

AWICS Housing News – June 2014

Contents:

- Guidance on Rents for Social Housing
- Queen's Speech 2014 – Implications for Housing
- Impact Housing Association Annual General Meeting
- Welsh Local Authorities to introduce Service Charges
- Severnside Housing Association's Learning Agreement with UNISON and Home Swap Drop-In
- Lambeth Council and the Lambeth Housing Standard
- WATMOS and the Lambeth Walk
- Gateways to Oldham
- Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance Seminar and Workshop
- Advertisement – Social Housing Finance Conference

- Advertisement - Voluntary Audit Committee Members



The South Lakes Foyer in Kendal where Impact Housing Association will hold its Annual General Meeting on 19th June 2014.

Guidance on Rents for Social Housing

In October 2013 the government published a consultation paper on rents for social housing from 2015/16. Consultation ended on 24th December 2013. In May 2014 the government responded to the consultation and provided its final guidance on rents for social housing.

This guidance sets out the Government's policy on rents for social housing for April 2015 onwards. Technically, it applies only to stock-owning local authorities although the Secretary of State has also issued a direction on the rent standard to the Homes & Communities Agency that will oblige them to have regard to it in setting the Rent Standard for private registered providers.

The guidance replaces the 'Guide to Social Rent Reforms', published by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions in 2001, and 'A Guide to Social Rent Reform in the Local Authority Sector', issued in February 2003; and any other guidance on rents issued in relation to those documents.

The Government's aims for its new rent policy are to:

- Ensure that rents for social housing remain affordable in the long-term.
- Protect social tenants from excessive increases in rents.
- Ensure rents take account of local conditions.
- Provide long-term certainty and stability to social tenants, social landlords and their funders to:
 - Enable tenants to understand their future housing costs better;
 - Enable landlords to plan for future investment better;
 - Encourage landlords to invest in new affordable housing, helping more people in need;
 - Support landlords to drive value for money; and

- Give investors confidence in social housing.
- Give landlords significant income to invest in the maintenance and improvement of existing homes, the provision of new affordable homes, and in providing good services to their tenants.
- Control public expenditure – principally, housing benefit costs.
- Support landlords to charge a fairer rent to those social tenant households with high incomes.

In particular, in coming to a decision on an appropriate basis for increasing rents in future, the government has tried as far as possible to balance the need to ensure rents remain affordable, with the need to ensure that landlords have the income they need to remain in good financial health and to invest, particularly in new affordable homes.

For local authorities, specifically, the government's aim is also to support them to make use of the opportunities presented by self-financing. Ten years of rent certainty should put them in a strong position to plan strategically and utilise the freedoms they now have following the reforms – including the ability to keep full rental income – and invest in homes and services.

However, the proposal to end 'rent convergence' will leave housing associations and local authorities that have yet to achieve 'target rents' with a 'black hole' in their budgets that will make it difficult for them to deliver either 'decent homes' or 'new build'.

The main changes included in the guidance are:

- Moving from annual increases in weekly rents of Retail Price Index +0.5% (plus up to £2 for social rents), to increases of Consumer Price Index + 1%
- As a result, removing (from 1st April 2015) the flexibility available to landlords to increase weekly social rents each year by an additional £2, above the increase in formula rent, where the rent is below the rent flexibility level and rent cap
- Making clear that rent policy does not apply where a social tenant household has an income of at least £60,000 a year

For many landlords and tenants the change from rent increases of the retail prices index plus 0.5% to the consumer prices index plus 1% will not be significant as the consumer prices index has historically risen at a rate of about 0.5% less than the retail price index. Many landlords and tenants will also welcome the announcement as bringing more certainty to future rent policy in the long-term.

However, where landlords have yet to achieve rent convergence the new approach would prevent them from doing so in future. This mainly affects local authorities that have not been able to converge their rents with formula rents either because of the operation of the 'caps and limits' in the existing rent policy framework or because of historic policy decisions. This is especially significant in that the debt settlement with self-financing was based on the assumption that rents would converge and the implementation of the new rent policy would therefore leave those councils with a 'black hole' in their self-financed business plans.

