Our Corporate plan

2017-22

Passionate about delivering more affordable homes and great services
Foreword

In April 2017 asra Housing Association and Leicester Housing Association – both part of asra Housing Group – amalgamated with Paragon Community Housing to create Paragon Asra Housing (PA Housing). Together we own and manage almost 24,000 homes in London, Surrey and the Midlands.

This corporate plan sets out our commitments, priorities and ambitions for the first five years of our new organisation.

Our Board is adamant that affordable housing is central to our future and that our focus is on providing services to our residents, whilst continuing to develop new homes.

Both Paragon and asra have always been about much more than just bricks and mortar. We intend to continue to focus on the wellbeing of the people we serve and to help our neighbourhoods thrive.

We have the potential to achieve brilliant things in the next five years. And we’re under no illusion that there is much to do to harmonise our structures and ways of working. But, in doing so we will unlock the benefits which PA Housing can bring – to our customers, our employees and in the wider community.

Aman Dalvi
Chair, PA Housing
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We consulted residents and staff from Paragon and asra extensively in the months leading up to the amalgamation. We wanted to know about their perceptions of the two organisations and their aspirations for PA Housing.

This was vital in making sure that our shared values were influenced and defined by our main stakeholders and that everyone had a voice in the development of our corporate plan – our future.

The values we share are very similar across the two organisations, with staff keen to continue to deliver great services to our customers and develop good quality new homes.

How we developed our plan

We consulted residents and staff from Paragon and asra extensively in the months leading up to the amalgamation. We wanted to know about their perceptions of the two organisations and their aspirations for PA Housing.

Residents were enthusiastic about the themes and concepts put to them. They were excited about how to bring these to life and bring the two organisations together.

It is clear that we have strong and continuing engagement across our new organisation. We are proud of the part our people have played in creating who we now are as an organisation and what we stand for.
About us

Our heritage

Paragon was formed in 2007 by Elmbridge Housing Trust and Richmond upon Thames Churches Housing Trust. Working in commuter-belt areas with high property values in the South-East and West London, Paragon’s development programme produced award-winning, good quality, well-designed homes.

Paragon has been dedicated to achieving high levels of customer satisfaction and was passionate about the work it has done to improve neighbourhoods.

Asra Housing Association began as a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) housing provider in London in 1984 and its initial purpose was to provide homes and services for Asian older people. Asra Housing Association joined with Leicester Housing Association to form asra Housing Group, which worked in urban areas in the Midlands, as well as in London.

With 14,000 homes, asra was the largest BME housing association in the UK before joining with Paragon.

We are energised by the heritage of our founding organisations. We will continue the role of being a prominent provider of housing services to multicultural communities and will be at the forefront of equality and diversity within the housing sector.

Our purpose

Passionate about delivering more affordable homes and great services.
Our vision
To become widely recognised as a social enterprise with a reputation for providing quality homes and services – within the next five years.
Our values

Our values underpin everything we do and our culture and behaviours define how we do things.

Always do the right thing
- We offer the best quality service that we can.
- We are dedicated to our people.
- We are honest, open and responsible.
- We challenge ourselves to be the best.
- We always look for best value.

There when you need us
- We always offer solutions.
- We listen and take action.
- We deliver on our promises.
- You can count on us.
- We treat people as we would want to be treated.

We never give up
- We are ambitious.
- We are unashamedly bold.
- We work together to make a difference.
- We welcome innovation.
- We show courage in our pursuit of growth.
- We create a culture that people want to be part of.

We are dedicated to our people.
The road to 2022

PA Housing was created so that we could continue to provide good-quality customer services in the face of the more difficult operating environment for housing associations.

Inevitably, the government’s four-year 1% rent reduction policy has reduced the financial capacity of the affordable housing sector, despite efficiencies and cost saving. Welfare reform is also increasingly impacting on our households who rely on benefits to meet their rent and other financial commitments, whilst the increase in homelessness in the neighbourhoods where we work is a major concern.

