



Aspire Housing Annual Report 2009/10



► INTRODUCTION and contents

Improving services and meeting needs

Welcome to Aspire Housing's 2009/10 annual report. This is the first report to customers under the new national regulatory framework for housing associations. It lets you know how we are performing against the standards set by the social housing regulator, the Tenant Services Authority.

This is one of the ways that can hold us to account and ensure performance is as good as we have promised.

We have been working hard with our customers to support the development of these standards and ensure that the services we provide to our customers meet these standards as a minimum.

Performance information reported to Aspire's customer groups is also available at www.aspirehousing.co.uk/about_us/performance

Over the coming year we will agree the new 'local offers' with customers. We are confident that in this way we can continue to improve services and better meet our customers' needs.



Aspire customers Les and Tracey Tolley with their 11 year old daughter Joanne at their home in Clayton.

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Join us to be involved in exciting progress

I am delighted to introduce the first annual report which demonstrates how well Aspire Housing is performing against important service areas and how it is continuing to strive for excellence.

This report is significant given that it reflects how customers have been holding services to account and working in partnership with staff to improve services for the benefit of all customers.

There is no doubt that customers have more influence over services than ever before.

I am proud to be involved with Aspire and, working together with other customers, to have helped make a real difference to the services offered.

We need more customer support and I would encourage any customer to be involved in the great work going on. Please contact the resident involvement team on 01782 635200 if you can spare some time and support us.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'S Meakin'.

Steve Meakin, MBE
Chair, Aspire Housing Customer Panel



► RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT AND CUSTOMER CARE

This standard covers how you access our services and how we listen to our customers when things go wrong or when we make changes to what we do.

Customer services, choice and complaints

What we do

We want to provide you with the best possible levels of customer service. In June 2009 we opened our customer services centre in Newcastle town centre and extended our opening hours. Our aim has been to provide you with high quality services and over the past year we have increased the number of services handled directly by the customer services team, so your enquiry is now more likely to be dealt with by the first person you speak to. This demonstrates our value for money approach to shaping services.

We are gradually introducing more services to our website to ensure that you have another way of contacting us, at a time that suits you.

We have reviewed our service standards with customers, to set out clearly what you can expect when you contact us across the range of services that we provide. We have published the revised standards recently. You can read them on our website or request a copy from our customer services team. We will be reporting how we are doing against these standards regularly.

We take complaints seriously. We always aim to ensure we put matters right and learn from the issues. Customers are involved in learning from complaints through our Scrutiny Panel. A customer board member acts as complaint champion for the company.

For example, following a complaint that further repair works were not completed after an out of hours emergency call out, we changed our procedures. This meant that each customer receives a call from our contact centre the following morning to log the follow up work required and agree a suitable appointment to complete the work.

How we measure up?

- We ended the year with 75% of calls being responded to within 30 seconds, a little below our target of 80%. This reflects the early development of our new customer service centre.
- More than 50% of customer inquiries are now dealt with at first point of contact, but our aim is to resolve at least 80% at first contact when all systems are developed.
- We received 175 complaints last year, slightly less than the previous year. Customer satisfaction with the way Aspire dealt with those complaints was 89%.

Our pledge to improve the service

- In future we will improve call answering times by maximising the resources available across the business and by making it easier to contact us in a range of ways.
- We will make more information and services available to you at the customer services centre and through our website.



Customers are assured of a warm and helpful welcome at the customer service centre.

► RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT AND CUSTOMER CARE

Involvement and Empowerment

What we do

Our customers can become involved in a wide range of ways. These methods were recently reviewed to make sure they met customers' needs and the requirements of the new standards.

Customers can influence what we do in many ways, including:

- Scrutinising our performance, ensuring we deliver value for money services and holding managers to account as part of a customer group.
- Checking and improving our services as part of a customer inspection.
- Dealing with problems in your neighbourhood through community panels.
- Attending customer events such as the annual customer conference.
- Taking part in estate walkabouts with neighbourhood officers to highlight local issues.
- Completing surveys and questionnaires to assess the quality of our services.
- Customers also have places on our board to ensure all our actions are scrutinised and endorsed by customer representatives.

