

PUBLIC SERVICES NEWS!

AWICS

Independence.....Integrity.....Value
Adrian Waite (Independent Consultancy
Services) Limited



October 2008

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'AWICS' provides a full range of ethical management consultancy and training services, principally to those who provide public services such as local authorities, schools, colleges, housing associations, health authorities, voluntary bodies and many more.

Budgets and Financial Management are like fresh air, exercise and a healthy diet

"Good Financial Management is like fresh air, exercise and a healthy diet. Organisations need it every day to stay fit and to live a full and active life." – Financial Skills Advisory Panel.

Budgeting and Financial Management have never been as important in the public sector as they are today. Indeed, budgeting and financial management are so important that they cannot be left solely to the accountants! How can an Elected Member of a Local Authority, Board Member of a Housing Association, Health Trust, College or other public body carry out their role adequately without a working knowledge of budgeting and financial management? How can a manager in a Hospital, School, Council Department or Housing Association carry out their role adequately without a working knowledge of budgeting and financial management?

An important part of financial management is governance:

- Financial Governance is achieving an increasingly high profile in both the private and public sectors
- Local authorities and other public bodies need good systems of financial governance
- Clear accountability is of critical importance to governance

Budgets can be analysed in three ways: Objectively, Subjectively and over time.

Cost Centres are used to analyse budgets 'objectively'. They reflect a meaningful activity. They may also be required for financial reporting. For example, in local government a 'Service Expenditure Analysis' is published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy as a template for local government financial reporting. Each cost centre should be managed by a single budget-holder. Examples in a local authority could include accountancy, a museum or a housing strategy section.

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'Subjective' analysis of budgets relates to what the income or expenditure is on. In Local Government, for example, expenditure and income is analysed subjectively as follows:

- Expenditure: Employees' Costs, Premises Costs, Transport, Supplies and Services, Third Party Payments, Transfer Payments, Support Services and Capital Charges
- Income: Customer & Client Receipts, Other grants, reimbursements & contributions, Recharges (to internal users) and Specific & Special Government Grants

'Profiling' is where budgets are analysed over time. Some expenditure will be incurred evenly through the year. Other expenditure will be uneven due to seasonal factors or planned programmes. The same applies to income.

Budgets are used to control income and expenditure. Budgetary control is:

- Necessary and increasingly important
- The process of matching expenditure to resources - a critical function of management
- Increasingly being devolved to operational managers
- Being linked to performance through the Efficiency Agenda
- Dependent on the Critical Success Factors for success

The Critical Success Factors are:

- Align Responsibilities for finance with operational responsibilities
- Provide Incentives for good financial management
- Control totals rather than details
- Operate with clear and straightforward rules
- Use 'Virement' effectively
- Establish clear roles for budget holders and accountants
- Ensure Good Information is available on finance and performance

Good Financial Management information includes: Actual Income, Expenditure and Accruals; an Annual and Profiled Budget; Variances to date and explanations of those variances; and Projections to Year End.

The Audit Commission has suggested that budget holders should have the following financial responsibilities:

- Budget holders should be involved in the budget setting process
- Budgets should be subject to review by senior officers
- Each capital and revenue budget should be assigned to the individual manager best able to use and control it
- Relevant non-financial and financial information, in addition to the budget should be reported to and used by senior officers
- There should be a line of professional accountability between those with principal functional responsibility for finance within business groups and the chief finance officer to ensure compliance with professional standards and objectivity of advice on financial matters
- All appropriate staff should be given relevant training and guidance to enable them to take responsibility for managing risk within their own working environment

'AWICS' is holding a series of regional seminars on 'Budgets and Financial Management in the Public Sector for Non-Financial People' during the autumn of 2008. This course comes at a time when all public bodies are addressing the 'Value for Money' agenda, central government is concerned with 'Embedding Financial Management Skills in Government' and local authorities are concerned to develop financial awareness among Members and Non-Financial Managers. If you are to be involved in preparing, approving or managing budgets for 2009/10 this course may be especially timely. Further details are on our website at: www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/budgetcourse.asp

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Is Regionalisation of Council Housing an Option?

