

# Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council



## Housing Services Report

*April 2019 to March 2020*

***Homes***

***Involvement and Engagement***

***Tenancy***

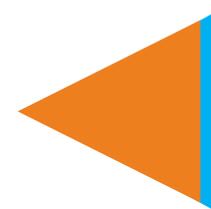
***Neighbourhood and Community***

***Value for Money***



**WELWYN  
HATFIELD**

*Working better, together*



## Welcome to our Housing Services Annual Report (2019-20)

**This report provides an update of how we have performed in delivering housing services to our tenants and leaseholders.**

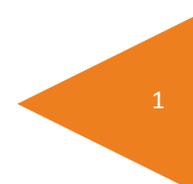
We are pleased to report strong performance in the services we provide to you and our continued success in building more, much-needed affordable housing in the borough.

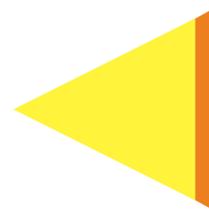
We are so proud to have completed our new housing developments at Lilac Close and Lime Tree Court, Hatfield - our first new homes for 25 years. Our building programme goes from strength to strength, and we have many more new homes planned for the future.

We are particularly proud of the dedication shown by our staff teams who have been working hard to help keep your homes well maintained and in providing support and advice to tenants. We know that the introduction of Universal Credit has meant that tenants in receipt of welfare benefits have had to adjust to the new system and our teams, along with our Citizens Advice Partners have provided helpful support to assist people in managing the changes. This is evident from our outstanding performance in rent collection and this in turn ensures that we have the income we need to deliver management and maintenance services for all our tenants.

The safety of our tenants is paramount, and we work in close partnership with all our contractors to help keep your homes safe. We have an excellent gas servicing record, and our ongoing planned maintenance programme helps to ensure your homes provide comfort as well as safety.

We are really committed to making sure that as council tenants you can have your say and are given the opportunity to scrutinize our services and help us plan for the future. Our Tenants Panel have been central to this and they have been testing our services and reporting back directly to senior council Members. We are now expanding our tenant involvement opportunities further, including new residents' associations and the neighbourhood improvement scheme. We would love to hear from you if you would like to get involved!





## Meeting our Corporate Priorities

Each year, the council publish a Corporate Action Plan that sets out our priorities against five key objectives. The plan explains our objectives and what we will do across all the council's services to achieve them.

### **The five key priorities are:**

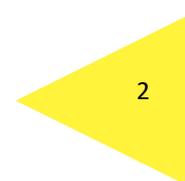
- 1. Our Community**
- 2. Our Environment**
- 3. Our Housing**
- 4. Our Economy**
- 5. Our Council**

Our housing priorities are aligned to these key objectives alongside key performance indicators that allow us to measure how well we are doing through the year.

To access a copy of our Action Plan 2019/20, visit the council website at:

[https://welhat.gov.uk/media/13800/Action-Plan-2019-20/pdf/Web\\_version.pdf](https://welhat.gov.uk/media/13800/Action-Plan-2019-20/pdf/Web_version.pdf)

