



Making a **DIFFERENCE...**

improving homes, communities and lives

Accent Group Ltd REPORT 08/09



Making a DIFFERENCE... *improving homes, communities and lives*

IN 2008/09, we launched a new vision to reinforce our strategy of putting our residents at the heart of everything we do.

To achieve our vision, we will help to support communities by providing homes, keeping them in good condition, and helping people into employment through education and training.

We have set four objectives to help achieve our vision:

- Deliver excellent services.
- Provide great places to live.
- Give residents and their communities more choice and opportunity.
- Be a well run and viable company.



In what was my first full year as Chairman, we set out to make sure everything we do, now and in the future, serves and

supports our communities, our homes within them, and the people who live in them.

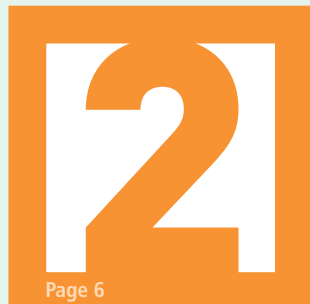
To help us achieve this, we appointed Gordon Perry as our new Chief Executive, and launched a new vision: *'Making a difference... improving homes, communities and lives.'*

Gordon first joined us in October 2007. His appointment as chief executive, and the changes made to the Accent Group Board, will enable the Group to become the organisation it aspires to be in the future.

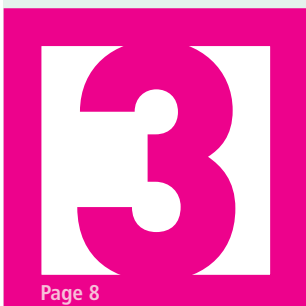
Our new group strategic plan forms the focus of our report this year. It has four main business objectives. With the needs of nearly 20,000 households to meet, our objective to **deliver excellent services** becomes paramount to the way we work. We have a number of key targets in place to help us achieve this, including improved quality of service, enhanced resident involvement, exceptional performance and better value for money. In achieving this objective, the Group will become a landlord of choice for our residents.



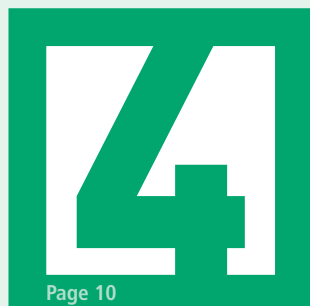
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Our Key Statistics 2008/09

▲ Provided new homes to almost 2,000 families.

▲ Supported over 200 people into employment.

▲ Built almost 500 new homes.

▲ Won a Gold Award for Tackling Worklessness.

▲ Supported 50 new businesses into financial viability.

Our second objective is to **provide great places to live**. We will achieve the Decent Homes Standard by December 2010 across 97% of our homes. The remaining 3% are exceptional cases and they will require special solutions.

We will also work with residents to develop a higher Accent Standard. Our housing development will focus on where need is greatest, and in the communities we have defined as priorities, and our new homes will meet both sustainability and environmental standards. We also plan to rationalise our stock and become more focused on our priority neighbourhoods. We will acquire more stock in areas where we have a presence, and dispose of it where we do not, so other landlords can provide our residents with a better local service.

Our third objective to **give residents and their communities more choice and opportunity** will see our residents, their families and their communities at the heart of everything we do. They will be offered real choices in the homes and services we provide, influence our value for money appraisals and our service standards, and be enabled to make value judgements about the services we provide and how well we perform. Some will benefit from our training, support and skills development programmes and be helped into employment or further education.

Our fourth objective is to **be a well run and viable company**. Our achievement of this objective is essential as, without it, we will not be able to deliver the other three. Our business processes, decision making and service delivery methods will be simpler, yet far more effective. We will be efficient, but flexible enough to meet local needs. In being transparent, we will ensure our governance, processes and management boards best represent our residents' interests. We will listen better to residents and respond to their needs more effectively.

Our aspirations, and what we have put in place to achieve them, mean that we are positive about our future. Our achievements so far – some of which you can read about in this report – make us proud, but I know that they are only possible because of the professionalism and dedication of our staff, and the commitment of our Boards, and I thank them for their support.

I look forward to a positive 2009/10 and to reporting on it next year.



Allan Smith, Chairman

Our aim is to improve the quality of services and homes that we provide.

Everything that we do seeks to increase the resources we have to invest in our homes, and to serve and support the people who live in them.



The new Red Doles training centre in Huddersfield opens.



