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Welcome



"We are committed to delivering high-quality services and improving communities by working together with our tenants. Our goal is to become an organisation that our tenants feel confident in."

A message from our Chair

Welcome to our annual report for 2017/18. This look back at the year gives you a chance to see how we have performed and gives us an opportunity to reflect on our achievements, as well as looking to the future.

During a year that saw us celebrate our tenth birthday and the achievements of our first decade, we also introduced a new look and renewed our focus on the future. We are committed to delivering high-quality services and improving communities by working together with our tenants. Our goal is to become an organisation that our tenants feel confident in and connected to.

With this in mind, we sent out a new service standards booklet to every household last year, setting out our promises to you. This report shows what we've been doing to hold ourselves to those high standards.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we need a strong financial position to support our work – both to deliver excellent services to you and to achieve our ambitious development plans, which will provide much-needed new homes. Our finance and treasury teams have worked hard this year to ensure we have strong financial support for the future.

The tragic incident at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 has had a lasting impact on the housing sector. The safety and wellbeing of all of our residents remains our top priority, and this year our Board voted to introduce sprinklers throughout our Abbey View and Munden View tower blocks – they will be installed in 2018/19. We will, of course, continue to monitor the outcomes of the government's review of building regulations and fire safety to make sure that we keep you and your home safe.

2017/18 has been an outstanding year, which has seen us perform well against our main objectives. As always, your feedback is the most important part of our journey, so please do get in touch to let us know what we are doing well and where we could continue to improve.

John Swinney

Chair



"Our dedication to creating friendlier communities remains as strong as ever. One of our key goals in 2017/18 was to make sure that you have the chance to engage with us and shape the services we deliver."

A message from our Chief Executive

This year has been filled with achievements to be proud of. In particular, we've maintained very high levels of satisfaction with our repairs service, built much-needed new homes and brought in new systems that allow us to operate more efficiently and deliver better services for you. We remain focused on providing homes and services that allow you to live life to the full and, in line with our values, we continue to innovate to make sure we achieve this.

Some of our biggest accomplishments this year have been in improving how we work for you, and with you. By working with our tenants, the level of rent arrears owed to us is currently the lowest it's been for almost a decade and we have made progress in reducing the time it takes us to re-let empty properties. This year also saw the launch of our brand new digital tenancy services, which allow you to manage your tenancy more quickly and easily online – and hundreds of people have already signed up and started making use of these services.

Our dedication to creating friendlier communities remains as strong as ever. One of our key goals in 2017/18 was to make sure that you have the chance to engage with us and shape the services we deliver, so we launched a new 'Involvement Menu' which sets out the wide variety of ways you can get involved with what we do and how we're run.

We've also been helping people from different backgrounds learn and achieve for themselves with our apprenticeships, which are helping to grow a workforce for the future that can deliver better services for you. We now have ten apprentices working with us and completing courses in a range of different disciplines, from repairs and IT to HR and customer services.

Finally, our development programme has continued to show fantastic results. We're more than halfway to our ambition of building 1,000 homes by 2020, and the homes we're building are of an impressively high quality. Establishing innovative partnerships has allowed us to deliver even more new homes in different areas, and we will continue to pursue opportunities to build desperately needed housing in the coming years.

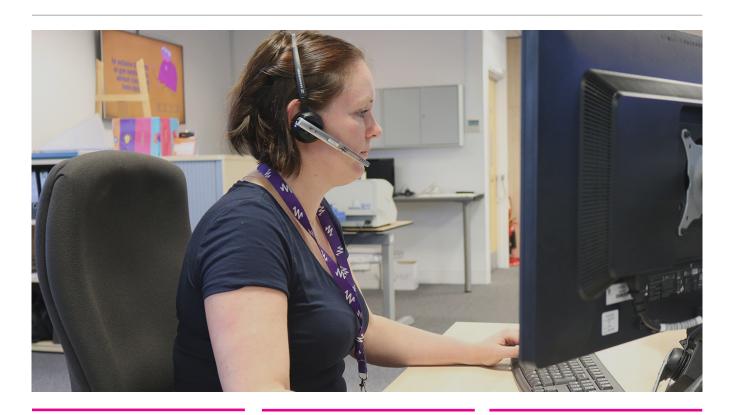
Thank you for taking the time to read this report and for continuing to work with us to achieve our vision of better homes, friendlier communities – together.