Our aim is to continually improve and adapt to keep pace with our challenging environment, as well as our customers’ expectations and increasingly complex housing needs.

Great services for customers

It is essential that we continue to improve access to our services for all of our customers. Many now use digital and mobile technology as part of their daily lives. In response, asra took early advantage of digital technology to revolutionise the way they delivered services. They adopted a leaner operating model and provided all asra residents with access to an online service.

This focused on:

› First Line Fix – resolving queries at the first point of contact with the Customer Contact Centre in Leicester
› My Asra’ – an online portal offering comprehensive 24-hour self-service for transactional processes
› Personal contact for complex issues, and
› Pro-active, helpful advice.

My Asra’ contains one of the first truly end to end digital repairs solutions in the country. This digital transformation programme is ambitious and will take time to complete.

We listen to our customers about the services they want and put them at the centre of our operations. This will mean investing more in digital technology to transform the way our customers can access services, as well as providing more support for our staff when they are out in our neighbourhoods.

However, it will not be at the expense of continuity of the overall high level of service and customer satisfaction we have achieved.

Integration and managing change

We know that we have to focus internally following the amalgamation. We plan to achieve savings of £3 million by 2020 and we have set clear efficiency targets and drawn up an integration plan to make this happen.

Our Board will closely monitor our progress against the agreed integration plan to make sure that we deliver changes in a measured way and that we meet our targets.

We can strengthen our financial position by placing greater emphasis on good budget management and delivering value for money. Value for money is fundamentally important to us. It acts as a bridge between day-to-day operating efficiency and future growth capacity. Our value for money strategy will be linked to this corporate plan.

Reviewing procurement opportunities will allow us to make savings from our new enhanced scale and purchasing power. As a result, we will set yearly procurement-savings targets.

We will continue to measure our costs and benchmark them using independent evaluation so that we are compared with the best performance within the sector.

We will embed a culture of cost awareness, efficiency and value.

Phased restructuring is taking place, but it is not a radical programme. We want to keep a steady ship and retain experienced staff. It is important to us to keep track of our organisational health indicators during the restructuring and fully engage our staff in our plans for the future.

Phase one of the restructuring is underway and our Finance and Corporate Services functions are now based at our office at Bede Island in Leicester. Migrating our core ICT functions from Case House in Walton-on-Thames to Bede Island is our top priority and this will take up to 2019 to complete.

Our intention is to make the Bede Island office the engine room for support services in PA Housing, serving all our colleagues most effectively, regardless of where they are based.

We want to keep a steady ship and retain experienced staff.
Empowering our people

Both previous organisations have invested heavily in their employees in order to provide excellent customer service. Asra invested in a well-known cultural transformation initiative which was administered externally. A great culture was fostered at Paragon by the ‘Paragon Person’ initiative. We will be setting out plans to build on this investment and bring these two initiatives together.

Opportunities to grow

At the core of our organisation we remain firmly committed to providing affordable rented housing.

The shortage of homes is more acute in London and the South East where the cost of accessing housing through the market is far out of reach for so many households.

Many of our current and future customers either are not able, or have no desire, to buy. This means that providing access to safe and secure housing at a genuinely affordable rent is essential. Our growth plans include a continuing commitment to develop new rented housing that is affordable for people living in the neighbourhoods where we work.

One of the main reasons for the amalgamation was to help meet the need to build more homes. PA Housing has the financial and management capacity and local links to build more homes as a result of the two organisations coming together – we can now maximise development opportunities that come our way.

This can involve managing an increased level of risk where appropriate – for example in purchasing development land. This will enable us to increase our work in the London market, which we see as a core area for expansion.

We will continue to use the value in our existing properties to supplement private finance borrowings and any public subsidy secured. We will dispose of a proportion of our stock to release value and help us build more new homes.

The success of our amalgamation, and our current experience of integration, means that we have a team in place with the expertise to support further successful mergers or partnerships with suitable partners. We are aiming to realise this ambition during the next five years and strengthen our geographical presence either within or next to our existing main operating areas.

We are aiming to realise this ambition during the next five years.
Our strategic objectives and goals

Our approach for the next five years is underpinned by three clear objectives, each with measurable goals.

1. We will continue to focus on customer services to improve customer satisfaction.

2. We will harmonise our culture and structures and improve our effectiveness.

3. We will grow to provide more homes and will rationalise our stock holdings.

What we will do

1. We will extend the digital transformation programme so that all customers have access to online services. But we will only do this once the programme achieves a sustained change in satisfaction and our staff and residents tell us that our customer service is working well and meeting customers’ needs.

2. We will keep the repairs services centre at Case House in Walton-on-Thames. The shared location with our south region repairs contractors (Fortem and PH Jones) means we can have day-to-day contact and work with them behind the scenes to maintain a good local service.

3. We will fully support staff working in our neighbourhoods so they can provide a friendly, local presence and promote safer communities and tenancy responsibilities.

4. We will encourage using new and existing initiatives, such as a handyman service (which at Paragon carried out minor repairs for vulnerable residents and achieved 100% customer satisfaction) and a £100 tenant support budget which empowers staff to resolve immediate housing management issues of their own accord.

5. We will develop a set of service standards in order to explain what we mean by ‘good quality customer service’. We will develop a property standard, as well as scheme and neighbourhood standards.

6. We will develop a long-term strategy for repairs and maintenance. Some of our current repairs contracts are being amended and we are considering whether to expand our Northampton-based Direct Labour Service to other areas. This service receives good customer satisfaction, and has the advantage of VAT savings and good cost control.

7. We will continue to invest in social and economic wellbeing programmes to support our customers, including addressing fuel poverty.

8. We will look to improve customer engagement wherever possible and will place greater emphasis on customer communications and brand awareness.

9. Both our previous organisations always put the health and safety of our residents and workforce as a key priority. Following the devastating events at Grenfell Tower, our Board will be considering the learning points from the fire when these are published. If further work is needed to respond to changing regulations and expectations we will resource this.

10. To provide further immediate assurance, we have reviewed all our policies and put in place bespoke plans for all our high rise blocks and reviewed standards for fire risk assessments.
Our goals

To provide a consistent and high standard of customer service.

To provide safe and pleasant homes and neighbourhoods where people have pride in their homes and surroundings.

To raise our profile nationally and at a local level.

We want residents to have a sense of pride in their homes.
2. We will harmonise our business practices and structures and improve our effectiveness

We intend to create a great place to work. As part of our integration we have spent a considerable amount of time collectively making sure that we create the right organisational culture.

By deciding on the sort of organisation we want to be, and identifying the skills and behaviours that make our employees a ‘PA person’, we will benefit from attracting and developing talented people who will share their passion, experience, skills and knowledge with their colleagues and with customers.

We are steadfast in our commitment to maintaining and improving levels of data quality and integrity so that we can be sure that the information we hold is secure and up-to-date.

What we will do

We are carrying out business analysis work to bring processes together and make them leaner. We will apply best practice from across the organisation.

Our people

We will update our recruitment process to focus on our new values to make sure that we employ staff with relevant skills and behaviours.

We will adopt new learning initiatives to attract and retain talent, including a major apprenticeship programme and a talent-development programme for our leaders.

We will encourage employees to train for external qualifications so that they have the skills and knowledge they need to deliver a professional service.

We will develop our management capability through a suite of training courses in a blended approach to ‘managing the PA Housing way’, and put personal development plans in place for everyone.

To ensure consistency across our teams and to be competitive in our labour market, we are undertaking a major review to harmonise our terms and conditions of employment, and at the same time review salaries and launch a new and attractive benefits package.

Board governance

We will carry out an early governance review The main focus will be on board member skills and succession, but later we will look at our overall governance structures.

The term of office of our Board Chair comes to an end in September 2018. We will recruit a new Chair in good time by then and take steps to fill any member vacancies. We intend to make sure that we have the right skills balance to provide effective stewardship for PA Housing into the future.