Getting our Housing Corporation Gold Award.

DELIVER excellent services

OUR COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

Responses to the Tenant Services Authority's key questions in our recent Status survey across all our residents resulted in an average satisfaction increase of 5%. Although this is a very positive result that shows we are well on the way of meeting our commitment to excellence, we are continuing to work hard to improve services in lower scoring areas, such as anti-social behaviour.

RESIDENT SATISFACTION

In responding to our residents' views, we are continuing to make improvements across our services. In terms of repairs, residents are benefitting from flexible appointment systems, improved target ratings and improved response and completion times. In other key areas, we are becoming more engaged with residents and helping staff to understand how their roles deliver excellent services.



The Go Peel sporting event, Hyndburn.



Staff and residents work together on the Accent Peerless Disability Forum to ensure services meet the needs of disabled residents.



Accent Foundation Residents' Panel road show, Bradford.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Following a customer survey and a complaints conference with residents, staff and board members, we have made improvements to our customer complaints process, and introduced ReSOLVE – a new system to help staff report, track and resolve complaints. We welcome complaints from all our residents and use them to make service improvements.

INVOLVING RESIDENTS

All our residents have the opportunity to get involved nationally and locally and directly influence and improve strategic and local service delivery. We have resident representation on our boards of management, and we have established a National Residents' Panel and a number of well supported local panels.

We aim to provide a range of well maintained homes in a variety of areas in order to respond to housing needs and demand.



New meeting rooms and Library facility at The Swifts, Fulbourn.

Provide **GREAT** places to li

HEMPSTED, PETERBOROUGH

Accent Nene's new affordable housing development recently welcomed its first households. The development, which was part financed by the Homes and Communities Agency, and awarded additional agency funding to switch a number of the shared ownership properties to intermediate rent, will deliver 202 affordable units with a range of tenures across a series of phases throughout 2009/10.

FULBOURN

As part of the phase of new homes completed this year on the Windmill Estate regeneration project in Fulbourn, a new meeting rooms and Library facility opened in June 2009. The facilities, which Accent Nene gifted to the community as part of its planning obligations, are managed by Fulbourn Parish Council.

More information on Accent Nene is available from Andrew Williams, Managing Director, andrew.williams@accentnene.org



Gordon Perry judges gardening competition entries, Stockton.



Kids go on site in Barrow to lay the first brick in a new extracare scheme.

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INVOLVING RESIDENTS

We are involving residents in our development plans, working with them to improve our estates and involving them in developing a higher standard for our homes – ‘the Accent Standard’.

ALDERSHOT

Accent Peerless’ 32 new affordable homes to rent in Aldershot were first intended for sale through shared ownership. Recognising the mortgage difficulties facing first time buyers, Accent Peerless offered them to residents at an intermediate subsidised market rent to give them a 20% discount against similar rents in the area.

In the last two years, Accent Peerless has delivered over 100 new homes in Aldershot, and they were awarded partnership with Rushmoor Borough Council in October 2008.

More information on Accent Peerless services is available from Angela Smithers, Managing Director, angela.smithers@accentpeerless.co.uk

LEEDS PFI

After first building them, the Group has managed seven health facilities in Leeds on behalf of the local NHS trust for the last five years. In February 2009, we sold these facilities and our responsibility for managing and running them. We firmly believe that the sale was in the best interest of all parties involved, and will help our resident focused services develop further.

STAFFORD

Our homes in Western Downs, Stafford were sold to Stafford and Rural Homes in April 2009. Residents and Stafford Borough Council were consulted about our plans, and residents were also involved in choosing their new landlord. This means that residents will receive a more locally based service.

Contact david.royston@accentgroup.org for more information on stock rationalisation.

We aim to provide more choice to our residents in how their services are provided, their service standards, and their costs.

National Resident Panel members go walkabouts in Bradford.



Give residents and their co **MORE** choice and opportu

THEY SAID, WE DID!

Over 500 residents joined staff on scheme walkabouts to inspect their homes, schemes and estates. The issues they raised, which ranged from parking to fencing, and landscaping to anti-social behaviour, have been resolved where possible. Where a longer term strategy was needed, we continue to work with residents closely to give them more choice on our products and services, and involve them in the decisions we make.

ACCENT PEERLESS ALLPAY SERVICE

The Accent Peerless Allpay pay station in the Camberley office is secure and easy for customers to operate. It accepts cash and debit cards, and uses voice prompting, video and touch screen technology to guide customers through the payment process, which is available in a number of different languages.