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Tina BarnardChief Executive

How we performed

Every year, we monitor the feedback you've given us along with our own performance statistics, so that we can improve the services we provide. These show that we made some positive changes in 2017/18, although there's always more we can do to improve the way we work.



90.6%

of tenants are satisfied with our repairs and maintenance service (compared to 88.7% in 2016/17)

75.9%

of tenants are satisfied with our overall service (compared to 80.2% in 2016/17)

51:49

Of all the feedback we received, 51% of the comments were compliments and 49% were complaints







87.5%

of calls to customer service were resolved on their first call (compared to 82% in 2016/17)



25 seconds

was the average waiting time for a call to customer services (compared to 22 seconds in 2016/17)



83%

of repairs were completed on our first visit



97.7%

satisfaction with the 64 aids and adaptations jobs we completed in 2017/18 (compared to 96.2% in 2016/17)



Better reporting

We made significant changes to our feedback systems in 2017/18. We've changed the way we report and log feedback internally to make our systems more robust. This will help us to ensure that complaints get followed up as effectively as possible and we can make changes to avoid similar problems happening again in the future.

We've also improved our satisfaction surveys, so that you have the chance

to share your thoughts on all aspects of our service. We now send more comprehensive surveys on a wide range of topics and have updated some questions to make them more relevant to you. More of our surveys are being sent by text and our new online account service provides another way for you to share your thoughts with us. This means you have different ways to tell us what you like and what we need to improve.

Coming up next year

- To help improve how we deliver services for you, we'll be reviewing each step of your journey with us from signing up as a Watford Community Housing tenant through to you handing your keys back to us if you move on. This will allow us to identify where we can improve our processes to ensure that everybody has a smooth and consistent experience with us.
- To be able to deliver a more convenient repairs service, we're upgrading our digital tenancy services so that you can use your online account to choose when your repairs are carried out.
- In order to deliver the best customer service, we will be asking for your thoughts on our call handling, training our staff so that they earn new customer service qualifications and working towards gaining accreditation from the Institute of Customer Services.

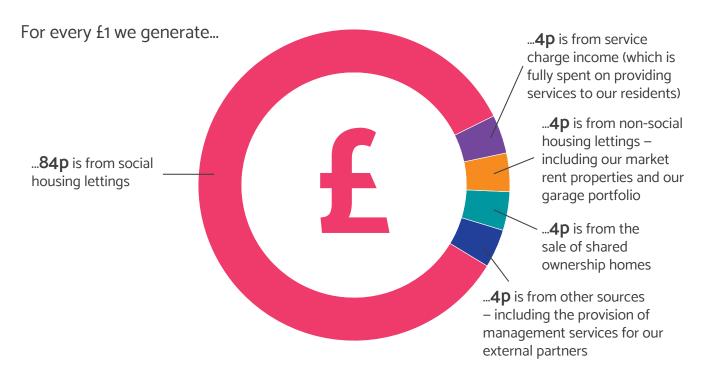
How did we do? A view from the Gateway Membership Team

"We are very happy to see where improvements have been made in performance figures this year. In addition, we're pleased to see that the way we can feed back our comments, either compliments or complaints, is being modernised and improved."

Value for money

Offering value for money whilst maintaining a strong financial position as a business allows us to provide the best services we can for you – and also ensure we can build much-needed homes for the community. We're committed to using the funding we receive, and new funding we seek out, to deliver the best results for you, your home and your neighbourhood.

