

inspire

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providing homes, improving lives

Simply The Best!

When it comes to improving performance Spire Homes is up there with the best! That's what the judges of the prestigious Housemark awards think and we hope you agree with them.

We recently won the Housemark's award for the biggest performance improver of the year (in the East Midlands area). This is a great achievement as Housemark is the social housing sector's leading provider of improvement services.

Our successes in re-letting empty properties within 22 days, improving the number of

emergency repairs carried out within 24 hours by 10% and achieving a 10% increase in the number of urgent repairs undertaken within seven days, helped us stand out from the crowd.

"I am incredibly proud that we've won this award and hope that our tenants can see the benefits of the changes we've made so far," says Phil Ison, Property Services Team Leader, Spire Homes.



Paul Manning (Spire Homes), Neil Owen (FWA West) and Phil Ison (Spire Homes) with the Housemark Award

UP, UP AND AWAY AS PILOT SCHEME TAKES OFF



Our new Tenant Inspectors will be working hard over the coming months focusing on

improving standards of properties for re-let. To begin with they will be taking part in our dedicated Tenant Inspector training.

They will then be busy visiting other housing associations and private rented houses to compare standards, as well as speaking to people who've just moved in or registered for housing for their thoughts. The findings will then be collated and a report will be produced with recommendations on how to improve our re-let standard.

Jean Spring, Tenant Inspector said, "My reasons for getting involved in the Tenant Inspector project was to learn more about the services that Spire Homes offer. The re-let standard is a very exciting project for the Resident Inspectors to be part of and I am looking forward to the group helping to make a difference".

We will keep you posted on the work of our new Tenant Inspectors in the coming months.

a handy fridge magnet and 2010 calendar are enclosed

Season's Greetings and a Happy New Year!

Where has the year gone? I can't believe that in just a few weeks 2009 will be behind us and we'll be looking forward to making the most of 2010.

As we approach the end of the year, I think it is fitting to have a little look back at what we've achieved over the past 12 months.

Did you know that we spent £3.8 million on improving homes this year, bringing the total to date to £66 million! We added 74 new homes to our stock, bringing the total to 371. We also worked incredibly hard to improve our repairs service and it's now the best it's ever been judging by the highest ever level of customer satisfaction.

This year, we also welcomed people from Rutland, who voted overwhelmingly in favour of transferring their homes to us.

We won't be resting on our laurels though. There's still much more we want to achieve and as usual we will keep on asking for your involvement.

Finally, I wish you and your family a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year!

John Farrar, Chairman of Spire Homes



WELCOME TO RUTLAND!

The Spire Homes family just welcomed 1200 new members, as tenants of Rutland County Council voted overwhelmingly to transfer their homes to Spire Homes.

The fact we've got a little larger is great news for everyone as it means we go into the New Year in a strong position. Over 87% of tenants who voted wanted to become Spire Homes' tenants and we're delighted to welcome them.

"I am sure you will join us in welcoming our new tenants to Spire Homes," said Julie Doyle, Managing Director. "It is great news for everyone and I want to make it clear that our tenants will only see positive changes as a result of this news."

Senior Managers go back to the floor!

Not every Managing Director volunteers to spend a day finding out exactly what it's like being a housing officer – but that's exactly what Julie Doyle did during National Customer Service Week.



Julie led by example and ensured that, as many staff as possible from our Senior Management Team were involved in the week, which focuses staff on providing the best possible customer service. As well as Julie going out and about, Lynn (pictured above) and Katy (both directors at Spire Homes) also visited tenants. They joined FWA West for the day and even took part in a spot of handy work.

Thank you from Africa

Earlier in the year, a container full of clothes, blankets and hats knitted by Spire Homes' tenants left the UK for St Luke's mission in Zimbabwe.

You'll be delighted to know that the container arrived safely and we received a wonderful thank you letter.

We would like to thank the many people that got involved. We started this project after a survey found many tenants loved knitting and we are delighted our tenants took this project to heart. We would like to thank them all for their hard work. The blankets, clothes and hats they've knitted are now all being used and appreciated in Africa.



