

# Annual Report to Tenants

West Lothian Housing Partnership  
Highlights and performance  
2020-21



# Welcome to the Annual Report to Tenants for 2020-21. You'll find information about our performance over the year and what we achieved by working with our tenants and communities.

The report is based on the key indicators we give the Scottish Housing Regulator.

The impact of the pandemic on customers, and our strict adherence to social distancing, meant we did not carry out our annual customer satisfaction survey this year.

The Regulator allows social landlords to use the same indicators for up to three years. As a result, the tenant satisfaction figures reported here – which we also gave to the Regulator – are from the year 2019-20. Those figures are highlighted with an asterisk (\*).

We will carry out another full customer satisfaction survey in 2022.



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# Welcome

from West Lothian Housing  
Partnership Chair  
**John M Hill**



The year will be remembered as an extraordinary and exceptionally difficult one, with unprecedented circumstances affecting West Lothian Housing Partnership, our staff, and most importantly, our customers.

The pandemic left many tenants facing severe financial hardship this year and I'm incredibly proud of the way WLHP responded in providing vital support to tenants and their families when they needed us most.

Our emergency food service EatWell, for example, supported 280 WLHP households with emergency food packs or supermarket vouchers, while our Emergency Response Fund helped 59 WLHP customers with one-off essential purchases ranging from fridges to mobile phone top-ups.

WLHP staff also stayed in contact by phone, text and online with tenants suffering from the effects of isolation. The reassurance that

WLHP was looking out for tenants was often as important as practical help in this most difficult of years.

Despite the unparalleled circumstances and restrictions on our activities this year, we built eight new homes over the year, progressed work on another 190, and invested £262k in planned improvements to our homes and communities.

The planned transfer of 215 properties from Barony Housing Association to WLHP was completed in May 2020. Along with the new homes we built this year, that brings the total number of homes owned by WLHP to 742. The effects of the pandemic will be with us for some time, but our strong position as part of Wheatley Group, our Think Yes culture and our track record in rapidly developing new services to support our customers means we can be confident in facing future challenges.

Here are some of our highlights of the year.

Landlord self-assurance is at the heart of the Scottish Housing Regulator's approach to regulation. An important element of this is our Annual Assurance Statement. We have assessed compliance against the relevant regulatory requirements and the Wheatley Group Board considered evidence at its meeting on 28 October 2020. The Wheatley Group Board has confirmed that all Registered Social Landlords which are part of Wheatley Housing Group Limited – GHA, Dunedin Canmore Housing, Cube Housing Association, Loretto Housing Association, West Lothian Housing Partnership and Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership – comply with all relevant requirements set out in the regulatory framework. The full statement is available to view at [www.wheatley-group.com](http://www.wheatley-group.com) We also comply with the Scottish Social Housing Charter. This Annual Report provides an assessment of our performance against the outcomes and standards.



As well as the difficulties posed by the pandemic, Universal Credit continued to present new challenges and hardship for many. More than a quarter (28%) of WLHP customers are now on Universal Credit, an increase of 3% from the year before.

We continued to support our customers through the challenges they faced during the pandemic, including attending online tribunals with the Department of Work and Pensions to represent vulnerable customers.

Our expert welfare benefits advisors and fuel advisors supported almost 150 WLHP customers over the year, and helped them claim more than £130k in benefits and tax credits they were entitled to. We also helped customers access external funding to alleviate fuel poverty. The support we provided meant many tenants avoided falling into rent arrears.

We will continue to support our customers over the next year with the difficulties posed by Universal Credit and the impact of the pandemic.

Working with Wheatley Foundation and Wheatley 360, we:

- ▶ created an opportunity for one of our customers to get into work or training;
- ▶ supported 21 new tenants with household budgeting, running a home and settling into their community through My Great Start;
- ▶ awarded two young people from our homes a bursary to go to university or college; and
- ▶ provided free books every month to 50 children under five in our homes through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library initiative.

While our allocations were suspended in the early part of 2020-21, we resumed letting in August and allocated homes to those in priority need, mainly homeless households. Over the year, WLHP provided 32 homes to homeless people.

Medical adaptations were suspended at the start of 2020-21 due to Scottish Government restrictions and the need to maintain social distancing to keep customers and staff safe. We contacted tenants affected to assure them we would reschedule adaptations after restrictions were lifted and it was safe to do so.

