

Ascham Homes Ltd.

**Performance & Development Committee
PUBLIC
Minutes of Meeting held at
Ascham Homes Board Room, Willow House, 869 Forest Road,
Walthamstow
On Tuesday 7th July 2009 at 1900 hours**

Committee Members		
Ascham Homes Board Directors		
Wendy Wilson	WW	Chair of Performance & Development Committee
Peter Woolcott	PW	
Annie Niner	AN	
Ascham Homes Officers		
Jan Taranczuk	JT	Interim Director of Property & Investment
Saadia Chowdhury	SC	Policy Manager
Janet Wilson	JW	Director of Operations
John Lowe	JL	Head of Policy
Elaine Gosling	EG	Head of Operations – North
Dulal Ahmed	DA	Head of Operations – South
Andy Kerrison	AK	
Lynn George [minutes]	LG	Executive Assistant to Jan Taranczuk

1.0	<p>Welcome, Introduction and Declarations of Interest</p> <p>The Chair welcomed all present.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Rothstein Williams</p> <p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>No declarations of interest were made.</p>	Actions:
2.0	<p>Minutes of last meeting held on 19th May 2009 and Matters Arising</p> <p>Accuracy:</p>	

Pg 6 at 4.1 balance scorecard should read “balanced scorecard”

Pg 8 at 5.1 delete “from LBWF” in sentence beginning “The situation was not helped...”

Matters Arising:

JT proposed that he would produce a separate note to the Committee with regard to the involvement of LBWF around the issues of the new repairs contract,

JT clarified that the delivery plan would come via this Committee and the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference would allow the Committee to do this.

A draft version of the new Performance and Development Committee Terms of Reference would be circulated at this meeting.

Ascham Homes would be issuing a press release regarding the bird boxes which would be published this week.

Aids and Adaptations had been raised at the Inspection Committee and LBWF would report back to that Committee. Members would be kept informed of the outcome.

JT advised that the balanced scorecard was something that would be dealt with via the Executive Management Team. Key Lines of Enquiry [KLOE] challenges would take account of what needed to be done and each division would have one service delivery plan that takes account of what comes out of this Committee. The Chair had examined the Audit Commission findings for 2006 and had noted that it said that the service plans had not been signed off until late in the year. The Chair noted that the updated service plans were not signed off at the last meeting as they were not robust enough and queried whether this would be an issue for the upcoming Inspection. JT was unaware that there was a need to sign them off and was unsure how to do this. JW advised that as long as we demonstrate that we are following the actions in the plans and that the plans are SMART there should be no problems. There had been plans that had been built on and this could be evidenced. JW further advised that as the delivery plan had been signed off this should cover the service delivery plan.

All members had received a detailed narrative from the Chief Executive regarding voids in which he had made a number of recommendations

Niamh Riordain would be examining complaints via the KLOE challenges and would produce a report that would cover this. The Chair noted that a complaints update was due to come to the Committee for this meeting. She also noted that this meeting should have been

JT

	<p>discussing empty homes as part of the agenda. However JT felt that with the issues with KBM it would be prudent to wait until there is something more to say. Reports on both complaints and empty homes would be on the September meeting agenda.</p> <p>On this basis, the minutes of the last meeting were agreed.</p>	
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Terms of Reference</p> <p>The Committee agreed that they would take away the latest version of the Terms of Reference, consider it and provide feedback via email to JT.</p>	<p>ALL</p>
<p>5.0</p> <p>5.1</p>	<p>Comment and Advice Reports</p> <p>Performance Report – May 2009 Author: Syeda Uddin, Policy Assistant</p> <p>SC presented the report and explained that the purpose of the report was to seek comment and advice from the Committee on the company's performance for the period April 2009 to May 2009.</p> <p>Of the 30 indicators reported at the end of May, 24 [80%] are meeting target and 5 [16.67%] are shown as red. There is 1 indicator that does not have a target [3.33%].</p> <p>Overall, Ascham Homes was performing at its best so far, with 80% of the Performance Indicators achieving Green status.</p> <p>In particular, repairs indicators had improved the most where 9 out of 11 indicators were Green [81.82%]. This showed that the repairs remedial action plan that had been put in place was resulting in improved performance.</p> <p>At present, two of the three rents indicators are not achieving target.</p> <p>PW noted that the report only showed two months [April and May], but was concerned that direction of travel for 16 KPIs was declining, 8 improving and 6 constant with BV185 still declining.</p> <p>SC responded that the June figures were due out tomorrow. JT added that at the Board meeting attendees were advised that the figures for April had been based on a small batch of data. In order to manage performance, there needs to be an understanding of what is being monitored. Hopefully by the middle of the year the target for Ascham Direct calls will be met. Generally, the picture is of an upward trend.</p> <p>The Chair suggested that as there was a report on rents on the agenda, these KPIs should be discussed at that point.</p> <p>She noted that the report stated that Ascham Homes was performing at</p>	