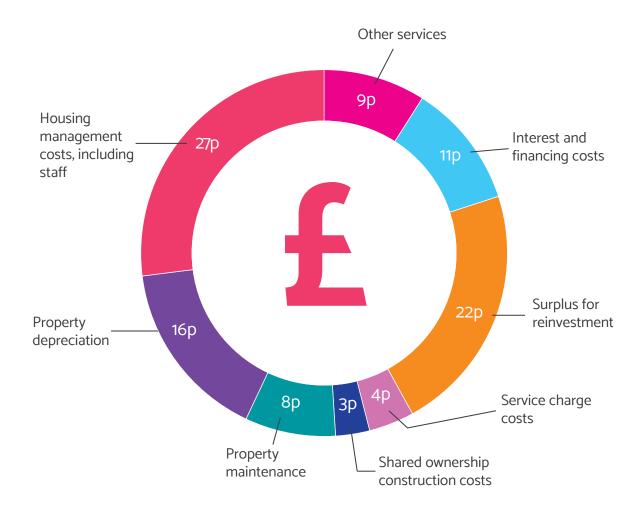
Where our money comes from



How did we do? A view from the Gateway Membership Team

"We're pleased to see the commitment to getting the best value for money. Being able to demonstrate this is crucial for the organisation to deliver its promises to us."

How each pound was spent



Housing management costs including staff

We spent 27p in each pound to provide services to our tenants and to pay for staffing costs and overheads.

Property depreciation

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

Property maintenance

We spent 8p in each pound on repairs and maintenance, including work carried out as part of our improvement programme to deliver upgrades to your homes.

Shared ownership construction costs

We spent 3p in each pound on building and selling properties for shared ownership.

Service charge costs

We spent 4p in each pound on heating, lighting, 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.

Surplus for reinvestment

22p in each pound will go towards delivering future improvements in our existing homes and building new homes in line with our business plan.

Interest and financing costs

We paid 11p in each pound to the bank as interest on loans.

Cost of delivering other services

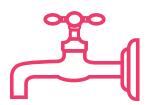
We spent 9p in each pound on other costs including services to support people and community initiatives.

Maintaining and improving your home

We want your home to be the best living space it can be, and that means we work hard to maintain, improve and repair your home. Through our repairs service and our planned improvement works, we did lots to enhance our homes in 2017/18, and we also continued to implement new methods to manage our housing stock more efficiently.

96.8%

of tenants are satisfied with the work carried out through our improvement programme (compared to 98.3% in 2016/17)



904

stock condition surveys were carried out, so that we know where work is required (compared to 722 in 2016/17)



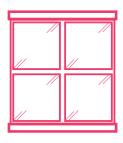
£2.1m

was spent on responsive repairs this year (compared to £2.3m in 2016/17)



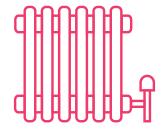
£800,000

was spent on repairs in empty properties (compared to £677,000 in 2016/17)



£200,000

Almost £200,000 was saved across the year by bringing our gas boiler repairs service in house



Through our improvement programme...

- 153 kitchens were fitted
- 165 bathrooms were installed
- 59 homes received new windows
- 45 roofs were upgraded
- 68 homes received new external doors



Major improvements

One of the most significant things we're doing to ensure high-quality homes is working with Engie (formerly known as Keepmoat) on our major five-year improvement programme. 2017/18 was the second year of the programme, which will see £15 million spent on upgrading over 3,000 homes overall.

Compared to the year before, we installed more kitchens and bathrooms, improved more roofs and fitted more windows. Satisfaction with the works remains high at 96.8%, so we're pleased to know that you think we're doing a good job of improving these key parts of your home by working with Engie.

As well as delivering our improvement programme, Engie also invests time and money in projects in the community. The

contractor sponsored some of the activities at our tenth birthday community festival, as well as hosting a stall of their own. Also, one of our residents has now started the first of a number of apprenticeships that will be available with Engie, based at their site compound on the Harebreaks.

Responding to Grenfell

Like many housing providers, we undertook a review of the fire safety measures in our buildings following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower in 2017. This confirmed that we were regularly carrying out the appropriate inspections and had suitable measures in place to protect residents. As part of our annual process, we carried out 47 Fire Risk Assessments across all of our residential blocks, ensuring our data remains up to date and that we are consistently enforcing our fire prevention strategy.

