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Our mission statement is 'Independence, Integrity, Value'. We approach our work from an independent standpoint – not burdened with our own preconceptions and objectives – but with a genuine wish to help the client to achieve their objective

AWICS Publishes Annual Report for 2008/09

AWICS has published its annual report for 2008/09. The text follows:

'AWICS' is passionate about public services. That is why I decided to enter local government service in 1981. That is why I founded 'AWICS' as an ethical management consultancy to provide support to those who provide public services – in all parts of Britain and also abroad! We want to make a real contribution to improving public services because they are so important to the fabric of our society.

Our mission statement is 'Independence, Integrity, Value'. We approach our work from an independent standpoint – not burdened with our own preconceptions and objectives – but with a genuine wish to help the client to achieve their objective. Our consultants are of the highest calibre. We observe the highest standards of integrity that should be expected of any consultant working with public services. We offer both 'quality' and 'value for money'. We are not the largest management consultancy. However, we are big enough to make a difference – but small enough to care!

This report covers the year 2008/09, the tenth year of trading and another very successful one. Turnover was the highest level ever achieved, representing an increase of 23% over the previous year. Gross profit increased compared with the previous year. It is now clear that 'AWICS' has been able to increase this level of turnover and profitability in 2009/10. During the year we had one full-time and six part-time employees. We also had seven associate consultants.

Our increasing numbers of clients include national government departments, local authorities, housing associations, arms length management organisations, professional bodies and others who provide public services. The services that we provide include:

- Regional Seminars
- In-House Training
- Management Consultancy
- Publications

And we made a real contribution to improving public services in many areas. The following illustrate just a few of the projects to which we have contributed during the year:

Our regional seminars are well received by the delegates who attend who find that the training and information provided enables them to become more effective in their roles. Organisations attending our regional seminars include central government, local government, housing associations, academic institutions and others

Regional Seminars

Our programme of regional seminars was launched in February 2006 with a series of five sessions of 'All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance' that were held in various venues around England during February and March 2006. Since then we have developed the 'All You Want to Know about...' series to provide an introduction and overview of a range of important subjects. We also offer more technical regional seminars.

Subjects presented during 2008/09 included:

- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance in Scotland
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Scotland
- All You Want to Know about Scottish Housing Association Finance
- All You Want to Know about Welsh Housing Association Finance
- Budgets and Financial Management in the Public Sector for Non-Financial People
- Implementing the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England
- Achieving Efficiencies and Value for Money in Social Housing

Our regional seminars are well received by the delegates who attend who find that the training and information provided enables them to become more effective in their roles. Organisations attending our regional seminars include central government, local government, housing associations, academic institutions and others.

We have developed the range of regional seminars further in 2009/10.

In-House Training

In-House Training courses were provided to Government Regional Offices, Local Authorities and Arms Length Management Organisations on:

- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance
- Budgets and Financial Management in the Public Sector
- Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England
- Achieving Efficiencies and Value for Money in Social Housing
- Implementing the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Homes and Communities Agency
- Estate Regeneration and Development
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Scotland
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance in Scotland
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Wales

Clients included:

- Ashford District Council
- Bournemouth Borough Council
- Canterbury City Council
- Carlisle City Council
- Copeland Borough Council
- Gateshead Borough Council
- Government Office West Midlands
- Hebridean Housing Partnership
- Milton Keynes Borough Council
- North Lincolnshire Council
- Perth & Kinross Council
- Redditch Borough Council
- River Clyde Homes
- Salford City Council
- Salisbury District Council
- Thurrock Borough Council
- Wrexham Borough Council

As a result of this, Councillors, Board Members, Civil Servants, Housing Staff, Finance Staff, Tenant representatives and others have been empowered to carry out their roles to greater effect. We are continuing to expand the range of in-house training available and a brochure that outlines the opportunities that are on offer is available on our website.

Management Consultancy

We offer a wide range of consultancy services to local authorities and others principally on management, financial and housing issues. For example, we assisted; Basildon District Council with a housing stock options appraisal; Enfield Borough Council with the development of their Housing Revenue Account Business Plan; London Area Procurement Network with the evaluation of efficiency gains in procurement; Salford City Council with value for money strategy; the Scottish Housing Regulator with housing inspection; and Waltham Forest Borough Council with financial modelling for new build Council housing.

We are continuing to work with local authorities and other public bodies on housing and other issues during 2009/10.

