

A photograph of a woman with dark hair in a ponytail and large hoop earrings, wearing a dark jacket, holding a young child with short brown hair and blue eyes. The child is wearing a dark quilted jacket and blue jeans, and is holding a small clear plastic bag. They are sitting on a colorful striped deck chair outdoors. The background shows other similar chairs and a bright, slightly blurred outdoor setting.

whg Social
Impact Report

2015

whg Social Impact Report 2015

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1 Introduction

At whg, we are dedicated to the success of our people and places. Our corporate plan sets out a 10-year vision to create great neighbourhoods where people and communities flourish. Based in Walsall, we work diligently and innovatively to get local residents back into work, tackle poor health and poverty and reduce the impact of our homes and neighbourhoods on climate change. We are also working to increase the supply of affordable homes by building over 200 homes each year.

As one of the largest housing providers in the West Midlands we play a pivotal role in regenerating and supporting local communities. In order to ensure value for money we aim to make every penny count. This report evaluates the impact we have made over the last 12 months and sets out our ambitious plans for the year ahead.

2 Methodology

We have used a mixture of personal testimonies, traditional accounting and methods prescribed by the HACT Wellbeing Valuation Approach to assess our social impact.

We have only accounted for outcomes that are directly attributable to our interventions and which we can evidence robustly. This report should therefore only be considered an overview of the true social impact we are creating. Where customers have given personal testimonies we have used fictional names.





3 Developing new homes

There is a great deal of research showing that the supply of housing in Britain simply is not enough to meet demand. Housing is getting more expensive, making it harder for local people to access decent, affordable homes.

whg along with other housing providers, local councils and government is working hard to address this. We have ambitious plans to add an extra 10,000 homes to our portfolio by 2024.

Over the last year we have built 226 new homes at a cost of almost £27 million and are projected to complete 1,889 homes by March 2018.

Our developers are on site now working hard to deliver 314 homes by next March and by the end of the year we will have around 1,000 new homes in progress which represents a large increase in scale from our previous programmes.

House building programmes support jobs in the construction sector and increase labour mobility, boosting economic growth. Research shows that for every £1 invested in developing new homes the local economy gains £3.50¹. This means the net return on investment for the new homes we built last year is £67.5 million.

By delivering more affordable homes we are also saving money for the tax payer in housing benefit costs. Last year our average affordable rent was 25% less than the private sector in Walsall². Furthermore, our rents are considerably lower than the Local Housing Allowance rates which are based on the lowest 30% of private rents³. An average three-bedroom whg home costs £23 a week less to rent than the Local Housing Allowance rate. This means we are able to deliver significant value for money gains to the Housing Benefit bill. Our analysis shows that these gains are worth over £14.5 million.

¹ Shelter (2010) ² Home.co.uk (2015) ³ Direct.gov (2015)

THE NET RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR THE NEW HOMES WE BUILT LAST YEAR IS



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Over the last year we have built **226 new homes** at a cost of almost **£27 million** and are projected to complete **1,889 homes** by **March 2018**.



4 Helping people to stay independent

There are times in all our lives when we face challenges or require additional support. People may struggle due to their age, physical or sensory ability, learning disability, mental health issue or because of an event such as a bereavement or accident. Sometimes people simply need some help with setting up a new home. We provide a range of support services to help our customers maintain tenancies and live healthy fulfilled lives.

Over the last year our Independent Living Team has helped 320 customers with issues such as budgeting, setting up a new home or accessing local health and support services. Through regular early interventions our support services prevent vulnerable customers from descending into crisis situations and having to draw on more intensive support from statutory agencies such as the NHS and social services.

We account for the social impact of this service by measuring outputs such as grants awarded, food parcels, adaptations, furniture and other goods and equipment that have been successfully secured for customers. The value of the outputs achieved by our Independent Living service over the last 12 months is over £120,000.