We want to ensure that all our customers have the opportunity to get involved and we provide training and support to new and existing customers. We also work hard to engage with groups of customers who do not always have the opportunity to make their voices heard. We publish our Resident Involvement Impact Assessment annually which details all the ways that customers have influenced the services we provide.

Aspire Housing also provides information to customers through the News n Views newsletter, leaflets, our website and this annual report.

How do we measure up?

- In July this year, we were successful in gaining accreditation from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service, becoming one of only 25 housing associations nationally to receive this recognition.
- Nearly two thirds of customers believe that their views are being taken into account in the decisions made by Aspire.
- We have doubled the number of customers who are actively involved in shaping our services over the past year and now have 550 on our database involved in a variety of ways.
- Aspire has invested in its resident involvement function as a key priority and as a result the costs of this service area are higher than average.

Cost per property of resident involvement



Our pledge to improve the service

- We will work to achieve more resident influence on the services we provide and the way neighbourhood improvements are carried out.
- We will work to achieve a greater voice for under-represented groups.
- We will support more residents' associations and help them with their activities.
- We will provide more training and development opportunities for residents.

CASE STUDY:

Resident involvement – empty property management

Customers were concerned about the poor condition of empty properties and the amount of time taken before they were re-let. Feedback from new customers was that the experience of being made an offer of a new home was generally good (94%) but that there was room for improvement in the standard of the homes both internally and externally.

Customers developed an inspection programme carrying out detailed checks of properties to ensure we were meeting our standards for quality.

Customer involvement has led to a new standard setting out what customers can expect from their new home which will be introduced in October this year.

We are continuing to work with customers to look at ways to improve quality and turnaround time so that we compare with the best housing associations in the country.

► RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT AND CUSTOMER CARE

Meeting everyone's needs

What we do

We aim to ensure that the services we provide are available in a fair way to everyone in our communities. We aim to be able to respond to you as an individual and tailor our services to meet people's individual needs. We also work with a wide variety of community groups and organisations that assist disadvantaged groups so they can access support and help.

We provide a wide range of additional services through our independent living team to support vulnerable people; these include Lifeline and Telecare services, adaptations, and sheltered housing. We have reviewed these services with customers in the past year to better understand their priorities.

This review has resulted in a plan to deliver services that are planned around the person and will help people to stay in their home and live independently. In this way better support is provided, resources are used more efficiently and the customer's needs are met. By combining additional services with improved customer satisfaction we are delivering value for money.

2009 saw the opening of Mill Rise, our extra care development. With 60 apartments and extensive facilities to support people to live independently, the scheme has been highly praised and won a number of national awards.

We also provide information in a range of formats, such as large print or audio, and we provide translation and interpretation services for customers who need them.

How we measure up?

- Over 95% of customers using the care call service were satisfied with the response.
- 94% of sheltered housing customers are happy with the service provided by us.
- 95% of people receiving a minor adaptation were happy with the overall service provided.

Our pledge to improve the service

- We are increasing our customer profile data so we can better meet the needs of individual customers, for example in accessing help and support.
- We have developed a comprehensive project to transform our independent living services to support our customers' vision of personalised services.



Mike Reynolds pictured outside the groundbreaking Mill Rise extra care development.

CASE STUDY:

Resident involvement

We carried out a review with customers during 2009/10 to change the way support services were provided.

Customers of Aspire Housing's independent living service wrote a play based on their experiences of being treated "like a parcel" by health, housing and social services in the past.

The play, written by Mill Rise customer Mike Reynolds, tells how tenant Joe comes home from a stay in hospital.

Despite numerous visits from health and social services who promise to "sort him out", he never gets his needs met, until an Aspire Housing support worker arrives.

The play has been released on a DVD to show how services need to work together to meet the needs of the individual.

► MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

This standard relates to the quality of your home and the repairs and maintenance service we offer.

Quality of your home

What we do

We invest over £10 million a year to make our customers' homes more comfortable and enjoyable places to live, by providing improvements such as new kitchens, bathrooms, doors, central heating, roofs and environmental works.

Our customers are offered choices in terms of the style and colour of fittings and decorations in relation to new bathrooms, kitchens and doors before we start work on their home.

In numbers – how many improvements we did in 2009/10 and how much they all cost.