"We installed more kitchens and bathrooms, improved more roofs and fittted more windows. Satisfaction with the works remains high at 96.8%." "We set up an in-house team to take over the repair and servicing of gas boilers – and we have achieved significant savings as a result."



Although we are confident that our buildings are already very safe, we took the decision to go above and beyond to make further improvements to the fire safety in our buildings – particularly in tower blocks Abbey View and Munden View, where we proposed to install new, intelligent fire alarms and sprinkler systems. After consultation with residents, it has been agreed that we will install these new measures during 2018/19.

In-house gas boiler services

During 2016/17 we set up an inhouse team to take over the repair and servicing of gas boilers, which had previously been carried out by a contractor on our behalf. 2017/18 was the first full year for the new team and we have achieved significant savings as a result.

In total we spent £449,000 on gas boiler services last year – in 2015/16, the last full year with a contractor doing this work for us, we spent £646,000.

The team performed excellently too, ensuring that our housing stock was 100% compliant and also dealing well with the challenges of several cold snaps over the winter, including the heavy snowfall in March 2018 which saw around 350 homes struggle with frozen pipes affecting their heating systems.

Coming up next year

- The Asset Investment Model has helped us identify three key community areas where some actions need to be taken to ensure a higher quality of life for our tenants. This has become the basis for our upcoming Neighbourhood Area Plans, which will focus on providing improvements and support to the Harebreaks, Sherwood and Vicarage neighbourhood areas.
- We will be installing the new fire alarms and sprinkler systems at Abbey View and Munden View, and will continue to implement our overall fire prevention strategy. This will see us conducting more detailed fire safety assessments across all of our blocks, and in particular in our Independent Living schemes.
- We'll begin a programme to replace door-entry systems to many of our housing blocks.
- Our improvement programme will continue into its third year.

How did we do? A view from the Gateway Membership Team

"We are pleased to see that the satisfaction figures for the planned works programme and asset management services are good and continuing to improve."

Better systems

We also looked at some of the IT systems and methods we use to help us maintain your home. To deliver a more efficient service to you, we're now using two new IT systems to better manage your homes and organise our repairs service.

We also streamlined our repairs service by agreeing a deal with Jewson to be the sole provider of materials, rather than sourcing them from a range of different organisations. This means that Jewson will deliver the materials we need to us at a reduced cost, rather than our repairs teams picking up materials as needed.

Additionally, we've continued to use the Asset Investment Model (AIM) which we introduced in 2016/17. This is a tool which helps us achieve a better understanding of how our homes are performing, and uses a more holistic approach to show overall trends. We can then use this information to identify how we can best target improvements to your home.

"To deliver a more efficient service to you, we're now using two new IT systems to better manage your homes and organise our repairs service."



Improving your neighbourhood

As well as looking after your homes, we want to help take good care of your neighbourhoods. By keeping your local areas clean and tidy, and by supporting you to manage your tenancy successfully, we work with you to build a stronger community.

76.3%

of tenants are satisfied with our neighbourhoods overall (compared to 77.8% in 2016/17)



687

tenancy audits were completed this year



Reviewing our service

This year, the Gateway Membership Team, which represents tenants, commissioned an independent consultant to lead our residents in conducting a scrutiny review of our grounds maintenance and cleaning services. We helped facilitate these reviews by holding meetings with the scrutiny team and drawing up a report of their findings.

The report and resident feedback showed us that there were a number of actions we needed to take in order to improve our estates service. We addressed these issues in a range of ways, including making the service more transparent by creating a poster that outlined the standards you could expect from us and our partners. We also used our community events as an opportunity to engage with more people, to ensure that our staff were discussing these key services with the residents who are most affected by them.

The report also found that some tenants wanted to be more involved in monitoring the delivery of these services, so we are recruiting residents to participate in reviewing the quality of the work delivered by our grounds maintenance and cleaning

contractors. In addition to taking on board feedback from all of our residents, this scrutiny group will help us as we look to appoint a new estates services contractor during 2018/19.

