

Investors in People

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Pickering & Ferens Homes

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Date: 21/01/05

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1. Assessment Details

Name of organisation:	Pickering & Ferens Homes
Address of the organisation	Silvester House, The Maltings, Silvester Street, Hull HU1 3HA
Telephone number:	01482 223783
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Number of sites:	Six
Number of employees:	37 + Voluntary Trustees
Nature of business:	Housing Association
Status of the Organisation:	Charitable status
Most Senior Person in the Organisation	Roger Elliot
Assessment type:	Standard Assessment
Assessor:	Lydia Wiffen
Assessment Co-ordinator:	Amy Read
Date of Initial Meeting	11/01/05
Date of Site Visits:	18/01/05
Date of Assessment Report:	21/01/05
Date of Feedback Meeting:	18/01/05

2. Assessors Recommendation

I am delighted to conclude that at the assessment site visit on 18/01/05 Pickering & Ferens Homes met all the indicators of the Investors in People National Standard.

3. Introduction

Pickering & Ferens Homes has been in existence since 1910. Over the years it has grown and achieved housing association status and today the association has a total housing stock of 1149 properties. The association has recently moved into new premises in the centre of Kingston upon Hull. A high value is placed upon customer service and maintenance of properties. This is very much a people focused business, staff training and development are viewed as critical to continuing to provide a very high quality service to residents. One of the stated core values is "To ensure that all trustees and staff are trained to a high standard".

The association has a relaxed but professional atmosphere and there is a friendly and open approach throughout.

Since becoming involved in Investors in People the Director says there have been many improvements, some of which have been:

- A business plan with objectives;
- People are now more aware of and contribute to the development of organisational aims and objectives;
- Setting of individual performance targets and review of performance to targets;
- Improved communications;

4. Objectives for the Site Visit

Objectives for the site visit were agreed with the Director on 11/01/05 and were as follows:

- To provide objective third-party feedback to aid continuous improvement;
- To establish whether the association meets the Investors in People Standard;
- To elicit staff feedback on the impact of the move to the new premises.

5. Areas of good practice/strengths

- Effective communications with sharing of training and development opportunities occurring regularly at meetings and feedbacks
- The association places great value on communications which are open, transparent and frequent
- There is a caring and supportive culture in existence, resulting in happy and motivated employees.
- The Director places great value on the contribution the employees make to the success of the association;
- There is a great deal of management and peer coaching and support for colleagues;

6. Areas for development

- Consider further defining and communicating more specifically what Pickering & Ferens Homes requires of managers in terms of their responsibility for managing the training and development of their teams;
- Consider further developing the training evaluation process by linking any training undertaken to the relevant target/performance indicator. Also further develop the Trustees analysis of the costs and impact of training;
- Implement the proposed process for evaluating internal training;
- Consider other Investors in People modules regarding management and leadership, recruitment and selection and work/life balance.
- Discuss the timing of the post-recognition review with Business Link Humber. The Profile approach could be valuable in terms of benchmarking.
- Become familiar with the revised Investors in People Standard to prepare for the first review;
- Continue to maintain the excellent practices and culture that are evident in Pickering & Ferens Homes;
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7. Findings against the Standard

COMMITMENT

An Investor in People is fully committed to developing its people in order to achieve its aims and objectives.

There is a genuine commitment to the development of staff at all levels; during discussions the Director, the head of housing and the personnel manager all described the strategies and activities that are in place to support the development of all employees. The strategies and actions described included:

- Induction;
- Appraisals
- Self development training for all staff;
- Coaching and training in the workplace;

All interviewees confirmed that the above actions take place and they also believed that the Director and trustees were genuinely committed to their development to maintain the association's quality service to residents/tenants. Without exception people interviewed felt that the move to the new premises had been a good one, it was well communicated and had a positive impact on the work processes, teamwork and organisation of the association.

(Indicator 1)

Interviewees from staff and trustees provided instances of how they were encouraged to develop themselves and to coach others. They said they are encouraged to put themselves forward for the excellent self development training provided by the association, feed in ideas for the business plan through taking part in group work to produce SWOT and PEST analysis and through the appraisal process.