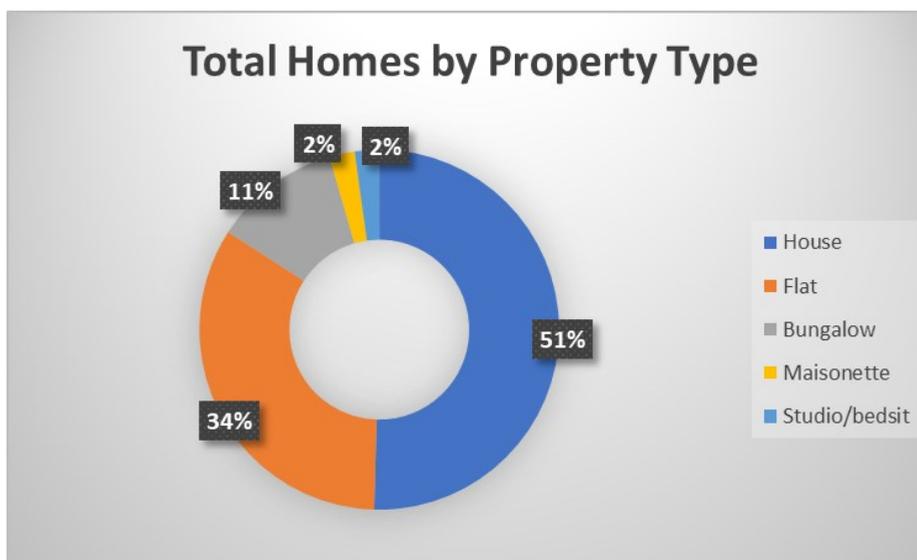
In setting our priorities for the service we consider the Regulatory Standards set by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH). RSH is a national body which ensures that social housing tenants have safe homes to live in, pay a fair rent and are able to get involved in the decisions which affect them. Our Annual Report gives many examples of how we are meeting the standards. A full explanation of the standards and whether we comply is included at the end of this report.



## Homes

We manage over 10,000 properties of varying property types across the borough. Here we look at different types and size of properties, split by general rented homes needs and leasehold properties.

General Needs	Number of Bedrooms							
Property Type	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Bungalow	4	401	748	5				1158
Flat		1455	800	38				2293
House		13	1074	3761	302	13	4	5167
Maisonette		7	60	69				136
Studio/bedsit	166							166
<b>Total</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>1876</b>	<b>2682</b>	<b>3873</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8920</b>
Leasehold	Number of Bedrooms							
Property Type	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Bungalow			10					10
Flat		617	477	61				1155
House								0
Maisonette		11	53	32				96
Studio/bedsit	59							59
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1320</b>
<b>Total Managed</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>2504</b>	<b>3222</b>	<b>3966</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10240</b>



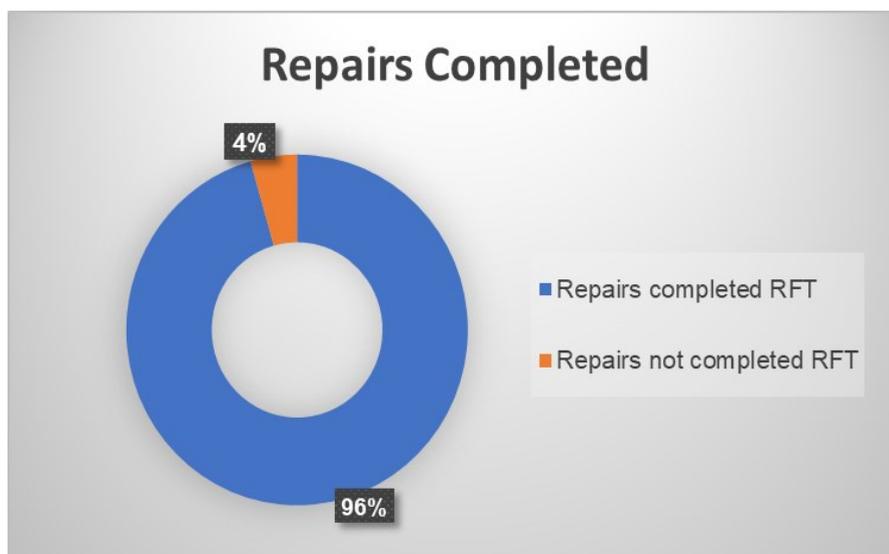
## Maintaining Your Home

During the year we continued to work closely with our contractors to maintain your home, develop the service and improve the customer experience.

We took 31,828 new repair calls between April 2019 and March 2020.

99.99% of the 28,198 repairs appointment made were kept, with only 4 appointments not kept.

We carried out 16,433 responsive repairs, with 15,720 (95.6%) completed right first time.



