



aspire

annual report 2008/9



Welcome

““ The passing of another year is marked by the production of this Annual Report, and it gives me great pleasure to summarise our successes and performance.

The year marked a momentous milestone in the history of Aspire Housing as we merged with training provider PM Training and thus created a new group structure.

Customer involvement has been a consistent theme through all of our activities as we continue to place them at the centre of everything we do – from board decisions to service delivery.

Our continued commitment to excellence across all of our services is demonstrated by us achieving the prestigious Investors in Excellence award. I believe this report demonstrates that we are much more than a housing provider – we

are committed to a wider agenda of social inclusion and improving the life chances of those we serve within local communities.

We continue to innovate and adapt to meet the changing needs of our communities, and this year I have been particularly proud to see the first residents move into Mill Rise – our first extracare scheme and the launch of a new tenancy support service.

Our successes could not have been achieved without the dedication of Aspire staff and support of partner organisations and I thank everyone for their efforts and commitment to the Group. I would also like to thank the growing number of customers who give up huge amounts of their own personal time to help us to achieve our aims. After 9 years with Aspire, I

am stepping down this year and moving to pastures new. It is, therefore, both a sad and yet exciting time for me – and before I go I would like to take this opportunity to thank colleagues, partners, customers and everyone else involved with the Aspire Group. Together we have already achieved much and I am so proud to have been involved in this. There is, of course, always more to do and I know that leaving the Group in the very capable hands of the executive team and the talented incoming Chair, Richard Clarke, O.B.E., will ensure the group moves on ever stronger into a bright and exciting future. ””

Jane Price
Chairman



About us

The Aspire Housing Group provides more than 20,000 customers with quality affordable homes and services across North Staffordshire and South Cheshire.

The Group has one of the largest social enterprises in the Country run by a registered provider, delivering over 1000 training and employment opportunities for young disadvantaged people living

in the local area each year through PM Training.

Our diverse range of properties and services reflect the individual needs of our customers.

We are passionate about improving the environment in which people live and enhancing quality of lives using our expertise in social enterprise and regeneration.



Our Vision

Excellent services, supporting sustainable communities, valued by all.

Our Values

- Appreciating our Customers
- Skilled Staff
- Partnerships
- Integrity
- Respect
- Excellence





Customers first

During the year we continued to ensure customers are at the heart of our decision making and business planning processes by developing a comprehensive resident involvement framework that offers a range of ways in which to get involved - from quality circles to grounds maintenance.

What a year!



After six and a half years of involvement in various roles, I can honestly say that I feel that the customer voice has firmly found its place and a difference has been made.

Customers have had a say, not always had their way, but we have been listened to and have achieved better outcomes as a result.

Customer Panel Chair Steve Meakin MBE summarises the year from a customer's perspective.

The Customer Panel has engaged in discussions about neighbourhood sustainability and how we take forward the Services Strategy. Aspire is supporting vulnerable customers, giving advice on income management and making a direct contribution to the worklessness agenda through PM Training. This has been a busy year. As a result of working with Aspire to improve services through the various customer groups, some of my highlights include:

- The first ever customer led conference brought together over 100 customers who looked at issues which affect them and celebrated the achievements of dedicated supporters.
- The successful launch of a customer training programme to support involved customers through new knowledge and skills.
- A strong presence at community events throughout the year.
- Attracting new customers to become involved.





Our new Customer Services Centre not only improves access to the full range of Aspire's services, but also helped to regenerate an area of the town centre.

- The development and opening of the new customer services centre with a dedicated customer resources centre, ensuring our services are more accessible to our customers.
- Engaging in the development of the Tenant Services Authority and making customers' views known through the National Conversation.
- Strong representation through the Midlands Tenant Participation Advisory Service network.

The Customer Panel and resident involvement activities continue to receive tremendous support from across the organisation.

