

# ***PUBLIC SERVICES NEWS!***

# ***AWICS***

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



**June 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.**

### **Adrian Waite joins Government Review of Housing Revenue Account**

Officials from HM Treasury and Communities and Local Government are undertaking a fundamental review of the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system.

The review was first announced by Yvette Cooper, then Minister for Housing and Planning, at a joint Chartered Institute of Housing / Housing Corporation event on 12th December 2007. It was formally launched on 10th March 2008 by Yvette Cooper, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and Caroline Flint, Minister for Housing and Planning. It will build on the work of the pilots that have already been conducted with six local authorities which looked at the costs and benefits of councils operating outside the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system. The review is expected to report to Ministers in spring 2009.

The main driver for the review of the system has been the recent work on self-financing which has demonstrated that the present system is unsustainable going forward, as well as the forecast of national surpluses and the complexity, lack of transparency, and volatility in the system.

The review is consistent with undertakings in the housing green paper 'Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable', which stated that 'in the longer term, we want to examine the case for more radical change to the redistributive subsidy system itself'.

Work stream proposals, including the Housing Revenue Account subsidy strand, will need to conform to the Terms of Reference for the Review of Council Housing Finance.

Findings of the Review will be used to inform Housing Revenue Account policy and the Communities and Local Government submission to the next Spending Review.

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The Chartered Institute of Housing, working with others, has been making a strong case for reform of the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system for a number of years. They have accepted an invitation by Communities & Local Government to support the review by running a series of workshops – attended by practitioners and other experts – and to engage stakeholders in other ways to identify and consider some options for reform.

There are four work streams on relevant themes considered within the workshops:

- Costs and standards for social housing
- Rents and service charges
- Mechanisms for delivering funding
- Current rules governing a local authority's HRA

It is anticipated that each work stream group will meet at least three times during the course of the review – for the first time in April/May, the second time in May/June and on a third occasion in September/October 2008.

Adrian Waite has been appointed a member of the workshop on mechanisms for delivering funding. Being involved in the Review in this way does come with some responsibilities. Individuals are being requested to support the work of the review by providing evidence, writing papers, conducting research or other activity.

The overall objective of the mechanisms for delivering funding work stream is to develop a sustainable mechanism for delivering council housing finance that is fair to tenants, local authorities and taxpayers, and maximises the efficient and effective use of the assets within the Housing Revenue Account.

Key assumptions that are being made include:

- The present Housing Revenue Account subsidy system is unsustainable in terms of the resources. Options should be on the basis of a fully funded system.
- Elements in the Housing Revenue Account subsidy entitlement formula create volatility and uncertainty for council house finances.
- The system cannot be abolished in the short term.
- Changes to the mechanism for financing should not come with an extra cost to Government or tenants unless there is a strong value for money case for doing so, and it is affordable.
- The current regime is criticised as being complicated and opaque. Whatever modifications are made should not further complicate the system.

The key questions that are being considered are:

- Should local authorities be allowed to retain all of their rents?
- How far can we achieve local autonomy but still exercise sufficient influence over a devolved system to protect the Government's fiscal position?
- How should we manage debt?
- What would we need to do to make the current subsidy system fit for purpose and how?
- What are the terms & conditions under which self-financing, or any other viable alternative, could take place?
- What improvements can be made to our handling of capital, for example for better asset management?

The scope of the work stream includes:

- Central or local control
  - Devolution
  - Retention and Improvement
- Rents & surpluses
  - Redistribution
  - Surpluses and Debt
- Costs & standards

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- Handling of Debt
- Capital
  - Future of Borrowing Support
  - Case for a Capital Charge
  - Receipts Policy and Asset Management
  - Relationship between capital and revenue

Matters excluded from the work stream include:

- The HRA (i.e. the landlord account)
- Level of allowances within the HRA subsidy system
- Rents policy
- Whether councils should continue to own council housing

Projects within the work stream include:

- Debt
- Capital Receipts and Investment
- Financing principles
- Opting out of Housing Revenue Account subsidy
- Keeping and improving the current system
- International comparisons

One international comparison that is under consideration is that of Scotland where there is a Housing Revenue Account system similar to that in England but no Housing Subsidy system.