The government's approach for local authorities and registered providers also differs. Registered providers would be able to negotiate waivers with the Homes & Communities Agency whereas in the case of local authorities the new regime will be enforced through the rent rebate subsidy limitation mechanism with 'rent limits' being calculated based on the permitted increase in the previous year's rents rather than on the rent formula.

This is bad news for landlords whose rents are still below the formula and provides an incentive for landlords in this position to maximise their rent increases in 2014.

It is interesting that the government wishes to increase the 'bedroom caps' in real terms. This will result in significant increases in rents in high value areas when dwellings are re-let.

The proposal to increase rents for tenants with high incomes is also contentious with many landlords arguing that it would be unworkable.

There are comprehensive briefing papers on the AWICS website covering both the consultation paper and the final guidance:

- Consultation Paper -
<http://www.awics.co.uk/dynamicdata/data/docs/rents%20for%20social%20housing%20from%202015%20-%20briefing%20paper.pdf>
- Final Guidance -
<http://www.awics.co.uk/dynamicdata/data/docs/guidance%20on%20rents%20for%20social%20housing%20-%20briefing%20paper.pdf>

I am available to assist local authorities and housing associations with the implementation of the new guidance on rents through providing advice, financial modelling and training. For further information please contact me at Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk or on 017683-52165. The new guidance on rents in social housing will also be covered in our seminar and workshop 'Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance' that will be held in London on 8th July 2014. For further information please see: <http://www.awics.co.uk/devts.asp>

Queen's Speech 2014 – The Implications for Housing

The 2014 Queen's Speech, that sets out the government's legislative programme until the next general election in May 2015 was made on 4th June 2014. The Queen stated that the government would continue to focus on cutting the public sector deficit, with both a total cap on benefit spending and an updated charter for budget responsibility being introduced to Parliament. The charter is expected to commit the next government to run a surplus by the end of the next Parliament in 2020.

The principal measures are:

- An Infrastructure Bill that will reduce the obligations on developers to provide affordable housing through section 106 agreements; and reduce the environmental obligations on developers.
- Reforms to speed up infrastructure projects, including new freedoms for the Highways Agency and allowing fracking firms to run shale gas pipelines on private land without getting prior permission. This proposal had generated opposition even before the Queen's speech was made with protestors surrounding David Cameron's house in Oxfordshire.
- A bill implementing reforms to annuities announced in March's Budget. In future, people will not be required to buy an annuity with their pension savings and will be able to draw their retirement income as a lump sum if they choose.
- A separate bill to allow employees to pay into collective pension funds shared with other workers, a move it is hoped will cut costs and encourage saving.

- A new state-funded childcare subsidy worth up to £2,000 a year, replacing the existing employer-funded scheme.
- Restrictions on public sector employees claiming redundancy and then taking a job within the same sector.
- Giving voters the ability to trigger by-elections where MPs have committed serious wrong-doing.

The 'imposition' of section 106 will be 'scaled back' on small-scale developments as part of the Infrastructure Bill. Section 106 is currently being consulted on by the government and it has previously been suggested there would be a ten unit threshold before section 106 would be introduced on developments. However, a spokesperson for Communities & Local Government said the department would not give any detail about the size of developments which were to be defined as 'small-scale' and that more information would be released later this year.

The Infrastructure Bill will exempt all small housing developments from new green standards and allow builders to pay their way out of full obligations.

The government has effectively abandoned a pledge to make all new homes 'zero-carbon' by 2016, as new legislation would not apply to housing built in small developments and companies would be allowed to buy exemptions from new green standards. Ministers have repeatedly watered down the goal of making sure all new housing does not create any carbon emissions and the new infrastructure bill would reduce the obligations of developers in an effort to encourage the construction of more homes.

The bill will exempt all small housing developments from the new green standards and allow builders to pay their way out of their full obligations. Where the developer chooses not to go 'zero-carbon', they can build a home with emissions 44% lower than 2006 levels and make up for this by contributing to alternative green schemes at a rate of between £38 and £90 per tonne of carbon to be saved. Liberal Democrat sources said the party was pushing for developers to have to pay at the highest end of this scale.

