

# West Granton Housing Co-operative

## Social Value Report

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# CONSULTANT PROFILES

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The analysis of West Granton Housing Co-operative's (WGHC) social value has provided valuable insights into the organisation's strengths and proven the uniqueness of the co-operative model. Using our 12 indicators, we have proven that WGHC performs well in all aspects of social value by providing an excellent level of service at a comfortable and speedy pace of delivery. WGHC's co-operative model is the key reason for its fantastic performance and has created a strong community-led organisation whose main goal is to uphold the living standards of their tenants. As such we commend WGHC for their continued efforts in all aspects relating to community, charity and standard of living for their exceptional performance.

# CONTEXT & OBJECTIVES

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## INTRODUCTION TO WGHC

West Granton Housing Cooperative (WGHC) is a registered social landlord in North Edinburgh which operates on a not-for-profit, tenant-owned cooperative model. Established in 1990 and with tenant satisfaction at its core, WGHC provides new rented housing to tenants as opposed to low demand council housing, supporting them and the wider community in various ways. Examples of their tenant-focused initiatives include their support for tenants through the cost-of-living crisis and charitable initiatives aimed at bettering the community. Additionally, as a non-profit organisation, any surpluses are used to further the objectives of the co-operative.

Misconceptions often arise in the difference between a housing cooperative and a housing association. For the purpose of this report, **a housing cooperative is defined as a stakeholder-owned, democratically run enterprise in which all stakeholders including tenants, workers and customers have a say in its operations.** The primary difference between a housing association and a housing cooperative exists in their ownership structure. While housing associations are managed entirely by its members, who may or may not be tenants, housing cooperatives are strongly committed to a tenant-led organisational structure, where tenant participation is key.

WGHC is one of 7 remaining housing co-operatives that currently exist in Scotland. With the rise of the housing association model and its growing preference by policy makers and regulators, the co-operative model's effectiveness is not as recognised. As such, this report aims to provide a clear methodology in indicating the evident impact of the co-operative model on the most important group in housing: tenants. We hope that this report will help promote the unique benefits and impact that housing co-operatives bring to tenants and the community through shared ownership and a stake in community matters.

## METHODOLOGY

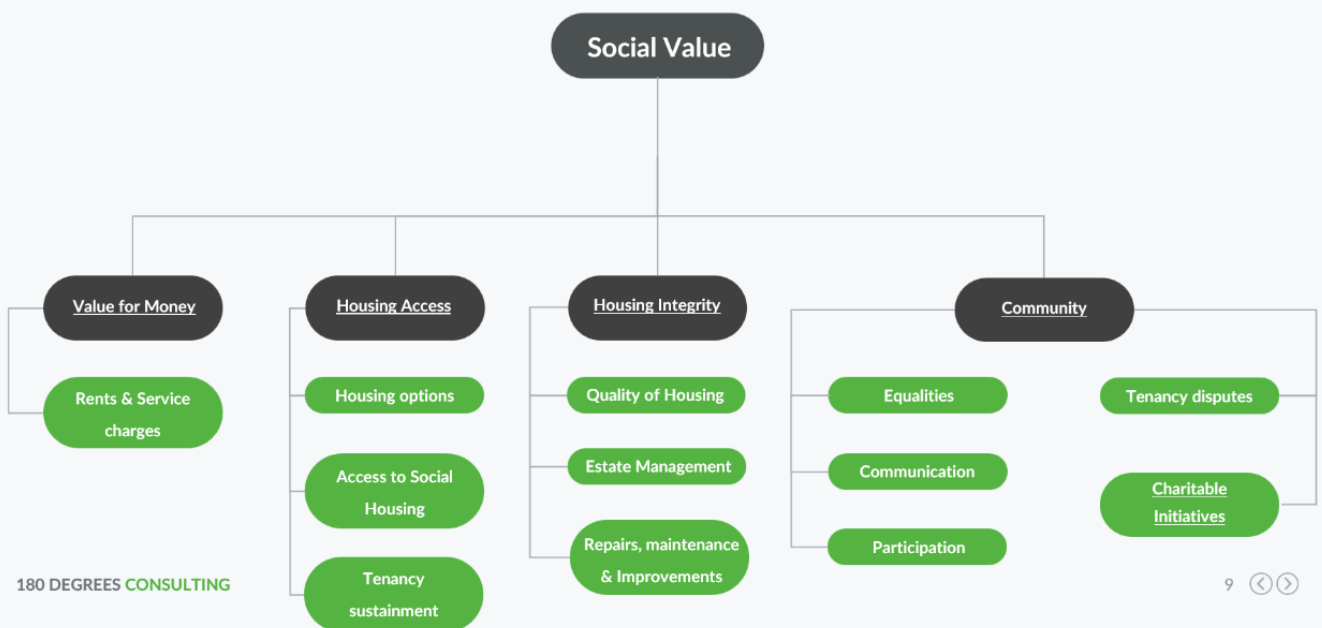
Social value refers to the quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits that an organization, project, or initiative generates for society and its members beyond financial profit. In the context of a housing cooperative, **social value can be understood as the positive impact that the cooperative model creates for its members and the broader community.** This includes affordable housing, community engagement and empowerment, stability and security and educational opportunities. It encompasses a range of social, economic, and environmental benefits that enrich the lives of residents and contribute to the well-being of the broader community.

