

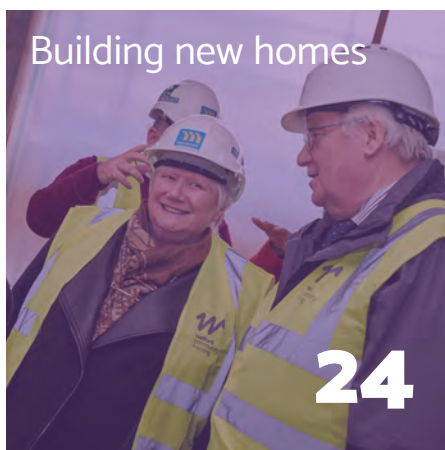
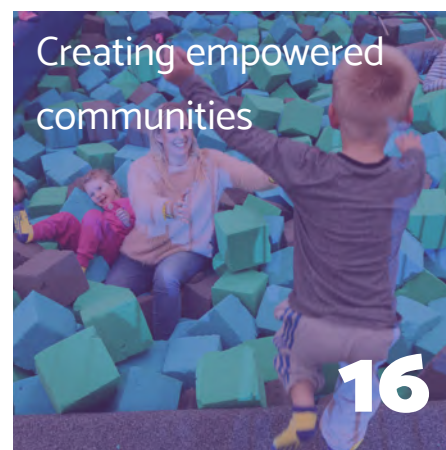
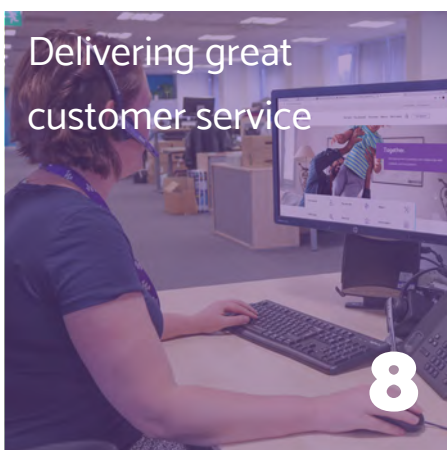
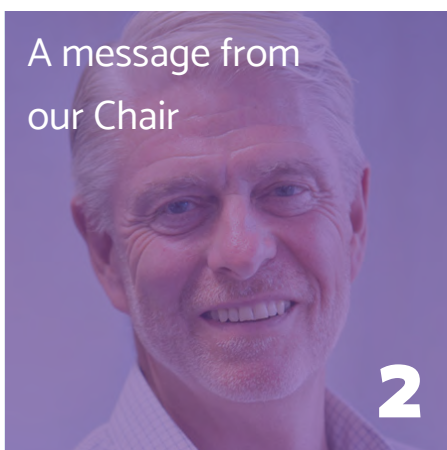


watford
community
housing



Annual report to
residents 2018/19

Contents



Welcome



“We continue to perform positively against our objectives and aspirations. We have also begun to develop our plans for the future, making sure we keep residents at the heart of our service.”

A message from our Chair

Welcome to our annual report for 2018/19. We have put together this summary of the last year so that you can see how we are performing and what we have achieved. By working closely with residents we have continued to provide high-quality services and make improvements which help us to deliver on our vision of better homes and friendlier communities.

As an organisation, we now have a much more complex business structure, and this year we have seen our new partnerships flourish. We have made strides towards our development aspirations, building safe, modern and affordable homes across a range of tenures and in different areas. Delivering much-needed housing is vital to providing for our local communities, and we will continue to invest in this area.

Ensuring our residents are safe has always been our top priority. We have, therefore, also invested significant amounts in making homes as safe as possible. In particular, we continue to reflect on how best to respond to the concerns raised by the tragedy at Grenfell Tower and have, for example, installed new sprinkler systems in our high-rise blocks to give residents the best protection available.

Ensuring we have a secure and strong financial position means that we can continue to improve our services to you. This year, our finance teams have been working hard to source funding to support improved services and more new homes.

As we move into the final year of our 2016-2020 business plan, we continue to perform positively against our objectives and aspirations. We have also begun to develop our plans for the future, making sure we keep residents at the heart of our service.

As always, we do our best work when we are informed by our residents. If you would like to share your feedback on the annual report or on our services, please do get in touch.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read 'John Swinney'.

John Swinney
Chair



“We are very pleased to have secured a multi-million pound grant from Homes England to provide a large number of homes for social rent in partnership with Watford Borough Council. Being able to provide truly affordable housing is one of our key aims.”

A message from our Chief Executive

2018/19 has been particularly positive for Watford Community Housing. As always, all of our work has been focused on providing safe, affordable and high-quality homes along with friendlier communities for all. We have continued to see improved results for our residents, including significant successes and progression towards a bright future. It is a strong reflection of our progress that overall satisfaction with our services has increased by 9% from this time last year.