At the inaugural meeting of the work stream, Adrian Waite was asked to prepare a paper on the implications of Housing Revenue Accounts paying a return on taxpayers' investment. This paper was considered at the June meeting of the work stream.

'AWICS' is holding a series of regional seminars during September and October 2008 on 'Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England'. These seminars will include an update on the work of the HM Treasury / Communities & Local Government work streams.

The seminars will also address other topical issues including:

- Communities & Local Government and Treasury Review of Housing Revenue Account – Funding Mechanisms, Housing Revenue Account rules, Costs and Standards, Rents and Service Charges
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 – Implications for Local Authorities of the creation of the Homes and Communities Agency and the Office for Tenants and Social Landlords
- Housing Green Paper, Comprehensive Spending Review and Housing Subsidy Determination 2008/09 – What this means for 2009/10 and future years
- Achieving Efficiency and Value for Money
- New Affordable Housing
- Local Area Agreements and the Area Based Grant including the absorption of Supporting People into Area Based Grant
- Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP)
- Rent Restructuring – Convergence in 2012, 2017 or never?
- Ring Fencing – Will it be enforced more strongly or will it come to an end?
- The future for Arms Length Management Organisations after 2010?

Further details about the seminars can be found on our website at: [www.awics.co.uk/services/devtshousingfinance.asp](http://www.awics.co.uk/services/devtshousingfinance.asp).

Further information on the work stream will be posted on our website as appropriate at [www.awics.co.uk/briefing/hrareview.asp](http://www.awics.co.uk/briefing/hrareview.asp)

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## **Integration of a Web-based Performance Management Framework**

Bolsover District Council's Performance Management framework development lends weight to the adage about people being at the heart of Information Technology and not the kit! Having developed a simple Microsoft Access-based piece of software – but importantly with a web browser up front – in 2005, Bolsover District Council decided it needed a more complete package that pulled together all the elements of a Performance Management framework.

We wanted it to be accessible – easy to see, easy to read and work with and simple to form around our existing business processes. The system we have developed, christened PERFORM II, links together Corporate Aims and Objectives, Service Plans, Performance Indicators, political responsibilities, individual strategies and initiatives together with appraisals.

Phase 1 (PERFORM I), the Access-based package, first developed in 2002, allowed Officers to come to terms with reporting their performance measures – electronically - directly to a central point on a regular timetabled-basis. But by choosing a basic template that satisfied the main parameters of performance measurement - target setting, mile stoning, linkage of activities – the Authority has been able to concentrate on the basis necessities. That is, getting managers to report regularly and consistently. You need to crack this before performance measurement will truly drive Performance Management.

Previously, all the data gathered by the PERFORM I system, was laboriously downloaded to Excel worksheets and presented to Members as part of a regular timetable of sub-Scrutiny meetings. But it's the early establishment of this process that gives such a strong member involvement to the present framework. These monthly meetings, each one of four with 7 Scrutiny members, deal directly with the performance of particular service areas. The groups can closely examine a suite of indicators, activities and progress with Service Plan key tasks and oversee medium term Corporate Objectives. Individual initiatives are monitored and each group undertakes its own Scrutiny Review programme and Cabinet Members report on their portfolio responsibilities on an 'invited' basis. As a result, the Executive can be held to account and all Members have a detailed understanding of their service responsibilities. Where there are misgivings about what's reported to them or concerns about performance, an exception report is created and sent 'up' to the main Scrutiny group.

The whole system is administered by three Officers: a Scrutiny and Policy Officer, a Planning and Performance Officer and a Performance and Quality Officer. Each of the three Officers understands each of the processes involved allowing 'cross skilling' and a broad understanding of the activities of each of the Member groups. The PERFORM II system sits at the centre, the mechanism that links all the data and information together. What the Authority has not lost sight of is, the software is only the tool.