The Communities & Local Government and HM Treasury working party on the financing of Council Housing is commissioning consultants to look in depth at the future management of debt and the potential introduction of a cost of capital charge. They wish to look at all options for financing council housing and Adrian Waite has written a paper on the implications of the regionalisation of council housing for consideration by the working party. What follows is an extract from that paper:

It is often said by Ministers that council housing in England is a national service, administered locally, and it is possible to argue that the root cause of the excessive complexity of council house funding in England may be the inherent difficulties in reconciling these two aspects of the system. Regionalisation could be part of the solution.

An option could be to establish an English Housing Executive that would own all Council housing and negotiate the level of subsidy (negative or positive) that it would receive from or pay to central government. It would then allocate resources on the basis of need and equity between tenants in different areas in much the same way as a local authority does so between different towns or housing estates. There would obviously be a need to retain a local management function and this could be the local authority acting under a management agreement, an arms length management company, a tenant management organisation, a Housing Association or a local branch of the English Housing Executive.

It could be argued, though, that an English Housing Executive would be too big – but that regional housing executives may be appropriate. There would be nine of them and the national total of negative or positive subsidy would be apportioned between them on the basis of a formula, or negotiation, or in response to bids for resources that would be linked to outputs or a combination of these methods. Each Regional Housing Executive would then set its own budgets and capital programmes based on need. Each Regional Housing Executive would also be well placed to work closely with the Regional Government Office, Housing Board and other regional bodies. With the advantage of scale it may also be better placed than individual local authorities to make efficiency gains in management and maintenance and carry out new build and could do this strategically.

There would still be a need for sub-regional management and there would be a range of options. Arms Length Management Organisations would be well placed to enter into management agreements with the Regional Housing Executive in much the same way as they currently enter into agreements with local authorities. Councils without Arms Length Management Organisations could either enter into management agreements themselves or set up Arms Length Management Organisations to do this. In some areas the Regional Housing Executive could set up its own management arrangements including an Arms Length Management Organisation or Tenant Management Organisation. Housing Associations could be appointed as housing management organisations.

Many people would see regionalisation as a dilution of the role of the local authority. However, in practice the local authority has already lost many management functions. The regionalisation (or nationalisation) of council housing may therefore be seen as something that has already happened in practice and that the formalisation of this position would therefore increase transparency.

As the Regional Housing Executives could deploy capital resources strategically it is unlikely that they would lack resources to achieve the decent homes standard in all their homes. Tenants who currently rent their homes from authorities that cannot achieve the decent homes standard could find themselves as tenants of a Regional Housing Executive that could afford the decent homes standard.

Housing Management organisations would operate under management agreements similar to those between local authorities and arms length management organisations. These could include performance standards. Under this system the Regional Housing Executive could replace housing management organisations that consistently failed to perform to acceptable standards.

Ownership of council housing would transfer to the Regional Housing Executives but it would remain as Council Housing if the Regional Housing Executives were constituted as local government bodies. This would also mean that tenants' rights including tenancy agreements would be unchanged and there would be no need to ballot tenants on the change – although there would be a need to consult. For example, the Greater London Authority could become the Regional Housing Executive for London, taking a strategic approach to management, maintenance and investment unaffected by housing subsidy calculations or historical factors that affect individual authorities.

Debt could be transferred, along with ownership, to the Regional Housing Executives. This would ensure that debt became more evenly distributed. Alternatively, debt could be written off. Either way, the government would presumably take account of debt levels when calculating the financial contributions to be paid to or by each Regional Housing Executive.

If the ownership of the housing transferred to the Regional Housing Executives, Capital Receipts would logically belong to the Regional Housing Executive. Capital Receipts could continue to be pooled, but another option would be for them to be 100% useable by the Regional Housing Executive. They could then be deployed strategically at the regional level and would be ring-fenced to housing as the Regional Housing Executives would be housing bodies. If the Greater London Authority became the Regional Housing Executive or Regional Housing Executives were given functions other than housing, consideration would have to be given to whether capital receipts would be ring-fenced.

