



# Home Office

## Crime Reduction & Community Safety Group

### Tilley Awards 2008 Application form

Please ensure that you have read the guidance before completing this form. **By making an application to the awards, entrants are agreeing to abide by the conditions laid out in the guidance.** Please complete the following form in full, within the stated word limit and ensuring the file size is no more than 1MB. Failure to do so will result in your entry being rejected from the competition.

Completed application forms should be e-mailed to [tilleyawards08@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:tilleyawards08@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk).

All entries must be received by noon on **Friday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008**. No entries will be accepted after this time/date. Any queries on the application process should be directed to Alex Blackwell on 0207 035 4811.

#### Section A: Application basics

1. Title of the project: [Vision Housing](#)

2. Key issue that the project is addressing e.g. Alcohol related violence: [Providing accommodation and support for ex offenders](#)

#### Author contact details

3. Name of application author: [Annys Darkwa, Managing Director](#)

4. Organisation submitting the application: [Vision Housing](#)

5. Full postal address:  
[Vision Housing](#)  
[Vestry Hall](#)  
[336 – 338 London Road](#)  
[Mitcham](#)  
[CR10 3UD](#)

6. Email address: [annys@visionhousing.org.uk](mailto:annys@visionhousing.org.uk)

7. Telephone number: [0208 390 7262](#)

#### Secondary project contact details

8. Name of secondary contact involved in the project: [Adrian Gains, Chair of Board of Trustees](#)

9. Secondary contact email address: [adrian.gains@paconsulting.com](mailto:adrian.gains@paconsulting.com)

10. Secondary contact telephone number: [07887 540 465](tel:07887540465)

**Endorsing representative contact details**

11. Name of endorsing senior representative from lead organisation:

[Rick Allard, Safer London Foundation](#)

12. Endorsing representative's email address:

[rickallard@saferlondonfoundation.org](mailto:rickallard@saferlondonfoundation.org)

13. For all entries from England & Wales please state which Government Office or Welsh Assembly Government your organisation is covered by e.g. GO East Midlands: [Government Offices for London](#)

**14. Please mark this box with an X to indicate that all organisations involved in the project have been notified of this entry (this is to prevent duplicate entries of the same project):**

**Section B: Summary of application - *In no more than 400 words use this space to provide a summary of your project under the stated headings (see guidance for more information).***

**Scanning**

One of the biggest problems facing the criminal justice system is rehabilitation of ex-offenders into society. Vision Housing was set up at the time by a serving prisoner who saw first-hand that a high proportion of those released from prison re-offended. It was obvious that a lack of suitable accommodation was a key factor. Vision works with serving prisoners six months prior to release and helps find sustainable accommodation and support thereafter.

**Analysis**

A number of research studies have proved that a lack of sustainable accommodation was a key factor in causing re-offending. At the same time, local authority housing was in short supply and private sector landlords were unwilling to take on ex-offenders. It was a seemingly intractable problem.

**Response**

Set up in January 2007, Vision works with ex-offenders prior to release from prison to ensure that they have full support and accommodation on release.

Vision now has worked hard to persuade a network of private sector landlords to house ex-offenders. Some were extremely reluctant but, by and large, the relationship has worked extremely well.

In addition to providing advice on complex housing issues, Vision also helps clients access to benefits and grants. They help 'sign-post' to the broad range of support networks that exist, including organisations that can help with drug, alcohol and mental health issues and those that can provide assistance with education, training and employment.

**Assessment**

To date, Vision has successfully housed around 70 people and, to date, none of these have re-offended (against a national rate of over 50%). This is a staggering achievement made all the more remarkable given that it has been run by one person on benefits with only £5,000 of funding.

All landlords that have had clients referred to them by Vision have been happy with the support they have received and many have offered up more accommodation.

Many referring agencies, such as local authorities and charitable groups, are on record as saying that Vision are providing a critically important role and are now paying a referral fee – a year ago this would have been unthinkable. Vision is now registered as a charity and the intention is make this sustainable - to expand the coverage across London and, ultimately, to the rest of the UK.

**State number of words: 375 words**

**Section C: Description of project** - *Describe the project in no more than 4,000 words. Please refer to the full guidance for more information on what the description should cover, in particular section 11.*

## Scanning

Annys Darkwa first set up the Vision project when she was a serving prisoner in HMP East Sutton Park.

