

West Lothian Housing Partnership



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Margaret Dunlop
Chair of West Lothian
Housing Partnership

West Lothian Housing Partnership (WLHP) is one of the newer Wheatley partners, formally joining the Group in July 2013. It has been a busy and exciting time for us, as we extend Wheatley's group-wide services to our tenants, get to know our new colleagues and adapt to new ways of working. I would like to thank the WLHP Board for its efforts for making this transition possible and to the staff for embracing the change.

WLHP manages 381 homes across the West Lothian area – most of which are less than 10 years old. We will be moving to our new housing office in Bathgate later this year to bring us closer to our tenants. We have three housing officers, who work out and about in our communities.

Joining Wheatley Group is already reaping benefits for our tenants. We are beginning to make savings and efficiencies by sharing costs and

central services. We made savings of £86 per unit between 2012-13 and 2013-14. This is allowing us to invest more in our communities and services. Already, we are providing a better deal for tenants through the provision of all the extra services and opportunities that being part of Scotland's largest housing, care and regeneration group brings.

Our commitment to delivering first-class customer services was recognised this year when WLHP gained Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation at the first attempt. CSE is the national standard for excellence in customer service in public sector organisations overseen by the UK Government's Cabinet Office. Gaining this recognition for our customer service focus is a real tribute to our team of five hard-working staff and I'm absolutely delighted we got this at the first time of asking.

People who live in our homes

can already take advantage of Wheatley's Handyperson Service for help with odd jobs around the home; some have accessed bursaries to help with the cost of going to university or college and all our tenants can talk with a Welfare Benefits or Fuel Advisor for support in managing their money and bills.

A further great benefit for our tenants is that they can now report a repair or pay a bill 24 hours a day, seven days a week, thanks to our Customer Service Centre. This is freeing up more of our Housing Officers' time, meaning they can spend more time out and about in their patch, meeting directly with tenants.

Joining Wheatley Group has given us the opportunity to see the best of both worlds in the housing sector. It allows us to maintain close links to our tenants while remaining deeply rooted in our local community.

Dan Blake
Housing Officer

Satisfied customers

We hold regular Tenant Satisfaction Surveys to find out how satisfied our customers are with their homes, environments and services. The most recent survey took place in April 2013 and showed 88% of respondents are satisfied with WLHP as their landlord and 82% are happy with their neighbourhood as a place to live. On repairs, 91% reported being satisfied with the service they received and 77% are satisfied with the way WHLP deals with day-to-day repairs and maintenance.

We also resolved more than 90% of anti-social behaviour cases.

Improving lives in communities

Our Housing Officers have been out and about in our neighbourhoods, identifying potential projects as part of our work to improve and strengthen our communities and to help people to live better lives.

This is a new role for our Housing Officers and it's a very interesting time for us as we speak to tenants and seek out areas where we can drive real improvements. We look forward to reaping the benefit of some successful projects soon.

Finding a home

We carried out a review of our allocations policy – the way we let our homes – and consulted residents on their views. Our proposals will see a new way of letting homes introduced over the next year which will give customers more of a say in where they live.

WLHP will advertise its available homes through Home Finder – an online portal which gives people who are registered for housing the chance to look at available homes and note an interest in any they want to live in.

Giving tenants a voice

Our Housing Officers worked closely with our tenants and the Wheatley Group Community Governance team to involve more tenants in having a say in what we do.

We have set up new local tenant forums which will enable us to hear more from our tenants and put them at the heart of decisions affecting their communities.

Some of our tenants have also joined forums which can influence services and decision-making across Wheatley Group. These include the Polish Forum, the Scrutiny Panel and a Welfare Advisor Panel.

WinterReady checks

This past year we were able to offer free WinterReady checks to all tenants over the age of 60 to help make sure their homes were in good shape for the cold winter months. A total of 12 of our tenants took up the offer, with a plumber visiting the home, checking the boiler and radiators and offering tips on staying warm and reducing energy bills.

Support and advice

All of our tenants can now access the support of a Welfare Benefits

Advisor who can offer free, impartial advice to tenants on all matters relating to benefits and welfare reform. Fuel Advisors are also available to offer free advice on reducing fuel bills.

WLHP's customer service benefits from very well-motivated staff who fully involve themselves in continuous improvement.

Customer Service Excellence (CSE) assessor

Help with higher education

We offered bursaries of up to £1500 to help people who live in our homes go to college or university. We're delighted that two of our tenants were able to get help while they study as a result of this scheme.

Help in the home

The Group's Home Comforts scheme helps people settle in their homes by collecting unwanted furniture, restoring it and recycling it before distributing it to tenants in need. Three of our tenants have already benefited from this new scheme.

Our Handyperson Service is available for tenants who are over 60 or disabled to help with odd jobs around the home. This includes tasks like changing plugs, basic plumbing, fitting shelves or cleaning internal windows.

Jobs and training

We have been actively promoting the Wheatley Pledge scheme to our customers which we hope in time will create employment opportunities for more of our tenants. Wheatley Pledge encourages our contractors and suppliers to create more jobs and apprenticeships for people in our communities. We are also learning about how we can create more jobs and training opportunities for people in our areas and are looking forward to making progress in this area over the coming year.

Joining Facebook

We made the step of signing up for social media with the launch of our own Facebook page, which allows tenants to stay in touch with us digitally. The page carries all the latest news and updates from WLHP as well as a link to enable them to pay rent online and, importantly, it allows tenants to get in touch with us with any feedback.

Our customer focus

We gained Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation at our first attempt. The scheme recognises excellence in customer services and is overseen by the UK Government's Cabinet Office.

All five staff were assessed across a number of areas including delivery of services, information, professionalism and staff attitude. WLHP was considered to be 'compliance plus' – the highest grading available – in four areas.

The assessors noted "areas of considerable strength in the customer service approach" and said the service "benefits from many very well motivated staff who fully involve themselves in continuous improvement".

They also said staff "demonstrated a highly customer-focused approach".

