

Our partnership proposal

September 2019

Strength in partnership



Message from DGHP's Chairman



Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership (DGHP) was set up in 2003 by tenants for tenants to improve the quality of homes and services.

Sixteen years later, that mission has not changed: we exist to be the best landlord we can be to you and your fellow tenants.

During recent years, DGHP has not delivered the services, investment in your homes nor the new-build houses that was expected of us, both as your landlord and the largest social housing provider in Dumfries and Galloway.

We acknowledge that our role has changed since DGHP was created in 2003. Much more is now required of us in terms of the range of services we deliver and the standard of homes we provide. The money invested in building new homes and carrying out improvement works could help generate jobs and training opportunities for tenants and their families here in Dumfries and Galloway.

Following an independent review, we identified that the most effective way for us to become a modern landlord of choice, delivering new and improved services, was to seek a constitutional partnership with a larger housing group, subject to the approval of tenants in a ballot.

Expressions of interest were received from several housing groups wanting to form a

partnership with DGHP. Three were shortlisted and Wheatley Group was selected as the preferred partner.

The Board of DGHP firmly believes that joining Wheatley Group would provide the best possible future for tenants, communities, staff and the organisation. The partnership would enable us to do much more than we could on our own. That includes investing more and faster in tenants' homes, expanding and improving services and building more housing across the region, all while keeping rents affordable.

Please take the time to read about the proposed partnership and tell us what you think.

Bill Robertson,
Chairman of the DGHP Board

Index

- 3 Strength in partnership
- 4 Why a partnership?
- 5 Wheatley Group – Making Homes and Lives Better
- 6 Better value
- 7 Benefits of partnership
- 8 What the partnership means for you
- 13 Join the conversation

Strength in partnership

Being part of Wheatley Group would deliver the best of both worlds. DGHP would remain your landlord but, as part of a bigger group, we would have the opportunity to deliver greater benefits for tenants. These include:

- ▶ up to £125 million of additional investment capacity for our communities through an accelerated home improvement programme;
- ▶ keeping rents more affordable;
- ▶ hundreds of new homes across the region including many designed for older people;
- ▶ up to 500 more jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities in Dumfries and Galloway for tenants and their families; and
- ▶ an expanded range of excellent services.

Have your say

We are now entering the consultation phase of the plans and want to hear your views on the partnership. This document explains why the Board believes Wheatley Group is such a good fit and why partnership is good for DGHP tenants, and good for Dumfries and Galloway.

We have been out and about talking to people about the partnership proposal and have also told you about the plans in our Open Door newsletter. During the consultation phase we will gather the views of tenants and stakeholders – like Dumfries and Galloway Council – and use these to shape the final proposal for the partnership. We will then seek tenants' approval for the partnership through a ballot to be held later in the autumn.

All DGHP tenants with a Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) are entitled to vote in the confidential ballot, which will be run by Electoral Reform Services.

But before that, please take time to read about the plans and have your say. See how you can give your feedback on page 13.



Why a partnership?

We want to deliver the best homes and services we can to our tenants and communities. We have been looking at how we can do this, both now and in the future.

We really want to make faster progress on modernising and upgrading homes, making them as warm, comfortable and energy-efficient as they can be. We also want to carry out more environmental improvements and to expand the services and support we can offer people at every stage in life, from getting their first home to ensuring older people can stay in their homes for as long as possible.

We know there is a real need for more affordable housing across Dumfries and Galloway and we want to play our role in building new homes. And, of course, we want to do all this while keeping rents affordable for our tenants.

We commissioned an independent review to look at options for how we could deliver, now and in the future, for you, our tenants, and our communities. The review recommended that DGHP should examine the benefits of joining a larger housing group. After detailed consideration, the Board has concluded that joining Wheatley Group – subject to the approval of tenants through voting in a ballot – provides the best possible future for tenants, communities, staff and the organisation.

Joining Wheatley Group would allow us to invest more in homes, improve how we deliver services, and get better value for your money by taking advantage of the size, strength and expertise of a group in areas such as purchasing, financing and sharing services. All of this would enable us to improve and provide more services to you and your neighbours – and keep rents affordable.



Wheatley Group – Making Homes and Lives Better

The six housing associations which are already part of Wheatley Group have together built an outstanding, global reputation for delivering excellent services to their customers.