I believe we have firm foundations in place to build closer relationships across the group as we enter another exciting 12 months ahead ”

Steve Meakin MBE
Chair of the Customer Panel

Helping during hard times....

The Income Management Team reduced outstanding rent arrears by £260,600 from the previous year.

We recognise that customers experience financial hardship and debt problems.

We support a Welfare Benefit and Debt Advice Service provided by A4E - helping customers to manage £1.02million of debt and apply for £54,793.35 of unclaimed welfare benefits.



Sinéad Butters



John Lindsay



Will Nixon

Our Executive Team

We are managed by an Executive Management Team of three. The team is responsible for the Company's operational management and performance whilst working with the Board in setting our overall strategic direction.

Sinéad Butters - Group Chief

Executive responsible for: strategic planning and direction, marketing & communications.

John Lindsay - Deputy Chief

Executive & Director of Resources

Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources. He is also the group's Company Secretary.

Will Nixon - Director of Operations

Director of Operations responsible for: Housing and Maintenance Operation, Housing Services and Operational Support Will Nixon is also Chief Executive of our training division PM Training.

Sinéad's highlight...

The acquisition of PM Training - signalling a fundamental shift in our focus and impact on neighbourhoods

John's highlight...

Recruiting the new chair of the Aspire Group and securing additional funding of £7.5million to fund our development and regeneration programme.

Will's highlight...

Phil Heraty winning the national Apprentice of the Year award. Phil epitomises everything that is great about the Group. We are helping to change lives.



Our Board

Our Board comprises 12 directors, including five independents, three local authority and three customer non-executive directors. Our Chief Executive serves as an executive director of the Board. Up to three further non-executive directors can be co-opted to the Board.

Vacancies are openly advertised and members serve for a minimum of three years.

Customers

Steve Meakin MBE
Joan Winfield
Paul Davies

Councillors

Brian Tomkins
Andrew Cooley
Marion Reddish

Executive Director

Sinéad Butters

Independents

Jane Price - Chair
Philip Sunderland
Brendan Nevin
Tim Harris
Jim Washington (retired 31.05.09)
Ron Dougan (retired 21.10.08)
Chris Ennis - Co-optee





Over the last year we have completed our £15 million Mill Rise Extra-care Village

60 new homes and communal facilities were delivered alongside a new Health Centre in a unique partnership with the PCT in Lower Milehouse.

Development

Mill Rise, our first extra care housing development was completed in June 2009, and is acting as a catalyst for the wider regeneration of Knutton and Cross Heath, one of RENEW North Staffordshire's Areas of Major Intervention.

The project is our largest to date and as well as providing apartments the scheme includes a hair salon, restaurant, coffee shop, lounge area and landscaped gardens.

2008 also saw the completion of our first development in Stoke on Trent with the successful delivery of 17 new homes at Denham Gardens in Blurton.

Following this will be Ingestre Square, again in Blurton. Working in partnership with Stoke on Trent City Council we will deliver a development including homes for sale and rent alongside shops and a new purpose built community building and Jobs, Enterprise and Training Centre.

Our rural development in Halmerend, Audley offers 10 new homes including houses and bungalows for both rent and sale broadening housing opportunities for local residents wishing to stay in the area.

We continue to work with private housing developers on large scale regeneration schemes at Silverdale and Lower Milehouse to provide affordable homes and sustainable communities.



Working with PM Training we have provided employment and training opportunities for individuals in the Knutton and Cross Heath area

Regeneration

The pre-training programme "Step into Employment" sponsored by Advantage West Midlands has enabled local young people to enter formal training programmes based around their individual needs.

This targeted approach involves local residents working in partnership with Aspire, Renew North Staffordshire and Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council.

The initiative addresses issues of worklessness and significantly enhances the living environment for residents in the Knutton and Cross Heath areas.

We continue to support and work in partnership with Project House - providing support for local children and their parents, encouraging healthy lifestyles, positive play, homework support and social interaction.



