

# Annual Highlights 2015–2016

A year at West Lothian Housing Partnership



# Message from West Lothian Housing Partnership's Chair

John Hill looks back over  
the year's highlights.

The bottom half of the page is decorated with large, overlapping geometric shapes in shades of blue. A dark blue triangle points upwards from the bottom left corner, meeting a lighter blue triangle that points downwards from the top right corner. The two triangles overlap in the center, creating a white diamond-shaped negative space.



**John Hill**  
Chair of West Lothian Housing Partnership

It has been another successful year for West Lothian Housing Partnership (WLHP) as we worked with our partner organisations in Wheatley to further improve and expand our services.

We introduced new online services for customers, enabling them to do much more when and where it suits them, and were able to introduce extra support for our most vulnerable customers through a new Tenancy Support Service delivered by our partner Loretto Care.

We continued to invest in our homes and communities and brought forward plans for new-build homes.

Above all, it was the year in which we worked with our sister organisations in Wheatley to develop a five-year Group strategy – Investing in Our Futures.

Investing in Our Futures spells out Wheatley Group's vision and aims between now and 2020. For WLHP, this means we have clear and ambitious plans for future growth.

Over the next five years WLHP will invest over £1million on upgrades to existing homes and £40million on building new affordable homes in West Lothian. We will also continue to expand services – including improved online services and more services for tenants with care needs – all while keeping rents affordable.

Tenants have been involved throughout the year, in a range of ways, in shaping our services and, after listening to their feedback, we developed a local plan which spells out what Investing in Our Futures means for our communities. To read more about this, visit our website at [www.wlhp.org](http://www.wlhp.org)

Here are some of our highlights for 2015-16.



Over the year we invested almost £200,000 on improvements to our existing homes.



### **New homes**

We brought forward plans for our first new-build homes since we were set up, with a total of 152 now in development.

The first new homes to be built will include 55 for social rent in Winchburgh, which are expected to be ready in 2018. Approval has also been given for our first 42 mid-market properties at Jarvie Street, Bathgate.

We plan to invest £40million on building 400 new homes by 2020.

### **Investment work**

Over the year we invested almost £200,000 on improvements to our existing homes. This included installation of over 120 showers within Boghall as well as 15 new kitchens installed in our properties in Stoneyburn.

Hundreds of tenants are enjoying the improvements.

Tenants also worked with us to shape the priorities for our £1million investment programme.

Work has started with priorities including:

- Boghall - installation of new kitchens and showers, and a boiler replacement programme
- Rowan / Elm Terrace - installation of new kitchens and showers, and a boiler replacement programme
- Stoneyburn – installation of new kitchens and showers, and a boiler replacement programme
- Perth Street, Craigshill – installation of new kitchens and a boiler replacement programme
- Gowanlea Court, West Calder – environmental works and renewal of flooring in common areas
- Broxburn – environmental works
- Bridgend Court – environmental works and installation of additional kitchen units
- Leyland Road – environmental works and renewal of flooring in common areas
- Elm Court – environmental works.

### Fuel advice slashes bills

Tenants across our communities saved £30,000 in the past year thanks to our free benefits advice service.

Our welfare benefits advisor helps tenants claim all the benefits and tax credits they're due.

Free expert advice is also available from our fuel advisor who can help tenants cut their bills and access the cheapest tariffs.

### Rents frozen for third year

For the third year running we froze rent levels for 2016-17 after consulting with tenants.

We have been able to hold our rent levels as a result of the efficiencies generated by sharing costs and resources with our other partners in Wheatley Group.

Rents pay for a range of WLHP services, including repairs, tackling anti-social problems and 24-hour customer service.

### Customers have a say

Tenants are at the heart of what we do and we want to give them real influence in local decisions.

We continued our 'Meet and Greet, Right In Your Street' roadshows where our housing officers engage tenants by visiting our neighbourhoods with a pop-up office on Saturday mornings.

The feedback we gather is used to keep improving what we do.

We held other events for tenants including one in Glasgow where customers from across Wheatley Group learned about our scrutiny panel and tenant-led inspection teams.

The scrutiny panel looks in detail at how WLHP and the rest of the Group performs – for example in environmental services – and reports back to WLHP bosses. Inspection teams look at services from a tenant's perspective and report back on what works well and not so well. We are continuing to work with our sister organisations in Wheatley to engage more people from our communities in local decision-making.