	<p>its best so far and wanted to clarify whether that was “best ever”.</p> <p>SC confirmed that the report showed that this was Ascham Homes' best performance since inception.</p> <p>The Chair congratulated the staff.</p> <p>The Committee noted the overall performance of the Company as set out in the report.</p>	
<p>5.2</p>	<p>Equality and Diversity Author: John Lowe, Head of Policy and Development</p> <p>JL presented the report and explained that its purpose was to update the Committee on diversity activity within the company.</p> <p>The Diversity Action Plan had been fully updated. The gap between Black and Minority Ethnic customer satisfaction and all-customer satisfaction is closing. The resident profile was being used to identify who services are being delivered to. Ascham Homes was making better use of information about individual customers. A new diversity service had been produced. Equality Impact Assessments were being carried out to test new policies and procedures. Ascham Homes had achieved its target to match the profile of its workforce with that of the community of Waltham Forest.</p> <p>JL added that a KLOE challenge session for equality and diversity would be taking place on 9th July.</p> <p>JL further added that the report stated that the Black and Minority Ethnic [BME] satisfaction had increased, however this was not something we could be complacent about as the overall customer satisfaction remains low.</p> <p>PW requested an explanation of the flag system.</p> <p>JL explained that Ascham Homes were trying to present information to frontline staff about customers in order to help improve the service that is provided to them ie 'knock and wait; elderly customer' or 'wheelchair user'. This was so that staff would be able to see immediately whether a customer had a specific need. We told the Audit Commission previously that this was what we were going to be doing and we want to be able to demonstrate that it is now happening. Vinita Patel would be training staff on how to update the system with this information.</p> <p>JT further advised that a recommendation from the Audit Commission's last visit was that we needed to 'personalise' information for people so that issues around individuals are known without the call handler having to ask for it.</p> <p>AN added that there was a general problem with tenants being unwilling</p>	

	<p>to complete forms requesting personal information.. AN asked whether it was possible for operatives attending to carry out repairs to make notes.</p> <p>JL answered that staff had been advised to only use information that customers had volunteered and that assumptions were not to be made. JL added that the flag system would also be used to identify properties where aids and adaptations had been applied.</p> <p>The Chair asked how comprehensive the flag system is.</p> <p>JL responded that the flag system was not very comprehensive and the take up percentage was low. He added that there was a process that would make it work.</p> <p>The Chair advised that diversity, along with aids and adaptations, would areas that he Audit Commission would be looking at closely.</p> <p>JT queried whether the Equality Bill introduced in the House of Commons on 24 April 2009 would impact on Ascham Homes with regard to providing adaptations to common parts.</p> <p>The Chair responded that it would, but generally the aim of this part of the Bill states that the tenant would pay for the adaptations; there is no intention to put a financial burden on landlords.</p> <p>The Committee noted the progress of equality and diversity to date.</p>	
<p>5.3</p>	<p>Right to Buy and Leasehold Services Author: Anita Murphie, Head of RTB and Leasehold Services</p> <p>JT explained that the purpose of the report was to provide an update of progress toward strategic objectives and operational performance.</p> <p>Operational performance of the team for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 May 2009 is on target for all current KPIs.</p> <p>The team's progress toward strategic objectives for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 May 2009 was satisfactory. The team's good performance was helping the company achieve its objective to provide an efficient and effective housing service to all our residents and continue benchmarking and customer feedback was helping to improve and develop our business through innovation and learning.</p> <p>JT advised that the update on the Lands Tribunal was that permission had been sought for the President to reconsider Ascham Homes' presentation and they had agreed to an oral hearing. This was unprecedented and would give us an opportunity to present our case verbally.</p> <p>PW felt that the percentage of correspondence received by the RTB and</p>	

