

WATMOS COMMUNITY HOMES

BOARD BRIEFING NOTE

Meeting Held on Thursday 31st January 2008

1. Correspondence & Briefing Items

- It was noted that the Chair has been awarded an MBE in the New Years Honours. The Board congratulated the Chair on the well-deserved recognition.
- The Chair and Chief Executive briefed the Board on a study visit to Holland to see a community owned fibre optic broadband system. It is hope that such an approach is adopted in Walsall. This could create jobs and revolutionise service delivery.
- The Chair updated the Board on work he is involved in to create a national tenant body for consultation with Government.

2. Repairs Review

The Board received a report setting out the final results of the repairs services review and considered options for the future of the service. The following was agreed:

- Review Option 4 - the packaging of responsive repairs and major works into a partnership contract that will enable the organisation to extend the handyman service and establish a long term partnership with a repairs/construction firm without reducing the freedom of TMOs to use the approved contractor of their choice.
- A service improvement plan - to address key service development and improvement issues identified during the review.

It was noted that some concerns raised about option 4 were based on misunderstandings:

- The option aims to build on the existing handyman service. It is not a threat to its future.
- TMOs will remain free to issue orders to any approved contractor.

3. Group Vision Event

The Board received a report setting out the results of the Group Vision survey conducted during December 2007 and January 2008. The following was agreed:

That the Conference would focus on four key themes:

- Safeguarding our uniqueness
- Developing new business

- Raising our profile
- Working smarter not harder

That the programme for the Group Vision Conference would cover the following:

- Facing the future: Key challenges & opportunities
- TMO hopes and fears for the future
- Presenting the new Central Support Team
- Working on the four key themes
- Summing up and agreeing next steps

4. Disability Equality Action Plan

The Board received and approved a draft Disability Action Plan to ensure that the organisation meets its regulatory and legislative obligations.

The action plan will be driven and monitored by a Disability Equality Steering Group and will include:

- Involving disabled people
- Measuring current performance
- Reviewing existing policies & procedures
- Producing a Disability Equality Scheme
- Developing disability equality KPIs

The work will focus on the following four organisational & service areas:

- Governance
- Customer Service
- Asset Management
- Employment & Training

5. New Development

The Board received and approved a report that establishes a framework to target and prioritise future new build development activities. The key aspects of the framework are:

- That new developments should focus on existing TMO areas.
- That priority should be given to those areas where stock has been lost due to Right to Buy (Delves, Brownhills and Pelsall).
- That family houses are needed to balance the organisation's stock profile.

6. Quality Assurance Audit Results (Quarter 3)

The Board received and noted the contents of the report:

- The Audit programme is slightly behind schedule but will be completed as outlined in the annual audit programme
- ASB, Complaints, Rents, Allocations and Racial harassment are now complete
- Former tenant arrears, voids, appointments and repairs will be audited in Quarter 4

- The improvements identified have been implemented within timescales and good progress is being made
- Rents have been identified as a priority for the next years audit programme
- Training is being centrally delivered for ASB and Customer complaints to all relevant staff

7. TMO Allowances Review

The Board received and approved a report that seeks to realign allowances. The Board approved to reallocate £160,000 from repairs allowances to Management allowances and a further £10,000 to grounds maintenance. The Board noted the TMO Consultative Committees decisions to retain full allowances in respect of voids and to bear the risk of overspend.

8. Performance to 31 December 2007

The Board received and noted a presentation summarising performance information for the Group up to 31 December 2007. The key issues are:

- Performance in rent collection appears to be good but is positively impacted by the two rent free weeks
- Performance for rent arrears is within target and top quartile
- Excellent performance in all repairs categories
- Poor performance for repairs appointments. The Board has asked for an analysis by TMO.
- Excellent performance for vacant and available to let
- Average re let time is slightly outside target and has deteriorated on previous two quarters
- Lettings to BME applicants is outside target
- Good performance in rent lost which is within target

Actions / areas for improvement

- Increased support at 1 TMO
- Increased monitoring at 1 TMO
- Low level monitoring at 4 TMO's
- Quality Assurance audit
- Review of repairs appointment system
- Development of Non decent homes strategy
- Appraisal process currently under review
- Key performance indicators to be validated for accuracy and compliance with Audit Commission / Housing Corporation methodologies

9. Management Accounts to 31 December 2007

The Board received and noted the management accounts for the Group up to 31 December 2007.

