



watford  
community  
housing



**Annual report to  
residents 2016/17**



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Watford Community Housing Trust has charitable status. It is a Registered Society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 and is regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

# Welcome



“As ever, our key focus is on improving your services and enhancing your community, as well as delivering much-needed new homes.”

## A message from our Chair

Welcome to our 2016/17 annual report. As we celebrate our tenth birthday, we can look back with pride at an exciting year which has seen us deliver significant improvements to some of our key services. We have also punched above our weight in the provision of new homes and are leading the partnership agenda with our innovative joint ventures.

You will have noticed that we are unveiling a new look to mark the occasion of our first decade delivering homes in Watford and the surrounding areas. We have come a long way in our first ten years. As we look towards the next ten, it is the right time to update our image.

We hope you like our new appearance. It is designed to reflect our status as a well-respected, ambitious and forward-thinking organisation – while remembering that our roots are right here in Watford.

As ever, our key focus is on improving your services and enhancing your community, as well as delivering much-needed new homes. These goals remain central to our work and we are pleased to have taken positive steps in all these areas over the last year.

We realise that the tragic events at Grenfell Tower earlier this year have raised concerns for social housing residents across the country. We want you to know that your wellbeing is our number one priority and we are fully committed to ensuring that your home keeps you safe, as well as helping you to live a happy life. We are here to listen to any concerns you may have – so do please talk to us.

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

**John Swinney**  
Chairman



*“In order to deliver our vision of better homes, friendlier communities – together, it is important that we build strong relationships with each and every one of you”*

## A message from our Chief Executive

It has been an excellent year for Watford Community Housing, with residents reporting high levels of satisfaction with their homes and many of the services we provide. Delivering homes and services that allow people to live happy and healthy lives is our number one aim, and it continues to drive us forward.

Our improvement programme got off to a great start with lots of work being done to upgrade homes. There has also been a strong focus on improving our repairs and maintenance operations, and this is paying off with residents telling us they are now experiencing a better service.

We have also stepped up to the challenge of building new homes for the many people and families who are in need of housing. We are proud to be ambitious and in order to deliver as many homes as possible we have set up joint ventures with both Watford Borough Council and Three Rivers District Council, which demonstrate our commitment to finding innovative solutions to achieve our goals and strengthen communities.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. It is vital to our success that residents engage with us and take an interest in what we are doing and how we are run.

In order to deliver our vision of better homes, friendlier communities – together, it is important that we build strong relationships with each and every one of you. This will be central to our work over the coming year, as we look to make sure we are fit for the future and in the best possible position to provide excellent services to our existing residents, as well as new homes for those in need.

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

**Tina Barnard**  
Chief Executive

# Your home

We believe in delivering homes that are more than just a roof over your head. As well as keeping you safe and meeting your needs, your home should allow you to enjoy life and take pride in where you live.

### Planned improvements

2016/17 saw the start of our major five-year improvement programme, which is seeing £15 million invested in upgrades to over 3,000 homes. It is being delivered by the contractor Keepmoat, and we had a very high customer satisfaction level of 98% for the works done through the programme across the year.

As a result of our long-term contract with Keepmoat and how we are managing the works, the programme is delivering excellent value for money and achieving significant savings. This meant that the bathrooms we installed in 2016/17 were 48% cheaper than in previous years, while kitchens were 11% cheaper – even though the quality remains very high.

Across the year, we delivered the following through our improvement programme:

- Kitchens for 99 homes
- Bathrooms for 116 homes
- Doors for 133 homes
- Windows for 26 homes
- Roofing for 23 homes
- External decoration for 323 homes

As well as upgrading homes, Keepmoat have worked with us on a number of valuable community projects. They have delivered safety talks at local schools, donated prizes for raffles held by community groups and volunteered their time to help paint our Edward Amey Community Hub.