Being released from prison can be an extremely daunting prospect. A large number of organisations are involved in supporting individuals and it can be difficult to know where and how to get help. The situation is exacerbated by the number of agencies involved, including the public sector and charitable bodies. Far too easily can individuals 'disappear between the gaps' and not get the help that they need and deserve.

The lack of a coherent 'joined-up' approach leads in no small part to the problem of re-offending – a significant problem for the criminal justice system. Annys saw a large number of fellow prisoners - who were perfectly capable of rehabilitation - not get the support that they needed and, in fairly short time, they had re-offended and were back inside. One of the basic problems they had was trying to find suitable accommodation – a very basic, fundamental need. Annys was determined to do what she could to help and helped set up the Vision project.

Vision Housing was created to ensure that ex-offenders at least had a roof over their heads on release from prison.

Putting aside the complexities and challenges of dealing with large number of government bodies and charitable bodies, one of the key problems in finding suitable accommodation is that most of it is in the hands of the private sector. Local authorities do not have sufficient accommodation and, where available, these were not always in locations that are most conducive to rehabilitation. So, to house ex-offenders, Vision had to persuade private sector landlords to provide accommodation. This was far from trivial to do. Ex-offenders, even though they have served their time, have a stigma associated with them. This means they can have difficulties in finding accommodation and employment.

Annys was determined to break this log-jam. She needed to build a network of landlords who could be persuaded to take on ex-offenders. To do so, she needed to persuade them that Vision would help screen out inappropriate tenants and provide sufficient support once her clients have been housed.

## Analysis

A number of Home Office studies have demonstrated that over 50% of ex-offenders re-offend and are back in prison inside a year<sup>1</sup>. In 2004 the actual re-offending rate for adults was 55.5% according to Home Office Statistics.<sup>2</sup> A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) identified stable accommodation on release from prison as a key factor that reduced the risk of re-offending by around 20%<sup>3</sup>. Each year around 90,000 prisoners are released in England and Wales and around 20,000 have nowhere to live. There can be little doubt that re-offending is a significant problem, costing hundreds of millions of pounds per annum. This includes both the costs of incarceration and also the harm caused by the crimes committed.

Whilst national statistics demonstrate the scale of the problem, and it is a huge problem, they can mask the very personal waste of life in each case. This is what Annys realised when she was in prison. She had first-hand experience of this vicious cycle of crime and was acutely aware of what needed to be done to help fix it.

Successful rehabilitation requires a much richer understanding of the problems ex-offenders face. Annys, being an ex-offender herself, understood what these are and can empathise with her clients. For example, co-locating individuals with their family and children can play a major role in helping support individuals and families. Conversely, locating some individuals in high risk locations (for example, where they can be coerced by gangs or have access to illegal drugs) can also cause problems and lead to re-offending.

Annys realised that a mechanical, rules-driven approach was inappropriate. Vision needed to have a deep understanding of the individuals and their circumstances. Each individual was treated on a case-by-case basis and Vision would work with them up to six months prior to release from prison, so that they understand in-depth their needs and suitable accommodation lined up well in advance.

## Response

On release from prison, Annys set up Vision as a limited company. This has grown very quickly, despite some of the challenges of her being an ex-offender herself, not least in securing funding and support. It has required great