We invested £10.5 million enhancing our customers' homes, thereby helping to improve the quality of their lives.

Repairs

Response times - % of repairs completed on target

Routine repairs

2008-9 99.2% **2007-8 98.4%**

Urgent repairs

2008-9 97.6% **2007-8 99.1%**

Emergency repairs

2008-9 99.2% **2007-8 99.4%**

Overall satisfaction with improvements (all types)

2008/9 95.3%

Home improvements

Our level of homes failing the decent homes standard fell from **5.8% in 2008** to **1.2% in 2009**.

Overall satisfaction with improvements (all types)

2007/8 94.6%

2008/9 95.3%

Over 4,900 households benefited from the improvements that included:

550 new central heating systems

701 new kitchens

490 new bathrooms

495 disabled adaptations

512 new security doors

208 electrical upgrades

62 new roofs

226 lofts insulated



We were delighted that Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council chose us to continue managing the housing register on their behalf.

Under the brand Newcastle Housing Advice, customers are able to access a full range of services from our new Customer Services Centre.

Our housing register

The housing register includes households applying to be housed for the first time and those wishing to move from one home to another.

The Housing Register at 31.03.09

Waiting list	2,771
Transfer	620
Total	3391

Demand by property type
Households requiring:

1 bed	1,322
2 bed	975
3+ bed	386
4+ bed	88

On 31.03.09 4.62% of applicants on the housing register were from BME households compared with 3.97% on 31.03.08.

New customers

During 2008/9 there were 661 new lettings, compared with 667 in 2007/8).

Lettings per property type

1 bed	- 326
2 bed	- 222
3+ bed	- 113

Household composition

Older People:	152 (23%)
Single Adult:	234 (36%)
Multi Adult (No Children):	78 (12%)
Lone Parent:	126 (19%)
Multi Adult (With Children):	67 (10%)
Total:	657

Lettings to BME households

2008-9 3.3% **2007-8 4.8%**

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





Performance

Our rents remain amongst the lowest within the registered social landlord sector in the Country
(TSA published data).

Average weekly rents
As at 31.03.09

Bedsit	£43.69
1 bed	£49.68
2 bed	£56.90
3 bed	£61.35
4+ bed	£66.68

Income lost through empty properties was **£200,364**

Rent collected % of net rental income:

Target	100%
Achieved	101.3%
2007/8	98.6%

Rent arrears of current residential tenants:

Target 6.0% Achieved 3.57%

Rent loss due to void dwellings:
0.81% (Target 0.80%)





Housing Stock

As at 31st March 47 properties were empty and available for letting - **0.56% of our stock.**

Average re-let time (excluding voids that involved major works):
2008/9 25.9 days (Target 17)
2007/8 18 days

Our social housing stock as at 31.03.09

4524 Houses
698 Bungalows
2575 Flats / Maisonettes
362 Sheltered Bungalows
187 Sheltered Flats
Total: 8346

By Size:

227 Bedsits
2354 1 bed
2835 2 bed
2746 3 bed
184 4 or more bed

We also own or manage
1990 lock up garages
119 shops/commercial units
242 leasehold flats



08/09 saw the launch of the involved customer training prospectus and during 08/09, 43 involved customers attended.

Our People

Part time	41
Full time	423
Male	272
Female	174
Disabled	3%

**2008/09 Learning Budget
£300,000**

**Average number of learning
days per colleague** **3.9**

Leading the way - Talent Academy

A bespoke career development scheme was launched that enables individuals to reach their career aspirations - 5 colleagues were successful in gaining a place in the academy and their development journey has already begun.





We are passionate about Apprenticeships and are committed to the career development of young people in North Staffordshire.

In September 2008 we recruited Aspire's first ever Business Administration Apprentice. This was such a success that we recruited a further three Business Administration Apprentices by December 2008.

