WECH
Walterton and Elgin Community Homes

Annual Report 2023 - 2024

Chair's Foreword

Gordon Quinlan
Chair of the
WECH Board

It's said that time flies when you're having fun. The year that has passed since the AGM has gone so quickly that it would suggest a year filled with laughter and joy. Whilst that has been true on occasion there have been stressful and frustrating times as well. Those who attended last year's AGM will remember it was a bad-tempered affair revealing the fractured relationship between both the Board and membership and staff and membership. Following the AGM and subsequent Special General Meeting, called by the members, we had a completely new Board elected and appointed.

The principal concerns expressed by the membership at the AGM were the forced redundancies of many experienced staff without adequate replacement and declining standards in services, particularly with regard to repairs. There was a perceived lack of leadership by the former Chief Executive at the time, who was rarely in the office, and a failure of the Board to address these concerns. It was felt that, if this continued, there was a danger WECH could lose its independence and be absorbed by a larger organisation, bringing its proud history to an end.

With this in mind, the first decision taken by the new Board was to commission housing consultants, Campbell Tickell, to undertake a comprehensive review of WECH and to make recommendations. Campbell Tickell had a longstanding connection with WECH and fully understood our model of community ownership. Their staff worked closely with the new Board, attended Board meetings and clearly laid out the role and responsibilities of Board members. The review concluded in May with some recommendations already put in place and others, subject to WECH members' approval, to follow. The value of this consultation cannot be underestimated and gave the new Board confidence in going forward.

Perhaps the most crucial thing that happened this year and the biggest turning point in WECH's fortunes was the decision by Suzanne Wolfe, who became the interim Chief Executive following the resignation of her predecessor, to take on the role full time.

Suzanne has provided the leadership that was so clearly needed. With her calm demeanour and steely determination, she has built a great staff team and restored good relations between staff and residents. It has not been easy as a number of disgruntled individuals mounted resistance to some of the changes, but thankfully, this appears to be drawing to a close.

You can read in the Chief Executive's report the improvements in services that have taken place this year and, without replicating what has been written, I would just say that particular attention has been given to the Elgin Estate, especially the gardening project, which has helped transform the estate and made it a more pleasant environment in which to live. Also, special thanks to Jacqui Haynes and her team who run the Food Bank every Thursday, amongst other events. She is providing a much needed service and her cheerfulness and boundless energy is infectious.

I hope this broad overview is insightful, but be assured that WECH is now in a good place and has re-established itself as a central pillar of the local community.

I look forward to seeing you at this year's AGM. It is the centrepiece of the WECH calendar and if there's only one event you attend each year it should be the AGM. Resident control only means something if there is active involvement. We are uniquely advantaged as residents in that we can initiate change: Residents of other Housing Associations are powerless to do so.

You come to realise that those who hold positions of power generally make empty promises and that 'the only people who'll help the people are the people themselves'.

Gordon Quinlan

Chair of the WECH Board

August 2024

"Walterton and Elgin Community Homes is a shining example of community leadership."
– Georgia Gould, MP for Queens Park and Maida Vale, House of Commons, 22 July 2024

Pictured above left to right: Lala, Facilities Team Leader, Suzanne Wolfe, CEO, Georgia Gould, MP and Gordon Quinlan, Chair at the WECH Summer Festival on 14 July 2024.

October 2024

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
30	1 Oct	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27 British Summer Time Ends
28	29	30	31 Halloween	1 Nov	2	3

A message from our Chief Executive

Suzanne Wolfe
Chief Executive

Welcome to our Annual Report for the financial year 2023 to 2024. I arrived as your CEO, originally as an interim, a month before the WECH 2023 AGM. On that night, I heard residents articulate, loud and clear, the need for stability and a better repairs service and promised you that I would make it my job to achieve this. Your perceptions were correct: the WECH team was at that point seriously understaffed, with vacancies in the Repairs Team with various other essential roles covered by expensive agency staff.

