



The
Orbit Story '12
Annual Report



building brighter futures...
for people and communities

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Introduction

Orbit's five-year business plan sees us going from 'good to great' by 2013. In the penultimate year we were clear that real improvement and change could only be achieved through relentless focus on our mission of Building Brighter Futures. Combined with our 'One Team' approach, this focus has helped us effect real change, by:

- delivering great services to customers
- investing millions into new homes, places and local neighbourhoods
- operating as a great organisation with committed people who do their job with passion and enjoy their work

Customer

We continued to enhance our customer service, giving people in our communities more choice over how they contact us, whether that be in person, over the phone or via a range of digital platforms. We embedded resident scrutiny to enable our customers to challenge the quality of our services and worked with partners to put worklessness and financial inclusion agendas in place to help those customers struggling in tough economic times. We launched the Brian Griffiths Award to provide grants to dozens of people to help them fulfil their ambitions, ranging from funding training to buying a computer.

Place

Despite a challenging housing market, we developed over 900 new homes, including our first market-led site, Aspire in Bedford, and secured the country's fourth largest contract with the Homes and Communities Agency, including one of the largest and most ambitious regeneration schemes at Lerner Road, Erith, London Borough of Bexley. We also invested around £1 million into our communities to help local people, and developed our sustainability activities to tackle fuel poverty.

Organisation

We developed our Orbit Academy to provide top class training to our people, our residents and our Board, and our people-centric culture was rewarded with all areas of Orbit achieving Investors in People accreditation. We invested in our IT systems and tools to improve efficiencies and to give our people the information they need, when they need it. We continued to drive down costs, hitting challenging targets for generating external income and delivering procurement savings of around £1 million to enable Orbit to invest more in building brighter futures.

Our Future

With our current business plan taking us up to March 2013, it was clear we needed a new plan to take Orbit into the future. However, against a backdrop of seismic social, economic and environmental change, we knew our plan had to be equally ambitious. At the start of 2011 we launched our 2020 programme, which has gained momentum over the past year, with involvement from staff, customers and stakeholders. We are now in the final stages of shaping our new vision, which will transform how we work, ensuring we can continue to build brighter futures for many years to come.

Thank you to all those who helped make 2011-12 a successful year for Orbit.

Paul Tennant, Orbit Group Chief Executive

Achievements In 2011-2012

Customer

In 2011-12 we developed our Customer First strategy further. A key part of this was compulsory Customer First training for all our staff, giving them the skills to provide excellent service to our customers, whether dealing with residents, stakeholders or internal colleagues. To compliment this training, we put tools in place to give our staff the right information at the right time. This included the final phases of our Customer Relationship Management and mobile working projects and the start of projects looking at performance reporting and electronic document management. The tools to do the job also took in changes to our Customer Service Centre, improving their systems and advisor knowledge to make our customers' experiences better at what is often their first point of contact with Orbit.

Our work with customers extended out into our communities, with the formation of local partnerships to deliver what our customers really need. This included work with Citizens Advice Bureaus to provide financial advice and local teams developing worklessness initiatives. Partnerships with organisations like MITIE enabled us to offer apprenticeships and training opportunities to our customers. The launch of our Brian Griffiths Award, named in honour of a former Board member, gave our customers the chance to apply for funding to fulfil their aspirations. We also brought our resident scrutiny panels to life, providing our customers with a route to tell us what we should be doing better.

And in 2011-12 we developed our customer base, beyond what might be expected of our organisation, by selling our services to the sector. We developed our Service Matters brand and successfully won contracts in procurement, audit and other areas, reinvesting profits from this work back into our mission of Building Brighter Futures.

Place

Despite a backdrop of uncertainty within the housing market, Orbit Homes continued to develop in 2011-12 and built over 900 homes across all tenures. In response to Government austerity, Orbit Homes also took the ambitious decision to increase its market-led development plans, with the opening of its first large-scale site of this kind, Aspire at Norse Road in Bedford. The sales team reported a sales total of £696,890, while the HomeBuy Agents processed 2,025 completions and the Mortgage Rescue team helped 223 people and families to stay in their homes.

