

PUBLIC SERVICES NEWS!

AWICS

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



December 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.

AWICS Annual Report for 2007/08 issued

The 'AWICS' annual report for 2007/08 was issued in November 2008. The text follows:

'AWICS' is passionate about public services. That is why I decided to enter local government service in 1981. That is why I founded 'AWICS' as an ethical management consultancy to provide support to those who provide public services – in all parts of Britain and also abroad! We want to make a real contribution to improving public services because they are so important to the fabric of our society.

Our mission statement is 'Independence, Integrity, Value'. We approach our work from an independent standpoint – not burdened with our own preconceptions and objectives – but with a genuine wish to help the client to achieve their objective. Our consultants are of the highest calibre. We observe the highest standards of integrity that should be expected of any consultant working with public services. We offer both 'quality' and 'value for money'. We are not the largest management consultancy. However, we are big enough to make a difference – but small enough to care!

This report covers the year 2007/08, the ninth year of trading and another very successful one. Turnover was the highest level ever achieved, representing an increase of 42% over the previous year. Gross profit increased by 43% compared with the previous year. It is now clear that 'AWICS' has been able to increase this level of turnover and profitability in 2008/09. During the year we had one full-time and six part-time employees. We also had seven associate consultants.

Our increasing numbers of clients include national government departments, local authorities, housing associations, arms length management organisations, professional bodies and others who provide public services. The services that we provide include:

- Regional Seminars
- In-House Training
- Management Consultancy
- Publications

And we made a real contribution to improving public services in many areas. The following illustrate just a few of the projects to which we have contributed during the year:

Regional Seminars

Our programme of regional seminars was launched in February 2006 with a series of five sessions of 'All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance' that were held in various venues around England during February and March 2006. Since then we have developed the 'All You Want to Know about...' series to provide an introduction and overview of a range of important subjects. We also offer more technical regional seminars.

Subjects presented during 2007/08 included:

- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Wales
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Scotland
- Arms Length Management Organisations – Freedoms, Flexibilities and the Future
- Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 – Implications for Local Authorities and Housing
- Developments in Housing Finance in Scotland – The Implications of the Green Paper

Our regional seminars are well received by the delegates who attend who find that the training and information provided enables them to become more effective in their roles. Organisations attending our regional seminars include central government, local government, housing associations, academic institutions and others.

We have developed the range of regional seminars further in 2008/09.

In-House Training

In-House Training courses were provided to Government Regional Offices, Local Authorities and Arms Length Management Organisations on:

- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance
- Budgets and Financial Management in the Public Sector
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance

Clients included:

- Arcadia Housing Association
- Basildon District Council
- Bournemouth Borough Council
- Carlisle City Council
- Easington District Council
- First Choice Homes Oldham
- Government Office for London
- Government Office Southeast
- Haringey Borough Council
- Newham Homes
- Plymouth City Council
- Redditch Borough Council
- Southeast London Housing Partnership
- Stoke on Trent City Council
- Waltham Forest Borough Council
- Wellingborough Homes

As a result of this, Councillors, Board Members, Civil Servants, Housing Staff, Finance Staff, Tenant representatives and others have been empowered to carry out their roles to greater effect. We are continuing to expand the range of in-house training available.

Management Consultancy

We offer a wide range of consultancy services to local authorities and others principally on management, financial and housing issues. For example, we assisted Carlisle City Council with the development and delivery of training strategies and programmes for Members and managers; Enfield Borough Council with the development of their Housing Revenue Account Business Plan; Harlow District Council with advice on Prudential Borrowing and Capital Financing; and Warrington Borough Council with housing revenue account business planning.

We are continuing to work with local authorities on housing and other issues during 2008/09.

Publications

We publish a range of books relevant to people with an interest in public services. Titles available during 2007/08 included:

- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Wales
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance in Scotland
- Sustainable Housing Business Plans and the Efficiency Agenda
- Arms Length Management Organisations – Freedoms, Flexibilities and the Future
- Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 – Implications for Local Authorities and Housing
- Developments in Housing Finance in Scotland – The Implications of the Green Paper

Professional Bodies

During the year Adrian Waite was invited to speak at conferences organised by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

We also publish the electronic newsletter the 'Public Services News'.

Our contribution to making improvements in public services has therefore been significant. Our potential to do even more in the future is even greater.

I also believe in the importance of making a voluntary contribution where appropriate. During the year I was a member of the Housing and European Panels of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy; and an Honorary Fellow and Vice President of the Institute of Public Sector Management.