The council's Asset Team complies with the government's Decent Homes standard and reports accordingly to Cabinet, detailing compliance, and any "no access" properties. A balanced three year forward plan of work to help ensure compliance with Decent Homes is in place.

A rolling programme of 20% stock condition surveys per year is underway. This will be enhanced by a proposal to undertake additional stock condition surveys when a property is void (between tenancies). The stock condition surveys are used to aid budgeting / business planning, medium term financial forecasting and to aid strategic programming of work and asset investment / options appraisals.

### Our Asset team have:

- Replaced 189 kitchens.
- Replaced 98 bathrooms.
- Replaced 69 roofs.
- Replaced 40 door entry systems.
- Carried out 5 lift replacements / refurbishments.
- Completed 88 window replacements.
- Carried out 1688 Electrical Rewires – 257 (full rewires) / 1431 (partial rewires).
- Completed 690 Boiler and Heating installations and upgrades.

## *Did you know?*

**Helping improve energy efficiency** - We have carried out several projects to improve the energy efficiency of council homes, including cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, energy efficient boilers and other measures to help address fuel poverty. 13 properties have been identified as projects to improve the overall thermal performance of the building. This will include new windows/doors, new central heating, cavity wall and loft insulation. This will be funded under the governments voucher scheme grant.

**Providing aids and adaptations based on the needs of our tenants** - 235 requests for adaptations were received during the year (54 external works; 181 internal works). We carried out a range of internal and external works to help tenants remain in their homes and live independently.

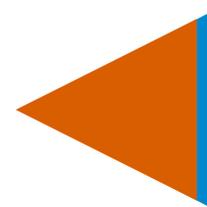
### **Meeting Housing Need**

Social housing is in high demand and we want to make the best use of our housing stock and resources to help meet local housing need. The council's Affordable Housing Programme has, to date, delivered over 320 new homes for local people with many more in the pipeline across Welwyn Hatfield.

#### ***Did you know?***

- We rehoused 269 tenants through transfer
- We let 285 properties to families that needed a home
- We supported 74 tenants to move by way of mutual exchange
- We helped 17 tenants who were under occupying their home to move via our assisted transfer scheme

We provided 44 new homes via our Affordable Housing Programme – which included a brand new development of seven two bedroom and three bedroom houses at Little Mead, Hatfield; the redevelopment of 16 one bedroom flats at Northdown Road, Hatfield and a mix of two, three and four bedroom homes through our open market purchase programme.



## Involvement and Engagement

Resident involvement and engagement are a key priority across the housing service, we value our tenants and leaseholders' views and want to ensure we give them opportunities to be involved in driving improvements and shaping how we deliver our services.

Our Resident Involvement and Community Engagement Team have been busy working with residents through the year, with 614 residents involved in various projects to shape and improve services or through accessing training opportunities to enhance their life chances. We have involved our residents in a variety of ways over the previous 12 months that includes;

Tenant Panel Meetings	Estate Audits	Neighbourhood Improvement Bids	Resident Training Opportunities
Reviewing Policies and Leaflets	Scrutiny of Services	Community Clean Up Days	'Your Voice' magazine content
Annual Gardening Competition	Satisfaction Surveys	'Love Hatfield' Campaign	Healthfest

### **We need your help!**

We are reviewing the ways in which residents, tenants and leaseholders can get involved, including developing a new strategy that sets out our commitment to working with residents to help shape the services they receive.

We would encourage as many residents as possible to get involved and to have your say. If you're interested or would just like to find out more about how you can get involved, please contact our team who will be happy to have a chat with you about the many opportunities available.

Please contact us by emailing us at [neighbourhoods@welhat.gov.uk](mailto:neighbourhoods@welhat.gov.uk)

## Tenancy

Our priority is to try to let our properties as quickly as possible, to families who need them and can have a place to call home. Ensuring the length of time that properties remain empty is kept to a minimum, we can reduce the amount of rent lost on our properties after they become vacant and in turn invest more money in providing services and maintaining our homes.