Following on from the success of the improvement programme, we have asked Keepmoat to assist with our aids and adaptations work too. Working together, we believe we can further improve the quality of the works we do to allow people to feel more independent within their own homes, while also reducing costs.

*“We believe we can further improve the quality of the works we do to allow people to feel more independent within their own homes, while also reducing costs”*

More than 80% of residents were satisfied with the overall quality of their home.



Satisfaction with our repairs and maintenance service continued to increase – it was 87% over the course of the year.



Customer satisfaction for our improvement programme works was 98% in 2016/17.





“Overall satisfaction with our repairs service increased too, from 82% at the start of the year to over 92% by the end of the year.”

### Communal service upgrades

We secured a five-year contract with Temple Lifts for the repair and maintenance of communal lifts in our properties. The deal includes the replacement of many of our older lifts, to ensure that residents benefit from brand new facilities. The first lifts to be replaced were those in Abbey View and Munden View, our high-rise blocks in Meriden, Garston. We also replaced several commercial boilers that provide heating and hot water to some of our Independent Living accommodation.

### Monitoring how your homes are performing

During 2016/17 we introduced a new ‘Asset Investment Model’, which gives us a better understanding of how our homes are performing. This allows us to identify specific areas that are in need of improvement and target our works to address those homes that need it most. We also managed to improve the average energy efficiency score of our homes during the year, and we will be looking to make further progress through energy efficiency programmes and advice to tenants in the future.

### Improving our repairs service

During 2016/17 we completed more than 14,000 repairs in over 3,900 homes. After every repair we ask you to complete a satisfaction survey so that we can measure how well our repairs service is performing. We ask for your views on all aspects of the process, from when you report a repair right through to how quickly the job is completed and whether our operative ensures your home is left clean and tidy.

These surveys show that we made significant progress throughout the year, with satisfaction levels increasing in all these different areas. Overall satisfaction with our repairs service increased too, from 82% at the start of the year to over 92% by the end of the year.

# Your feedback

Your feedback

We constantly monitor all feedback from residents, in order to ensure that we know what we are doing right and how we need to improve.

One of the ways in which we measure how we are performing is by monitoring the number of complaints we receive, as well as the number of compliments we get from residents. This includes feedback that we receive in person, in writing, on the phone, by email and on Facebook or Twitter.

In our 2016-2020 business plan we set out our goal to improve our services and to make sure we get at least as many compliments as complaints – and in 2016/17 we achieved this.

Across the year we received 301 compliments, compared to 200 in 2015/16. We also received 217 complaints, down from 291 the previous year – a decrease of more than 25%.



Compliments 2016/17:

**301**



Complaints 2016/17:

**217**





# Building more homes

As well as looking after existing residents' homes, we believe it is important that we build new homes for people who need them. This year we have stepped up our efforts, working independently and establishing innovative partnerships with other organisations.

**There is a serious housing shortage in the UK – especially in the south-east. More than a million people are on waiting lists for a rented home and high property prices mean it is more difficult than ever to get onto the housing ladder. We are committed to building new homes to help ease the shortage and we are proud to have ambitious development goals.**

As well as building homes for social and affordable rent, we are involved in developing temporary accommodation, homes for shared ownership and homes for sale on the open market. Delivering new housing across a range of tenures provides a vital source of income, helping to secure our future and generating revenue for investment in more affordable homes.

In 2016/17, we:

- Completed 93 new homes
- Committed to building 240 homes, including 44 for shared ownership
- Identified potential opportunities to build more than 200 additional homes

## Partnership working

In order to access additional resources and to help us deliver as many homes as possible, we have set up innovative partnerships through our commercial development arm, Clarendon Living. Through Hart Homes, our joint venture with Watford Borough Council, we plan to build more than 550 homes over the next five years. We are already on site with our first development, with a scheme to build 36 residential apartments and 40 temporary accommodation dwellings near Tolpits Lane.