We are very pleased to have secured a multi-million pound grant from Homes England to provide a large number of homes for social rent in partnership with Watford Borough Council. Being able to provide truly affordable housing is one of our key aims, and we are thrilled to be able to actively demonstrate that commitment. The 58 social homes which we can now provide will go some way to increasing the provision of much-needed housing which meets the needs of people in the local area.

Putting in place our new cleaning and grounds maintenance contract with Accuro was one of our biggest accomplishments this year. This was the result of many hours of collaborative working between residents, staff and the Group Board – and we are confident that it will result in a service that meets the high standards you expect from us.

Now that the contract is in place, we will be monitoring the new approach to ensure it meets these expectations so we are providing the best for our communities. This is just one example of how we are working more closely with residents than ever before, with lots of people ordering from our Involvement Menu to find ways to get involved with helping us to deliver better services and do valuable work in the community.

Thank you for reading this report on our activity over the last year at Watford Community Housing, and for working with us to help us improve and grow. We will continue to strive for better homes and friendlier communities – together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tina Barnard".

Tina Barnard
Chief Executive

Repairing & improving homes

Making sure your home is a safe and comfortable place to live is one of our key priorities. Every year, we maintain and upgrade homes through our in-house repairs service and our planned improvement programme.

This year, as well as upgrading properties through our improvement programme, we replaced a large number of boilers, carried out a major regeneration of one of our 50+ Living schemes and made it easier for you to book repairs.

Our improvement programme continues

In 2016, we began a five-year programme of improvement works in partnership with Engie. 2018/19 was the third year of giving our residents upgraded kitchens, bathrooms, roofs, doors and windows.

It has been an excellent year for the programme. As well as carrying out lots of upgrades, Engie has achieved a very high customer satisfaction score of 99.43% and an exceptional score under the Considerate Constructors Scheme, which measures the impact of contractors on the communities they are working in. Engie has also held training and work experience for local residents, and given their former apprentice, Watford Community Housing resident Kelsey Fox, a full-time job as an administrator.



205 boilers replaced

88%

satisfaction with our repairs



£700k spent on sprinkler systems



99.43% satisfaction with our improvement programme



93% of emergency jobs completed on time



80% of repairs fixed first time

In numbers – home improvements:



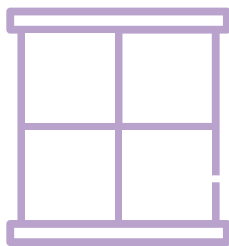
92 new kitchens



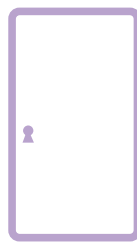
152 new bathrooms



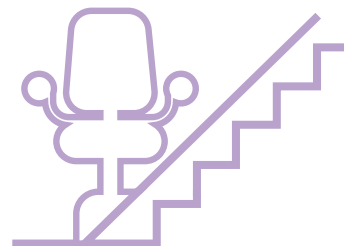
54 roofs upgraded



73 homes fitted with
new windows



46 homes fitted
with new doors



77 residents helped with
aids and adaptations



Improving your repairs service

When something in your home goes wrong, we can send one of our operatives out to take a look and repair it. This year we made a few changes to make the service more efficient, as well as making it easier for you to book repairs.

One of these changes was to appoint a single supplier for all equipment and tools. Our contract with Jewson means we have better access to materials, so we can find the parts we need to carry out repairs easily and deliver an improved service to you.

We also made improvements to our online digital account system, which allows you to manage your tenancy quickly and easily. This year, we upgraded this service by giving you the chance to book the timeslot for your repair using a calendar system, so you have more control over when we visit.

Cutting energy bills

We continued to replace old, out-of-date boilers in our communal blocks and homes. Installing better, more energy-efficient boilers helps residents to save money and is better for the environment.

As well as installing more economical boilers, we also helped residents to reduce their bills by trialling a new smart thermometer device. The device measures your energy use and saves you money by helping to reduce the amount you spend on heating your home.

Increasing safety measures

We worked closely with Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to further strengthen fire safety in our bigger blocks. This work included installing intelligent radio-linked smoke and heat detectors in the individual apartments in our high-rise blocks – Abbey View and Munden View – and our 50+ Living residences. We also installed full sprinkler systems in Abbey View and Munden View, helping to make people's homes as safe as possible.

In addition, we replaced many of our door-entry systems as well as installing new CCTV for our high-rise blocks and the surrounding area. By repairing and updating the door systems used to enter our communal blocks, we have improved the safety and security measures in place for residents.

A new look for Combewood

Combewood is one of our 50+ Living blocks – and this year we spent £260,000 bringing the building up to date.

Although the building was much-loved, it no longer met modern standards so we made a significant investment to deliver major improvements for residents. We improved the internal fittings, filling the lounges with modern furniture and features, and re-decorating the communal spaces. We also upgraded the external facilities, including the gardens.



Delivering great customer service



56% compliments vs
44% complaints



14 seconds –
average waiting time
for calls to customer
services



**4 minutes 27
seconds** – average
call handling time



79.3% of queries
resolved on the
first call



190 food bank
vouchers given out



55% of residents
pay their rent by
direct debit



As well as making sure your home meets your needs, we aim to offer high-quality customer service to help you manage your tenancy easily.