The void time for this financial year has remained consistent at just over 18 days on average, the same as in 2018/19. We continue to review our processes and work hard with our contractors to improve how we work to make changes where possible, to improve efficiency.

### **Our Tenancy Support Service**

The past year has been very challenging for some of our tenants. The continued roll-out of universal credit has also had an impact on many households across the borough.

We provide intensive, personalised support packages to help prevent households becoming homeless for reasons such as rent arrears or other breach of tenancy. Where other help has been needed, we have also put people in touch with specialist agencies.



## Home Ownership

The Homeownership Team manages the accounts and charges for leaseholders, managing a wide range of services, including:

- Managing service charge and major works accounts and billing
- Processing Right to Buy applications
- Property purchases
- Managing leaseholder leases

A leaseholder handbook is available and provides a central place for all the information a leaseholder could possibly need after they have purchased their home.

Tenants can purchase their council home through their Right to Buy. Last year we sold 50 properties, an increase from 35 during 2018/19.

## Neighbourhood and Community

We have a passionate and committed Neighbourhood Team who are dedicated to working with our residents to improve the neighbourhoods and communities they live in.

We are committed to delivering the best housing service we can for tenants and leaseholders and by continually reviewing the way we work we are now working more effectively across our communities.

We are committed to improving our neighbourhoods to ensure they are safe, clean and pleasant places to live in. The Neighbourhood Improvement Bid Scheme is starting to deliver projects that help us achieve this, with many more in the pipeline to be delivered in future.

The bookings on our community buses have increased, meaning that we transported 2581 residents from across the borough to events, community centres, shopping trips and trips to the seaside. This has enabled social inclusion and helps older people live as independently as possible.

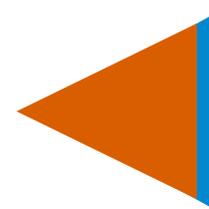
We have developed a new sheltered housing brochure which promotes the benefits and services that residents can expect when moving into independent living accommodation that is managed by the council.

The 24-hour Control Centre received over 100,000 calls via the emergency call equipment installed in residents' homes.

## Thank you to tenants and leaseholders who....

- Have helped us by keeping the communal areas of blocks free from bikes, prams and discarded rubbish.
- Worked with us to continue to maintain their gardens to a good standard.
- Gave us their views, through consultation and feedback on a range of issues and projects.
- Helped by providing us with evidence to take action against problematic tenants and their visitors.

## Preventing and Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour



The safety of our people who live, work and visit Welwyn Hatfield is paramount and we have reviewed how we respond and manage anti-social behavior (ASB) across the borough.

We now have five full-time members of staff to deliver a proactive approach to investigate and manage anti-social behavior incidents across the borough. This ensures we have the correct resources to ensure we can keep people in the borough safe.

We have introduced satisfaction surveys to capture how effectively we have handled resident's complaints of ASB. Since introducing the survey, 100% of those residents surveyed have been satisfied with how we handled their complaint.

### Did you know?

We are now holding regular online ASB surgeries in partnership with the police. This is a really effective tool giving residents real-time access to raise and discuss their concerns about anti-social behaviour in their communities.

Through the last year, we have successfully managed ASB and carried out enforcement to prevent ASB in our communities. We have obtained:

- 8 Closure Orders for properties with drug related anti-social behavior
- 13 injunctions to stop people committing ASB
- 35 Community Protection Notice Warnings, of which 10 Community Protection Notices were served to protect communities from ASB
- 8 evictions against serious perpetrators of ASB in the borough

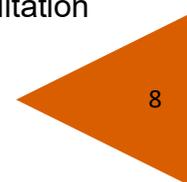
## Value for Money

Our rent arrears increased slightly from 1.40% to 1.51% over this year, although this was better than target. This slight increase was expected due to us seeing an increase in Universal Credit cases from 980 to 1585 over the course of the year.

