

2019/2020

# Report to *members*



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[Report to  
Members' video](#)

# Hello



## Welcome to your 19/20 Report to Members

### A SUMMARY OF OUR ACTIVITIES

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Merthyr Valleys Homes, our mutual, is owned by our tenant and employee members.

We, the Democratic Body, are here to act on your behalf and in your best interests when working with the Board of Directors and Executive team to make decisions and influence activities throughout the Mutual – here's how we have been doing this over the past year.

**Natalie**  
**Chair of Democratic Body**

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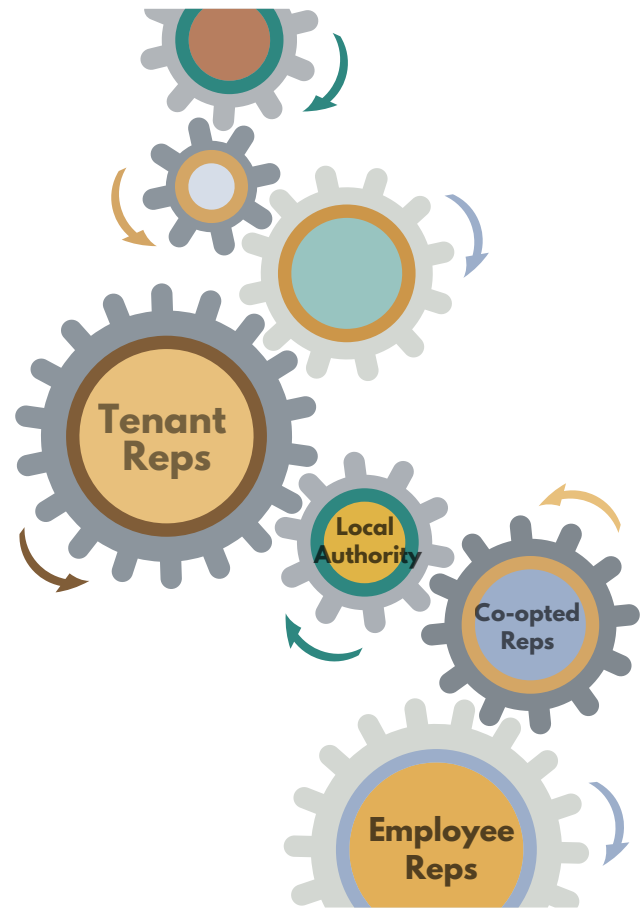
### Progress against the Membership Strategy

# About the Democratic Body

## IT'S STRUCTURE




The Democratic Body is made up of:

- **11 Tenant** Representatives (elected)
- **8 Employee** Representatives (elected)
- **2 Local Authority** Representatives (nominated)
- Up to **3 Co-opted** Representatives (appointed)



## KEY FUNCTIONS

The Democratic Body has a number of key roles and responsibilities:

-  To **appoint (and remove) Non-Executive Directors** to the Board of MVH
-  To **approve the appointment** (by the Board) of the **Chief Executive**
-  To **work with the Board and the Chief Executive to ensure the good governance** of the mutual.
-  To work with the Board and the Chief Executive in **developing the mutuals' business plan, including setting the strategic direction and approving the policy framework**
-  To **approve the programme of internal audit** and to **monitor the performance of the organisation**
-  To set a **Membership Strategy** and to **monitor its progress**

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# Your Democratic Body

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Here's a little bit about who we are.

You can find a bit more information about us on our website— [www.mvhomes.org.uk](http://www.mvhomes.org.uk)



**Natalie Warner**  
**Chair of Democratic Body**  
**(Employee Representative)**

Natalie is extremely community orientated, and is keen to develop services for tenants and residents alike across the borough, believing that having projects or centres that bring people together is vital for our tenants and the wider community



**Nigel Phillips-Gunter**  
**Vice Chair of Democratic Body**  
**(Tenant Representative)**

Nigel's involvement in the Democratic Body, other forums and groups has allowed him to gain a wide variety of skill sets. Nigel takes great pride in working for the betterment of tenants and employees alike.

## Your Tenant Representatives



**Fran Bevan**

Fran has been involved with MVH since its inception in 2009 and has served on the Board as well as Democratic Body. Fran is extremely passionate about housing rights, about tenant involvement and about the communities of Merthyr Tydfil.



