

Midland Heart's engagement with Walsall

February 2018

Introduction to Midland Heart

Midland Heart is a leading housing organisation, delivering homes and services across the Midlands that enable people to live independently. We own and manage 33,000 homes and are dedicated to providing decent, affordable homes combined with excellent services to over 70,000 customers. We deliver support services for homeless people and older people, anchored within our accommodation. Founded in 1925 we are a trusted not for profit organisation whose social purpose drives us to invest in our customers and homes.

Our profile in Walsall

Midland Heart has a relatively small and dispersed profile of 275 homes in Walsall. Some are located close to the town centre, whilst others are in more peripheral locations, including Pelsall and Willenhall.

Most of our Walsall homes are for general needs but we also have a small portfolio of shared ownership homes, mostly in Willenhall, and a flagship extra care scheme at Oakwood Lodge, also in Willenhall. Here we support older people with a range of care needs to continue to live independently. The scheme provides 45 homes to people aged 55 and over and is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Customers have their own self-contained flat with access to wellbeing facilities, a hair salon, picturesque gardens and daily entertainment activities.

We also offer a range of specialist support services to our general needs customers, including money advice and support for people threatened with or suffering from domestic abuse.

Full stock profile in Walsall

Tenure	Number of homes
Social Rent	152
Affordable or Intermediate Rent	30
Specialist homes for older people	45
Shared ownership	48
Total	275

(This data is taken from our 2017 Statistical Data Return (SDR))

Stock investment

We are extremely proud of our stock investment programme, which last year saw us spend £27 million on routine and planned maintenance and a further £4 million on major works. The programme delivers general repairs, communal area upgrades, replacements to kitchens and bathrooms and environmental improvements. We continue to prioritise stock investment to ensure we provide all our customers with a bright, clean and above all safe place to live.

We are also a developing housing association. Over the last five years, we have developed over 2,000 new homes and now expect to increase our development output to 550 homes a year for the next five years. We primarily build homes that are affordable to rent. We have an aspiration to be in the top 20 housing associations nationally for these types of homes and see this as critical to our corporate strategy and core purpose. In 2016/17, when 52% of the sector's development output was for Social and Affordable Rent, Midland Heart achieved 68%. We are on track to maintain a similar proportion of homes for Affordable and Social Rent this year.

Our role in tackling homelessness

Homelessness is still an experience that too many people will have at some point in their lives. There is no single reason why someone can find themselves without a home; for some people it can mean sleeping on the street each night, for others it might mean their current housing is only temporary, of poor quality or is poorly suited to their needs.

Our services are about more than just providing a bed for the night. Across the Midlands, we deliver almost 2,000 temporary homes with support to help vulnerable people live independently.

We work closely with statutory, private and voluntary sector partners to ensure customers are able to gain the skills they need to move on to independent living, and safe and secure accommodation is often the first step on that journey.

Impact of Government policy

Like all housing associations, we are affected by changes in Government policy. In recent months, there have been some significant positive policy developments, which will ultimately help us to develop more homes. These include the decision not to apply the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) cap to social housing, the confirmation of the post 2020 rent formula, and the

commitment to an additional £2 billion of social housing grant. These measures combined will offer us greater financial security and the confidence to increase our output of new homes. As a consequence, we expect to increase our projected delivery output from 450 to 550 homes per year.

Whilst the removal of the threat of the LHA cap has been very positive for the sector, there is still a considerable amount of uncertainty around the future funding arrangements for supported housing. We are particularly concerned about the prospect of a local authority block grant model for short-term supported housing, which we believe will create uncertainty for providers and reduce investment in new and existing short term supported accommodation.

Other Government policies continue to pose challenges too. The gradual transfer of customers onto Universal Credit is affecting arrears levels but we are carefully managing the process to minimise the impact on our customers and business. Alternative payment arrangements have been critical for preventing tenancies from failing as a result of increasing arrears.

West Midlands Housing Association Partnership

Midland Heart is a founder member of the West Midlands Housing Association Partnership (WMHAP), which brings together more than 30 housing associations from across the region. Members own and manage over 120,000 West Midlands homes.

Together we make a significant contribution to the regional economy, employing more than 18,500 people and building thousands of new homes each year.

WMHAP aims to harness the collective financial strength of local housing associations to support the West Midlands Combined Authority in its aim of delivering more homes.

Midland Heart's aspirations

Midland Heart has a stated ambition to develop 550 homes a year and the West Midlands remains a priority development area in our 2017-2022 Housing Delivery Strategy. We currently have almost 700 homes on site, mostly based in major cities including Birmingham, Coventry and Leicester. Alongside our ambitious development programme, we will continue to invest in upgrading our existing homes, making sure all homes are safe and focusing on getting things right first time.