This annual report is designed to give you a flavour of what 'AWICS' is about. We also have two websites and welcome enquiries by e-mail, telephone or at our office. Addresses are shown below.

2008/09 is proving to be another successful year for 'AWICS' with an increase in the range of services offered to an increasing number of clients. Our policy of offering quality services and our practice of funding growth and investment by reinvesting surpluses rather than through debt means that 'AWICS' can look forward to further growth despite the recession. I would like to thank all our clients for their support. We look forward to providing continued support to our existing clients and to welcoming new clients.

Adrian Waite

Institute of Public Sector Management to Promote Joined up Government and Good Practice with Adrian Waite as President

The Institute of Public Sector Management held its Annual General Meeting in London on 21st November 2008. As the only membership body exclusively dedicated to managers working in the Public, Voluntary and Not-for-profit Sectors, the Institute intends to spend the next year promoting joined up government, value for money and good practice.

The Annual General Meeting also elected new officers for 2008/09. **Adrian Waite** has been elected President. Stepping down as President after two years is **Derek Wolfe** (Chief Executive Officer at Barry Town Council, South Wales).

Robin Raily was elected Vice-President. He is Best Value and Quality Manager at Bolsover District Council. **Derek Wolfe** was re-elected Honorary Secretary. **Maurice Condie** was elected Honorary Treasurer. He is Chief Executive of Byker Bridge Housing Association, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

Other members elected onto the Institute's Council are:

- **Gregory Alake** – Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea Council
- **Stephen Guile** - Barnet, Enfield & Haringey Mental Health Trust
- **Martin Harvey** – Public Service Consultant (Wales)
- **Rodger Lawrence** – Retired Member (Midlands)
- **Stephanie Pateman** - Devon County Council
- **Julie Price** – Rugby Borough Council
- **Pravin Shah** – London Borough of Brent Council

The Institute of Public Sector Management has members in all public services and in all parts of the United Kingdom and this is reflected in the membership of the Council and the Institute's officers.

Adrian Waite said:

"We have a diverse membership representing all areas of society and the public sector. Members have access to a broad network, sharing knowledge, skills and experience, helping them to deliver better public services.

"Whether you're just starting out as a manager; considering your next career move; or looking for expert knowledge and support, the IPSM is right there beside you. Membership of the Institute provides excellent networking potential with fellow public sector managers, and our links with training providers ensure that members have access to topical and relevant training and development.

"All this, plus our members' magazine, e-newsletter and forum helps managers to develop their skills and expertise in the ever-changing public sector management environment. The IPSM is therefore well placed to help public bodies and their managers deliver the joined up government and value for money agendas."

The Institute's Council decided to establish a regional structure with branches in Scotland, Wales, Ireland and each of the English regions.

The Institute of Public Sector Management is also aiming to increase its membership during 2008/09. Membership is open to individuals and corporate bodies. Details of the benefits of membership can be found on the Institute's website at www.ipsm.org.uk . One of the benefits of membership is an entitlement to a 10% discount at 'AWICS' regional seminars.

Adrian Waite

The Queen's Speech 2008

The Queen's Speech of December 2008 was widely seen as being devoid of controversial legislation. However, it did contain some proposals of relevance to public services.

The Queen's Speech included fourteen new bills. The bill of most relevance to public services is probably the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill. It is hoped that the bill will strengthen local democracy, promote regional and local economic development and ensure fairness in construction contracts.

The government considers that the Bill is the keystone of a wider programme to put people at the heart of local decision-making, giving citizens greater influence over decisions affecting their lives and making public services more transparent and accountable to all. It also builds on a continuing programme to devolve decision making to regions and local areas, ensuring that those who best understand local circumstances are those who are able to take decisions affecting the local economy. In addition, the bill will ensure a more level playing field for construction businesses, especially small, local ones, in construction contracts. It is based mainly on the proposals contained in the 'Communities in Control' White Paper and the sub-national review but is significantly more cautious in its approach.

The key benefits of this bill include:

- Transfer of greater power and influence to regions, local authorities and citizens allowing decisions to be made by those directly faced by the localised issues
- Providing the tools and rights needed for local authorities to work together at regional levels and across boundaries to provide better services and achieve value for money
- Encouraging greater participation by local people in shaping their local area
- Improving legislation to ensure fairer system for awarding commercial contracts and improving cash flow for construction companies.