10. Internal Audit Services

The Board noted that the Audit Committee has re-appointed TIAA as the Group's Internal Auditor following a competitive tendering process.

WATMOS COMMUNITY HOMES

BOARD BRIEFING NOTE

Meeting Held on Wednesday 19th March 2008

1. Correspondence & Briefing Items

- The Chair and Chief Executive briefed the Board on the Group Vision Event held on 1st March 2008 and the key themes emerging from the process. It was noted that maintaining committees and giving incentives for involvement are major challenges for the future.
- SM advised that an application for Independent Board Membership has been received from Ejikeme Fabian Okoro who has a professional background in construction and lives in Oldbury. The Chair and Executive plan to meet him to discuss his application on 10th April.
- The Chair advised the Board that the Communities Minister Ian Wright MP will be visiting Burrowes Street on 8th May 2008.

2. Housing Allocations Policy

The Board approved proposed changes to the Group's allocations system. This involves a move from the old points system to a simplified banding system. Applicants are placed in date order within one of three bands (Band 1 – multiple housing needs, Band 2 – at least one housing need and Band 3 – no housing need). In addition, if an applicant makes an on-going voluntary contribution to the work of a TMO, they can appear in a fourth band that gives them an additional opportunity to be offered a property.

Under the new system, out of twenty lettings, allocations would be made as follows:

- Council nominations - 5
- Band 1 - 6
- Band 2 - 5
- Band 3 - 2
- Band 4 - 2

The Board also agreed the following:

- To close the Housing Register temporarily from 1st April to 30th June to enable the changes to be made.
- A new 'Discretionary Housing Policy' which deals with exclusions from the Housing Register.

Revised policy documents will be presented to the next Board meeting and guidance/training will be given to employees. The plan is to introduce the new arrangements on 30th June 2008.

3. Group Human Resources Strategy

The Board received and approved a new Group Human Resources Strategy called "A Strategy for Our People".

The Strategy includes the following specific themes:

- Theme 1 – An inspiring organisation
- Theme 2 – A learning organisation
- Theme 3 – A listening organisation
- Theme 4 – A diverse organisation
- Theme 5 – A high-performing organisation
- Theme 6 – A high-calibre organisation
- Theme 7 – A motivating organisation
- Theme 8 – A healthy organization

And the following over-arching themes:

- Group Human Resources Policies
- Computerised Human Resources System
- Human Resources Support Service

4. Homelessness Action Plan

The Board received a presentation about homelessness strategies from Nick Sedgwick of the Housing Corporation and agreed an action plan setting out how the Group will respond to the Government's policy of giving priority to preventative measures.

5. Budget and Business Plan 2008/9

The Board received and approved a report setting out the budget and business plan for the next year.

It was noted that although the Group is in a strong financial position and working within business plan assumptions there will be a need to try and outperform the plan in order to fully fund affordable warmth and cyclical maintenance commitments.

The rent policy will need to be reviewed to ensure that the rents for all WATMOS homes converge with target rents within the agreed timescales.

6. Group Risk Map 2008/9

The Board approved a reviewed risk map detailing the assessed risks of the organisation and how these are being managed. It was agreed that the following are our priority risks:

- Low demand for WATMOS homes
- Affordability due to high service costs
- Right to Buy sales weakening TMOs
- Complex and onerous governance arrangements
- Ensuring succession of the current tenant leadership

The risk map had previously been considered in detail by the Audit Committee whose members recommended it to the Board.