Alongside the other partners in Wheatley Group – including a care division and a charitable trust – they operate across 17 local authority areas and have more than 250,000 customers across Scotland. They are united in their mission of ‘Making Homes and Lives Better’.

Together they are building thousands of new homes across their communities, making Wheatley the biggest developer of homes for social rent in the UK for three years in a row.

Wheatley Group itself doesn’t own any homes as all the housing associations own and manage their properties.

Wheatley enables and supports each to:

- retain its own identity, Board and governance arrangements;
- provide affordable rents, modern, energy-efficient homes and excellent services; and
- remain totally rooted in its local communities.

Wheatley Group companies are excellent employers offering great opportunities and benefits for their staff including a commitment to no compulsory redundancies,

About Wheatley Group

Wheatley, which is based and operates only in Scotland, currently has six housing associations, or Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). All, like DGHP, are regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator. They are:

- Glasgow Housing Association;
- Dunedin Canmore;
- Cube Housing Association;
- West Lothian Housing Partnership;
- Loretto Housing and;
- Barony.

It also comprises:

- two care organisations – Loretto Care and Barony;
- a charitable trust, Wheatley Foundation;
- a mid-market housing company Lowther Homes;
- a support services subsidiary Wheatley Solutions and;
- YourPlace Property Management, one of Scotland’s largest factors.

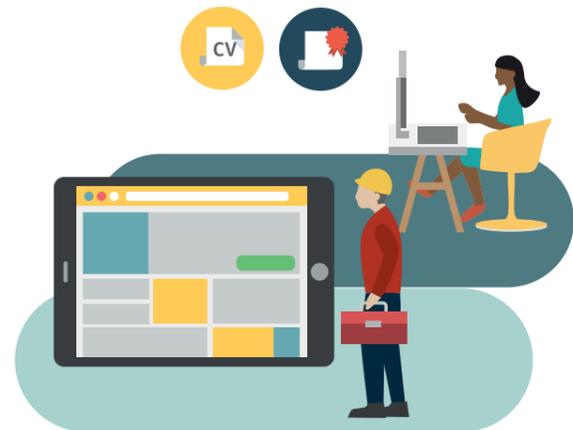
Better value

DGHP's Board firmly believes joining Wheatley Group would offer tenants in Dumfries and Galloway better value for money. That's because we would be able to benefit from Wheatley's size and scale in everything from purchasing and financing to sharing and improving services.

Wheatley, as a force for good in Scotland, wants to extend the great work it does by supporting DGHP to invest in affordable housing in Dumfries and Galloway and in services. It is also keen to help our communities benefit from its charitable organisation.

In the last three years, Wheatley Foundation has invested over £10million supporting up to 12,000 disadvantaged people every year. In that time, it has:

- created 2000 jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities;
- supported more than 16,500 tenants, offering everything from money advice and financial support to free recycled furniture and emergency food provision;
- provided £1500 annual bursaries to over 100 tenants and their children, enabling them to go to college and university; and
- encouraged 3000 tenants and their children to participate in sports and the arts.



Benefits of partnership

Benefits for you and your family include:

- additional investment capacity to improve homes, making them modern, warmer and more energy-efficient;
- 1000 new-build houses in the region, including many designed for older people;
- lower rents than planned with increases capped at no more than 2% a year for the next three years;
- improved frontline and customer services with more staff working much more closely with customers and communities;
- improved repairs and maintenance with the service brought in-house;
- up to 500 new jobs, training places and apprenticeships in our communities created through the expanded investment and new-build programmes and Wheatley Group's employability schemes;
- new 'wraparound' tenant services including fuel advisors to help tenants lower their bills and improve energy efficiency; Home Comforts which provides vulnerable tenants with free, high-quality furniture and white goods, and EatWell which delivers emergency food to vulnerable families;
- opportunities for improving older tenants' services including through a free handyman service and homes and services suited to people's needs.