The team have developed a really effective partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions who, through early interventions are able provide support to residents transitioning onto Universal Credit to ensure they maintain regular rent payments and do not get into rent arrears. Rent arrears for those residents in receipt of Universal Credit reduced from 5.44% (2018/19) to 4.69% this year, a clear indication that the partnership is delivering on its objectives of supporting residents moving over to the new benefit.

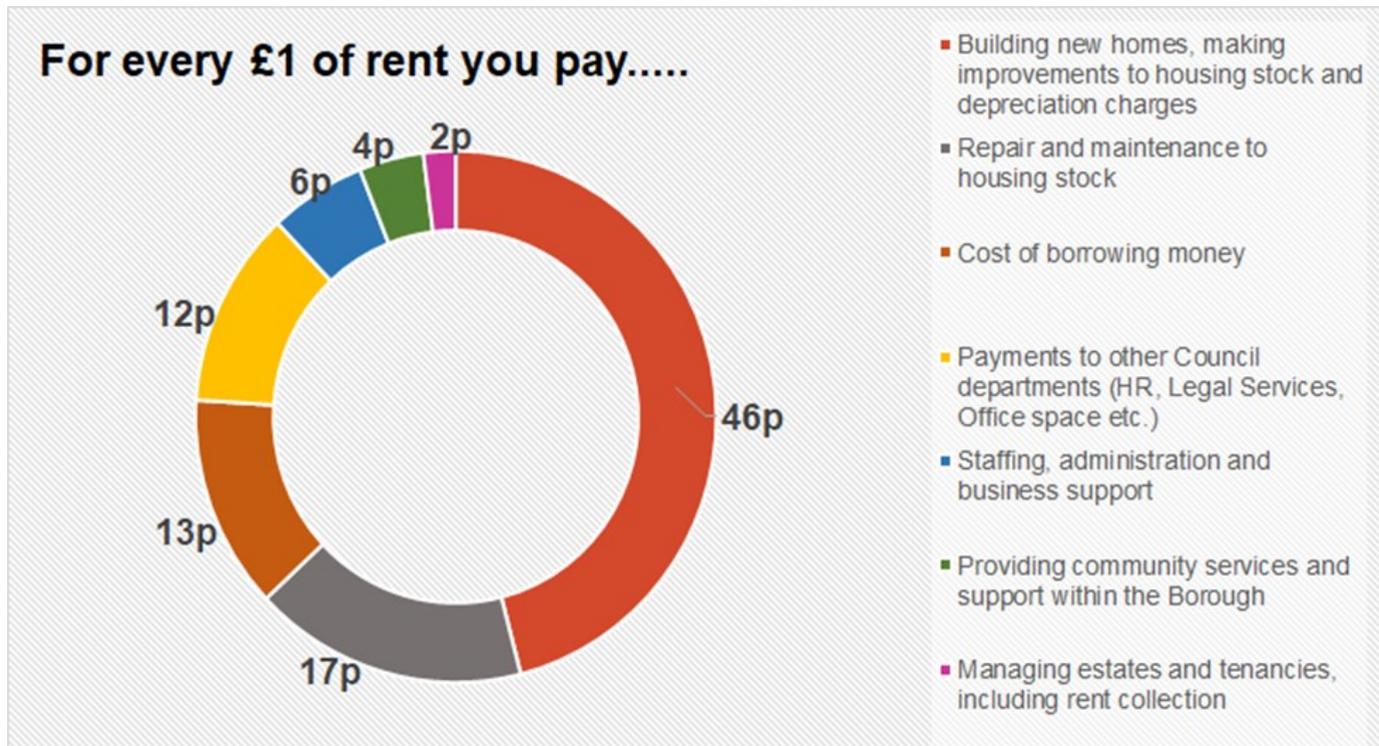
The team collected just under 100% (99.3%) of the rent charged which is really strong performance and ensures that we are able to continue to invest in our services to tenants, supporting people and improving our neighbourhoods and communities.