At the end of March 2009 we had a total of 13 Apprentices working across the business in a variety of positions:

- **4 Business Administration**
- **3 Gas Fitters**
- **3 Painters**
- **1 Joiner**
- **1 Bricklayer**
- **1 Plasterer**

Apprenticeships offer many benefits for both individuals and companies. We have a target of employing 50 young apprentices by 2010. At the time of going to press we have 45 apprentices across all disciplines within the Aspire Group.

All of our Apprentices are sourced from Group member PM Training, who also provide excellent formal training and qualifications.





Aspire Group Income and Expenditure Account For the year ending 31.03.09

	2009 £'000	2008 £'000
Turnover: continuing activities	29,195	26,505
Operating costs	<u>(29,455)</u>	<u>(27,460)</u>
Operating deficit: continuing activities	(260)	(955)
Deficit/(Surplus) on sale of fixed assets - housing properties	(202)	116
Interest receivable and other income	70	65
Interest payable and similar charges	(5,482)	(5,343)
Other finance (charges)/income	<u>(36)</u>	<u>275</u>
Deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	(5,910)	(5,842)
Tax on deficit on ordinary activities	-	-
Deficit for the financial year	<u>(5,910)</u>	<u>(5,842)</u>

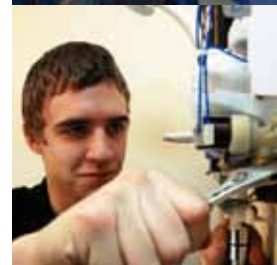
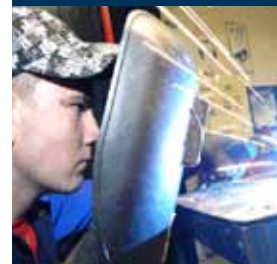


Balance Sheet

For the year ending 31.03.09

	2009	2008
	£'000	£'000
Tangible fixed assets		
Housing properties	74,937	67,494
Social housing grant	(6,617)	(5,931)
Other grants	(2,856)	(2,465)
	<u>65,464</u>	<u>59,098</u>
Other tangible fixed assets	8,261	7,651
Intangible fixed assets	998	-
	<u>74,723</u>	<u>66,749</u>
Current assets		
Property developed for sale	2,594	626
Stocks	394	282
Debtors	3,974	4,107
Cash at bank and in hand	1,268	2,072
	<u>8,230</u>	<u>7,087</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due after one year	(7,674)	(9,534)
Net current liabilities	556	(2,447)
	<u>75,279</u>	<u>64,302</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		
	<u>75,279</u>	<u>64,302</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year	103,097	86,541
Net pension liability	6,357	1,459
	<u>109,454</u>	<u>88,000</u>
Capital and reserves		
Non-equity share capital	-	-
Revenue reserve	(34,175)	(23,698)
Consolidated funds	<u>(34,175)</u>	<u>(23,698)</u>
	<u>75,279</u>	<u>64,302</u>

Accounts audited by Grant Thornton. A full set of accounts is available on request.





Introducing PM Training

In August 2008 we welcomed
PM Training into the Aspire Group

Established in 1982, PM Training is a social enterprise operating across both private and public sectors providing high quality training and employment opportunities, offering a wide range of services which have significant and proven benefits for individuals and businesses.

With a focus on tackling worklessness among young people, PM Training offers around 1,000 training opportunities every year.

PM Training is the most successful training provider in Staffordshire in both 2008 and 2009 in terms of helping young people to find positive future opportunities and jobs.

Since forming PM Training has assisted over 9000 individuals into sustainable jobs, apprenticeships and NVQ training - helping over 250 companies benefit from increased productivity and staff retention.

Executive Team:

Will Nixon - Chief Executive
Alan Salt - Director of Operations
Dan Canavan - Director of Projects
Kath Miller - Director of Finance

Board :

David Seviour OBE *Chair*
Emma Hodges
Will Nixon
Steve Meakin MBE
Brian Tomkins

Our Vision

**To create
enterprising futures
for individuals,
companies and
communities**



Opportunities for all

Last year, 81% of participants involved in our workforce development initiatives successfully completed their individual programmes.