**Tracey Powell**

Tracey has been an active tenant many years, and has been on the Democratic Body for four years. For Tracey it is all about representing tenants and having a real say in what matters to them.



**Gaynor Bradley**

Gaynor has been on the Democratic Body since 2016. Gaynor is mam to four boys and a Director on the board of a local charity. Gaynor has a real sense of community spirit and displays this by regularly volunteering within the community.



**Beryl Evans**

Beryl has a degree in Psychology and Sociology and has previous experience of volunteering in Citizens Advice Bureau and Victims Support. Beryl is happy to use her knowledge and experience as a tenant representative.

# Your Democratic Body



**Mark Williams**

Having grown up in social housing, Mark feels that he is in a good position where he can identify and relate to housing and community issues



**Carolyn Jones**

Carolyn cares about her community and the people who live in it, she enjoys volunteering and the Democratic Body is no exception. Carolyn's passion is the environment.



**Marlene Burns**

Marlene enjoys the level of influence that members have and encourages others to join the Democratic Body. She firmly believes that the only experience you really need is that you are a tenant and that you care about your community.



**Vivian Evans**

Vivian enjoys being on the Democratic Body, he says all representatives have their say and that it is a great way to solve problems and come up with new ideas to benefit our members.



**Olga Thomas**

Olga lives in Georgetown with her husband, and has resided there since 2014. In addition to the Democratic Body, Olga gives a lot of her spare time to MVH serving on our Residents Participation Forum and Grants Panel.



**Bernadette Batson**

With over forty years experience of being a tenant, Bernadette feels she has a good knowledge of local issues and understanding of what tenants need. She is always prepared to highlight these through the relevant channels in a positive way.

## Your Employee Representatives



**Stephen Puddy**

Steve has worked with MVH since its inception in 2009. He finds it very rewarding working with tenants and employees on the Democratic Body, particularly enjoying how the group has a real say in the way they would like to see the organisation heading for its members.



**Julie McCarthy**

Julie has worked within the housing sector for more than 19 years. She is a very proud Merthyr girl and is very family orientated. Julie has a passion for helping people to achieve their individual goals, unlocking potential and encouraging them to grasp new opportunities.

# Your Democratic Body



## **Marcus Powell**

Marcus has a passion for delivering excellent customer service, something he has extensive experience in having worked in Barclays Bank Plc for 13 years. Marcus is passionate about making his home town of Merthyr Tydfil a great community and a great place to live.



## **Nicholas Lyons**

Nicky has worked at MVH for nearly five years, and loves working for our mutual, says it is an honour to represent his fellow colleagues on the Democratic Body. He is from Merthyr and resides here with his family.



## **Kirsty Beattie**

Kirsty feels privileged to have worked in MVH for the past 7 years alongside passionate people who care about providing an excellent service. She really enjoys helping others and working as a team on the Democratic Body with fellow colleagues and tenants.



## **Mark Davies**

Mark feels that being out in the community in his role gives him a strong understanding of what is relevant to tenants. He is proud that he has the opportunity to work on the Democratic Body with tenant and employee members to effect change in the organisation.



## **Shaun Chappell**

Shaun works in responsive repairs and his trades person perspective of processes and services coupled with his day to day engagement with tenants allows him to bring a real insight to what our tenants and communities want and need.

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# Your Democratic Body

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## MTCBC Representatives



**Cllr Jeremy Davies**

Jeremy was elected as a Local Councillor in the Gurnos Ward in 2018 and is our nominated Councillor representative. Born and bred in Merthyr Tydfil he currently resides in the Gurnos. Jeremy is very active in the community and is also Chair of the Gurnos Community Zone Implementation Group.



**Suzanne Abbot**

## Co-opt Representative



**Annette Longbottom**

Annette has lived in Merthyr for over 8 years and loves the town. Annette is passionate about building new properties whilst maintaining existing homes, she is proud to give back to MVH by serving on the Democratic Body and thoroughly enjoys playing a real part in decision making.



# Our Key Activities

## KEY APPOINTMENTS

One of our key responsibilities is to appoint **Non-Executive Directors to the Board** – these are independent people who have the right skills and expertise, along with the right values and beliefs, to sit on our Board. We often refer to them as ‘Board Members’.

