



Welcome to Wigan and Leigh Housing's annual report and accounts. In his introduction last year John Roe welcomed me as joint chair, an honour and challenge I would not have survived without the advice and support of John, Board Colleagues and Staff.

The Board saw a number of changes during the year. Sadly we lost one of our most active supporters in Cllr Chris Hitchen, who succumbed to illness bravely borne – she is remembered fondly by us all.

In our third year as an ALMO we have continued to make progress on the ambitious repair and renewal scheme. We are ahead of schedule with the major works, as those residents with new kitchens and roofs will confirm. You only need to travel around the Borough to see the activity of our staff and contractors and we can be rightly proud of the Company's contribution to the Council's "better place to live" objective.

During the year we had the delights of an Audit Commission inspection. Heartfelt thanks are due to all the Staff, Residents and Board members involved in this necessary but arduous process. As you will all have heard we were rated a good two star service and given some ideas for improvements which have already been built into our review and action planning processes. The best measure of our success is the continued high level of positive tenant feedback. As a Board we measure many areas of performance but try to keep our priority fixed on our residents.

The Company has undertaken a comprehensive review of its communications strategy. To reflect the wishes of residents, we have invested heavily in a Contact Centre. According to numerous tenant surveys, it is by far the preferred way of contacting us. We have made sure the Contact Centre is based in the Borough and staffed by local people. After some initial teething problems the centre is running smoothly.

During the year we have also received the Community Legal Services, Quality Mark, General Help Level and been reaccredited for Charter Mark and the Disability Symbol Award.

The great challenge now is to secure our future. Over the next few months we will be consulting with all our stakeholders to produce a strategy for the next five years. Although the "extra" ALMO funding will end, the Company has no intention of losing the initiative this has engendered. With the guidance of our partners we must come up with a strategy to secure the future quality of Wigan and Leigh's properties and support services.

A major task now facing us is to replace the Chief Executive who has given notice of his intent to retire. As one would expect of Peter, this is to be at the Company's convenience rather than his. I am sure much will be written and said when the time comes. The legacy of a smooth transition to a highly regarded ALMO, with a continued good relationship with Council, Board and Staff, sets Wigan and Leigh Housing above its' peers and reflects the quality of his leadership. Although it is said that no one is irreplaceable it will certainly take someone special to fill his position. Rest assured we are determined to find them!

As Board members we were also sad to learn of the departure of Karen Armitage - Area Director Leigh Homes, but are delighted that her ability has been recognised by Stafford and Rural Homes who appointed her Chief Executive, congratulations!

Finally, on behalf of all the Board members, I would like to thank all of the staff for their hard work and dedication over the past twelve months. They are indeed our greatest resource.

Chief Executive's Statement



Another year as an ALMO. Another year of change and challenge. It has been a year of continued progress of which we can be proud.

A year also during which the quality of our services has been subjected to close scrutiny by government inspection.

We continue to grow and develop but are at a point where we must determine what sort of organisation we wish to become in the future. Although the ALMO movement is still in its infancy the prime objective of achieving the Decent Homes Standard is close to being met by ourselves as well as many first and second round ALMO's.

What is to be the role of ALMO's beyond 'Decent Homes'?

This is a major challenge for us and one that will shape our future. We have begun by having a 'visioning' event for all Board Members and have established a working group of stakeholders that will plan the future for WALH. Government views on the way forward for ALMO's and options available to them are expected to be published before the end of the year.

Whatever the outcome it is clear that the present structure of WALH at both Board and officer level will change. Hopefully much of the visioning work will be complete by the time we negotiate our second contract with the Council. The present contract expires in April 2007.

The past year has been a demanding one and amongst some of its highlights and challenges have been the following:

- The best value inspection in February 2005 was a testing time for us and the result that confirmed our good 2 star rating but said we had uncertain prospects for improvement was in many ways a disappointing one. We disagreed with some of the judgements particularly in relation to how we are preparing for the future and our relationship with the Council. More pleasing was confirmation that virtually all our services to customers were judged to be good or excellent. All the recommendations in the inspection report have now been integrated into our improvement plans.
- We have implemented significant changes in the way we provide services to our customers. The Service Excellence Review has developed our Contact Centre and this has proved to be highly successful. It provides a fast and efficient service and is now the chief way that our customers make contact with us. After only 12 months the Contact Centre has been awarded accreditation by the national Call Centre Association, one of only 5 local authority contact centres in the country. The success of the Contact Centre has brought about a move to 6 main area housing offices with remaining offices operating on a part-time basis. These will be subject to further review.

