



**Our Journey Together Continues**  
**Annual Report To Residents 2015/16**





WELCOME



YOUR HOME & YOUR SERVICES



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# WELCOME TO THE 2015/16 ANNUAL REPORT

## Our Chair

Welcome to our 2015/16 annual report, which reveals how we have performed over the last year and sets out the Trust's key goals for the year ahead.

We like to set ourselves challenging targets which reflect our aspiration to provide consistent and high-quality services.

The improvements we have made in pursuit of these ambitions have resulted in a score of over 80% for overall satisfaction with the Trust across the year.

As this report demonstrates, the Trust continues to work hard to deliver services and initiatives that make a real difference to people's lives, as well as building much-needed new homes.

Our new improvement programme, which is now under way, will also see more than 2,500 homes receive significant upgrades over the next five years.



John Swinney, Chair



## Our Chief Executive

In line with our vision of delivering 'better homes, friendlier communities... together', residents remain at the heart of our work at the Trust.

Following the government's decision to reduce social housing rent levels by 1% for each of the next four years, it is more important than ever that we are financially responsible and find innovative ways of working.

With this in mind, we launched our new 2016-2020 business plan this year, which sets out how we are adapting to the challenging economic landscape for housing providers so that we can continue to deliver a high level of service to our tenants.

I hope you enjoy this look back on our achievements over the last year and would like to thank you, our residents, for your input and support in helping to shape the services we deliver, as well as the Trust's staff, whose continuing hard work is central to all that we achieve.



Tina Barnard, Chief Executive





- ▶ More than 80% of residents were satisfied with the overall quality of their home.
- ▶ Almost 85% of residents were satisfied with our repairs and maintenance service – up from last year.
- ▶ Over 80% felt that their rents represented value for money – a significant improvement on 2014/15.

## Repairs

As part of our drive to improve the Trust's repairs service we have put in place a specialist team to monitor and improve customer satisfaction. We now follow up on 25% of all completed jobs by phone to ensure that tenants are satisfied with the work that has been done.

We have also started monitoring how satisfied you are with each of our repairs operatives individually, allowing us to ensure accountability and pinpoint areas of the service that require improvement. Over the last year we have also delivered training to our repairs operatives.

## Planned maintenance

Ahead of a major improvement programme, we appointed a new planned maintenance contractor. Keepmoat will be delivering around £15 million-worth of upgrades to more than 3,000 of the Trust's homes over the next five years. This new contract includes particular incentives to ensure that the contractor delivers excellent customer service for you.

The agreement with Keepmoat also represents a saving of around £2 million across the life of the contract in comparison to our previous model for delivering improvements, allowing us to undertake works on more homes. In preparation for the planned maintenance programme, we completed 3,000 surveys in your homes to help us identify where work is needed.

**Across 2015/16, prior to commencing our major improvement programme, we delivered the following works:**

- Replacement windows for 77 homes
- External wall insulation for 84 homes
- 37 kitchens
- 26 bathrooms
- Roofing for three blocks, incorporating 36 homes
- Loft insulation for 54 homes

## BUILDING COMMUNITIES



This year we have strengthened our commitment to our residents by working with you to produce a new 2016-2020 Community Development Strategy.

It sets out our plan to ensure that we continue to:

- invest in your area – building new and better communities for future generations
- be a community anchor – a business with our roots strongly established in our communities
- enhance our tenants' wellbeing – through projects that support physical and mental health
- help people manage their tenancies successfully – providing support when it is needed

### Community development fund

The Trust allocated £120,000 to the Community Development Fund to support local community activities across Watford and Three Rivers. These included hosting the Enterprise Cube, which helped local people set up businesses and find employment;

our Nifty Fifties programme, which provided friendship, learning and days out for active older residents; and the Resolving Chaos project, which supported tenants with complex lives and needs.

### Community hubs

The popularity of our hubs grew this year, with 14,214 visitors to our Leavesden Green Hub alone. Around 250 people participated in our summer activities programme and we also made it easier to view and book our hubs online, and increased our predicted income from the hubs by £40,000. We achieved a 91% customer satisfaction rate from those hiring our facilities.

### Option studies

Each year we carry out 'community option studies' to find out how you feel about your neighbourhood – both good and bad. The results help us to focus on providing improvements to the communities we serve.

In 2015/16, we surveyed residents in a number of ways. The Comments Campervan mobile diary room returned and lots of you used it to help us shape the plans for the redevelopment of The Brow shopping parade. Residents in Radlett Road fed into a consultation about Centrepoint and we also met residents from across all of our areas in the town centre, with people having plenty to say about a variety of issues including repairs.