**Last Summer two of our Board Members reached the end of their first term of office (a 3 year term), and both wished to remain on our Board for a further term. Following a short re-appointment process, we were pleased to welcome them to stay on the Board.**



**Carol James**

Carol has been a HR professional for over 30 years having worked in various sectors and countries, including Australia, USA, Netherlands, Switzerland and Singapore, as well as in the UK.



**Elizabeth Lendering**

Elizabeth is a qualified chartered accountant, and has over 10 years experience working in social housing. Elizabeth is currently working as Finance and Resources Director at the Cadarn Housing Group.

We also play a part in the recruitment of Directors, and helped to design an inclusive recruitment process consisting of a technical interview (to ensure that the candidates had the right skills, knowledge and experience) balanced with a values-based interview (to ensure their values and beliefs aligned to that of our mutual). Several of our Democratic Body representatives sat on the interview panels, and some of our members had an opportunity to get involved too. We were delighted to join the Board in welcoming;



**Stacy Thomas**  
Director of Homes  
and Places



**Anthony Hearn**  
Director of Housing  
and Communities

Find out more about Carol, Elizabeth, Stacy and Anthony by visiting our website [www.mvhomes.org.uk](http://www.mvhomes.org.uk)



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# Our Key Activities

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## GYDA'N GILYDD

### Our Plan for Our Future



**Back in 2016 we developed a new vision for our mutual, Yfory, and we are really pleased to report to you that overall, this vision was achieved. However, in 2019 it was time to think about developing plan, a new path for our mutual with some fresh goals and objectives.**

We began this piece of work with a **series of focus groups with our members** in June 2019 to **find out what was most important to you in terms of your home, your community, the services MVH provides and what new opportunities we may consider.** We came out a did a series of focus groups with our tenant members, along with an online survey, and chatted with staff. We **took the feedback from our members and worked with the Executive Leadership Team and Board to map out our new plan – and we called it ‘Gyda’n Gilydd’**

**Everything that we do will impact positively on future generations.**

We are building on some of the strengths of Yfory.



We will:

- continue to provide **advice and assistance to people;**
- ensure that our **homes are affordable**
- and we will **pay a fair wage.**



We will also:

- demonstrate **value for money**
- and **strengthen the local economy.**



But we also have some new goals and aspirations, including:

- an **aim never to evict people into homelessness;**
- the **development of new affordable and energy efficient homes;**
- the **development of more opportunities for training, education and employment** and
- we will **explore a new funding model for our mutual.**

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**Thank you to those members that took the time to give us feedback – you have influenced our path for the years ahead.** You will soon be able to find Gyda'n Gilydd on our website, please keep a look out – [www.mvhomes.org.uk](http://www.mvhomes.org.uk)

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thank  
you

# Our Key Activities

## GOVERNANCE REVIEW

**2019 seemed the right time for us to step back and look at how we are operating and performing.** After three years as a mutual we have achieved a strong sense of 'ownership' by everyone involved, and we have received the highest rating by Welsh Government. **There have been a number of changes over the past year or so** - we have a new Chief Executive, we need a new plan for our mutual and lots of external factors have been changing too.

We commissioned an **independent organisation (Central Consultancy) to undertake a review.** They met with members, Democratic Body and Board, and watched us operate in action! The review was a good experience with lots of positive results, coupled with some advice for improvements. **2020/21 will see us put the improvements into practice so we can strengthen our position for the benefit of our members, tenants and communities.**

## INTERNAL AUDIT

We set the plan for 2019/20, making sure that all of the key risks were being covered, and had sight of the key findings. This helps to provide assurance that our mutual is operating as it should be.

We also have Natalie, Nigel and Steve on Audit Committee, who alongside representatives from the Board, are responsible for reviewing and monitoring audits and risks to our mutual.



### What's an internal audit?

They are reviews undertaken by an independent company and help to protect our mutual as they check that we are complying with the law and good practice, operating in line with our policies and providing good services.



# Our Key Activities

## STRATEGY & POLICY

In 2019 we helped to develop and influence a new **Homes and Places Strategy**.

We were keen to ensure that we would continue to build on the excellent level of services provided currently, including repairs and maintenance, major refurbishments and safety and security, and that we further develop our communications. Energy efficiency and the development of new homes that people want and need were also top of the list for members – the full strategy can be found on our website – [www.mvhomes.org.uk](http://www.mvhomes.org.uk)

We have also set up a **Policy Committee** – ensuring that representatives have influence and a say when setting and reviewing policies.