If they were local government bodies the Regional Housing Executives would maintain Housing Revenue Accounts and could either receive housing subsidy under the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act or be exempted from housing subsidy under the 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act. However, if they were single purpose housing authorities there would be no possibility of the ring fence rules being interpreted in a way that reduces the resources available to the housing revenue account.

The Homes and Communities Agency has been established to link housing investment more closely to economic regeneration. The Homes and Communities Agency has adopted a regional structure. Regional Housing Executives would be able to link with the Homes and Communities Agency at a regional level. There may be a role for Regional Housing Executives in extending their remit to regeneration. There may also be an option of the Regional Offices of the Homes and Communities Agency becoming the Regional Housing Executives.

Information on the Communities & Local Government and HM Treasury study into the financing of Council Housing, including copies of the papers written for the study by Adrian Waite can be found on our website at www.awics.co.uk/briefing/hrareview.asp.

AWICS is holding a series of seminars on 'Developments in Local Authority Finance in England' that will refer to this study. Further details about the seminars can be found on our website at: www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/developmentinlocalauthorityhousingfinance.asp

AWICS is also holding a series of seminars on 'Implementing the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008' that will refer to this study. Further details about the seminars can be found on our website at: www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/implementinghousingandregeneration.asp

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Scottish Housing Regulator appoints Adrian Waite as an Associate Inspector

Adrian Waite has been appointed an Associate Inspector with the Scottish Housing Regulator with a specific brief to consider financial and value for money issues.

The Scottish Housing Regulator regulates all of Scotland's social housing including registered social landlords and the landlord and homelessness services of local authorities. Their overall purpose is to regulate to:

- Protect the interests of current and future tenants, and other service users;
- Ensure the continuing provision of good quality social housing in terms of decent homes, good services, value for money and financial viability; and
- Maintain the confidence of funders.

They are an executive agency of the Scottish Government. They exercise independently the regulatory powers of Scottish Ministers in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. They consult and collaborate with the people and organisations that have a key stake in their work. They have two advisory groups – the Regulation Advisory Group (RAG) and the Tenants' Regulation Advisory Group (TRAG), that meet four times a year. These groups enable tenants, landlords' representative organisations, and others with an interest in regulation and inspection, to make an active contribution to what the agency does.

The Agency employs around seventy people, based in Glasgow. Karen Watt is Chief Executive. She is the senior executive and the accountable officer, responsible for managing and directing the organisation to fulfil its purpose and meet its objectives. She is supported by a Regulation Board, which includes the Executive Management Team and three Non-Executive Board Members.

Michael Cameron is Head of Inspection. He is responsible for delivering an efficient and effective inspection service. His teams inspect registered social landlords and the landlord and homeless services of local authorities to provide assurance and act as a catalyst for improvement. They conduct individual and thematic inspections, and publish their findings. The inspection teams are supported by tenant assessors.

Tenant assessors are volunteers from all over Scotland who have been trained to take part in inspections. They bring a range of skills and experience and, most importantly, a tenant's perspective to the inspection of a landlord's service. They are unpaid and only receive the cost of their expenses.

The Scottish Housing Regulator registers and regulates independent social landlords and also inspects the housing and homeless services provided by local authorities. They drive improvements in landlords' efficiency and performance, and help to ensure that registered social landlords continue to attract private finance at competitive rates to build and improve affordable homes.

They publish performance standards jointly agreed with the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations that they expect landlords and service providers to meet. These provide a framework for the regulator to assess performance and for landlords to self-assess their own performance.

To help regulated bodies meet Performance Standards, manage for improvement and comply with their expectations they publish good practice and signpost to other good practice publications. For example, their health and safety gateway provides access to a wide range of information. They publish guidance for landlords that sets out their regulatory expectations.

Performance Standards lie at the heart of the regulatory framework. They are a common set of standards for both Registered Social Landlords and local authorities and let all social housing tenants know what they can expect from their landlord.

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The Standards provide a framework for both the regulator to assess performance and for landlords to self-assess their own performance. Local authorities and Registered Social Landlords can access comprehensive guidance and good practice about each Performance Standard to use in self-assessment and in the development and continuous improvement of their services. They also provide self-assessment material based on the Performance standards.