Reducing property re-letting times

When somebody moves out of one of our homes, we have to undertake any necessary repairs before we can let it to anyone else. As the nationwide housing crisis continues, it's vital that we do our best to reduce waiting times for these properties so that people can move into their new home quickly. Importantly, making sure our re-letting times are as short as possible also means we deliver better value for money for all of our residents, by cutting the length of time that we aren't receiving rent on the property.

During 2017/18, we worked to reduce the time between a property becoming empty and new people moving in. One of the ways we achieved this was by working with local partners such as Watford Borough Council to place priority on vulnerable people who most needed a home. As a result of our work, most of our properties are now let to a new tenant in around nine days on average.



"There were a number of actions we needed to take in order to improve our estates service. We addressed these issues in a range of ways, including making the service more transparent."

Tackling tenancy fraud

This year, we undertook 687 tenancy audits. These involve one of our Neighbourhood Officers visiting your home to inspect the condition of the property and ensure we have the correct information about your household.

As well as improving the quality of our data, tenancy audits help us to keep your community safe by identifying cases of fraud. As a result, we can claim these properties back for people who need them, as well as saving us money and deterring criminals. Tenancy audits also help us to identify people who could benefit from additional support from us.

Helping you manage your tenancy

With the introduction of Universal Credit last year, it's been important for us to help you stay on top of your rent payments. In the last six months alone, our Tenancy Support Officers have helped over 150 people to access more than £100,000 in additional financial assistance.

In order to support our tenants on Universal Credit, we offer support and guidance, and can help you work out a sustainable future payment plan. As a result of our commitment to this during 2017/18, we managed to ensure that the level of rent arrears owed to us was the lowest it's been in eight years.

Coming up next year

- We will be reviewing our Independent Living and Flexicare service, making sure our schemes are modern, comfortable and fit for purpose.
- We will continue working with our tenants, including resident inspectors and our scrutiny group, to decide on the terms of the new contracts for our grounds maintenance and cleaning services, before appointing new contractors.
- We will introduce
 Neighbourhood Area Plans,
 focusing on improving and
 enhancing the three key
 local areas identified by our
 Asset Investment Model.

How did we do? A view from the Gateway Membership Team

"The Gateway Membership Team were proud to launch a scrutiny review this year on cleaning and grounds maintenance after listening to tenants' feedback. We couldn't have done this without the hard work of the scrutiny review team."

Empowering your communities

We know that, given the chance, a strong and connected community can change lives for the better. That's why our community engagement work is so important to us. We support the good things our tenants and local organisations do, and provide you with the chance to influence the work we do for you and your community.

£49,248

was spent on community projects that were approved by a panel of tenants

150+

young people began regularly attending sports projects on the Meriden which we have funded

£113,800

of income was generated by our community hubs (compared to £130,935 in 2016/17)







28,300

visits to our hubs throughout 2017/18

90

residents engaged in our Community Options Studies, telling us how they feel about their neighbourhood







Encouraging engagement

It's really important to us that our tenants are able to get involved with how we're run and the services we provide. This year, we launched an 'Involvement Menu', which outlines all the ways you can work with us to help shape what we do.

The menu lists a range of 15 different volunteering opportunities, which are flexible so that everyone can get involved. We help you decide which option to choose by inviting you to a skills mapping session, which identifies the types of volunteering that best fit you. As a result of our Involvement Menu, more tenants have engaged with us over the last year through a range of activities – including taking behind-the-scenes tours, volunteering with our community engagement team,

working with us by email and giving us feedback through social media.

Our Community Options Studies surveys are a particularly easy way you can make a big difference to what happens in your area. The five areas we focused on this year were Mill End, Tudor, Garston, Foxhill and Edward Amey. By discussing what residents liked and didn't like about their area, we were able to make some positive changes.