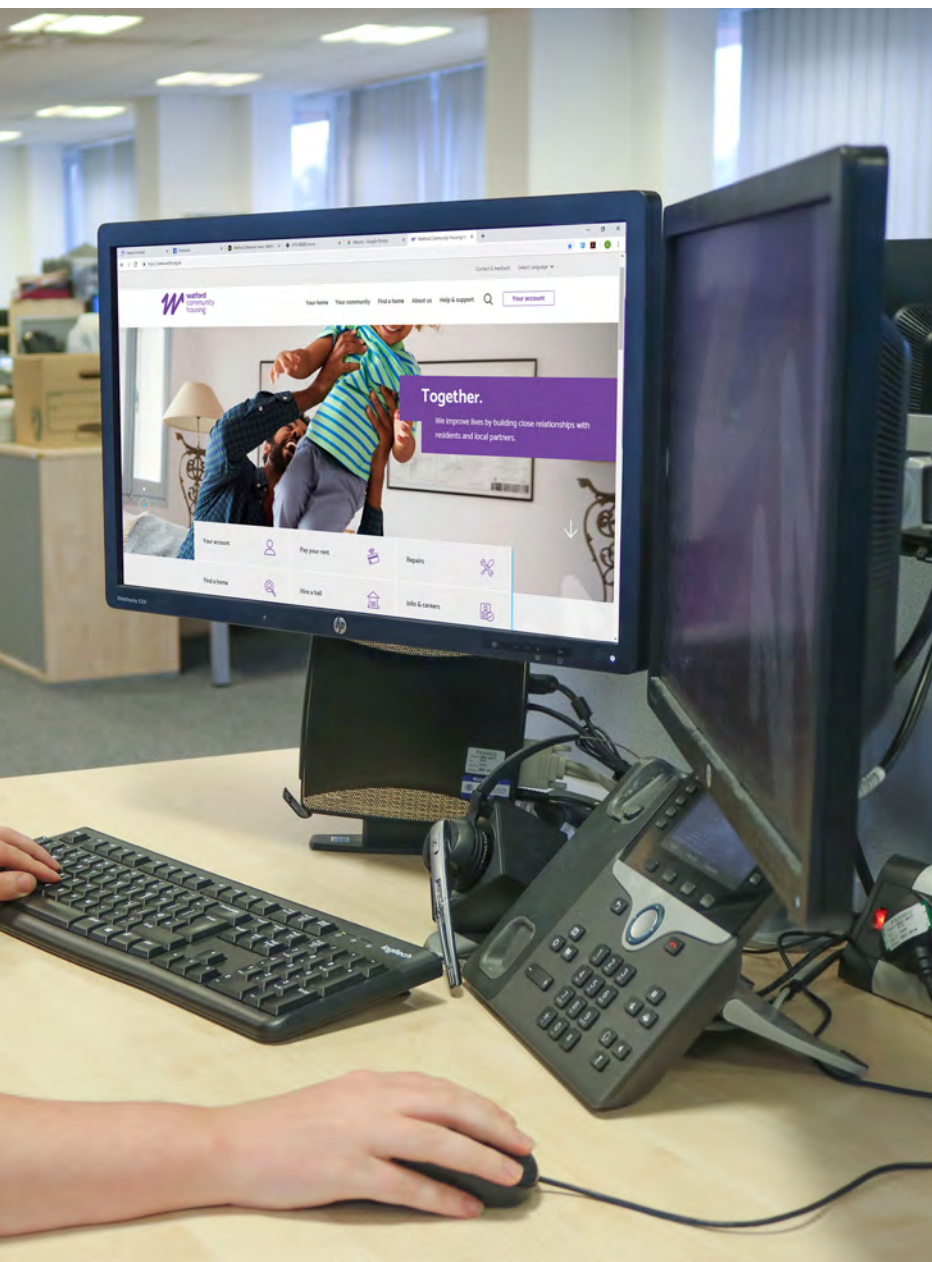
Whether you're reporting a repair, speaking to us about an issue in your neighbourhood, asking for support with managing your finances or calling us about something else, our Customer Services team is there to help you.

In 2018/19, we improved a number of our services and introduced some major changes to our feedback procedures to help us understand what we do well and where we could look to get better.

Listening to your feedback

We're always keen to get your views, so we carry out surveys to help us find out how we're performing and to see what we do well and where we could improve. This year, we updated our feedback processes to help us find out more about what you think of the service you receive from us. In June 2018, we introduced new post-call surveys, so that you can instantly let us know about your experience with our Customer Services team.

We also conducted an in-depth survey that helped us to understand how we are performing in comparison to other organisations. Your responses told us that you think our service has improved overall, although there are a couple of areas where we could do more, such as the ease of contacting the right person and the speed of our responses.