House Exchange

Since joining House Exchange last year we have seen many exchanges completed successfully and a growing number of tenants registering. House Exchange allows tenants to 'swap' homes with other tenants who are also looking to move, whether they are close by or at the other end of the country.

If you would like further information about the House Exchange service just call us on 0845 603 5399 or log on to our website at www.spirehomes.org.uk

Want to go undercover?

We've just recruited our latest team of mystery shoppers but we still want more people to go undercover and help us improve our service levels.

The most recent recruits enjoyed a taster session, which involved them popping into Waitrose to test their services and see how easy and useful mystery shopping can be.

"I've never been a mystery shopper before and I was surprised at how easy it is to take part" said Jenny. It's also really rewarding as I know what I am doing will help make the level of customer service we receive even better."

If you're interested in becoming a mystery shopper please get in touch.

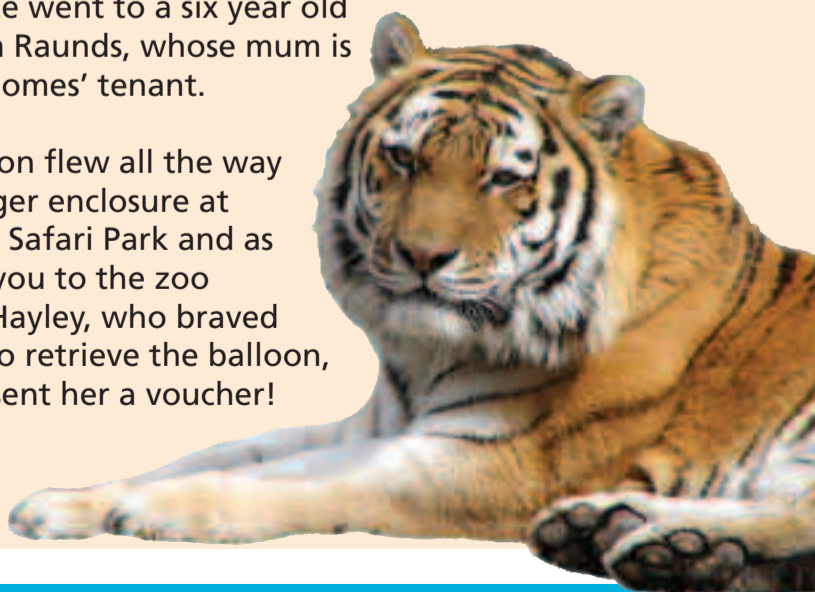


Balloon travels a Longleat way

A zookeeper at Longleat Safari Park in Wiltshire was the most unusual winner in the balloon release competition, which we staged during our recent fun day.

Hundreds of balloons were set off on 12th September, with the person whose balloon travelled the furthest winning £20. That prize went to a six year old boy from Raunds, whose mum is a Spire Homes' tenant.

His balloon flew all the way to the tiger enclosure at Longleat Safari Park and as a thank you to the zoo keeper, Hayley, who braved her life to retrieve the balloon, we also sent her a voucher!



Could you be FWA's next apprentice?

FWA West Ltd is looking for employees over the coming year to join their team as apprentices.

"At the moment, we have one apprentice plumber who is in his last year of college and also a trainee, who is currently working for us," said Neil Owen at FWA West. "As we have been successful in winning the improvement work contract we have taken on another apprentice electrician. We are looking to take on more trainees in the future."

Anyone wishing to send in their CV can do so via Spire Homes and we will pass them on to FWA West Ltd.

"We're really keen to employ local people and it would be even better if the new apprentices were Spire Homes' tenants," added Neil.

Thanks for stepping out

Our estate walkabouts are up and running (so to speak) and because you're involved they are making a real difference.

We are really pleased with how many tenants are joining us and judging by this thank you letter from June, who lives in Thrapston, you also feel they are worthwhile. "I feel that someone is listening to what we have to say. I can confirm that the work has now been done and that everything now seems to be in working order. Thank you for your help in getting this matter sorted out," June wrote.