For example, we held a clean-up day in Garston, providing a skip for people to throw away bulky items easily, which helps to tackle fly-tipping. Additionally, we visited Edward Amey with Hertfordshire Constabulary and Watford Cycle Hub to advise cyclists about the dangers of cutting through certain areas.

"As a result of our Involvement Menu, more tenants have engaged with us over the last year through a range of activities."



Supporting community work

Our Community Development Fund sets aside money each year for us to support a whole range of worthy causes in your community that help to improve people's lives. We've supported a wide range of projects this year, including:

- events, meetings and training for our residents' associations, which have continued to support and improve your local areas
- projects to support young people and improve their mental health and wellbeing through physical activity and learning
- a 'tea dance' for some of our independent living scheme residents, where they relived songs and dances from their youth
- a mental health champions project, One YMCA, which helps young people aged 12-16 gain tools for dealing with various emotional and social issues

 an event to celebrate the winners of our 'hampers for heroes' awards, which honoured the people in your community who you said deserved a 'thank you' for going out of their way for others.

Celebrating our birthday

Last year, we turned ten! To celebrate, we hosted a community festival on the Meriden, and everyone was invited. We wanted to make the day inclusive for everybody, as well as being an affordable way to have a fun day out.

Thanks to sponsorship from many of our contractors, most of the rides and activities were free, including a bungee run, petting zoo and go-karts. A charity abseil down our Munden View tower block saw more than £12,000 raised for Watford-based Peace Hospice Care and we also had stalls from local organisations, such as Hertfordshire Constabulary, and performances from dancers, singers and even a Tae Kwon Do group!

Going digital

We're working to make sure the services we provide are as modern and accessible as possible. One of the ways we do this is to ensure you can manage your tenancy online with ease.

Our new digital tenancy services have now launched, which allow you to view live rent account information, request repairs, send us messages and change your tenancy details quickly and easily.

However, we know that not everyone has the tools to get online, so we worked with 'We Are Digital' to provide computer skills classes to a group of tenants who were keen to get online. All the learners boosted their skills, with 70% of the group passing their final exams.

As a result of the popularity of the course, we'll be running more in the future in partnership with the Hertfordshire Family Learning Service.

Your community hubs

Our community hubs provide a vital focal point for a wide range of community activities, and this year we opened a new hub in Hillside. The former home of the Hillside Residents' Association, this new community space will allow us to provide training and meeting rooms, and host more local groups that we know benefit the lives of our tenants. Residents can also rent the space for private events, and the income we receive will be put back into our communities.

Up until 2017/18, our hubs received annual funding from Watford Borough Council as part of the deal we signed when we first took ownership of them. Although we no longer receive this funding, we have seen more people visiting the hubs to join in with the groups and events we offer. From coffee mornings and the Nifty Over 50 group to the Deaf Club, the variety of people coming along shows the importance of the hubs in the community.

Your voice in the community

The Gateway Membership Team (GMT), which represents tenants, continues to work hard to ensure your voice gets heard. As well as the scrutiny reviews, the GMT also commissioned an independent facilitator to host a series of Tenant Question Time events, where tenants could ask members of staff questions on important topics.

There were five Tenant Question

Time events in total, on parking, asset management, anti-social behavior, new developments and repairs. The evenings were well attended by tenants, and many constructive ideas and important questions have been discussed as a result, meaning your voice has been heard clearly, and is contributing to the way we deliver our services. Following their success, the GMT will be hosting four more of these sessions in 2018/19.

Supporting diverse communities

In 2017/18 we carried out a significant customer profiling exercise to help us understand more about our tenants' needs and backgrounds. We surveyed 1,000 of our residents and the results will help us to ensure we're providing services that are tailored to you and that we're communicating with you in a way you want and understand. If you were amongst those who responded to our survey, many thanks for taking the time to help us improve!

We also delivered a programme of initiatives across the year, all aimed at recognising and valuing the rich diversity of our communities, partners and employees. These included our continued sponsorship of Herts Pride last September, supporting the annual Watford Interfaith pilgrimage in November and celebrating LGBT month in February, and a number of events linked to mental health awareness and key religious festivals.