PERFORM's success is how it has facilitated a 'right first time' culture. In the early stages of development, the software was formed around the needs of the authority rather than the other way round. Larger, outwardly more sophisticated software packages tend to dictate development parameters and direction (e.g. Balanced Scorecard, EFQM), whereas, PERFORM was developed in the authority's 'likeness'. We decided, in simple terms, what it would look like – our Corporate image – what we wanted to do and what we wanted to achieve. The software company delivered a basic training package to three Officers at their premises and then assisted the Authority along on its journey with regular helpdesk input. At this stage, these first steps threw up questions about how our framework linked together and anomalies in our thinking.

The software producer, TEN Systems, encouraged the authority by not being prescriptive about which direction and way the Council should develop the package. The Council was assisted in the development so its own initiatives and existing framework could be integrated. We also decided that it should be 'open access', that is, all those Staff and Officers with access to the authority's intranet can see at any time any aspect of the Authority's performance. The only check put in place was warning advice being given to Heads of Service about data protection and the display of personal information.

This 'heart on our sleeve' approach is contributing to the development of a 'no blame' culture as everybody's performance is on display and not 'buried' in reports. Even if some staff never actually look at the system, when Officers are typing free text or data into the system, they are 'psychologically' laying themselves open.

A further aspect of this 'open' approach is, the software is set up so it recognises individuals by their network log-in user names and passwords. The system is tailored so the responsibility for individual indicators or activities is passed to particular Officers and they have to log on to the system to enter performance and progress data and information detail for their service activities. This gives 'ownership', an important aspect of 'right first time'.

A further aspect of this approach is, managers must have confidence that data and information being presented on their behalf – by the system – is accurate. The only way to truly ensure that, is to give them responsibility for its entry. Also, by linking all the elements of the Performance Management framework together, the data and information only ever has to be entered once, thus, avoiding duplication and the inevitable inaccuracies that creep in but more importantly, reducing the amount of time spent on producing reports.

The key to good Performance Management is not just software, it's a package of integrated measures – Audit, Member involvement, Officer commitment – and a SIMPLE I.T. system!

**Robin Railly**  
**Performance and Quality Officer – Bolsover District Council**

### **Babergh District Council disposes of old Council Houses**

Many local authorities have disposed of old Council Houses, but Babergh District Council claims to have disposed of the oldest!

In 1900, Samford Rural District Council bought two thatched and timber framed fifteenth century cottages in the village of Tattingsstone for one penny. Since then Samford Rural District Council and then Babergh District Council have rented them out as council houses.

When the staircases became dangerous in the mid-twentieth century they were removed but the tenants requested that they should not be replaced and since then tenants have inhabited only the ground floor rooms.

Unfortunately, one of the tenants died recently and the other moved into a nursing home. Council officers inspected the houses and decided that, while the houses would require a major investment to reach the decent homes standard, they would be quite valuable on the open market. The Council has therefore disposed of them and plans to use the proceeds to build four modern council homes.

I wonder what the fifteenth century builders would have thought of the 'decent homes standard' – and whether the new council houses will still be there in the 27<sup>th</sup> century!

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## Homes and Communities Agency

It was in January 2007 that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced a proposal to create a new housing and regeneration agency for England. In her statement to the House of Commons on 17 January 2007 she said:

*"I am convinced that we should now move towards one national housing and regeneration agency that combines the functions of the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships with key delivery functions from my own Department including in the areas of decent homes, housing market renewal, housing PFI, housing growth and urban regeneration. I propose to establish a new agency, Communities England (later renamed Homes and Communities Agency), to support local authorities in their drive to create and shape prosperous and cohesive communities. This new expert partner will pioneer innovative new ways of working with key partners in the public, private and voluntary sector to ensure we get even better outcomes from our investment in places throughout England.*

*"Communities England will form a key part of the new delivery landscape set out in the local government White Paper, offering a one-stop delivery partner for local government. It offers a coherent portfolio of investment tools, and will work alongside local authorities, to adopt a more flexible market-based approach to housing development."*