When councils grant planning permission, they usually do so with conditions attached such as building flood defences, landscaping or including affordable homes. However, house builders claim that councils are delaying tens of thousands of new homes by failing to sign off the conditions. New legislation will mean that planning applications will be automatically approved if councils 'fail to discharge a condition in time'. Planning experts have described the move as a 'nuclear' option.

The Government is set to press ahead with its controversial plans to transfer statutory responsibility for the local land charges register and delivery of local land charges searches from local authorities to the Land Registry. The Government claimed that transferring statutory responsibility for the local land charges registry to the Land Registry would support 'the delivery of digital services'. It added that the Registry's powers would also be extended to enable it to provide information and register services relating to land and other property.

Most commentators are agreed that this Queen's speech has presented a very light legislative programme for 2014/15. However, this is usual in the last year of a Parliament.

The Infrastructure Bill appears to be significant for housing with the government attempting to increase house building by reducing the obligations that the law places on developers especially with regard to planning conditions, the provision of affordable housing and environmental targets. This will probably be of concern to those in the affordable housing sector. The Chartered Institute of Housing has already expressed reservations.

There are plans for increased devolution in Scotland and Wales.

Perhaps the 2014 Queen's speech can be seen as a missed opportunity to address important issues in housing and local government such as the lack of affordable housing, the crisis in adult social care and the 'democratic deficit'.

There is a comprehensive briefing paper on the 2014 Queen's Speech on the 'AWICS' website that can be freely downloaded from:
<http://www.awics.co.uk/dynamicdata/data/docs/queens%20speech%20june%202014%20-%20briefing%20paper.pdf>

Impact Housing Association Annual General Meeting

Impact Housing Association's Annual General Meeting will be held at the South Lakes Foyer in Kendal on Thursday. As Chair, I will be presenting the annual report to members for 2013 in the context of the key challenges that we are facing and the Homes & Communities Agency's proposals for regulation. The key questions that I will be asking and answering are:

- Are we fulfilling our Mission in an increasingly commercial environment?
- Do we have an ambitious agenda or are we complacent?
- Are we a well governed and well managed organisation?
- Do we achieve Value for Money?

I will outline the performance of the association during the last year and for the first time will report on how well the board has performed against its own specific performance measures.

The Annual Report for 2013 summarises the year as follows:

"Impact Housing Association is a mature organisation with a wide range of activities that benefit the communities of Cumbria and North Lancashire.

"Whilst we achieved all the targets that we set ourselves for the year, including achieving the surplus that our lenders require, we are in an increasingly difficult operating environment- for our general needs housing, for our supported housing, for our student accommodation, for our furniture stores, for our support services (such as Domestic Violence and Youth Work contracts), and so on.

"This has continued to be a difficult time for our tenants and the communities in which they live, as welfare reforms continue to bite, as local government cuts continue and as poverty continues to increase. We have worked hard to support our tenants with intensive financial advice to housing applicants and existing tenants, through rehousing those tenants hit by the bedroom tax, by continuing to forge stronger links with other organisations to make better use of resources, through continuing to make our housing more affordable and develop new housing.

"However, where necessary we have made difficult decisions- to take on Salterbeck's Oval Centre and staff when it got into difficulties; to hold back staff salary increases for yet another year; to increase our rents to cover additional services, improve our stock and fund additional homes.

"We have put great store on integrating a Value for Money approach into all of our activities, with continuing improvements in performance and customer satisfaction as well as continuing savings in staffing and back office costs.

"We continue to be highly regarded by all that we work with- statutory and partner agencies, lenders, our regulator, our customers.

"We have continued to develop new services to meet the needs of our Cumbrian and North Lancashire communities."

Our performance during 2013 was impressive and when our annual report is publically available I will provide a link from this website.