Larner Road in Erith, Bexley, is Orbit's largest ever regeneration scheme, with funding secured in 2011-12 for a 600-plus homes development. The funding secured for this was part of the fourth largest Homes and Communities Agency contract in the country.

Orbit continued to be strong in the sustainability sector, both in new build and retrofit, developing our ground-breaking Passivhaus versus affordable retrofitting project at Elliott Drive in Wellesbourne. Through our public affairs programme we also influenced Government thinking on the Green Deal.

We also sought to make the best use of our properties, completing a stock rationalisation review and disposal programme. And we increased our understanding of the value of our homes and investment by developing a new market intelligence framework.

Finally, Orbit set up our new 'Building Brighter Futures' volunteering scheme for staff to go out into the communities where we work and give something back by improving the places where our residents live.

Organisation

For Orbit, 2011-12 was a year of investment in our people. Our Orbit Academy was developed to provide opportunities to staff, Board members and residents. These ranged from e-learning to the setting up of apprenticeship and talent management frameworks. Our focus on our people led to every area of Orbit being awarded Investors in People status. Our annual staff survey showed an increase in engagement across Orbit Group with staff satisfaction rising.

Our IT systems saw continued investment, with all offices moving on to a new platform to speed up service delivery. We also set up a digital futures group looking at how we can develop our digital offering to make Orbit a more responsive, accessible and future-proof organisation. And our social media presence grew with Twitter and Facebook pages set up for local services and communities to improve our interactions and bring the organisation forward in line with our residents wants and needs.

Orbit's external profile grew in 2011-12, with Orbit speakers taking part in various events on everything from the future of housing to social media. The last year was one where our national media presence grew with articles across all major broadsheet titles. We also won national awards, with Procurement Team of the Year and ICT Team of the Year in CIH's Housing Heroes Awards.

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Our Background

Orbit is a 37,000-home housing organisation operating across the Midlands, East and South East, including areas of London. We not only provide general needs homes, but also manage sheltered and supported housing as well as a wide range of support services. And we go beyond the traditional offerings expected of a social landlord by providing training and job opportunities, bursary funding and by selling back office services within the sector.

Our turnover was £177 million last year, we employ 1,300 people and serve around 100,000 customers.

Our Structure

We combine national influence with regionally and locally-delivered services, using our economies of scale and expertise to drive forward our organisation as a whole.

Our operating associations, Orbit East and South and Orbit Heart of England, provide frontline services, working directly within our communities and forging strong relationships with our residents and others.

Orbit Homes is our development and sales arm, providing the organisation with a strong pipeline and surpluses from market-led developments to reinvest in our social purpose. Orbit Homes also includes Orbit HomeBuy Agents and Mortgage Rescue.

Orbit Services provides back-office support for all our frontline teams, with Service Matters selling those services externally within the housing sector and beyond.

Major investment comes through our joint treasury vehicle, Orbit Treasury Limited, which generates funds to invest in improving homes, communities and services for our customers.

Structural Changes

Orbit's Private Retirement Leasehold Service moved from Orbit Homes to the two operating associations.

Supported Housing and Older People's Services became Orbit Independent Living.

Our focus on society

As a socially active organisation we are clear that reinvestment into our communities and into society as a whole is vital. To do this we generate income and surpluses, drive efficiencies and develop effective partnerships. We improve life chances and listen to our customers in shaping the homes and services we provide.

Last year we reinvested £1 million of surpluses back into our communities via our Brighter Futures investment fund; this money provides our communities with facilities and services above and beyond those we provide as a landlord. It could be anything from a new playground to a summer sports academy to a new communal kitchen.

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However, our commitment to community extends throughout the services we develop and provide every day. 2011-12 saw us start a ground breaking two-year project to develop a hoarding toolkit through our Care and Repair service partnered with Coventry University. Our Home Improvement Agency has also been innovative with a hospital discharge service that makes sure vulnerable patients in need of adaptations to their home have them completed before leaving hospital. And Orbit Independent Living secured funding last year to set up a Dementia Café in Warwickshire, servicing local needs.

“ 2011-12 saw us start a ground breaking two-year project ”

Another key area of our investment in society is to ensure our customers are aware and prepared for the many changes happening in the housing sector, especially in light of welfare reform. 2011-12 saw Orbit set up welfare reform advice sessions for residents and team up with Citizens Advice Bureaus to help our residents manage their money in a changing financial world.