### Overall satisfaction

Tenants satisfied with the overall service



\*Same figure as last year (see page 2)

### Medical adaptations

Average time to complete approved applications for medical adaptations (calendar days)



### Complaints

Average time for full response to complaints at Stage 1 and Stage 2 combined (working days)



# Improving our services

The coronavirus crisis changed how we delivered services in 2020-21, with the safety of customers and staff remaining our top priority throughout the year.

With housing staff and customer service advisors working from home, repairs and maintenance staff and Neighbourhood Environmental Teams continued their essential work out and about in WLHP communities, while following strict safety guidelines to keep our customers and staff safe.

At the start of the year, repairs services were limited to emergency and essential repairs, along with gas safety checks and servicing. Investment work crucial in terms of health

and safety, including the installation of smoke and heat detectors, continued throughout the year. Non-essential internal investment work was suspended due to Scottish Government Covid restrictions.

Our Neighbourhood Environmental Teams prioritised bulk uplifts in WLHP communities in the early part of lockdown. The NETs also provided a vital lifeline for many tenants delivering essential items including fuel top ups, microwaves and baby products.



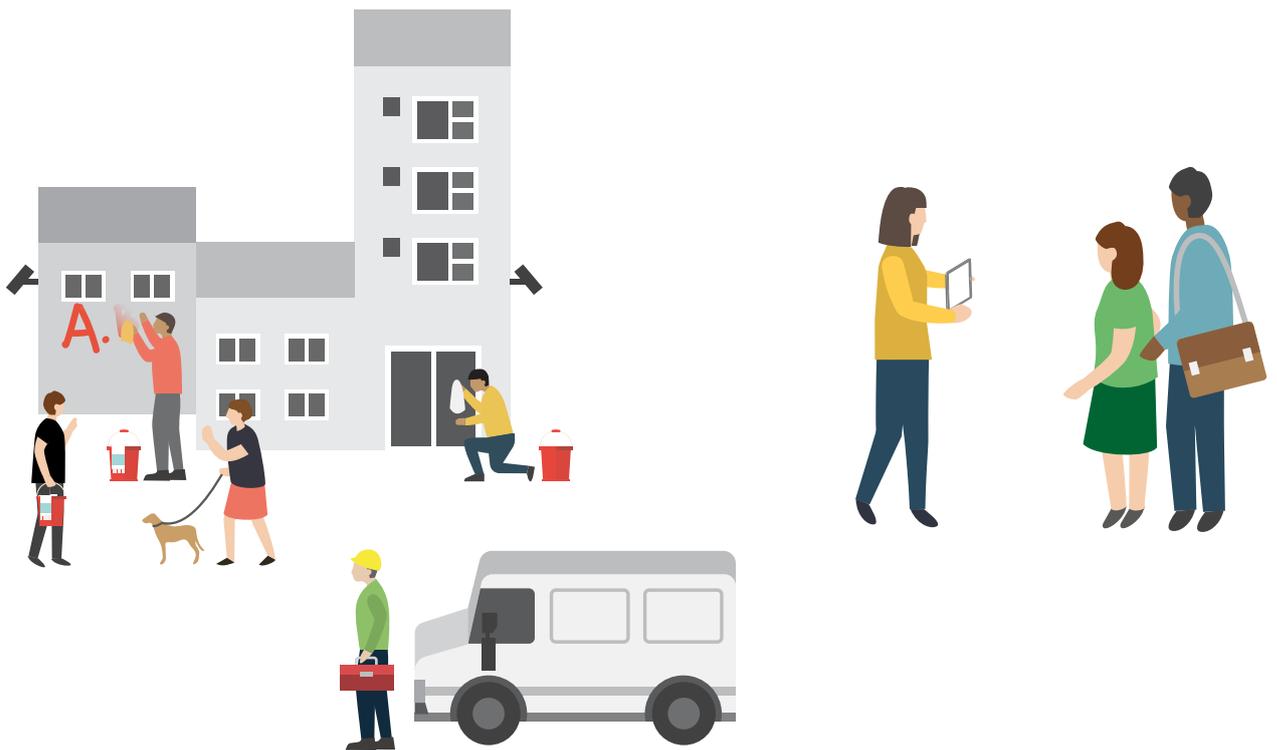
**WLHP responded quickly and decisively to changes in government guidance over the year.**

When lockdown restrictions were temporarily eased, we increased the range of services we could carry out, such as stair-cleaning and a wider range of repairs, but reverted back to emergency and essential services as restrictions tightened again.