85%
overall satisfaction with our services



903 people have signed up to manage their tenancy online




12% of tenants are on Universal Credit



78% of tenants are up to date or in advance with their rent





“We’re always keen to get your views and find out how we can improve our services”

Improving our digital services

This year, we launched a new website. After consulting with residents and staff about their current experience, we updated the layout, look, feel and navigation menus to make it easier for you to find the information and services you need.

We also continued to make improvements to the services you can use through our website. By signing up for an account, you can manage your tenancy online by reporting repairs, viewing your rent account and more. We added to these features in 2018/19 so you can now also book specific timeslots for your repairs, pay your rent and give us feedback directly.

Helping to combat money worries

We know that the support we can offer with managing finances is a vital part of our services for some of our residents – especially with the introduction of Universal Credit. In order to help residents to keep on top of their rent payments and reduce their worries about money, our Tenancy Support Officers use their expertise to help people access funding, benefits and financial aid.

In the last year, our Tenancy Support Officers assisted 250 people in total, supported 46 tenants in making applications for Discretionary Housing Payments and helped residents become better off by a total of £310,000 per year.

We also helped residents to save money by agreeing to meet the premium costs of the Allpay rent payment phone line, so that calls are now charged to residents at local rates, or free as part of your phone plan.



Looking after your neighbourhood

Taking care of your home isn't just about your four walls - we also help to look after neighbourhoods so that they are pleasant places to live. Our work includes helping to combat anti-social behaviour, maintaining communal spaces and working with our partners to keep your area safe.

During the year, we worked closely with tenants who are passionate about the services we provide to improve cleaning and grounds maintenance. We also focused on combating tenancy fraud, training our staff to raise awareness of issues around safeguarding and finding out more detailed information about our residents so that we can provide tailored services.

Improving services for communal spaces

After working with a panel of tenants and staff experts, in 2019 we signed a new contract for cleaning and grounds maintenance in our communal spaces. These services will now all be provided by Accuro.

We have listened to the feedback from residents about the changes they would like to see, and incorporated them into the new contract. In particular, our resident inspectors have informed us on the actions that need to be taken to improve the service. Now, amongst other changes, grass will be cut based on how long it is, rather than just a set number of times per year, there will be an annual programme of deep cleans and newly-trained cleaners will receive the Real Living Wage for their work.





27

residents worked with us to agree the appointment of Accuro, our new cleaning and grounds maintenance contractor



35 mutual exchanges completed



77% of households' diversity & inclusion info updated, so we can deliver the right services for you

“Taking care of your homes isn’t just about your four walls – we also help to look after neighbourhoods”

Tackling tenancy fraud

Tenancy fraud is a crime covering a range of illegal activities such as sub-letting rooms, abandoning a property and not reporting additional members of a household. We aim to tackle tenancy fraud to make sure that we can provide homes to the people who need them most.

In 2018, we set up an anonymous tenancy fraud hotline so that residents or neighbours who have seen any suspicious activity can report it in confidence – you can call it on 01923 209120. We also held a key amnesty to encourage tenants who may hold keys to a property fraudulently to return them.

As a result, 12 cases of tenancy fraud were referred for investigation and one abandoned property has already been successfully recovered.

Tailoring our services to you

By finding out more about our residents – the ages of people in your household, your needs and preferences, and the condition of your home – we can help to provide you with services that meet your expectations.

This year, we carried out 1,155 tenancy audits – these are visits to your home that allow us to verify details about the house itself and the people living there. We also collected diversity and inclusion data from 77% of residents, so that we can ensure our services are suited to your needs.

Safeguarding and supporting residents

Carrying out tenancy audits and collecting data about residents also allows us to identify where we may need to offer more support. Our staff have received in-depth training from relevant organisations such as the police on issues including human trafficking, hoarding, cuckooing and safeguarding children.

This training, along with gaining access to one fifth of our properties throughout the course of the year, has meant we can offer better support for residents. In 2018/19, we referred 61 safeguarding concerns to relevant teams and made 59 referrals to the mental health charity Hertfordshire Mind Network.

Successful partnership working

A key part of our work in your neighbourhoods involves working closely with local authorities, the police and the fire service, as well as other partners. Our work with other organisations has led to significant success. In 2018, we worked with the police to issue a closure order for a former problem property, meaning the house could be refurbished and a new family could move in.

In August 2018, we signed up to work closely with Mediation Hertfordshire, which helps to resolve conflict and rebuild relationships in local communities. Through this service, we resolved three long-standing disputes. We have also continued to join forces with local organisations to promote safety, security and healthy living through the Community Safety Partnerships.



1,155 tenancy audits completed



61 cases referred as safeguarding concerns, helping to protect people who might be vulnerable

Creating empowered communities

We know that one of the most important ways we can support residents is by helping to build vibrant and connected communities. Our work with residents, local groups and community partners enables us to provide you with skills and opportunities to help you reach your full potential.

By reaching out and talking to the people in our communities, we can deliver services to improve your local area, offer support and assistance to improve your lifestyle and create opportunities for our residents to flourish.