On 14th June I went to the Cumberland Show for a day out. The reason why I mention this is because Impact Housing Association took a stand, manned by the residents and staff from the Young People's service. The young people have been involved in designing and creating a Health Action Project called 'Junk Bunnies' creating craft from recycled materials and focussed on promoting well-being through positive activity. This project has been funded by the Big Lottery in conjunction with the Foyer Federation, and forms part of the Healthy Conversations agenda that works to improve physical health, mental well-being and healthy eating both within the service and to the wider community. Both the Cumberland Show in general and the 'Junk Bunnies' stand in particular were excellent. More information about the project is available on the Impact website at: <http://www.impacthousing.org.uk/news/impacts-junk-bunnies-will-be-present-cumberland-show-2014>

Welsh Local Authorities to introduce Service Charges

The Welsh Government is introducing a new policy for social housing rents that applies to local authorities from April 2015, subject to the closure of the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system. The policy requires local authorities to disaggregate service charges from rent; and to consider the impact on their Business Plan, the achievement of the Welsh Housing Quality standard and other government priorities. It requires a full de-pooling exercise to be undertaken to ensure that only tenants that receive, or are entitled to receive, services pay the service charges. The Welsh Government regards de-pooling service charges as best practice.

The de-pooling of service charges is also required by Universal Credit. When Universal Credit is introduced tenants will need to provide information on their rents and service charges as part of their on-line applications. Furthermore, while the current housing benefit rules make the vast majority of services eligible for housing benefit, universal credit regulations set out the services charges that will be eligible for benefit and those that are not.

Local authorities have traditionally included the cost of providing additional services to shared or communal areas in the rent that all tenants pay, regardless of whether all tenants benefit from the services being provided. While a pooled approach to service charges is administratively simpler for the landlord, it also has a number of disadvantages including:

- Tenants may be paying for services they don't receive.
- Tenants may be unaware that they are paying for services.
- Services provided, and quality of service, may not reflect the needs and aspirations of tenants.
- The housing revenue account contribution to some services may not be related to the cost of providing that service.
- The cost to the landlord of providing services may be unclear.
- It is difficult to demonstrate value for money.

Even without the new policy for social housing rents in Wales and universal credit, there would be strong reasons for de-pooling service charges as follows:

- Introducing service charges can generate additional income from properties that receive the service.
- Charging tenants for services can improve the quality of the services being provided, as tenants are more likely to complain about poor service when they know they are paying for it.
- De-pooling service charges provides an opportunity to localise services to reflect tenants' needs and aspirations.

These reasons for introducing service charges are as strong in England and Scotland as they are in Wales.

The new rent policy contains a set of key principles for landlords as follows:

- Social landlords should ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are put in place to ensure that service charges are based on full cost recovery, non-profit making and an open and transparent basis.
- Social landlords will need to consult with the affected tenants on, for example, the range, quality, frequency and cost of services provided and how costs will be apportioned between tenants.
- The rent increase notices provided to tenants each year must show separate charges for rents and service charges. Tenants should be provided with information in a clear and consistent format that sets out which service charges are deemed eligible for claiming housing benefit or universal credit.
- Social landlords to provide advice, as appropriate, to those tenants that would have to fund part, or all, of their service charges from their own resources.
- Service charges will be based on the estimated cost of the services to be provided in the forthcoming year.
- At the end of each year, service charges must be reconciled prior to, and as part of, the setting of estimated service charge costs for the following year.
- Each year, service charges will take into account any underpayment, or overpayment, for the previous year.
- Tenants should be provided with an annual statement and breakdown which ensures that they fully understand how the service charge is calculated.

- Tenants should also be provided with information on how they are able to challenge or raise concerns about the reasonableness of service charges.
- Where rent pooling currently applies and tenants do not receive, or are not eligible to receive, services, it will be for each social landlord to determine whether the weekly rent for those tenants should be reduced or held on a marked time basis.
- The de-pooling exercise may impact on tenants receiving support from a warden or support worker who is part funded through the Supporting People Programme Grant. In such cases social landlords are required to discuss the implications of this exercise with their Supporting People Regional Collaborative Committee and local authority Supporting People Team.

The Welsh Government expects service charges to be fully implemented by 2016.

I am currently assisting Denbighshire Council with the introduction of service charges and am available to assist others through providing advice, financial modelling and training. I have also recently assisted with the de-pooling of service charges at Northampton Borough Council and Oldham Borough Council. For further information please contact me at Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk or on 017683-52165.