Wendy

Wendy lived with an abusive partner and two children until it became too much to bear and she fled to a refuge. She was soon rehoused in a safe and comfortable whg home but had no household possessions such as beds or a sofa. We helped Wendy secure crisis support and a budgeting loan to cover essential household items such as a cooker, fridge

and beds for her family. We also helped her get support with child care from her local Surestart centre so she could start looking for work. Now Wendy has a decent well-equipped home to raise her family, greatly improved confidence and new opportunities to seek employment.



5 Finding new solutions for housing young people

For some young people, living with parents until you are ready to set up a home is not an option. We work collaboratively with Walsall Council and other organisations to ensure vulnerable young people in our communities are not left on their own.

Last year, we teamed up with Walsall Council to provide 30 homes for homeless young people to live in on a shared occupancy basis. Two young people share a well-equipped and conveniently located flat. This model provides value for money by making best use of our housing stock and ensuring young people can sustain their tenancies by providing built in support networks. To date all the young people housed in the new scheme have sustained their tenancies and six have moved on to more independent accommodation.

We will undertake a full social impact assessment of the scheme over the next twelve months as we look to sustain and grow our offer to young people.

To date all the young people housed in the scheme have **sustained their tenancies** and six have moved on to more **independent accommodation**.

30 FLATS
MEANS UP TO **60**



YOUNG PEOPLE
HOUSED

James

James became homeless at the age of 17 after falling out with his family and was sleeping rough. He applied for help from Walsall Council and was housed in a furnished whg property shared with another young man. James has rebuilt his confidence and is now completing an apprenticeship in Travel and Tourism.



6 Helping customers make ends meet

Many people in our communities face considerable financial hardship and we offer a money advice service to assist customers in need of help. Last year our money advice service helped over 260 customers manage their debts and secured financial gains of over £23,000 for customers struggling with debt issues.

Our advisors also helped almost 600 customers make successful benefits applications and over 400 customers get ready for the financial challenges of taking on a tenancy. In total the money advice service leveraged financial gains of £2.2 million for our customers. This year we will reach out to even more people in need of help to manage their finances effectively and have set a target of assisting 500 customers with managing debts.

Our money advice service leveraged financial gains of £2.2 million for our customers.



Brian

When Brian got in touch with our money advice team his finances were out of control. He had been working as an odd job man for years but relied on benefits to supplement his low income. When Brian's benefits were stopped he did not know how he was going to cope. With bills piling up and very little income to live on from day to day, Brian could not see a way out other than giving up work and relying on benefits completely.

Our money advisor believed Brian had the skills and acumen to run his own business and did

not need to rely on benefits. The team worked with him to build his confidence and before long Brian had set up a diary to record all his jobs and registered as self-employed with HMRC.

The money advice team helped Brian sort out his accounts and record his expenses for tax purposes so that he was not losing income he was entitled to. Brian is now running his own business successfully, is no longer reliant on benefits and is making National Insurance contributions to save for his retirement.

7 Getting people back into employment and training

Walsall still has higher than average rates of unemployment with almost 7% of working age adults unemployed compared to 4.4% across England and Wales⁴. We are determined to help as many customers as possible get back into work and move their lives forward. We provide a wide range of programmes to build capacity, skills and confidence enabling disengaged young people and the long term unemployed to access the job market.

Looking ahead, we will develop our social inclusion and employment activities to tackle other important issues including digital inclusion and fuel poverty.

7.1 PREP (Preparing Residents for Employment)

The PREP programme began in 2014. It offers a mixture of activities to boost confidence and build the skills that local employers are looking for including numeracy, literacy and IT. For those interested in the construction sector, the programme also offers training in relevant areas of Health and Safety and enables participants to obtain an entry level Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card.

⁴ 2011 Census

To date 32 customers have completed the programme and of those, 29 have undertaken further vocational training. Seven have then successfully gained employment and one has become self-employed.

This is a very positive result considering the participants are some of the hardest to reach customers who have previously failed to engage with other support agencies.

The cost of last year's programme was £16,000 and the outcomes were worth over £50,000. This means the PREP Programme has delivered a return on investment of £3.30 for every £1 invested.