Offering engaging opportunities

In 2017, we launched our Involvement Menu to give you the chance to work with us to improve our services and your skills. In 2018/19 we met with 130 tenants for a face-to-face conversation about how we can offer support to help you reach positive and achievable goals for yourself and your community.

By working with residents, we have made a difference to people's lives in a huge variety of ways. Our community engagement options enable us to support you in whatever way suits you best, whether it's finding a place for you to help us make organisational changes, passing on career recommendations, or working with you to hold community events – such as the Women's Day and Men's Day that we held to help raise awareness of gender-based issues.





202

people engaged with us through
our Neighbourhood Plans

“One of the most important ways we can support residents is by helping to build vibrant and connected communities.”

Investing in community groups

In order to help us reach further into the community, we support a range of specialist volunteer groups and projects, and we continue to work closely with a number of residents' associations too.

This year, the continued hard work of the Nifty Over Fifty group, our social and activity group for people over fifty, was recognised when they were nominated for two national awards. 2018/19 has also seen the rise of Solo Stars, a friendship and support group for single parents in Watford. Originally a group set up by us, Solo Stars now has its own committee which organises and runs popular events for members and their children.

Through our funding panel, which includes residents and staff, we also funded 46 community projects using money from our Community Chest and Community Development Fund. This has allowed us to support even more people as they use their services and skills to help others.

Educating and raising awareness

By raising awareness about key issues that concern our residents, we can help to educate, share advice and encourage communities to be healthier, happier and more understanding. Some of the free sessions we delivered included a talk about autism, training on how to be a 'dementia friend' and information on how young people can stay safe online and in relationships.

We have also invested in training residents in essential skills, providing 23 training opportunities in 2018/19. In partnership with the Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service, we arranged courses for people to improve their IT skills, develop their spoken and written English and further their first aid knowledge. We also paid for two residents to complete a Level 2 course in Housing Practice with the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Making positive changes in your neighbourhood

Every year we carry out surveys into a select group of our community areas to find out how living in your neighbourhood impacts your life and what we can do to help you. In 2018/19 we focused on the Sherwoods, Vicarage and Harebreaks areas of Watford. We spoke to residents and heard your feedback in a variety of ways, which helped us come up with a unique 'neighbourhood plan' for each area.

Based on your responses, we have taken action to tackle your concerns. To improve safety and communication about anti-social behaviour, we created drop-in sessions for residents to meet our Anti-Social Behaviour team and their local Police Community Support Officer. We have also started to look into funding fun activity courses for young people in each area.

Hubs at the heart of our community

Our community hubs give neighbourhoods a valuable resource and a focal point for residents. In 2018/19, they continued to be used for a wide variety of activities hosted by many different groups. Amongst these groups were W3RT, the Watford & Three Rivers Trust, which is now based at our Harebreaks and Leavesden Green hubs. Activities held in our hubs included sessions held as part of the National Diabetes Prevention Programme and the ever popular Christmas carol concert hosted by the All Saints Church at Leavesden Green, which saw around 150 people attend.

At the Meriden Community Hub, we helped to set up a therapy centre for The Living Room, which provides vital support and treatment for people with addictions. We also welcomed a team of volunteers from the Prince's Trust who kindly redecorated the nursery area at Leavesden Green and the space at the Harebreaks used by performing arts group The Dan Tien, making both facilities more modern and welcoming for visitors.



In numbers – supporting local communities:



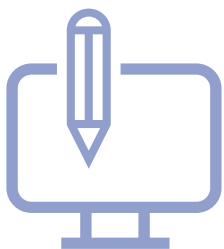
130 residents engaged with us through our involvement menu



46 projects supported through funding bids



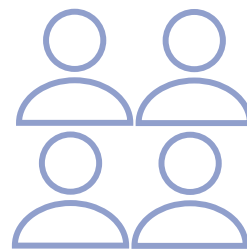
26,816 visits to our hubs



23 training opportunities created for residents



£9,298 allocated by the Community Chest and **£4,539** allocated to TRAs



£60k invested through community projects



Working closely
with residents



150+
hours of work completed by the
Gateway Membership Team

As a Gateway organisation, we're committed to working in close partnership with our residents. We have a number of channels for in-depth discussion of how we can deliver high-quality services. Listening to your feedback and ideas helps us to adapt and grow to meet the needs of all of our residents.

This year, we introduced new ways of collaborating with residents on important aspects of our service. These have allowed us to refine how we work, enhance our contracts with suppliers and look at how we can make improvements for the future.

Evaluating our processes

Scrutiny of our services takes place with a different focus each year. In 2018/19, the resident scrutiny group focused on our 'welcome and settle' process – what happens when a tenant first moves into a property. As part of their work, residents looked at the sign-up process, reviewed policies and paperwork, and played a key role in redesigning the welcome pack new tenants receive.

Resident volunteers also worked hard with staff to procure a new grounds maintenance and cleaning contractor. The tender process for a new contractor is intensive, and involved meetings, travelling to visit potential contractors and making key decisions. Throughout the procurement, the thoughts, advice and feedback from residents was instrumental in making the final choice.