These will be achieved through a number of changes to existing legislation and creation of new rights. Some of these will include

- Making it a "duty to involve" local people in decision making
- Making it a legal duty for local authorities to respond to petitions
- Setting up a National Tenant Voice to ensure views of tenants are central to decision making on housing issues.
- A new duty on local authorities to produce assessments on the economic conditions in their area
- Duty on Local Authorities and Regional Development Agencies through a new Local Authority Leaders Forum to produce a single regional strategy
- Improving the cash flow and adjudication of construction contracts through amendments to the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

The Queen's Speech also includes the following bills:

- Draft Community Empowerment Bill – includes an easing of rules on politically restricted posts, remote voting for councillors, voting incentives and measures to make it easier to introduce directly elected mayors.
- Business Rates Supplements Bill – introduces the proposal contained in the Comprehensive Spending Review for local authorities to be able to levy a supplementary business rate in specific circumstances.
- Policing and Crime Bill – includes provision for the direct election of police authorities.
- Children, Skills & Learning Bill – transfers responsibility for education of sixteen to nineteen year olds from the Learning & Skills Council to local authorities.
- Marine & Coastal Access Bill – proposes a public right of access to the entire coastline
- Political Parties & Elections Bill – includes increased regulation of expenditure by candidates.

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Managing Director: Adrian Waite MA CPFA ACIH FIPSM. Company Secretary: Elaine Waite.
Company Number: 3713554. VAT Registration Number: 721 9669 13.

Welsh Local Government

Welsh Local Authorities spend over £6billion a year on a wide range of services for local people. Demands on these services are increasing and so are the expectations of citizens and service users, yet local authorities are expected to deliver within tight financial constraints. This means that there is a greater need than ever for people to be aware of how local authority finance works in Wales.

In 2007/08:

- Welsh Local Authorities budgeted to spend £2,277 per head of population or £6.7billion.
- Provision for education services accounted for 34% of the total budgeted gross revenue expenditure, social services for 19%, whilst police and fire services accounted for a further 9% and 2% respectively.
- Welsh Local authorities' capital expenditure was £1.1billion
- The total number of dwellings liable for council tax in Wales was 1,298,112. The average band D council tax across Wales was £1,005, a rise of 4% over 2006/07.

With the recent economic downturn the Welsh Assembly government have announced a further £42 million of extra funding to help boost the housing market providing vital stimulus to the construction industry and the most vulnerable home owners. This will help in the development of more than 500 more affordable homes.

The Welsh Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery, Andrew Davies, has also begun a major consultation on the role that inspection, regulation and audit should play in delivering top quality public services to the people of Wales. He has said:

"Inspection, audit and regulation bodies in Wales have already shown they can act powerfully to protect citizen interests and to promote service improvement. We now need to make them more consistently effective"

The "One Wales" vision of the Welsh Assembly Government has also set out four simple but profound principles for Wales:

- Putting people first
- Working together to deliver improved public services
- Achieving better value for money
- Improving and engaging the workforce

These are likely to become important to local authorities and it will be expected that authorities will demonstrate that these principles are being adopted and achieved.

The "One Wales" vision also outlines key commitments to the provision of affordable homes including:

- Meeting housing needs
- Improving access to housing
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing
- Ensuring 21st-century housing

The Welsh Assembly Government has placed information on the "One Wales" vision on their website at: www.wales.gov.uk/about/strategy/publications/onewales/?lang=en

AWICS will hold a regional seminar in Cardiff on 18th February 2009 on "All you want to know about Local Authority Finance in Wales". This seminar is designed to provide an introduction to, and overview of, local authority finance in Wales. It is suitable for non-financial managers, elected Members, people who are new to finance and anyone else with an interest in local authority finance in Wales. If you would like to find out more about this course or to book a place please get in touch with us or find more information on our website: www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/.

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Regional Spatial Strategy – The North West Plan

The North West Plan was published in September 2008 and is the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the region. It sets out policies in relation to the development of land and also transport within the region for the next 15 to 20 years. As it forms a part of the statutory development plan, the Local Development Frameworks and Local Transport Plans must conform to it. Additionally it must be taken into consideration when determining planning applications and all other plans, proposals and investment decision in the region which should be in keeping with its nine key development principles. A summary of the document and the policies in it is included below:

The spatial principles provide some of the key sustainability elements of the Regional Spatial Strategy and can be used to challenge or improve any investment or planning proposals within the region. The principles set out under this section include:

- Promote sustainable economic development
- Promote sustainable communities
- Make the best use of existing resources and infrastructure
- Work to manage the travel demand, reduce the need to travel and increase accessibility
- Promote environmental quality
- Adapt to climate change and reduce climate change
- Mainstream rural issues

Additionally this set of policies set out to promote the development of sustainable communities and sustainable economic development within the region. These should consider the needs of the local areas and also see a reduction in the inequalities in the economy, environment, education, health and other social area. The policies outline that where possible brown field sites and places requiring regeneration are developed before the use of any new sites, especially within green belt areas. These developments should also be built where there is a need for them as opposed to where new needs could be created (e.g. building new offices where people need jobs...rather than building first then needing staff).