Our new-build programme, suspended at the start of 2020-21, resumed in June.

At all times we did everything possible to protect both customers and staff through strict adherence to health-and-safety practices and the use of the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

The year 2020-21 was a difficult one for everyone, but we will do all we can to learn lessons from the pandemic to help make our services even better than before.



The Panel also met with senior officers, including the Performance and Procurement Lead, to discuss customer-focused performance measures. The Panel was pleased to be involved in the design and development of these measures and believes that they focus on the correct areas which are important to customers; repairs, environment, complaints, anti-social behaviour, and housing allocations. The Panel will continue to scrutinise the Group's performance against the agreed measures.

# Homes and communities

## Building new homes

**Despite the challenges we faced over the year, WLHP built eight new homes for social rent at Dixon Terrace, Whitburn.**

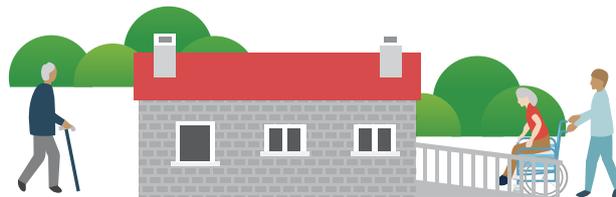
We also progressed work on 120 new homes at Almondvale in Livingston; eight at Blackness Road, Linlithgow; 42 at Jarvey Street, Bathgate; and 20 new homes at Winchburgh.

**190**  
new homes under construction in 2020-21

## Investing in our homes

**Despite the restrictions caused by the pandemic this year, we delivered £262k of improvements to homes and communities.**

This included new smoke and heat detectors for 178 homes and new boilers for 12 homes.



## Improving our neighbourhoods

**Despite the restrictions this year, we continued our work to create clean and safe neighbourhoods people are proud to live in.**

Our Environmental Teams ensured bulk items did not pose a fire risk when West Lothian Council temporarily suspended their bulk uplifts in the early part of lockdown.

Our sector-leading partnership with Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB) continues to see staff and customers assess the environment in our neighbourhoods.

We're delighted to report we have retained our five-star rating from KSB, achieving a 6.3% increase in the score from our 2018 assessment.

Wheatley's Community Improvement Partnership (CIP) – made up of seconded police and fire officers and our own staff – continued to work with WLHP communities to tackle anti-social behaviour, crime and fire safety.

While Covid restrictions meant home fire safety visits were suspended over the year, we continued to support customers over the phone and online.

Despite the pandemic and the fact that people spent an increased amount of time at home over the year, the total number of accidental fires in Wheatley homes fell by 5.3%.

We will continue to work with customers and communities to build on the high level of satisfaction with WLHP's contribution to the management of their neighbourhood.

### The number and type of WLHP homes as of 31 March 2021

Self-contained stock			
stock by apartment size and rent	Total units	Number of lettable units	Average weekly rent
1 Apt	0	0	N/A
2 Apt	185	185	£86.16
3 Apt	399	396	£92.80
4 Apt	137	137	£98.44
5 Apt +	7	7	£106.85
Total self-contained	728	725	£92.31

(Average rents are based on lettable stock only)

# Your repairs service

At the start of 2020-21, our repairs and maintenance service was restricted to emergency and essential services only.

**Throughout the year, our overriding priority was the safety of our staff and customers.**

As lockdown restrictions were temporarily eased, we were able to increase the range of essential repairs we could carry out, but reverted back to emergency and essential services as restrictions tightened again.

Despite the challenges of strict health and safety guidelines, new procedures to keep people safe, as well as restrictions on travel, WLHP still managed to deliver almost 2370 reactive repairs over the year.



We understand the provision of many Group services was impacted by the exceptional circumstances of Covid-19, for example the repairs service, and are pleased with the progress made so far in the remobilisation of these services. In particular, we are happy with the improvement in repairs being completed right first time which is a significant improvement since our previous review.