**£30k**  
saved by tenants in the past year thanks to our benefits advice service



### Online services

More than 60 tenants signed up for our new improved online services which went live in summer 2015.

Tenants can now see their account, with details of all their payments and charges, as well as pay their rent or other bills, book a repair or request other services.

The online services are part of our drive to give people more choice about how they get in touch and transact with us.

Up to April 2016, tenants who registered had made a total of £64,000 of payments to their accounts using the new online services.

### We are 'dementia friendly'

We became accredited as a 'dementia friendly' organisation – with our staff learning how to better support people with dementia and Alzheimer's stay active in their communities.

WLHP worked closely with Alzheimer Scotland. Housing and environmental teams were trained to identify the early signs of dementia and Alzheimer's and provide the appropriate support. They have pledged to treat customers with dementia with patience, dignity and respect.

The team has also made changes to our office in Bathgate to make it more welcoming for visitors with the condition.

WLHP is the first part of Wheatley Group to achieve 'dementia friendly' status.

### Customer service excellence

Our focus on customer service excellence was again recognised this year when Wheatley was awarded accreditation to a prestigious UK scheme.

Wheatley gained Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation - the national standard for excellence in customer service in public sector organisations - with one of the best ratings in the scheme's history.

CSE accreditation is overseen by the UK Government's Cabinet Office and recognises how organisations serve the people they work for.

WLHP was part of the assessment which saw Wheatley awarded 16 ratings of Compliance Plus and 34 ratings of Full Compliance. It is understood that only one other organisation has achieved a higher number of Compliance Plus ratings in the history of the Standard.



**60+**  
tenants signed up for  
our new improved  
online services



### Improving performance

We made significant progress across many areas of our business performance this year.

Highlights included:

- ▶ overall customer satisfaction was 87%
- ▶ tenants who feel their rent represents good value for money increased from 72% to 76.3%
- ▶ the time taken to undertake non-emergency repairs reduced from 6.77 days to 6.07 days with repairs completed right first time up from 92% to 95%
- ▶ letting performance remained consistent from last year with a low turnover and average length of time to relet under 7 days and
- ▶ rent arrears improved from 5% to 4.7% in the year.

As WLHP stock is all relatively new, the entire stock meets the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

### Jobs and training

Across our parent organisation, Wheatley Group, we created a total of 564 jobs and training places for people in our communities over the year.

One tenant from WLHP secured a training place and we hope to build on this over the next year.

We create jobs and training through employability schemes, Modern Apprenticeships and through clauses in our new-build and investment contracts which require contractors to provide employment opportunities for local people.

We also create opportunities through our Wheatley Pledge scheme, which incentivises contractors and suppliers to do more for our communities.

### Handyperson service a hit

Wheatley's handyperson service is there to help tenants who are over 60 or disabled with small jobs around the home.

The team, which carried out seven jobs for WLHP tenants, do everything from hanging curtains to plumbing in washing machines and assembling flat-pack furniture.

Tenant Noreen Davidson, from Boghall, said: "I've used the Handyperson to fix a letter box to the back of my door and also hang pictures. It's reassuring to know there are people out there you can turn to if you need a hand."



### Fond farewell to Board members

Our Chair Margaret Dunlop stepped down and we also said farewell to some Board members.

Margaret Dunlop was Chair for six years and did a fantastic job guiding WLHP through some key milestones in WLHP's history, including joining Wheatley Group. She remains as a member of the Board.

Five of our Independent Board Members stepped down at our AGM. They were: Audrey Gordon, who had served on the Board since 1998 and the beginning of the Partnership; Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick, who joined in 1999; Stewart Melrose who became a member in 2000; Councillor Martyn Day, who joined in 2002, and David McGruther.

All made outstanding contributions and will be sadly missed.

### Welcome to our new Chair

We welcomed John Hill as our new Chair.

John, 62, an accountant, took up his new role in October. He has extensive executive-level experience in local government and recently retired from his role as Depute Chief Executive at West Lothian Council, prior to which he headed West Lothian Council's Operational Services.

John has a wide range of experience including overseeing the Council's Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) and senior management roles in relation to business services.







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