What does the partnership mean for DGHP? It means we would:

- be stronger, allowing us to do more for tenants and communities;
- keep our name and our identity in the partnership;
- retain and develop our locally-based staff and grow the DGHP workforce by bringing the repairs service in-house;
- work closely with the other housing associations which are already part of Wheatley Group. They would become our sister organisations and Wheatley would be our parent company;
- have our own Board who would make decisions and set the strategies and policies. We would also have a place on the Wheatley Group Board, influencing Group-wide decisions;
- achieve better value for your money as we could take advantage of the size and strength of a group and all its expertise;
- be able to build more much-needed affordable homes for people and families across Dumfries and Galloway.

What the partnership means for you

DGHP would continue to be your landlord, regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator, and would keep its name, its Board and responsibility for day-to-day operations. Partnership with Wheatley Group would **NOT** change your Scottish Secure Tenancy.

The partnership would mean a number of improvements and benefits. Here we set out in more detail what a partnership with Wheatley Group would mean for you.

	What would the partnership mean?	What would happen without partnership?
Rents	There would be a guarantee to cap annual increases in rent for all properties for 3 years at 2%. This would mean an average saving of approximately £380 over that 3 year period.	Our current Business Plan assumes rents would continue to rise at 3.75% next year and 3% for the following 2 years. For the properties built by DGHP, rents would rise by 3%.
Investment and improvements in homes	The partnership would enable DGHP to release additional funds of up to £125million to fund improvements to existing homes and build hundreds of new homes. This additional, and accelerated investment in tenants' homes would include new windows, rendering, paths and fencing as well as improvements to the common areas for tenants living in blocks of flats.	DGHP would put in place an investment programme. It would take much longer to invest in every home.

	What would the partnership mean?	What would happen without partnership?
New-build homes	In partnership with Wheatley, DGHP would build 1000 new homes for social rent by 2025. These would be built across Dumfries and Galloway.	DGHP would be limited to build no more than 250 homes by 2025.
Services to older people	Additional services, over and above our existing sheltered housing, to help older people stay independent in their home for longer. For example, Wheatley's existing landlords offer: amenity properties designed for older tenants, with community rooms for social activities and support staff; flexible and adaptable homes; properties with new technology and telephone support services with mobile teams; and handyperson services to help with small jobs around the home.	DGHP would continue to offer sheltered housing services in our existing schemes across Dumfries and Galloway.
Handyperson service	A handyperson service would be introduced offering over 60s and people with a disability free help with small tasks around the home including: changing light bulbs, assembling flat pack furniture, moving furniture, putting up a shelf, taking down/ putting up curtain poles and many other things.	DGHP has no plans to offer this service.
Repairs service	Wheatley is committed to supporting DGHP to set up its own in-house repairs service whereby existing repairs staff would become directly employed by DGHP. Along with forming the in-house team, significant investment would be made in IT technology to help our staff bring the right materials to the job and be more flexible about the time they spend in your home to get the work completed on the first visit.	DGHP would need to tender for a repairs and heating contractor by April 2020.

	What would the partnership mean?	What would happen without partnership?
Housing services	<p>Staff would be equipped with technology that enables them to be out and about more, helping tenants in their home.</p> <p>They would be able to offer a wide range of services based around tenants' personal housing needs. For example welfare benefits advisors would be joined by new fuel advisors who would work with tenants to lower their bills and improve energy efficiency. Other examples could include access to free, high-quality furniture and emergency food for vulnerable families.</p> <p>Online services would also be developed so tenants can access services when they choose and we would introduce MySavings which enables tenants to save up to 10% on their everyday spend with many well-known shops.</p>	<p>DGHP would not be able to provide additional services.</p> <p>DGHP frontline housing team would continue to manage the communities you live in. Tenants would be able to access welfare benefits advice from our team but we would continue to rely on independent organisations to access more specialist advice.</p>
Jobs, apprenticeships and training	<p>In partnership with Wheatley, DGHP would support the creation of new jobs in the region.</p> <p>The partnership commitment to improve homes, expand services to tenants and build 1000 new homes, together with Wheatley's employability schemes, would support 500 new jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities for people in our communities by 2025.</p>	<p>DGHP currently offers limited opportunities for training through its wider action programme, with a limited number of apprenticeship roles offered by contractors working on our behalf.</p>