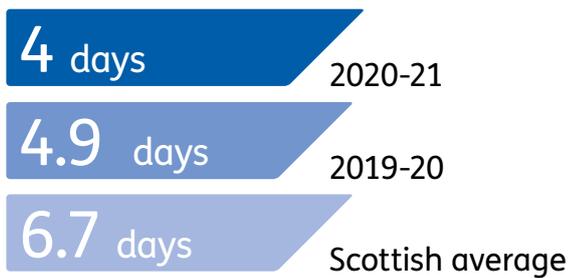
**Despite the difficulties we faced this year, the average time to complete non-emergency repairs was reduced to 4 working days, down from 4.9 working days the year before.**

The percentage of reactive repairs completed right first time, 97.2%, was up from 96.4% the year before.

Satisfaction with repairs or maintenance carried out in last 12 months stood at 84.2%, down from 94.2% the year before. We will continue to work hard to improve on this for next year.

### Non-emergency repairs

Average time to complete non-emergency repairs

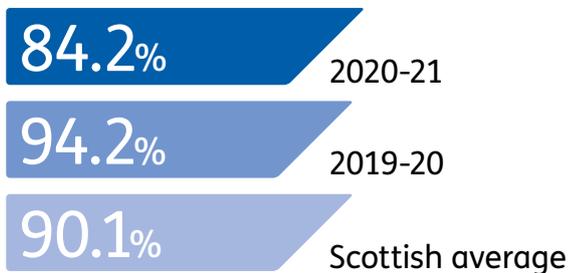


### Gas safety

Like all social landlords, WLHP has a statutory obligation to carry out gas safety checks in tenants' homes within 12 months of a gas appliance being fitted or its last check. Scottish Government restrictions, and the fact many customers were shielding, meant there were eight times this year we weren't able to complete all gas safety checks within 12 months. But we prioritised safety certificates which had expired in the early part of 2020-21, and all checks were successfully carried out by August 2020.

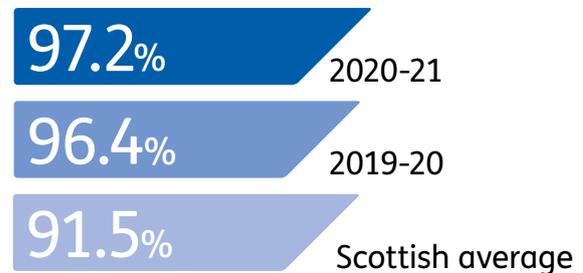
### Repairs and maintenance

Satisfaction with repairs or maintenance in last 12 months



### Reactive repairs

Reactive repairs completed right first time



# Rent and value for money

We know how difficult last year was for our tenants, and many will continue to face challenges posed by the impact of the pandemic.

That's why it's more important than ever that tenants feel their homes and services are good value for money.



**Moving on to Universal Credit caused unprecedented challenges for many of our customers and we worked hard to help them access support available and to pay their rent and other household bills.**

Our online discounts scheme, MySavings, continues to help customers make their money go further and cut the cost of their weekly shop. In 2020-21, 5086 customers across Wheatley were registered for MySavings, an increase of 1470 from the previous year.

Despite the extraordinary difficulties posed by the pandemic and the severe financial hardship faced by many customers, we managed to maintain high levels of performance across the indicators reported each year to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

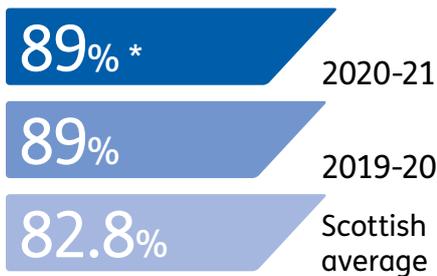
Our gross rent arrears increased slightly from 2.3% to 2.6% this year, while rent collection stood at 97.7%, compared to 99% the year before.

The average days to let properties figure reflects the fact that Scottish Government restrictions meant we were unable to let homes for part of the year.

The impact of the pandemic will be with us for some time to come, and we will continue to do all we can to help tenants overcome the difficulties they face and ensure they feel their homes and services are good value for money.

