

European housing leaders gathered in Birmingham for annual conference



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Housing organisation leaders from across Europe gathered in Birmingham as the UK hosted its first Eurhonet General Assembly.

Eurhonet is a network of approximately 40 public and social housing companies including those from France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Austria and the UK.

The two day conference took place last week (Oct 25 & 26). Guests were welcomed to Birmingham by Councillor Ian Ward, leader of Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Mayor Andy Street.

Delegates discussed different topics around housing, giving their experience of this within their own country and hearing examples from UK, including:

- The opportunities and barriers to offsite manufacturing
- How design can play its part in making homes for the future
- How to ensure homes are sustainable and low cost for customers
- What can be done with existing homes to make them more sustainable

Eurhonet members were also given the opportunity to visit Accord Housing Association's new LoCaL Homes factory in Walsall, which was officially opened on October 25, the same day as the Eurhonet visit.

LoCaL Homes is Accord Housing Association's offsite manufacturing facility, which utilises a panelised system to build low carbon, quality timber frame homes.

The group also visited Trident Group's Cherish House and Washington Court, which are both based in Birmingham.

Cheshire House is a unique scheme that caters for people within the Chinese community over the age of 50.

Established in 1997, it offers sheltered housing to Chinese elders in the UK.

Washington Court is a direct access hostel that provides 101 beds to both men and women. The support offered at the hostel addresses the underlying issues that have contributed to an individual's homelessness, including but not limited to; mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, financial problems and criminal activity.

This was the first time the annual Eurhonet event has been hosted in the UK, and it was organised by West Midlands based Matrix Housing Partnership. Matrix Housing Partnership is a not-for-profit cooperative of housing associations responding to the need for more affordable housing in the UK.

Chris Handy, Chief Executive of Accord and Chair of the Matrix Strategy Group commented: "It was great to welcome so many Eurhonet members to Birmingham for its annual general assembly, which was held in the UK for the first time.

"The conference was an excellent opportunity for us to share information and best practice and discuss the latest trends and issues affecting the housing industry across Europe. The whole conference was a great success and I hope to welcome members back to the UK soon."

The partnership is led by Accord Housing Association and encompasses a group of leading housing providers including Trident Social Investment Group, Rooftop Housing Group, Trent and Dove, Pioneer Group and WATMOS Community Homes. The partners are also working closely with Sandwell Council and a number of other housing providers.