Another area covered is the need to reduce the level of CO2 emissions within the region including the need to meet national and regional targets. One way of achieving this is the development of new cycle and footpaths to help encourage people to not use their cars to get around. These policies outline general requirements around different parts of the UK and cover development of major towns and cities where regeneration is needed including Manchester and Liverpool alongside the needs for Rural Areas, Coastal Areas and Green Belts.

Economic policies are aimed at ensuring that development, in particular regeneration, is focused in the right areas where it will have most impact. The aim for rural areas is to identify key service areas and to ensure there are boosted to provide a higher quality of rural life and support local businesses and service providers. It is intended that regeneration along coastal regions will enhance the maritime economy, recreation and tourism. It is also intended that green belts will be protected. Overall the aim of this set of policies is to ensure that regeneration and development are carried out in the correct area where they can have the most positive impact while continuing to protect the environment and quality of life for people in the areas.

These policies deal with ensuring the strengthening of regional economy and ensuring new jobs do not get placed outside of the area. This is achieved with the range of policies which allow for the allocation and de-allocation of land for employment land. It is also provides provisions to help keep new development within the area (i.e. using brownfield sites) rather than being built outside of the area (i.e. greenbelt sites).

This set of policies also deal with the development of retail sites and the tourism industry. This includes ensuring that no new retail centres will have a negative impact on any of the other local retail centres or the local transport network. With regards to tourism it highlights key areas for tourism development and the types of tourism to encourage and the needs for development to be of high quality, environmentally friendly and well designed.

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All of these economic policies are designed to ensure an increase in the regional economy while not having a negative impact on the environment, quality of life or levels of unemployment in the area.

The housing policies are aimed at ensuring the development of new homes is sustainable within the area they are built. This includes the need to ensure that the required services exist and more importantly are able to cope with the new demands which will be imposed on them from the new residents in the area. Additionally suitable public transport along with cycle and foot paths should be provided to help encourage people not to drive their own cars.

Local Authorities must also undertake Strategic Housing Market Assessments and the policies identify how they must be used. This includes supporting development in areas needing regeneration rather than development at new sites and getting derelict building back into the active housing pool. Additionally the development and quality of homes must be maintained. Requirements for affordable housing must also be in the plans and strategies including location, size and types of development.

The transport policies look at the development of sustainable and integrated transport systems within regions. It is hoped that more can be done to encourage people to stop using their own private cars and to use more environmentally friendly methods including public transport, cycling and walking. The policies also focus on trying to reduce journey times in the mornings and evenings at rush hour and to tourist spots.

Public transport should also be structured so as to reduce overcrowding and waiting times and make them more accessible. Public transport should also make it easier to get to key service centres. Local Authorities and Highway Agencies should also look at how infrastructure can be utilised better to provide improved safety and reduce traffic growth. The policies also include requirements of airports, ports and rail networks to including finding the optimum levels between trade and leisure, sustainability and controlling further development of site boundaries. It also outlines the need to consider the environmental and community impacts of further development.

Environmental policies set out the need for an integrated approach to identify, protect, enhance and manage environmental assets within regions. This includes the need to carry out conservation activities, deal with climate change, protecting and restoring sites, features, species and places of historic importance. This includes the need to create plans and strategies to achieve this and then also carrying these out.

Management of minerals for mining must be well managed and the sites must be restored when the site is finished with to ensure it is in keeping with the environment. Amounts of resources must be managed on a national level and aggregates must be, where possible, recycled. Waste Management must be a key priority and as much as possible should be done to minimise waste produced starting at its source and continuing right through to disposal and should include recycling activities including provision of local recycling points.

It also sets out the needs for sustainable energy supplies including the use of renewable energy within the region. This should include 20% of energy in the region coming from renewable sources by 2020. Decentralised energy sources should also be incorporated into new developments where possible.