“Your Gateway Membership Team is here to represent you. By hearing your views, we ensure you are at the heart of what we do.”

Monitoring services in your neighbourhood

In 2018, we set up a resident inspector programme so that you can give feedback about your communal block and the grounds maintenance near your home. Although we have Estates Officers who maintain your neighbourhood, asking residents to report how contractors are performing helps us to better monitor the service.

Resident inspectors check the condition of the most recent cleaning or grass cutting carried out by our contractors, then feed back to us using a scorecard. Our work with resident inspectors gives us the chance to receive regular and accurate reports of the service you receive.

Your tenant representatives

Three new people joined the Gateway Membership Team as your representatives within the organisation. As a result, the group now represents a wider variety of the voices that exist in our communities. To further their skills around the important work they do, representatives from the Gateway Membership Team attended a two-day conference about tenant engagement.

The Gateway Membership Team has continued to deliver for residents. In 2018/19 there were four Tenant Question Time events, on topics such as parking, repairs and Universal Credit. Team members have also volunteered their time to hold meetings, attend away days and work closely with Watford Community Housing's Group Board and leadership team to ensure residents' voices are heard.

Mazie Gibson, who has been actively involved with our work since we were formed in 2007, stood down from the Gateway Membership Team after nine years of dedicated service. Mazie is a keen supporter of the Community Gateway model for housing associations and served as Chair of the Gateway Membership Team, as well as Chair of the Independent Living Sheltered Housing Forum.

She has also worked tirelessly to represent tenants on a national level, including being one of 50 social housing residents who made up the National Tenant Council in 2010, helping to give tenants a voice and steer national housing policy.

A word from the Gateway Membership Team:

“It has been a busy year for the Gateway Membership Team as we continue to work closely with Watford Community Housing to make sure that tenants' voices are heard. We have strengthened our relationship with the organisation, getting involved with staff on major projects that affect residents' lives and attending workshops with the Group Board to help shape the organisation's plans for the future.

“We feel that Watford Community Housing are working hard to improve services for tenants and we are particularly pleased to see their commitment to building more homes for social rent. This is something we have been calling for as we believe it is important that homes are made available at the lowest rent level for those who are most in need, so we are really glad they have responded.

“Our Tenant Question Time events have continued to provide residents with the chance to discuss any concerns they have directly with senior members of staff, and we have raised issues around Universal Credit, helping to make sure that tenants have the support they need when they are signing up.

“We also contributed to Watford Community Housing's response to the government's Green Paper on social housing, and to the National Housing Federation's Together With Tenants consultation. By giving our views, we have been able to play a part in influencing how social housing is viewed by the government and across the country, encouraging people to put tenants first.”



3 new people joined the Gateway Membership team in 2018



4 Tenant Question Time events held

Building new homes

Part of our work to create stronger communities includes building new homes, so that we can continue to give people the opportunity of a high-quality place to live.

Increasing our housing stock and allowing for a variety of tenure types, such as shared ownership and market rent, ensures we can continue to invest in our existing homes and communities.

Over the last year, we've been building in new areas, with new partners and with an increasing focus on providing truly affordable housing.

More homes for social rent

This year, we secured a £3.3 million grant from Homes England to build a large number of homes for social rent in partnership with Watford Borough Council. This funding will allow us to work closely with the local authority to provide high-quality homes which are genuinely affordable for people in Watford.

With the funding, we are planning to deliver 55 new homes for social rent, a mixture of two- and three-bedroom flats and houses, with construction starting in 2019. By partnering with local authorities, we can boost the number of social rent homes we offer, giving people the chance to live in a home that meets their needs.

In addition, we gained funding to deliver a further three homes for social rent as part of the new development at The Brow.

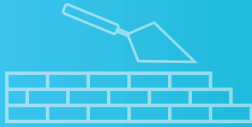




55

homes to be built for social rent in partnership
with Watford Borough Council





311 homes currently under construction



33 homes built at The Chess – the first development for Three Rivers Homes



61 homes completed – 35 affordable, 8 social rent & 18 shared ownership



76 homes delivered by Hart Homes in partnership with Watford Borough Council

“We’ve been building in new areas, with an increasing focus on providing truly affordable housing”

A year of firsts

As a business, we are now more complex than ever. We have several joint ventures with nearby local authorities and a commercial subsidiary, all of which help us to provide much-needed affordable housing across the county.

Our partnerships have made significant progress. In October, we celebrated our first development as part of Three Rivers Homes – The Chess in South Oxhey – reaching its highest point ahead of its completion in spring 2019. Construction work took place on homes in Puckeridge, which marks the first development by Clarendon Living, our commercial arm, and our first development in East Hertfordshire.

We also expanded into more areas. Our first homes in Dacorum, on Jupiter Drive in Hemel Hempstead, were handed to residents in September, and we started construction on Park Mead, delivering more new homes in Hertsmere.