In December, under the leadership of the new Board, I was delighted to be permanently appointed as your Chief Executive and have continued to work with them, on your behalf, to secure a strong staff team, every one of whom understands and respects WECH's fundamental principle of 'Residents In Control'.

The Board and I have been working through challenging times. The Financial Statements for the year ending 31 March 2024 spell out the cost of restoring stability to our staff team, compounded by the sharply increased Elgin Estate loan interest rates charged by our lenders since the post-Truss government financial crisis.

Despite these challenges, we worked quickly in the months that followed the AGM to make changes for the better. We tendered a major five-year Cyclical Works Programme for the Walterton Estate, restoring this essential work to the pre-2020 frequency. The Board commissioned an independent Finance & Governance Review which provided guidance and assurance that WECH was well placed to stay independent and strong into the future.

We implemented a Stock Condition Survey, which will enable future maintenance work to be programmed to the best effect and reviewed and strengthened all of our property health and safety compliance arrangements.

We asked you what you wanted from WECH's community programme; you told us that help with the cost-of-living crisis was most urgent. On this basis we reset our priorities, securing funding for practical help such as the Food Bank, free Wednesday Brunch and Clothes Bank, all of which take place at our Community Centre and help make day-to-day living more affordable.

We have strengthened partnership working, for example, securing funding from Greening Westminster to carry on the work to make our neighbourhood greener and healthier, planting many new trees and shrubs on the Elgin Estate and inviting everyone to get gardening with us.

Our staff have risen to the challenge of rapid change. We have seen the appointment of a new Executive Team, and creation of a strong staff group, a blend of old and new people. I have been pleased by the positive feedback received in recent months. There is still lots to do; we will press ahead to continue to give you more of what you want from both our housing and community services in the year ahead.

I would like to thank our Board for the leadership and support given to me and my team throughout this somewhat challenging but tremendously rewarding year, in particular our Chair, Gordon Quinlan, who gives many hours of his time, wisdom, common sense and knowledge of 'all matters WECH', a true anchor. None of this, however, would have been possible without you, our residents, who collectively make up the WECH community, the living embodiment of 'Residents In Control'. I am grateful for your trust and support - and excited to see what we can achieve together in the year ahead.

Suzanne Wolfe

Chief Executive

August 2024

"The best breakfast in town!" - Stephen, WECH Resident.
Georgia Gould MP visiting the Wednesday Brunch Club in June 2024.

November 2024

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
28	29	30	31 Halloween	1 Nov	2	3
4	5 Guy Fawkes Night	6	7	8	9	10
11 Remembrance Day	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30 St. Andrew's Day	01 Dec

Welcome

to our Annual Report for 2023 - 2024

Walterton and Elgin Community Homes (WECH) is a registered provider of social housing and we operate only within the City of Westminster. We own and manage 675 homes. We also have a community centre, park and provide some community and commercial spaces. WECH is a community owned and democratically accountable organisation, with our residents in control.

Our aims:

WECH is a charitable Housing Association. Our aim is to provide homes at affordable rents for those in housing need. But WECH is not only a Housing Association, it is moreover a Community organisation as we organise various community/ social services and events for the local community and are therefore playing an active part in the regeneration of North Paddington.

WECH's aim over the next ten years is to continue to provide a service that is based on knowing our residents personally and having specific knowledge of the condition of WECH's property.

WECH aims to build on the strong partnership between residents, staff, contractors, funders, local authority and statutory organisations and local voluntary organisations so that WECH can respond to the housing and other needs of our existing residents and contribute to the continuing regeneration of North Paddington.

The report shows how we have performed over the past year in the areas of:

Involvement

You elected the Board at the AGM, you joined Committees, you attended the AGM, you attended our events and consultation meetings.

Community

We organised a range of social events and activities, we provided benefits and debt advice services, we organised fundraising activities, we supported local regeneration initiatives.

Repairs

We repaired and looked after your homes.