Sevenside Housing Association's Learning Agreement with UNISON and Home Swap Drop-In

Sevenside Housing Association met with their three recognised trade unions, UNISON, Unite and UCATT in May 2014 for the official signing of their Learning Agreement. All three trade unions partner with Sevenside to develop and deliver the learning agreement that aims to build a successful and effective learning and development partnership. The agreements include 'make, learning and development' opportunities that are accessible and affordable to all Sevenside employees and encourage them to access learning and development and establish a learning culture within the workplace and to maximize the use of current Government and Union learning initiatives.

The housing association has also agreed to work with organisations such as Shrewsbury College and Sector Skills Councils to ensure that the learning partnership is a success and contributes to improving the performance of Sevenside through the enhanced skills of its people. The learning agreement states that all partners recognise the benefits of lifelong learning and development and that it is essential to the successful future of the organisation and individuals who work there. All parties are committed to working in partnership to promote and support lifelong learning across Sevenside and ensure equal access to learning opportunities for all employees.

In conjunction with the agreement, a Sevenside Learning Committee has been established. Its aim is to promote, initiate, support and monitor lifelong learning activities across the organisation. The Committee will work to make learning opportunities as accessible and affordable as possible to all employees, enabling them to increase skills and maximise their potential.

These initiatives recognise the fact that if any organisation is to achieve its full potential then it must engage with its staff to ensure that each individual achieves their own full potential.

Stuart Wheeler, Head of Human Resources and Communications at Severnside Housing told the Housing News that:

“Severnside is a learning organisation and we recognise that our continued success is dependent upon our people and those people need to be trained, educated and informed to deliver the very best service to our customers.”

Louise Foster, UNISON regional representative said:

“It is great news that we've signed up to the new learning agreement with Severnside Housing, building on the good work that has already been taking place with staff development. UNISON is committed to working with employers to provide high quality learning for all staff and we look forward to putting the agreement into practice.”

In June 2014 the Association held a Home Swap Drop-In. The event was aimed at people who are looking to change their property because their current home is either under-occupied or overcrowded or they are being affected by the 'under-occupation penalty'. Rachel Mountford, Decant Officer at Severnside Housing, said:

“This is a great opportunity for anyone considering moving, due to the bedroom tax or other circumstances, to come along and see what homes are available for swap.”

Tenants were able to meet other social housing tenants who are looking to exchange and register on Home-Swapper; a database of people looking to swap their property, both locally and nationally. They were also able to talk to Severnside staff about benefits and cash incentives available for moving. Such initiatives are clearly important for housing associations that wish to assist their tenants with the financial problems that are often caused by welfare reform.

'AWICS' has recently completed a Value for Money project for Severnside Housing Association and has provided financial and business analysis to support UNISON in their recent successful campaign to maintain an effective in-house fleet management service at Lancashire County Council.

Lambeth Council and the Lambeth Housing Standard

Lambeth Living and Lambeth Borough Council have awarded new refurbishment and repairs contracts worth £250million to five contractors. The work will focus on external replacements and internal refurbishments that are part of Lambeth Living's ambitious £450million Lambeth Housing Standard programme. The contracts with Mears, Keepmoat, Breyers Group, Mulalley and Lakehouse are for four years with an option to extend for a two year period. Councillor Pete Robbins, Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration told the 'Housing News that:

“Not only will these new contracts help ensure we achieve the Lambeth Housing Standard by 2017, but we are confident they will deliver value for money for all residents. All five contractors have given us a commitment to help create apprenticeships and training opportunities as well as supporting local businesses where possible.”

Ola Akinfe, Director of Property Services at Lambeth Living said:

“These contracts are arranged in a unique way to ensure we achieve the Lambeth Housing Standard by 2017. Breyers, Mears and Keepmoat have been allocated geographical areas in the borough. Lakehouse and Mulalley will serve as reserve contractors ensuring continuity of work if one of the main contractors leaves or is unable to handle the full work schedule.

“The contractors will be expected to deliver around £250million of work as part of the ongoing Lambeth Housing Standard programme. Works will be focused on roof, window and external door replacements, but there will also be an element of internal decent homes upgrades including boiler replacements, plumbing, rewiring, and installation of new kitchens and bathrooms.