	What would the partnership mean?	What would happen without partnership?
Our staff	<p>Our staff would continue to be employed by DGHP and would enjoy enhanced career opportunities, greater learning and development and staff benefits. There is a commitment to no compulsory redundancies as a result of the partnership.</p> <p>We want our staff to deliver more to you and a more personal, tailored service. Using new technology and by re-organising how we deliver frontline services, the partnership would help us vastly increase the number of staff in our local communities and spend more time in your street, estate or village.</p> <p>Staff would be better placed to bring new focus to helping and supporting our tenants beyond traditional housing matters. This includes with employment and training, accessing specialist support services, tackling anti-social behaviour and new approaches to help people live independently as they grow older.</p>	<p>There would be no change to DGHP's team – you would still receive the services you do now.</p>
Your landlord	<p>DGHP would remain your landlord and the owner of our 10,300 homes in Dumfries and Galloway.</p>	<p>DGHP would remain your landlord and the owner of our 10,300 homes in Dumfries and Galloway.</p>
Your rights as a tenant	<p>There would be no change to your current tenancy agreement or to your rights and responsibilities as a tenant.</p>	<p>There would be no change to your current tenancy agreement or to your rights and responsibilities as a tenant.</p>

	What would the partnership mean?	What would happen without partnership?
Tenant participation	DGHP would continue to offer a variety of ways that tenants can be involved in shaping services and influencing decision making. However, there would be extra opportunities to get involved in influencing decisions and shaping services at national level. Wheatley has a wide range of forums for customers to have their say and to share their experiences.	DGHP would continue to offer a variety of ways that tenants can be involved in shaping services and influencing decision making as a standalone organisation.
Anti-social behaviour	The partnership would allow us to address ASB more effectively. Officers would be able to access specialist expertise through Wheatley's ground-breaking Community Improvement Partnership which sees Police and Fire officers seconded to work closely with housing staff.	There would be no change to how we deal with anti-social behaviour.
Governance	DGHP would become a subsidiary of Wheatley Group which would be our parent company. DGHP would continue to be run and governed by its Board of Management in Dumfries and Galloway. Local strategies and policies would be individual to DGHP and in line with Wheatley governance arrangements for the Group. Membership of DGHP would remain open to all tenants, and existing memberships would continue. The Chair of DGHP would sit on the Wheatley Group Board.	DGHP would continue to be run by its Board of Management who are responsible for setting our strategic direction and overseeing operations. As now, membership of DGHP is open to all tenants.

To read more about the business planning for the proposed partnership please go to www.dghp.org.uk or call us and we'll send you details.

Join the conversation

We've been out and about talking with tenants and others about the partnership proposal. Our housing and repairs staff have chatted to tenants as they go about their work and our customer contact centre has been on hand to answer queries.

We've also written to you about it and included information in our recent newsletter.

The feedback so far from tenants, partners and stakeholders has been overwhelmingly positive about the partnership.

We are now entering the consultation phase and want to hear what you think about the partnership proposal.

Please give us your feedback before 30 September 2019 by:

- completing and returning the prepaid postcard enclosed with this proposal
- emailing us at: partnership@dghp.org.uk
- calling on 0800 011 3447.

We'll look at all the feedback we receive and use it to shape the final partnership proposal. You will then be asked to vote on the final proposal in an independent ballot later this year. If a majority of DGHP tenants who vote do so in favour of partnership, DGHP will become a part of Wheatley Group, early next year. If they do not, the status quo will remain.

Your vote will be confidential and the ballot will be organised and run by Electoral Reform Services.



Independent advice

To ensure there is easy access to free and impartial advice about the proposal, Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland (TPAS) has been appointed as independent tenant advisor.

TPAS is committed to the good practice of independent advice for tenants. They can provide free independent and impartial advice about the partnership proposals. They can be contacted on:

- › **Email:** lesley.baird@tpasscotland.org.uk
- › **Freephone:** 0800 049 5761
- › **Web:** www.tpasscotland.org.uk
- › **Facebook:** TPAS Scotland

TPAS will also host drop-in sessions in locations across Dumfries and Galloway. Full details of the sessions will be sent to you in a newsletter from TPAS.



This publication can be requested in large print and community languages. For information contact our Customer Service Centre on 0800 011 3447 or email customerservice@dghp.org.uk

Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership,
Grierson House, The Crichton, Bankend Road,
Dumfries DG1 4ZS. Freephone: 0800 011 3447
www.dghp.org.uk

