

HOUSING

 

Co-operatives UK working with

West Granton Housing Co-op

**West Granton Housing Co-op: Social housing done differently**

Co-operatives are innovators by nature, helping communities work together to meet their common needs and solve collective problems. As the national association for the co-operative movement, Co-operatives UK works with many great examples of co-operation, promoting, supporting and empowering our members. We facilitate members to work together to solve collective problems together, we also work to promote the fantastic work many of our members are doing. Therefore in this case study we are keen to highlight the excellent work of our member West Granton Housing Co-operative in Edinburgh.

Housing remains one of the key issues facing communities, with the cost of average renting rising by 8.3% to £1,220 a month[[1]](#endnote-1). The cost of rent is driving more families into poverty[[2]](#endnote-2) and 2023 saw 39% rise in number of no-fault evictions from the year previous and with less social housing[[3]](#endnote-3) the waiting list for social housing is now over 1 million strong[[4]](#endnote-4). Among those who are living in social housing many are facing unaccountable landlords, living in poor quality homes[[5]](#endnote-5), we are living through a housing crisis that is giving communities little control over their houses and by extension little control over their lives. This is where housing co-operatives like West Granton come in, tackling the housing crisis by giving residents affordable rents with greater democratic control over the homes by putting tenants first.

David Quinn has an acute medical condition and requires care and attention on a weekly – and often daily – basis. For the 31-year-old, social housing needs go beyond bricks and mortar, and that is where West Granton Housing Co-operative in Edinburgh comes in.

David has been a member tenant since November 2021. This means he is a part-owner in the co-operative, with a say in how the business operates. He said: “They’ve done nothing but help me. Everybody is really helpful, absolutely amazing – I can’t fault them. It’s a community working together.”

For David it is often the little things that have the biggest impact, like knowing an eye is being kept on his home when attending appointments. Maintaining the local area and community engagement are also important. He said: “I don’t get any trouble. It’s a great community. The co-operative looks after the place and the parks.”

WGHC has a social housing stock of 372 ‘general needs’ properties. It is a not-for-profit organisation, with all surpluses used to benefit its member tenants.

WGHC’s CEO Larke Adger said: “The tenants – the members – pay our wage; it’s all about them. Our members are paramount in everything we do. We’re here for them. A lot of housing associations do good work... but everything we do is about our tenants. That comes across in our service and our values. It’s not only a house; it’s a holistic service and we’re here for all our members.”

That holistic service has included providing air fryers, fuel top-ups, food vouchers and warm spaces over the last year. Larke added: “Let’s do things which work for our tenants. Let’s give people a bit of dignity. Sometimes it’s those little things that make a big difference.”

Member tenants have given WGHC the stamp of approval. In an independent survey, 99.5% were satisfied with the overall service provided. The national picture is not as rosy, with less than 90% of tenants satisfied with levels of service received.

WGHC also offers superior value for money. Average weekly rent for a one-bed property is almost 20% below the Scottish national average (£73.31 versus £87.80). Two and three-bed properties cost less as well.

It is perhaps no surprise when the social landlord’s board is made up of member tenants. Larke said: “Tenants tell us how they want to be governed. They come to the table with a business hat on, but they’re also a member. They live here. Our board members see the immediate impact of decisions.”

The biggest surprise is that Scotland does not have more co-operative housing stock. There are just 54 housing co-ops at the start of this year, an increase of only seven since 2019. And that list is not limited to social housing, for which the picture is even bleaker.

Larke said: “I’d love for co-operatives to have a much bigger impact in the social housing sector. We demonstrate that tenant-led solutions work. I think we need to find a way to increase the amount of co-operatively owned social housing stock."

This is why we urgently need Scottish Government to require the social housing regulator north of the border to consider alternative models of social housing delivering including democratic tenant led housing.

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1. <https://www.zoopla.co.uk/discover/property-news/average-rent-uk/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.caee.org.uk/rents-are-unsustainable-and-driving-an-inexorable-rise-in-homelessness/> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/feb/08/renters-in-england-face-rising-no-fault-evictions-as-reform-bill-delayed-again> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/social_housing_deficit#:~:text=Yet%2C%20not%20enough%20social%20homes,than%20there%20were%20in%201980>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-housing-quality> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)