“These latest contracts represent excellent value for money. The ability to deliver wider community benefits in line with our joint vision and ensure sustainability were also top priorities for the procurement. Breyers, Mears, Keepmoat, Lakehouse and Mulalley will all contribute to meet our joint vision of creating apprenticeships, training opportunities, share basic Do –It-Yourself skills involvement for residents and help support local Small to Medium size Enterprises, where possible.”

The Lambeth Housing Standard was co-produced between 5,600 Lambeth residents, Lambeth Living and the council. Fresh contractual capacity was needed to deliver agreed objectives within the Lambeth Housing Standard by 2017. When the Decent Homes Standard was introduced in 2000 the Council faced a significant need to invest in its council housing following years of under-investment. The original intention was to achieve this through the former government's arms' length management programme and as a result 'Lambeth Living' was formed. However, the current government withdrew this funding in 2010 and substituted a smaller decent homes programme. Self-financing, introduced in 2012, provides the council with many opportunities but left the housing revenue account short of revenue resources. The Council are therefore to be congratulated on putting together the Lambeth Housing Standard and a plan for its delivery.

Lambeth Borough Council and Lambeth Living are both 'AWICS' clients. We have recently acted as Independent Residents' Advisors in the 'LATMOS' housing stock transfer; carried out housing stock options appraisals and provided advice on accounting for hostels in the housing revenue account and general fund. Lambeth Borough Council and Lambeth Living both send delegates to our seminars and workshops.

WATMOS and the Lambeth Walk

Five badly deteriorated murals in the famous 'Lambeth Walk' are about to be restored to their former glory - by residents from a tenant management organisation. In May 2014, Pearly Kings and Queens joined residents from Ethelred Tenant Management Organisation and a team of dedicated artists for The Big Mural Launch Event. The five painted wooden panels were put up in the early 1980s to celebrate the region's music hall stars including Charlie Chaplin, its street markets, a free school for the poor, the ceramics industry and the theatre.

Now residents and staff from Ethelred Tenant Management Organisation – part of WATMOS Community Homes that owns the Lambeth Walk buildings – have teamed up with community arts charity Creative ‘Sparkworks’ to recreate the artwork. And the original artists Gordon Wilkinson and Sarah Faulkner, now husband and wife, also came along from for the launch. They will be sharing their original research material with the group. The murals were on display alongside an exhibition showing how artists plan to help residents complete the restoration during Saturday workshops over the summer. Members of The London Murals Preservation Society that is providing technical and historical information on the artworks were there too. The revamped murals will be back in place by spring 2015 along with a sixth piece of art being designed by the residents to reflect life in the region today. Creative ‘Sparkworks’ tutors Sylvia Edwards and Suzy Masterson will run the summer workshops for residents of all ages and artists from the Royal Academy Schools and Whitechapel Art Gallery have also volunteered to help. Film students from ‘Sparkworks’ Production, an offshoot of Creative ‘Sparkworks’, will be capturing the entire project on camera.

Estate Director of Ethelred Tenant Management Organisation, Chris Christou told the ‘Housing News’ that:

“This project aims to bring the community together to collectively produce something that will celebrate the vibrant and rich history of Lambeth Walk. It will also demonstrate the ethos of the community... The mural restoration project is part of our wider regeneration plans. Not only do we want to recreate the well-known paintings, we hope to recapture the amazing atmosphere the street markets of Lambeth Walk were famous for.”

The Ethelred Tenant Management Organisation that is leading the project, is also planning to install new lighting, seating, signs and planters in the courtyard.

As outlined above ‘AWICS’ worked with Lambeth Borough Council and Ethelred Tenant Management Organisation on the stock transfer to ‘WATMOS’ as the Independent Residents’ Advisor. Residents of Ethelred clearly wished to take more control over their estate and to ensure that improvements were made. It is good to see that progress is being made.

Gateways to Oldham

Oldham Borough Council has unveiled the first new homes that have been built in Central Chadderton as part of the £113million ‘Gateways to Oldham’ Private Finance Initiative contract. Wates Living Space is constructing and refurbishing around 700 homes at Primrose Bank, Dew Way in West Oldham, Keswick Avenue in Fitton Hill and Crossley as part of the scheme. Residents have moved into the first batch of 87 houses at Crossley that have been constructed alongside a purpose built community centre, shops and green open spaces. Improvements have also been carried out to roads, footpaths, parking and street lighting.