105 Roof replacements

£490,000

120 Rewires

£280,000

500 Bathroom upgrades

£1.7 million

208 Electrical upgrades

£70,000

501 Disabled adaptations minor

£280,000

276 Replacement doors

£200,000

503 Kitchen replacements

£2.3 million

552 New central heating systems

£2 million

411 Digital TV upgrades

£100,000

► MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

We spent £3 million on environmental and other improvements and on the renovation of our non-traditional properties.

We provide minor adaptations to enable customers to maintain their independence at home. In 2009/10 we spent over £250,000 providing minor adaptations to 501 properties. We also work closely with Newcastle Borough Council and Revival home improvement agency to complete major adaptations such as bathroom works.

We aim to continue to invest in and improve homes above the Government's minimum standard. Following consultation with customers, we have introduced the "Aspire Standard" that will provide environmental improvements to the outside of customers' homes, as well as quicker replacement cycles for kitchens and bathrooms.

Customers are closely involved through the service improvement group and ensure we deliver quality, value for money and choice. To improve the service, particularly for more vulnerable customers, we have introduced customer liaison officers who support customers through the entire improvement process.

How we measure up?

- Satisfaction with your home increased from 86% in 2007 to 90% in 2009.
- We met the national "decent homes standard" in April 2010, eight months before the legal deadline.
- Customer satisfaction with our improvement works was 96.1% during the year.
- The cost per property of major repairs and the cycle of ongoing maintenance, such as gas servicing, compares well with other landlords. This reflects the progress that we have made towards achieving the "decent homes standard" and value for money delivery.

Cost per property of major repairs and cyclical maintenance



Work to install the cork insulation underway.

CASE STUDY:

Improvements to Non-Traditional Properties

Aspire has recently undertaken major refurbishment works to 54 non-traditional homes. These properties were built from steel and brick panels, which over the years had deteriorated to the point where the properties fell below modern standards of heat and noise insulation.

We invested £1.7 million to bring the homes up to modern standards. New exterior panels lined with cork were used, the first time a housing association has used this environmentally-friendly material in this way (see photograph above).

Aspire Housing customer Carolyn Freeman, who has lived with her family for 12 years in Arnold Grove, Bradwell, Newcastle-under-Lyme, said the work had transformed her home.

She said: "The house used to be cold and damp. I used to have the heating on full in the winter and it was expensive.

"Now I'm looking forward to a winter where we can keep warmer and where the bills for heating and hot water will be much lower. The outside of the house also looks much better now and the whole street is nicer too. It's like having had a new home."

► MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

Our pledge to improve the service

- We are developing a local offer for the quality of housing to review and confirm our Aspire Standard.
- We are developing a new improved strategy for managing and improving your home that will ensure improvements are delivered more effectively.
- We are communicating and involving customers more in the development of our programmes and in key decisions.

Repairs and Maintenance

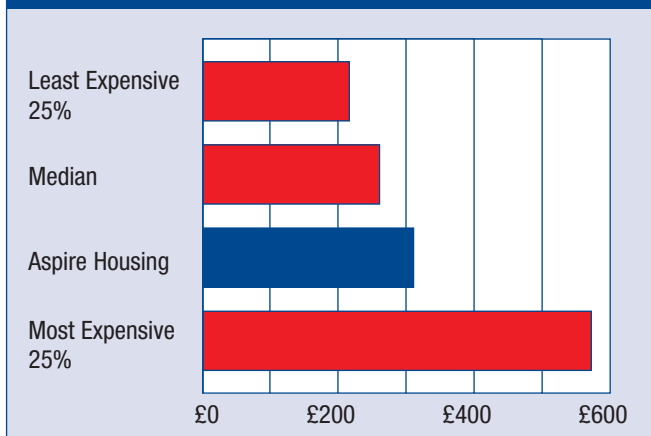
What we do

We know a high quality repairs and maintenance service is very important to customers. Our repairs service is provided by Aspire colleagues, complemented by specialist contractors where necessary.