	<p>Leasehold Services Team was very high.</p> <p>JT agreed to confirm the accuracy of this figure and what issues were being raised in the items of correspondence received. JT would request that Anita Murphie, Head of RTB & Leasehold Services provide a summary of the issues that need to be addressed and advise the Committee how they will be addressed.</p> <p>The Chair advised that although the satisfaction rating was low, it was low amongst all ALMO leaseholders and that Ascham Homes are not doing too badly, relatively speaking.</p> <p>The Chair added that she was unclear what the 100 leaseholder volunteers would do.</p> <p>JT clarified that, like the Tenant Involvement Group, these were people who had expressed an interest in a particular subject and who would like to be further involved.</p> <p>The Chair had noted that the update made reference to the HQN Gap Analysis. However this document had not been shared with the full Board yet.</p> <p>JT advised that this document would be discussed at the Inspection Committee on 14 July 2009.</p> <p>PW noted that report stated that the Audit Commission recommendation regarding the Northgate service charges module would not be available until April 2012 which was six years after the recommendation was originally made.</p> <p>JT clarified that this was a typing error and should read 2010. However, he agreed that this is still a long time. The system had been implemented at Tower Hamlets and Camden previously and it had been necessary to remove it and start again. Ascham Homes would be testing in the autumn ready to go live.</p> <p>The Committee noted the content of the report.</p>	<p>JT</p>
<p>5.4</p>	<p>Service Standards Author: John Lowe, Head of Policy & Development</p> <p>JL presented the report and explained that the purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an update on the Service Standard Review.</p> <p>The Service Standards had been reviewed and were now shorter, more direct and fully up to date. There are 18 standards. Customers and staff had been fully involved in producing the new standards.</p> <p>Once approved will be re-designed.</p>	

	<p>PW felt that this was an excellent and comprehensive report.</p> <p>The Chair commented about the repairs and keeping appointments and that this reflects back to the performance around appointments. Also, Ascham Direct is not answering the phone within 7 rings.</p> <p>JL advised that this was before remedial action had been taken within Ascham Direct to address this.</p> <p>The Chair asked for confirmation that offer notices would include a structural survey to leaseholders.</p> <p>JL advised that Ascham Homes was not in a position to offer this at the moment, but would confirm with Anita Murphie the status of this.</p> <p>The Chair asked why there was a perception that there is a gap between estimated and actual invoices received by leaseholders.</p> <p>JL admitted that this surprised him too.</p> <p>JT advised that the answer may come out in the survey that this is something that needs to be addressed.</p> <p>The Committee approved the Service Standards,</p>	
<p>5.5</p>	<p>Tender for the Mechanical and Electrical Planned Maintenance, Tender for Planned Lifecycle General Refurbishment Works and Tender for Manufacture, Installation and Maintenance of Windows and Doors Author: Jan Taranczuk, Interim Director of Property & Investment David Coleman, Head of Construction</p> <p>AK presented the report and explained that the report provided an update to the Committee on progress of tendering three separate contracts, Mechanical and Electrical, Planned Lifecycle Refurbishment and Window Installation and Maintenance.</p> <p>This report also set out the process and actions to ensure conformity with consultation requirements pursuant to section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (as amended).</p> <p>In light of the LVT ruling regarding the Decent Homes Partnering Contracts the report set out how Ascham Homes had complied with the relevant areas of the legislation. It also highlighted how Ascham Homes sought the appropriate approvals and carried out everything reasonably practicable to meet the requirements of the section 20 in relation to the Mechanical and Electrical Partnering, the Planned Lifecycle Refurbishment and Window Installation and Maintenance Contracts.</p> <p>The failure to complete the tender process by January 2010 and thus</p>	