Over the course of this report, to measure social value, we will be measuring the performance of WGHC across the 12 indicators shown below, developed loosely from the Scottish Social Housing Charter standards. The 12 indicators have been split across 4 categories:

**(Value for Money, Housing Access, Housing Integrity and Community)**, representing the extensive impact that WGHC has on the tenants, the housing sector and the community as a whole. In our Social Value Measurement report, we will reflect on all 4 categories, with special emphasis on the Community category.

### 12 Social Value Indicators

Categorised indicators for analysis



# CATEGORY 1: VALUE FOR MONEY

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## RENT & SERVICE CHARGES

In terms of value for money, the rent and services charges set by WGHC are seen as highly reasonable by the tenants and have a positive return on the community. With 98% of tenants surveyed feeling that rents represented good value for money, WGHC sits well above the Scottish average of 81.8% (WGHC 2023).

Furthermore, a recent rent increase of 7% was approved by the co-op committee themselves. In our survey we discovered that the majority of tenants reacted positively to this rent increase due to the social return provided by rent increases. Most notably, this rent increase aids tenants with the cost-of-living crisis with new microwaves, bedding and other amenities which have helped tenants get through the winter in good health. 87 New bathrooms were also refurbished last Spring which provided many tenants an opportunity for walk in showers and vital refurbishment (WGHC, 2023).

Moreover, The fact that the average weekly rent for a one bed property is almost 20% below the Scottish National average (£73.31 vs £87.80) proves that WGHC provides better value for money for its properties, aiding tenants with their bills (Co-ops UK, 2023).

Thus, the satisfaction of tenants to their rent pricing proves that WGHC has a positive impact on their community using rent and service charges for reinvestment, which are controlled and monitored by their co-operative committee.

# CATEGORY 2: HOUSING ACCESS

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## HOUSING OPTIONS

WGHC offers plenty of support and aims to do as much as possible to make sure their tenants have suitable housing, however, there will still come situations where tenants may be at risk of losing their homes. WGHC staff have procedures in place to help struggling tenants make sure they have a roof of their heads, with the last step being to refer them to the Local Council Office to ensure they receive more practical assistance and can make a strong homeless application.

WGHC have shown that they offer fair pricing and housing options to the community, with reports showing that WGHC were able to find new tenants to move in every 19.2 days on average (much lower than the Scottish Average of 44.1 days).

## ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING

Access to social housing stands as a cornerstone of WGHC's commitment to community welfare and housing accessibility. As a partner landlord of EdIndex, an innovative collaboration between the City of Edinburgh Council and 17 housing associations and co-operatives, WGHC streamlines the application process for prospective tenants. By participating in EdIndex, applicants benefit from a simplified procedure, requiring completion of just one form to apply for housing provided by all participating social landlords.

This initiative not only reduces the administrative burden on applicants but also fosters greater transparency and efficiency in the allocation of social housing resources. WGHC's involvement with this scheme underscores its dedication to promoting equitable access to housing opportunities, ensuring that individuals and families in need can secure safe and affordable homes within the community, enhancing its overall wellbeing and security.