The Department felt that by bringing together these organisations into one body significant benefits would be obtained by:

- Being a one-stop delivery partner for local government and other partners
- More effective forms of investment by more efficient use of public resources and powers to achieve the desired outcomes. This approach is particularly important in the delivery of estate regeneration, mixed regeneration and strategic growth sites
- Increased private sector leverage for regeneration projects
- More effective marshalling of scarce skills
- Sharing best practice
- Economies of scale: particularly in procurement
- Increased negotiating power: with developers and suppliers
- Increased innovation
- More timely interventions: harmonising the timing and sequencing of Housing Corporation, Communities and Local Government and English Partnerships activity (e.g. bidding rounds, corporate plans and programme horizons) would greatly increase their impact, as well as allowing the new body to respond more flexibly to urgent needs
- Increased environmental benefits: Communities England will pioneer the low and zero carbon standards in the new Code for Sustainable Homes
- A stronger, more strategic Department: moving delivery support for Housing Market Renewal, Decent Homes, housing growth and urban regeneration outside Central Government, will sharpen Communities and Local Government's focus on strategic policy

Clearly the overriding aim behind the decision to bring together English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation and the various delivery work undertaken by the Communities and Local Government was to achieve greater focus, efficiency, value for money and improved delivery of the government's regeneration and housing objectives.

On the whole the proposals were well received by the sector. In relation to the Consultation paper the Government received 187 responses. In relation to the proposal for a new housing and regeneration agency the responses were largely supportive; the key issues raised were how it would work alongside other agencies (especially local authorities) and how to ensure it would be accountable to residents and communities. The National Housing Federation welcomed the new agency saying that the:

*"Proposed transfer of functions because it has the potential to support our goal of improved outcomes for neighbourhoods and communities"*

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In January 2008 the Government provided more details of the work of the Agency. The Agency will take responsibility for the management of the following:

- Regeneration programmes from English Partnerships, including remediation of brownfield land, facilitating the provision of homes for key workers, the National Coalfields programme and developing its strategic sites programme to facilitate the delivery of increasing numbers of new homes
- Provision of new affordable housing, currently provided through social housing grant from the Housing Corporation
- Delivery responsibilities for the decent homes programmes for the social housing sector from the Department for Communities and Local Government including Arms Length Management Organisations, Large Scale Voluntary Transfers and Housing Private Finance Initiatives for existing housing and new supply. This will enable the Agency to work closely with local authorities to join up delivery of Decent Homes with the wider regeneration of communities. Ministers will continue to make final decisions on stock transfers and the establishment of Arms Length Management Organisations
- Transferring programme management responsibility from Communities and Local Government on Housing Market Renewal facilitating the joining up with other agency programmes, allowing it to work with Local Authorities to develop multifaceted regeneration programmes that deliver community as well as housing market renewal
- The Agency will take on the housing and regeneration delivery functions of Communities and Local Government in support of the main existing growth areas, including Milton Keynes-South Midlands, London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough, and Ashford. Fulfilling its objective of becoming the "Best Delivery Partner" for local authorities, it will also work with local authorities to develop support for new and emerging growth points and will become Government's main source of advice on the delivery of housing growth. Responsibility for selecting and assessing growth areas will remain with Communities and Local Government and with Ministers;
- Similarly the Agency will take on housing and regeneration delivery functions from Communities and Local Government in the Thames Gateway, including driving forward the implementation of the Thames Gateway Delivery Plan published in November.
- Additionally, the Academy for Sustainable Communities will transfer to the Agency, as will delivery responsibilities for the following programmes, currently undertaken by Communities and Local Government:
  - Mixed Communities
  - Capital Investment on Homelessness Hostels and Specialist Supported Housing
  - National Land-Use Database of Previously Developed Land.

'AWICS' is holding a series of regional seminars during September and October 2008 on 'Implementing the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008'. These seminars will include reference to the Homes and Communities Agency.