The service provides a number of important services including:

- Responsive repairs service – we complete 38,500 repairs a year to our customers' homes – an average of nearly five a year per customer – and we provide an emergency out of hours service.
- Gas servicing – we ensure gas systems and appliances are safe. Over the past year we have started to install carbon monoxide detectors in customers' homes, in addition to smoke alarms. This follows feedback from customers.
- A cycle of maintenance works such as exterior painting and lift servicing.
- We work closely with customers to review this service area through our service improvement group and regular feedback.

Cost per property of responsive repairs



Gas engineer and plumber Rob Griffiths, hard at work in a customer's home.

How we measure up?

- We completed over 99% of repairs within our target completion times.
- We ensured that over 99% of customers had a valid gas safety certificate, but this was slightly lower than our annual target.
- Satisfaction with our repairs service is among the highest in the country at over 85%.
- We only provided appointments for 31% of responsive repairs, which is below what we would like it to be.

The total cost per property of our responsive repair service is higher than average, this is due to us completing slightly higher numbers of repairs per property but we've reviewed this service area during 2009 and made changes which will improve efficiency in future years.

Our pledge to improve the service

- We are working closely with customers to make our service more accountable and responsive to customer priorities through our new local offer
- We aim to complete as many repairs as possible "right first time" and are making changes to complete as many jobs as possible at the first visit.
- We are seeking to provide appointments for all responsive repairs
- We have prioritised gas safety and have produced a new DVD to help ensure we can service all properties. In August 2010 we achieved 100% of customers with a Gas Safety Certificate.

► MANAGING OUR PROPERTIES

This standard relates to how we let properties, how we set and collect rents and how we manage your tenancy.

Allocations

We speak to around 1,000 people a month about re-housing issues. Our allocation policy which we have developed with Newcastle Borough Council is linked to local housing needs. This policy sets out how the council will meet the current regulatory requirements. We are contracted to provide Newcastle Housing Advice services on behalf of the council.

In March 2010 we had:

- 2,395 people on the waiting list
- 25% are current Aspire tenants looking for smaller or larger accommodation
- Aspire let 790 properties between April 2009 and March 2010
- 45 of these were new build units

The way we allocate homes has recently changed. In 2009/10 we consulted customers and others on moving to a “choice based lettings” scheme. The support for the approach led us to introduce NHA Options in July 2010. This allows customers better choice about where they go and has made the allocation process more open and transparent. Customers can contact us using a range of methods and Aspire has worked with partners to ensure that clients who have support needs can access the new service.

We have also changed the way that we manage applications for housing. Some customers said that we did not provide enough information or that the team were hard to contact. As a result, we now have a dedicated team to manage new applications and to provide home visits and a review every six months.

We also provide services for people threatened with homelessness. Two thirds of the people who use this service are able to use the team’s advice to prevent homelessness or manage their situation.

Rent

Aspire is required to apply the government’s rules on the level of rent increase for housing associations. While our rents remain some of the lowest in the country we aim to do more for customers. In April 2009 Aspire’s rents

increased by 8.5%, which equated to an average of £4.33 per week. However, in April 2010 the average increase was £1.32 or 2.23% per week, using the same rules.

Our average weekly rents in March 2010, were:

■ Bedsit property	– £48.72
■ 1 bedroom property	– £56.54
■ 2 bedroom property	– £63.21
■ 3 bedroom property	– £67.77
■ 4+ bedroom property	– £72.22

Note: Rents are paid on a 48 week cycle

In 2008 we carried out a major consultation with customers about what additional services we should be providing. One of these was the estate caretaker service and we carried out further consultation on the charge that this service would attract. As a result of customer comments we first introduced a free estate caretaker service in 2009 and have made small incremental increases in charges after the first six months of operation.

We aim to maximise the amount of income that we receive and have reduced the level of rent arrears by £250,000 over the last two years, helping over 1,000 customers out of housing debt. We also provide welfare and debt advice and we support partners who provide affordable financial services locally. In response to customer feedback, we introduced two new payment methods in 2009, and the income management team introduced a Saturday morning service, to help customers access the services. It is clear that the low rent, high performance, improved services demonstrates Aspire’s focus on value for money delivery.

Tenure

We want our customers to be happy and secure in their homes. We will always seek to support customers before considering enforcement action and we treat eviction as the very last resort.