<sup>1</sup> RDS

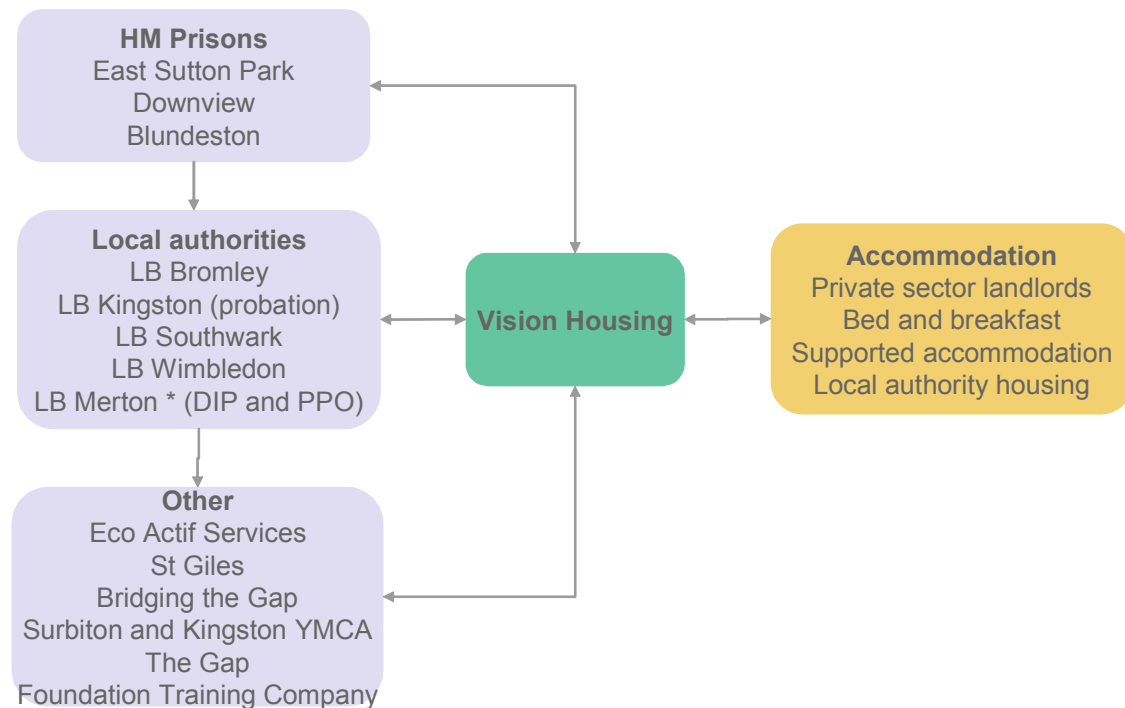
<sup>2</sup> Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Reoffending of adults: results from the 2004 cohort 06/07, March 2007

<sup>3</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, reducing re-offending by ex prisoners, July 2002

tenacity to make progress in the face of what, at times, has seemed to be almost insurmountable problems. In order to keep this section brief, we focus on what Vision has done and what has been achieved.

### Vision now has built a wide network of referring agencies and accommodation providers

Annys worked hard, from scratch, to build up a network of landlords, estate agents, bed and breakfast providers and local authorities, who are able and willing to house ex-offenders. At the same time, she also had to build a complex network of referring agencies (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Main referral routes for Vision Housing

These include referrals directly from prisons, including HMP East Sutton Park, HMP Downview and HMP Blundeston. She has also had referrals from a number of local authorities in south London, including LB Kingston, LB Bromley, LB Merton, LB Bromley and LB Wimbledon. These include multiple different functions within each authority, ranging from Probation, Drug Intervention Programmes (DIP), Housing and Persistent Prolific Offender teams. She has also developed networks with a number of not-for-profit organisations, such as the YMCA, Women in Prisons, St Giles (a larger charity that deals with ex-offenders) and organisations that provide education, training and employment (such as an organisation called Eco Actif). She has also developed very close links with a number of Safer Neighbourhood teams in the Metropolitan Police and have worked together to solve local community-based problems. When Vision houses ex-offenders in a community, they routinely inform the local Safer Neighbourhood team, so that if there are any problems, for example that may occur in multi-occupancy houses, that any risks can be mitigated against before they escalate into more serious issues.

Vision Housing is an excellent example of multi-agency joined-up working.

### Vision now offers a wide range of services for their clients

Vision works in partnership with referring organisations to help provide a range of services tailored to the specific needs of her clients. In brief, these include providing:

1. **Housing advice** - Vision invests considerable time into understanding their clients and their families' current situation and produces a tailored risk-register for each client – this is done in an open and honest non-confrontational way. They then tailor the housing and support each client needs and are also qualified to provide advice on up-to-date local authority housing law.
2. **A database of private landlords and accommodation providers** – Vision has developed a comprehensive database of private landlords that will accept people who are ex-offenders on benefits. This list is regularly reviewed, updated and added to as new partners work with Vision and the number of clients has increased.

