

Measuring the benefits of empowerment through community ownership

Summary of evidence gathered from the population of a mutual resident-controlled housing association and compared at various levels

January 2011

“If more places were like WECH there would be more happiness.”

(WECH resident, Survey 2010)

1. POLICY CONTEXT

1.1 Statutory transfer of council housing to community landlords

The Coalition Government recognises the importance of collective action, community empowerment, and the transfer of assets into mutual ownership for tackling social and economic problems, preferring local innovation to bureaucratic imposition in the fight against poverty and social breakdown.

In 2008, the Labour Government restored the right for council tenants to change their landlord through the Housing & Regeneration Act, which amended the 1985 Housing Act with a new Section 34A.

The Coalition Government is now preparing to make the regulations for this Act, which it has named the Right to Transfer. It intends soon to issue a draft for consultation. Once brought in, these regulations will require a local authority to co-operate with a proposal from a tenant group to transfer their council homes to an alternative social landlord, and to resource a time-scaled transfer process.

S34A's predecessor, Tenants Choice, was enacted by the Conservative Government in 1988, but was repealed in 1996 following only a handful of transfers. The most significant of these was to a resident controlled housing association, Walerton & Elgin Community Homes (WECH), which grew from a campaign to stop the sale and redevelopment of two council estates.

In 1992 WECH took ownership of 921 homes from the local authority. It is the only large-scale statutory (as distinct from voluntary) transfer of council housing in England & Wales to a mutual community owned housing association. Therefore, WECH's experience is most relevant for informing the impact assessment supporting the introduction of regulations to implement the statutory Right to Transfer.

The WECH study results provide convincing empirical evidence to support the implementation of the Right to Transfer for council tenants. They demonstrate that empowerment through community ownership of council estates is an especially effective means for delivering the significant improvements to wellbeing that could so benefit poor and disadvantaged communities.

1.2 The need for evidence

The Evidence Annex of the Government's 2008 Empowerment White Paper (*Communities in control: real people, real power*, Page 64) observed that it is generally acknowledged that identifying and measuring outcomes of participation and engagement is problematic and that this is exacerbated by:

Empirical evidence supporting the Right to Transfer: January 2011

- A lack of systematic and comparable evidence;
- The difficulty in establishing reliable and meaningful measures of community engagement; and
- The complexity of establishing a firm causal chain from engagement to desirable social goods.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/doc/906917.doc>

1.3 The WECH study

In light of this, and anticipating Government policy towards empowerment through mutual ownership of social housing, WECH commissioned an academic study to:

- Determine whether such empowerment makes people happier;
- Expose the links in the 'causal chain' between empowerment and outcomes;
- Provide reliable and comparable evidence to inform the development of policy for empowerment through mutual ownership of social housing to facilitate happier and more cohesive communities.

Professor Peter Ambrose of Brighton University conducted in-depth interviews with 26% of WECH's 600 tenants and leaseholders between February and July 2010 (*Happiness, Heaven and Hell in Paddington: A Comparative Study of the Empowering Management Practices of WECH*, Peter Ambrose and Julia Stone, September 2010).

A group of Dr Becky Tunstall's post-graduate students from the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics' undertook the interviews of WECH residents.

Dr Madhu Satsangi of Stirling University compared the WECH data with external datasets at various levels. (*Community Empowerment*, Madhu Satsangi and Susan Murray, School of Applied Science, University of Stirling, January 2011.)

As part of the project, Human Rights TV were commissioned to interview staff, residents and researchers. The video clips can be viewed at <http://www.humanrightstv.com/> Type WECH into search. One of the LSE researchers, Juliana Bidanure, sums up the relationship between empowerment, community ownership and wellbeing, as she experienced it at WECH, in this one-and-a-half minute video:

<http://www.humanrightstv.com/uk-housing-policy/juliana-bidanure/1089>

The WECH study project was funded by WECH and by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

2. FINDINGS AND STUDY BACKGROUND

2.1 Findings

In summary, the thinking behind this study was that despite high levels of deprivation, WECH residents are happier and more engaged because they collectively own their estates.