Our service extends to ensuring that new tenants settle into their homes and that they can sustain their tenancies over time. We have started a programme to visit each customer at least every two years and completed 2,000 of these visits last year. Through these visits, we have been able to prevent early signs of antisocial behaviour and intervene to assist customers to access other services they need. Additional help and support can be made available through a painting and decorating service and provision of basic items of furniture.

▶ MANAGING OUR PROPERTIES

In 2009/10 we have expanded our floating support service which provides help in people's homes. As a result we have had some real successes in helping customers to remain living independently and we have prevented more than 80 cases of enforcement action.

How we measure up

- 86% of customers were satisfied with overall landlord services – among the top 25% of landlords.
- 93% of customers were satisfied with how we dealt with their housing application.
- The numbers of homeless households has halved in Newcastle over the last three years.
- Over 90% of new tenancies were maintained for at least 12 months, which is above our target.
- 86% of customers have told us they think the rent for their property is good value for money.
- Through our welfare and debt advice services we helped customers to reschedule £1m of debt and we have helped customers to get an extra £130,000 in benefits.
- The amount of rent arrears outstanding improved significantly and is among the top 25% of landlords.
- Only 42.9% of customers surveyed were aware of our debt and welfare service.

The cost of managing our properties compares well with other similar organisations.

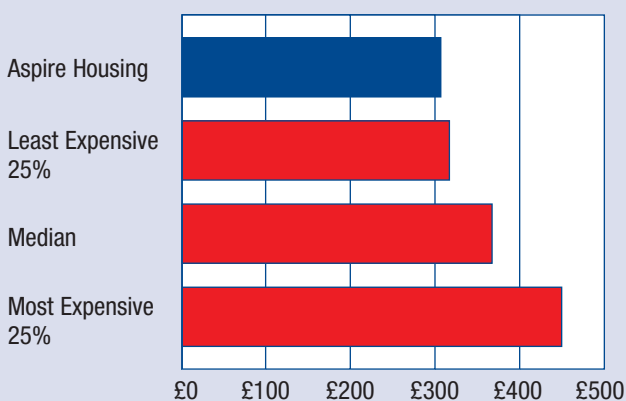


Dawn Watson, pictured with her three sons, was one of the first Aspire customers to find a home using Choice Based Lettings System.

Our pledge to improve the service

- We are working with customers to consider the benefits of a revised tenancy agreement.
- We need to develop new approaches to identify and respond to households that are overcrowded or under-occupy their home.
- We need to consider whether "local letting" policies would help to support the regeneration of some neighbourhoods.
- We will consult on the introduction and costs of cleaning services for communal areas in blocks of flats.
- We will promote the welfare benefit and debt advice service more widely.

Cost per property of housing management



CASE STUDY:

A new way to find a new home

Dawn Watson and her three boys recently moved from the Isle of Man back home to Newcastle to be nearer her family.

She was one of the first people to be allocated a home under the new choice based lettings system, which allows people on the waiting list to choose where they want to live.

She said: "The bidding process went very smoothly. It was very easy and I got my first choice, so I'm very pleased."

▶ YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

We know that the neighbourhood where you live is important to your quality of life. We work together with local partners to deliver improvements in the neighbourhoods where we own properties.

Neighbourhood management

What we do

We have a regular grounds maintenance programme and seek to ensure that our neighbourhoods are well looked after. In response to customers' concerns about local areas, an estate caretaking service is now available across Newcastle borough.

Our officers carry out regular street inspections, inviting local residents and local service providers along. We can deal with graffiti removal and litter quickly. We also identify small scale environmental improvements.

During 2009, Aspire started an audit of its estates to look at their quality and condition. We invited customers from Wulvern Housing in Crewe to join us to help, and our customers helped inspect their neighbourhoods. Customers also undertook an inspection of our grounds maintenance provider and produced a series of recommendations.

We are committed to improving local neighbourhoods. We do this through:

- Environmental improvements to the exterior of homes, including off street parking, fencing, hard and soft landscaping.
- Improvement works to local estates through environmental works to land and open space.
- Participating in community pride "clean up" events.

Our new charity, the Realise Foundation, is helping to improve the neighbourhoods in ways we could not do as Aspire Housing alone. For example, we have:

- Worked with local schools to create gateway features at open spaces.
- Provided landscaped gardens and artworks in local schools.