Vision has negotiated special deals with their landlords in making them aware of some of the funding challenges and requirements of their client group.

3. **Help with access to grants and housing benefits.** Getting access to benefits for ex-offenders can be a daunting experience and the system does not always work in their favour. Vision works with their clients to get access to benefits that they are entitled to. This includes completing housing application and benefit forms, jointly attending interviews, helping clients access the rent in advance scheme, assisting them accessing deposits and ensuring this gets paid to the landlord. Other support they provide includes accessing grants such as the Community Care Grants.
4. **A sign-posting service to other agencies.** There are a lot of agencies who are able and willing to support ex-offenders specific needs. These including agencies who can help with specific drug and alcohol problems, mental health issues and support with education and training for employment. Over the last year, Vision has built up a large and growing network of contacts that can provide advice and help. The strong relationships they have developed with their client base, and the fact that Vision can communicate empathetically with them in language that they understand, means that their advice is valued and acted upon.
5. **Ongoing support and problem solving.** Housing ex-offenders inevitably will not be without difficulties and the support needs will vary from individual to individual. Vision offers a full support service and will visit tenants and landlords on a weekly basis. In time, as required, this moves to a fortnightly and, ultimately by mutual agreement, to a telephone contact. Vision also has a trouble-shooting function and will respond and deal with situations that routinely arise.

#### Vision is putting in place more robust governance arrangements to cope with predicted growth

Vision Housing has made a substantial contribution to the successful housing of a large number of ex-offenders. The fact that this has been achieved with next to no funding by one person claiming benefits makes it all the more remarkable. The current levels of activity are, however, untenable with one person and Vision will expand significantly over the next year or so, scaling up to deal with the increased demands.

Recent changes include:

- establishing a board of trustees including senior representatives from the private and public sector (see Figure 2)
- formal registration with the Charity Commission as a charity
- running a series of networking events to promote Vision to a wider audience
- developing a charging regime to build a sustainable future (previously referrals were done at no cost to either party – this was necessary to build track record and demonstrate credibility)
- the appointment of two volunteers who are serving prisoner (to both provide administrative support and to give them work experience)
- securing permanent office accommodation

Any award or grant secured by Vision would be used to pay for expenses for Annys (who is now no longer eligible to claim benefits), to fund running costs and to document a 'how to' guide to help transfer skills and knowledge to other organisations wanting to adopt the approach to their area.

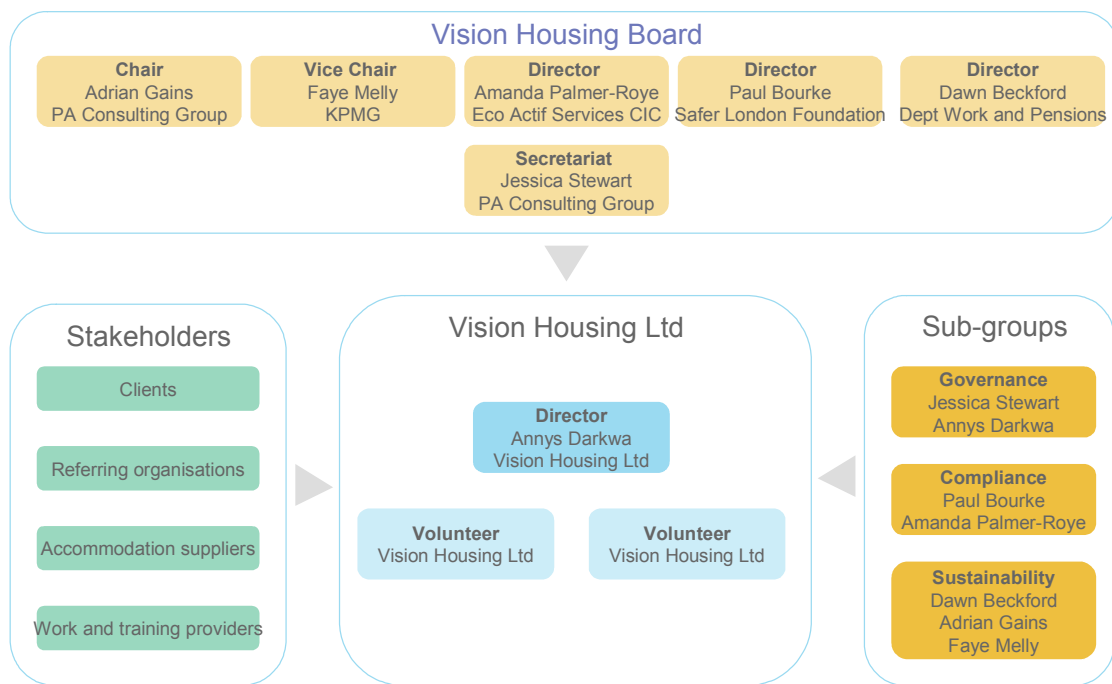


Figure 2 Governance arrangements for Vision Housing

### Assessment

In the first year (2007), Vision Housing provided accommodation for around 50 ex-offenders. In the first quarter of 2008, this has increased to well over 70 and is rising on a weekly basis. Demand for Vision Housing far exceeds current capacity to supply and the main constraint is resource within Vision Housing itself – they have plenty of organisations who want to refer ex-offenders (and will pay) and enough landlords with vacant properties on their books that are supportive of Vision. Any additional funding will help build capacity and make Vision a sustainable charity that can expand into other geographies and provide a broader range of services (for example to provide housing to families).

Vision keeps an up to date record of where their referrals are coming from and what the outcomes have been. Figure 3 shows where referrals have come from in 2007.

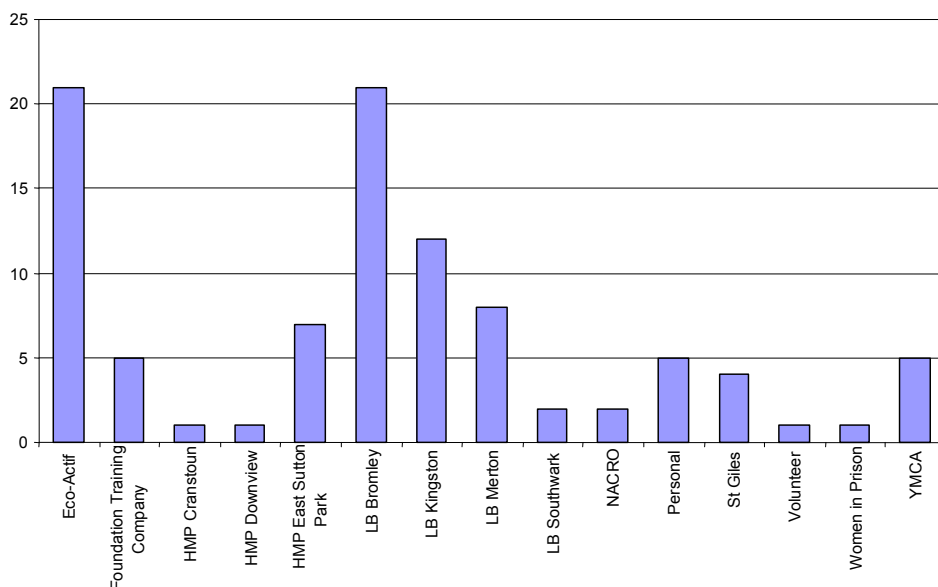


Figure 3 2007 referral routes



In terms of outcomes, the most remarkable is the re-offending rate. To date, *none* of Vision Housing's clients have re-offended – now in excess of 70 ex-offenders. Given national re-offending rates of over 50% this is extraordinary and, even on relatively small numbers, statistically significant at a very high level indeed.

The prison service costs around £40,000 per prison place per annum (multiplied by 35, assuming 50% had re-offended) then even a very rough calculation would suggest benefits of around **£1,400,000** not taking into account the society costs of harm caused by crime.

Given, that Vision has operated on a total budget of just **£5,000** and one person, taken into the context of the wider criminal justice system, this is a very impressive outcome and a case study in what can be achieved with fairly modest, but highly focused, resources.

In addition, qualitative feedback from clients, landlords and referring organisations has also been positive....

### **Feedback from referring organisations**

“This is a letter to say a big thank-you from myself and the St Giles team at Camberwell for all your hard work. It is extremely hard to find housing for any of our clients once released from custody but almost impossible when they have little or no support needs. Vision is filling a very needed gap in finding properties for ex-offenders. I have come to you with two different clients.... you managed to find them accommodation and you did it very swiftly.