From the totality of the evidence that has been collected and analysed it is possible to conclude that:

- WECH residents are much more deprived when compared with the populations of England and Inner London, and are at least as deprived as similar profile populations.
- The WECH population is much happier and more engaged under community ownership than it was with its previous council landlord.
- WECH residents feel a much stronger sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, and feel much more able to influence decisions affecting their local area, than do people nationally.
- WECH residents are significantly more satisfied with their homes and with their landlord than are council tenants across London.
- Satisfaction with the landlord, the home and the neighbourhood is higher for WECH residents across the various levels of comparison, and they also declare a higher degree of active participation.
- The measureable benefits to quality of life associated with empowerment through community ownership appear to mitigate the detriment to wellbeing caused by financial deprivation, physical illness and fear of crime.
- Residents perceive WECH as an organisation that “listens” to their concerns and “cares” about them, their homes and the neighbourhood. Most commonly, they say that WECH has “helped” them individually and as a community.

Why, peculiarly, is WECH so responsive to its residents, so concerned about the wellbeing of its community, and so attentive to the condition of its neighbourhood? It seems, from the statistics generated by the academics, and from the answers provided by WECH residents, this is because community ownership makes the landlord directly and democratically accountable to its residents.

2.2 Study hypothesis

- Community ownership makes people healthier and happier because it empowers them to have control over their lives and immediate environment.
- Community owned landlords develop management styles, engagement and democratic mechanisms that are more effective at supporting individuals, instilling citizenship and building community than other forms of ownership because they are directly accountable to their ‘customers’.
- A range of positive individual and social outcomes is attributable to forms of constructive intervention which community landlords are better able to achieve than other landlords.

2.3 Summary methodology

Extracts from the quantitative and qualitative data have been selected for this summary to reflect the significant evidence that supports the project's hypothesis, and to illustrate the individual and social benefits that arise from community ownership and resident control of social housing.

Ambrose's questionnaire involved asking more than 70 questions, just over half of which required residents to rate their responses according to their experience under WECH and their experience under a previous landlord. Throughout the questionnaire, residents were asked to explain their feelings and give examples.

Section 3 summarises this data. The WECH/ previous landlord scores reported by Professor Ambrose have been multiplied by 25, then rounded up from .5 to provide a percentage of the extent to which residents feel they agree with the questions. The two comparisons with the Government's April to June 2010 Citizenship Survey are unadjusted: the wording and rating methods are identical. The bracketed numbers following some of the qualitative data record the number of responses which repeated that statement.

Section 4 presents the findings, statistical data, and conclusions for the comparisons of the WECH population with England, with the population of, and council tenants in inner London, and with NDC areas at earlier and later stages of their programmes. Pages 5-7 inclusive of Dr Satsangi's report have been reproduced in their entirety.

Section 5 provides a large selection of residents' answers to two specific questions in the Ambrose survey about how WECH has affected their wellbeing, and what are the best things about WECH. In their own words, residents reveal the links in the causal chain between empowerment and outcomes. The answers represent about 85% of the available responses. Responses omitted include a handful of negative answers, and answers that are short, repeating word for word those of other residents. Each paragraph is a statement from a different resident. They are presented in the same order as in the results spreadsheet.

3. THE WECH POPULATION

3.1 Residents feel secure, proud and at home in the area

The extent to which WECH residents feel	Previous %	WECH %
Secure in their homes in terms of tenure security	62	94
Proud of their homes	64	91

“More security than with previous landlord.” (10)

“So much better than [previous landlord] which made us ill and affected my son’s schooling.”

“WECH changed everything.”

“WECH makes you happy about where we live.”