The Agency maintains a public register of registered social landlords. Their other regulatory activities include:

- Collecting financial and performance information about individual registered social landlords, and the sector as whole;
- Considering applications for consent for changes to a registered social landlord's constitution, disposals of land or property, or to amalgamate or dissolve the organisation;
- Checking compliance with restrictions on payments and benefits.

They issue guidance about each of these requirements so it is clear what they expect registered social landlords to do. Registered social landlords need to be fully aware of these requirements, and comply with them all. Where necessary to protect the interests of tenants, they may need to use statutory powers to intervene in a registered social landlord.

They inspect registered social landlords and the landlord and homelessness services of local authorities under powers set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Their purpose is to provide an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery and make recommendations to help landlords improve.

The Scottish Housing Regulator's Guide to Inspection sets out how they carry out their inspections. At the start of every inspection they ask the inspected organisation to provide them with information on it and how it is performing. Organisations provide this information by giving a completed inspection submission. The Inspectors then analyse this information and seek confirmation and further details. The Inspection involves a period of work on-site as well as desk based work before and after the on-site work.

Following inspection, they expect all organisations to respond effectively to their recommendations using their own improvement planning processes. They ask organisations that receive fair or poor assessments to prepare an improvement plan.

They provide further information on inspection in a series of leaflets for:

- Tenants and Service Users
- Staff of Social Landlords
- Councillors
- Governing Body Members

They publish their findings from each inspection in a public report. Information on which organisations will be inspected during the year is published in the inspection programme.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gives the Scottish Housing Regulator powers to step in or intervene in a registered social landlord where they need to protect the interests of tenants, service users, investors or other stakeholders. They can intervene by appointing a manager, a governing body member, a special inquirer or an auditor. They do not use these powers lightly or routinely.

They explain in their Intervention Strategy when they would step in and how they would manage any intervention. Generally their approach is to encourage registered social landlords to tackle any problem themselves. If a registered social landlord is neither able nor willing to do that then they may feel it is necessary to step in. They always provide details of any intervention in their annual report.

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Welsh Housing Associations build Homes and Communities

Housing associations in Wales provide over 74,000 affordable homes (that is 5% of all homes in Wales) to rent and buy to single people, families, older people, disabled people and homeless people. They can be found in towns and villages across Wales. They employ 4,000 people and regenerate Welsh communities by investing in projects and people making a huge impact in terms of social, financial and environmental benefits. Housing associations do not make profits – any surplus they make is reinvested in homes, services and communities. They are run by boards whose members are volunteers and on average 25% of all members are actually association tenants.

So far, housing associations have built over 2,500 homes to help people get their first step on the property ladder. They build homes where needs are greatest and they ensure their homes are accessible, energy efficient, warm and sustainable.

A number of Welsh local authorities have recently transferred ownership of their homes to Housing Associations using the Community Ownership model. This model provides for increased tenant participation in the management of an association with community goals.

Community Housing Cymru represents housing associations in Wales and is campaigning to see the Assembly invest £223million in providing new affordable homes. When combined with the private finance that only housing associations can access, this could see them deliver an investment in local communities of over £500million a year.

Community Housing Cymru believes that better housing is important to improving people's lives. Better housing is linked to improved health, higher educational achievements, more training and job opportunities, additional sustainable development and it also helps to overcome poverty.

Housing Associations will soon be able to deliver a wider range of affordable housing and a new-look Home Buy scheme will increase the opportunity for home ownership under plans unveiled by Jocelyn Davies, Welsh Deputy Minister for Housing.

The Essex Report had earlier set out a comprehensive package of recommendations that give a clear foundation and direction for everyone involved in delivering the vision and targets in the 'One Wales' agreement. 'One Wales' is the agreement made between the Welsh Labour Party and Plaid Cymru when they agreed to form the current Welsh government.

Early progress on the report includes having approved 22 new housing schemes (400 new homes) being built to higher energy standards and further progress on streamlining bureaucracy and increasing flexibility in the range of homes that housing associations are allowed to buy.

Ms Davies said:

"We are working towards our One Wales promise to deliver 6,500 additional affordable homes despite the current economic climate. However, the future holds even greater challenges that will have to be met in order to deliver promises made. Families are struggling with basic housing and energy costs and despite our best efforts, new ways must be found to meet the challenges of the credit crunch."