## TENANCY SUSTAINMENT

WGHC have shown considerable prowess in keeping their tenants satisfied, demonstrating that their focus is on both new tenants, as well as current ones. For new tenants as well as existing tenants who renew their tenancy agreement, WGHC provides the newly-introduced New Tenancy Fuel Initiative, providing each new tenant with £50 credit to use towards their bills.

As part of their initiative to help tenants adjust to the Cost of Living Crisis that started in 2021, WGHC have made increased funding available to the Tenancy Sustainment Fund and introduced a Fuel Assistance Fund, to provide financial aid to those who have yet to adjust to the increase in living expenses (WGHC, 2022).

As an example of WGHC's consideration towards their tenants, the Tenancy Sustainment Fund is an excellent addition to the services they provide, designed to help tenants buy essentials and step in when welfare funding schemes are unable to help. WGHC have also developed a joint working partnership with Fresh Start, a charity designed to help new tenants settle into their homes by providing them with Starter Packs, which are full of essentials such as cookware, toiletries, bedding and provisions.

Furthermore, WGHC's attitude towards struggling tenants has always been to offer welfare and support, both emotional and practical, with loss of housing being the last thing on the list. To demonstrate WGHC's work, recent reports have shown that there were only 10 changes in tenancy in 2022-23 compared to 29 in the previous year, and 83.3% of tenants who began their tenancy in 2021-22 have remained in their homes for over a year (WGHC, 2023).

# CATEGORY 3: HOUSING INTEGRITY

## QUALITY OF HOUSING

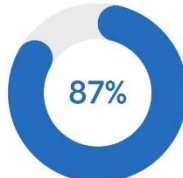
Even though most of WGHC’s stock were constructed prior to the implementation of the Scottish Housing Quality Standards, WGHC maintains an impressive compliance rate of 91%, surpassing the national average of 87%.

Moreover, WGHC demonstrates its commitment to housing excellence through pioneering initiatives such as **adhering to net zero government regulations**, pioneering **‘pilot’ solar panel installations**, and deploying **electric vehicle charging points**. With an outstanding 92% of WGHC’s tenants expressing satisfaction with their residences, and a commendable 100% of its housing stock meeting the Energy Efficiency Standard, WGHC sets a high standard for quality housing.

### WGHC stands out as a housing cooperative with higher standards



of WGHC's stock meets the Scottish Housing Quality Standards



of The Average Scottish's stock meets the Scottish Housing Quality Standards

### WGHC's strong management practices ensures high housing quality



of WGHC's tenants were satisfied with their quality of home



of the Average Scottish's tenants were satisfied with their quality of home



of WGHC's Stock meets the **Energy Efficiency Standard**

## ESTATE MANAGEMENT

WGHC's estate management under the guidance of the executive team, led by Larke and David, exemplifies dedication to tenant satisfaction. An overwhelming 97% of WGHC tenants express contentment with the management of their neighbourhood, showcasing a notable increase from the previous year's already high rating of 96.5%, surpassing the national average of 84.7%. Through interview conducted directly with WGHC's tenants, it is evident that the team's commitment extends beyond mere satisfaction, including:

- regular upkeep of parks tailored for children's enjoyment.
- implementation of slabbing to combat fly-tipping, ensuring a clean and safe environment.
- individualised services such as garden inspections, gardening assistance and engagement for those unable to manage their own.

Accessibility remains a priority, with multiple channels available for tenants to voice concerns or seek assistance. Furthermore, the provision of these essential services to eligible tenants are free of charge underscoring WGHC's commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive community.

## REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE & IMPROVEMENTS

Overall, WGHC's effective management of repair, maintenance and improvement tasks reflects the co-operative's commitment to providing quality housing, ensuring tenant contentment. Notably, there is a decrease in non-emergency repair requests from 1,279 in 2021 to 1,153 in 2023, indicating an improved state of WGHC properties with an average repair completion time of less than 5 days (4.44 days) which is notably faster than the Scottish average of 7.9 days. Emergency repairs are also swiftly handled with an average completion time of 2.14 hours (Scottish Average is 3.6 hours). Besides that, contractors achieved a success rate of 94.28% in completing reactive repairs accurately and WGHC'S repair services boast a satisfaction rate of 96.63% (Scottish average 87.8%). Interview responses echo this sentiment, with tenants appreciating the promptness of WGHC's response, particularly in urgent situations.