Everyone received individual feedback via a newsletter, as well as being given the chance to fill out a community survey. Several communities have benefited from the introduction of new services in response to their requests for support, including increased youth provision at Radlett Road and the Fella's Fitness classes hosted at the Harebreaks Hub.

As our work this year shows, it is always worth telling the Trust if you think your area can be improved – and we will look to support projects that can enhance your community.

## Grounds maintenance & communal areas

Our grounds maintenance team helps to ensure that green spaces, flower beds and shrubs in our community areas are kept neat and tidy. Residents' overall satisfaction with their neighbourhoods improved across the course of the year, reaching 85% by the final quarter.

88% of residents were satisfied with the grounds maintenance service we provided in 2015/16. Meanwhile, we achieved 92% satisfaction for the cleaning service we provide to communal areas of our flat blocks.

Working closely with the Gateway Membership Team, we also agreed to reduce the frequency of grass cutting in order to deliver a saving which will ensure that other services are maintained and improved.

## Representing you

The Gateway Membership Team (GMT) elected a new Chair and Vice Chair in 2015/16 and refocused their work to the areas that are most important to tenants. They also reviewed and approved important policy documents, such as the service charge policy, and worked with staff and Board members on the appointment of Keepmoat as the contractor for the Trust's improvement programme.



## Supporting residents & improving lives

Over the last year, we have continued to deliver initiatives that help people to lead better lives. These include hosting a 'Thriving Families' worker, who supports the most vulnerable families who are at risk of losing their homes, and a 'Community Navigator', who works with vulnerable tenants who need help to build support networks so that they can cope with long-term health conditions, caring for others or dealing with social isolation.

We have also provided financial advice through our dedicated tenancy support officers, as well as giving tenants guidance about how to access benefits and maximise their income. We saw more than 1,000 tenants in the last 18 months and, on average, they are £100 better off per week.



## CUSTOMER SERVICE AND FEEDBACK

It is important to us that when you get in touch with the Trust you receive the help you require, quickly and accurately. With this in mind, we made significant improvements within our customer service centre over the course of the year.

We invested in our staff by conducting over 1,000 hours of training for customer service representatives, with staff now holding NVQ level 2 qualifications, while further training is ongoing to ensure continual improvement.

We also appointed a new out-of-hours and call overflow service provider, which is allowing us to deliver a better and more reliable service, while generating an annual saving of around £22,000 for the Trust.

These improvements helped us to further reduce the average call waiting time from 45 seconds in 2014/15 to 25 seconds, and our abandoned call rate has also dropped significantly from 4% to 1%.

### Compliments and complaints

The Trust continues to log all the compliments and complaints that we receive, either in person, in writing, on the phone, by email or through social media. We are pleased to be able to report significant improvements in both these areas.

This year saw a reduction in complaints, with 291 being made in 2015/16, compared to 365 in 2014/15. We also received 200 compliments over the last year – up from 170 the previous year. We are working towards achieving a 50/50 split between complaints and compliments in the feedback we receive – these figures show that we currently stand at 59% complaints to 41% compliments.



Compliments 2015/16  
200



Complaints: – 2015/16:  
291



Compliments – 2014/15  
170



Complaints: – 2014/15  
365

How this compares to last year:



## DELIVERING NEW HOMES

The Trust remains committed to delivering new affordable housing in Watford and Three Rivers, with our new business plan setting out our ambition to increase the number of homes we build.

With housing in the south-east becoming increasingly hard to afford, we believe that it is important that we play our part in delivering much-needed homes for people, including different property types across a range of tenure options.

Over the last year, we have:

- completed 19 new homes
- committed to building 149 new homes
- identified potential opportunities to build more than 250 further homes

### Homes we have completed

February 2016 saw the completion of phase one at Rembrandt House, where the Trust is working with Shanly Homes to deliver 31 affordable homes. The first phase included six family houses for social rent, with 25 flats also due to be finished in 2016.

In May 2016 we officially opened Robert Court, a development of nine flats for affordable rent on a former garage site on Tolpits Lane.

We have also converted a bungalow in Coates Way into a hostel for homeless families and, to further help alleviate the shortage of temporary accommodation in Watford, we worked with Watford Borough Council to convert some of our empty homes for temporary use.

### Working in partnership

In order to help us meet the goals we have set ourselves for new homes, we have also embarked on a joint venture with Watford Borough Council to form a housing company. The new company will deliver increased numbers of affordable homes, which will be subsidised by the development of housing for sale.





