



Kevin Rodgers

Group Chief Executive of WM Housing Group



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WM Housing Group is a large housing association with around 30,000 properties in the Midlands. It includes Whitefriars in Coventry, Optima Family in Birmingham and West Mercia Homes in Hereford and Worcester.

School life

Kevin grew up in the Hillfields area of Coventry and started at Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School in 1980 in Columba House where he spent five years working towards his O-Levels. He then went on to do his A-Levels at the school's sixth form.

Kevin said: "Maths was my preferred subject which stood me in good stead for my later career. I was also very sporty and at that time Cardinal Wiseman was a good school for sports and had a very good basketball team in my era. I also swam and played football for the school.

"One of my favourite teachers was Mr Giles who was an English teacher. Certainly with my O-Levels and choice of A-Levels, he really drove us and was a brilliant teacher but he actually went beyond teaching.

"He knew that especially for boys that were 15 and 16-years-old there was an awful lot of distractions, and it was largely through him making sure that we were motivated that a lot of us did really well in our O-Levels and A-Levels."

Kevin attended Cardinal Wiseman at a time when it had separate boys' and girls' schools. He had two siblings at the school including his brother who was in the year below him as well as a younger sister who attended the girls' school and was three years below.

Kevin has hundreds of fond memories of Cardinal Wiseman and that the test of any school is what happens later in life.

He added: "I left Cardinal Wiseman 29 years ago and my closest friends are still the lads I was at school with.

We came away from Wiseman and we were proud to have gone there and we were proud of the friendships we made and they've stood a lot longer than all of the other people I've come across since.

"When I was doing my A-Levels it was a time when the government was changing the rules on how they were going to fund students at university and my family wasn't particularly wealthy, so when it came to doing A-Levels I seriously considered taking other routes rather than go to university. It was actually a number of teachers that talked me into going to university and doing a degree and I never regretted it.

"I went to Birmingham to do Economics - at 18 I didn't know what I wanted to be or what I wanted to do, I just knew that getting a degree behind me would set me up for later life."

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Career

After completing his degree in 1990, Kevin got a job with the Audit Commission and moved to Lincoln on a training programme to become a qualified accountant.

A self-confessed home bird and with all of his friends in and around Coventry, Kevin then got a job with accountancy firm Coopers Lybrand, now PricewaterhouseCoopers, in Birmingham where he worked for six years as an Audit Manager and then a consultant on housing projects.

He said: "I was working on a lot of projects in Manchester and Liverpool on council estates and having grown up on one in Coventry there was a real connection with the work and I really enjoyed it."

Kevin then joined Whitefriars in Coventry as Assistant Finance Director in 2002 shortly after it had taken over the management and maintenance of all of Coventry's council houses. A number of jobs then came up over the years which saw Kevin rise further through the ranks.

He became group Finance Director of Whitefriars in 2004 and when

Whitefriars formed WM Housing Group with another housing association in 2009, he became group Finance Director of the new group and was then appointed Chief Executive in 2015.

Kevin added: "My job today is about ensuring our tenants can pay their rent on our 30,000 properties, and helping my team to deliver excellent services. For us, that's ensuring our properties are well maintained and that we are dealing with any issues in and around the estates.

"Also, because we are a social housing organisation we typically house people that can't buy or rent in the private market so we are trying to work with local councils in Coventry, Birmingham, Hereford, Solihull and Worcester to make sure there's affordable housing for everyone in their area.

"This means we are always looking for opportunities to build new homes as well as looking at what kind of services we need to provide to help people who are struggling, such as support services and financial advice.

"Looking to the future, I've never really had a five or 10 year plan for my own career. I love the job I've got now

and I love the fact it's so relevant to the region that I grew up in. I'd like to continue doing this job for as long as I'm successful at it."

Advice to current pupils

Kevin said that he would advise any pupil not to put any limits on their own ambitions.

He said: "The reality of being at any school is that as you're growing up it becomes harder and harder to focus on your school work when you've got other distractions. For me it was always football, if it wasn't playing football it was watching football. That was far more interesting to me than actually getting my head down and studying.

"I was lucky that I had a mum who was very keen on us getting on academically and insisted that we did the work. I was also incredibly fortunate that I had teachers at the school that knew what the risks were of us not fulfilling our potential and really nagged us and encouraged us to get our heads down and work. I think it's paid off for all of us in later life because without those qualifications you're not off to the best start."



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