We also committed to a joint venture with Three Rivers District Council and identified our first project together, which will see 33 homes built on the former site of the Grapevine pub in South Oxhey. It will include a mixture of social rent, market rent and shared ownership apartments.

A further 38 homes are being delivered on a former NHS site in Stratford Road, Watford, through a partnership with Mears New Homes.



## Completed developments

We delivered 93 new homes during 2016/17, across a number of sites in South West Hertfordshire. These included 20 affordable homes and two homes for social rent at our Lincoln Green Court development.

There were 12 new homes at Boundary Way and 18 at Horwood Court, all delivered through the first phases of larger ongoing developments. We also delivered 25 apartments within the Rosefair Court development, built by Shanly Homes.

In early 2017, 12 apartments were completed at Hemingford Court in Gartlet Road. All of the homes were made available for shared ownership, helping first-time buyers onto the property ladder. We also delivered a further four one-off homes at individual sites.

# Your community

As well as delivering good-quality homes, we believe in investing in people to create friendlier communities. This is why we provide activities, projects and initiatives to help make our residents' lives better.

**In April 2016 we launched a new Communities Strategy, setting out how we plan to deliver improvements to our community areas. It focuses on four key themes - investment in your community, providing thriving community hubs, improving health and wellbeing, and helping people manage their tenancies successfully.**

“As well as over 30 projects from our £70,000 community development fund, we also contributed £300,000 to the regeneration of the Meriden Community Centre, which was led by Watford Football Club's Community Sports and Education Trust.”

## **Investing in your local community**

We provide vital support for a range of activities in our local community areas, to help improve lives and create opportunities for people. We held consultation events as part of our largest development schemes in Meriden, Holywell, Sherwoods and Boundary Way. These were well attended and gave residents the chance to offer feedback, which helped to shape the final designs. We also listened to other suggestions about the wider area at these events, which helped us to identify smaller community projects that have enhanced the environment for everyone. These included community clean-up events, bulb planting and artwork being installed in public spaces.

We attracted £24,000 in match funding for projects by working in conjunction with local partners such as BeeZee Bodies, who run diet and fitness programmes for youngsters and families. By securing this outside funding, we have made your money go further and ensure that we are targeting individuals with joined-up projects that meet community needs.

We worked with residents to devise a range of community-led projects across 2016/17. These were focused on important issues such as affordable fitness for men, diversionary activities for young people and cultural experiences for increasing community integration for Muslim women. As well as over 30 projects from our £70,000 community development fund, we also contributed £300,000 to the regeneration of the Meriden Community Centre, which was led by Watford Football Club's Community Sports and Education Trust.

We invested £8,000 in skills training for those already involved in our governance structure. We also independently reviewed our involvement service with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service. We will announce the results of this review as part of our 10th birthday celebrations, as well as how you can get involved in scrutinising our work to help us improve our services.



### Improving health and wellbeing

We work closely with a range of partner organisations to address the most important health issues for our tenants at every stage of their lives. During 2016/17, we delivered the initiatives below to support people of all ages:

#### • Starting well (ages 0-5)

We identified and retained a new pre-school at Leavesden Green Community Hub, which provides subsidised spaces for families on low incomes and has an 'outstanding' rating. We have a referral process for families moving into new homes to be signposted to their local children's centre and continue to support projects such as the 'My Life' course, which helps parents to build confidence.

#### • Developing well (ages 5-25)

We supported a number of projects that provide engagement opportunities for young people living in Harebreaks and Hillside. There were previously no projects in these areas and sessions have been provided jointly with Youth Connexions Hertfordshire.

#### • Working and living well

(ages 16-65)

We worked in partnership with agencies such as Guideposts, Probation services and Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning service to identify gaps in provision for adults with mental health issues and long-term conditions. We also jointly funded a number of wellbeing projects that are designed to support people with mental health problems, by encouraging participation and discussion through activities such as art therapy.