## A PROGRESSIVE COMMUNITY BUSINESS

Our goal is to be an ‘organisation of choice’. This means being a competitive employer that offers value for money, as well as being an innovative and valuable partner to the organisations we work with in Watford and Three Rivers, including local authorities, health organisations and social enterprises. We also aim to be an organisation of choice to our residents and the communities we serve by providing excellent services and support.

### **Apprenticeships and graduate trainees**

We remain committed to directly supporting local employment and have expanded the apprenticeship scheme within our Gateway Repairs Team from two to three positions, as well as creating new apprenticeship opportunities within the Communities, Human Resources and Communications teams.

We have also recruited a new Graduate Trainee onto a two-year programme to learn about different areas of the business and prepare them for a career in housing.

Our Assistant Project Surveyor has remained with us and is progressing towards becoming fully qualified.

### **Career progression opportunities for our staff**

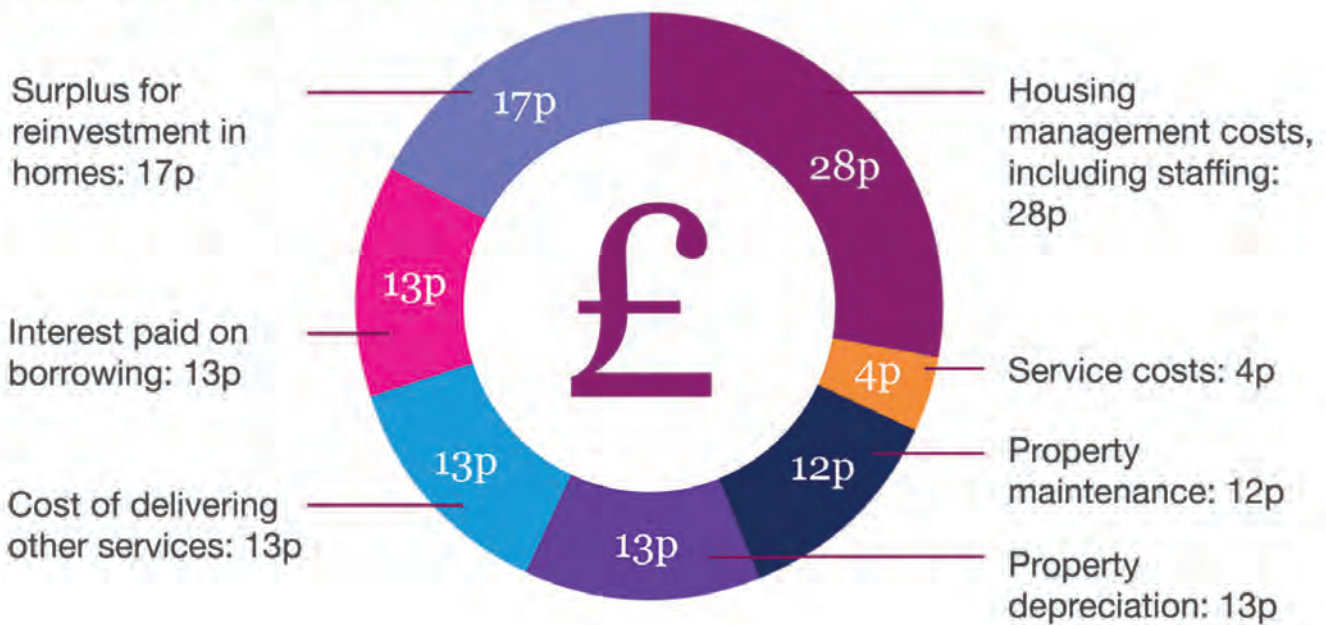
Although we are not a big organisation, we believe in offering good career opportunities for our talented staff. It’s one of the things that make us an employer of choice.

During 2015/16, nine of our staff have permanently moved jobs within the Trust, often following on from successful secondment opportunities, and all of our managers and team leaders have participated in a leadership programme designed to support their development and enable them to take more personal ownership for delivering excellent services. As a result of this we are retaining more of our staff, helping to ensure that we can deliver better and more consistent services for you.

## VALUE FOR MONEY

Over the year we generated a surplus of £5.0 million (compared to £4.8 million in 2014/15), as a result of careful financial management and our drive to achieve greater value for money from all our activities.

### How each pound was spent



#### Housing management costs including staff:

We spent 28p in each pound to provide services to our tenants and to pay for staffing costs and overheads.

**Service costs:** We spent 4p in each pound on heating, lighting, cleaning and other costs recoverable by service charges.