Sheltered residents get fit with Wii, Accrington.



Communities Choice

COMING CLEAN AT PRIMROSE HILL

During a major property refurbishment on our Primrose Hill Estate in Stockton, our local neighbourhood team and regeneration staff worked closely with residents. Residents cleared overgrown landscaped areas and took joinery classes at our training centre in Middlesbrough. Residents' involvement was crucial to the refurbishment's success, and created a lasting feeling of pride and ownership.

For more information on our residents' training initiatives and projects, contact will.jennings@accentgroup.org

Elevate YouthBuild trainee Amy Eddleston was awarded Best Apprentice/New Starter of the Year in the under 25s category of the Women in Construction Awards.

ABBEY ACTION WORKLESSNESS TRAINING

This programme of training for our front line staff will help to signpost unemployed residents to relevant local services. The training will help staff identify barriers to work and the type of help available from supporting agencies.

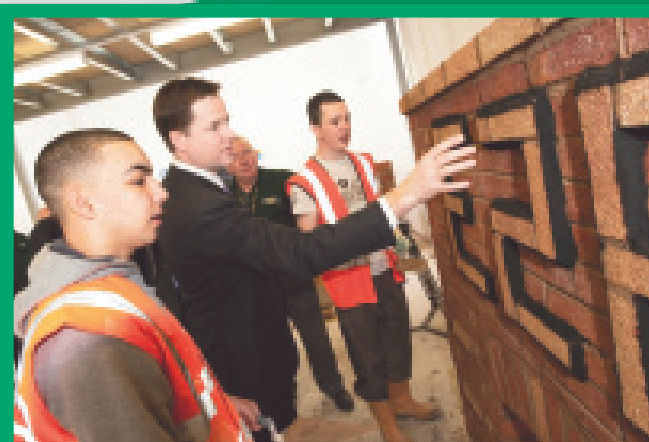
E-LEARNING FOR RESIDENTS

With the Virtual College, we are the first landlord to set up a residents' e-learning programme. Our first scheme in Burnley, will be extended into all our priority communities.

PACT

This local neighbourhood initiative kick-started by Accent Nene five years ago is now largely managed by the local community. It continues to provide training and evening class facilities for residents in the Paston area of Peterborough.

We aim to simplify the way we run our business by reducing the number of companies within our structure.



Liberal Democrat Leader Nick Clegg visits the Barkerend Training Centre.

Be a WELL RUN and viable

We are accountable to our residents and regulators to be a well run and viable company with the capacity to achieve its plans.

We reduced the number of Group companies by 20% in 2008/09, and plan to reduce them by a further 50% by March 2010, to reduce costs and improve decision making.

We will increase efficiency by keeping all our costs under review, and setting ourselves targets for savings. Our processes will be tested against a quality measure to assess success or identify shortcomings. We will increase our transparency, and ensure our governance, processes and boards represent our residents' interests and our residents have access to these processes, and we listen and respond to what they say.

More business information is available from gordon.perry@accentgroup.org



We have pride in our staff and support them in running our company.



company



ACCENT FOUNDATION DEBT RECOVERY

Our debt recovery team has had its best ever year for cash collections, recovering just over £400K from former residents in 2008. Our processes for covering current arrears are just as effective, and both current and former debts continue to decrease.

NEW HR SYSTEM

Introducing a new human resources system has enabled us to rethink the way we provide the service to the group, with staff and managers having access to the system for most common HR tasks. The changes have enabled a restructure of our HR department, and a saving of £170K a year from the cost of providing the service.

The new human resources system launches.



Our principal activity is to provide high quality, well maintained affordable housing for those in housing need.

We provide homes for those with general and specific needs including supported housing, extra care and sheltered schemes for older people. Our homes are provided on both a rental and an ownership basis including social rent, intermediate and market rent, outright ownership and low cost home ownership options.

Our homes and services are managed by Accent Foundation, Accent Nene and Accent Peerless. The Group has substantial involvement in community regeneration activities including supporting business start ups, training and education and apprenticeships, and we are also the private sector partner in two NHS Local Improvement Finance Trusts.



**One voice,
many accents...**

Accent Group
Accent Foundation
Accent Nene
Accent Peerless
Accent Regeneration
Accent Community Partnerships
Accent Property Solutions

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For more information,
please download a copy of our
Group Strategic Plan from
our website, under publications.