Tackling antisocial behaviour

We have improved the way we tackle antisocial behaviour and the feedback we give to customers. We deal with around 50 new cases of antisocial behaviour a month. These include fly tipping, litter, noisy neighbours and a small number of severe cases.

Customers had said that we did not offer enough information and re-assurance to people who report antisocial behaviour.

In response we have changed the way that we manage cases to ensure that customers receive better information from us about the actions we are taking in response to their complaint.

Aspire uses a number of methods to tackle antisocial behaviour including the use of independent surveillance and noise monitoring equipment where appropriate.

We want to support customers to solve problems without resorting to legal action and eviction wherever possible.

In 2009 we obtained eight court injunctions to deter antisocial behaviour. We evicted two households for antisocial behaviour and four households for not occupying their property.

Working in partnership

We work closely with our local partners to improve neighbourhoods and services to communities. During the year we reviewed our partnership arrangements to ensure we are working effectively together and contributing to the key priorities locally. For example we work closely with a number of other organisations including the police, the youth service and the fire service to improve community safety and tackle antisocial behaviour in neighbourhoods.

Our officers support the Local Area Partnerships, which ensure that local priorities are considered by key partners in the delivery of local services.

The customer community panels and the residents associations that we support provide a local voice to highlight local issues.

We have worked with partners to make big improvements to the look of homes and streets in Knutton and Cross Heath through an environmental improvements programme. This work was done by learners from our training company, PM Training.

New homes are also helping to transform neighbourhoods in Knutton and Silverdale – where we are providing 147 new homes for rent and shared ownership.

▶ YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

How do we measure up?

- 83% of new and current tenants are satisfied with the neighbourhood they live in, and this compares favourably against similar housing associations.
- 77% of customers were satisfied with the way their antisocial behaviour case was dealt with by Aspire.

The cost of delivering our estate services in 2008/09 – the most recent year for which figures are available – was lower than average in comparison to similar housing associations.

Our pledge to improve the service

- Customers are carrying out an inspection of the antisocial behaviour service.
- We aim to measure the impact of the new antisocial behaviour policy and improve the information available.
- We aim to improve services to victims and witnesses by working more closely with our partners.
- We aim to continue work on preventing antisocial behaviour by working with schools in hot-spot areas and providing training to people waiting to be re-housed by Aspire.
- We aim to develop local plans with key neighbourhoods to improve their services.

Cost per property of estate services



CASE STUDY:

Aspire has six teams of caretakers who maintain all 33 of Aspire's neighbourhoods in Newcastle. Their duties include litter picking, clearing fly tipping, cleaning graffiti, removing bulky refuse and maintaining garage areas. Seasonal tasks include removing leaves in autumn, gritting in winter.

The caretakers also help new customers to settle in and provide a highly visible and friendly face around the estates. They check empty properties daily and report any issues they cannot deal with to colleagues, the council or police.



Tidying up a garden in Roberts Avenue are estate caretakers David Thorpe, left, and Craig Appleby.

▶ VALUE FOR MONEY

Aspire is a “not for profit” organisation which means that we are able to invest all the income we receive into customers’ homes and the communities in which they live. Every £1 we save through efficiency is re-invested for our customers so the more we save, the more we can deliver.

Our commitment to ensuring we deliver value for money is at the heart of everything we do in order to benefit our customers and the communities in which they live. For this reason our customers are heavily involved in the process and we have a value for money customer group who work tirelessly to ensure this is delivered.

Aspire regularly compares its performance with other housing associations to ensure our costs compare well with other providers. The information in this report is based on the 2008/09 financial year (the latest for which comparisons are currently available) and compares us to a group of 82 similar organisations.

Our involved customers take an active part in our buying process to ensure that everything we buy provides maximum benefit and value to our customers. The factors we take into account when selecting suppliers goes way beyond the price we pay and the quality provided. We also take into account factors including the creation of local employment, apprenticeships and evidence of innovation.