This excellent performance was recognised through achieving external recognition with an award of excellence from the Housing Quality Network (HQN). The accreditation mark awarded by HQN is a visible sign Welwyn Hatfield not only meets or exceeds good practice standards but is also proud to offer a best-in-class service to its tenants and residents. The accreditation demonstrates that our services have been scrutinised by a reputable and independent organisation and found to meet exacting standards and is a measure of confidence that customers, clients and partners will recognise and trust.



## How your rent is spent

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council has in excess of 10,000 Council homes and in 2019/20 rental income was £48.7 million. This diagram shows how that money was spent.



## Complaints and Compliments

Customer feedback is important as we use it to make improvements to the services you receive.

[We received 238 complaints during 2019/20, compared to 239 during 2018/19.](#)

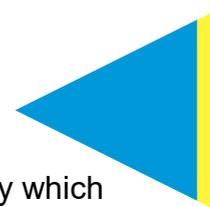
The average time from receipt to resolution of complaint increased slightly from 29 days in 2018/19, to 31 days in 2019/20.

84% of complaints were responded to within our corporate timescale of 10 days.

Only 12 of the 238 (5%) complaints received were escalated to stage two of the complaints process.

As well as complaints, we also record 47 compliments from tenants in 2019/20.

## Key Performance Highlights 2019-20



**How are we doing** - These are our Key Performance Indicators and major projects by which we use to measure performance and improve our services.

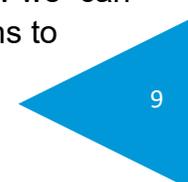


Achieved	Within Tolerance	Not Achieved
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Brief description of KPI	Target	2019/20 Year End	Achievement
Housing repairs appointments made and kept	95%	99%	
Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance	92%	90.31%	
Repairs completed right first time	90%	96.6%	
Properties with a valid gas safety certificate	100%	99.7%*	
Tenant arrears as a percentage of the annual rent debt	2.2%	1.51%	
Evictions due to rent arrears as a percentage of council rented stock managed	0.3%	0.19%	
Average void property re-let time for standard council homes in days	18 Days	18.78 Days	
Time for mobile wardens to attend an emergency alarm call	12 Minutes	10.71 Minutes	

\* This represents the position on the last day of the financial year. We monitor this weekly and over the year we generally achieve 100% compliance.

Where we have not achieved our high standards of performance, we have looked at how we can improve in these areas next year. We have implemented local service improvement plans to address areas where we have fallen short. We will be reviewing current processes, listening to your feedback, and making changes to how we deliver services where possible.



## Key Action Highlights 2019-20

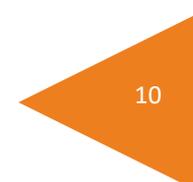


Project Action Description	Target Date	Achievement
Explore and implement where possible options for the provision of on-line surgeries for advice and support on anti-social behaviour over the internet and/or smart device.	December 2019	
Explore options for increasing promotion of the Jim McDonald Centre and its activities through the use of social media and other promotional opportunities.	March 2020	
Complete and publish an Asset Management Strategy. This will include aligning our stock investment strategy with housing needs and ensuring our stock is maintained to a good standard meeting all regulatory standards.	March 2020	
Publish the council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan 2019-24 setting out how we will provide local people with opportunities to access good quality homes.	September 2019	

## Looking Forward

Here we take a quick look at some of the key priorities and objectives for the coming year during 2020/21.

- Develop and deliver a new 'Right Sizing' project to ensure we make best use of the council's housing stock and encourage and improve tenant mobility to the right size property.
- Implement a new tenancy audit framework to improve identification of tenancy fraud and ensure that homes are used by those that need them
- Achieve 'Crystal Mark' accreditation for all ASB case management letters
- Deliver the re-procurement of the housing maintenance contract for all council housing repairs and maintenance services
- Commence and progress work on an exemplar sheltered housing scheme of 90 new independent living homes
- Actively identify, develop and implement new housing schemes and developments to support the ongoing pipeline of 500 new affordable homes
- Launch a new housing company to help to meet local housing need in the borough.