We helped shape and influence a **Communications Strategy** during the year – the key aim being to ensure that we are engaging effectively with our members, employees, tenants, our communities and other stakeholders. Other aims are to demonstrate the successes of our mutual and to ensure people understand who we are and what we do – we agreed that these aims will be achieved by being as open and transparent as possible.

## EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

In **May 2019**, MVH achieved **Tai Pawb's QED Award (Quality in Equality and Diversity)**. This demonstrates our commitment to tackling inequality. We have **undertaken awareness training**, and have reviewed the diversity of our body. **Julie, Steve Nicky and Nigel sit on the MVH Equality and Diversity Group**, and they regularly inform us of their work and the progress being made across the organisation.

We have also been monitoring the diversity of our membership to identify any areas of under-representation. We want to ensure that our membership is representative of the communities that we serve, and is as diverse as possible. Over the course of the coming year, we will be striving to attract and recruit members, and will be linking in with community groups, forums and charities to help us achieve this. We want to ensure that our mutual is welcoming and inclusive for everyone.



# Our Key Activities

## VALUE FOR MONEY

As your member representatives, we act on your behalf to make sure that we are achieving value for money in everything that we do. Achieving good value for money is really important to us – a good price and a good quality service / product, but we also look at how efficient and effective we are.

Last Summer our membership officers came out to our communities to hold a series of focus groups, and the key themes that kept coming out were:



Set an affordable living rent



Maintain homes to a high standard



Source good quality products and services locally.

We have recently set a new Value for Money Strategy based on these principles, and we will monitoring activities closely over the coming year. To find out how we've done this year, check out our [Value for Money Statement](#).

## RENT SETTING

In January 2020 we received the news that Welsh Government had set a 5 Year Rent Policy and we considered the potential impacts of this on our Living Rent Policy (that rents are fair, affordable and easy to understand).

We decided to apply the same principles as 2018/19 - the living rent was recalculated using new income data, and we decided on a slight increase in rent on family properties, with a slight decrease on rent for single person accommodation.

Representatives felt this was in line with our values and would have a positive impact on our target of zero evictions. It is also in line with Welsh Government policy. We set the calculations out and explained how rents are set in a leaflet to tenants.



# Our Key Activities

## BUDGET SETTING

Every year we participate in 'Star Chamber' – an inclusive budget setting session where we come together with Board, Executive Leadership Team and budget holders within the organisation. We have the opportunity to review and scrutinise budgets to ensure that money is being budgeted in line with our Value for Money principles.

Setting the budget is no easy task, but by working together we achieved **£433,481 of savings**, whilst still budgeting to maintain the services we currently provided.



## BRIGHTER FUTURES

During the past year we have launched our 'Brighter Futures' programme. It's been founded on feedback and ideas from you, our members, as to how Merthyr Valleys Homes could support people in our communities with opportunities to:

- Gain new qualifications
- Develop new skills
- Improve knowledge
- Do something they enjoy

Over the past year we have helped young people with their career plans - including offering a work placement programme where we supported 5 young people. We've also assisted people to get back into the workplace by offering support and advice and work placements. It's been very rewarding to see people securing apprenticeships and jobs.



We are linking with providers like 'Adult Learning Wales' to provide dozens of free training courses, and we've offered a few practical training sessions from 'trades masterclasses' in Cyfarthfa High School to painting and decorating. We've linked in with schools and community groups to offer digital skills courses, along with practical skills like family cooking sessions and learning sign language. We really do have something for everyone, and we'd love to hear your feedback and ideas.



During lockdown we took Brighter Futures online and will be re-designing our offering over the next few months with some exciting new projects. We are really proud of what has been achieved so far and are excited for a brighter future for us all.

# Our Key Activities

## MEMBERS' CHARITY

**Our Members' Charity of the Year in 2019/20 was Cancer Aid Merthyr Tydfil.**

We have worked in partnership with this charity during the year, and held various fundraising events, from holding lunchtime quizzes, to sweepstakes, and cupcake sales! We are pleased that lots of members got involved during the year!