'AWICS' is holding a seminar on 'All You Want to Know about Welsh Housing Association Finance' on 6th November 2008. This will give an introduction and overview of this important subject and will be suitable for Board members, non-financial managers and people who are new to finance in Housing Associations and others with an interest in Welsh Housing Association finance. Further details are on our website at: www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/housingassociationswales.asp.

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Welsh Local Government gains additional funding

The Welsh Assembly Government provides funding for Local authorities in Wales, including: unitary authorities, police authorities, national park authorities and fire authorities.

The funding for local authorities comes from a number of sources. The largest element of funding comes from the Welsh Assembly Government through grants that can be used by the authorities for any purpose they wish in delivering the services for which they are responsible. These grants are known as non-hypothecated grants and this includes the largest single grant they receive (the revenue support grant).

The Welsh Assembly Government also provides funding to local government in the form of hypothecated grants. These grants are provided for a specific purpose and their receipt is dependent upon funding being spent in a particular way. In addition to the funding authorities received from the Welsh Assembly Government they receive some hypothecated grants from other Government departments. They also receive non domestic rates income which is set nationally and council tax income which is set locally.

Also local authorities are now able to determine how much they can afford to borrow based on a prudent assessment of their finances using professional codes of practice. The primary and secondary legislation (made by the Assembly) provide the broad framework for the 'prudential system' but the new system places the emphasis on local authorities planning their needs for capital expenditure in a sensible and long term way based upon sound management of assets and finances.

Local Government Minister, Dr Brian Gibbons has announced that the local government revenue support grant will receive an overall uplift of £105million for 2009/10. This additional resource, included in the Assembly Government's budget, will be used to ensure that an average increase in the revenue support grant of 2.8% with all local authorities receiving an annual increase in of at least 1.5% in 2009/10.

The draft budget includes an additional £10million in revenue support grant for Welsh local authorities in 2009/10 and a further £10.5million in 2010/11. This represents an increase of £105million or 2.8% next year and an increase of £112million or 2.9% after adjusting for transfers in the following year. Local authorities will also receive in excess of £650million in specific grants in 2009/10 for priority areas such as the Foundation Phase and concessionary bus fares. However, it is considered by many that these increases will still be inadequate to fund increased levels of need arising from the growing elderly and disabled population and increased costs of services including waste management. Dr Gibbons said:

"I acknowledge that local government, along with all sections of society, is facing additional pressures from escalating energy costs and that difficult decisions will have to be made in budgeting for the coming year... I will announce full details of next year's allocations to individual local authorities next Wednesday [15 October]... Last year I made additional money available to fund a floor arrangement so that every local authority in Wales was assured of a minimum increase. Given the unprecedented economic context to this Budget round I have decided to retain a floor funding arrangement for 2009-10... I have set the threshold at 1.5 per cent and this will be secured through the additional £10 million in funding announced in the draft Budget."

'AWICS' is holding a seminar on 'All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance in Wales' on 18th February 2009. This will give an introduction and overview of this important subject and will be suitable for Councillors, non-financial managers and people who are new to finance in Local Government and others with an interest in Welsh Local Government finance. Further details are on our website at: www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/lgfinancewales.asp.

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Campaign to Protect Rural England appoints Adrian Waite as an Expert Advisor

Adrian Waite has been appointed as an expert advisor on housing to the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England is the champion of England's countryside. They are a registered charity with over 60,000 members and supporters living in cities, towns, villages and the countryside. They operate as a network with over 200 district groups, a branch in every county, a group in every region and a National Office. Over 2,000 parish councils and 800 amenity societies belong to the Campaign to Protect Rural England. This makes them a powerful combination of effective local action and strong national campaigning.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England are one of the longest established and most respected environmental groups, influencing policy and raising awareness ever since they were founded in 1926. They campaign for a sustainable future for the English countryside. They highlight threats and promote positive solutions. Their in-depth research supports active campaigning, and through reasoned argument and lobbying they seek to influence public opinion and decision-makers at every level. They are:

- Reasoned and authoritative in their arguments;
- Independent and principled when engaging in debate;
- Challenging when protecting what is valued in the countryside;
- Realistic and constructive in their proposals;
- Enthusiastic and welcoming to all who support their aims and activities.