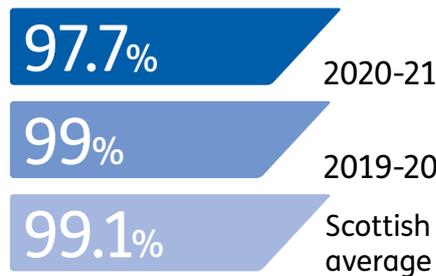
**Value for money**

Percentage of tenants who feel their rent is good value for money



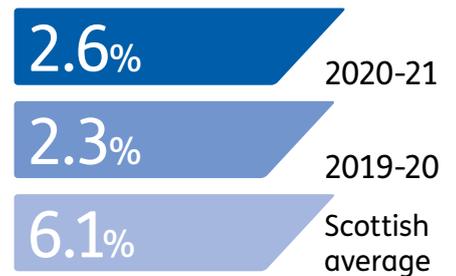
**Rent collected**

Rent collected as a percentage of total rent due



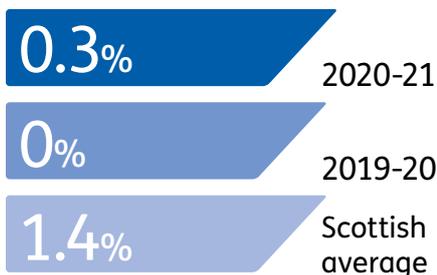
**Rent arrears**

Gross rent arrears



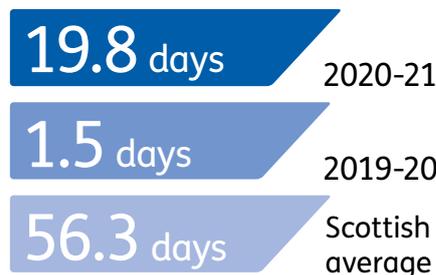
**Rent lost**

Rent lost through properties being empty



**Re-let properties**

Average length of time taken to re-let properties

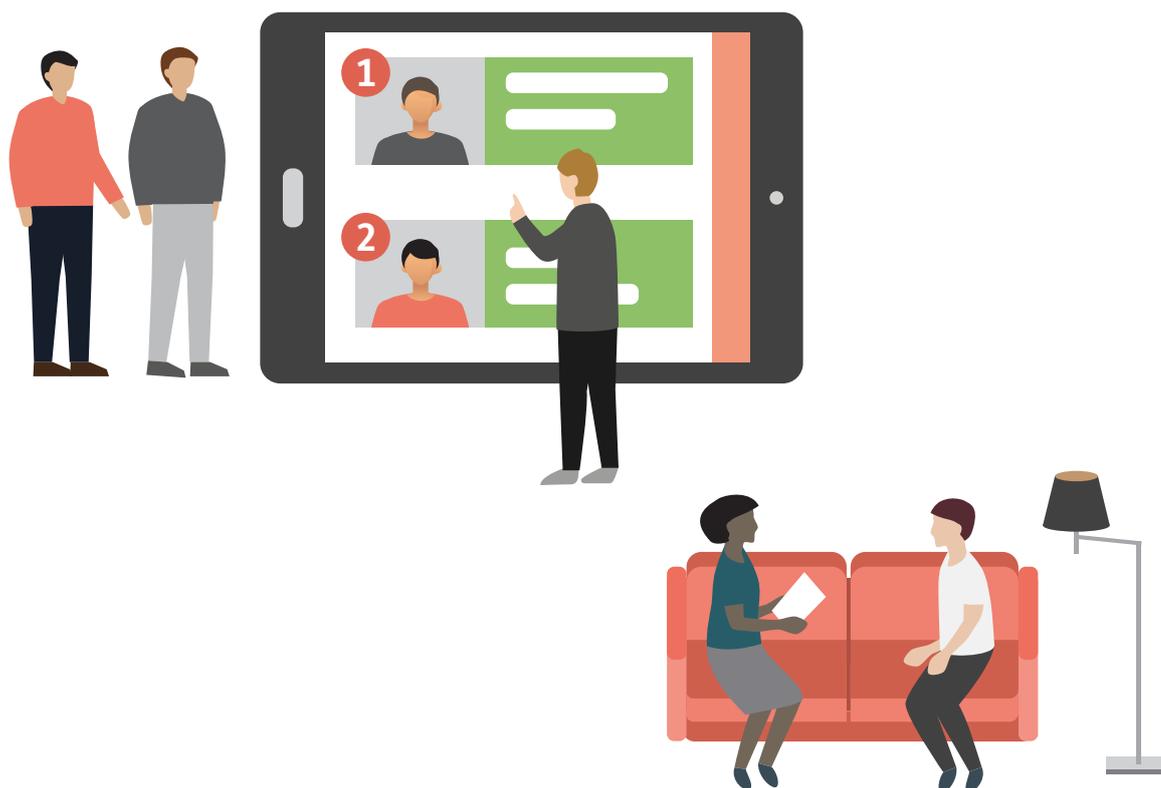


\*Same figure as last year (see page 2)

# Engaging with customers

In what has been a difficult year for everyone, engaging more effectively with our communities became more important than ever.