## Equal opportunities for our tenants

Our council is committed to providing fair access to all of our tenants and housing applicants. The council has a published Equalities Policy and Equalities Scheme, which sets out our approach and the steps we take to make sure that people with protected characteristics are not treated less favourably. The council produces an action plan which is updated every year and published on our website.

Equalities at Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council are owned by everyone and our steering group is made up of senior staff from all service areas in the council and the Leader of the Council is a member of the group.

All staff receive equalities training, tailored to their role within the council and we work with contractors to make sure they follow the council's approach. We carry out equality impact assessments whenever a new service is being planned, or changes made to our existing services. All committee reports for Members set out the impact of new policies on people with protected characteristics.

You can find more information on Equalities at Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council here

<https://welhat.gov.uk/equality>

## Providing easy access to our services

The council has recently developed a new Customer Service Strategy, based on a customer service commitment to all residents, including our tenants. There was a wide consultation process, including the Tenants Panel.

The customer service strategy is closely linked to our Equalities Policy, to ensure that the needs of our diverse residents are taken into account when providing access to our services. The council is also developing a new digital strategy and next year we will be investing in a new customer relations management system, which will provide a more customer-centered approach to transactions with the council. This, coupled with our new easy-to navigate, mobile-friendly website is really improving the experience of our tenants.

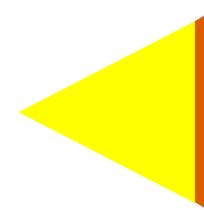
You can find more information about our Customer Service Strategy and Commitments here:

<https://welhat.gov.uk/media/14984/Customer-Service-Strategy/pdf>

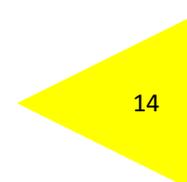
## Meeting the Regulatory Standards

Have we met the standard?		How we are working to improve our service
<b>Home Standard</b>		
<b>Quality of Accommodation</b>	<p>A programme of stock condition surveys (20% per year).</p> <p>Void letting standard.</p> <p>Voids performance (key to key) monitored and reported as a principal KPI.</p>	<p>Stock condition surveys carried out to voids from March 21.</p> <p>Repairs reporting interface with Mears from March 21.</p> <p>Review of key to key voids process commence in September 2020.</p>
<b>Repairs and Maintenance</b>	<p>Range of KPIs across our partnering contracts (primarily Mears) were met.</p> <p>Post inspection regime in place.</p>	<p>Trialing software to help tenants to engage directly with Mears to improve customer service by enabling them to change repair appointments online.</p> <p>Streamlined phone system to better serve customers.</p> <p>Enhanced software to combine databases for servicing, asset management and repairs logging.</p>
<b>Tenancy Standard</b>		
<b>Allocations and Mutual Exchanges</b>	<p>We have clear policies on both Allocations and Mutual Exchanges, both available to residents on the council's website.</p> <p>Our Allocations Policy sets out clearly how we assess and prioritise housing applications.</p> <p>We have a dedicated panel review process for considering and deciding on exceptional cases to ensure decisions are clear, transparent and wider issues and implications are considered.</p> <p>We provide access to online services to enable tenants to exchange their tenancy by way of a mutual exchange.</p> <p>The application process and bidding process is all online.</p>	<p>We carry out periodic reviews of our policies to ensure our approach makes best use of our stock and we can consider future impacts on housing demand and need.</p> <p>We are moving many of our services to digital online self-service options.</p>