## CATEGORY 4: COMMUNITY

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### EQUALITIES

WGHC prioritizes recognizing and addressing every tenant and customer's unique needs, ensuring fair treatment and equitable access to housing and services. A notable example of this commitment is seen in the swift provision of medical adaptations in tenants' homes, with an average turnaround time of 21.29 days in 2022-23, significantly faster than the Scottish average of 46.8 days (WGHC, 2023). Additionally, WGHC regularly gathers information on tenants' specific preferences and requirements to tailor its services effectively, further enhancing the overall experience for residents.

Catherine Pettigrew, a tenant for 22 years, attests to WGHC's dedication to equality by sharing her positive experience: "My fridge freezer was too small for my growing family! WGHC purchased me a new one, I am now able to buy more than a few days' worth of shopping that fits in my fridge freezer." This anecdote illustrates WGHC's personalized approach in meeting individual needs and promoting fairness and respect among tenants.

Moreover, WGHC demonstrates a proactive stance in addressing challenges faced by tenants, especially those with disabilities. From installing showers instead of baths and changing lights free of charge during times of illness to offering support with financial burdens related to home improvements such as radiators and doors, WGHC ensures that tenants are supported and accommodated throughout their residency. The organisation's commitment to equality ensures an inclusive environment where every tenant feels valued and supported.

## COMMUNICATION

"The staff are always ready to help, friendly, and helpful! It's easy to get in touch, and responses are usually faster than expected." Remarked Donna Anderson, a tenant of 14 years. This sentiment reflects WGHC's commitment to efficient and responsive communication with tenants. As evidenced by the remarkable 99.5% agreement among tenants regarding being well-informed about WGHC's services and decisions, WGHC surpasses the Scottish average of 91.4% in terms of communication to tenants (WGHC, 2023). This high level of communication is facilitated through various channels such as newsletters sent twice a year, updates on the website, consultation sessions, and postal surveys, ensuring that tenants are kept abreast of important information and decisions.

Tenants appreciate the transparency and inclusivity in communication, highlighted by events like the annual general meeting (AGM), which is open to all tenants. The management committee, comprising tenants rather than external individuals, plays a key role in decision-making processes, ensuring that tenant voices are heard and considered. Additionally, WGHC involves tenants in consultations, such as when rent adjustments are proposed, demonstrating a collaborative approach to decision-making. Tenants also benefit from practical support, such as financial assistance for utility bills based on house size and incentives like vouchers and essential household items for new tenants, fostering a sense of community and support within WGHC.

## PARTICIPATION

WGHC tenants are highly engaged and satisfied with the opportunities provided to participate in the decision-making processes, as evidenced by the 100% satisfaction rate compared to the Scottish average of 87.8%. The recent 33rd Annual General Meeting saw an exceptional turnout, with 23% of WGHC tenant members actively participating, reflecting the strong motivation and interest among tenants in community affairs (WGHC, 2023). Their motivation is fuelled by a sense of community with neighbours and a deep appreciation for the cohesive and supportive environment fostered by WGHC. Tenants express contentment with the

committee's actions, which focus on keeping rents affordable, maintaining cleanliness, and sponsoring various community initiatives such as football teams and schools. The tenant charter and the committee's commitment to independence further contribute to tenant satisfaction and the overall positive atmosphere within the WGHC community.

## TENANCY DISPUTES

The tenants, many of whom have lived in the properties for decades, have experienced relatively few instances of property damage. WGHC has a well-defined process for handling disputes, with a stage 1 complaint being a frontline issue that is usually resolved immediately, accompanied by an apology. In the fiscal year 2022-23, WGHC received 16 front-line complaints (compared to 21 in 2021-22) and addressed all of them within the specified timeframe, exceeding the Scottish average response rate. For more serious or complex issues, a stage 2 complaint requires a detailed investigation, and WGHC received 6 such complaints in 2022-23 (compared to 2 in 2021-22), responding to all within the expected timeframe, again surpassing the Scottish average (WGHC, 2023). This structured approach ensures efficient dispute resolution, maintaining tenant satisfaction and a positive living environment within the community.