Management services

We allocated available homes fairly, we responded to reports of noise or neighbourhood nuisance as quickly as possible, we collected the rents efficiently.

Value for money

We have provided a summary of the accounts and a range of other performance information for you to see how well the money we have received has been spent.

Membership:

WECH has a total of 673 (2022-23: 628) members. As a WECH member you have the right to attend and vote at General Meetings and can stand for election onto the Management Board of the organisation. The Board is elected by members to run the organisation on their behalf.

WECH's overall objectives:

- To fulfil the commitments made to residents at the time of transfer.
- To provide affordable high quality homes.
- To manage and maintain efficiently all WECH's homes and other property.
- To support and sustain an active community within WECH's area of operation.

Friends old and new come together at the WECH Over 60s Christmas Party, 17 December 2023.

December 2024

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
25	26	27	28	29	30 St. Andrew's Day	1 Dec
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15 WECH Over 60s Christmas Party
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24 Christmas Eve	25 Christmas Day	26 Boxing Day	27	28	29
30	31 New Year's Eve	1 Jan New Year's Day	2	3	4	5

Our Board Members

Gordon Quinlan
Resident Chair

Lorraine Etienne
Resident Vice Chair

Angelique Csere
Resident Vice Chair

Nadia Faucher
Resident Board Member

Sean Griffin
Resident Board Member

Vera Mrdak
Resident Board Member

Luis-Jose Lopez-Johnstone
Resident Board Member

Alicja Johnston
Resident Board Member

Charmaine Stoukas
Resident Board Member

Monica Feeney
Resident Board Member

Paul Judge
Resident Board Member

Sarah Seisay
Resident Board Member

Keith Jenkins
Board Member

John Andrew
Board Member

Audrey Williamson
Board Member

Dan Jones
Board Member

Jan Taranczuk
Operations Committee Member

January is a great month to try something new. Find a deeper connection to the mind, body and soul with the wider WECH community through yoga. Classes run weekly at the WECH Community Centre.

January 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
30	31 New Year's Eve	1 Jan New Year's Day	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31	1 Feb	2

WECH - At the Heart of our community

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

At the heart of North Paddington lives an independent community which, in 1992, following a seven-year struggle with Westminster City Council, saved its 675 homes from sale and demolition for private profit.

WECH residents are that community. At that pivotal moment in our history, you, the residents, won community ownership, gaining democratic control over your housing association. Since that time, WECH has cared for its residents and their homes, providing a range of community services. Our community is open, welcoming and confident, an anchor for the wider North Paddington neighbourhood.

In July 1993, WECH completed its first whole Victorian house retrofit, installing internal wall insulation and double glazing. Since then, we have refurbished 200 whole houses, transforming living conditions for 500 tenants and leaseholders. Now, WECH is working with Westminster Council to see how, together, we might repair and insulate two Victorian houses in Barnsdale Road, using the latest green technology, as a pilot to show other local social landlords how to improve hundreds more.

On the Elgin Estate, following resident control, we took down the asbestos ridden tower blocks, insulated and upgraded the 96 homes in Athens and Kincardine Gardens, and built 55 new homes. More recently, we have added 43 new homes to the Elgin Estate, installed lifts, and built new offices and a community centre.

Above: WECH campaign poster 1985

We also installed 410 solar panels to generate electricity, which, when the sun is shining, powers WECH's offices and the community centre, along with lifts and lighting in the Estate's common parts. We are investigating whether we can increase capacity to provide cheaper electricity directly to residents.

A previous academic study showed that empowerment through community ownership had improved our residents' wellbeing. Residents told researchers: *"WECH is a family." "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." "It means everything to me." "If there were more places like WECH, there would be more happiness."*

This past year, our Board, Executive Team and residents have worked enthusiastically to showcase WECH's shining community leadership. Past challenges may have changed, but WECH leads the way to tackle today's issues, not least the cost-of-living crisis.

Our community programme is expanding, with something for everyone, and plans to grow further in the future. We are proud to be the beating heart of North Paddington and we look forward to building on our fine heritage together.