The continued existence and quality of so much of the English landscape is a testament to their eighty years of successful campaigning. The Campaign to Protect Rural England led the campaign to create the town and country planning system, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belts. Even so, the countryside continues to face a multitude of threats. The Campaign to Protect Rural England campaigns to protect and enhance our landscape heritage for the benefit of all.

Their authority is based upon their understanding of the issues facing the countryside, derived from their work for the public benefit over the last eighty years.

They work at national, regional and local levels with campaigning organisations, government, businesses and individuals. They seek partnerships with those that share their values and goals, and open dialogue with the uncommitted. We challenge those who threaten the countryside.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England wants a beautiful, tranquil and diverse countryside that everyone can value and enjoy; a working countryside that contributes to national well being by enriching our quality of life, as well as providing us with crucial natural resources, including food. They wish to see the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. The countryside, including its villages and towns is ever changing, but they strive to ensure that change and development respect the character of England's natural and built landscapes, enhancing the environment for the enjoyment and benefit of all.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England has the following values:

- We believe that a beautiful, tranquil, diverse and productive countryside is fundamental to people's quality of life, wherever they live
- We believe that landscape should be valued for its own sake
- We value team and individual achievement and draw strength from all levels of our organisation
- We strive to be competent, constructive and to act with integrity
- We use our resources where they are likely to have the most effect

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Institute of Public Sector Management negotiates a good deal on Training

Individual Members of the Institute of Public Sector Management have benefited for some time from a 10% discount at 'AWICS' regional seminars. This means that an individual member of the Institute of Public Sector Management can recoup the whole of their £66 annual membership fee by attending three 'AWICS' regional seminars and receiving a discount of between £22 and £25 at each.

This offer is now being extended to corporate members of the Institute of Public Sector Management. Corporate members of the Institute can now claim a 10% discount on up to ten 'AWICS' regional seminars each year. This means that a corporate member of the Institute of Public Sector Management can recoup the whole of their £210 annual membership fee by sending ten of their staff to 'AWICS' regional seminars and receiving a discount of between £22 and £25 at each.

The Institute of Public Sector Management is the only professional institute for practitioners working within the public services (in the widest sense of that term) who have a significant management element in their job role. Amongst other objectives, it seeks to raise the standards of management practice of those working within the public services. The Institute is a mutual organisation taking the form of a company limited by guarantee.

Members work in all areas of the public sector, ranging from Town, Parish & Community Councils, Housing Associations, Trade Associations, Charities and Health Authorities to Principal Local Authorities and Central Government Departments - in fact any manager from the public, voluntary and not-for-profit sectors is eligible. They give members the opportunity to network within this wider public service community and improve their skills and abilities.

They are a campaigning body seeking to raise public awareness and respect for the role of public services, to raise public awareness and respect for the role that effective management can play in delivering excellence in those services, and to raise public respect for the importance of the role of the manager in such services.

They admit:

- (1) As individual members those practitioners currently working in or alongside public services that have a significant management element in their job role;
- (2) As corporate members bodies with a close association to with public services, such as commissioners, providers, suppliers and consultants.

The Institute's Core activities involve:

- The publication of the quarterly journal "TOPICS".
- The promotion of the Institute and the use of the designatory letters IPSM and FIPSM by all full and honorary members.
- The promotion of the views of the Institute and its members on issues of the day, presenting those views to Government Departments and other bodies responsible for initiating consultation on specific issues.
- The provision of a web site and through the Institute's site information on services provided by the IPSM or by any of its partners for the time-being. All members have free access to all parts of the web-site.
- The launching of continuous professional development and a set of awards / qualifications to assist the career development of members.
- The promotion of an active Discussion Forum, available only to paid-up IPSM members.