	<p>implement a new contract from April 2010 would have major implications for the completion of the full Decent Homes Programme.</p> <p>The report listed the consultation requirements and procedures necessary.</p> <p>The report detailed the current programmes, where we are within these programmes and also how we have complied with the requirements.</p> <p>The report showed how we have confirmed and checked using our own Ascham Homes Leasehold Specialists and sought approval from external Legal Consultants.</p> <p>AK handed round the key milestone dates.</p> <p>The Chair asked what issues had been raised in the letters received from leaseholders.</p> <p>JT would investigate and report back to the Committee.</p> <p>The Chair asked whether the slippage had occurred due to delays in obtaining legal advice.</p> <p>JT confirmed that this was the case as well as trying to get LBWF on board because they wanted to be sure that the relevant legislation had been complied with.</p> <p>The Committee noted the content of the report.</p>	JT
<p>6.0</p> <p>6.1</p>	<p>Information Reports</p> <p>Report on Customer Care Indicators Author: Saadia Chowdhury</p> <p>SC explained that the purpose of the report was to outline the processes behind Customer Care indicators, identify the reasons for poor performance and explain the solutions that have been put in place or are planned to improve performance.</p> <p>The Chair had previously expressed concerns about the Customer Care indicators and had requested a detailed report about these indicators be submitted to this meeting.</p> <p>The poor performance of the Customer Care indicators was currently being addressed by a number of management initiatives.</p> <p>The Chair advised the Committee that at the time this report had been requested, the customer care indicators were all in the red, however, the situation had improved somewhat.</p>	

The Chair asked whether there was a system in place to monitor which Councillors were frequently in touch with a view to encouraging them to ring rather than submit a formal enquiry.

JT responded that he had recently written to all Councillors asking them to contact him directly regarding the repairs services. He would wait a few more weeks and then contact those that had contacted Ascham Homes several times regarding repairs.

The Chair appreciated that this would be an intensive process, but felt it would be worth building up an understanding/relationship with Councillors so that they speak to us before they write in.

JW advised that during election year we would probably be inundated with Members Enquiries.

EG added that we were also receiving more enquiries via email. There were also a number of police forums happening throughout the borough and things were being picked up through other meetings. We have a good relationship with a few Councillors, but need to move others onto the same sort of basis.

The Chair queried the target for calls to Ascham Direct and why the target was not being met. The report set out what action was being taken but did not spell out what was behind the failure to achieve target.

JT responded that this was dependent on the call centre being fully staffed. Therefore things like annual leave, sickness, staff training affect the ability to meet the targets. There had been some thought about recruiting staff on short term notice to do some quick work to try to hit these targets. JT remained confident that the volume of staff to calls was correct.

The Chair was concerned about the statistic which stated a third of calls were being dropped when the service was handed over to Waltham Forest Direct at 8pm.

JT proposed to investigate this and report back to the Committee.

The Chair asked how we could find out why people are giving poor ratings for tenancy management and anti social behaviour.

JL advised that this lower rating was also reflected in the Status Survey. JL believed this reflects the nature of dealing with anti social behaviour and its complexities.

The Chair advised that if the Ascham Direct telephone answering performance did not improve she would like to revisit it sooner rather than later.

JT

<p>6.2</p> <p>6.3</p>	<p>The Committee noted the content of the report.</p> <p>Tenancy Management Author: Janet Wilson, Director of Operations and Elaine Gosling, Head of Operations [North]</p> <p>EG explained that the purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an update on the performance of the tenancy management services of the company.</p> <p>The report also updated the Committee on the preparation work for the Audit Commission inspection in February 2010.</p> <p>This report provided some background information and gave an overview of the partnerships that we currently have in place to assist us with this area of work.</p> <p>It also gave an update on the findings from the 2008 STATUS survey and explained what actions were being taken to address them. This was followed by an update on staff training.</p> <p>The report gave an update on performance for 2008/09 and gave some information from feedback to satisfaction surveys of closed cases of anti social behaviour. This showed an improvement in resident satisfaction from the 2008 STATUS survey referred to earlier in the report.</p> <p>The report then gave an update on the action plan that was now within the Key Line of Enquiry framework and explains that key pieces of work for 2009/10 include updating all company documents, development of Ascham Homes' internet and intranet, training of staff and development of the Northgate customer services module.</p> <p>At the end of the report there was an update on introductory tenancies and the new tenancy terms and conditions that the Council introduced in May 2009.</p> <p>The Chair noted the poor rating on GovMetric about face to face contact and accepted that remedial actions had already been explained.</p> <p>Income and Debt Recovery Author: Janet Wilson, Director of Operations and Dulal Ahmed,</p> <p>The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with an update on income collection and debt recovery performance for 2008/09. It also brought to the Committee's attention the current concerns regarding performance against profiled targets in the first two months of 2009/10.</p> <p>The report set out some background information regarding the Rent</p>	
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Income Strategy and action plan, confirming that since September 2008 this had been based on the Key Line of Enquiry for Income.

