

## One Star and Promising Prospects for Watmos!

We are pleased to tell you that the Audit Commission's Inspection report about WATMOS, that was published on 15th March 2007, concludes that we are providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement.

The Audit Commission have praised WATMOS and the eight TMOs for our strong customer focus, high levels of tenant involvement, the success of the housing improvement programme and the high standard of our estates. The report, however, also identified the need for improvement

in a number of areas including service standards, service information, a more strategic approach to diversity, improved performance management and a stronger approach to achieving value for money.

Chair of WATMOS, Terry Edis said, "It is good to see that the inspectors have recognised the real success of WATMOS as the first landlord in the country based on tenant management. We are still a young organisation but we are determined to give priority to the services that really matter to residents such as major housing improvements, high quality neighbourhoods and good security measures. In particular, we are proud to have increased the number of our homes meeting the Government's Decent Homes

Standard from 10% to 94% in the last four years without the need for long term borrowing."

WATMOS Chief Executive, Stuart Masters said, "Thanks to the positive approach of the inspection team, we found the inspection process an extremely positive experience. We are delighted that they have concluded that, due to effective leadership and robust improvement planning, we have promising prospects for improvement. All of the Audit Commission's service improvement recommendations have been incorporated into our Service Improvement Plan and everyone within the organisation, both tenant volunteers and group employees, are working together to meet the challenges that lie ahead."



# Audit Commission Report

## The Results

The Audit Commission's report following its inspection of WATMOS was published on Thursday 15th March 2007.

The Audit Commission has concluded that we are providing a 'fair', one star service that has promising prospects for improvement.

### Areas of Strength

The report identifies the following services as areas of strength:

- Stock Investment & Asset Management (strategic property services)
- Capital improvement, planned, cyclical & major works
- Void property management & repairs
- Gas Servicing
- Estate management

### Areas of Weakness

The report identifies the following services as areas of weakness:

- Diversity
- Responsive repairs
- Aids and adaptations
- Tenancy management (including Anti social behaviour)
- Housing income management (rent arrears)
- Value for money

### Prospects for Improvement

The report highlights the following factors that demonstrate promising prospects for improvement:

- There is good leadership and self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses
- A range of service improvements have been made
- There is good business and service planning
- There is a robust approach to financial and risk management
- There is good use of IT to manage and monitor services
- There are examples of inward investment and partnership working

### Improvement Challenges

The report highlights the following challenges that need to be addressed to ensure long-term improvement:

- The need to improve the capacity of WATMOS to co-ordinate and drive improvements.
- The need to plan for the future tenant leadership of the organisation
- The need for a Group-wide approach to Human Resources management, training and development
- The need to strengthen the strategic approach to diversity
- The need to further develop our approach to performance management
- The need to ensure that we are a 'learning organisation' (effectively using internal and external feedback information to improve services)

# Could you be making the News?

Would you like to contribute an item to our newsletter? Is there something interesting going on in your local TMO area?

If so we'd like to hear from you. Please contact the Editor at WATMOS Community Homes, 29 Stafford Street, Walsall, WS2 8DG or telephone 01922 471910 or email [info@watmos.org.uk](mailto:info@watmos.org.uk)



## What the Lead Housing Inspector had to say

Deborah Good, the Audit Commission's Lead Housing Inspector for the West Midlands, said:

"Through its support of the tenant management organisations (TMOs), WATMOS has made sure that tenants have a clear role in managing their services and estates. This has resulted in improvements that are focused on the needs of tenants and communities. Effective leadership and robust improvement plans should ensure further improvements."

### The organisation's strengths include:

- Improving tenants' homes and letting empty properties to consistently high standards
- Maintaining estates to a high level and working with tenants to meet local priorities, such as security
- Helping to maximise tenants' income by working with the local authority to increase benefit take up
- A strong level of self awareness which helps it focus on delivering improvements in services to customers

### Our recommendations for improvement include:

- Developing its approach to diversity to ensure that services and future improvements are delivered fairly
- Improving its understanding of the cost of services and working with TMOs to set local efficiency targets
- Managing performance more effectively by identifying and monitoring trends in areas like repairs and complaints



# Our response to the inspection

**WATMOS Community Homes welcomes the Audit Commission's report and we are pleased that its findings are consistent with the organisation's own self-assessment. We are also delighted that the Commission has assessed that we have promising prospects for improvement due to effective leadership and robust improvement planning.**



WATMOS has a unique community empowerment structure with over 100 tenants directly involved in governance and service delivery. The results of the inspection confirm that this unique structure is effective and has the capacity to achieve service improvements over time.

The inspection experience was extremely valuable and we would like to thank the inspection team who were honest, co-operative and constructive throughout the process. Their positive approach certainly added value and helped us get the most out of the experience.

All the Inspectorate's recommendations are included in our Service Improvement Plan which is managed directly by the WATMOS Executive and monitored by Board Members at every WATMOS Board Meeting. We are confident that



the recommendations will be addressed within the timescales specified in the report.