Publications

We publish a range of books relevant to people with an interest in public services. Titles available during 2008/09 included:

- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance

*Councillors, Board Members,
Civil Servants, Housing Staff,
Finance Staff, Tenant
representatives and others
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- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Wales
- All You Want to Know about Welsh Housing Association Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance in Scotland
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Scotland
- All You Want to Know about Scottish Housing Association Finance
- Sustainable Housing Business Plans and the Efficiency Agenda
- Arms Length Management Organisations – Freedoms, Flexibilities and the Future
- Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 – Implications for Local Authorities and Housing
- Implementing the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England
- Achieving Efficiencies and Value for Money in Social Housing
- Budgets and Financial Management in the Public Sector for Non-Financial People
- Developments in Housing Finance in Scotland – The Implications of the Green Paper

Our contribution to making improvements in public services has therefore been significant. Our potential to do even more in the future is even greater

Professional Bodies

During the year 'AWICS' was invited to speak at a conference organised by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (Northern Ireland).

We also publish the electronic newsletter the 'Public Services News'.

Our contribution to making improvements in public services has therefore been significant. Our potential to do even more in the future is even greater.

I also believe in the importance of making a voluntary contribution where appropriate. During the year I was a member of the Housing and European Panels of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy; an Honorary Fellow and President of the Institute of Public Sector Management; a Member of the Working Party established by Communities & Local Government and HM Treasury on the Review of Council Housing Finance; and an Advisor to the Campaign to Protect Rural England on Housing.

This annual report is designed to give you a flavour of what 'AWICS' is about. We also have two websites and welcome enquiries by e-mail, telephone or at our office. Addresses are shown below.

Adrian Waite
Managing Director

Learning and Skills Council – Enhancement Fund

The Learning and Skills Council; a body existing with the goal of helping young people and adults in England gain skills to create a more skilled and competitive 'world class' workforce has recently introduced a 'Train to Gain' programme that is available in areas including the Yorkshire and the Humber region.

Yorkshire & Humberside's £30million 'Train to Gain' enhancement fund has been introduced to engage employers across the region in skills development programmes, with the goal of increasing adult and young people skills learning.

The Fund provided by the European Social Fund (ESF) and Yorkshire Forward provides resources to support training activities that meet specific business needs which are not currently being met through existing training programmes.

This fund is commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council in the Yorkshire & Humberside region and is administered by Calderdale College. £20million of the funds are allocated to South Yorkshire and £10m to West and North Yorkshire and the Humber. However, the current figure of £30million may be increased to £50million depending on the initial success of the programme.

In the current volatile economic climate, it is increasingly important that resources for training and skills opportunities are available to ensure companies remain competitive in the current domestic, European and International market.

The Enhancement Fund provides financial assistance to businesses wanting to develop their staff, supporting both accredited and non accredited activity, of any duration, at any level.

The new fund has taken over to build on the success and good practice of the 'Skills Fund'; a previous European Social Fund initiative. The administration of the 'Train to Gain' Fund includes tailored support for single business applications. This ensures that activity meets company needs; allowing flexible learning and training support for employees who feel their employers are not supporting them in learning and skills development.

The training programmes through the new enhancement fund are designed to stimulate business growth in the region and increase competitiveness across the local business network and beyond which will directly link into existing 'Train to Gain' developments.

In the current volatile economic climate, it is increasingly important that resources for training and skills opportunities are available to ensure companies remain competitive in the current domestic, European and International market

North Lincolnshire Council has taken advantage of the scheme to fund a programme of training for managers in budgeting and financial management that is being delivered by 'AWICS'

Ebrahim Dockrat, a skills development Director for the Learning and Skills Council in Yorkshire and the Humber, comments:

"This initiative is a fantastic opportunity for both employers and employees across the region to become involved in skills development. It demonstrates how ESF can be used strategically to add value to mainstream programmes. As a result of this investment, employers in the region will be in a unique position to secure financial support to develop their workforce irrespective of size or geography."

Ruth Adams, Assistant Director of Skills for Yorkshire Forward, adds:

"We are delighted to have invested in the Train to Gain Enhancement Fund in order to allow targeted activity in Higher Level Skills, focusing on the management potential of technicians and addressing sectoral priorities in line with geographic area needs. We need to focus on adults in employment to develop their skills in order for our region's companies to remain competitive in an increasingly difficult marketplace - The Train to Gain Enhancement Fund will enable us to do this."

For anyone who is to be involved in preparing, approving or managing budgets for 2010/11 this course is especially timely

North Lincolnshire Council has taken advantage of the scheme to fund a programme of training for managers in budgeting and financial management that is being delivered by 'AWICS'.

The 'AWICS' course in 'Budgeting and Financial Management in the Public Sector for Non-Financial People' is designed for a time of recession when all public bodies are addressing the 'Value for Money' agenda, central government is concerned with 'Embedding Financial Management Skills in Government' and local authorities and other public bodies are concerned to develop financial awareness among Members and Non-Financial Managers. For anyone who is to be involved in preparing, approving or managing budgets for 2010/11 this course is especially timely. It is presented by Adrian Waite.