We work with suppliers and contractors to maximise the return we get from the £20 million a year we spend on goods and services. A programme of reviews is carried out to ensure each service area delivers best value for customers. Over the last three years we have made over £2m worth of efficiencies. This may involve paying a bit more for a service that provides greater quality and wider benefits. Some examples of this include:

- Increased investment in the income management service produced a significant improvement in performance, reduced rent arrears and helped more customers to manage their debt.
- The merger with PM Training has enabled us to deliver additional services efficiently and create local employment and training opportunities, both for customers and their families.
- The process of setting the specification and seeking a supplier for central heating boilers allowed Aspire to reduce costs significantly and to source boilers that are more appropriate for customers’ needs.
- Costs were reduced, quality improved and installation times reduced in the fitting of kitchen units through using new suppliers.



PM Training Homeworks apprentice Stefan Farr hard at work on the facelift, which has improved quality of life in Knutton.

Aspire’s financial performance remains strong. Our accounts for 2009/2010 were approved with no concerns by our external auditors, Grant Thornton. We also met all of our regulator’s standards on financial viability, which ensures we have a strong business plan and the resources to deliver our plans for customers.

During 2010/11 we are updating our value for money strategy with our customers to develop our approach further.

▶ ASPIRE'S FINANCES

Aspire Housing's turnover in 2009/10 was £36 million.

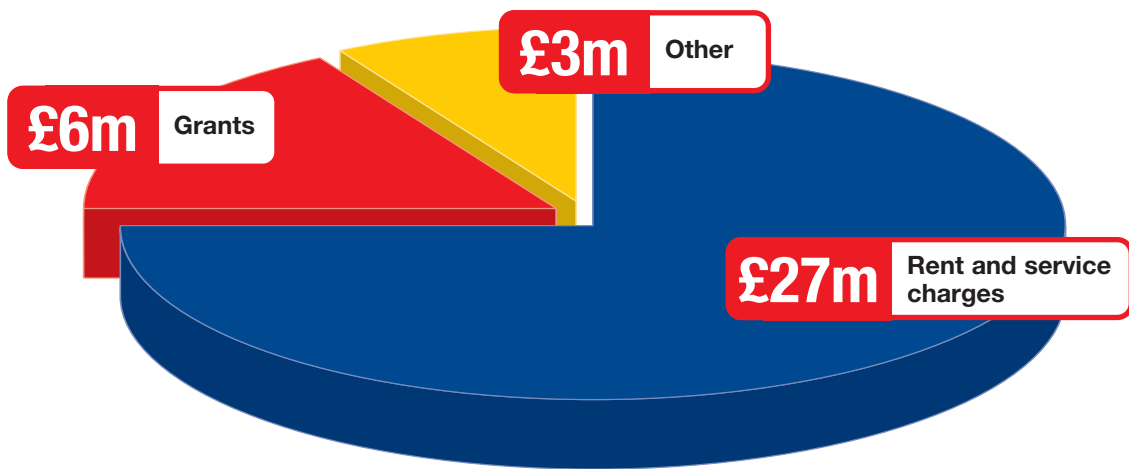
Our income is mainly from rent and service charges, together with the loans we have taken out over the past 10 years. We also receive grants from the Homes and Communities Agency and regeneration agencies to build new homes and improve neighbourhoods.

We spend the majority of that income on improving and maintaining our homes, as well as building new homes.

