

# Most people-focused *CEO of the year*

**Winner**

## *Helen McHale*, CEO, Stockport Homes Group

When employees were asked how they felt about working at Stockport Homes Group last year, phrases that came up were: “This organisation is run on strong values”; “I’m inspired by the person leading this organisation”; and “giving something back”. The team believe this has a lot to do with the approach of its CEO Helen McHale.

It is on an intimate and local level that McHale has been able to achieve this; she has shown herself to be a visible, approachable leader who cares deeply about the wellbeing of her people.

McHale has initiated flexible and modern working practices that demonstrate her acknowledgement that everyone is an individual, with different responsibilities in their private as well as working lives.

This includes a birthday scheme, in which everyone gets a personal birthday card and cake from McHale on their birthday. This CEO also sits in the communal lunch area and eats with staff. Employees say McHale puts engagement at the forefront of everything, and is solution-focused. She also writes a weekly blog, which is published on the organisation’s intranet and encourages comments and questions to be posted openly.

When many housing organisations responded to recent government cuts by announcing they would have to make redundancies, McHale reacted in a different way – “We will not be making redundancies to our people, instead we will utilise their talent and passion, to grow our way out of austerity, to grow the business to generate more income streams, and to all work together as one team to transform lives,” McHale said in a statement to the workforce. This is exactly what the team did; they are now Stockport Homes Group, with three subsidiary companies, 650 staff and experiencing rapid growth.



McHale ensures she attends all team meetings annually to stay up to date on all operational issues and meet staff in an informal setting. She also personally delivers treats and rewards to celebrate achievements, and takes the opportunity to

meet with team members during the annual staff awards process, taking the time to listen, feed back and share the information she hears with the wider team. The highlight for all is hearing her speak about the future of the organisation and expressing her thanks to employees at the company’s annual staff conference.

In this vain, McHale strives to support people to do their best in the workplace, providing both a flexible culture and flexible working practices, but also tackling under-performance.

Earlier this year, McHale lost her 21-year-old son in tragic circumstances. But she has taken little time off work, preferring the structure and focus that work and the environment she has built there provides to help her through her grieving process.

McHale wanted to talk to staff and be open about her experience. This was so that, in her words, “they wouldn’t feel uncomfortable” around her. McHale received numerous cards from staff thanking her for sharing life’s difficult experiences, which allowed them to feel they too could open up when struggling.

This is McHale all over, employees say, who highlight that the workplace she has created has a family-like, safe feel. She has made the organisation somewhere people can seek solace, they report.

For our judges, Helen McHale is “a real inspiration”, who has shown “exceptional values and bravery” under even the most difficult circumstances. We know her team agree, and there is no doubt that she is someone who truly deserves and has earned the title of Most people-focused CEO of the year.

### Shortlisted

**Matthew Austin, Lindt and Sprüngli**

**Kate Bendall and Louise Laver, Connect Catering**

**Fyona Dawber, Synergy Vision**

**Richard Flint, Sky Betting & Gaming**

**Scott Gardner, Cisco**

**Paul Harris, Vibe Teaching**

**Rob Jupp, Brightstar Financial**

**Tim Morfin, Transforming Lives for Good**

**David Stevens, Admiral Group**

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