The Institute of Public Sector Management has recently updated its website. The design of the new website has a number of new facilities compared with the previous one. The website can be viewed at www.ipsm.org.uk

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Independent Tenants' Advisors should be Accountants says CIPFA

In January 2008 changes in the regulatory environment affecting professional accountants came into effect not only in the United Kingdom but internationally. As a result the International Federation of Accountants and United Kingdom accountancy bodies require those providing accountancy and related financial services to register with a Practice Assurance Scheme.

New money laundering regulations also came into effect at the end of 2007. These require people working in accountancy to be independently regulated. This either means entering a scheme developed by one of the accountancy bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) or registering directly with HM Revenues & Customs.

Those who register with the scheme of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, for example, are obliged to comply with:

- The Council Statement on Public Practice
- The Practice Regulations
- The CIPFA Standard of Professional Practice on Practice Assurance
- Regulations on Professional Indemnity Insurance
- Regulations on Clients' Money
- Guidance on arranging continuity of cover in cases of incapacity
- Guidance on making arrangements to deal with issues of professional liability.

While accountancy and related financial work clearly falls within the scope of these regulations, CIPFA has also advised 'AWICS' that Independent Tenants' Advisors may also fall within the scope of the scheme. According to Rhiannon Soper, Technical Manager for Professional Standards and Regulation at CIPFA:

"The role of an Independent Tenants' Advisor may fall within the scheme scope. If the engagement does involve advising on the accounts or financial affairs of any person or organisation then a Practising Certificate would be required."

Presumably this would include a situation where an Independent Tenants' Advisor provided advice to tenants on the financial implications for the local authority of policy choices in projects such as housing stock options appraisals, housing stock transfers or procurement exercises. It could also be interpreted as applying where an Independent Tenants' Advisor provides advice on the potential impact of different policy options on rents.

Adrian Waite

European Parliament and Homelessness

The European Parliament has committed itself to ending homelessness in the European Union by 2015. In July 2008 a majority of Members of the European Parliament signed a written declaration on homelessness that has become an official statement of intent and has formed the basis of debate in the European Parliament.

Housing is not a specific competence of the European Union but this declaration is seen as reflecting growing recognition at European level of the housing issues faced in all member states.

It is expected that the declaration will lead to a European wide commitment that would define homelessness, require members to collect reliable figures and provide annual updates on action taken and progress made by members towards ending homelessness. The Scottish Government is already committed to ending homelessness in Scotland.

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Services on offer!

'AWICS' offers a wide range of management consultancy and training courses in management and financial topics. These include:

- Regional Seminars
- In-House Training
- Management Consultancy (including Business and Best Value Reviews, Advice on Procurement, Housing Finance, Housing Stock Options Appraisals, Housing Association finance, Public Authority accounting, Advice to voluntary bodies and Performance Management)
- Independent Tenants' Advice
- Publications

For further information, please contact Adrian Waite on: Adrian.Waite@awics.co.uk or 017683-52347 or 52165.

'AWICS' 2008 Programme of Regional Seminars

Our 2008 to 2009 programme of regional seminars has now been arranged as follows:

- Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England (September to December 2008)
- Implementing the Housing and Regeneration Act (September to November 2008)
- Financial Management and Budgeting for Non-Financial People (November 2008)
- All You Want to Know about Welsh Housing Association Finance (November 2008)
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance (February to June 2009)
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance in Wales (February 2009)
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance in England (March to June 2009)
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance (April to June 2009)

Details are available on our website: www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/index.asp

Opportunities with 'AWICS'

'AWICS' are looking for people who would like to become Associate Consultants. The role requires not only appropriate qualifications and significant relevant experience, but also a strong commitment to public services to working with independence, integrity and value.

We are especially interested in appointing Associate consultants with expertise in the following fields:

- Local Government Finance
- Housing Management
- Arms Length Management Organisations
- National Health Service Finance
- Finance of Voluntary Bodies

Applicants should send a copy of their curriculum vitae to Adrian Waite at AWICS Limited, Appleby Business Centre, Bridge Street, Appleby in Westmorland, Cumbria. CA16 6QH. Or e-mail Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk. Further details will be made available on our website: at www.awics.co.uk/opportunities.asp.

Note: Any views that are expressed in this newsletter are those of the author of the article and do not necessarily reflect the views of 'AWICS' or of Adrian Waite.

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