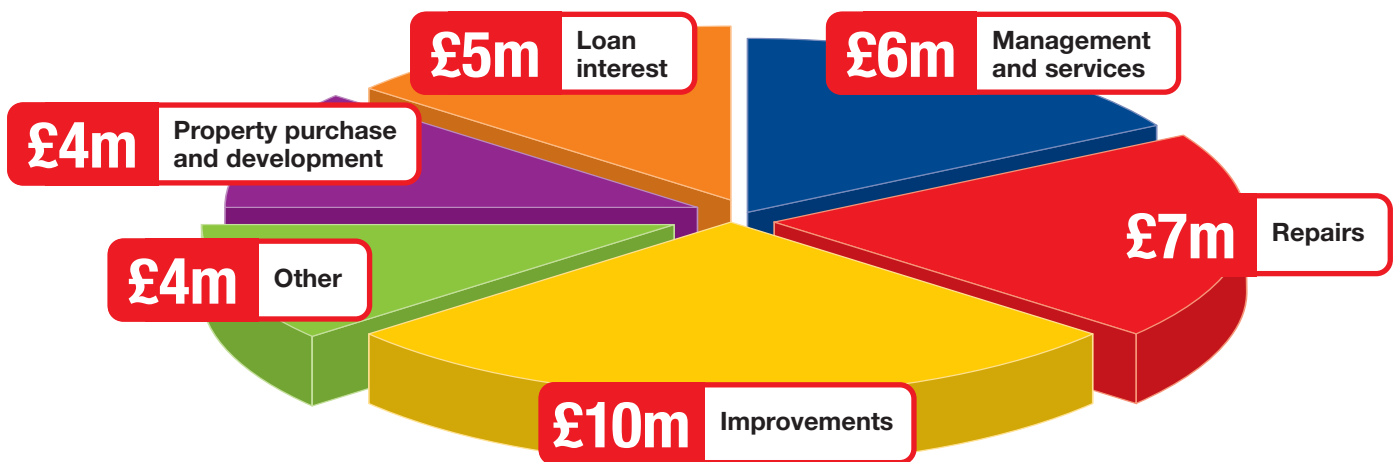
Other major areas are the cost of paying our staff and the interest on the loans.

The graphs show where the income we get comes from and how we spend it, on behalf of customers.

WHERE DOES OUR INCOME COME FROM?



HOW DO WE SPEND OUR INCOME?



▶ THE BIG CHANGE



Tony Campbell, head of maintenance services, and involved customer Paul Davies discuss 'The Big Change'.

“THE BIG CHANGE”

All social housing providers have been asked to consider the development of enhanced standards called “local offers” to three of the national standards. They are:

1. Involvement and empowerment
2. Home
3. Neighbourhood and community

To develop the “local offers” we carried out the biggest ever consultation we have held with our customers over summer 2010.

The “big change” consultation asked customers about their priorities for improving the services we provide. We also asked for customers’ views on proposed changes to our governance arrangements and applying for charitable status.

In the autumn 2010 we will consult again in detail with customers about our proposed “local offers” before refining and agreeing the standards we pledge to meet from April 2011.

Some of the methods we have used to ask customers about the “local offers” include:

- Information and a questionnaire sent to all customers’ homes
- Personal visits to most sheltered housing schemes and our Mill Rise extra care development
- Public drop-in exhibitions in our community panel areas
- Stands at the Midsummer Mayhem fun day and other major local events
- Interactive meetings with several of our customer groups
- Personal visits to rural areas and to our homes in Blurton and Crewe.

How we run ourselves

Part of our responsibility is to ensure we govern ourselves effectively and operate in the interests of our customers and partners. We must also ensure that we have effective financial controls in place and access to the funds needed to sustain the business.

The Aspire Board is chaired by Richard Clark OBE, who brings a wealth of experience from the housing sector. Richard’s fellow board members collectively have a wide range of professional skills appropriate to the requirements of the organisation. In April 2010 the board of Aspire Housing agreed to adopt the National Housing Federation code “Excellence in Governance” and we believe that we comply with the principal recommendations of this code.

▶ THE FINAL WORD

We are committed to delivering excellent services for our customers and welcome the opportunity to share how we've been performing over the past 12 months. I hope you've found this annual report useful.

2010 has been the 10th anniversary of Aspire, and we've been looking back at what we've achieved in terms of improving homes and neighbourhoods, but we're also looking forward to the many things we want to do and improve. Many of our services are performing well, but there are other areas where we know we can do more.

We are developing the range of services across our group to deliver our aims of supporting communities across North Staffordshire. While this report has focused on Aspire Housing's activities other group members continue to go from strength to strength.

We have greatly expanded our training company PM Training, which provides apprenticeships and training to young people across North Staffordshire. PM Training now works with more than 300 companies and trains 1,000 people a year.

We have launched our charity, the Realise Foundation, this year. The charity is working to improve open spaces, raise skills, create apprenticeships, encourage learning and help people into employment throughout our local communities.

Overall it is about improving our services, delivering value for money and furthering opportunities by placing our customers' needs at the heart of everything we do.



Sinead Butters
Group Chief Executive



Chief Executive Sinead Butters meets residents.

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

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

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

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

CONTACT US

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