“Before I couldn’t sleep – it lead to a heart attack. The difference between WECH and [Council landlord] is Heaven and Hell – no exaggeration. Before it was like you were trapped.”

The extent to which WECH residents feel	Previous %	WECH %
At home in this area	73	90

People feeling they belong strongly to the neighbourhood	National %*	WECH %
Very strongly	38	52
Fairly strongly	41	38

*Citizenship Survey April to June 2010

“Feels a lot safer than before and there’s a strong sense of community. Long term security – with WECH you can settle down.”

“Someone comes to check on us often. One time they did our shopping, another time they drove us to a funeral.”

“Everyone’s lovely – I feel so at home.”

“Neighbours supportive when partner ill.”

3.2 Landlord fosters good community life

The extent to which WECH residents feel	Previous %	WECH %
Landlord helps them to meet their neighbours	42	84

“Community events work well and give good opportunities to meet people.” (16)

“A big family atmosphere.” (3)

“A lot of healthy older people live on their own at WECH because they feel the community is supportive.”

“I bake cakes for events. I’m pleased to do it. The people at WECH are really nice.”

“Considering how diverse it is, it is close knit.”

“We respect our neighbours.”

The extent to which WECH residents feel	Previous %	WECH %
There is a good community life in the area	56	79
The area is a good one to encourage people to get involved	49	79
Landlord plays important role fostering community & voluntary activities	45	85

“Lots of opportunities to meet others and get involved.” (30)

“There are lots of opportunities for community life. I was visited by a very friendly community officer who encouraged me to get involved. Because I was supported in the beginning and encouraged by a friendly person I volunteer a lot now.”

“I love the work WECH are doing. It gives me the will to participate more.”

“WECH are the best in the country.”

“A village effect is attached to WECH – unusual and great.”

“WECH has a knock on effect on people’s health, mental stability, happiness, education and crime.”

“WECH are my friends, they visit me if they are passing. They visited me in hospital.”

Do WECH do anything to lead to your making more friends and acquaintances?

“Events and festivals, barbeque, carnival and garden parties.” (46)

“Meetings and AGM.” (23)

“Christmas party [for older people].” (22)

3.3 Landlord is responsive, takes notice and acts promptly

The extent to which WECH residents feel	Previous %	WECH %
Landlord staff are warm and approachable	59	94
Landlord staff take notice of what you are saying	57	91
Landlord staff will act promptly when help needed	54	92

“Very quick repairs service.” (27)

“Nice/ helpful/ polite/ excellent/ efficient.” (14)

“Very good – always listen.” (8)

“If I have a problem I can always get hold of someone which is a nice feeling.”

“Having the same staff is reassuring. They always take your side, always on time, they do the best possible.”

“I trust WECH with my life.”

“Sometimes I speak to the Chief Executive. He is very approachable.”

“It’s very good they deliver Christmas dinner.”

3.4 Residents feel they can influence policies and services in their area

NB: For nearly a decade WECH has housed a police officer as a tenant in exchange for him playing a role in community affairs and making himself accessible to WECH residents.

The extent to which WECH residents feel	Previous %	WECH %
They can influence housing policies and services generally	37	64
They can influence Police policies and services	40	58

Feel able to influence decisions affecting local area	National %*	WECH %
Definitely agree and tend to agree	38	62

*Citizenship Survey April to June 2010.

“I can speak at WECH meetings if I want to.” (11)

“They let you know what is going on.” (3)

Anyone can be involved in WECH.”

“WECH is very democratic.”

“We’ve got a policeman. He listens to us.” (5)

“WECH has some sort of influence with the Police.”

3.5 Residents feel happier, more in control and more part of the neighbourhood

The extent to which WECH residents feel	Previous %	WECH %
Happier because settled and in charge	52	88
Better, as have greater control over their housing situation	55	84
More part of neighbourhood & sense of mutual trust & support	58	80

“My rent is reasonable which means you can afford to do something that doesn’t make a lot of money plus there is a sense of freedom and wellbeing.”