2020: The future of housing

The future of the housing sector is in a state of flux, with no 'givens' for how it will look in future, or what we or our residents can expect. With this in mind we knew we had to be bold, plan our journey and provide a platform for growth in spite of the long term uncertain economic view. In 2011 we also launched Orbit 2020, a major research and business strategy programme. Orbit 2020 is enabling us to use in-depth research and engagement to better understand what the external environment might bring so that we can transform our business to continue to build brighter futures beyond 2013 to 2020.

We have made significant progress on Orbit 2020 in the last year, completing three core elements to inform our understanding of the future world. These are:

- A housing market assessment report by the University of Cambridge investing millions into new homes, places and local neighbourhoods
- Development of a unique in-house market intelligence tool
- Commissioning of five expert think pieces on the future world

We also launched an organisation-wide staff engagement programme, the first of its kind within Orbit. Staff participated in roadshows, world cafes, online discussion forums and straw polls and in-office graffiti walls. From this, Orbit's

Executive Team gathered wide ranging views and ideas to directly inform the future vision of the organisation.

The importance of our residents' views in the 2020 programme was also recognised, with a 'Big Society' project, using the London School of Economics and resident peer researchers to get the views of around 150 residents and community leaders, allowing them to tell us what they want and need from us in future years.

The 2020 programme continues and reaches its culmination in 2012-13, when we will be developing our 2013-16 business plans and deciding on how we will change to meet the challenges of the future to 2020.

“ We also launched an organisation-wide staff engagement programme, the first of its kind within Orbit ”

However, 2020 does not mean our focus has changed, we are still aware of six key priorities that are critical in the current climate:

1. **Increasing financial pressure on our customers** and growing inequality because of factors such as Welfare Reform and the economic climate
2. Delivering even better **Value for Money and efficiency** while meeting growing demand as public services shrink during austerity
3. Our **response to Localism and Big Society** within a new regulatory environment where we will co-create our offer to local communities
4. The **need for innovation and choice** in a deepening housing crisis where public subsidy for development is declining
5. The organisational and financial impact of **major policy changes** such as Supporting People funding and Welfare Reform
6. **Increasing risk profile** driven by the need to diversify our business model and the need to deploy resources such as IT as effectively as possible

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Board Members

For 2011- 12, the Orbit Group Board Members were as follows:



Liz Potter,

Chair – start date January 2004



Tony Crook,

Deputy Chair – start date October 2010



Fran Beckett,

Chair of Orbit East and South – start date April 2011



Chris Crook,

Chair of Orbit Homes – start date December 2011*



Robin Dahlberg,

Chair of Orbit Heart of England –
start date April 2011



Jackie Matthews,

Chair of Orbit Treasury Limited –
start date March 2007



Michael Marron,

start date January 2004



Kim Massey,

start date January 2004

Executive Officers



Paul Tennant,
Chief Executive



Anne Turner
Deputy Chief Executive/Executive Director,
Corporate Resources



Stewart Fergusson,
Managing Director – Orbit Heart of England



Paul High,
Managing Director – Orbit Homes



Afzal Ismail,
Managing Director – Service Matters



Vivien Knibbs,
Managing Director – Orbit East and South



Tony Williams,
Director of Organisational Development

*Chris Crook replaced Richard Reynolds as Chair of Orbit Homes. Richard was appointed in April 2008 and left in October 2011. There were no other changes during 2011/12.

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Purpose and Principle

Purpose

1. We are value-based organisations with the shared ambition of Building Brighter Futures for People and Communities
2. We meet our ambition by providing great places to live, great services and investing in communities
3. We make surpluses which we invest in achieving our ambition and we seek to grow to do more

Principles

1. We provide a range of housing and services to meet people's aspirations and needs
2. We focus our resources in the areas where we will have most impact in achieving our ambition
3. Running an efficient and effective organisation enables us to generate surpluses to meet our ambition

Partnership

1. Our business is based on partnership to deliver strategic strength, local delivery and a collaborative culture
2. Our objectives are shaped, delivered and scrutinised in partnership with our customers
3. We collaborate with councils, civil society, Government and other agencies to do more to help people and communities



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