It was noted that for the first time each local TMO has its own risk map this year.

7. Starter Tenancies

The Board received a report about Starter Tenancies in which new tenants are offered assured shorthold tenancies for the first 12 months. This enables the landlord to gain possession more quickly and cheaply if the tenant causes nuisance and anti social behaviour.

The Board recognised that this presented the organisation with a dilemma. On the one hand we are a tenant-led organisation with a stated commitment to protecting tenancy rights. On the other hand we wish to deal with anti social behaviour swiftly and effectively.

An analysis of anti social behaviour cases failed to show that new tenants are significantly more likely to be perpetrators of anti social behaviour overall. However, the statistics did demonstrate a strong link between anti social behaviour and new tenants at Leamore TMO.

The Board agreed to explore further the possible use of Starter tenancies and to undertake consultation. It was suggested that this might be piloted at Leamore TMO.

8. Raleigh Street Development

The Board noted that there had been no demand for the Raleigh Street properties as shared ownership units and gave approval to the conversion of the development to general needs lettings.

9. Former Tenant Arrears Write-Offs

The Board agreed to write-off a number of 'uncollectable' former tenant debts. However, members were concerned about the very high debits accruing on a number of these cases.

The Board asked for a report at the next meeting giving more information about the highest value write-off case and an analysis of all current rent arrears cases where the debt is currently over £3000.

10. Performance Targets for 2008/9

The Board agreed a range of Group-wide performance target for the next year. In all but two cases the target assumes that the organisation will be performing within the sector upper quartile level; the exceptions being rent arrears and SAP (a measure of the thermal efficiency of properties).

11. Community Empowerment Review Terms of Reference

The Board noted the terms of reference for the value for money and continuous improvement review of involvement and the Community Empowerment Strategy. The objectives of the review include:

- Improving the tenant satisfaction rating for opportunities for involvement.

- Ensuring that TMO committees are able to retain sufficient committee members in future.
- Securing the future succession of the Group's tenant leadership.

12. Audit Commission Action Plan Update

The Board noted a report updating on progress with the audit Commission Action Plan. There are only a small number of actions outstanding and these have been agreed with the Housing Corporation.

WATMOS COMMUNITY HOMES

BOARD BRIEFING NOTE Meeting Held on Wednesday 21st May 2008

1. Correspondence & Briefing Items

- The Chair briefed the Board on the visit of Communities Minister Ian Wright MP to Burrowes Street on 8th May 2008. The visit was very successful and The Minister appears to be strongly supportive of the TMO and efforts to develop new community-based ways of running neighbourhood services.

2. Board Member Application

Members received an application from a potential Independent Board Member. Ejikeme Fabian Okoro has extensive experience in property services and asset management. The Chair, Chief Executive and Housing Services Director met him to discuss his application on 28 April 2008.

It was agreed that Mr Okoro be appointed as an Independent Board Member subject to confirmation that he is still committed to taking up the position.

3. Group Human Resources ICT System

Richard Anderson from a company called Cascade gave a presentation about a human resources computer system that could help store, organise and manage the Group's HR records, policies and processes.

The Board then received and approved a report from Michael Anderson recommending the procurement of the Cascade system. It was noted that an implementation plan would now be developed with the input of Group Managers and the central ICT Team.

4. RSR Return 2007/8

The Board received and approved the Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR) for 2007/8. This will now be submitted to the Housing Corporation. The RSR includes a wide range of statistical information about our organisation including performance, finance and governance.

5. BME Diversity performance and Targets

The Board received a report setting out performance against BME diversity targets for 2007/8 and proposed targets for 2008/9. It was noted that targets had generally been achieved in the following areas:

- Tenant satisfaction
- WATMOS Employees
- Racial harassment

However, targets had generally not been achieved in the following areas:

- Lettings
- WATMOS Board Membership

- TMO Committee membership

The Board approved the BME Diversity Targets for 2008/9.