- In previous years the progress of our massive improvement programmes has been a major factor in the judgement of the progress being made by WALH. Achievements in the last year have again demonstrated that the successful partnership arrangements are delivering improvements that will enable us to comfortably meet the decency standard for all Council homes by 2008. Both the kitchen refurbishment and roofing programmes have been accelerated and will be completed by the summer of 2006. A vital element of the programmes is to monitor the satisfaction of our tenants with the works. This remains at a very high level and is a great credit to staff and to our contractor partners.
- Whilst the acute shortage of affordable housing continues in the borough the demands for Council housing are at their highest for many years. Homelessness is now a major issue and we have been unable to reduce the use of temporary bed and breakfast accommodation. These issues represent a major challenge for the coming year. Our new allocations policy has had a difficult introduction due to the present climate of housing shortage. It is now being reviewed and changes may have to be made.
- Over the last 12 months a great deal has been done to strengthen, stabilise and develop WALH. The implementation of the new HMIS computer system is virtually complete and there have been very positive improvements in our tenant participation and tenancy relations services. The services we provide through the supporting people regime are subject to budget reductions and this will present a challenge to us in the coming year.

It has been another successful year for WALH and one we should acknowledge with pride. My thanks and appreciation go to all staff and Board Members. The Board has been extremely supportive throughout and at a time when there have been some significant changes to Board membership.

I believe that our customers have again been well served. As you will know this is the last time that I will contribute to the annual report as Chief Executive. It has been my pleasure to lead the organisation and to work with so many talented and committed people both staff and Board Members. I wish WALH every success in the future and know the organisation will go on from strength to strength.

Wigan Homes

A joint message from Mike Grimes Area Director Wigan Homes and the Joint Chairs of Wigan Board, Dorothy Abbott and Pat Cummins.



It is a pleasure to report on the improvements made this year in many areas of our service. We would like to highlight some of our achievements.

- **Repairs Service** - Mears are firmly established in the Wigan Homes area and are providing an excellent repairs service to tenants along with BHE who carry out gas servicing and repairs. 70% of repair orders are now ordered through the rapid response service MERIT and BGOOD, with appointments being given when tenants telephone the Contact Centre. The Partnering Agreement with our repair contractors will bring further improvements over the next few years supported by improvements in computer technology.
- **Estate Management** - This was an area of strength in the view of the Housing Inspectors and the quality of the estates was recognised. A key part of this is the role of the Estate Caretaking Service and the dedicated work done by the Caretakers across the Borough. Regular Estate Inspections play an important part in maintaining the high standards of estates.
- **Rent Arrears** - With the new computer system fully in place to support staff, we have had another year where arrears have reduced. This has been done in a sensitive, but firm manner, with the majority of tenants in arrears maintaining their re-payment agreements. Evictions have been kept to an absolute minimum and only carried out where the tenants concerned have not worked with us to reduce their arrears.



- **Empty Properties** - The number of properties coming empty this year has been one of the lowest number on record. This has put pressure upon applicants waiting for suitable accommodation and the Property Shops and Area Offices have been extremely busy. The number of properties empty at any one time has been reduced to just over 1% of the total stock and the time taken to relet them reduced to an average of 35 days. This is a further improvement on the previous year's position and means we assist prospective tenants with offers as quickly as possible.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour** - Our Neighbour Nuisance Strategy has been completely revised in full consultation with tenant representatives. Our close working relationship with partners in the Council and the Police means that we use the full range of options open to us to deal with the problems.
- **Homelessness and Housing Support** - Homelessness has continued to increase. Our specialist teams have responded to this challenge and we work closely with partners in the Council to help to reduce the problem. We will also be putting greater emphasis upon work to prevent people becoming homeless over the next 12 months.

Overall, this has been a challenging year but with clear improvements in service being achieved. This sets the direction for our continued drive towards excellence delivered by dedicated and committed staff supported by managers who take pride in the services they are leading.

A message from the Area Director of Leigh Homes Karen Armitage and the Joint Chairs of the Leigh Board, George Robinson and Marjorie Marsden.