> ***"Walterton and Elgin Community Homes is a shining example of community leadership."***
>
> Georgia Gould, MP for Queens Park and Maida Vale, House of Commons, 22 July 2024

Below: Resident Control in Action: 2023 AGM

"Beryl Carmody, a lifelong resident of the Elgin Estate, dedicated all her time to care for and help WECH tenants. To celebrate and commemorate her life to helping others, family, friends and residents came together to plant a tree in her memory so that she may never be forgotten. We miss you Beryl." - Alicja Johnston, Athens Gardens Resident, at tree planting commemoration on Saturday 24 February 2024 with the Right Worshipful Lord Mayor of Westminster 2023 - 2024, Councillor Patricia McAllister and members of Beryl's family.

February 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
27	28	29	30	31	1 Feb	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14 Valentine's Day	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	1 Mar St. David's Day	2

Working in partnership

WECH has cemented strong relationships with our key partners. This is because we - and they - know we can achieve better outcomes together for the good of our community.

Earlier in 2024 we consolidated our relationship with Maida Hill Projects, led by Jacqui Haynes. The Maida Hill Project provides safe and warm spaces for local people to participate in activities in a social setting, usually accompanied by food.

Although targeted at disadvantaged and vulnerable people in North Paddington, family, social and community ties broaden the overall user group geographically, intergenerationally, and ethnically.

Jacqui delivers the Food Bank and Brunch Club, with food supplied by the Felix Project and funded by Westminster City Council, each week at the WECH Community Centre. These serve around 80 households every week. Our Clothes Bank, GarmHub, was launched, giving everyone the opportunity to upcycle, swap or pick up an item of pre-loved clothing.

Westminster City Council invested £25,000 last year in our Elgin Estate gardens and green projects on the Walterton Estate through their 'Greening Westminster' fund and have pledged a further £50,000 grant for 2024/25.

***"I can never afford a full breakfast like that, we are so lucky to have this."* – Lia, W2**

***"God bless you guys, I haven't eaten properly for a week"* - Darren, W9**

We will continue to work with HCGA (Healthy Community Gardens Association) and Paddington Development Trust's Climate Action Coordinator in the year ahead, delivering planting events and weekly gardening sessions, as well as employing our own Community Gardener to keep our green areas looking better than ever and encourage resident involvement.

Our Yoga Classes are free, offering the opportunity for our community to come together and practice.
We plan to expand our range of activities for all ages in the year ahead.

Gardening events for our residents with Megan of Healthy Community Gardens Association and Lola, Paddington Development Trust's Climate Action Coordinator.

Jacqui Haynes' Food Bank at the WECH Community Centre with Kevin Frey, Community Development Officer, Westminster Council and Suzanne Wolfe, CEO.

Pictured left: Councillor Patricia McAllister, the Right Worshipful Lord Mayor of Westminster 2023 - 2024 with a young resident, 24 February 2024. Pictured right: Funded by Greening Westminster, we planted over 100 shrubs to make the Elgin Estate bloom year after year, 23 March 2024.

March 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
24	25	26	27	28	1 Mar St. David's Day	2
3	4 Shrove Tuesday	5 Ash Wednesday	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30 British Summer Time begins
31	1 Apr April Fool's Day	2	3	4	5	6

Getting creative at the WECH Easter Family Fun Day, 3 April 2024.

April 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
31	1 Apr April Fool's Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18 Good Friday	19	20 Easter Sunday
21 Easter Monday	22	23 St. George's Day	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	1 May	2	3	4

Planting seeds and building bug hotels at Watson Gardens with Healthy Community Gardens Association, 29 May 2024.

May 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
28	29	30	1 May	2	3	4
5 Early May Bank Holiday	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26 Spring Bank Holiday	27	28	29	30	31	1 Jun

Your homes

Routine maintenance:

We spent £1,053,074 on routine repairs in 2023/24.