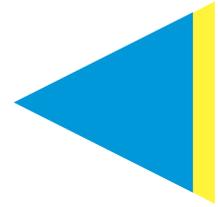
## Meeting the Regulatory Standards



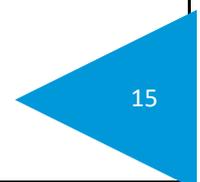
Have we met the standard?	How we are working to improve our service
<b>Tenancy Standard</b>	
<b>Tenure</b>	<p>We offer both secure lifetime and flexible tenancies for five years for our general needs properties.</p> <p>We managed tenancy reviews for flexible tenancies in line with our Tenancy Policy.</p> <p>Where breaches of tenancy occur, we will investigate and enforce such breaches in line with the relevant legal options available.</p> <p>We periodically review our Tenancy Strategy to ensure our strategic approach to tenure is aligned to meet local housing need across both our own and local registered providers housing stock.</p>
<b>Neighbourhood and Community Standard</b>	
<b>Neighbourhood Management</b>	<p>We carry out regular inspections of all our neighbourhoods areas, working with our contractors to ensure these are maintained and are kept clean and safe.</p> <p>Where possible, we engage with Neighbourhood Champions.</p> <p>This service is under review to explore different models for delivery that provides both an enhanced service offer as well as value for money for service chargeable costs.</p>
<b>Local Area Co-operation</b>	<p>We deliver a programme of resident training courses to enhance the life chances of residents and to help reduce worklessness across the borough.</p> <p>We have an in-house tenancy support service (in partnership with Herts County Council) and local partnership with Citizen's Advice who supports tenants who are finding it difficult to manage their tenancies.</p> <p>We are always looking for ways of how we can improve local partnerships and engagement opportunities with our tenants. This will be included as we develop a new engagement and involvement strategy.</p>
<b>Anti-Social Behaviour</b>	<p>We have a ASB Strategy and Policy in place that sets out our approach to tackling ASB across the borough.</p> <p>We are moving many of our services to digital online self-service options and want to explore further opportunities for digital access to self-service for ASB.</p>



## Meeting the Regulatory Standards



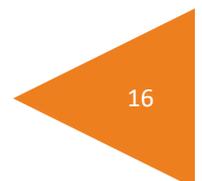
Have we met the standard?		How we are working to improve our service
<b>Neighbourhood and Community Standard</b>		
<b>Anti-Social Behaviour</b>	<p>We work with all relevant agencies through various partnership groups, CSP, Police, Registered Providers, etc. to develop a collaborative approach to prevent and tackle ASB.</p> <p>We are successful in utilising all appropriate enforcement tools available monitor these outcomes, cases numbers and satisfaction with case handling.</p>	
<b>Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard</b>		
<b>Customer Service, Choice and Complaints</b>	<p>We provide information and services that are appropriate to individuals needs and our customer service standards reflect this.</p> <p>We have a clear corporate Complaints Policy which sets out the council's approach to managing complaints. This complies with current housing sector standards for compliance management.</p>	<p>We are enhancing our digital offer for tenants who wish to complain, allowing them to log complaints, track its progress receive contact in a way that is preferred by the customer.</p> <p>We are enhancing our performance framework on complaints, including an enhanced approach to monitor outcomes and lessons learned.</p>
<b>Involvement and Empowerment</b>	<p>We have an active Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Panel who are the voice of tenants and have a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in shaping services. The panel are regularly involved in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing and providing feedback on housing-related policies and strategies.</li> <li>• Carry out scrutiny of performance through panel meetings and are represented at formal council meetings, i.e. Cabinet Housing Panel.</li> <li>• Attend neighbourhood inspections as Neighbour hood Champions.</li> <li>• Propose ideas and suggestions to improve the local areas they live in.</li> </ul>	<p>We need to develop a new Resident Involvement and Engagement Strategy that sets out a more ambitious and comprehensive suite of involvement options which will allow more tenants to get involved on a more regular basis.</p>



## Meeting the Regulatory Standards



Have we met the standard?	How we are working to improve our service
<b><u>Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard</u></b>	
<b>Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants</b>	We have an Equality and Diversity Policy, with a strategic steering group responsible for overseeing equalities initiatives across the council.  We need to understand our customers better to enable us to truly shape services to individual needs. Although this is captured for many residents, this is not completely up to date for everyone.





If you have any comments about this report, would like a hard copy  
or would like to receive it in a different format, please contact:

Policy and Communications  
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council  
The Campus  
Welwyn Garden City  
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