## CHARITABLE INITIATIVES

### ***PARTNERSHIP WITH MIDNIGHT AND BEYOND***

WGHC's partnership with Midnight and Beyond, a charity aimed at preventing crime and gang recruitment amongst young people, clearly displays its commitment to ameliorating the status quo in the wider community. 'Midnight and Beyond' conducts social activities for young men susceptible to gang recruitment, thus offering support and life skills to increase their access to opportunities.

WGHC provided immense aid in navigating the formal registration process with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), even leasing its centrally located office space to Midnight and Beyond for a nominal fee of £1. In terms of monetary support, WGHC has

awarded about £12,000 to Midnight and Beyond over the years ensuring its effective operation and further expansion to reach new age groups. Additionally, WGHC also accessed £15,315 in Fuel Support funding on behalf of Midnight and Beyond, supporting 29 families of 120 individuals with access to food and winter clothes as well as energy payments. The fund's administration by a local charity meant that people had a consistent point of engagement.

### ***WORK WITH ARCHIE ALLIANCE***

Alongside five of the housing associations and cooperatives that were a part of the ARCHIE alliance, WGHC sourced funding from the Scottish Government's Community Recovery Fund to distribute goody bags for over 900 tenants. They offered a mix of different supplies of practical energy conservation items, tablets to assist with digital access and debt advice work delivered in Edinburgh.

### ***ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON KEY POLICY AREAS FOR THE SOCIAL HOUSING SECTOR***

WGHC actively works with government representatives to action change and improve standards of living amidst the cost-of-living crisis, Brexit, and pandemic recovery by creating platforms where honest communication is possible. Evidenced by a roundtable discussion that they hosted, the meeting saw members from the SFHA (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations) and housing minister Paul McLennan MSP expressing their views on the difficulties faced by associations and cooperatives amidst challenging financial environments and their focus on tackling poverty and supporting tenants.

### ***PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR HOUSING COOPERATIVES***

WGHC established a peer support group for housing co-operatives in Scotland to share their specialised experience and knowledge. Facing a steep decline in the number of existing co-ops in Scotland, WGHC established a knowledge-sharing platform for co-ops to gather and discuss common problems.

### ***WINTER WARMTH AND FOOD PROJECT***

WGHC was awarded £27,436 funding from the National Lottery Community Fund as well as a £38,000 from the Scottish Federation Housing Social Fund for the WWF (Winter Warmth & Food) project to support the community through the winter and the cost-of-living crisis. This money was used to support tenants and families as well as locals through the provision of food parcels, food vouchers, fuel vouchers, electric blankets, winter bedding sets and more while some of it was donated to charities that provide free meals to the community. Kitchen appliances such as microwave ovens, kettles, thermal curtains and air fryers were also invested in while several rooms were re-carpeted to assist with keeping warm.

### ***SPONSORING LOCAL TALENT***

WGHC sponsored Sienna Thomson, a 16-year-old girl, daughter of a longstanding tenant. Being a part of the Elite Boxer group (EBG), Sienna aims to represent Scotland in the Commonwealth Games in 2026. In support of her and in an effort to promote the local youth, WGHC contributed £4,000 to Meadowbank Amateur Boxing Club to cater to Sienna's training needs.



# CONCLUSION

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Using our 12-indicator methodology, we hope to have proven that West Granton Housing Co-operative provides a strong and holistic level of social value. Across the board, WGHC has shown that the co-operative model is well suited for community and tenancy tasks as well as keeping community spirit alive.

Most notably, it has performed strongest in the community sector, providing an excellent level of service whilst ensuring that the tenants themselves are in control of key decisions that govern their homes and families.

Furthermore, WGHC is a key stakeholder in the wider non-tenant community illustrated by its vast array of charitable initiatives. This community and tenant focus leads to the extraordinary belief within WGHC that “everybody makes a chance for everybody”, be it through attending annual general meetings or increasing rents to ensure a high level of service provision.

“Everybody makes a chance for everybody .”

*Joanne: WGHC Tenant*

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