ACTION: The Board asked all organisations within the Group to produce an action plan aimed at meeting the BME diversity targets for 2008/9.

The targets are attached at Appendix A.

6. CRE Code of Practice

The Board received and approved a report setting out an organisational self-assessment against the Commission for Racial Equality's new Code of Practice in Rented Housing. An action plan has been established to address areas for improvement in the following areas:

- Governance
- New and improved housing
- Sales and lettings
- Homelessness and housing advice
- Tenancy/housing management
- Racial harassment and anti social behaviour
- Contract procurement
- Involvement of residents and tenants

7. Gender Equality Action Plan

The Board received and approved a report setting out an action plan to meet the Group's obligations to achieve gender equality in the following three key areas of its activities:

- Governance
- Employment
- Service delivery

8. WATMOS Housing Allocations Scheme

Following approval of a new housing allocations system based on applicant banding rather the old points system, the Board received and agreed a revised Housing Allocations Scheme to reflect these changes.

This document will form the basis of detailed guidance for employees involved in housing allocations. It can be viewed by following this hyperlink:

[Q:\01 Housing Management\Allocations\WATMOS Housing Allocations Scheme \(July 2008\).doc](#)

The new policy will go live and the Housing Register will re-open on 30th June 2008. Employee training will take place on 13th and 20th June.

9. High-Value Rent Arrears Cases

Following a request by the Board at its last meeting, a report was presented which provided detailed analysis of a Former tenancy arrears case which was written off at the last Board meeting. The board

were also presented with analysis for all current cases with arrears in excess of £1500. It was noted that these high-value cases had built up in the past due to non-compliance with the rent arrears policy and procedures. However, through the quality assurance audits and regular monitoring the level of non-compliance has now been significantly reduced.

10. End of Year Performance Analysis 2007/8

The end of year performance was presented to the Board. It was noted that a detailed presentation of End of Year performance had been made to the Operations Committee. The presentation covered:

- Performance indicators and analysis
- CORE information
- Satisfaction performance and analysis
- Diversity performance and findings
- Value for money of legal services
- Actions for improvement

It was noted that the majority of indicators were within top quartile or within locally set targets and showed continuous improvement over the last 3 years. Improvement was needed in Rent written off, repairs appointments, estate inspections, appraisals and sickness. It was also noted that the diversity analysis did not highlight any areas for concern. The Contribution made by Committees, Board, Chairs, TMO employees and the Central Team was noted along with the improvements in all round performance and understanding of performance across the organisation.

11. Management Accounts to 31 March 2008

The Board received and noted the management accounts for the final quarter of 2007/8

WATMOS COMMUNITY HOMES

BME DIVERSITY TARGETS 2008/9

1. LETTINGS			
Lettings are proportionate to BME housing need in the area where the association has homes.			
This target is based on the level of BME demand for WATMOS/the TMOs on the housing register. In future the target will be increasingly linked to the profile of the electoral ward in which the TMO is located.			
	Housing list	ward	Target
The Avenues:	17.5%	3.1%	15%
Burrowes Street:	15.5%	18.1%	16%
Chuckery:	24.5%	38.7%	25%
Delves:	32%	48.1%	32%
Leamore:	11%	18.1%	11%
Sandbank:	10%	3.3%	10%
Twin Crescents:	19%	2.8%	14%
WATMOS/Walsall:	19.2%	14.2%	19%

2. Tenant Satisfaction	
Tenant satisfaction is at least as high as for non-BME tenants.	
The tenant satisfaction targets for 2008/9 are as follows:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce an annual report analysing all tenant survey results by ethnic origin. • Black & Minority Ethnic service users' satisfaction to be comparable to that of White British service users. 	

