

Annual Report

2006/7

Delivering more to our customers,
our partners and our colleagues.



Contents

Welcome	3	Support	18
Reach	4	Develop	20
Achieve	8	Grow	22
Deliver	12		
Evolve	15		



Welcome to our Annual Report for 2006/7 – a year of exciting developments for the Aspire Housing team

It's been a busy year for everyone at Aspire Housing. A year in which we have not only achieved tremendous results, but laid the foundations for even better performance in the future.

Central to that future is our new Corporate Strategy. As you'll see on page 19, the targets we have set ourselves are definitely ambitious – but with the determination and talent of our people, we're sure that we can meet them.

This year saw us gain Investors in People accreditation; something that we're all particularly proud of. Our team put a lot of hard work into this, but it has been more than worth the effort. We now have the processes in place to deliver outstanding learning and development opportunities to our colleagues. Put simply, we want to give each individual the tools they need to reach their potential as they help us reach ours.



We were also pleased to welcome a new executive team on board during the year. Sinéad, John, Caroline and Will all bring a powerful commitment to our values, and to ensuring that the Aspire Housing name is synonymous with quality homes and strong communities.

Customer involvement has again been a key focus, building on the pioneering work of previous years. Everyone at Aspire Housing is committed to the belief that our customers should play a major role in shaping the services that they receive.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to every one of our team, customers and partners for the massive contribution to this highly successful year. Of course, we can only give a brief overview of our highlights in this report, but if you would like any more information about Aspire Housing and how we perform please do not hesitate to get in touch.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jane Price'.

Jane Price
CHAIR

Reach



Our stock at 31st March 2007

4586	houses
751	bungalows
2539	flats
580	sheltered bungalows
190	sheltered flats
<hr/>	
8646	

32	bedsits
2401	1 bed
2871	2 bed
2762	3 bed
190	4 or more bed

We also own or manage:

1990	lock up garages
137	shops/commercial units
229	leasehold flats



All about Aspire Housing

Aspire Housing provides over twelve thousand customers with quality affordable homes across North Staffordshire and South Cheshire. We offer a diverse range of properties and services, tailored to meet individual needs - our aim is to provide our customers with real lifestyle choices and maximum flexibility.

Aspire Housing passionately believes in improving the environment in which people live. We use our expertise in large-scale regeneration programmes to forge strong working relationships with local authorities, effecting positive change and delivering improved communities.

Our customers and partners will choose Aspire Housing because of our reputation for providing innovative and excellent services that meet their aspirations.

To achieve this we are guided by a set of key **values**. These underpin every aspect of our work, and steer our approach to building partnerships with our customers, stakeholders and colleagues.

Appreciating our customers: we value our customers, because our success depends on listening to them and involving them in shaping our services.

Skilled staff: our employees and members are Aspire Housing people, and we recognise that committed, motivated and highly skilled people are essential to our success.

Partnerships: we will enhance our services by working with partners.

Integrity: we will manage our business in an honest, open and accountable way.

Respect: we will treat everyone with respect and fairness and we will value and celebrate diversity.

Excellence: we strive for excellence and provide value for money in everything we do.

Our Executive Team

During 2006/7 we were pleased to welcome a new executive team on board.



Sinéad Butters - Chief Executive

Joining Aspire Housing in 2000, Sinead's first role was to lead the Business Development team to drive the growth of the company. In 2006 she moved to the post of Director of Operations, before becoming Chief Executive in October 2006. Sinead's passion is people. Her ambition is to ensure that each customer enjoys an exceptional service, while every colleague is inspired to achieve outstanding results within a collaborative working environment.



John Lindsay - Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Resources

John joined Aspire Housing in 2000, having previously worked as Director of Finance for Birmingham based fch Housing and Care. With a wide-ranging remit that includes finance, information systems, organisational development and business assurance, as well as acting as Company Secretary, John sees his key challenge to be the delivery of central services to support operational excellence and new business. He also ensures that Aspire Housing's corporate strategy is underpinned by robust financial plans and controls.



Caroline Simpson - Director of Business Development

Before joining Aspire in December 2006, Caroline was Head of Policy and Partnerships at the Northwest Regional Development Agency. In this role she was responsible for a £140 million annual regeneration programme and urban policy. Here at Aspire Housing, she focuses on generating new business, diversifying our commercial activity and raising the profile of Aspire Housing through promotion of our successes.