It set out the performance achieved in 2008/09 and advised that 2 out of the 3 indicators did not meet target. It looked at what was achieved in 2008/09 and confirmed that 82% of the actions in the strategy were met. The target was for 75% to be achieved.

It goes on to give some information about the profile of tenants who have rent arrears and gives some performance data about the work carried out by the Citizens Advice Bureau.

It moved on to look at 2009/10 and highlights the concern that the targets set by the Council are unrealistic based on last year's performance. It also gave an update on the action plan for 2009/10.

JW advised that a rents performance challenge on would be held on 15 July 2009 and Cllrs Pye, Macklin and Rayner would be attending. The challenge would be looking at last year's performance and not necessarily this year.

DA circulated an analysis of the causes of debt.

DA added that although the rents indicator is in the red, generally over the last three months the gap had steadily been closing and the report highlighted the type of work that was being undertaken. We are working with tenants to boost their income with Housing Benefit take up and developing a rent plus service.

The Chair asked whether Housing Benefit arrears were 33%.

DA explained that this was a cause of debt. When people completed their financial audit form they may have ticked Housing Benefit as a cause for their debt. This was not necessarily a backlog at Housing Benefit, but their belief that they should have been in receipt of it. DA also pointed out that Friday Hill had turned around their performance at the end of Q1.

The Chair asked how much their [the TMO's] poor performance would affect Ascham Homes' overall performance.

JW responded that the affect was not significant.

DA continued that in terms of our message of help to council tenants, Ahead had focussed on rent and types of assistance available to tenants.

The Chair hoped that LBWF would revisit the targets for 2009/10.

JW agreed and felt that by making continuous improvement they hoped to reach their targets for this year. LBWF may be reluctant to change a

published target as it was in the public domain. JW advised that a Prosperity Team had been formed with members of staff from various departments to assist tenants. We want to show that every avenue had been exhausted before resorting to evicting people.

The Chair wished JW good luck for the challenge session on 15 July 2009 and asked for a report on the outcome to come to this Committee.

The Committee noted the content of this report.

6.4 Summary of TSA Discussion Paper
Author: Saadia Chowdhury, Policy Manager

JT explained that The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) had published a discussion paper on their proposals for a regulatory framework and the standards that would form this framework.

The discussion paper would form Phase 2 of the National Conversation. The TSA want their stakeholders to comment and feedback any suggestions that they may have on the proposed regulatory regime.

This report provides a brief overview of the TSA's paper to help inform discussion.

The TSA will be the new regulator of all social housing providers from April 2010.

In preparation for this, the TSA would be conducting a National Conversation with both tenants and landlords to help shape their regulatory regime.

Phase 1 of the National Conversation had been completed. This involved asking tenants across the country what they thought of their landlords and what the priorities in social housing should be.

Findings from Phase 1 identified the following priorities:

- repairs and maintenance
- safety and security
- reasonable and affordable rent
- homes that are up to date and in a decent condition

These priorities had been used as the rationale for the proposed TSA standards.

Phase 2 of the National Conversation would be launched in July 2009 and would be asking stakeholders to comment and feedback on the proposed regulatory regime. The deadline for responses to the

	<p>consultation is 8 September 2009.</p> <p>The purpose of this stage was to find out from stakeholders at an early stage what they think of the proposals. These views would then help the TSA to produce proposals for a formal consultation later in 2009.</p> <p>The TSA was proposing a regulatory approach based on co-regulation where the emphasis would be on tenants and landlords deciding together what good service delivery looks like.</p> <p>The standards had been grouped into the following framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The service offer to tenants ● Tenant empowerment and involvement ● The tenancy agreement ● Governance ● Viability ● Value for money <p>These standards would be on a national level but there may be some scope for local variation.</p> <p>The Audit Commission would continue acting as the inspection body on behalf of the TSA. Its role was still in the process of being finalised but it was likely that full inspections would continue and short notice inspections would become more common as a way of dealing with a specific service delivery failure.</p> <p>JT advised that this piece of work should go to Contract Panels. From an organisational point of view, we had participated in the National Conversation and we need to show that we talk with our residents. It was important that Ascham Homes demonstrated that we had taken the opportunity to express a view about how this would operate.</p> <p>The Chair commented that it was good that this had been brought to the Committee and agreed for it to be referred to Contract Panels.</p> <p>The Committee noted the content of this report.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p>Public Comment and Proceedings</p> <p>None</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>There were no further items for discussion.</p>	