3. Dealing effectively with racial harassment	
The association establishes targets for reporting, victim support and satisfaction, and action taken against perpetrators.	
The targets for 2007/8 are as follows:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% compliance with the Racial Harassment Policy and procedures based on the Group's Quality Assurance Audit Programme. 	

4. Governing Body Membership								
The proportion of BME new appointments and re-appointments to the governing body is the same as under the application of the lettings criteria.								
<table> <tr> <td>Men -</td> <td>8 (80%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Women -</td> <td>2 (20%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>White -</td> <td>10 (100%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>BME -</td> <td>0 (0%)</td> </tr> </table>	Men -	8 (80%)	Women -	2 (20%)	White -	10 (100%)	BME -	0 (0%)
Men -	8 (80%)							
Women -	2 (20%)							
White -	10 (100%)							
BME -	0 (0%)							
Aim to appoint at least one BME Board Member and one co-optee during 2008/9 to fill existing skills and diversity gaps.								

5. Staffing								
New appointments and promotions achieve the same levels of representation, at all levels of the organisation, as under the application of the 'Lettings' criteria.								
Existing WATMOS employee profile:								
<table> <tr> <td>Men:</td> <td>15 (62%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Women:</td> <td>10 (38%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>White:</td> <td>16 (63.5%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>BME:</td> <td>9 (36.5%)</td> </tr> </table>	Men:	15 (62%)	Women:	10 (38%)	White:	16 (63.5%)	BME:	9 (36.5%)
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BME:	9 (36.5%)							
The % of current BME employees is far higher than for the population of Walsall as a whole.								
The targets for 2007/8 are:								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To maintain the current diversity of the WATMOS team. To produce an annual report to the Board providing information about recruitment, resignations, promotions and exit interviews by ethnic origin. 								

6. Representation in tenants/residents associations			
Representation reflects the ethnic mix of the association's tenants in the relevant area.			
TMO membership already reflects the profile of tenants in the area as membership is a condition of granting the tenancy. The membership of the TMO committees should reflect the wider profile.			
<u>TMO</u>	<u>Tenants</u>	<u>Committee</u>	<u>Target 06/07</u>
The Avenues	5.5%	0%	5%
Burrowes Street	9.0%	0%	10%
Chuckery	24%	8%	12%
Delves East	8.5%	0%	10%
Delves West	12%	13.5%	13.5%
Leamore	3%	15%	15%
Sandbank	1%	0%	5%
Twin Crescents	2%	0%	5%
Additional Target:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VFM & CI Community Empowerment Review to produce proposals for increasing BME volunteer activity within the Group's formal governance and representative structures. 			

7. Employment performance of suppliers, contractors & consultants
As a criterion for award of work or contracts and a condition of doing business, associations should pass on requirements in respect of staffing, customer satisfaction and dealing with racial harassment to their consultants, contractors and suppliers.
The following targets are proposed for 2007/8:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If possible ensure that a BME-owned contractor is invited to tender for the major works and responsive repairs partnering contract. Continue to require that, as a condition of being awarded work, all suppliers, contractors and consultants have an acceptable racial harassment policy/procedure or if not, agree to adopt the WATMOS policy/procedure. That the contractor selected for the major works and responsive repairs partnership contract commits to using a workforce that is representative of the ethnic profile of Walsall's population.

WATMOS COMMUNITY HOMES

BOARD BRIEFING NOTE Meeting Held on Monday 23 July 2008

1. Correspondence & Briefing Items

- A letter from Derrick Turner of Leamore TMO resigning his Board membership was received and accepted.
- The Chair and Chief Executive have met Jon Morris about possible Board Membership. It was agreed that he would attend the next couple of meetings as an informal co-optee so that both he and WATMOS can assess the value of his involvement.
- The Chief Executive gave a presentation about the Burrowes Street neighbourhood management project at a conference looking at developing a community-controlled fibre-optic broadband system for the Birchills area.
- The Chair updated the Board on his activities in national policy development.