There are lots of chances to get involved on a walkabout over the next few months, for instance we will be in:

- Irthlingborough on 16th December
- Warmington on 20th January
- Higham Ferrers on 10th February and 10th March
- Irthlingborough on 17th February and 17th March

For more details, please phone us on 0845 603 5399 or visit our website at www.spirehomes.org.uk. As usual we will send an invite to all tenants in the local neighbourhood before the walkabout as a reminder.



Performance Focus

Last year we asked 800 tenants to share their thoughts with us. We've now compared our ratings with other housing organisations across the UK. As you can see – the results speak for themselves!

1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009	Spire Homes	Housemark National Performance (top 25%)
Satisfaction ratings with the:		
Overall service of the landlord	86%	84%
General condition of the property	86%	81%
How enquiries are dealt with	87%	78%
Way repairs are dealt with	86%	80%
That views are being taken into account	74%	65%
Neighbourhood as a place to live	81%	82%
Value for money for rent	84%	82%

Saving Energy, Saving Money

It seems that energy bills only seem to go one way – up! So you'll be pleased to know that we are trying to do something about it.

Energy efficiency is measured by the Standard Assessment Procedure – that's SAP. Each home has a rating of between zero (bad) and 100 (fantastic!) We have been busy modernising central heating systems which has meant SAP ratings have gone from 59 to 80 (on average). And here's the really good news. By doing this, we've helped people save an average of £144.63 on their annual energy bills!

Even more work is planned for 2010 as we look to make more homes as energy efficient as possible.

Spire's talent shines through

Once again you've shown us what a fantastic bunch of entertainers you are in the third annual Spire's Got Talent competition, which was kindly sponsored by FWA West.

The winner of our £500 first prize was Harry, aged 9. The singer and guitar player impressed the judges slightly more than Kitty, (also nine years old), who's singing claimed second place. Third place went to singing duo Ben and Katie, who shared £50. Just like the X Factor, we also welcomed back last year's winner, Katie Wright, who performed during the vote counting.

All of our finalists were fantastic and everyone had a really good afternoon.



DON'T BE IN THE DARK WHEN IT COMES TO HOME SAFETY

Keeping your house secure is important all year round but there's something about the winter and these long, dark nights that makes people even more aware of the need to be safe at home.

There are some really simple things you can do to make sure you are as safe as possible at home, for example:

- Never answer the door to someone you do not know.
- If you have a door chain always ensure that this is used.
- Do not leave your door keys in the door.
- If you are approached by an energy company or salesman at your door, they do not need to enter your property and they do not need to see any financial or personal information. If unsure do not let them in.

The winner for Inspire issue 18 is: Mrs Aries of Rushden. The answer was Scarecrow.

Send entry to **Inspire, Spire Homes, 1 Crown Court, Crown Way, Rushden, Northamptonshire, NN10 6BS** for a chance to win a £20 Argos voucher by 21st December 2009.

inbrief



Inspire formats

Your Inspire newsletter is now available in different formats. If you require a version on tape, in braille, in a different language or large print, please contact us on 0845 603 5399 and we will be happy to help you.



Getting in touch

You can now contact us by email at: spirehomes@longhurst-group.org.uk

Our main office number is:

0845 603 5399

Our text number is:

447797 800 062

Log onto: www.spirehomes.org.uk

Xmas Opening Hours

24th & 31st Dec we will close at 3pm
25th & 28th Dec and 1st Jan the office will be closed all day
29th & 30th Dec we will close at 4pm

Normal office hours will be in place from 4th January.

COMPETITION Winter Wordsearch

Find the hidden words running forward, backward, upward, downward or diagonally.

Which one is missing?

A	R	P	R	E	S	E	N	T
K	F	A	I	P	X	Q	R	H
P	A	R	T	Y	E	S	T	M
M	I	S	T	L	E	T	O	E
L	R	P	B	V	Y	T	N	J
P	Y	U	Z	F	A	I	B	L
H	A	Q	S	N	K	N	U	C
B	D	A	N	P	O	S	M	I
G	M	C	O	A	S	E	P	V
X	Z	I	W	H	O	L	L	Y

HOLLY
IVY
XMAS
PRESENT

GLITTER
BAUBLE
FAIRY
PARTY

TINSEL
MISTLETOE
NOEL
SNOW

Name:

Address:

..... Age:

The missing word is: