

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE REVIEW REPORT

ASHFIELD HOMES LTD

Key Information

Assessment Type	Review
Assessor Name	Kerry Wood
Visit Date	30 th June & 1 st July
Assessment Reference Number	ENQ-81265-MCXH6D

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Background to this review

When I came to meet you and Angela to arrange this review you told me of the review currently underway to ascertain the future of Ashfield Homes. In view of the uncertainty about the outcome of the review and future strategies it was decided that this Investors in People review would be solely against the Core Investors in People Standard. In view of the respect that I hold the organisation in it would have been interesting to assess Ashfield Homes against more ambitious criteria but I fully appreciate your reticence at this juncture.

We agreed that I would spend two days on site and that the whole exercise would take three days, including planning and writing this report. As usual you sent me your staff list in good time and of those I suggested I meet, I actually saw 25 of your people from all levels and functions within the company. I suggest that my initial misinterpretation of the timing schedule for the second day had no real effect on the thoroughness of my investigations, nor indeed the final outcome.

As ever your people were open and friendly and it has always been a pleasure to talk with them.

This report will cover my thoughts about the performance of Ashfield Homes, the outcome and suggested developments. What I saw was similar to my previous visit hence the passage covering how the company meets the Investors in People Standard will not differ much from the last report. However, in order to bring the facts to life, I have included a number of quotes of what your people actually said. At the end I have included an action plan which you may or may not choose to use and I am required to include the chart that shows which of the 196 evidence requirements the company meets, even though you have only chosen to be assessed the 39 of the Core Standard.

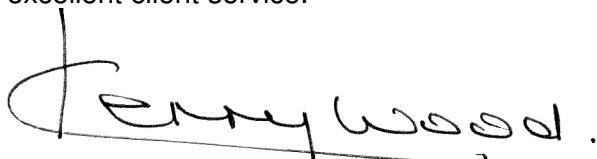
Conclusion

Ever since I first assessed Ashfield Homes I have always had a respect for the company, and on this occasion whilst the people processes have altered little since my previous visit, I believe that what I witnessed was even more impressive than three years ago. The culture of open communications, support of staff and real professionalism seems even stronger now. Considering the uncertainties that people are understandably feeling about their personal futures this is a massive testament to how well Ashfield Homes is managed.

Hence I have absolutely no hesitation in confirming that Ashfield Homes Ltd continues to meet the Investors in People Core Standard.

You reminded me that this was the fourth time that I have assessed Ashfield Homes – time flies! I did mention at our feedback meeting that this may well be my last visit, despite your belief that I'm going to go on forever!

Whatever the outcome of the review and however the future of the company evolves, I sincerely hope that Ashfield Homes is allowed to maintain its admirable people focus, total professionalism and excellent client service.



Investors in People Assessor

5th July 2011

The next steps:

If there are any aspects of this report that concern you, or you would like to discuss with me, please feel free to contact me.

At any rate you agreed that I could contact you, probably in November, to find out how Ashfield Homes is being affected by whatever the outcomes of the review are. And assuming that Ashfield Homes, per se still exists I shall contact you again a year or so later to see what progress is being made and what future assessment strategies you may wish to employ (assuming also that I am still working).

I would remind you that EMB-Excellence run numerous work-shops for clients that may interest you or your colleagues; all will be listed on their web-site.

What most impressed me at Ashfield Homes:

Communications:

In most organisations if people are asked how effective they believe communications are the responses will be pretty negative. At Ashfield Homes staff see how well they are informed as a strength. The formal processes, such core briefs and employee conferences, are well supported by the communicative relationships that managers have with their reports. Even despite the restrictions you currently are now under, people appeared to appreciate that the management were being open as the situation allowed.

Employee support:

Many interviewees spoke eulogistically about how well both the company and individual managers have helped them with their careers, work issues and personal problems.

Seeking feedback:

The management at Ashfield Homes do not rest on their laurels, there is a constant determination to improve. The regularity of the views of both clients and staff being sought demonstrates the desire to ensure that the needs of those two key stakeholder groups are being met.

Recruitment:

Whilst recruitment is addressed in the Framework of Investors in People, it is not covered in the Core Standard. However the manner in which the company assiduously selects its new employees continues to impress me. Indeed the end results, ie the employees I met with, were committed, professional and a credit to Ashfield Homes.

Induction:

Newer staff were enthusiastic about how they had been introduced to their roles and the company. The process is rigorous and applied at a speed that people were comfortable with. There were no examples of managers rushing through the process to the detriment of the job or the employee.

Health & Safety:

As with recruitment health and safety is not explicitly covered in the Standard, but I have to mention how deeply rooted the culture is at Ashfield Homes. Not only are the procedures thorough and appropriate training carried out, but staff are genuinely committed to the ethos of health and safety. Additionally I would salute the realistic, pragmatic approach that is taken to the subject – hence people have not become cynical about health and safety.

Access to promotion:

The number of interviewees who told me about having progressed their careers at Ashfield Homes is laudable. It was clear that managers encourage staff to develop their careers and are supportive to people on that journey.

Mentoring/coaching:

Much of the coaching and mentoring is informally carried out at Ashfield, but it was clear to how effective it has been and how involved managers are prepared to be in their reports development.

Staff appearance:

All staff, whether in uniform or mufti, without exception looked professional and well-groomed – a further indication of Ashfield Homes exemplary performance.

Aspects which Ashfield Homes may wish to consider by way of future development:

As my comments so far demonstrate Ashfield Homes are doing most things right, so it would be strange for me to list a series of continuous improvements. Additionally the current review has somewhat put matters on hold for the company. I shall therefore limit my suggestions to:

Management structure:

There is a fairly simple straightforward management structure at the company. I therefore find it odd that this is confused by a series of level titles such as 3rd tier. I, for one, would certainly understand the structure better if the grading were abandoned.

Leadership competences:

You are currently going through the process of spreading the formal leadership competences to the lower levels of management. I would encourage you to continue with this, ensuring that everyone who has people reporting to them knows, understands and does their job with them in mind.

HR on-line management:

I mentioned this three years ago, but I would say that I have been increasingly impressed with such systems. Both management and their reports from organisations that employ such systems relish the benefits. Updating progress against KPIs and agreed development are logged on the systems along with the agreed outcomes from PDRs.

Developing Strategies to improve the performance of the organisation

A strategy for improving the performance of the organisation is clearly defined and understood:

There are clearly defined and published Vision Statement, Aims and Objectives and Values, which are posted around the offices. These are supported by the business plans and an HR development strategy.

"It rolls down from top management"

As there is only a minority of the workforce who are members of the trades unions the employee rep system supplements the negotiating and representation responsibility. However in the light of the current uncertainties about the future of the company and the difficulties encountered in gaining access to the Unison regional organiser the management and the Union proactively tried to recruit new shop stewards.

"I think the communications with the reps are really useful"

Managers aim to glean the thoughts and views of their reports during the planning processes. As a result interviewees do feel involved and understand what they and their teams are expected to achieve in their roles.

"They'll all ask the charge-hands"

Learning and development is planned to achieve the organisation's objectives:

The HR department has a comprehensive development strategy and the PDR process remains the key tool for establishing the development that is required by staff. However staff and managers can discuss development needs at any time.

There is significant use of NVQs and there was at least one example of a member of staff being supported by the company to become an NVQ assessor.

In addition to a central development budget each department has its own budget for training.

"When you raise a need they do try to address it"

Strategies for managing people are designed to promote equality of opportunity in the development of the organisation's people:

The PDRs apply to all employees at Ashfield Homes and the completion of them by managers is monitored/policed by the HR department, thus ascertaining that all employees go through the process. Certainly all those I met with had had their PDR.

"It applies to everybody – it's fair"

“You can put your views forward”

As mentioned above the employee representative structure ensures that all employees have a voice within the company and there has been a recent quest to strengthen the trades union representation at Ashfield Homes.

“So hopefully everybody can be involved”

Meetings are minuted, including the core briefs, which ensures both that issues are raised at subsequent meetings if they are not enacted and that absentees can have access to what has been discussed. Likewise the times of team meetings are changed to ensure that people don't miss out.

The Zone magazine comes out in paper form and is on the intranet for maximum access.

“The company gives you more than one chance to get information”

“You can raise anything with your peers, manager and senior management”

“You're treated as an individual”

The capabilities managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively are clearly defined and understood:

The leadership competences continue to be cascaded to the more junior levels of management, such as 3rd tier managers. Likewise management training continues to take place, with a number of managers being able to speak of leadership courses that they had undertaken, including ILM. “The Ashfield Homes manager” document is on the intranet.

I was told that the leadership competences are reviewed annually and they included:

- Communication
- Leadership style
- Engaging with people
- Can do attitude
- Learning from mistakes

The various development opportunities include those which would enhance their ability to carry out their jobs, such as training for PDRs and core briefs.

It is fair to say that there is still not total accord in managers' understanding exactly what is expected of them at Ashfield Homes. Nevertheless as the managers universally adopt so positive a people focused attitude in their jobs, their reports have come to take for granted all the established processes and the support that they will be given.

Taking action to improve the performance of the organisation

Managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people:

As seen in previous assessments managers are still carrying their main functions regularly and effectively. These include PDRs, core briefs, supporting training activities, informal feedback and frequently praising staff for good work. I witnessed an increasing use of informal coaching and mentoring.

“I’m striving towards excellence but they wanted me to get more involved with”

“I’m seeking to move up and they are helping me”

“How I manage people was discussed at my PDR”

The workforce at Ashfield Homes holds their managers in very high esteem, and confirmed that all the key development activities did take place.

“I think the company is run really well – everything is organised”

“My boss is fantastic – I’ve got nothing but praise for them”

“My boss said that’s there’s nothing too big to drop at his door – don’t worry you go home to your family”

A very positive consequence of the effective staff development at Ashfield Homes is that so many of the current management team have been promoted; indeed some of them have progressed right through the ranks.

“A manager suggested that I go for promotion – I’ve always been encouraged”

People’s contribution to the organisation is recognised and valued:

The fact that managers ensure that they “stay close” to their reports helps sustain a belief by people that they and their contribution to the company are truly appreciated and valued. Awards at the annual conference are given to staff who have performed well.

“I do feel very valued – it’s the way they look after you”

“I’m told I’m valued – they’ve told me that I’m doing more than I have to”

“You reach your targets and get a well done keep it up email”

The company used to give everyone a birthday card but this practice has now been discontinued as a consequence of the cutbacks; however it was interesting to note that those staff who mentioned the birthday cards all understood the need to do so. Nevertheless it is the less formal gestures that people seem to most appreciate:

“They sent a bunch of blue flowers when my son was born”

“If a tenant likes what you’ve done, you get a letter”

“They always say thanks at the end of the day – she’s always grateful”

People are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision-making:

Succession planning is a high priority at Ashfield Homes and from an early stage people are encouraged to take responsibility for what they do. This includes the delivery of the core brief as whilst managers are expected to deliver the key elements of the information dictated by senior management, they are allowed to deliver it in their own style and add any items they believe relevant.

“I’m in charge of my own working environment”

“We know our jobs and what we’ve got to do”

Both during PDRs and team meetings staff are very much encouraged to have a fulsome involvement.

Employee representation is taken seriously at Ashfield Homes. The company has been proactive about establishing and maintaining the employee reps and enhancing the effectiveness of trades union representation.

“You’re trusted to work on your own”

“Coming here has been refreshing – you are listened to and you can be creative”

People learn and develop effectively:

Training activities will have an evaluation form and managers are expected to talk through the new learning with their reports and it will be addressed again during the PDR. Some of the training will carry tests to ascertain that the new knowledge has been adequately absorbed. It would be fair to say that managers do not always follow up training with quite the assiduity that they might. Despite the latter point staff did tend to have a clear appreciation of what they had learned and how the new learning should be applied whilst doing their jobs.

“The benefits are starting to come through – they’re getting more involved in a wider range of areas”

“I’ve only not scored 100% once on my telephone listening”

Induction is effectively carried out at Ashfield Homes. The process includes an initial opportunity to learn of policies etc, introduction to colleagues and relevant managers and a separate induction day. The latter can be held some time after the original engagement of the new employee, when sufficient new starters have been employed. During the induction day new recruits are exposed to the senior team and the core values and culture of the company.

People spoke well of their inductions:

“Coming here has been a breath of fresh air”

“I’ve fitted in really well”

The needs of employees who have been absent for a period, such as maternity leave, are also being addressed. The minimum will be a return to work interview.

Evaluating the impact on the performance of the organisation

***Investment in people improves the performance of the organisation:
Improvements are continually made to the way people are managed and developed:***

Effective staff development has always been of great importance to Ashfield Homes. Over the years there have always been amendments to how this has been carried out, such as refreshing the induction day and improving the PDR process. However in view of uncertainties over the last year the status quo has not altered much on this occasion.

Nevertheless there is substantial evidence that the emphasis placed on staff development is well worthwhile. This is understood by both senior management and other staff.

Some of the main evaluation tools utilised by Ashfield are:

- post development feedback
- various inspections, audits and assessments
- benchmarking against other organisations
- employee reps and focus groups
- scrutiny panels, including the Board
- resident focus groups and telephone surveys

Evidence of the effectiveness of staff development include:

- results from this year's employee survey
- company performance against the KPIs
- relationships with the employee forum and trades unions
- 3* and expected to improve
- lack of necessity for subsequent inspection
- best ever results on rent arrears

"It had so little affect on the work-force" (uncertainty re: possible return to in-house)

"It's an organisation that functions extremely well"

"Good people are keen to come" (recruitment)

"They've made us better"

"Survey results – there is a link to staff development"

Appendix 1 – Continuous Improvement Plan

Areas for Continuous Improvements and / or Areas for Action Plan	Activity	Support from (e.g. Assessor / Centre / Other)
Simplify terminology of management structure		
Extend leadership competences to all levels of management		
Consider on-line HR management system		

Appendix 2 – Assessment results summary

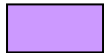
The Investors in People Framework

The Evidence Requirements

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
The Indicators	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																							
	2	✓	✓	✓	✓																								
	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																							
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	8	✓	✓	✓																									
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	10	✓	✓	✓																									

The number of evidence requirements met is **39**

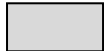
Key:



The Core Investors in People Standard



Your Choice from the IIP Framework



Not part of the Investors in People Framework