2. Internal Controls Assurance

The Board received a report that set out the range of ways in which the organisation seeks to ensure effective internal control of its business (including the management of strategy, risk, finance, performance, regulatory and legislative obligations). The Board endorsed the adequacy of current internal control arrangements.

3. Financial Statements 2007-08

The Board received the financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2008. These were approved along with the letter of representation and the external auditor's management letter.

The Resources Director gave a presentation summarising key aspects of the Group's financial situation.

It was suggested that the WATMOS and the TMOs need to consider agreeing group-wide strategic priorities that guide investment and the use of surpluses.

4. Self-Assessment against the Regulatory Code 2007

The Board received a report that included:

- A detailed self-assessment of the Group's compliance with the Housing Corporation Regulatory Code (the range of standards that a housing association must meet to be registered as a social landlord).
- A proposed action plan to address key areas for improvement emerging from the self-assessment (see summary of actions at Appendix 1).
- An analysis of the organisation's compliance with transfer policies.

The Board accepted the self-assessment, approved the action plan and made a formal statement of the organisation's compliance with the Regulatory Code. The Board also approved the analysis of the organisation's compliance with transfer policies. All these have now been submitted to the Housing Corporation.

5. The Frequency of Board Meeting

The Board received and approved a report proposing that the number of Board meetings per year should reduce from 6 to 4. In making this decision, the Board took account of the robustness of current internal controls, the organisation's strength and stability and the new governance structure that has been implemented over the last 12 months (that includes the establishment of TMO and employee consultative committees and Committee Link Officers).

6. Satisfaction Surveys

The Board received a report setting out a number of options for running satisfaction surveys in future.

The Board decided to move to a system of 10%-20% sample surveys backed up by telephone surveys where the response rate is low. This will be co-ordinated by the central Team. It was agreed that if any negative returns are received these will be passed to both the manager and the chair of the TMO concerned.

7. Money Advice Project

The Board received a report about a project being developed with other local housing associations to jointly commission money advice services for tenants. The Board supported the approach being taken and gave approval for WATMOS to enter into a partnership with the Money Advice Project subject to successful negotiation of the detail.

7. Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy

The Board received and approved a new policy setting out the organisation's approach to dealing with fraud. The Audit Committee considered this policy at its meeting held on 16 July and recommended it to the Board with some minor amendments.

8. Land Disposal at Comwall Close, Leamore

The Board agreed to dispose of a small strip of land at Comwall Close Leamore to the Council as part of a road improvement scheme. Leamore TMO will benefit from some environmental/security improvements at this location. WATMOS is required to register this transaction with the Housing Corporation.

9. Amendment to the Tenancy Agreement

The Board considered a proposal to amend the tenancy agreement for new tenants precluding the installation of laminate flooring in flats above the ground floor.

The Board approved the proposed amendment but decided that each TMO should determine whether to implement this change in their area as a local policy decision.

- 9. Quality Assurance Report for 2007/8**
The Board received and noted a report setting out the results of the quality assurance programme for 2007/8 and the planned programme for 2008/9.
- The quality assurance system is having a major impact on improving service consistency and compliance with policies and procedures across the Group.
- 10. Employee Annual Questionnaire 2008**
The Board received and noted a reporting setting out the results of this year's employee questionnaire. Overall 53% of Group employees completed and returned the questionnaire. The results will now be discussed with the TMO Consultative Committee and the Employee Consultative Committee to agree what actions need to be taken to address issues raised.
- 11. Annual Viability Review 2008**
The Board received and noted the Housing Corporation's most recent review of the organisation's viability. A green light was received which indicates that WATMOS meets the Corporation's viability expectations set out in the Regulatory Code.
- 12. Analysis of Staffing Developments 2007/8**
The Board noted a report analysing employee recruitment, promotions and resignations by gender and ethnic origin during 2007/8.
- 13. Audit Commission Short Notice Inspections**
The Board received a report providing information about the Audit Commission's new system of short notice inspections that will begin in the autumn. Key points about the new system are as follows:
- RSLs will only receive 5 days notice of an inspection (with less time to prepare the AC believes that this will give a truer picture of the services being inspected).
 - The inspections will focus on the quality of services delivered to tenants and leaseholders.
 - The inspections will only look at one or two service areas.
 - The focus will be on weaker services provided to tenants and leaseholders ('one star' RSLs are likely to be targeted and previous inspection reports will be taken into account when determining the inspection programme).
 - The inspection team will be on-site for about 3 days.
 - The Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation will agree the inspection programme but this will not be published.
- 14. WATMOS Service Improvement Plan 2007-2010**
A report was received and noted updating the Board on progress with the Group's Service Improvement Plan. During 2007/8 a total of 94 were completed.