“Feel happier as more settled.”

“Our health is good in this house.”

“I can relax properly.”

“A sense of ownership and democratic control over my housing situation.”

“I love where I live.”

“Before I was more on edge.”

“Before, I was more isolated.”

“I’m happy because of the good atmosphere.”

3.6 Residents are satisfied with governance and empowered through accountability

The extent to which WECH residents feel	%
Satisfied by resident Board's policies & decisions on rents, repairs & allocations	78
Empowered through accountability and responsiveness of landlord	82

What is WECH and what does it mean to you?

"A resident led housing association that takes the views of residents seriously."

"An organisation which helps people to have a better quality of accommodation and very good services."

"A tremendous agent for good, a piece of paradise."

"It means living without fear."

"I was in difficulty and they gave me a lifetime chance."

"They make me feel at home – they have been there for me."

"A reliable partner for me to maintain my home."

"A housing association that cares about tenants, environment and community."

"A housing association that helps vulnerable people."

A housing association that helps poor people."

"It started with real people power."

3.7 Residents think their wellbeing is positively affected

The extent to which WECH residents feel	%
Empowerment through WECH positively affects their wellbeing – physical and mental health	74

Give examples of the best things about WECH

"If you have a complaint/ problem you can always express it and they will listen to you." (8)

"It has allowed me to get in contact with different types of neighbours, people I would not have met otherwise. It is a multicultural community, which is a nice feeling. The mixture of different age groups is very important for wellbeing."

"We get much feedback. Having a beautiful house changes the children's lives."

"It makes me feel good. WECH's work influences my aspirations in participating more, even if because of my job I can't."

"If more places were like WECH there would be more happiness."

4. WECH'S POPULATION COMPARED

Pages 5, 6, and 7 of Dr Satsangi's *Community Empowerment* report are reproduced below, in their entirety.

Findings

Table Two below shows how WECH Survey data compare at the four levels. The most striking comparisons are indicated **in bold face in the table**. Interpreting some of the headline results shows the following.

National comparison

Judged by some common indices, WECH residents are relatively deprived: they are overwhelmingly social renters, with relatively low incomes, high rates of unemployment or being outside of the labour market and high incidence of limiting or long-term illness.

Looked at nationally, WECH residents feel a strong sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and place very high ratings on their area and its facilities like shops and the health centre. They also rate higher for feelings about their home. However, they are rather more likely to feel unsafe being out after dark than are people across the country and they show a lesser degree of trust in their neighbours.

WECH residents declare relatively high degrees of voluntary activity. They also record high satisfaction with WECH as a landlord/service provider.

Sub-regional comparison

In comparison with Inner London, WECH residents are relatively deprived, using the same measures as for England as a whole. They have particularly low monthly incomes, though it is likely that the regional figure has an upward bias from a (fairly small) number of high earning householders.

Compared with other people in (inner) London, WECH residents place higher ratings on their area and its facilities. Though they are more trusting of their neighbours, they feel less safe in the neighbourhood than people in the region.

WECH residents are significantly more positive about their home and their landlord/service provider than council tenants across London as a whole.

WECH and the New Deal for Communities areas

WECH residents and those of NDC areas are similar in being relatively deprived: on some measures, WECH residents are more so (tenure, unemployment and economic inactivity, long-term illness) and they seem to have quite similar household incomes (allowing for the date of survey difference).

In four years of its programme, the NDC achieved improvements in residents' perceptions of their area and its facilities and of neighbourhood safety. WECH resident scores on neighbourhood safety were similar, but much higher on satisfaction with their area. There appears to be no real difference between WECH and NDC residents' (high) ratings of their home.

NDC areas did not change between 2004 and 2008 in the declared level of voluntary activity of residents. WECH recorded a significantly higher level. WECH was rated

much higher as a landlord/service provider than NDC landlords, albeit that these improved marginally.