The course will be a comprehensive guide to the Housing and Regeneration Act and will cover:

- Government Priorities and Policies for Social Housing
- Regulation of Social Housing and Registration of Social Housing Providers
- Housing and Communities Agency
- Office for Tenants and Social Landlords
- Reform of Local Authority Housing Finance
- Disposal of Property
- Other Provisions

Further details about the seminars can be found on our website at: [www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/implementnghousingandregeneration.asp](http://www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/implementnghousingandregeneration.asp) .

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## Housing Association Grant in Scotland

In its Green Paper of 2007, the Scottish Government stated that securing greater efficiency from Registered Social Landlords requires them to adopt a fundamentally different approach to the way in which they subsidise new Registered Social Landlord housing. The current approach to awarding Housing Association Grant is straightforward. Any Registered Social Landlord seeking to build new houses for social rent can apply to Government for Housing Association Grant to make up the difference between the cost to them of building each house and the amount of borrowing they can support from the rental income that the house will generate once operating expenses have been deducted.

The Scottish Government considers that the strength of this process is that it allows relatively large numbers of Registered Social Landlords to develop new social housing in response to local need. Its weakness is that it does not enable them to form a strategic view on where to direct subsidy to meet need most effectively within housing market areas. They propose to replace it with a new approach that allocates subsidy to fewer larger scale and longer-term programmes.

To improve the value that is gained from public expenditure, the Scottish Government would require the lead developer to identify the greatest amount of resources, including money and land, that they and the Registered Social Landlords for whom they were developing, could contribute to the programme and to develop proposals for using them as efficiently and effectively as possible.

It will take some time to introduce a competitive regime – and the Scottish Government would not expect it to be in operation before April 2009. In the meantime, they believe that the increase in demand for social housing and their duty to secure value for public expenditure require them to make immediate progress in reducing the cost of subsidy per house. A competitive regime such as this has operated in England since 1988 and has resulted in reductions in grant rates to an average of 44%.

The responses to the consultation on the Green Paper were published in May 2008, with most of the responses regarding the proposals on Housing Association Grant being critical.

However, in June 2008 the Scottish Government announced a £1.5billion affordable housing budget. However, this represents a lower level of grant per home than has been available during previous years. It is intended that 21,500 new affordable homes will be built and the Scottish Government has expressed the view that this can be achieved through greater financial efficiency. Stewart Maxwell MSP, Minister for Communities said:

*“I firmly believe that housing associations can achieve these efficiencies and still deliver the quality of service for which they are renowned.”*

However, Housing Associations have protested that this will oblige them to increase borrowing by about 30% at a time when the financial sector is becoming reluctant to lend and interest rates are expected to increase – forcing them to increase rents. Brian Gegan, Chair of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, was quoted in ‘Inside Housing’ as saying:

*“This is housing policy created by M Mouse and D Duck... I think every housing association in the land will be sitting down with governing bodies and saying ‘Can we afford to develop any new homes?’.”*

‘AWICS’ is holding a seminar ‘All You Want to Know about Scottish Housing Association Finance’ in Edinburgh on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008. The session is suitable for Board members, housing managers, finance staff and anyone with an interest in Scottish Housing Association Finance.

Further information and a booking form can be downloaded from:  
[www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/scottishhafinancecourse.asp](http://www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/scottishhafinancecourse.asp)

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## **AWICS Value for Money Strategy**

Much has been written and said about value for money strategies in local authorities, housing associations and other public bodies – but the principles of value for money are equally applicable to any organisation – public, private or voluntary.

'AWICS' is an example of an ethical business with a value for money strategy that puts customers at its heart. Value for Money is about how to deliver Value for Money products and services to customers. Only through doing this will an organisation achieve Value for Money for itself.

Achieving Value for Money involves striking the right balance between economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Economy means doing things at the least cost; Efficiency means maximising the ratio between outputs and inputs; and Effectiveness means maximising the relationship between outcomes and outputs. However, it is not possible to determine how to achieve this balance without first establishing what customers would regard as a Value for Money service.