(Indicator 2)

Without exception interviewees believed their contribution to the company was recognised and appreciated by the Director and managers. They said that the managers were good at giving feedback at appraisals and that training was always a key part of the discussion. All staff are invited to meetings and included in the training activities. People gave a number of examples how their contribution was recognised which included:

- Verbal thanks on a daily basis
- Letters of thanks sent to people by the Director
- Positive comments from the Director and trustees
- Support given during sickness or other non work problems.

(Indicator 3)

The opportunity to train and develop is given to all, for example everyone has been invited to attend the self development training and training is identified as a result of the appraisals that all employees experience. The association carried out an equal opportunities and diversity audit in 2004 which led to equal opportunities and diversity training being delivered to all staff.

Indicator 4)

“The training & development policy states how important equal opportunities are and everyone has equal access to training & development”

“I feel appreciated, the flexibility here helps you feel appreciated, you give a certain amount but feel that you get it back”

“I got positive feedback at my appraisal; I was given positive comments from the trustees. My line manager is very caring and takes on board everyone’s opinions”

“Trustees say, thanks for the hard work that went in to that report”

“There have been huge improvements in the last couple of years, things are reviewed regularly, and people say thanks, including trustees”

“We have just got a new steam cleaner, so me and another cleaner we went through the video and instructions together before using it,...(manger) is always there if we have problems”

“We are valued, it is really good. Everyone is aware of other people’s job roles because we need to work as a team to give a good quality service and keep standards very high”

PLANNING

An Investor in People is clear about its aims and its objectives and what its people need to do to achieve them.

The Pickering and Ferens team have developed a broad ranging long term business plan running from 2004 – 2034. The plan incorporates annual organisation performance indicators and targets. These include

- Rent arrears;
- Repairs;
- Letting of vacant properties;
- Maintenance costs.

From the business plan the association has developed a training plan and the training needs are cascaded to individuals through the appraisal meetings.

The business plan and training plan are reviewed by the Director, senior management team and the trustees regularly. All staff were involved in building the business plan through group work at meetings where they produced SWOT and PES analysis which fed in to the process.

Interviewees were very clear about what the overall aims of the association were, and how the aims impacted on their jobs.

(Indicator 5)

There is a great deal of internal & external training activity taking place, and good records are kept of external training courses. All training links to the business plan targets and performance indicators. Topics covered include:

- Excel;
- Gas safety
- Data Protection;
- Payroll seminar;
- Equality & Diversity
- Personal development programme
- Electrical safety

Everyone at Pickering & Ferens Homes had a good understanding of what they should be achieving from their development activities both for themselves as individuals and for the team and company. People have to consider how any training will help them in their jobs so they knew what they needed to achieve from it for example, one person talked about how training had helped with transferring callers through to the right person quickly on the new phone system.

There is an active staff representative group and new policies and procedures are submitted to UNISON for comments.

(Indicator 6)

When asked to describe how they felt they contributed to the achievement of the Organisation's objectives, people could very easily explain, they linked the impact of their job to the performance of the association as a whole; they attributed this to the knowledge built as a result of participation in the business planning process, appraisals and training.

(Indicator 7)

“There is a 6 month plan in each department which is linked to the business plan aims and objectives, then there is a separate human resources action plan to cover things like contracts of employment, job descriptions etc”

A draft of the plan is produced taking into account staff comments, we have time to read it and then it goes to Trustees for sign off”

“At every one to one I have we discuss training and how I feel about it, and how it will help me in my job role”

“I help to keep staff happy and maintain morale, and provide appropriate training to give staff the ability to do the job”

ACTION

An Investor in People develops its people effectively in order to improve its performance.

The training noted in the individual and course records provides plenty of evidence of in house and external training, coaching and support from managers. The association provides personal development training for all staff which is delivered through an external consultant and this has proved to be highly effective for all concerned. Staff rate it highly; it has helped to increase customer service skills and confidence amongst the team. The Directors and managers also support and advise people, there is an open door policy and people feel they can approach managers at any time.

Managers are supporting their teams well, they talked about on the job coaching, appraisals, induction, meetings, and ongoing one to one chats as being part of their role in developing people. Staff were positive that managers were proficient in managing their training.