Will Nixon - Director of Operations

With responsibility for housing and maintenance operations, Will's role is to ensure that we provide quality housing management services and that our properties are maintained and improved to a high standard. He joined Aspire Housing in January 2007, having led the successful recovery of the Urban Living (Birmingham and Sandwell) Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder. Looking ahead, Will sees his key challenges as being to ensure that all of Aspire Housing's services deliver excellence to customers.

Our Board Members

The Board is made up of:

Five tenant Non Executive Directors (currently elected through our Tenants' Panel and who serve for a minimum of three years).

Joan Winfield	17.06.03	Stephen Meakin	09.12.03
Anthea Edwards (nee Lockley)	23.05.06	Paul Davies	23.05.06
William Eaton	11.10.05		

Five independent Non Executive Directors who bring experience from housing organisations, other professions and businesses to the Board. Vacancies are openly advertised. Independent members serve for a minimum of three years.

Jane Price (Chair)	11.03.99	James Hickey	13.07.00
Jim Washington (Vice Chair)	11.03.99	Philip Sunderland	22.05.01
Ron Dougan	13.03.07		

Five Non Executive Directors nominated by Newcastle Borough Council each year.

Marion Reddish	08.08.06	Ann Heames	08.08.06
Andrew Cooley	08.08.06	Eileen Braithwaite	08.08.06
John Cooper	08.08.06		

Co-opted members.

John Eccleston	02.03.04
Mohammed Iqbal	13.03.07

(Dates shown are the dates that members joined the Board)

The Board is assisted by a number of committees that generally consider more detailed information to monitor Aspire Housing's performance.



(L-R) Tenant members, William Eaton, Joan Winfield, Board support officer Ben Morris with Stephen Meakin MBE.

Achieve

Some highlights of our year

Here are a few of our key achievements during 2006/7. Every one of these is a tribute to our team, whose commitment and belief have made this such a great year for Aspire Housing. Thank you!

Our commitment to our people was recognised through achieving Investors in People (IIP) accreditation. We received excellent feedback which particularly recognised our strong learning ethos and our commitment to leadership.

Our performance across **all** areas has continued to rise:

- % of rent collected increased to 99.4%
- Income lost from properties left empty fell by over 20%
- % of routine repairs completed on time rose from 92.1% to over 95%
- % of urgent repairs completed on time rose from 91.2% to over 95%
- Emergency repairs completed reached 99% last year – a rise of over 4% from 2005/6.



During 2006/7 we completed 30,000 responsive repairs, hitting all of our targets and leaving our customers delighted. Overall satisfaction with the service averaged 96% throughout the year. Despite achieving such strong repair time results, our actual repair costs have fallen. The total efficiency gain for the repairs service was £367,000.

We delivered major service improvements within our maintenance department including the introduction of a new appointments system, which provides two hour time slots for our customers. Customer satisfaction with the way we make arrangements for repairs access has increased to a staggering 99.3%.

We also invested in a new fleet of over 90 vehicles, which are strongly branded and easily recognised as they travel between our properties. We also increased the size of our maintenance depot in Brick Kiln Lane – a further demonstration of our commitment to this area of the business.

Aspire Housing's average rent remained the lowest in the country compared to all Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). We have demonstrated the ability to deliver service improvements across the board while still providing excellent value for money for our customers.

We have continued our drive towards ensuring 100% of our properties achieve Decent Homes Standard by 2010 by reducing our level of failing homes from 12.8% to 8.9%.

Our CareCALL service for elderly residents has continued to grow and we are building a strong reputation for delivering excellent services which use the latest technologies. During the year we received 90,801 calls and our team's performance exceeded all targets set.

Aspire Housing continued to work closely with our customers to improve our services. During 2006/7 we established a customer Product Focus Group, allowing us to consult with customers across a wide range of areas including product specifications and maintenance programmes.

One of the significant developments of 2006/7 was the appointment of a new Chief Executive, Sinead Butters, and a newly formed Executive Team. Sinead and the team immediately embraced the core values of the business and developed an ambitious Corporate Strategy which demonstrates the new vision of Aspire Housing: to *'Deliver excellent services, supporting sustainable communities, valued by all.'*

This vision is backed up by a new Corporate Strategy and clear strategic aims for the period 2007-10.