But how do you find out what customers would regard as a Value for Money service? I would suggest doing three things:

First, put yourself in the customers' shoes. If you were buying this service what would you regard as representing Value for Money?

Second, ask the customers in a structured way. Actively seek feedback from people who attend regional seminars and in-house training courses or who receive management consultancy services or buy books. Do it in a way that encourages customers to express themselves honestly – pointing out weaknesses as well as strengths and inviting customers to point to opportunities. Consider the feedback carefully: Do they suggest that there should be a change of approach to providing existing services? Do they suggest that new services would be appreciated?

Third, listen! Shortly after I started working as a management accountant I stayed overnight in a pub in a North Yorkshire village and spent the evening talking to the landlord. He told me that he had built his business by listening to his customers. Customers, he said, are keen to tell you what they want but they will rarely do this directly. They will do it in subtle ways. You need to keep your ears open. I am not sure that I am naturally a good listener but I am sure that he was right and that if you want to provide Value for Money services you need to listen carefully to customers.

Having done these three things, my conclusion is that our customers are looking for a quality product at a competitive price. We need, therefore, to achieve the high quality standards that our customers seek while ensuring that our costs remain competitive.

The next question is how to achieve this Value for Money service. However, it is important to recognise that this is a moving objective. Customers' expectations will constantly change and will usually increase. Furthermore, the service that you provide will always fall short of perfection. Value for Money is therefore a quest for continuous improvement rather than an attempt to achieve a specific goal. It is a constant circular process of planning, delivering and evaluating that results in improved Value for Money each time you complete the circle.

Let me give you some examples of what this approach means in practice:

First, Regional Seminars. The outcome that delegates are seeking is to be better informed as a result of which they will be better able to carry out their role effectively – whether that is as a manager, accountant, elected Member, Board Member, civil servant, tenant representative, lecturer or journalist. They are prepared to pay for a good quality product but do not want costs to be excessive.

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We therefore need to achieve a close match between what we are offering and what delegates are looking for. We need to design the regional seminars around what delegates need and make sure that our publicity is explicit about what we are going to cover. People who attend our regional seminars should find that what they get is 'what it says on the tin'. Our speaker(s) should be knowledgeable about their subject and able to present complex issues in a clear manner. They should be able to field questions ranging from the basic to the technical.

There should be opportunities to ask questions and opportunities for discussion. Groups should not, therefore, be too large and in practice we aim to have between ten and twenty people at a seminar with a maximum of 26. Delegates also need written material to take away with them so we not only provide them with copies of the slides but also with a book to accompany the seminar. Where we run a seminar annually the book and the presentation are both updated each year.

The venue needs to be conducive to learning with good conference facilities including disabled access. The venue also needs to be in a good geographic location. Achieving this is more difficult than would appear at first sight because good venues are hard to find. Even if you do a site visit before holding a seminar you don't know how suitable the venue will be until you actually try it.

So – having identified the quality product, how do we deliver it at a price that represents value for money? First, we monitor the fee levels charged by other providers to ensure that our prices are competitive. Second, we attempt to minimise our costs in ways that will not adversely affect the product. This includes careful selection of venues and negotiation of discounts and exercising tight control over expenditure on travelling, subsistence, accommodation, printing and stationery.

Second. In-house courses. Here, customers are looking for a similar quality product to the regional seminars but tailored to their individual situation. The key to providing a quality service is therefore to understand the situation and requirements of the client and then to tailor the course to that situation and those requirements. This involves finding out the background – what is the client trying to achieve by having an in-house course? What are the particular issues and concerns locally? It also involves using local data to illustrate the points that are made in the presentation.

Again, we ensure that we deliver courses at a price that represents value for money by comparing our prices with competitors and by controlling our costs. Clients may have agreed to meet expenses but that is no reason to depart from our usual careful approach to costs. We use public transport whenever possible, seek competitive rates for travel and accommodation and seek to combine journeys so that costs can be apportioned between two or more jobs.