OUR PREP
PROGRAMME
DELIVERED A
RETURN OF
£3.30
FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED



Dean

Dean left school four years ago with no formal qualifications. When he was recruited onto the PREP Programme his literacy and numeracy skills were at the level of an average 10 year old. Dean lives with his family in a whg property and until recently the entire household was dependent upon benefits.

Lacking any positive role models or connections to the world of work, Dean began to get involved in anti-social behaviour. After initially displaying some challenging behaviour on the programme, he quickly got

into the rhythm of attending regular sessions. He boosted his numeracy and literacy skills and gained accredited qualifications to allow him to work on a construction site.

After some interview and job application coaching Dean was successful in getting a job and now works for a major national construction firm and is no longer benefit dependant.

7.2 Volunteering Works

Last year 28 customers were recruited onto the Volunteering Works Programme. The aim of the programme is to enable customers not currently able to access the job market the opportunity to increase their employability. This is achieved by gaining knowledge and experience of working in a professional environment and developing transferable skills. All participants are closely monitored and receive coaching from a mentor.

A total of 13 customers have already progressed into employment following their experience on the programme and all the other participants have undertaken further training. The cost of last year's programme was £18,530 and our assessment valued the outcomes at well over £110,000. This means that the Volunteering Works programme delivered a return on investment of £5.97 for every £1 invested.

THE VOLUNTEERING
WORKS PROGRAMME
DELIVERED A
RETURN OF

£5.97
FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED



Chris

Chris had been unemployed and welfare dependent for over 20 years when he was recruited onto our Volunteering Works Programme. He took up a role volunteering at whg which initially he found challenging as he was not used to the pattern of a working day. With close support and monitoring, Chris went on to gain a recognised

qualification from Walsall Adult and Community College. It took him about 12 months to build his confidence and experience to a point where he felt able to make credible applications for jobs. Recently, Chris was successful in gaining temporary employment with a major online retailer. He has now been offered a permanent contract and is no longer dependent on welfare benefits.



7.3 Be who you can be

Over 200 customers have benefitted from our capacity building programmes, including 'be who you can be' which helps individuals to realise their true potential.

The programme is aimed at the most disadvantaged people within our communities who often suffer with low self-esteem. Confidence coaching helps customers to take control of their emotional wellbeing by promoting a more positive outlook to life. This enables people to move into a position where they are comfortable with themselves and can start positively impacting on their families and communities as well as accessing the employment market. A total of 70 customers were supported on the programme last year with 31 going on to undertake vocational training and 15 taking up regular volunteering positions.

The cost of the programme was £26,118 and our assessment valued the outcomes at well over £70,000. This means the 'be who you can be' programme has delivered a return on investment of £2.68 for every £1 invested. This represents excellent value for money especially considering the intensive nature of the support work required.

THE 'BE WHO YOU CAN BE' PROGRAMME DELIVERED A RETURN OF

£2.68
FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED



7.4 Apprenticeships

Our specialist centre for the construction trade, The Skills Centre, trained over 100 apprentices in a range of trades last year. Apprentices are sponsored by local and national companies including those contracted to build new whg homes.

More than half of those that completed an apprenticeship secured full-time employment while the remainder progressed to further training. In addition, we have directly employed 12 apprentices and improvers within whg. The young people recruited are learning skills in a diverse range of areas including administration, maintenance and plumbing.

Our apprentice and recruitment programmes demonstrate a strong commitment to employing and nurturing talent from within our local communities.

Overall levels of good health are lower than average in Walsall with one in five residents suffering from an activity limiting condition⁵. Obesity is a particularly acute problem with over two thirds of adults in the borough classed as overweight or obese⁶.

Over the last 12 months we have delivered a range of creative interventions to boost health and wellbeing and tackle obesity. Initiatives have included walking football for older men, family sports events and weight loss programmes. In previous years the impact of our health programmes has been recognised by the National Housing Federation's Community Impact Awards.

8.1 Waist Away Programme

A recent programme that had a huge impact locally is our 'Waist Away' Programme. Female participants were taught about diet and the importance of exercise as well as how to cook healthy food and access affordable fitness opportunities. Some were also supported with sexual health and emotional wellbeing.