Regulatory Code Action Areas – A Summary

As part of the annual self-assessment against the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code, WATMOS has identified the following action areas for 2007/8:

1. **Viable**

- We will seek to renegotiate our current loan covenants with Lloyds TSB.

2. **Properly Governed**

- We will undertake a review of the structure of governance meetings across the Group to achieve streamlining and ensure that we are 'working smarter not harder'.
- We will produce a long-term Board training and development strategy.
- We will complete a Value for Money and Continuous Improvement Service Review of Community Empowerment and tenant participation producing proposals to improve tenant satisfaction with opportunities for involvement.
- We will develop a system of tenant mystery shopping and inspection as part of the Quality Assurance system.
- Based on the results of the Community Empowerment Review, we will establish an action plan to improve BME involvement in the Association's governance and other informal participation activities.
- We will complete all due actions within the disability equality, CRE Code of Practice and Gender Equality actions plans.

3. **Properly Managed**

- We will review our target rents convergence rate to ensure convergence by 2012.
- We will develop a group wide training programme including key Housing management refresher training.
- We will Implement a Group Intranet system.
- We will deliver the planned year two Quality Assurance audit Programme
- We will establish key community empowerment service standards and KPIs.

- We will complete the Value for Money and Continuous Improvement Service Review of community empowerment and tenant participation.
- We will implement the repairs review decisions including service improvement plan.
- We will begin the value for money and continuous improvement review of rent collection and arrears management services.
- We will achieve Board approval for the Group Asset Management Strategy.
- We will review money/debt and welfare rights advice services and explore a partnership approach with other local RSLs.
- We will complete all due actions in the WATMOS Homelessness Action Plan.
- We will produce proposals to increase the use of social, economic and housing market information in the Group's business planning process.

WATMOS COMMUNITY HOMES

BOARD BRIEFING NOTE Meeting Held on 19 November 2008

1. Correspondence & Briefing Items

- The Chair and Chief Executive made a presentation about WATMOS at a conference organised by Leeds Tenants Federation. There appears to be growing interest in tenant management in the city.
- The Chair is to be involved in a housing related 'round-table' discussion at the Guardian Newspaper.

2. Tenant Board Member Appointments

The Board received applications from the following tenants nominated by their TMOs and agreed to appoint them to the Board:

Joseph Ralph - Twin Crescents TMO

Dorothy Dennis - Avenues TMO

3. The Impact of the Central Team 2007-2008

The Board received a report analysing the impact of the restructured central team during the past 2 years. It was noted that working in partnership with the TMOs the team has achieved the following during the period:

- Improved consistency of Group services to minimum agreed standards.
- Improved management of performance
- Improved Group communication and consultation arrangements
- Improved service development and continuous improvement arrangements
- Improved Group advice services
- Improved Group support services
- Improved strategic management information
- Improved financial control and awareness
- Improved Group internal governance arrangements
- Improved training and development arrangements

There is clear evidence to suggest that the above achievements are reflected in sustained improvements in performance and tenant satisfaction.