This is a big help as in my experience when offenders are left without accommodation they find it much harder to make the changes they need. Vision is a valid organisation and we hope to continue working with you in the future.”

### **Anthea McKenna, St Giles Trust**

“Just to say a huge thank you for accepting the referral of the above named whom we could not assist with re-housing. I am very pleased he has settled into his accommodation well and has even found employment, none of which would have been possible without your hard work, determination and dedication. I will be referring other single clients that we cannot assist in the future as I have found your services so proactive and beneficial.” **Stella Everard, London Borough of Bromley**

### **Feedback from clients**

“It has been my pleasure to work with Annys Darkwa from Vision Housing numerous times since I first met her over four months ago. During this period she has placed a number of her clients with me. Annys continues to impress me with her drive, professionalism and poise. She is a dependable, accurate, self-motivated individual, who amazes me with her commitment to help her needy clients disadvantaged by their circumstances. I would gladly recommend Annys as an individual and Vision Housing as an organisation.” **Shane O'Donovan, private landlord**

“I went through a very difficult time in the past and I really needed some help with counselling, housing, etc. The help from Vision Housing came at a right time when I was ready to move out and follow my goals. I am pregnant and looking forward to starting my life in my new home. I have got this great chance to have my own place where I can feel safe and feel my peace. I kindly appreciate your help and hope that there will be more happy people like me.”

### **Miss A, Vision Housing client, ex-offender**

### **What next for Vision Housing?**

We believe that Vision is unique. No other organisation has managed to broker such a special and complex relationship between ex-offenders, referring organisations and private sector landlords to such effect. It is an extremely exciting model and one that we believe could, and should, be replicated and scaled up to other areas.

Results speak for themselves and there is now compelling evidence in place that proves that the Vision Housing model, although on a relatively modest scale, has made a substantial contribution to what is considered to be a seemingly intractable problem.

We highly commend it to the problem-solving awards as an excellent example of how, even a relatively small project, can make a demonstrable impact on preventing crime.

**State number of words used: ~ 2,500**

**Section D: Endorsement by Senior Representative** - Please insert letter from endorsing representative, this will not count towards your word or 1MB size limit restrictions.



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Tel: 020 7021 0301 Fax: 020 7021 0302  
info@saferlondonfoundation.org  
www.saferlondonfoundation.org

To whom it may concern

**Re: The Tilley Awards 2008**

My name is Rick Allard, I am a Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Inspector seconded to the independent charitable arm of the MPS, the Safer London Foundation (SLF).

SLF has recently provided funding for Vision Housing to pay telephone expenses for a year and to cover volunteer expenses for six months.

As an organisation we are aware of the service Annys Darkwa and Vision Housing provide and are fully behind her in her lateral problem solving approach to housing ex-offenders, which makes a considerable contribution to crime reduction in the capital. Vision Housing epitomises the problem-oriented, multi-agency approach creating long-term sustainable solutions that the Tilley Award seeks to celebrate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Allard', written in a cursive style.

Rick Allard

The Safer London Foundation.

**Checklist for Applicants:**

1. Have you read the process and application form guidance?
2. Have you completed all four sections of the application form in full including the endorsement from a senior representative?
3. Have you checked that your entry addresses all aspects of the judging criteria?

4. Have you advised all partner agencies that you are submitting an entry for your project?
5. Have you adhered to the formatting requirements within the guidance?
6. Have you checked whether there are any reasons why your project should **not** be publicised to other police forces, partner agencies and the general public e.g. civil or criminal proceedings pending in relation to your project?
7. Have you inserted your project name as a footer note on the application form? Go to View-Header and Footer to add it.
8. Have you saved you application form as a word document and entitled your message '**Tilley 08 entry (followed by project name in brackets)**' before emailing it?

Once you are satisfied that you have completed your application form in full please email it to [Tilleyawards08@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Tilleyawards08@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk). One hard copy must also be posted to Alex Blackwell at Home Office, Effective Practice & Communication Team, 4th Floor, Fry Building (SE Quarter), 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF and be received by 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008.