The money raised by charitable events was topped up by Merthyr Valleys Homes to an amazing £10,000. **An incredible effort went into achieving this amount – well done to all involved!**

WE'VE RAISED

**£10,000**

to our Members' Charity of the Year



*together we're*  
**STRONGER**

“

We'd like to thank MVH and it's members for this fantastic donation, it will be a massive help and will be used to continue our valuable complimentary therapies.

This donation could not have come at a better time as many income streams have gone as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak.

Once again, a big thank you to you all for your support

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Tracey, Cancer Aid Merthyr Tydfil

We have decided to **postpone** our 'Members Charity of the Year' for 2020/21 due to COVID-19. In its place we will be supporting lots of local community organisations and charities throughout the year

# Progress against the Membership Strategy

## AIM #1




To grow and maintain membership numbers to ensure that Merthyr Valleys Homes is a truly member owned organisation and to achieve a 10% annual growth target year on year for the first three years. To ensure that membership is representative of the communities the organisation serves

Objective	Comments	Have we complied?
To meet the annual target of a 10% increase in membership year on year, for 3 years	This is the target for the first three years of the strategy. We rolled the strategy on for a further year, so this is the fourth year of meeting this target. We haven't quite met the target of 10% - this year's increase is 8.3%	
To take steps to ensure the membership reflects the diversity of the communities that Merthyr Valleys Homes serves	Generally our membership reflects our tenant base, but we are striving towards having a more diverse membership to ensure that no groups are under-represented. We have more work to do against this objective	
To develop a simple and accessible process for becoming a member	Our process is simple and straightforward – members can sign up in various ways (online and hard copy application forms are available) and our Membership Officers are happy to support.	
To maintain an accurate membership database which meets statutory requirements and aids membership development	We keep a Membership Register in line with our statutory obligations. During 2019/20 we have linked our Membership Database to our CRM system and aligning our systems has resulted in better management.	






## AIM #2

To communicate effectively with members, potential members and other stakeholders

Objective	Comments	Have we complied?
<b>To promote membership and the organisation's work</b>	We promote our mutual and its membership locally with tenants, employees, our communities and other stakeholders, and nationally and internationally at meetings, conferences and seminars. We also promote digitally via website and social media platforms.	
<b>To identify further opportunities for two-way communication between members and the organisation</b>	We identify members' preferred communication method, and communicate in this way. We have made good use of social media, particularly through our open Facebook page, to encourage two-way open conversations. We have held focus groups across the Borough, and during the current pandemic, we will seek to move these to an online platform.	
<b>To ensure communications encourage engagement with members</b>	All members receive a welcome information pack on sign up. We keep members informed of events, meetings, vacancies, decisions, consultations and elections via a range of methods including direct targeting, members newsletter (Membership Matters) our intranet (for employees), website and social media channels. Staff are encouraging tenants to become members through routine day to day engagement.	



## AIM #3

To engage with members and encourage involvement to ensure that members have an opportunity to influence decisions

Objective	Comments	Have we complied?
To identify a range of opportunities for members to get involved and have a say	This year members have been able to have a say in things like helping us set our business plan (Gyda'n Gilydd), value for money, voting in elections and choosing our members' charity of the year. We want to explore more ways in which to engage with our wider membership, and will be looking at this in the coming year	
To ensure the views of members are understood and acknowledged	This year we have used members' feedback to inform some key decisions, like setting the path for future years in Gyda'n Gilydd. But we want to do more	
To encourage more members to stand for election to the Democratic Body	We had another active and contested campaign for both tenant and employee elections in 2019. Due to COVID-19 the Democratic Body decided (on behalf of members) that we wouldn't have elections in 2020. We plan to move forward with elections from 2021 onwards and will be actively seeking potential representatives.	

## AIM #4

To provide more opportunities for members to benefit

Objective	Comments	Have we complied?
To identify what benefits/incentives/discounts members want	We actively encourage members to put forward ideas to determine what they could benefit from. Equally, we target local businesses to seek their interest in joining our scheme. We have had a number of businesses join our scheme in 2019/20.	
To develop partnership working with a range of businesses across the borough	We have reviewed and increased the number of businesses that participate in our membership benefits scheme in 2019/20. In 2020/21 we will be reviewing the benefits for local businesses too.	
To review the use of the benefits scheme	We haven't completed a review in 2019/20 – this is rolling on to 2020/21 in light of COVID-19	