Our performance

	Target	Achieved
Rent collected as a % of Net Rental Income	99%	99.4%
Rent arrears of current residential tenants	6.5%	6.5%
Average re-let time (days)	24	18.1
Rent loss due to void dwellings	0.9%	0.8%
Dwellings failing Decent Homes Standard	10%	8.9%



Our financial performance

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

For the year ended 31 March 2007

	2007 £'000	2006 £'000
Turnover	23,335	22,694
Operating costs	(22,748)	(22,236)
Operating surplus	587	458
Surplus on sale of fixed assets - housing properties	233	742
Interest receivable and other income	26	49
Interest payable and similar charges	(4,519)	(4,294)
Other finance income	241	57
Deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	(3,432)	(2,988)
Tax on ordinary activities	-	-
Deficit for the financial year	(3,432)	(2,988)

The financial statements were approved by the Board at a meeting held on 10 July 2007.

A full set of accounts can be obtained on request

BALANCE SHEET

As at 31 March 2007

	2007 £'000	2006 £'000
Tangible fixed assets		
Housing properties	61,570	57,383
Social Housing Grant	(3,321)	(2,418)
Other Grants	(1,624)	(631)
	<u>56,625</u>	<u>54,334</u>
Other tangible fixed assets	<u>7,635</u>	<u>7,856</u>
	<u>64,260</u>	<u>62,190</u>
Current assets		
Stocks	306	273
Debtors	2,640	2,423
Cash at bank and in hand	1,024	1,619
	<u>3,970</u>	<u>4,315</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	<u>(7,431)</u>	<u>(7,765)</u>
Net current liabilities	<u>(3,461)</u>	<u>(3,450)</u>
Total assets less current liabilities	<u>60,799</u>	<u>58,740</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year	77,268	71,767
Net pension liability	2,973	4,053
	<u>80,241</u>	<u>75,820</u>
Capital and reserves		
Revenue reserve	<u>(19,442)</u>	<u>(17,080)</u>
Company's funds	<u>(19,442)</u>	<u>(17,080)</u>
	<u>60,799</u>	<u>58,740</u>

Deliver

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

Housing Register

We administer the housing register on behalf of Newcastle Borough Council. The register includes households applying to be housed for the first time and those who wish to move from one home to another.



The Housing Register at 31.03.07

Waiting list	2493
Transfer	620
Total	3113

The Housing Register at 31.03.06

1305
427
1732

Demand by property type

1 bed	49.3%	53.0
2 bed	32.7%	32.3
3 bed	13.6%	} 14.6
4 bed	4.3%	

On 31st March 2007, 3.08% of applicants were from BME households, compared with 2.54% at 31st March 2006.



Home improvements completed during 2006/7

During the year we invested £10.6 million improving the quality of lives of our customers by enhancing their homes and environment. The work included:

599 homes had new central heating systems installed

747 homes had kitchen refurbishments

453 homes had bathroom refurbishments

412 homes had electrical upgrades and rewires

26 disabled bathrooms

33 walk-in showers

We also provided:

- Low surface temperature radiators
- Specially adapted thermostats for customers with learning disabilities
- Braille thermostat controls
- Specially adapted smoke alarms for customers with hearing difficulties
- Environmental improvements including fencing, paving and security lighting

Customer satisfaction – our improvements survey

Every customer who has improvement works carried out in their home is asked to complete a satisfaction survey. During 2006/7, overall satisfaction levels for each type of improvement were:

	2006/7	2005/06
Bathrooms	94%	85%
Kitchens	98%	93%
Security doors	95%	93%
Outhouse roofs	84%	82%
Heating installation	94%	95%
Communal entrance doors	100%	80%
Disabled adaptations	100%	100%
Electrical rewires	96%	91%
Loft insulation	100%	92%
Electrical periodic testing	95%	95%
Combination boiler renewal	98%	96%
Re-roofing	90%	N/A
Re-pointing	87%	N/A
Footpath renewal	93%	N/A
Overall satisfaction with improvements (all types):	94.6%	91.5%

New tenants

During 2006/7 there were 803 new lettings (compared with 802 in 2005/6).