One of our biggest achievements of the year was the opening of new homes off Tolpits Lane, near Croxley View, which were delivered by Hart Homes – our joint venture with Watford Borough Council. This development included provision for temporary accommodation and 36 new homes for affordable rent.

Regenerating the Meriden

Work also began on the Meriden regeneration, which is our biggest project to date. It will enhance the area for residents and communities, providing 133 newly built homes, an expanded community hub, a new parade of shops and fresh green spaces.

The works will cover two phases, with phase one progressing well. Already, we have delivered new parking spaces for residents, and construction has begun on the first homes – including high-quality, modern bungalows for older people.

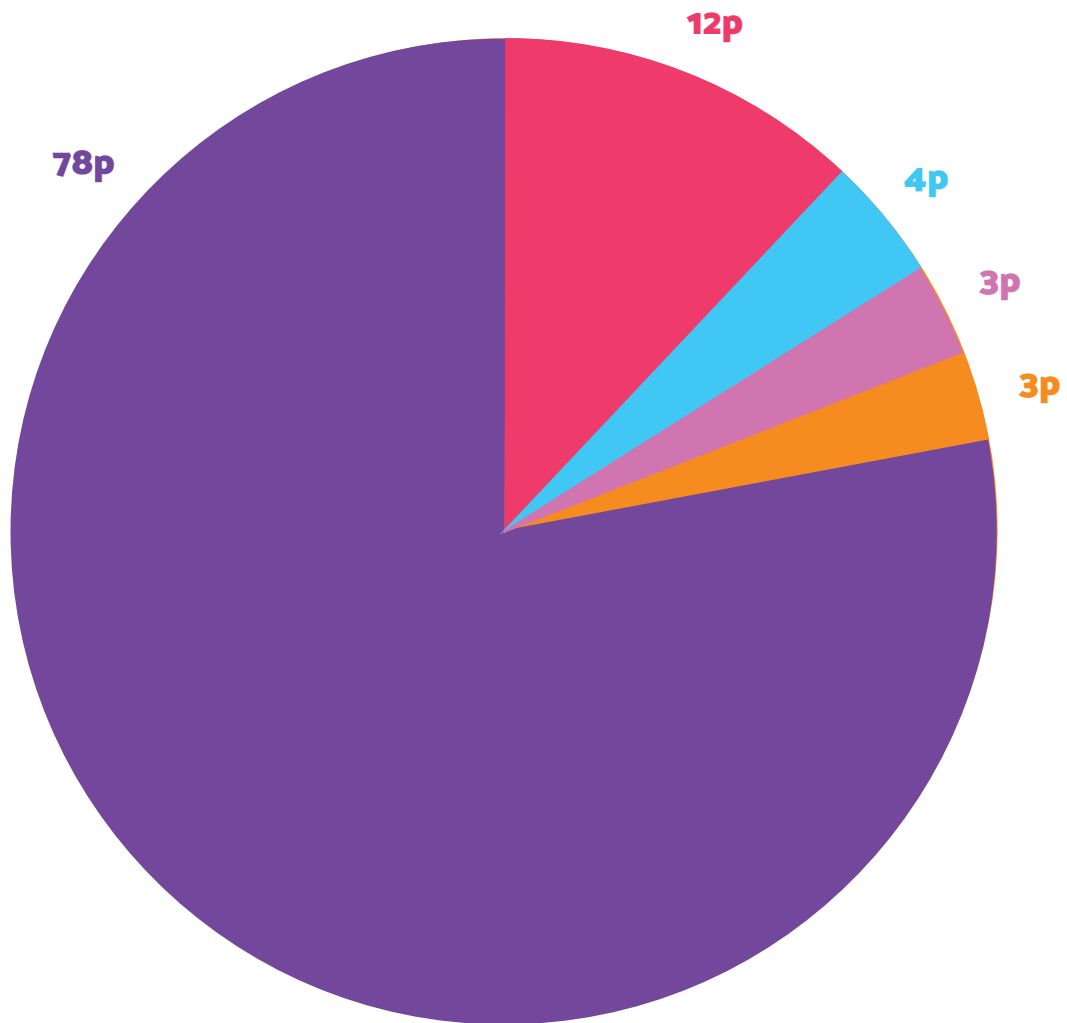
Delivering value for money

Providing high-quality services also means ensuring residents receive good value for money. One of our aims as an organisation is to stay in a strong financial position for the future, and we are committed to delivering excellent services by generating, spending and saving money in ways which will benefit residents for years to come.



