our purposes as a Charity. This planning work will include Board, staff, volunteers and partners, parents, children and other stakeholders.

We will also continue to streamline our systems including a review of our company structure and our Mems and Articles to ensure our governance is also meeting our aspirations for 2021 and beyond.

Also, as the main crisis of the 2020 pandemic is subsiding, we cannot be complacent and must also continue to support our staff’s wellbeing and help mitigate from the challenges that the pandemic brought for them personally and professionally.

The continuing inequity between third/private sector and public sector pay rates can make it difficult to recruit and retain staff as well as making the sector feel less valued. CALA will continue to lobby for greater pay and conditions parity across the sector. We believe staff should enjoy pay rates which reflect the value of highly skilled and professional staff.

CALA will continue to build on relationships that were strengthened during the Covid crisis including with national partners such as Scottish Out of School Care Network, Early Years Scotland, National Day Nurseries Association and SCMA (Scottish Childminding Association) seeking ways to ensure a holistic joined up approach to sector wide issues across the country, while also maintaining our Highland and Moray focus.

Our partnership work with Scottish Government is highly valued and enables the voices of the sector, especially in remote and rural areas, to be heard. Our work on the ELC Recovery Group helped inform and shape policy and funding decisions during the Covid crisis and we are rightly proud of our role in that and grateful for the listening ear of Government.

We aim to 'Futureproof' CALA services for communities for the years to come. We recognise that fiscal austerity is a reality and as we move forward income diversification will be ever more important. We also recognise that work patterns and therefore demand for some childcare services have changed and we may need to consider how we reshape our services in a post Covid world. We will continue to provide 'Best Value' and ensure we are working so that our high quality, efficient service meets the diverse needs of children and families in remote and rural areas in an innovative and flexible way.

Recognising the financial impact the pandemic has had on many families, we will continue to develop our work to support the reduction in child poverty, working with Community Planning Partners as well as considering how our services can positively impact on child poverty.

We will develop our work with parents, supporting them to not only play and interact with their children but also look at that as an opportunity for them to grow in both confidence and new skills. This could then lead to them undertaking training to allow them to consider a future career in ELC.

We recognise we must do more to communicate to others the high quality vital work we do to support families. Building on our Covid response and continuing to take all opportunity to showcase our services we aim to highlight the vital importance of quality ELC services for the sustainability of Highland and other rural areas as a whole.

It has been an unprecedented, hugely challenging year for CALA, families and communities and there will be much work needed for many years to come to fully recover from this crisis. However, it also allowed us to re-evaluate our ways of working and we believe we are now in a much stronger, more dynamic position moving forward, allowing us to grab opportunities and look to develop services in an innovative way using our streamlined services and the new skills learnt over such a difficult time.

We must also celebrate the resilience and expertise of all our staff and the huge ability CALA had to adapt quickly and respond appropriately and professionally to the needs of families and their children. As we move into an exciting time for CALA, we will balance opportunities with capacity, focus on innovation and income diversification and overall quality of ELC all within the 'new normal' of the post pandemic period. We are grateful for a hugely supportive, expert volunteer Board, collaborative partners as well as a dedicated, enthusiastic and professional staff without whom we could not deliver to the high standards we do day in day out – which meets the needs of children and families and helps ensure Highland, Moray and Scotland is the best place to grow up.

"The measure of intelligence is the ability to change." — Albert Einstein

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CARE AND LEARNING ALLIANCE - REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
for the year ended 31 March 2021

Financial review

Close monitoring and review of the ongoing financial situation has remained steady throughout 2020/21 ensuring that CALA's financial position remained tightly linked to budget targets and planned expenditure, despite a very challenging financial climate and the uncertainty of the Covid crisis. Forecasted budget planning is in place for 2021 onwards and we are developing a Strategic Plan for 2021-2024 linked to a strategic financial plan to ensure we diversify income streams to continue to provide a quality service that is sustainable. We will be closely monitoring any changes in funding from the Highland Council to ensure any impact of these is managed and limited and ensure early discussions with our main funding partner on any budget changes to provide the greatest level of preparedness.

Investment policy

The company received shares on the flotation of the Alliance and Leicester Building Society (now Santander) and it is the company's policy to retain these shares.

Reserves policy

It is the policy of the charity to maintain unrestricted funds, which are the free reserves of the charity, at an appropriate level.

Structure, Governance and Management

CALA trustees are elected annually ensuring that the company benefits from a breadth of experience and skills. Throughout the year training and development opportunities are made available to the Board of Trustees. The Board meets every 8 weeks with Chief Executive, Jaci Douglas, to review the strategic work of Care and Learning Alliance including scrutiny of the current and future financial position. The Finance and Audit sub-committee ensures greater scrutiny over finances and risks and is helping support the senior team to develop new ways of working and identify possible solutions and strategies to cope with the ever changing fiscal and policy landscapes.

The day to day running of the company is devolved to the Chief Executive.

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Registered Company number SC115681
Registered Charity number SC009292

Registered office
40 Longman Drive
Inverness
IV1 1SU

Company Secretary

Jaci Douglas

Trustees

Margaret Kinsella (Chair)
Angela R Baxter – resigned October 2020
Scott Hay – appointed February 2021
Linda Kirkland - resigned October 2020
Jane Litster
Marie J F Mackintosh
Shirleyanne MacDonald
Alice Mongiello – resigned February 2021
Graham Watson

CARE AND LEARNING ALLIANCE - REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES

for the year ended 31 March 2021

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Auditors

Frame and Kennedy

Solicitors

Macleod & MacCallum
28 Queensgate
Inverness IV1 1YN

Banker

The Royal Bank of Scotland plc
29 Harbour Road
Inverness IV1 1NU

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

The principal activities of the company (CALA) are to promote, maintain, improve and advance the educational and social development of children and their families working with centres and clubs offering pre-school education and childcare and through direct support to parents.

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees (who are also Directors of Care and Learning Alliance for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Report of the Trustees and financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (U.K. Generally Accepted Accounting Practice). Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the trustees are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditors are unaware;
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditors are aware of that information

AUDITORS

Frame Kennedy were appointed as auditors after the Annual General Meeting on 3rd October 2019.

CARE AND LEARNING ALLIANCE - REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES

for the year ended 31 March 2021

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on _____ 2021 and signed on its behalf by:

Margaret Kinsella
Chair of the Board of Directors

Jaci Douglas
Company secretary