Over the course of the programme, three groups lost over 6st in weight. All participants have joined local fitness centres and sustained their weight loss by maintaining active lifestyles.

⁵ 2011 Census ⁶ Public Health England (2014)



Our Waist
Away groups
lost over 6st.

9 Supporting older customers

Our Wellbeing Service is designed to help older customers maintain independence in their own home. Our Wellbeing Officers help customers connect with their community, get advice and make the most of their surroundings. Support typically involves friendly visits, access to social activities, help with aids and adaptations and support around medical appointments.

Over 100 customers have been supported by the service since it was launched three years ago and around 50 customers are currently receiving support on a regular basis. We have ambitious plans to grow the service to provide regular support to over 100 customers a year.

The cost of the service is met by customers who pay an hourly rate which is set at an affordable level. We do not make a surplus from this service.

We have undertaken detailed research with customers looking at the impact of the support provided. Our analysis shows that the service delivers significant outcomes for customers relatively quickly. Nevertheless, when assessing the social impact we measured the cost of running the service over 10 years to reflect the length of time a customer is likely to engage.



The projected value of the outcomes achieved so far is over £1.6 million. The cost of running the service over 10 years is projected at £407,790 (this does not take into account our ambitions to grow the service). This means the Wellbeing Service is currently delivering a return of £4.13 for every £1 invested.

THE WELLBEING SERVICE IS CURRENTLY DELIVERING A RETURN OF

£4.13

FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED



Dorothy

For the last three years of her life Dorothy lived at one of our wellbeing accommodation schemes. She was unable to stay in her original home as she suffered from chronic lung disease. Dorothy's health condition meant she needed Oxygen 14 hours a day which severely impacted on her mobility and capacity to keep on top of daily life. When she first moved to the wellbeing scheme Dorothy was isolated, lonely and completely sedentary.

Initially our support focussed on getting practical things sorted including bills and aids and adaptations to her home. Once Dorothy became more settled our Wellbeing Officer was able to work with her to improve her health and access social activities. As Dorothy's confidence grew she began taking part in chair exercise classes and attended talks on a variety of subjects. Dorothy quickly became one of the most active members of the community. As her mental attitude became more and more positive, her physical strength improved too and soon she was not only walking again but also using an exercise bike. Sadly Dorothy passed away this year but her family were keen to report that she spent three happy years at our wellbeing scheme being supported by people who cared about her without having to rely heavily on the health service or other agencies.

Investing in home improvements to reduce fuel poverty

Over 15,400 households across Walsall are affected by fuel poverty⁷. Research by the Energy Saving Trust shows that energy efficiency improvements can lead to savings of many hundreds of pounds per year and we have long recognised the potential of these works to help families make ends meet. We began retrofitting properties back in 2009 under the government's CESP Programme and since then we have improved over 2,800 homes.

In 2014, we started a major new external insulation programme in partnership with British Gas to retrofit a further 3,000 homes. These improvements will make homes warmer and more energy efficient, reducing energy bills for thousands of low income families and cutting carbon emissions.

Since the programme started, a total of 655 properties have already been improved. This represents an investment of £2.3 million into local communities, an estimated annual saving for customers of around £100,000 in fuel bills and an annual carbon saving of 500 tonnes. We are keen to understand the impact of energy efficiency improvements on people's lives in greater detail to demonstrate the impact of our investment. Recently, we successfully secured funding from National Grid to undertake in depth studies into the impact of improvements across four blocks of flats. The study will include careful monitoring of energy use and any resulting savings as well as qualitative research with customers to understand their experiences. We will report initial findings in this year's social impact report.

We also plan to provide more advice to customers on how they can best manage their utility bills and save money whilst keeping warm and healthy. We are currently undertaking research into fuel poverty in our communities with the aim of rolling out carefully designed advice programmes.