Data quality and integrity

We are making major investments in IT, including bringing in a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

We will launch a new IT strategy which will cover the IT infrastructure, IT applications and the role of the service desk.

We are making preparations for the changes arising from the general data protection regulation coming into effect in May 2018.

We will regularly update our customers’ data and put in place resilient IT security measures which we will continuously review and monitor. ‘My Asra’ provides the opportunity for customers to verify information held about them on our systems.

Equality and diversity

Asra published a ‘Respecting difference’ strategy, setting out their approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. Paragon also had an active equality and diversity strategy and action plan. These strategies will be harmonised to demonstrate PA Housing’s commitment to striving for high standards of equality and diversity in the housing sector for both residents and employees.
Our goals

To create a new PA Housing culture.

To recruit and retain good quality staff.

To make sure our systems and processes are efficient, effective and accurate.

We will continue to offer opportunities to tenants to move into home ownership should they want to.
3. We will grow to provide more homes and we will rationalise our stock

PA Housing has a bedrock of financial strength, and we have worked with our banks and investors to put in place the credit lines we need to deliver this sizeable programme of growth over the next few years.

Our treasury policy is conservative and we will review our investment needs in line with funding opportunities. The financial ‘golden rules’ that the Board has signed up to give us further assurance that we will keep an iron grip on our financial position.

This plan gives us moderate exposure to housing market risks and builds on the experience we already have of delivering new shared ownership and market sale properties. Interest rates are still at a low level and we are aware that these are bound to rise over the next five years.

What we will do

To achieve our growth ambitions, we will restructure and expand our Development team and bring in land-buying specialists in London.

Building new homes

Although London is our main area for expansion, we will continue to develop in the geographical areas around our base in Walton-on-Thames. We will restart development in the Midlands using a demand analysis. Our approach initially will be to concentrate on certain core areas.

Subject to market conditions, we will build up a development programme to produce at least 500 good quality homes each year, split as follows:

- 50% affordable rent – some will be for social rent
- 40% shared ownership and intermediate rent
- 10% market sale

Although we have already set in place a strong approach to risk management we will continue to robustly stress test and sensitise our development programme at both an aggregate and individual scheme level to make sure that these risks are fully identified and properly controlled.

We will have bespoke marketing and sales strategies for each new development. We will work with mortgage lenders to ensure that customers have access to advice on how much to borrow and the range of products available. We will also make sure that our products meet market requirements.

We will continue to offer opportunities to tenants to move into home ownership should they want to. We are participating in the pilot Voluntary Right to Buy Scheme in the West Midlands and will continue to take part in any further schemes.

We will also continue to offer tenants the possibility of buying a stake in their home on a shared ownership basis.

We are working in partnership with RB Greenwich and Lovell on the ‘One Woolwich’ regeneration scheme to regenerate three large run-down council housing estates. This is our biggest scheme and we will provide 525 affordable homes. It also has a ground-breaking short-life element whereby properties are rented out in the short-term.

Stock rationalisation

We will concentrate on our core areas by moving out of some of our outlying locations where we have little stock.

We will either invest in our existing stock to make sure all our homes meet decent homes standards, or dispose of them. We will take decisions about this using a rigorous and comprehensive return-on-assets analysis system, so that these decisions will be strategic rather than piecemeal.

There is also the possibility of exploring stock swaps in Greater London, where this will make efficiency savings.
Our goals

To deliver our value for money strategy so that we build at least 500 new homes a year.

To rationalise our assets in order to create more new homes and provide better services.

To ensure high service levels to all tenures and at all stages in the customer life cycle.

Our homes

- Berkshire: 129
- Buckinghamshire: 24
- Derbyshire: 123
- Hertfordshire: 56
- Leicestershire: 5369
- Lincolnshire: 145
- London: 7627
- Northamptonshire: 1473
- Nottinghamshire: 2588
- Surrey: 5601
- West Midlands: 351
- Warwickshire: 228