"We are proud to announce we have once again delivered on all of our promises to show improvements in all key services to the customers of Leigh Homes stretching from Atherton, Tyldesley and Hag Fold, through Leigh, Higher Folds and Westleigh to Hindley, Golborne and Platt Bridge

We are responsible for:

- **Tenancy management** – ensuring the conditions of living in our properties are met by tenants and by us with 184 estate inspections completed between April 2004 and March 2005
- **Collection of rent arrears** – in a fair but firm way ensuring we achieve the maximum collection rates. This year we have reduced arrears in Leigh Homes again, by 0.35%.
- **Management of empty properties** - including repairing and reletting as quickly as possible. We have reduced turnaround time from 52 days last year to 43 days in 2004/5 and this reduction is continuing.
- **Homelessness** – ensuring people in the Borough faced with homelessness achieve a permanent home as soon as possible. We make decisions within 15 days with some cases being very complex.
- **Repairs** – we ensure we maintain the housing stock and do necessary repairs quickly and effectively with our repairs partner Leigh Building Services. We achieved 95.84% repairs completed on target through our BEST response team.



- **Tenancy relations** - we deal with anti social behaviour and neighbour nuisance and assist people to change their behaviour and reduce disruptive behaviour. We dealt with 1,227 cases last year.
- **Tenant participation** – we are proud of our achievements. We are totally committed to including our tenants as key voices in all services and encouraging them to help us make things better. With 13 recognised and financially supported groups we have a good spread of involvement from our customers but are always looking to increase it.
- **The Property Shop Service** is friendly and helpful and staff work hard to assist customers in understanding and being able to take part in 'bidding' for property.
- **The Contact Centre** is managed here in Leigh and we are proud of the fabulous work achieved. Thousands of calls answered and excellent performance targets achieved. What does the future hold?

Congratulations and thanks to all our staff at Leigh Homes as you have done us proud.

We have built a new and lasting partnership with our repairs contractors Leigh Building Services and BHE gas servicing provider. We have seen improvements on every one of our estates and it is with pleasure we see the improved stock with proper environmental works to make our estates places people would want to live.

Top class managers and staff, dedicated to delivering services for the people living in the Leigh Homes area, are proud to be working for you".



More than Housing Management

Wigan and Leigh Housing is more than just a manager of housing stock in the borough.

The Housing Needs Division delivers valuable services to vulnerable customers to help them maintain their tenancies and independence. Services include sheltered housing for older people, furnished tenancy service, temporary accommodation and floating support for the homeless and the asylum seeker support service. Staff in the division also ensure we deliver services fairly to all our customers.

Achievements in 2004/05 include receiving a positive report from the Audit Commission Inspectors on the quality of support services, retendering the furnished tenancy contracts, changing the way scheme managers work in sheltered housing to meet customers needs, a sheltered housing agreement with tenants and raising awareness of equality issues including adopting the strapline "There is no quality without equality".

Challenges for 2005/06 include achieving level C of the Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework, renegotiating the asylum seeker support contract, improving our position against the Equality Standard in Local Government and ensuring services deliver value for money.

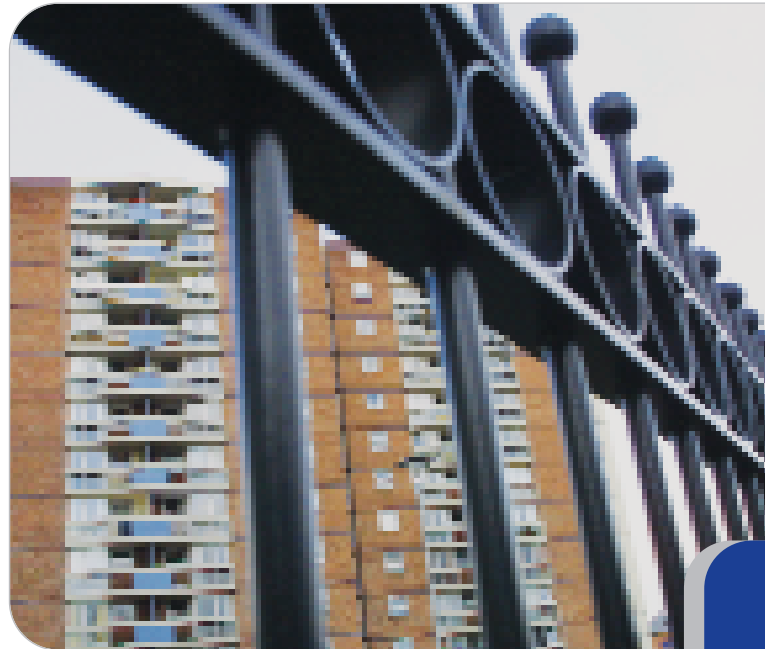
Behind the scenes

Although the majority of our staff work on delivering services direct to our customers, the organisation couldn't function without the "backroom" staff who do the things that are vital in any organisation our size. These include the Human Resources, and Business Management Teams and the IT, Finance and Admin Teams.