Preparing people for work

Working predominantly with young people who have left school with limited formal qualifications, we help prepare them for the world of work through:

- **practical work experience**
- **In centre training**
- **apprenticeships**
- **social, personal and interactive skills**
- **employability skills**

Last year we secured full time jobs and apprenticeships for nearly 70% of our learners, surpassing the national average of 54%.

Workforce Development

We have our own qualified trainers and assessors who provide structured work programmes based on 'on the job' training and assessment, enabling individuals to enhance their skills and qualifications and achieve their full potential.

Apprenticeships

Last Year, 64% of the apprentices mentored and supported by us were successful in achieving their full apprenticeship compared to a national average of 52%.

Working with companies across the country, we provide significant apprenticeship opportunities in the following areas:

- **Business Administration**
- **Construction**
- **Customer Service**
- **Engineering**
- **Horticulture**
- **Landscaping**
- **Manufacturing**
- **Team Leading**
- **Warehousing and Distribution**

Homeworks

Now in it's thirteenth year 'Homeworks' was developed by PM Training, in partnership with Stoke on Trent City Council it provides direct home improvements and environmental services across the local area, providing:

- **Gardening and Landscaping**
- **Carpet Fitting and Furnishings**
- **Painting and Decorating**
- **Environmental Improvements**
- **Estate Caretaking**
- **Public Art**





PM successes

In October 2008 PM Training's Phil Heraty celebrated after receiving the Youthbuild UK's 'Young Builder of the Year' award at the House of Commons.

In January 2009 PM Training announced an innovative partnership with Staffordshire Housing Association. The two organisations now work together

on a number of community projects across Staffordshire, training local people and increasing their chances of finding future employment.

In April 2009 PM Training announced a landmark partnership with leading regeneration agency RENEW North Staffordshire to deliver new training initiatives for local people. The partnership will endeavour to regenerate the wider

community by helping jobseekers into employment, and creating neighbourhoods where young people choose to settle.

In 2009 PM Training expanded into new, purpose-built state-of-the-art accommodation adjacent to our existing site in College Road, Stoke-on-Trent.





Looking to the future



“ I hope that you enjoyed reading this year's report.

The arrival of PM Training has changed Aspire Housing forever - and I am looking forward to the Group's exciting future.

We operate in an ever evolving environment and I am delighted about how effectively colleagues, partners and customers have worked together to achieve everything you have read about – and more – within these pages.

Our customers have been magnificent. It is only right to recognise their input into making the year so successful.

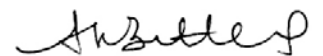
Our new Involvement Framework ensures that we make the most of each and every interaction we have with them.

Aspire's services continue to expand and diversify. I am particularly proud that we now offer caretaking services in all local communities. This not only ensures improved neighbourhoods for

customers, it also provides lasting jobs and training for local people.

2010 is only just around the corner. This will see us celebrating our 10th Birthday, launch an ambitious new Corporate Plan and introduce our charity - the Realise Foundation.

I look forward to you joining us on this exciting journey.



Sinéad
Group Chief Executive



This information can be made available in

- Other languages • Large Print • Braille • Audio tape • Computer disc.

If you would like information in another language or format, please ask us.

यदि आपको सूचना किसी अन्य भाषा या अन्य रूप में चाहिये तो कृपया हमसे कहे - Hindi

اگر این اطلاعات را به زبانی دیگر و یا در فرمتی دیگر میخواهید لطفاً از ما درخواست کنید - Farsi

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو براۓ مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔ - Urdu

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać. - Polish

ئەگەر زانیاریت بە زمانیکی کە یا بە فۆرمیکی کە دەوی تکایە داوامان لی بکە - Kurdish



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