Conclusions

The evidence reported here is consistent with the hypothesis framing the study, that collective ownership is associated with measurable benefits to life quality:

- Looked at nationally or regionally, WECH residents show high levels of deprivation, similar to areas that were the subject of the New Deal for Communities.
- Satisfaction with WECH, the home and the neighbourhood is rather higher for WECH residents across the various levels of comparison, and they also declare higher scores for active participation.
- The measureable benefits associated with empowerment through community ownership appear to mitigate the detriment to wellbeing caused by financial deprivation, physical illness and fear of crime.

This study highlights how the differences between questions posed in various surveys present a methodological challenge to meaningful comparison. This challenge is partly avoidable and Government's plan to institute a new Wellbeing Index presents an opportunity to allow proper comparison across time and place by having a standard set of indicators, each with a set of sub-questions, which can be used by different survey commissioners. These will clearly develop and change over time in the light of experience and it is hoped that the WECH experience reported here will be useful to draw on.

Table Two WECH survey data compared

Comparator	WECH	England	Inner London	New Deal for Communities [Empowerment initiative-free]	
				2004	2008
Tenure	Social renting: 75%	Social renting: 18%	Social renting: 26%	Social renting: 62%	Social renting: 55%
Monthly Income	£1,211	£1,455	£2,117	£916	£978
Limiting illness * Health limits daily activities	42%	36%/18%*	NA/9%*	30%*	31%*
% adults unemployed/ economically inactive	65%	42%	47%	48%	53%
Feelings about home	87%	80%**	68%**	82%	84%
Ratings of area and facilities	89%	65%	79%	53%	74%***
Neighbourhood safety (score 3 or 4)	54%	71%	63%	46%	50%
Neighbourhood trust	75%	82%	63%	NA	NA
Active participation	29%	21%	25%	20%	18%
Satisfaction with landlord (score 3 or 4)	84%	80%	66%****	70%	73%
Health and Happiness (score 3 or 4)	75%	70%	76%	58%	77%
				3 = 41%	
				2 = 33%	
				1 = 25%	

** For tenants of English councils/London Boroughs (respectively) undertaking satisfaction surveys in 2008, records satisfaction with property quality

*** Same score in Working Neighbourhood Fund areas, 2008/09

**** For tenants of London Borough Councils undertaking satisfaction surveys in 2008, records satisfaction "taking everything into account".

[NB: No findings have been drawn from the last comparator in the table because, as Dr Satsangi explains in his report at (III) on Page 3, "The WECH survey questions on health status and happiness relate to a prompt about being a WECH resident, i.e. "Living in a WECH home makes a difference to your health and life generally". This asks a relative question: asking people to make a judgement on how they felt before and after WECH becoming their landlord/service provider. It also asks them to judge the extent to which their health/well-being status reflects on WECH being their landlord/service provider. None of the detailed prompts are found in comparator data and this means that we can only make very broad, tentative inferences in this part of the comparison (the last comparator in the table)."]

5. IN THEIR OWN WORDS – WHAT WECH MEANS TO RESIDENTS AND FOR THEIR WELLBEING

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE AMBROSE WECH SURVEY 2010

What is WECH and what does WECH mean to you?

WECH are very nice people. People at the office are good, they know us and we know them.

Great landlords. If I needed a repair today they'd be here today or tomorrow.

WECH is a good community; WECH is a kind of family. WECH is for me. WECH means a lot of good things to me. I don't know about other housing associations in London. The way I feel here is that WECH is the best housing association, having heard about how things work in other housing associations. It took a month for things to get fixed in my friend's house. WECH fixes things quickly.

WECH means a whole lot to us - they're not only our landlords; they have a big influence in our lives. They play a huge part in our life. They're more socially involved than other landlords.

They've given us a nice home and do lots of work in the home. They make socialising easy with people.

WECH is a housing association and it's helping people in the community. WECH is a small community.