Third. Management Consultancy. Again, understanding the requirements of the client is critical to delivering a value for money service. At the inception of the project we seek to agree a clear brief with the client so that we understand exactly what is required and can ensure that we deliver what the client requires. However, we are also flexible as we know that client requirements can develop during a project. With Independent Tenants' Advice we know that establishing empathy with the tenants and their interests is important in delivering a quality service. Again, value for money is achieved by ensuring that our rates are competitive and by controlling our costs.

I once heard an excellent service defined as one that exceeded the expectations of the client. Whether we are holding a regional seminar, an in-house course or carrying out a management consultancy project we hope to provide a service that exceeds the expectations of the client.

**Adrian Waite**

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Company Number: 3713554. VAT Registration Number: 721 9669 13**

## What do People say about our Courses?

Alan Davies, Corporate Director at Northwest Leicestershire District Council recently attended one of our regional seminars 'All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance', after which he wrote to me as follows:

*"I thought I would drop you a line to say how much I enjoyed the course, and how useful I found it... I think I learnt more on the day about housing finance than I have over the last ten years. I will certainly recommend you to others. Thank you."*

Some other comments that we have received recently include:

- Comprehensive and detailed information provided
- The course information was just about right – enough to provide a foundation, and get you interested
- Helped me put into perspective how Local Government Finance works and links to Local Area Agreements
- Information provided was useful and well put together.
- Very good overview of housing finance, would recommend to others.
- The application of our budgets to the presentation made the information very relevant, informative and understandable
- Very informative insight into the financial process of Local Authorities
- A good overview of the Housing Finance issues facing us in a local authority
- With being new to the public sector it gave me a good oversight how the housing operates in a local authority
- Very interesting day. Learned a lot of new information about housing finance that will benefit me in the future
- Understood fully as jargon minimal
- Learned a lot from training day. Good real-life examples and interactions with group. Hand-out to take away very useful
- Provided a stepping off point for discussion. Real value came out of the discussion
- Good to be able to have a discussion on Value for Money as senior managers. Good practice examples were useful
- Excellent, really helped fill the gaps and piece information together
- Clear and very informative
- Knew his subject really well
- Well presented – good use of presenting experience, to illustrate points, the handouts good – the presentation was at the right level and at the right place.
- Good overview of Housing Finance; would recommend to colleagues seeking an introduction to the topic.
- Fast and understandable!
- Sessions were about right length for what is quite a heavy topic. Speaker managed to illustrate and keep attention.
- Excellent, made a complex, dry subject as interesting as it can be!
- Delivered at steady pace yet covering a wide range of topics
- Well presented – in straightforward and simple language
- Extremely knowledgeable & well presented information
- Covered a wide range but kept attention and interest
- Very clear and at appropriate level
- Presenter knowledgeable and presented in a clear and easy to understand manner. Housing finance does not appear as daunting as originally perceived.
- I now know I know more than I thought! Many bits have fallen into place with me & I have learnt new things too. Thank you it was great to meet you both.
- Good course and liked the booklet supplied
- Hearing others experiences, very interesting
- I found the information and presentation just right for me.
- Very clear, clearest financial 'explanations' I've ever had
- You have a very good communication style that is immediately understandable

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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

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

## 'AWICS' 2008 Programme of Regional Seminars

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

- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance (Scottish and Welsh versions – April to July 2008)
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance (Scottish and Welsh versions – March to July 2008)
- Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England (September to October 2008)
- Implementing the Housing and Regeneration Act (September to October 2008)
- Financial Management and Budgeting for Councillors and Non-Financial Managers (October to November 2008)

Details will be placed on our website: [www.awics.co.uk/regionalseminars/index.asp](http://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 including Independent Tenants' Advice
- 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](mailto:Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk). Further details will be made available on our website: at [www.awics.co.uk/opportunities.asp](http://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.

Printed, Published and Circulated by:

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