Overall it seems clear that the government is keen to see the Regional Spatial Strategy ensuring that future development work is carried out in an environmentally friendly manner and results in a sustainable future.

Richard Myers
Head of Information & Communications Technology, AWICS

This article is an interpretation of Andy Yuill's (Regional Officer, Campaign to Protect Rural England) interpretation of the RSS available from:
<http://awics.co.uk/briefing/economicdevelopment.asp>

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Housing Subsidy Determinations 2009/10 and 2010/11

The draft housing subsidy determination for 2009/10 and 2010/11 was published in November 2008 following an unusual pre-draft subsidy determination consultation. The overall theme of the draft settlement is one of making limited changes to the system or the formulae until after the outcome of the review of housing revenue account funding mechanisms is known.

The Department for Communities and Local Government favours fixed guideline rent increases for the next two years. This is also the preferred option from those who took part in the pre-determination consultation in August. This will prevent the rents from being based upon inflation rates which in the current climate are unstable and this will help ensure real increases in rents should not become too high but still allow for the aim of eventual rent convergence. A date for the convergence is as of yet unconfirmed and may continue to vary given the current climate. The 2009/10 draft determination effectively assumes that convergence will take place in 2024/25.

Ministers have expressed themselves concerned at the recent large real increases in council rents in some areas and this is the reason for the cautious approach to guideline rents. They also propose a cap of 7% on increases in average rents.

To help to maintain the stability of management, maintenance and major repairs allowances it is proposed that three-year rolling averages be used for figures such as the regional crime data and the building costs index. Additionally, Communities & Local Government is continuing to use existing data instead of more recent data from 2007 to help reduce volatility in figures.

However more than sixty councils have come together to campaign for housing subsidy to be abolished and the same view is taken by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH). Councils calculate that they will be short more than £1billion to cover management and maintenance costs in 2008/09 while at the same time the Treasury is taking £0.2billion out of housing revenue accounts through negative housing subsidy. In 2009/10 and 2010/11 these problems will be exacerbated as the draft housing revenue account subsidy determination continues the practice of previous years of increasing guideline rents by a greater proportion than the various expenditure allowances thus increasing the total amount of negative subsidy.

The Pre-Budget Report included an announcement that £175million would be brought forward to fund Major Repairs of council housing. It is assumed that this will be achieved by increasing the Major Repairs Allowance in the final subsidy determination for 2009/10. However, there is a range of options open to Communities & Local Government to achieve this and the option selected could affect the geographical distribution of the increased Major Repairs Allowance.

The Local Futures Group recently carried out an analysis of how the recession was likely to affect different local authority areas and concluded that the impact was likely to vary significantly from place to place. The ten areas with the highest proportions of employment in vulnerable sectors were found to be the London Boroughs of Hillingdon, Tower Hamlets and Westminster, the City of London and the core cities of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield. There may be an argument for concentrating the additional investment in these and other similarly threatened areas.

It must also be remembered that the additional Major Repairs Allowance is not new money. The total available during the 2008 to 2011 Comprehensive Spending Review period remains the same and so the increase in resources in 2009/10 will be mirrored by a reduction in 2010/11.

Adrian Waite is a member of the Housing Panel of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy that recently published their comments on the Draft Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Determination. They have noted that:

“An upper limit of 7% on individual rent increases seems rather high in the current financial climate and is likely to hit those tenants who receive no benefits support for their rent particularly hard.”

“In CIPFA’s view, there may be an anomaly in the proposals with regard to 2010/11. The covering letter envisages the restructure timetable coming back to 2013/14 if inflation is 3% in September 2009. However all calculations are based on guideline & not actual rents. Therefore perversely, where there is a significant gap between guideline & actual rents, a fall in inflation can result in higher rent increases. That is, the closing of the gap over a shorter timespan will more than offset the impact of the lower inflation rates in rent calculations. This would especially impact adversely on tenants in those authorities which have un-pooled service charges”

“Returning to consider 2009/10, CIPFA agrees with the option of 15 year convergence date. In CIPFA’s view, it would also be helpful for avoidance of doubt if the CLG could state more clearly if it is their preference that this option is mirrored for setting of individual rents. However we are still of the view that decisions around the date are best taken at a local level, for example, some authorities in the process of considering imminent stock transfer have to meet assumptions in their business plans and may therefore prefer a sooner restructure target date”

The draft housing subsidy determination for 2009/10 and 2010/11 therefore defers taking significant decisions until after the outcome of the review of the financing of housing revenue accounts is completed. The final meetings of the working groups are now being held and it is envisaged that the Independent Chair of the groups will report to Communities & Local Government and the Treasury early in 2009. This will be followed by a government response, probably in the form of a consultation paper on the way forward, with the earliest date for implementation of any proposals being April 2010. Local authorities will be studying these papers carefully, making appropriate representations and (possibly) making applications to withdraw from the housing revenue account subsidy system during 2009.