⁷ Department for Energy and Climate Change (2013)

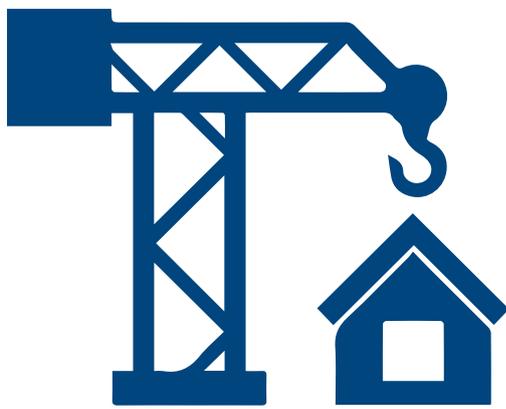


Last year's home improvements resulted in an annual carbon saving of 500 tonnes.

11 Improving neighbourhoods

Over the last two years we have undertaken detailed research into the quality of our neighbourhoods as perceived by customers. The findings are very encouraging with the vast majority of neighbourhoods being rated 'good' or 'very good'. Customers felt however that more investment was needed to improve the kerbside appeal of neighbourhoods in some areas. We are now using this research to plan future improvement works to paths, car parks, green spaces and landscapes.

Last year we invested over £1 million in neighbourhood improvements and a further £520,000 is planned for this year. In addition to this, we have developed a new project known as 'Street Scene' aimed at improving the kerbside appeal of communities at a micro level. Through this project we will improve over 200 properties over the next two years which represents an investment of over £600,000. To maximise the social impact of the project, we teamed up with local training and employment provider Steps to Work to train up 11 of our own unemployed customers to undertake the works. The long term aim is that these customers will be able to use the qualifications and skills they have gained to move into full time employment at the end of the programme.



LAST YEAR WE INVESTED
£1 MILLION
IN NEIGHBOURHOOD
IMPROVEMENTS AND A FURTHER
£530,000
IS PLANNED FOR THIS YEAR

12 Procurement

In the last financial year we spent close to £93 million on suppliers and contractors. How we contract with organisations and their respective supply chains can have a significant impact on the social outcomes delivered. Already we have achieved significantly enhanced social returns from our agreements. Our contract with developer Kier, for example, secured 30 local apprenticeships in addition to our core employment and training activities. Our agreement with Pinnacle resulted in additional levels of service for no extra cost delivering higher quality landscape environments in our neighbourhoods.

This year we will develop a new procurement strategy which will include a social value toolkit. This will clearly define the outcomes for each procurement exercise so we can achieve the greatest possible impact. Our suppliers will be scrutinised even more closely to ensure agreed social objectives are met.

We also plan to produce an annual procurement report that captures the social value contributions of every major contract. The report will provide a perfect outlet to showcase the success stories of our contractual arrangements and fresh ideas for improvement.

13 Keeping people safe

We provide an award-winning community safety service to tackle anti-social behaviour across our neighbourhoods. Last year the team helped almost 3,000 customers overcome issues with anti-social behaviour within their home or community. We recognise, however, that we cannot be everywhere all of the time. In 2013 we invested almost £1 million in sophisticated new CCTV technology to help keep our customers safe in areas where there was concern about anti-social behaviour.

We analysed the impact of our investment and found significant benefits to communities. In a survey, the number of residents who had reported being a victim of crime fell by 24% in the 12 months following the installation of CCTV.

Just one year after the new equipment was installed, the outcomes achieved for just 40 of the 1,000 customers affected were worth over £600,000 representing a return of £9.12 for every £1 spent.



OUR CCTV PROJECT
DELIVERED A RETURN OF
£9.12
FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED



Conclusion

Whether you look at our ambitious development plans or our broad range of programmes to support local people back into work and improve health and wellbeing, it is clear that our work has a huge impact on communities. We are well placed to understand local needs and will continue to strive to raise aspirations and give local people the best possible opportunities.

At a time of spending restraint, it is even more important to ensure our programmes are delivering strong returns. We will further develop our approach to social impact assessment, measuring an even broader range of services, and report back on an annual basis.



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