Letting property type

1 Bedroom	53%
2 Bedroom	31%
3+ Bedroom	16%

Household composition

Single over 60	17.1%
Single under 60	32.8%
Couple over 60	6.28%
Couple under 60	3.9%
Families	31.1%
Other	8.75%

Lettings to BME* households

2006/7	3.74%
2005/6	3.12%

**We regard BME as anyone who does not classify themselves as belonging to the white British group.*

Just under **30%** of new tenants responded to our satisfaction survey and:

- **93%** were satisfied with the way their application was dealt with (an increase of 6.5% on the previous year).
- **95.5%** were satisfied with the amount of information they received during the viewing process (an increase of 8.5% on the previous year).
- **90%** felt that they receive good value for money from Aspire Housing as their landlord (an increase of nearly 10% on the previous year).



Evolve

Development and Regeneration

2006/7 proved to be a year of outstanding success for our development and regeneration teams. Some of the highlights include:

Development

We continued to make significant progress on developing the first Extra Care project in Newcastle. This fantastic new development will provide 60 apartments for elderly people within a village complex and will have an extensive range of leisure and care facilities on site. Twenty of these apartments will be offered on a shared ownership basis, the first such scheme for Aspire Housing. The project will be completed by January 2009 and will be the first new build project for Lower Milehouse as part of the Knutton and Cross Heath Masterplan proposals. During 2006/7 we appointed Prima 200 to develop our scheme which will adjoin a new health centre funded through the Primary Care Trust. The scheme will be on site later in 2007.



In March 2007 we acquired our first 25 properties in Crewe and Alsager. We aim to build on this success and develop strong links in the local area in the future.

Our new build programme continues to go from strength to strength as evidenced by our first development in Blurton, Stoke on Trent. Working closely with Stoke on Trent City Council we are developing 17 new bungalows on Denham Square. During 2006/7 we started the demolition and clearance of the site with the new units expected to be completed by Spring 2008.

Other schemes added to the pipeline during 2006/7 include a development of 10 new properties in Halmerend and the redevelopment of Beasley Place, a site owned by Aspire Housing which could feature up to 42 new units.

We continued to drive forward the delivery of the Masterplan for Knutton and Cross Heath. Following a rigorous selection process, Bellway Homes was appointed as the lead developer for this project.

We also acquired a further 12 properties as part of an ambitious acquisition programme funded by Renew North Staffordshire.

Our relationship with strategic partners has continued to strengthen with our increasing track record in delivery and our growing expertise in development and regeneration. We have worked closely with our local authority partners in Newcastle under Lyme and Stoke on Trent to develop affordable housing solutions and meet the needs of our communities.

We remain a prominent member of the Sanctuary Development Consortium and, through this partnership, secure support and recognition from the Housing Corporation.

The new Corporate Strategy puts growth and new development as a key aim as we move forward. The development programme set a new target during 2006/7 to develop or acquire 400 new units by the end of 2010.



Regeneration

Our role in leading the regeneration of Knutton and Cross Heath remained a priority for us during 2006/7. The two year delivery plan to secure RENEW's investment for Knutton and Cross Heath in 2006-8 was agreed by RENEW North Staffordshire, Aspire Housing and Newcastle Borough Council.

The draft Masterplan for Knutton and Cross Heath was revised following an economic appraisal. The revised plan, which proposed 178 fewer demolitions, was presented to residents from Knutton and Cross Heath at an Open Day in September 2006. The Community Steering Group, made up entirely of local residents, continues to influence the plans and had a 25% weighting in the final decision to appoint Bellway Homes as the lead developer for the area.

Working with partners, we developed a relocation support package for households affected by clearance on the Lower Milehouse estate. The relocation of households from the estate began in February 2007 and will continue for the next three years.

A programme of 29 separate environmental improvement projects was completed, using £500k of funding from RENEW North Staffordshire and Aspire Housing. Customer satisfaction surveys revealed that 87% of people felt that the projects had a positive impact on their area.

We were appointed as the lead RSL to work with Stoke on Trent City Council in Blurton, an area to the south of the City Centre. We worked closely with the local community to develop a two-year investment strategy and delivery plan for the area which was agreed by the Council and Renew North Staffordshire.

During 2006/7 we delivered one of the first schemes identified in the plan and successfully transformed the district centre in Newstead through a series of comprehensive environmental and shop front improvements. In total, Aspire secured over £350k of investment from Stoke on Trent City Council and Advantage West Midlands, to help fund the project.



Support



Investing in people

People – they're at the heart of everything we do as an organisation. The talent and belief of our team drives us. This is why we're totally focused in supporting every one of our colleagues to achieve their potential.