AWICS has a long record in assisting local authorities with housing revenue account business plans and Adrian Waite has been a member of the working party on mechanisms for the financing of the housing revenue account. We are currently working with authorities on modelling and comparing the implications of remaining within or leaving the housing revenue account subsidy system.

We are also holding our 2009 series of ‘All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance’ in venues in every region of England between February and June 2009. This is a popular annual series that offers an introduction and overview of the finance of local authority housing in England. It is suitable for non-financial managers, elected Members, tenant representatives, people who are new to finance and anyone who has an interest in local authority housing finance. Details of the courses are available on our website at: <http://awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/lahousingfinance2009.asp>.

Our website also contains free briefing papers on matters relating to local authority housing finance at www.awics.co.uk/briefings/housing. These include copies of papers that have been considered by the working group on mechanisms for funding the housing revenue account.

Adrian Waite

Information Technology in the Public Sector

The government is keen to see Information Technology making more of an impact in the provision of better services and increasing Value for Money in their delivery.

A good example of the potential of effective Information Technology in the public sector includes Tameside Council who have recently rolled out a new automated system for processing free school meals. The system now allows applicants to place a request in by 11am on a given day and to receive (if entitled) a meal that lunch time and the new system costs them just £500 a year. This is compared to a lengthy process of about 2 weeks using the old manual system at a cost of nearly £140,000 a year! The new service also allows for 98% of decisions to be approved on first contact compared with an average of 18 contacts in the old system and now they are also able to inform them of other related benefits including clothing grants and travel cards.

Another good example can be seen in York where the Council has teamed up with an IT supplier to launch 'York Traffic' that provides residents and visitors with up-to-the minute travel information to plan their journey over mobile and online services for free. It is hoped that this will encourage more people to make use of public transport services and help get more cars off the road, a key part of their Local Transport Plan.

Monmouthshire County Council have been working on the development of a new website designed to focus on providing services to citizens in a way in which they can access and make use of them rather than the easiest way to fit the services (service driven). It will also bring access to all the services and data available under one website rather than being provided through a number of different sites and hosting services. This will see a reduction in overall costs and improved quality of service to citizens. Suraj Kika said:

"Monmouthshire County Council has a clear vision for customer service delivery ... The Council's approach is both forward thinking and focussed on customer engagement and satisfaction – a strategy designed to make people's lives richer and happier."

In addition to all of this the government is keen to see ICT within the government sectors become greener as outlined in its Greening Government ICT strategy and therefore to see the impact of IT on the environment minimised. This includes seeing the energy consumption of ICT equipment becoming carbon neutral by 2012 and for ICT equipment to become carbon neutral over their life time by 2020. Therefore although the government wants to see more use and more importantly the effective use of ICT in providing Value for Money it should not be having an impact on the overall environment.

AWICS are now well positioned to help providers of public sector services in achieving Value for Money through the effective use of Information Technology Systems. We have worked on the development of simple to use financial models which make it easier for users to evaluate different financial scenarios to see the financial impacts of different schemes. These include models for business planning, setting rents and service charges and evaluating capital projects including new build schemes. Additionally we are able to develop bespoke models to evaluate any data you need to evaluate.

We also have experience in the development and delivery of web based applications which can range from productivity applications for in the office to aid in the sharing of information and data to the interaction with customers. For example carrying out tenant surveys or providing easy access to the latest information published by landlords. If you would like to discuss the development of a new system for your organisation please feel free to contact Adrian Waite or Richard Myers here at AWICS.

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Managing Director: Adrian Waite MA CPFA ACIH FIPSM. Company Secretary: Elaine Waite.
Company Number: 3713554. VAT Registration Number: 721 9669 13.

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' 2009 Programme of Regional Seminars

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

- All You Want to Know about LA Housing Finance in England - February to June 2009
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance - April 2009
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance - March to July 2009
- All You Want to Know about Budgets & Financial Management – May 2009
- All You Want to Know about Housing Finance in Scotland – May 2009
- All You Want to Know about Housing Finance in Wales – June 2009
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance in Wales – February 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
- 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/oppotunities.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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