#### • Ageing well (ages 65+)

Our Nifty Fifties scheme now has an active membership of 150 residents and an annual programme of over 20 events, some of which happen weekly in our older persons' living schemes. As hosts of the Community Navigator project we also received a £3,000 prize fund as overall winner of the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire Award for partnership working.

"We work closely with a range of partner organisations to address the most important health issues for our tenants at every stage of their lives."



“We increased footfall at the Leavesden Green hub to more than 16,000 people across the year.”

### Thriving Community Hubs

Our community hubs ensure that you have a place where you can meet socially, hold events for your community, take part in new activities and access services such as healthcare and childcare. During 2016/17 we worked hard to make sure that the hubs were being used to their full potential.

We increased footfall at the Leavesden Green hub to more than 16,000 people across the year. Income was higher than predicted, at £130,000, and we have also started to let our head office building to local groups and charities at weekends. We now have local health services provided by the NHS based at our hubs, which has reduced the distance that families have to travel for baby clinics and wellbeing checks.

We have a thriving network of nine local community groups operating across our community areas. We invested £11,000 in staff time and grants, to support them and fund projects that help to improve those communities.

We have worked in conjunction with Origin Housing to support community cohesion and sports events that have benefited our tenants in both Holywell and Harebreaks. We also work closely with Hightown Housing Association, which utilises some of our office space at the Leavesden Green hub.

Following feedback from a review of our services, we have given our staff the training and equipment they need to work more effectively while out and about in your community. This means that they can have more information to hand when they visit you in your home.

### Helping you manage your tenancy successfully

Last year our internal financial inclusion service delivered affordability assessments to 112 people to help them manage their finances. As well as offering general advice, we can help people to save money on contents insurance, access emergency funding at favourable rates through the Watford Credit Union and to understand and claim any benefits they are entitled to.

We communicated projects providing employment and training opportunities to residents, through emails, our website and posts on Facebook and Twitter. These included schemes run by local partners such

as the Prince's Trust, National Citizen Service (NCS) and apprenticeships offered within our own employment.

As well as working in conjunction with Watford Borough Council to provide a free Wi-Fi service at our community hubs and older persons' living schemes, we also held three courses at our offices which provided residents with digital skills to help them to understand how to access everyday services and information on the internet.

“Last year our internal financial inclusion service delivered affordability assessments to 112 people to help them manage their finances.”



# Value for money

Value for money

Careful financial management is central to our commitment to providing services that offer value for money, as well as delivering much-needed new homes. By ensuring that we maintain a strong business we can ensure we are fit for the future and can continue to improve our offering to you.

**We performed strongly during 2016/17, generating a surplus of £7.3 million. As a not-for-profit business, this helps to ensure that we are on a strong financial footing and will have money available to invest in improving services and building new homes over the coming years.**