WATMOS is already driving on-going service improvement and organisational development, led by the Board and supported through:

The **Service Improvement Steering Group** – taking responsibility for identifying and implementing service improvement and innovation.

The **Organisational Development Working Group** – taking responsibility for organisational development that will enable service improvement and business excellence.

WATMOS Community Homes' success is built on effective partnerships and joint-working and we would like to thank all our tenant volunteers, Board Members and employees for their hard work and commitment.





# Specific recommendations we need to address

The Audit Commission has asked us to work on the following issues during the next six months.

## 1. Strengthening our customer focus

This will include improving our use of service information and service standards, developing services to meet diverse needs, ensuring we act on customer feedback, enhancing opportunities for resident involvement and helping staff to improve advice and services for vulnerable customers.

## 2. Strengthening our performance management

This will include improving our monitoring of responsive repairs, using formal complaints to improve services through better monitoring and reporting, taking a more strategic approach to the management of rent arrears and having a system to record and share learning from inside and outside of the organisation.

## 3. Strengthening our approach to value for money

This will include improving our approach to pursuing former tenant arrears and recharges, developing TMO efficiency targets with the involvement of local tenants and employees and systematically comparing levels of service and performance amongst the eight TMOs.

# Working Hard to Improve Services

We have developed an action plan to address the main recommendation contained in the inspection report. We aim to complete all of this work by September 2007.

In addition, based on our own self-assessment and the inspection findings we are now working on some key service improvement and organisational development themes.

## Service Improvement Themes

### Service Consistency

We aim to develop a quality assurance system that will guarantee the consistency of all our main service activities. This will incorporate a commitment to challenging service standards and targets.

### Diversity

We have recently introduced a Group Diversity Strategy. The main objectives of the Strategy are to ensure that our services are flexible to meet different needs and that they are delivered fairly.

### Value for Money

Over the next few years we plan to undertake a programme of service reviews to test value for money and ensure on-going service improvement.

### Resident Involvement

We will review our community empowerment strategy and look carefully at how we can provide new involvement opportunities for tenants and residents who are not involved in our Board or the TMO committees.



## Organisational Development Themes

### Developing our Employees

We will be giving a high priority to ensuring that our employees get the training and development they need to do their jobs and contribute to improving services.

### Supporting Resident Volunteers

We will be running a group-wide training programme for TMO committee members to ensure that local people can continue to lead the organisation and run their own services.

### Working Together

We will be looking at how greater co-operation and joint working between all parts of the Group can improve services and value for money.

### A 'Learning Organisation'

We want to make sure that we continually improve services by learning from our experiences and from the feedback you give us.

# Tell us what you think. We value your feedback!

1. What do you think about the Audit Commission's findings?

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2. Do you have any comments about our response?

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3. What do you think about our improvement plans?

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4. How can we improve how our organisation works?

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5. What service improvements would you like to see us make?

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6. How would you like us to involve you in what we do?

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7. If we could learn from the good practice of one other organisation which would it be?

Four horizontal lines for text input.

8. Do you have any other comments or queries?

Four horizontal lines for text input.

Name:

One horizontal line for text input.

Address:

Four horizontal lines for text input.

Telephone:

One horizontal line for text input.

Email:

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Please return this feedback form to 29 Stafford Street, Walsall, WS2 8DG or hand it in at your local TMO office.

# Contact Details

You can find **WATMOS** at:  
29 Stafford Street  
Walsall  
WS2 8DG  
Tel: 01922 471910  
Fax: 01922 612967  
Or email us on  
info@watmos.org.uk

You can contact each of the TMOs as follows:

**The Avenues TMO**  
10/11 Second Avenue  
Brownhills  
WS8 6JA  
Tel: 01543 453659  
Email: avenues@watmos.org.uk

**Burrowes Street TMO**  
Burrowes Street  
Walsall  
WS2 8NN  
Tel: 01922 613292  
Fax: 01922 746949  
Email:  
burrowes@watmos.org.uk

**Chuckery TMO**  
2 Brookes House  
Tantarra Street  
Chuckery  
Walsall  
WS1 2HS  
Tel: 01922 644456  
Fax: 01922 640841  
Email:  
chuckery@watmos.org.uk

**Delves East TMO & Delves West TMO**  
West Bromwich Road  
Delves  
Walsall  
WS5 4NW  
Tel: 01922 720790  
Fax: 01922 638658  
Email: delves@watmos.org.uk

**Leamore TMO**  
1 Dover House  
Providence Close  
Leamore  
Walsall  
WS3 2AW  
Tel: 01922 493266  
Fax: 01922 400219  
Email: leamore@watmos.org.uk

**Sandbanks TMO**  
1a Clarke House  
Bloxwich  
WS3 2HF  
Tel:01922 400333  
Fax:01922 400333  
Email:  
sandbank@watmos.org.uk

**Twin Crescents TMO**  
11 Grove Crescent  
Pelsall  
Walsall  
WS3 4NG  
Tel: 01922 682539  
Fax: 01922 682539  
Email:  
twincrescents@watmos.org.uk

