

# WORDS INTO ACTION



Annual Report 2010 Summary



*Westward*  
Housing Group

Incorporating Westcountry Housing and Tarka Housing

# Introduction from the Chairman & Message from the Chief Executive

Peter Cowling  
Chairman



Julian Tuck  
Chief Executive



I am pleased to introduce another year of strong performances from Westward Housing.

Despite the adverse economic environment, we have:

-  built more homes
-  won more contracts
-  and made more savings

than we had planned just a year ago.

Over the past year the Westward Board has been monitoring the effectiveness of the Group. Our aim is to be ready for anything this age of austerity can throw at us and still exceed the expectations of our customers. At a time when the whole sector is bathed in uncertainty we want to continue delivering the best.

In particular we want to ensure that:

- Our governance structures are suited to the needs of the business.
- We make intelligent and innovative responses to the challenges ahead.
- We make the most effective use of emerging technologies.

I am immensely grateful to my fellow Board members for their valuable input to this work and to all the staff, across the Group, for their continued dedication and commitment.

**Peter Cowling, Chairman**

As well as seeing demonstrable continuing improvement in the delivery of front line services to our customers and efficiency in the value delivered within the Group structure, we can point to some very important areas of progress including:

- Development programme substantially above target providing many more, much needed homes.
- South West Homes delivering home ownership for many families throughout the south west region.
- Major progress for Tarka delivering its five year promises to tenants.
- Additional support services and new social enterprise services.

The economic realities have forced the new government to plan radical changes which will have a huge impact on us and other providers. As a result we have focussed our forward planning framework to help meet these challenges.

All the current indications are that the next couple of years will continue to see huge changes and require us to make maximum use of our strengths.

**Julian Tuck, Chief Executive**

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## **Deliver better homes**

To deliver the asset management strategy achieving WHG's standard by 31/03/15 across all Group stock and top quartile customer satisfaction with the quality of our homes (Status).

## **Provide healthier environments**

To continually be environmentally responsible in the ways that we work and the resources we use through the development of an environmental sustainability strategy across the Group.

## **Provide stronger, happy neighbourhood**

Develop our social inclusion strategy embracing issues including fuel poverty, financial inclusion, ASB, support services and worklessness by 31/03/11 with delivery over the planning period.

Assess key issues facing neighbourhoods and address these through implementing the neighbourhoods strategy through integrated services between housing services and asset management

## **Growth**

Continue to grow the Group in line with the growth strategy, develop at least 900 units, attract additional members into the Group, manage over 10,000 homes, evaluate all opportunities for growth and be a recognised leading provider of services.

Be a partner of choice, understanding external perception of key stakeholders, to set a stakeholder satisfaction target by 31/03/11.

## **Deliver excellence through meeting our promises**

Be an exemplar organisation achieving top quartile performance against our Housemark peers, TSA standards and exploring external accreditation opportunities by 31/03/11.

Involve and empower our customers to shape our services, monitor our performance and drive continuous improvement to achieve top quartile or better satisfaction with views being taken into account (Status).

Ensure strong and effective governance across the Group, delivering the annual governance improvement plan.

Ensure financial viability; strong, robust financial business planning and meeting our financial covenants and legislative requirements. Benchmarking efficiencies and target setting, and meeting realistic budgets.

Establish and implement an effective, robust and legally compliant health and safety management system by 31/03/11.

Attract, retain and develop a skilled, motivated and engaged workforce including working to IIP standard and being an employer of choice.

Be a leading support services provider in the area, achieving overall QAF A in at least 90% of services by 31/03/12.

Harness information and communications technology ensuring our IT systems are fit for purpose in order to support continuous improvement and delivery of the business plan.

Improve communications with our customers in accessible, meaningful and interesting ways which aim to meet their diverse expectations and take account of changing lifestyles.

**We are confident that the achievement of these goals will not only bring substantial benefits to the Westward Group but also to its partners and most importantly to its customers.**

# Delivering Better Homes

**To find out all about how we deliver better homes and services, provide healthier environments, and build stronger happier neighbourhoods by working with our customers to identify continuous improvements, please read the Westcountry Housing and Tarka Housing annual reports to their customers on our website or request a copy by post or email.**

## **Growth**

This year the Group performed exceptionally well in terms of providing many new homes, despite the economic climate. We completed 154 homes with the support of our Local Authority partners and funding from the Homes and Communities Agency. 250 homes have started on site using funding from the HCA of over £26 million.

Tarka Housing took its first steps in providing new homes with the decision to purchase two homes 'off the shelf' from another housing association.

Affordability is of major importance to our customers and we have continued to provide homes within target rents. Our properties for sale have also been set at affordable levels, selling, on average, a 36% share of the open market value.

Thirty-seven of the new homes provided this year were New Build HomeBuy. The sales and marketing team have continued to secure sales with the market picking up in the spring of this year. Re-sales have also now started to increase.

As the local provider of the government backed Mortgage Rescue scheme, we also purchased the first of these homes in the peninsula region. Following on from our Local Authority Building Control Award last year; we were again awarded certificates this year for schemes in Tiverton and Newton Abbot.

Supported Housing successfully bid to take the assignment of all Signpost Care Partnerships support services in Devon, Torbay and Plymouth and have successfully implemented charitable transfer of Community Projects North Devon (CPND) into the Westward Group.

“improve  
communications  
with our customers”

## **Making money go further**

The Group was delighted to achieve its target of £1,000,000 of value for money savings for 2009-10. Staff and residents really pulled together to investigate and deliver the savings identified.