At WLHP, we have been determined to engage with and support our communities in every way we can.



We acknowledge the importance of tenant engagement and the opportunity for customers to give their views and have ownership over their communities. The Panel met with the MD of Dunedin Canmore to give our feedback on the new Group engagement framework, Stronger Voices, Stronger Communities. We are looking forward to the implementation of this and will work closely with the Stronger Voices team to improve customer engagement and encourage participation.

**We continued to support our customers to get online and to encourage them to engage with us through our digital channels and online self-service accounts.**

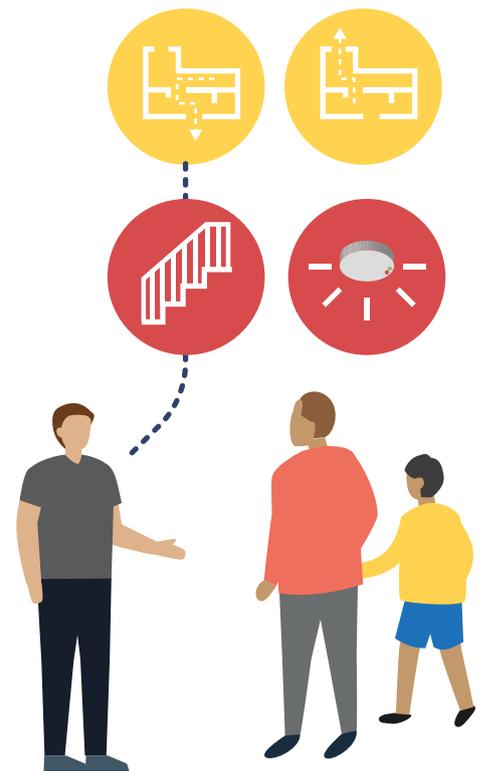
We continued to embed our innovative new approaches to services and supporting our customers. Housing officers, for example, introduced new ways of talking with customers online, such as through WhatsApp, FaceTime and Zoom.

WLHP’s online channels and services, which offer our customers easy and convenient ways to pay bills, book appointments and access advice and information, continued to grow in size and popularity.

By the end of the financial year, almost 66% of WLHP customers had registered for an online account with us. More than 1020 people used the WLHP website every month.

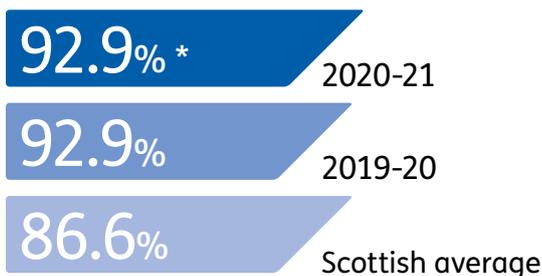
The number of followers on our social media channels this year was 862, an increase of 72 from the year before.

We know how important it is for tenants to be informed about services and decisions and to have opportunities to be involved in decision-making. Our new engagement framework – Stronger Voices, Stronger Communities – will help us give customers more control over the services they want and create even more opportunities for all customers to be involved.



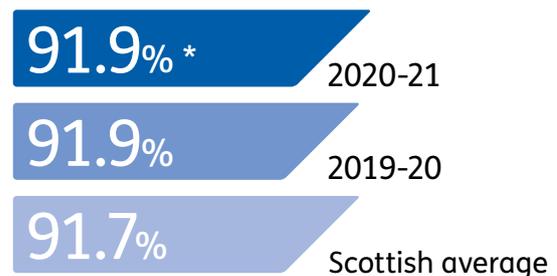
**Decision making**

Percentage of tenants who were happy with opportunities to participate



**Keeping you informed**

Tenants satisfied with their landlord keeping them informed about their services and decisions



Are you happy with how information is presented in this report? We can use your feedback to help improve things for other people. Email us at [talk@wlhp.org](mailto:talk@wlhp.org) or phone us on 01506 416 438.

\*Same figure as last year (see page 2)

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West Lothian Housing Partnership.  
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