The Human Resources Team has led on a number of new initiatives introducing a bullying and harassment policy, developing accredited NVQ qualifications for our modern apprentices and starting to review fire safety standards at all our sheltered schemes and flat blocks. This is as well as carrying out a range of vital training to help staff do their job better and ensuring that staff get paid on time!

The Business Management Team has also carried out some vital work in the year. Highlights include a complete review of the complaints system to ensure we respond more effectively, carrying out a range of surveys to find out what our customers think about different issues. It has also included renegotiating the performance measures we are judged on by the Council to make them more focussed and facilitating and supporting the re-inspection of the Company.

IT have worked hard to ensure the smooth transition to a new integrated computer system. This new system links together all information relating to tenants and properties. It allows instant access to performance information allowing us to see how we are



doing at a glance. The challenges ahead for IT include a move to testing mobile working and remote access to information by tenants through a secure website.

The Finance Team have once again managed the budget to ensure spending levels across the whole range of company functions is on track. The pressures of delivering the budget whilst getting to grips with a new financial system have been immense, but a challenge which they have risen to admirably.

Our performance in 2004/05

In order to develop an excellent housing service, Wigan and Leigh Housing has its own Performance Management Framework "Excel". To monitor how we are doing we have a range of performance indicators. The indicators are measured against stretching targets set at the beginning of the year to see if we are delivering. The table and charts on these next four pages show our performance for 2004/05 in key areas of the services we provide.

Key symbols

Status - These symbols show if we are within tolerance for meeting our targets.



Performance below 5% of target



Performance below target, but within 5% of target



Performance on target, but not beating it by more than 5%



Performance beating target by 5% or more

Trend - These symbols show how performance compares with performance from the previous year.



Performance improvement on previous year



Performance equal to previous year



Performance not as good as previous year

Customer Care

Indicator	Actual 2003/4	Target 2004/5	Actual 2004/5	Status	Trend
% of telephone calls answered within 10 rings	97%	98%	98%		
% of letters that receive a response within 10 working days	86%	96%	76%		

Empty property management

Indicator	Actual 2003/4	Target 2004/5	Actual 2004/5	Status	Trend
Proportion of empty homes as % of stock	2%	1.9%	1.6%		
% of rent lost through properties becoming vacant	1.73%	2.2%	1.53%		
Average relet time for properties	54 days	41 days	39 days		

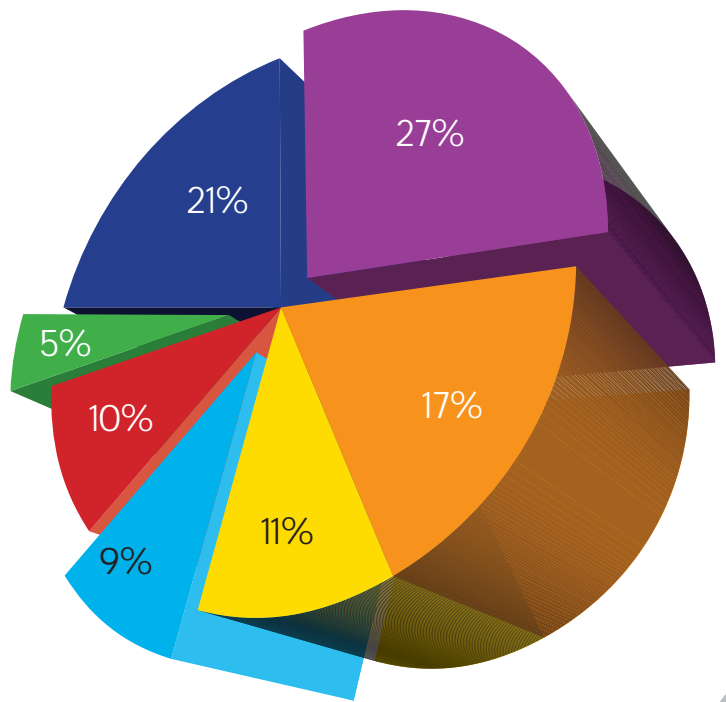
Rent collection and arrears

Indicator	Actual 2003/4	Target 2004/5	Actual 2004/5	Status	Trend
Proportion of rent collected including arrears carried forward	96%	97.8%	97.09%		
Proportion of rent collected without arrears brought forward	98.8%	100.12%	99.77%		
Rent arrears as a % of rent due	2.9%	2.7%	2.45%		
% of tenants owing more than £250 and 13 weeks rent	5.05%	4.5%	4.10%		