Since I've lived with WECH, it means a lot that I have a secure home for me and my family. They take care of us and it means we have a high standard of living.

A big company working in housing. They are a good company - I am happy.

A self-run organisation. I feel a part of WECH because I was in the group when it first started. I have a sense of belonging.

A resident run-housing association.

Housing company. They always say 'hello' to you in the street. They're nice people.

Housing association - better security and fosters a sense of community.

Housing association. They mean a lot - they're my landlord after all.

Housing association that thinks about and cares about tenants, the environment, the area, the community. They do very well!

WECH are about better housing and lower rent and they have fulfilled that.

WECH is peace, helpful and relax.

WECH is an office for renting houses. This means a lot to us. If we have any problem you can count on them, they help you.

WECH provides a fantastic home to me, I am very happy, WECH is a fantastic home provider, I am very thankful to be here.

Empirical evidence supporting the Right to Transfer: January 2011

WECH is very helpful. I cannot talk for everyone there but my housing officer is lovely.

WECH means charity, helping people to have a house.

WECH is a community housing association. It gives houses for the community. We have a community to be WECH tenants.

WECH is a sense of very good community housing. This means a safe place and reasonably priced accommodation for people. It's brings the community together.

WECH is set up to protect the community and their homes.

WECH means a lot. It means home, it's good, nice people, helpful.

WECH is my housing association, which means that they make me more safe, happy and I can trust them when I need help. They are very friendly.

Just brilliant landlords.

With WECH I've got a nice warm flat, and I'm comfortable. They let me stay in this place after my niece passed away.

It means everything to me. I think it's a marvellous thing that we did.

A good company, for looking after old people.

A local resident led housing association, started from Walterton and is an example of real people power.

Good services and friendly people.

The freeholder of my property and a local community organisation.

WECH mean an awful lot – they provided a smaller place when needed, and are extremely nice and cooperative.

Very good housing association, helpful, trustful, close contacts.

Everything is alright and settled. I don't have to worry about it. Tremendous agent for good. A way of helping people. Piece of paradise.

It's a housing association. It means someone to trust if something goes wrong.

I think they really do value the community and want to listen to the community, and because they're small they can do a lot. They try to get you involved.

I find the staff approachable, caring to listen, responsive.

WECH are one big family that see no barrier, no colour, no race, that treats all tenants equally. The tenants are lucky to have such wonderful staff. Very polite, understanding, helpful. An organisation that I think everybody would appreciate. Number one in Britain. It's Walterton and Elgin.

WECH are a housing association, an organisation. Some of the staff and officers are my friends. WECH represents my home.

Empirical evidence supporting the Right to Transfer: January 2011

It means it's an association that cares for its tenants. Because they care for you, if there's something positive or negative going on, they inform you. They are straightforward to us.

WECH is a resident led housing association. It means to me that they are taking very seriously the views of its tenants and it tries its best to support people in their lives.

WECH means a good life to me. It allows you to live without fear as opposed to isolated, ill crazy. WECH has done lots for me. In comparison with short-life housing, there is very good long term tenure security. You really can settle down with WECH, the prices are very low and this affects your wellbeing: a reasonable rent means that you can afford to do something that does not make a lot of money: you are more free. If there were more places like WECH, there would be more happiness.

WECH is like a family. They gave me everything. I am so grateful. They gave me a roof, I felt good, and thanks to them I realised my dream: I finally got children, at 50 years old!

WECH is a housing association where the tenants get involved all the time. They do a much better job than the council. They are top class. This is how things should be!

WECH is a housing organisation. If you want them to support you, they are here. They are really good. Even if you need some job, they guide you.

If [empowerment through WECH] does have a positive effect [on your wellbeing] can you give examples of how this has made you think differently about things and what the best things are about WECH?

Globally, I feel better.

Good - takes our complaints seriously. Best thing - communication.

Fix repairs quickly - same day! We don't have any problems with WECH.

