



Watford Community Housing Trust

Tenant involvement in decision making is integral to Watford Community Trust

Watford Community Housing Trust (WCHT) was established in September 2007 following the transfer of just under 5000 rented properties from Watford Council. The Trust also manages 300 leasehold and shared ownership properties as well as some shops and other commercial properties.

pimss4communities – everything you need to manage your housing assets:

- Proven web based asset management system**
- Easy to implement, train and upgrade
- Deploy across multiple sites
- Core module to manage decent homes/WHQS**
- Links with other systems for accurate data sharing
- Dashboard view, quick access to most used information

- Optional modules**
- Energy – with in-built energy calculator
- Asbestos – comprehensive reporting
- Planning - scenario planning to manage forecasts and budgets
- Contracts – track progress and spend
- Servicing – managing servicing schedules
- Handhelds – rapid transfer of data gathered on site

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pimss4communities – practical and easy to use data management

Watford Community Housing Trust has bought the core system, and the planning, energy and contracts modules. Consideration is being given to buying other modules such as servicing, asbestos and handhelds, but as the team at the Trust is still being recruited, care is being taken to make sure the basics are in place and that the property data is up to date before installing the full system.

pimss4communities is a web based system with a ‘dashboard’ view, allowing users to see their most frequently used parts of the programme and to pull up a number of windows. Jacky appreciates this facility, “it is easier to move around different aspects of the system – I can look at a survey or some photographs without having to open and close different programmes. It is also easier to attach documents to assets – so photos, warranties, surveys and guarantees will all be visible and readily accessible.”

Links to the Orchard housing management system and to the finance system were a key driver for change. Having systems operating independently inevitably lead to data inputting errors and is time consuming. Integrated data flow overcomes these problems. The Contracts module will remove large volumes of work for the Trust’s asset management team, leaving more time for work planning.

Having the ability to draw all the information about a property together in one place means that access to information for tenants is also improved and this is particularly important as the Trust is moving to choice based lettings.

Thinking about the future

“We just have to get away from multiple data gathering says Jacky – we have boxes of guarantees for example on cavity wall insulation – when we want information on specific properties, it is time consuming to locate. We are investing in the resources we need to make sure we are fair and consistent and are able to obtain best value for our residents. Our absolute priority is to deliver on promises we have made to tenants and having a sound database with all the records attached provides a platform for us to do this.”

Watford Community Trust has ambitious plans for the future and expects PIMSS Data Systems and pimss4communities to continue to respond to developments in the social housing sector. “An area to watch will be EcoHomes XB” says Jacky. “We think these standards could become mandatory – and we know that in PIMSS Data Systems we have the right partner to respond on developing the necessary data gathering and reporting if that happens.”



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software that’s an asset



The Trust was the second Community Gateway organisation in the country and the first in the south of England. The Community Gateway model means that tenants are at the heart of decision making, with the Board made up of elected tenant members, Council nominees and independent business people.



The Gateway Committee is 30 elected tenants, that work in partnership with the board and influence the decisions of the Trust. The Gateway Committee has set up smaller working groups where tenants work closely with a specific department or project. Over 2000 of the 5000 tenants are already members of the Trust, and all are entitled to be involved, influence and shape their communities.

The Asset Management Group is one such working group. Chaired by a tenant, the Group is actively involved in selecting contractors, agreeing programmes of work and consulting and communicating plans with the residents.

The Trust has divided its stock into 20 local areas and is carrying out a programme of local options studies in each area. An option study consists of finding out about local issues from residents in a number of ways for example, surveys, open days, and resident meetings. The Trust has committed to completing 4 each year and supports residents to create an action plan of how to tackle the issues. The Trust empowers residents to improve their local area.

The Trust started its Decent Homes improvements programme in June 2008. This initially addressed internal aspects such as kitchens and bathrooms. External work is due to start this summer. Apart from renovation and improvement works on individual properties, the Trust has committed to spend £5.9 million over 5 years on community improvements that may include security, communal facilities and landscaping.

Jacky Eimermann, Head of Strategic Asset Management says that the Trust is working together with residents to improve local areas and there is considerable interest from other housing associations looking at setting up similar structures.

The housing stock

The Trust's property portfolio is 50% flats and 50% houses – most properties are located on large estates or are Victorian street properties and there are around 600 non traditional properties – for example timber framed houses. There are 2 sheltered schemes that are due to be closed and the sites redeveloped. The Trust is also keen to develop good quality new properties and has recently appointed Regeneration and Development Manager to work with Circle Anglia who will be the Trust's development partners.



Asset management – why PIMSS Data Systems?

Watford Council was introduced to PIMSS Data Systems via Savills Commercial who undertook stock condition surveys in 2003/4. PIMSS was the asset database used by Savills and the data and the relationship transferred with the housing stock. Jacky Eimermann explains that the plan is for the Trust to complete all its own surveys, building on the data and plans are underway to appoint a surveyor to manage this.

The decision to buy **pimss4communities** arose from the new Trust's desire to have an asset management system that would link to the finance system and to have greater opportunity to run option appraisals and look at business planning. The implementation of **pimss4communities** started in October 2008.

Amongst the reasons for choosing **pimss4communities** as the asset management system for the Trust was that the team were used to working with PIMSS. Jacky says "we are used to working with the people at PIMSS, the response times are good, much better than from larger companies, and it's clear that Martin and his team are focused on working with customers to deliver systems that meet their specific needs. We were able to be involved in the development of the Contracts module and whilst it is designed to meet the needs of a wide range of users, early involvement meant that our requirements could be built in too."

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