(Indicator 8)

One interviewee described the induction received at Pickering & Ferens homes which started with a pre start date chat with the Director. This was followed on the first day by a site orientation and introduction to all staff and then went on to include time spent in each department to get an overview of the work. The induction took two weeks and was recorded on an induction checklist which was signed off when complete. Feedback on the induction received by a recent new employee was very positive

People do know what they are expected to do as a result of their development activities, one manager who had attended the personal development programme said that as a result of what they had learnt they could now delegate appropriately and ensure that they described what needed doing thoroughly so people were clear on what was expected of them.

“I have one to ones in addition to my appraisal, we discuss training- I am going on a sign language course. My manager runs team meetings and I can go to her at any time with problems”

“...(manager) is very open and I can go to him with problems anytime. He advises me and does my appraisal, he tells me clearly what needs doing and why. We all work together as a section of team players”

“The induction was thorough, at the end it was all signed off. I felt confident quickly”

“We went on the telephone skills training so we could all answer the phone in the same way to make the initial image of the organisation better”

EVALUATION

An Investor in People understands the impact of its investment in people on its performance.

The housing association sector has to meet the requirements of government initiatives like the Supporting People initiative, and also submit to regular Audit Commission and Charity Commissions inspections. The relevant reports are used by senior managers and trustees to assess and make judgements on the overall performance of the organisation.

The trustees and senior managers discuss forthcoming training activities and after training has taken place they see the assessment of the training by the employee which captured on a ‘Training courses attended’ feedback sheet and submitted to each personnel sub committee meeting. Individual training plans are also completed as a result of appraisal discussions and decision records are completed for ad-hoc external training. An additional evaluation sheet has just been introduced for internal training sessions. It is fair to say however, that this captured information has yet to be used to its full advantage when analysing costs and benefits of training in relation to achieving the objectives in the business plan.

There have been a number of improvements in training and development processes and activities in the association, some of the examples cited by interviewees were:

- The introduction of the Blue Sky personal/self development programme for all staff, which has given people more self confidence, increased team work and motivation;
- Appraisals are no longer linked to salary increases – so ensuring the appraisal discussion is focused on performance and training. The appraisal process has been reviewed and simplified and honed to the current needs of the association.
- Consultation with staff and the input that staff now have to building plans and ideas for the future

Training is planned in line with the business plan. There are questions on the form used for evaluation of external courses that ask the participant to state their reasons for attendance and conclusions on the value of the training.

The Director and managers clearly see that training is crucial to Pickering & Ferens Homes continuing to improve results in relation to, for example, the percentage of repairs completed within target times (currently 97%) and reducing the average time it takes to re-let vacant properties (currently 3.7 weeks against a target of 4 weeks)

(Indicator 10)

The business plan is reviewed annually and individual's achievements are reviewed through the appraisal reviews. As a result of the business plan reviews, the board and sub committee meetings, trustees and management undoubtedly have a broad understanding of the benefits of training and development

Individuals explained how training had impacted on performance for example, one person who had been on the managing supported housing training said that it had made her more assertive and able to manage residents issues more effectively by asking them the most appropriate questions to get to the problem more quickly.

(Indicator 11)

Examples of improvements to training and development activities include:

- the induction programme,
- the revised appraisal process
- cascading of what people have learnt whilst on training, to their team
- Improved internal training and the use of the new board room in which to deliver it.

All the above have been contributory factors in the improvements to team working and the success of the association over the past two years. **(Indicator 12)**

“Things are much better with internal training; we have now got the board room to deliver it in”

“The appraisal process is much better, we were asked what we thought about the forms and now some questions on the old form have been eliminated and appraisals now flow much better and clearer”

“Everyone completes a post course form and says how they have benefited from the course, completed forms go to the personnel sub committee and the minutes of the committee minutes got to the full board for discussion.”

“I learnt the when delegating work to staff to make sure they see it all the way through by telling them the whole job, start to end, and why they are doing it”

8. Conclusion

I am pleased to confirm that Pickering & Ferens Homes complies with the requirements of the current version of the Investors in People Standard and that there are no actions required to meet the Standard, following this successful assessment visit.

Subject to the Panel's approval, recognition is granted for a period not exceeding three years from the date on the front cover of this report. The current guidance states that the organisation can seek assessment at any stage provided the period between each assessment does not exceed three years. The organisation should discuss the exact timing of the next assessment with their Investors in People Adviser, an appropriate Assessor will be appointed nearer the time.