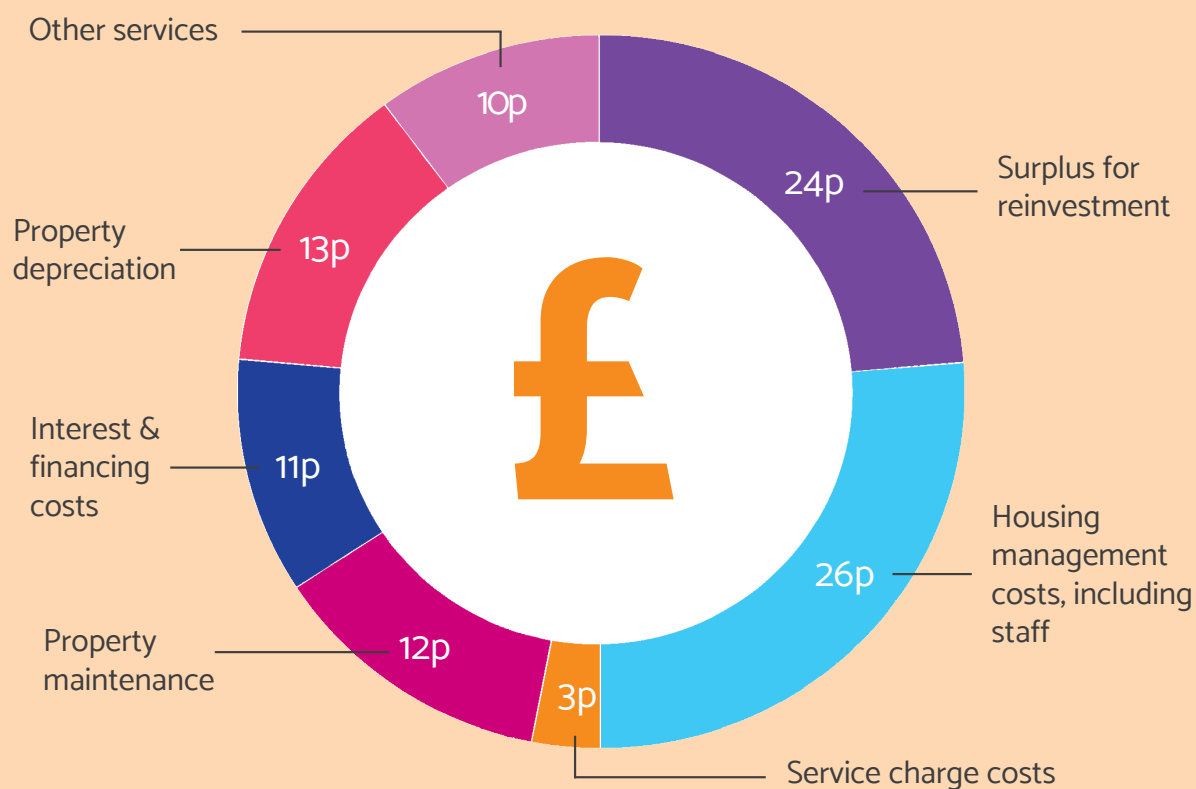
#### Where our money comes from

For every pound we generated, 88p was from social housing rents received. We got 5p from sales of shared ownership homes and 4p from non-social housing lettings. We also made 3p in each pound from other sources of income, including providing management services on behalf of other landlords.

**To view our full financial statements, visit [wcht.org.uk](http://wcht.org.uk) or call us on 0800 218 2247 to request a copy.**



## How each pound was spent



### Housing management costs including staff

We spent 35p in each pound to provide services to our tenants and to pay for staffing costs and overheads.

### Property depreciation

18p in each pound accounted for the wear and tear of our assets, including the homes we own.

### Property maintenance

We spent 15p in each pound on repairs and maintenance work.

### Interest paid on borrowing

We paid 15p in each pound to the bank as interest on loans.

### Cost of delivering other services

We spent 11p in each pound on other costs including services to support people and community initiatives.

### Service charge costs

We spent 4p in each pound on heating, lighting, cleaning and other costs recoverable through service charges.

### Improvements to properties

2p in each pound has gone towards our improvement programme, to deliver upgrades to your homes.

# Looking ahead

As we celebrate our tenth year, it is also natural that we think about what the future holds. Here are some of the key things we will be focusing on over the next year and beyond, as we continue to strive to deliver better homes, friendlier communities – together.

## Improving our services

We have made great progress with our repairs service this year and we want to keep this going, to make sure you consistently receive an excellent service from us. Following consultation with the Gateway Membership Team, we will also be introducing a new set of Service Standards, to help explain our offering and what you can expect from us.

We will be relaunching our website so that it is more user-friendly and to help you find the information you need from us. As part of this, we will improve our self-service portal so that it is even easier to pay your rent, report repairs or anti-social behaviour, give feedback and book rooms in our community hubs.

We are currently striving to earn accreditation from the Institute of Customer Services in order to make sure we are delivering a high level of customer service across the organisation. We are also working to improve our estate services contracts to offer better value for money to residents.

