

COMPANY: City Building
BASED: Glasgow
FOUNDED: 2006
MAJOR PROJECTS: Glasgow Housing Association, Commonwealth Games
STAFF NUMBERS: 2,200
TURNOVER: £200 million

City vision

As the former maintenance arm of Glasgow City Council, City Building has flourished since branching out on its own nine years ago

By Nick Martindale

Glasgow-based City Building is less than a decade old, but in that time has established itself as one of the UK's leading construction companies. Originally the direct labour organisation responsible for repairs and maintenance for Glasgow City Council's housing stock, the entity became a business in its own right in 2006 and has since expanded its portfolio to include major construction projects, newbuild housing and refurbishment programmes.

"At that time repairs and maintenance for the council were in general decline but there was a lot of work available from the industry outside and we had a big workforce and apprenticeship programme to maintain," says Graham Paterson, executive director. "Becoming a limited liability partnership allowed us to expand into other market areas and work in both the private and public sectors."

The business is still wholly owned by the council, and this work still accounts for a considerable amount of its £200 million turnover. It recently won a long-term repairs and maintenance contract with the Glasgow Housing Association, worth around £35 million a year, which provides direct employment for around 800 people.

"We have to clearly demonstrate best value for work with the council; we're not just given that automatically," says Graham. The Glasgow Housing Association contract was one

of the biggest repairs and maintenance contracts in Europe at the time and we won that in competition with 17 other companies, securing employment and jobs and training for a long time." The business also services 56 other housing associations, in and around the Glasgow area.

Alongside this, however, City Building has built up the construction side of the business, from £30 million four years ago to around £80 million today. It has recently completed the construction of 27 schools in the city and is embarking on a new five-year programme worth £250 million, which will eventually see every primary school in the city upgraded or rebuilt. "There's been a massive shift in terms of the construction side, and looking ahead at our order book that's not going to change," says Graham. "I don't see it dropping below that £80 million level over the next few years." Other areas of focus include care homes and newbuild homes.



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Stephen Rankin

300: The number of electricians employed by City Building

to house 350 athletes. After the Games we made it fit for purpose as a care home."

From an electrical perspective, the Tontine Building was particularly challenging, says Stephen Rankin, senior electrical planning manager. "It was a two-year contract to modernise a building that was massively run down and we had big problems with asbestos and crumbling walls, as well as outdated electrics. It was a full refurbishment with the mains coming into the street from the substation and into the building and up to the four storeys, plus the ground floor and the basement, so it was a massive job to undertake."

Stephen heads up the company's electrical side, which provides support to the wider business on all its projects through its team of more than 300 electricians, as well as operating dedicated business units for fire alarms and controlled entry systems.

Talent hotspot

The business as a whole directly employs around 2,200 people, and indirectly provides work for another 2,000 or so in its wider supply chain. Major contracts tend to be planned in advance, says Graham, helping the business manage its employee base, and it relies heavily on apprenticeships as a means of generating a pipeline of talent (both Graham and Stephen are themselves former apprentices with the business).

It takes on approximately 100 apprentices a year – around 9 per cent are women – including around 20 electrical apprentices, and currently has almost 500 on four-year schemes. "It's very important for us to keep that training and apprenticeship programme going," says Graham. "The aim is for them to secure jobs within the business, and we've been very successful at that. But if it's not with City Building then at least they have the skills and training to go out into other organisations and the wider industry itself."

City Building is also a big employer of people with disabilities, through its Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries business, which employs 250 people designing and manufacturing kitchen, office and educational furniture. "It's the largest supported manufacturing facility within Europe with over 50 per cent of the workforce registered disabled, and that's a key part of our supply chain as well," says Graham.

As well as this, the business actively encourages both women and those from black and ethnic minority backgrounds to consider construction as a career choice, and its work in this area was recently recognised at both the prestigious Scottish Business Awards, where it won the corporate social responsibility title, and in the allocation of the Queen's Award for Enterprise in 2012 for its sustainability initiatives.

The business recently developed a two-year business plan and forecasts turnover remaining steady at around the £200 million mark, says Graham, adding that he would like to grow both the construction and newbuild housing operations. He also sees energy efficiency as a potential growth area. "The most important thing for us is making sure we maintain apprenticeship and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. That's central to what we're about."

» Nick Martindale is editor of *Connections*



4,200: The number of people who depend on City Building, either directly or indirectly

Sporting chance

The business was also heavily involved in construction work for the Commonwealth Games, which took place in Glasgow last year. "One of the biggest projects was the National Hockey Centre," says Graham. "We also worked on the headquarters of the Commonwealth Games team, which was a major refurbishment of an old building known as Tontine Building in the city. Another big project was the Scotstoun Squash Centre in the Commonwealth Village that was used