If you're content in your home, which I am, and if you're safe in your home - I'm just happy with everything as it is at the moment. I've got nothing but good things to say about WECH after living under Westminster Council.

I feel very happy about where I live and how I live and WECH's contribution to that. I've never had better than here.

When you need help they send a member of staff and give you advice about how to deal with certain situations.

WECH has provided us with lovely homes, made play areas for children, have wonderful, helpful staff. If they can't help us they'll put us in touch with someone who can. They have nice low rents - stuck by their word. Fantastic repair system, don't have to wait long. Always deal with nuisance neighbours. They provide for the community - from the July street part to community centre activities. They help the elderly, middle aged, young people - they include everybody. They run a very efficient office.

Because they do the jobs that you know you can't do yourself. They have these meetings that we can all go to; I like the meetings. When WECH took over from the council they made improvements to the house – before, the place was falling down. There's a terrific repairs service under WECH. WECH has been brilliant; I am much happier living under WECH than Westminster.

They try and help.

Empirical evidence supporting the Right to Transfer: January 2011

The contacts I have with staff are really good. They are very professional.

WECH provides someone to talk to if I need someone to talk to. They listen to you. They are very, very, very kind.

Just the whole sense of community - you know the people around here. I've been in the area my whole life. I moved out a few years ago to go to university and then moved back - it was an easy transition because of the people around here.

Overall, I can honestly say WECH is the best housing association I've been with, and I am more than comfortable being here with them. The staff are friendly every time. A housing officer is allocated to each tenant; she helps you with any arrears and any problems. You can always just give her a call.

When anything happens, you tell them, and they fix it straight away. They help you fill out forms - I don't read English. This is very good.

I can imagine people are healthier living here - we have control. We feel privileged. If there's a problem, there's a friendly face. I know all their first names and have personal relationships with everyone in the office. When I've had problems, WECH take it seriously. They really do care. We don't want WECH to get too big. It should be housing for local people. It's starting to get a bit impersonal. We need to keep the WECH philosophy going.

Keep doing a good job - they're great!

I'm quite pleased with WECH - they listen to me. Really, I cannot fault WECH.

There's better security and a sense of community. If I have a problem with the house or neighbour, I can go to WECH and they respond quickly.

Very helpful. They listen and respond straight away. Compared to other associations and private landlords I know about, WECH is great. I think WECH are brilliant people.

There's nothing to worry about - it's all taken care of. Everything is good. They pop by to say 'hello', call to check how you're doing. They have time for everyone. They're genuinely concerned and care about us. They're doing a fantastic job and I hope they continue. The handyman and volunteers help so much. A disability liaison officer would be good - I'd do it!

They provide nice homes for tenants. They are warm and supportive. The staff are lovely - very warm towards tenants. They always try to help if they can - they always attempt to meet you half way even if they can't do it all. Properties are nicely refurbished. Overall, I have no complaints. They're a nice housing association and I'm in no hurry to move.

You can get involved with how the house is run. You can ring and they know you by name as a person. They try to act on what you say quickly and efficiently. I've never lived anywhere like this before. They always ask for feedback on maintenance etc. They care what we think.

They fix my problems at home, which makes me feel comfortable. I feel empowered. WECH supports me and makes our lives easier.

They are helpful, friendly and listen to the tenants.

They are willing to listen. They are local, around the corner, you can go to the office and ask somebody. They are close, it's very good

Empirical evidence supporting the Right to Transfer: January 2011

They allow you to live in a nice house, rent is low, repairs are quick. I moved here and the house is nice. The staff are very friendly. They try to get people involved, which gives a sense of community to people. My house has enough space and it is in great condition.

It's a safe area, which is something that makes me comfortable and happy.

I can give opinions but the Board just makes the decision, this doesn't have to do anything to do with my health. However, I like the decisions they have made; so I feel healthy.