Gas servicing and repairs:

WECH spent £61,557 on servicing and repairing boilers, gas fires and smoke detectors. At 31 March 2024 we had up to date gas certificates for 99.4% of our properties.

Planned maintenance and major repairs:

We spent £200,468 on planned maintenance and major repairs.

Cyclical Works Programme:

There was no cyclical works programme in place before the 2023 AGM. Work began in Autumn 2023 to tender a major 5-year programme for the Walterton Estate, restoring this to the previous frequency. The cost for the first year will be £507,500.

Lettings:

WECH made 13 lettings during the financial year 2023/24, all to WECH residents.

Cyclical Works starting on the Walterton Estate.

The GarmHub Clothes Bank helps tackle the cost-of-living crisis by making clothes available free of charge, with the opportunity to swap or donate unwanted garments.

June 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
26 Spring Bank Holiday	27	28	29	30	31	1 Jun
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	1 Jul	2	3	4	5	6

Annual Report & Financial Results

In September 2023, 130 residents representing 20% of all households attended the Annual General Meeting (AGM), electing a new Board by an overwhelming majority.

This was the pivotal moment when the resident Membership reasserted control over its organisation, taking hold of its strategic course – enabling change for the better.

With support from external professional advisers, the newly elected Board and Chair immediately implemented extensive measures to strengthen services and reaffirm WECH's core principles.

A new permanent Executive Team was appointed, and fresh independent Board Members selected for their skills and experience in specific areas identified during the governance review.

Following the AGM, the new Board and Executive Team:

- Undertook an independent review of finance, governance and risk;
- Commissioned a comprehensive Stock Condition Survey to inform future maintenance plans; and
- Revised the staff structure, brought back several longstanding team members and eradicated the use of expensive temporary staff, settling three historic employment-related cases.

The new Chief Executive enhanced the repairs service, began improving the garages to return them to use, and redirected environmental funds to significantly improve the Elgin Estate, planting new trees and shrubs.

WECH negotiated an extension of the lease of part of its offices to Robinson Wilson Solicitors, thus continuing the longstanding provision of local legal services for residents.

Listening to residents

The new Board listened to residents and reset the community vision. WECH withdrew from the Community Champions scheme due to low participation rates, turning its support to assist the many residents affected by the Cost-of-Living crisis, and partnering with the Council and others to secure funding to improve health and wellbeing.

WECH joined forces with the Maida Hill Project's Foodbank and Brunch Club team, supporting their activities to help those in greatest need, so increasing the positive social impact of our Community Centre. WECH has re-engaged with City of Westminster Councillors and officers, stepping up to its anchor role in the recently established North Paddington Programme, and has quickly established a positive relationship with our new Member of Parliament.

Increased expenditure incurred in 2023/24

The cost of specific corrective actions and other improvements was significant. Interest paid on the Elgin Estate development loan increased by £180,000 due to interest rate rises after the Truss government's mini budget.

Operating costs for the year increased by £645k, which included temporary staff costs, legal advice and employment related settlements amounting to £294k, along with outsourced accounting services costing £107k.

Looking ahead

Whilst we anticipate interest costs continuing at a similar level in 2024/25, WECH's outgoings have significantly reduced. The staff team is consolidated, with temporary cover costs minimalised. Accounting services will be brought back in house from the middle of the year.

Summary of Financial Results

As well as delivering our Audited Accounts to each resident, they will be presented at the AGM. They can also be found at the www.wech.org.uk/about-wech/annual-report-and-resident-report/ and on request from the WECH Office. Figures shown below relate to WECH's Social Housing operations.