Considerable savings were made through membership of the Advantage South West Procurement Club, on Asset Management contracts. Tarka used some of these savings for an additional refurbishment programme. Some of the savings achieved on wet room installation has also enabled further aids and adaptations provision. Westcountry has been able to purchase a mobile office to improve customer outreach in rurally isolated areas.

## **Gold Award**

One of our Older Persons schemes received a gold award from the Elderly Accommodation Counsel, for Best UK Retirement Housing Scheme of between 30-44 homes. A resident said: "This recognises the quality of life enjoyed here, supported by the managerial skills of Westcountry Housing.. Markers should be a blue print of how life could be for senior citizens."

## **Tailoring services to the individual**

Westcountry and Tarka have made personalisation of services a priority and Westcountry has worked with residents to develop a new customer communication model following major consultation. This includes a mobile office, direct dial phone numbers so we can 'get it right first time', more home visits and longer repairs request phone line hours.

## **Investing in people**

One of our key aims is to attract retain and develop a skilled, motivated and engaged workforce.

The Group gained Investors in People status across every member organisation.

The Group also became an approved development provider for The Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM).

Westward's Jo Willis won Business Administration Apprentice of the Year from South Devon College.

The Group also has some big initiatives planned such as e-learning pilots, and talent management and development planning.



# Governance

## **Ensure strong and effective governance across the Group, delivering the annual governance improvement plan.**

After careful consideration and consultation with stakeholders, the Group agreed to introduce payment for independent Board members of the Westward and Westcountry Boards. The reason behind the decision was to ensure that we could attract and retain Board members with high level skills that would lead the Group forward to become a strong regional provider. The Tarka board felt it was inappropriate to consider remuneration until they have delivered the transfer promises.

The Board of Westward Housing Group has 12 members, including two Board members from Tarka and two from Westcountry.

<b>Peter Cowling:</b>	Independent Chair
<b>Liz Smith:</b>	Independent Vice Chair
<b>Sue Jones:</b>	Tarka Tenant Member
<b>David Howell:</b>	Tarka Chair
<b>Ian McDougall:</b>	Westcountry Chair
<b>Geoff Buck:</b>	Westcountry Independent
<b>Jonathan Bayliss:</b>	Independent
<b>David Bowen:</b>	Independent
<b>Sarita Worden:</b>	Independent
<b>Karen Evans:</b>	Independent
<b>Julian Tuck:</b>	Westward Chief Executive

Westward's Scrutiny Panel is engaged on a two year pilot basis to develop greater tenant influence into decision-making and strategic direction (including from those tenants often seen as 'harder to reach' such as those in rural communities); increasing the capacity of tenants, staff and Board, leading to improved processes and better services.

The Group continues to work with tenants, residents and service users in a decision-making capacity through Scrutiny Panel, Auditors, service related panels, consultations and surveys.

## **Stronger Happy Neighbourhoods**

Westward's Single Equality Scheme develops our pro-active approach to ensuring fairness, accessibility and transparency in every aspect of our work.

By adopting an integrated six strand approach to equality and diversity, we aim to ensure a joined up approach to the delivery of our commitments.

Westward continues to work with racial equality organisations in the area to deliver support to black and ethnic minority tenants in the region through our Housing with Respect partnership.

“Building communities, not just bricks and mortar”



The Westward Board

## South West Homes

Westcountry Housing, working in partnership with Sovereign Housing Group, is the government - appointed HomeBuy Agency for the whole of the south west region, covering seven counties. Working together we have been able to combine our strengths and resources to deliver an excellent service. The contract has now been extended to 2012.

The south west is the only region where house prices are higher and incomes lower than national averages, making it the least affordable region for housing. The work of the agency is therefore particularly important.

We have worked with developers, lenders, housing associations and local authorities to ensure our customers are well informed and assisted to make the right housing choice for them.

The agency is a web-based service delivered from Torquay and Bristol. Applicants can register online and view properties for sale and market rent. An average of 10,000 households eligible for affordable housing on the South West Homes are currently registered.

## Key Achievements

An accolade highlighting the agency's achievements from the Chartered Institute of Housing at the SW Housing Summit.

HomeBuy Direct scheme administration achieving more than 1,000 completions, far exceeding government expectations.

Administering the government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme in the south west.

Roadshows, in partnership with stakeholders, to raise awareness of HomeBuy.





## Westward Values

Westward Housing Group is a leading social housing and support provider in the South West.



We are committed to providing intelligent and innovative responses to the needs and aspirations of our customers and to nurturing successful communities.

We are a learning organisation which promotes the concepts of social responsibility, involvement and empowerment.



Chairman of the Board:	<b>Peter Cowling</b>
Chief Executive:	<b>Julian Tuck</b>
Managing Director, Tarka Housing:	<b>Nigel Barnard</b>
Managing Director, Westcountry Housing:	<b>Karen Ayling</b>
Director, Supported Housing:	<b>Piers Smith</b>
Director, Investment and Procurement:	<b>Jill Gregg</b>
Director, Finance:	<b>Janice Hughes</b>



Westward Housing Group is a non-asset holding parent with exempt charitable status. All properties are owned and/or managed by the subsidiaries: Tarka Housing and Westcountry Housing. Both Tarka and Westcountry are also registered social landlords with exempt charitable status. Westward Housing Group Ltd is an exempt charity, registered under Industrial & Provident Soc. Act 1965 No.30308R Tenant Services Authority (TSA), the Regulator of Social Housing No. L4510.A member of the National Housing Federation

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