4. WATMOS: Bog-Standard or Unique?

The Board received a report setting out concerns that have been raised within the Group about the general direction of the organisations. Some feel that in responding to the demands of the regulatory and inspection regimes WATMOS is becoming more like a 'bog-standard RSL.

In responding to these concerns, the Chair has produced a paper arguing that the Group needs to go back to basics and focus on the following key issues:

- Comply with the regulations but lobbying for change
- Tenants and what they want must be at the heart of everything we do
- Ensure employees are not overloaded and there's adequate cover
- We must work hard to ensure that our unique structure continues to work
- Improve communication with our tenants & residents through the TMOs

The Chair and Chief Executive have developed a joint response to the issue that will form the basis of future actions. This is made up of 10 commitments:

1. We will work together to protect & strengthen what is unique about the WATMOS Group
2. We will support tenant leaders in agreeing their vision for the Group
3. We will raise awareness that the TMOs and the central team are interdependent
4. We will work together to improve people's understanding of the Group's constitution and the regulatory framework
5. We will support efforts to maximise resident involvement & our understanding of what tenants want
6. We will encourage & support TMOs to find new & better ways of doing things
7. We will support TMOs in reviewing staffing & cover arrangements to avoid work overload
8. We will support our people to enable them to work smarter not harder (esp. procedures)
9. We will encourage & support TMOs to develop new community services/activities that meet their tenants needs & aspirations
10. Through national representative bodies we will lobby for a regulatory framework that is friendlier to tenant-led and community-based RSLs

The Board supported these commitments and approved the Organisational Development Working Group's recommendation that the tenants leadership should work with an independent facilitator to develop their vision and values for the future.

5. **KLoE Self Assessment Results**

The Board received a report setting out the results of self-assessments undertaken against the main areas of weakness highlighted in the Audit Commission inspection report following the inspection carried out in December 2006.

It was found that significant improvement had been achieved in the following areas:

- Responsive Repairs (particularly administration and response times)
- Housing Income Management (particularly the management of rent arrears)
- Tenancy Management (particularly our approach to anti social behaviour)

However, it was also found that significant weaknesses remain in the following areas:

- Aid and Adaptations
- Diversity
- Value for money

The Board approved an action plan to address these weaknesses.

6. Proposed Changes to the Nominations Agreement

The Board received and approved a report setting out changes proposed by the Council to the nominations agreement. Essentially, the changes provide flexibility for the Council and partner RSLs to vary nomination rates for family houses where demand requires it.

7. Group Rent Setting Policy

The Board approved a Group Rent Setting Policy that will ensure that rents for all homes will reach the Government's targets by 2012.

7. Human Resources Policies

The Board received and approved a new framework of Human Resources Policies following extensive consultation with Group employers and employees. The policies are available to view of the Group Intranet.

8. Relationship Breakdown Policy and Guidance

The Board approved a new policy and comprehensive guidance regulating the way in which cases of relationship breakdown are dealt with. The policy and procedures comply with current legislation and good practice. The policy and guidance will be available to view on the Group Intranet.

9. Former Tenant Arrears Write-Offs

The Board received a report setting out information about debts that have been written-off under the value of £500.

9. Mid-Year Group Risk Review

The Board received and noted a report looking at current risks with particular emphasis on current economic conditions.

10. Group Performance to 30 September 2008

The Board received and noted a reporting setting out the Group's performance at the end of the second quarter.

11. Management Accounts to 30 September 2008

The Board received and noted the management accounts to the end of the second quarter.

12. West Midlands KPI Benchmarking 207/8

The Board received and noted a report setting out the Groups performance against other RSLs in the West Midlands produced by Housemark.

13. Working Smarter Not Harder Strategy

The Board received and noted a report setting out some initial thoughts on the development of a Working Smarter Not Harder Strategy for the Group.

14. Housing & Regeneration Act 2008

A report was received and noted that provided information about the provisions contained within the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. This information is available on the Business & Performance page of the Group Intranet Site.