Gaining our Investor in People (IIP) award was an important step towards this goal. Following a rigorous assessment process, Aspire Housing excelled in a number of key areas including leadership, team working, communications and recruitment. What's more, we achieved the standard with flying colours for our strong commitment to learning development and best practice.

Ele Morrissey, Aspire Housing's Head of Organisational Development, describes some of the initiatives that contributed to the award: "We have invested in a number of programmes aimed at developing,

retaining and attracting the very best people in order to improve the service we deliver to our customers".

"We now have a dedicated internal learning and development team, fully equipped learning centres at both of our sites and have introduced trade union learning. Overall, we've established a culture that both embraces and values learning and development".

The assessor's report detailed the company's open and honest communications, inspirational role models and a 'praise culture' in which people feel valued and able to contribute to business decisions.

Sinéad Butters, Chief Executive, added: "The accreditation marks the first step in a new era for Aspire Housing. One in which our colleagues feel part of something worth being part of, where our customers experience excellent customer service and our partners recognise and share our success."

"Clearly a very good organisation with a participative style which helps to engender very obvious employee enthusiasm."

West Midlands Quality Centre Panel.

Aspire Housing's people at a glance

Part time	31
Full time	333
Male	215
Female	149
Disabled	3.57%

Ethnicity:

White British	97%
White Other	1.1%
Black Asian	0.27%
Black/Black British (Caribbean)	0.55%

White & Black Caribbean	0.27%
Chinese	0.27%
Asian/Asian British: Indian	0.27%
Other Ethnic group	0.27%
Not known	0%



Develop

Our new corporate strategy

It's time to look ahead. To set our sights on 2010 and establish a clear vision to work towards. Our goals are certainly ambitious, but we make no apologies for that. Only by aiming high can we truly deliver innovation and excellence in everything we do.

Our journey begins and ends with people: our customers who shape our services and our colleagues and partners who deliver them. So the foundation upon which we will build our future is the support we give to each of those people, investing in them at every level and empowering them to achieve great things.

Our broad strategic aims are underpinned by clear objectives within three core areas. Together these create a thread that brings the organisation together.

Delivering excellent services

Our services will equal or exceed the expectations of our customers. Our aspiration is to be recognised as one of the top housing service providers in the country.

- We will achieve a validated 2 star status in 2007/8.
- We will have secured Investors in Excellence in 2008/9.
- We will continuously improve our Key Performance Indicators, leading to 70% in the top 25% in the country by 2010.
- We will achieve demonstrable year-on-year improvement in customer satisfaction.

Growing the business

We will grow our business through the development of new affordable housing, providing shared ownership and diversifying our commercial activity. We will use our existing asset base to grow and recycle surpluses into our communities.

- We will deliver 400 affordable homes in the life of the plan.

- We will establish a commercial arm with a turnover of £8 million by 2010.
- We will increase the turnover on service delivery by £200k by 2010.
- We will be a partner of choice to five Local Authorities in our reference area.

Enhancing our reputation

We will establish a reputation both regionally and nationally for providing excellent services, so that our key stakeholders will value their relationship with Aspire Housing.

- We will be recognised nationally and regionally through our success in awards and acknowledged best practice.
- We will feature in the Sunday Times 'Best Companies to Work For' by 2010.
- We will improve staff perceptions of Aspire Housing year-on-year.
- We will achieve Investors in People in 2007. (Update: achieved, please see page 16.)

Grow

The last word

The opportunity to lead a fantastic organisation with so much potential presents me with a truly exciting challenge as the new Chief Executive.

Driving Aspire to excellence is my vision - and I am looking forward to working with my colleagues to build on the achievements to date and deliver our new Corporate Strategy. I would like to take this opportunity to mention the tremendous support I've had since day one from all of my colleagues, not to mention the Board. Thank you.



The successes of the last year are a massive tribute to every member of the Aspire Housing team. While it is easy to glance over the figures in this report and just see them as numbers, it's worth considering for a moment the effort needed to achieve them, and the positive impact that these results are having on our customers.

I believe that you can only deliver exceptional results if you're willing to go the extra mile: to take genuine pride in putting customers first and doing your job to the very best of your ability every time.

And that commitment is what sets Aspire Housing people apart, and will continue to be the essence of what makes us special.

So it's probably best to end this report by thanking everyone for their work. Your dedication to making a positive difference to people's lives makes Aspire Housing what it is - and that's why I'm so proud to be part of it.

Sinéad Butters, Chief Executive



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