	Total Year ended 31 Mar 23 £	Total Year ended 31 Mar 24 £
Turnover		
Rent receivable (net of void losses)	3,721,775	3,963,345
Amortisation of housing grant	288,652	284,444
	4,010,427	**4,247,789**
Operating costs		
Management	(1,026,769)	(1,506,446)
Services	(428,117)	(556,845)
Routine maintenance	(1,042,928)	(1,053,074)
Planned maintenance	(157,114)	(136,063)
Major repairs expenditure	(34,278)	(64,405)
Bad debts gain	17,213	(2,004)
Depreciation of housing properties	(779,272)	(788,608)
Accelerated depreciation	(18,918)	(7,701)
Depreciation of furniture	(18,328)	(13,479)
	(3,488,511)	**(4,128,625)**
Operating (deficit) / surplus	**521,916**	**119,164**
Void losses	**83,723**	**94,036**

Staff and residents having fun in the sun at the WECH Summer Festival, 14 July 2024.

July 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
30	1 Jul	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1 Aug	2	3

Councillor Robert Rigby, the Right Worshipful Lord Mayor of Westminster presents Athens Gardens Resident, Liam Brennan, with a special 'WECH in Bloom Award' on 27 July 2024 for transforming his little patch of North Paddington into a mini nature reserve.

August 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
28	29	30	31	1 Aug	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25 Summer Bank Holiday	26	27	28	29	30	31

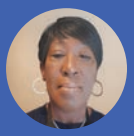
Our team

Chief Executive

Suzanne Wolfe

Housing Team

Carmen Clarke
Head of Housing



Jackie Dawkins
Housing Services Manager

Serene Wringer-Burnett
Income Officer

Eleanor Warsop
Residents' Services Assistant

Barbara Pereira
Neighbourhood Housing Assistant

Abdi-nur Lala
Facilities Team Leader

Abdirahim Abi
Facilities Officer

Florian Poama-Neagra
Membership and CRM Administrator

Finance Team

Kathryn Dowlath
Corporate Services Director

Genish Watson
Finance & IT Manager

Shirley Skyers
Financial Operations

Maintenance Team

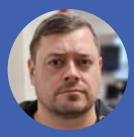
Scott Richardson
Head of Property Maintenance

Linda Bekkari
Repairs and Compliance Manager

Anita Mason
Contracts Officer

Yinka Andoyi
Maintenance Surveyor

Natalie Sylvester
Repairs Administrator



Rob Paterson
Multi Skill Operative

Julian Bond
Multi Skill Operative

Resident Control in Action: 130 residents attended the WECH AGM, 20 September 2023.

September 2025

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1 Sep	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 WECH AGM	25	26	27	28
29	30	1 Oct	2	3	4	5

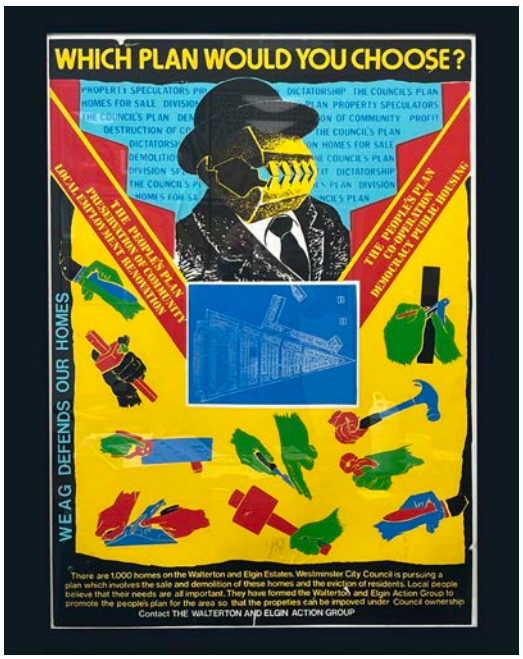
Walterton and Elgin Community Homes Ltd.

Address: Selbourne House, 36A Elgin Avenue, London, W9 3AZ

Telephone: 020 7266 3347

Website: www.wech.org.uk

Registered with the Regulator of Social Housing L3939
Registered as a Community Benefit Society 27378R
Registered with the Housing Ombudsman
Member of the National Housing Federation
Member of the Community Land Trust Network

Accessibility

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