**Property maintenance:** We spent 12p in each pound on repairs and maintenance work.

#### Property depreciation: 13p in each pound

accounted for the wear and tear of our assets, including the homes we own.

**Interest on borrowing:** We paid 13p in each pound to the bank as interest for the loan we borrowed.

**Surplus for reinvestment:** We will be reinvesting 17p in each pound in maintaining and improving our existing homes, providing better services, developing our communities and building new homes.

### Where our money comes from

For every pound we generated across the year, 92p was from rents received. We got 1p from providing property management services on behalf of other landlords and 2p from water commission and other income. The remaining 4p came from service charges. From 1 April 2015 to the end of March 2016, the total income generated was £29.4 million, of which £21.5 million was spent.

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



## LOOKING AHEAD

In 2016/17, we will be implementing our new business plan to ensure that we continue to deliver better services, as well as improvements to your homes. The government's decision to reduce social housing rents by 1% means that we need to find even more efficient ways of working in order to ensure that we continue to improve. Here are some of our key goals and ambitions for the year:

### **Making your homes better**

We are aiming to build on the improvements we have already made with our repairs service, to achieve a consistent satisfaction level of 85%. We are investing in new software that will allow us to deliver a better repairs service, offering options such as text message reminders and giving residents the opportunity to choose individual time slots for repairs appointments.

Our new improvement programme starts in 2016/17 and will deliver approximately 900 kitchens, 900

bathrooms and new windows for 300 homes over the next five years. More than 250 properties will benefit from new roofing, over 330 from new doors and in excess of 600 homes will be fitted with new electrics over the course of the programme.

As part of our new asset management strategy, we will be implementing our Asset Investment Model, which will help us to better understand the Trust's level of performance so that we can deliver planned maintenance to the community areas that need it most.

We plan to undertake around 1,000 stock condition surveys in 2016/17, so that we have an even better understanding of the work that is needed in your homes. To help people cut their fuel bills, we will be rolling out energy-saving measures as well as helping residents to use their homes more efficiently.

## **Improving how we work**

We are always looking to find better ways to work, so that we can improve the quality of our services to you and add more value to the work we do in your communities.

In 2016/17 we will continue to expand mobile working so that our staff can work more efficiently and provide you with a quicker, more responsive service. We will also look to implement more self-



service options for residents, allowing them to access more services online such as setting their own repairs appointment times, accessing and updating information in real-time and using digital channels of communication with our staff.

Our employment offer to young people will be expanded to provide more apprenticeship and work experience opportunities in partnership with Hertfordshire Youth Connexions. We will also work to ensure that we remain an employer of choice by meeting changing workforce expectations and positioning ourselves competitively in the market.

## **Building new homes**

In line with our ambition to provide much-needed affordable housing, we will look to develop new homes across a wider geographical area, with a target of building a presence in six local authority areas.

In 2016/17 we are planning to be on site with the Trust's largest and most ambitious scheme to date, which will bring 133 new homes to The Meriden, along with new green spaces and an improved shopping area.

We are also building affordable homes on a number of other sites, including Hemming Way, Lincoln Court, Thorpe Crescent and the former North Watford Police Station site.

Hemingford Court in Clarendon Road, the first shared ownership scheme through our Clarendon Living brand, is due for completion in 2016 and will deliver 12 shared ownership homes within a larger 34-home development.

In May 2016 we received planning permission to build four shared ownership properties and two affordable rent homes on Broomfield Rise. We are also intending to build shared ownership and affordable rent homes on The Garth, with the project currently in the planning process.



## WORKING FOR YOU

### Board

John Swinney – Chair

Chris Meade – Vice Chair

### Other members

Peter Jeffree

Raj Kumar

Judith Moores (stood down May 2016)

Robert Rabinowitz (resigned September 2015)

Jeremy Kape

John Lavers

Brian Trowbridge

Nigel Benjamin

### Executive team

Tina Barnard – Chief Executive

Julie Robinson (resigned May 2016) – Director of Resources

Gareth Lewis – Director of Partnerships

Jackie Kelly (appointed May 2015, resigned August 2015) – Director of Customer Excellence

Tony Lewis (appointed September 2015) – Assistant Director of Customer Services

### Our Gateway Membership team

Mazie Gibson – Chair

Chris Blackett – Vice Chair

### Other members

Avril Barclay

Mary Daniel-Fearon

Cheryl Hollingsworth

Cara Marie Smalley

Karen Bell

Shenaz Ghani

Fatoumatta Jallow

Naomi Welch



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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 Community Agency (HCA).

Registered Society No: 30183R

Registered Housing Trust No: L4495