Complaints

Indicator	Actual 2003/4	Target 2004/5	Actual 2004/5	Status	Trend
% of complaints which receive a response within 10 working days	70.2%	96%	72%		
% of complaints reaching stage 2 of the complaints procedure	5%	10%	3.4%		

Breakdown of types of complaints received 2004/05



Repairs and maintenance to properties

Indicator	Actual 2003/4	Target 2004/5	Actual 2004/5	Status	Trend
The proportion of Council properties that meet the Government's decency standard	69%	76%	78%	😊	↑
Customer satisfaction with programmed works activity	91%	91%	93%	😊	↑
Average time taken to complete non urgent repairs	12 days	11 days	10 days	😊	↑
% of urgent repairs completed within Government time limits	87%	93%	87%	😞	↔
% of emergency repairs completed within target time	84.4%	90%	90%	😊	↑
Tenants satisfaction with overall repairs service	94%	94%	94%	😊	↔

Helping homeless people

Indicator	Actual 2003/4	Target 2004/5	Actual 2004/5	Status	Trend
Average length of stay in temporary accommodation	34 days	33 days	40 days	😞	↓

Buying your home

Indicator	Actual 2003/4	Target 2004/5	Actual 2004/5	Status	Trend
Average length of time to receive an eligibility notice under the buying your home scheme	24 days	28 days	24 days	😊	↔

Accounts

Profit and loss account for the Year Ended 31 March 2005

	2004/05	2003/04
	£	£
TURNOVER	14,319,972	13,245,427
Administrative expenses	14,338,065	13,247,110
	<u>-18,093</u>	<u>-1,683</u>
Other operating income	17,939	1,506
OPERATING LOSS 3	<u>-154</u>	<u>-177</u>
Interest receivable and similar income	9,362	4,103
Interest payable	<u>-1,145</u>	<u></u>
PROFIT ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	8,063	3,926
Tax on profit on ordinary activities	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR AFTER TAXATION	8,063	3,926
Retained profit brought forward	8,777	4,851
RETAINED PROFIT CARRIED FORWARD	<u><u>16,840</u></u>	<u><u>8,777</u></u>

Balance sheet at 31 March 2005

	2005	2004
	£	£
Current assets:		
Debtors	156,299	
Cash at Bank	659,439	782,706
	<u>815,738</u>	<u>782,706</u>
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	<u>798,898</u>	<u>773,929</u>
Net Current Assets	<u>16,840</u>	<u>8,777</u>
Total Assets less Current Liabilities		
Reserves		
Profit & Loss Account	16,840	8,777
	<u>16,840</u>	<u>8,777</u>

Board members as at 31 March 2005



Wigan and Leigh Housing Board

Susan Loudon	Council
Geoff Roberts	Council
Fred Walker (Link)	Council
Chris Ready (Link)	Council
Tom Frost (Link)	Independent
George Robinson (Link)	Independent
John Roe	Independent
Don Battersby	Independent
Linda Jones	Tenant
Patricia Cummins (Link)	Tenant
Marjorie Marsden (Link)	Tenant
Michael Baines	Tenant



Wigan Homes Board

Christine Hitchen	Council
Chris Ready (Link)	Council
Michael Winstanley	Council
Terry Halliwell	Council
Brian Dobson	Independent
Christopher Harris	Independent
Dorothy Abbott	Independent
Tom Frost (Link)	Independent
Margaret Bowen	Tenant
Patricia Cummins (Link)	Tenant
George Barlow	Tenant
Kathleen Lowe	Tenant



Leigh Homes Board

Myra Whiteside	Council
Fred Walker (Link)	Council
Vacant	Council
Kevin Anderson	Council
Albert Haynes	Independent
George Robinson (Link)	Independent
Jean Garlick	Independent
Peter Davidson	Independent
Jacquelyn Farrington	Tenant
Marjorie Marsden (Link)	Tenant
Nora Farrimond	Tenant
James Dunster	Tenant



Chief Executive: Peter Gee FCIH

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