'Budgets and Financial Management in the Public Sector for Non-Financial People' is available as a regional seminar or an in-house course.

For information on regional seminars please visit our website at: [http://www.awics.co.uk/RegionalSeminars/ViewCourse/budgets and financial management 09](http://www.awics.co.uk/RegionalSeminars/ViewCourse/budgets_and_financial_management_09)

For information on in-house courses please visit our website at: http://www.awics.co.uk/View/Page/training_course_budgets_and_financial_management/

Adam Waite

Heart of Eden Community Plan, Murton Parish Survey

Many parishes and groups of parishes are in the process of preparing community plans. The idea of a community plan is that communities are consulted about the issues that affect them and their wishes for the future and that a plan is then prepared and implemented to address these issues. One example is the group of parishes that surround Appleby in Cumbria that is preparing a community plan for the 'Heart of Eden'.

The parish of Murton is one of those in the 'Heart of Eden'. It contains 137 households, most of whom have lived there for over twenty years. It is a relatively prosperous parish with a low crime rate but suffers from poor access to services. The parish council has undertaken a survey as part of the Heart of Eden Community Plan. Within this survey the residents of Murton had an opportunity to express their views and opinions on a wide range of topics.

The survey received a good response with 74% of the 137 residents responding, far outstripping the response rate in the main town of Appleby (of 11%).

Public Transport

Public transport in the area is not good and only six of the respondents used it on a regular basis. 22 said they would if improvements were made. Views expressed by residents were varied on how improvements could be made including the start of daily, weekly or evening services going to and from various points in the Murton Parish area.

The suggestion of a bus service linking the Murton Parish to the nearest train service was met by two preferred choices of a weekend service or a non-work related weekday service. However, only eight respondents would use this service if introduced and 24 said they would not use such a service at all.

Environment and Environmental Problems

62 of the respondents of the survey felt that the village recycling facilities were inadequate and wished to see more doorstep recycling. At the moment there is no doorstep collection other than a fortnightly paper collection and no recycling centre. Eighteen residents wished to see a recycling centre within the village itself and a further fourteen wanted to see a greater range of recycling opportunities for local residents.

32 respondents thought that their local facilities to recycle were adequate. Two respondents raised problems with the lack of frequency in the emptying and the poor state of the facilities at Appleby.

The idea of a community plan is that communities are consulted about the issues that affect them and their wishes for the future and that a plan is then prepared and implemented to address these issues

Future building and housing in the village was addressed with just over half of the respondents being in favour of more affordable social housing

The issue of gritting during the colder months was a concern for many residents with 65 respondents from the village of Murton alone marking this as a major problem, ahead of other problems such as flooding.

The responses to the gritting were very precise with the roads from Appleby to Murton, Brackenber to Coupland Beck and the Roman Road figuring as major problems for many residents. These are the main access roads to the parish from Appleby and the A66. This lack of gritting can make the village inaccessible which causes concern to those who need to travel to work or to access services. Also, potholes were noted as a problem. The verges on the roadsides were given a mixed review with 23 feeling they were of a good standard, 43 with the opinion that the verges are satisfactory and thirty suggesting they are poor.

When asked about the possibility of a small scale discount renewable energy source within the village most respondents were in favour of a solar powered scheme with 67 favouring hydro-electricity amongst others.

Housing

Future building and housing in the village was addressed with just over half of the respondents being in favour of more affordable social housing with 27 objecting and 11 showing no opinion. Respondents were in favour of starter homes with 45 in support and sixteen noting an objection.

Family homes were also shown to be a favoured type of building in the community with the most favoured types of housing for the village being self build for local people with 57 respondents in support and conversions for local people with 67 in support and only eight objecting.

However, holiday homes, industrial units and luxury homes were all strongly objected to in the survey with 50, 53, 43 objections respectively.

The parish has experienced an increase in the number of holiday homes and second homes at the same time as housing has become increasingly unaffordable for local people with low to average incomes.

Occupation and Economy

In the Murton Parish the vast majority of people are in either full or part time employment with many of that number being self employed. However, there are also a significant number of retired people within the parish. Many residents felt that developing the economy of the area was essential with suggestions for re-opening Appleby Castle (a tourist attraction that has been closed in recent years), increasing training opportunities and creating a local job centre.

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Community

With regards to crime and traffic accidents fifteen people in the area reported incidents of a criminal nature ranging from an obscure phone call to threatening behaviour and vandalism. Six respondents had been involved in a traffic collision within their time at the village.

The Appleby Horse Fair is a major event that takes place annually near the parish. Only one of the residents considered the fair to be of a beneficial nature, with 59 reporting a range of disruptions to normal life with examples such as; traffic congestion, litter, fouling, overcrowded verges, fear of crime and extra security and vigilance needed.