"Our community hubs provide a vital focal point for a wide range of community activities, and this year we opened a new hub in Hillside."

Coming up next year

- We'll be holding diversity and inclusion sessions – raising awareness and offering advice to our residents on a variety of topics.
- We want to use our Involvement Menu to get more residents involved in our work and we'll be doing 'skills mapping' exercises with volunteers to identify the best way for you to get involved.
- We'll be focusing on providing adult learning courses in conjunction with the Hertfordshire Family Learning Service to residents who'd like to boost their skillset.

How did we do? A view from the Gateway Membership Team

"The new Involvement Menu, which we have worked on with the Community Engagement Team, is giving tenants and residents a huge opportunity to get involved with shaping our homes and communities."

Delivering new homes

It's our aim to have committed to 1,000 new homes by 2020. It's an ambitious target, but we know we need to do our bit to ease the housing crisis in this country – and increasing our housing stock also helps to support our services for existing tenants. To continue to develop high-quality new homes, we're now more diverse than ever, and we're working with a variety of partners and contractors across South-West Hertfordshire and beyond.

54

new homes we've built have had residents move in

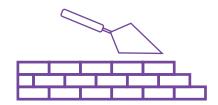
330

new homes are currently being constructed

76

homes for our Hart Homes partnership have started to be built







homes are being developed as part of our Three Rivers Homes partnership

97

of the homes we are building are for shared ownership







Achieving our goal

We have worked on a range of different types of developments this year as part of our ambition to reach 1,000 new homes by 2020. As well as homes for affordable and social rent and shared ownership, we are also providing new temporary accommodation to help with homelessness. The income we make from shared ownership goes directly back into improving our services and building more homes, so that more people can live in a place of their own.

We've also started to work in some new places, helping to deliver homes across a wider geographic area. We are now building in Dacorum on the site of some unused garages in Hemel Hempstead, and providing housing in Hertsmere. Beyond these, we have hopes that we can build in more areas and benefit even more people in the future.

This commitment means that we are now over halfway to our target of 1,000 new homes by 2020, with two years to go.

Working in partnership

As a result of our recent development activity, we are now a more complex organisation. We have joint ventures with local authorities and a commercial subsidiary – Clarendon Living – as well as one-off partnerships with construction companies.

"Hart Homes, our joint venture with Watford Borough Council, has nearly completed its first development near Croxley View, which will deliver 76 new homes – 36 for affordable rent and 40 for temporary accommodation."



After entering into two joint ventures last year, we're making great progress on the first developments in these new partnerships. Hart Homes, our joint venture with Watford Borough Council, has nearly completed its first development near Croxley View, which will deliver 76 new homes – 36 for affordable rent and 40 for temporary accommodation homes. Three Rivers Homes, our partnership with Three Rivers District Council, has its first project underway for 33 new homes in South Oxhey.

Regenerating the Meriden

This year saw the beginning of our largest project to date – regenerating the Meriden to deliver a new, modern look and feel to the area. The actions taken so far include undertaking works to the utilities (such as gas and telephone lines) that will be affected, putting up the main hoarding around the future site compound and

Coming up next year

- We will continue to build high-quality homes in a range of areas around Hertfordshire and beyond, as we work towards our ambition to build 1,000 new homes by 2020.
- We will carry on working in our innovative partnerships to create new homes for our communities, offering much-needed housing options across a range of tenures.
- The Meriden development will continue, and we will work with residents to keep you updated on the progress of the works.

beginning to refurbish the car park near Peartree Court.

Working with Mulalley and Co, we'll be building 131 much-needed homes, including a 50-bed extra care facility for older people and some homes for shared ownership. We'll also be renovating the parade of shops, providing an expanded community hub and creating some newly-landscaped green spaces, so it will deliver real benefits for local residents.

How did we do? A view from the Gateway Membership Team

"We know first-hand the effect of the housing crisis in Watford, so we are pleased to see the ambitious target set by Watford Community Housing."

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 Community Housing

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