WECH involves people, the tenants. It takes people as a community, it involves people to be a part of the Board, and we are able to make decisions. This is very positive.

If you can give your opinion, that empowers you. When you act as an individual you should think in community. The decisions are for all, so they benefit you as an individual and also everybody. If someone listens and they involve you instead of ignoring you, you feel happy.

Because I know WECH will try to do everything to involve me in what's happening, and I feel supported.

It's a caring organisation. They care about their tenants. When I was in the hospital some of them came to visit me. Everybody is so pleasant, everybody is nice and helpful. It does make a difference, and I don't think they could do any better.

They have dinner at Christmas. You can ask for help and they'll do their best to help you. We only have to ask and help if they could. It's nice to know you can ask for something and it doesn't sound like begging.

If I'm worried about anything I can go to them. I'm happier here. WECH help me send housing benefits to the office. If there was any other help I needed, they wouldn't hesitate. I really trust them, I really do.

WECH is home from home; the girls in the office are great to talk to and they select their staff very well.

Sense of being helped and listened to. Rents are reasonable. We know the staff and we trust them.

Two effects: constant worry of removal does not exist (security...); WECH is an agent for great achievement for neighbours and me. Democratic accountability.

They encourage you to get involved with the community and they put activities in place to get involved. There's the summer fair, childcare, and a professional nursery. They touch base with you and make sure you're not on your own. In a general sense, they really care about their tenants. I've had some personal issues and they've helped me. There's an understanding. They want to carry on improving.

My actual home is greatly improved, the amenities, sense of security as well. I've got reserved parking.

To be honest, before we came under WECH, my thinking of associations was very negative. Certain landlords gave rough treatment. We went to Westminster and got a better place, but it was a bad experience. I thought less of associations. Then we went to WECH and WECH revived our hope. We gained back our faith, we thought associations were all the same, but now we see they are different and WECH are completely different.

Empirical evidence supporting the Right to Transfer: January 2011

The best thing is the family feel that they have. You know a point of contact for everyone. It's literally a phone call away. Everything's done quicker than a big organisation.

They don't bother me when we make changes to the house. Whenever I meet people they're nice and polite. I enjoy the Christmas party and other events they put on. They're good with us one on one. They're, if not the best, definitely one of the best housing associations in Great Britain. You couldn't wish for a better housing organisation.

They actually take care of property. The staff are fantastic, you build a rapport. They don't just work for WECH. They are WECH. In terms of WECH overall, it opens your eyes to realise. When you think of social housing, it's not the same treatment. You're secure that you have your home. We know it's our home. WECH are good.

I trust them and I respect them. I think that they have the same opinions as me. That provides safety and security. The staff always gives me good advice. They care for their tenants. They care. If I have a problem with anything, they always respond. Their response is positive.

It has allowed me to get into contact with different types of neighbours, people that I would not have met otherwise. I feel the pleasure of multicultural community, that is a very nice feeling. WECH is really multicultural. It's not like anywhere else in London. There are different age groups and this is very important for wellbeing.

The services are very good, the prices are very low, the location is so great, the shops are great. So it makes me feel good. I love the work that WECH does and this influences my aspirations in participating more, even if I cannot.

Without WECH, I would have a crap life. I would have to earn so much for things that do not even really matter.

There is a feeling of involvement. You feel you are involved! WECH is the best thing that has happened to this area since World War Two. Without WECH, we would be in the street.

The more things done, the better, so people in the neighbourhood can do more.

We are happy here. The rents are nice, the standard of repairs is very good. We are contented and satisfied with the lifestyle it allows. After 7 years, it is still as lovely to get to that front door!

I am happy!

Further information about WECH

WECH's Annual Report 2009/10 provides a detailed description of the organisation, its activities and its finances; reflects on its 25-year history; and records its achievements since residents took ownership of their estates 18 years ago. <http://wech.co.uk/images/stories/pdf/Annual-Report2010.pdf>

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