## Building our relationship with you

We want to ensure that we have a positive relationship with you and that you can get support from us when you need it. Following some changes to our Communities and Neighbourhoods teams this year, you now have a dedicated staff member responsible for estate inspections and tenancy issues in your area. We believe that these staff will enable us to proactively manage any issues within your community and they will be looking to build stronger relationships with you over the coming months.

We have stepped up our programme of tenancy audits and wellbeing checks, to make sure that we have a better understanding of your needs. We also want to make sure that residents and communities have an effective voice and can help to shape the services we provide, so we will be looking at how we can work more closely with you.

“We have made great progress with our repairs service this year and we want to keep this going, to make sure to consistently receive an excellent service from us.”





“We are also looking into measures to make homes more energy-efficient, including piloting smart thermostats, which can tell you how much money you could save by changing how you use your heating and hot water.”

### Investing in existing homes

Our £15 million improvement programme will continue throughout 2017/18. Through this, we will carry on investing in new kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, roofing and more to make your homes decent, modern and fit for purpose.

We will be replacing boilers in lots of individual homes to ensure that you have up-to-date heating and hot water systems. Our commercial boiler replacement programme will also continue across our communal heating, including the system that serves Abbey View, Munden View and some of Meriden’s other low-rise buildings. As well as delivering greater reliability, we are looking at installing systems which will give us early warning of any problems or failures so that we can respond more quickly.

We are also looking into measures to make homes more energy-efficient, including piloting smart thermostats, which can tell you how much money you could save by changing how you use your heating and hot water.

Our lift replacement programme will be continuing, with more of our communal buildings benefiting from new facilities, and we will also be replacing many of our communal entrance doors to make them safer and more modern.

### Delivering new homes

We are aiming to build our 1,000<sup>th</sup> new home by 2020, and we will continue to work towards this goal over the coming year. This will involve investing in land and identifying possible developments that we can deliver either on our own or in partnership with others. We want to build more new homes for people in Watford and also further afield.

# Working together

Working together

We are committed to being an 'organisation of choice' which is valued by partners and other organisations, and is recognised as a competitive employer that is capable of attracting talented individuals to help deliver better services for you.

During 2016/17 we continued to develop our employee benefits package, to ensure that we deliver value for money and attract a high number of good-quality candidates when we are looking to recruit new people.

Staff satisfaction rose during the year to 78%, up from 71% in 2015/16. This compares favourably when benchmarked against other organisations, according to figures provided by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

We continue to provide excellent opportunities for career development for our staff and a number of staff took the next steps in their careers last year, successfully transferring over to new roles. We also employ apprentices across our Repairs, Communities, Human Resources and Communications teams. They played a valuable role in delivering better services to residents, while learning new skills and working towards qualifications that will set them up for their new careers.



#### Our Board

**John Swinney** – Chair

**Chris Meade** – Vice Chair

**Nigel Benjamin**

**Chris Cheshire** (Board Co-optee - appointed September 2016)

**Raz Hussain** (appointed September 2016)

**Peter Jeffree**

**Jeremy Kape**

**Raj Kumar**

**Bernadette LaVenture** (appointed November 2016)

**John Lavers**

**Marsha Thompson** (appointed September 2016)

**Brian Trowbridge** (resigned September 2016)

#### Our Executive Management Team

**Tina Barnard** – Chief Executive

**Paul Richmond** – Director of Finance and Resources (appointed September 2016)

**Gareth Lewis** – Director of Partnerships

**Ben Johnson** – Director of Operations (appointed May 2017)

#### Our Gateway Membership Team

**Mazie Gibson** – Chair

**Chris Blackett** – Vice Chair

**Avril Barclay**

**Mary Daniel-Fearon**

**Shenaz Ghani**

**Cheryl Hollingsworth**

**Collette Sillah**

**Naomi Welch**





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