Where our money comes from

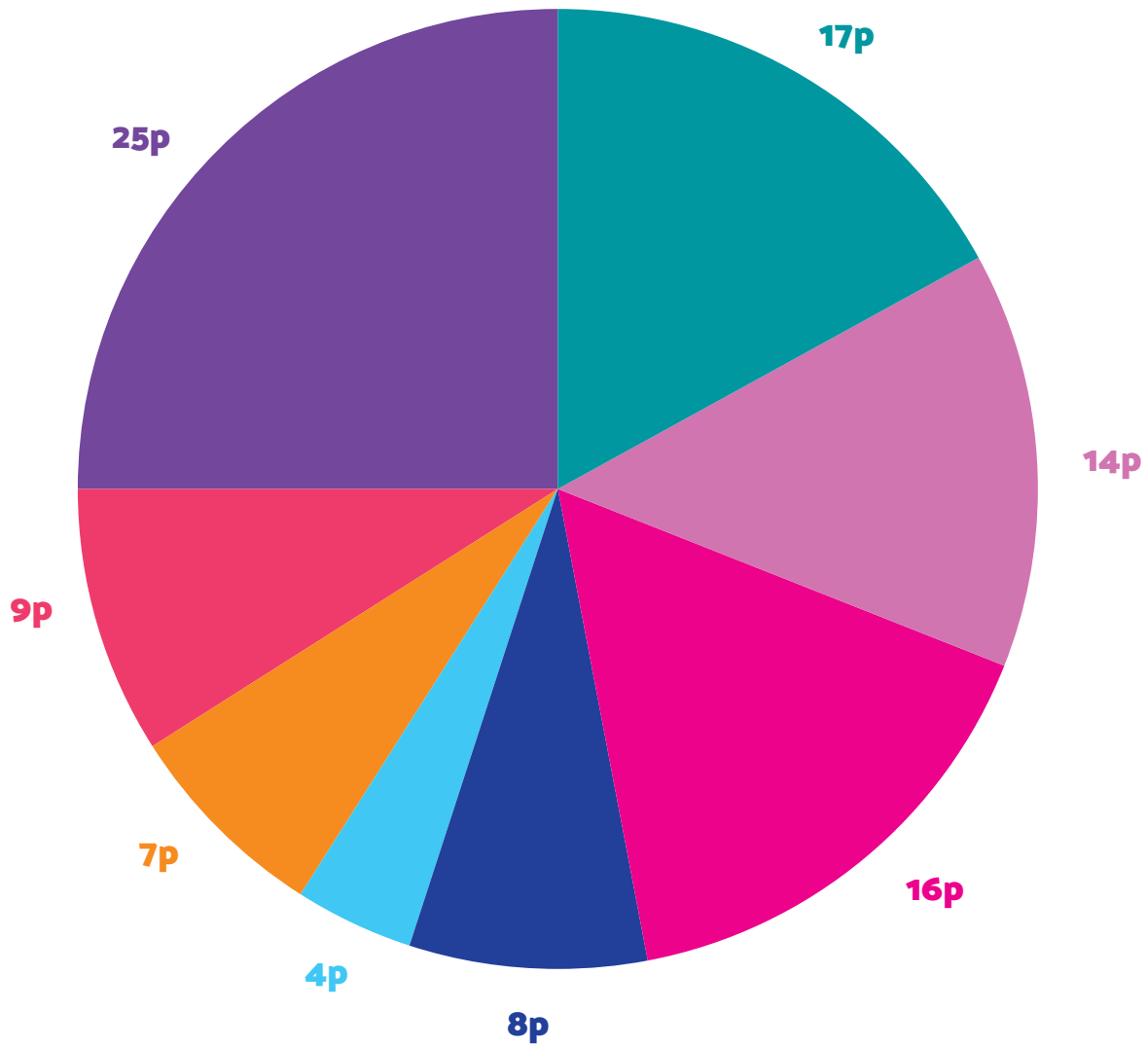
For every £1 we generate:



- **78p** is from social housing lettings
- **12p** is from the sale of shared ownership homes – the surplus generated from these sales is used to support our charitable objectives
- **4p** is from the service charge income (which is fully spent on providing services to our residents)
- **3p** is from non-social housing lettings – including our market rent properties and garages
- **3p** is from other sources – including the provision of management services for our external partners



How each pound was spent





Housing management costs including staff

We spent 25p in each pound to provide services to our tenants and to pay for staffing costs and overheads.

Property maintenance

We spent 9p in each pound on repairs, servicing and maintenance, including work carried out as part of our improvement programme to deliver upgrades to homes.

Construction costs

We spent 7p in each pound on building and selling properties for shared ownership.

Service charge costs

We spent 4p in each pound on heating, cleaning and other costs recoverable through service charges. We regularly benchmark our service charges against the wider housing association sector, which shows that our service charges are lower than the sector average.

Cost of delivering other services

We spent 8p in each pound on other costs including services to support people and community initiatives.

Property depreciation

16p in each pound accounted for the wear and tear of our assets, including the homes we own.

Interest and financing costs

We paid 14p in each pound to the bank as interest on our loans.

Surplus for reinvestment

17p in each pound will go towards delivering future improvements in our existing homes and building new homes in line with our business plan.

Read our full financial statements now at www.wcht.org.uk/page/Publications-Reports/



Your feedback

We want to know what you think of our services. Let us know how we did this year by getting in touch!

You can email us at feedback@wcht.org.uk or call us on 0800 218 2247.



watford
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housing

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