The improvements that villagers wished to see within the next ten years were varied. These expectations included things such as a more positive approach to green issues within the Eden area, local transport, alternative energy and sensible care for the environment.

Others would like to see wider reaching changes such as value for money council tax, a tighter control on MOD noise pollution (the village is adjacent to an army firing range) and an increase in pensions. However, some were content with a local pub or just another street light to improve their standard of living and their village community.

Adam Waite

Rise of the Ethical Dentist

A new dental organisation, Genesis Social Enterprises, plans to bring dentists back to some of our regions where dental health was on the decline. In recent months, with the government cut backs on spending and a contract change in 2006, many dental professionals have left NHS practice. Patients too were on a rapid decline; a recent study by 'Which?' suggests that up to 8% of us have attempted DIY dentistry at home, and Genesis records that 60-70% of their new NHS patients have not been to see an NHS dentist for three or four years, a decline of over a million in the last two years alone.

The Genesis Enterprise plans to place the emphasis on prevention, whilst reducing social exclusion from dental care. To achieve their goals, genesis dentists are paid substantially less than a dentist who spends 75% of their time on NHS patients, between 15-45 thousand pounds less to be exact. But they are rewarded in part by the support of their ethically minded management, who will allow uneconomical procedures to go ahead, including root canal work if it is required. The Genesis group now run nine practices in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and South Yorkshire, with four more on the way. The project is still set to expand in terms of surgeries and dental professionals. Steve Holmes, Chief Executive of Genesis Enterprises says;

Liam Byrne, Minister for the Cabinet Office, strongly advised that social enterprises should play a larger role in public services as a whole

“We’re seeing increasing interest from dentists who are ethically minded”

The Genesis enterprises clinical director, John Skelton, expects that due to the “in the community” approach to training given at the UK’s top dentistry universities, many more graduates will be interested in joining this type of ethical dentistry. Similar enterprises are in development across the country, in Hull the establishment of the Social Enterprise group, City Health Care Partnership, has seen more than 1,200 members of staff leave Hull Primary Care Trust. This Social Enterprise model seems to be seen by the government as the best step forward, to cut down the cost of dentistry and get the public back in the dentist’s chair.

In February 2009, Liam Byrne, Minister for the Cabinet Office, strongly advised that social enterprises should play a larger role in public services as a whole:

“These changes are good for the purse strings – ours and yours...I want to see your teams, your businesses, your organisations grow by some 25,000 over the months to come.”

Another emerging not-for-profit dental enterprise is SCA Healthcare, based in Southampton. They now have five surgeries throughout Hampshire. John Kellas, Chief Executive says:

“Our aim is to provide NHS dentistry in areas that which wouldn’t otherwise get it.”

SCA also plans to open a new dental lab to manufacture dentures, not just for its own practices, but also some others, and Genesis hopes to launch a mobile surgery to provide dental care to the elderly and those in rural areas, Steve Holmes explains;

“A man with a bag going in to a nursing home can’t deliver much in terms of dentistry, but this way the patient could be wheeled into a state-of-the-art surgery... ..This sort of development really chimes in with our aims.”

Genesis is continuing to grow, with plans to expand into Wales and Scotland. Holmes expects they will eventually have approximately 50 practices around the UK.

With good provision for NHS dental care often hard to find in the UK due to the economic slump and public use still on the decline, there may still be hard times ahead for these enterprises. But as Steve Holmes said;

“We have proved we can deliver.”

Amy Elliott

With good provision for NHS dental care often hard to find in the UK due to the economic slump and public use still on the decline, there may still be hard times ahead

Upcoming Regional Seminars

We will be holding a number of our Regional Events around the UK over the upcoming months.

- Budgets and Financial Management in the Public Sector for Non-Financial People
- Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England
- All You Want to Know about Welsh Housing Association Finance
- All You Want to Know about Scottish Housing Association Finance
- Opportunities and Challenges for Arms Length Management Organisations
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Scotland

You can find more information about all of these regional courses on our website : <http://awics.co.uk/RegionalSeminars/Overview/>.

You can also find a copy of our In House Training Courses Guide for 2009 which includes information on all the courses we can provide. These are available specifically for England, Wales and Scotland from our website:

http://awics.co.uk/View/Page/in_house_training_courses/

Other Services

In addition to our in house and regional seminars AWICS also provide a range of other services including:

- Management Consultancy including:
 - Business and Best Value Reviews
 - Advice on Procurement
 - Housing Finance
 - Housing Stock Options Appraisals
 - Housing Association Finance
 - Public Authority Accounting
 - Advice to Voluntary Bodies
 - Performance Management
- Independent Tenants' Advice
- Publications

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