The properties will be managed by the Great Places Housing Group, maintained by Wates Living Space and will be made available for rent through the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, operated on the authority’s behalf by First Choice Homes Oldham. Half the homes at Crossley will be allocated to those who qualify as Working Xtra applicants which means that they must be working, in training, caring for a family member or volunteering.

The first batch of 87 houses at Crossley has been completed and residents have moved into their new homes. A purpose built community centre and new shops have also been constructed plus improvements to the roads, footpaths, parking, street lighting and green open spaces have been made.

The local authority and the Inspiral Oldham consortium, made up of John Laing and Great Places Housing Group, officially entered into the landmark Gateways to Oldham 25-year PFI contract in November 2011.

Councillor Dave Hibbert, Cabinet Member for Environment and Housing, said:

"I'm delighted these houses have taken shape and residents are moving into them – they are at the heart of the regeneration of Crossley... The Gateways to Oldham project has provided more than eighty quality family homes on Crossley, all built to the highest specification and green standards. The homes will benefit the people living in them and make a positive impact on the immediate and wider community... Through the Get Oldham Working scheme we are committed to creating 2,015 employment opportunities by 2015 and the Gateways to Oldham contract is a great example of this initiative in action. The project has created jobs and training opportunities in the supply chain, which have boosted the borough... This project, as well as other construction schemes such as the regeneration of St Mary's, are transforming housing across Oldham and helping to change lives in a positive manner."

John Gilmore, General Manager for the project, said:

"We are delighted to see the new homes in Crossley come to life. This final stage in the delivery of successful and sustainable local communities across Oldham is testament to all the hard work carried out by Oldham Council and the Inspiral Oldham consortium partners. We look forward to continuing this work over the next 25 years to improve the lives of people across the region."

'AWICS' has recently completed a project with Oldham Borough Council, reviewing service charges. Representatives of the Council also attend our seminars and workshops.

The AWICS Housing News is published by 'AWICS' Limited. Articles are written by Adrian Waite unless otherwise stated. However, the views expressed in articles are not necessarily those of 'AWICS' or Adrian Waite unless expressly stated.

About 'AWICS'

'AWICS' is a management consultancy and training company. We specialise in providing support in finance and management to clients in local government and housing in England, Scotland and Wales. We are well known for our ability to analyse and explain complex financial and management issues clearly. Our mission statement is 'Independence, Integrity, Value'. We therefore provide support to clients from an independent standpoint that is designed to help the client to achieve their objectives. We are passionate about working with the utmost integrity. We believe that we offer the best value for money that is available today!

For more information about us and our services please visit our website at www.awics.co.uk or contact Adrian Waite at Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk. Services that we offer include:

- Management Consultancy – <http://www.awics.co.uk/ManagementConsultancy.asp>
 - Interim Management – <http://www.awics.co.uk/interimmanagement.asp>
 - Regional Seminars - <http://www.awics.co.uk/seminars2014.asp>
 - In-House Training - <http://www.awics.co.uk/inHouseCourses.asp>
 - Independent Residents' Advice – <http://www.awics.co.uk/IndependentTenantAdvice.asp>
 - Technical Books - <http://www.awics.co.uk/TechnicalBooks.asp>
 - Free Information Service - <http://www.awics.co.uk/information-service.asp>
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Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England 2014

July 2014

We are holding a seminar and workshop on 'Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England' in London on 8th July 2014. This seminar is designed to look in depth at current developments in local authority housing finance in England – especially the implications of the recession, austerity, self-financing and the welfare reforms. If you want to be up to date with the world of local authority housing finance, this is the seminar and workshop for you!



Wellington Mills in Lambeth, London.

The seminar and workshop will address the following questions:

- What is the Political, Economic, Social and Technical Context of Local Authority Housing?
- How can we develop effective self-financed business plans in the light of government reforms to rents, right to buy and welfare; and changing approaches to the ring-fence?
- How can we invest in existing and new housing in the light of the 'borrowing cap' and the conditions for social housing grant?
- What can the Strategic housing services achieve?
- How can we get 'value for money' and excellent customer service?

The day also includes a Participatory Case Study – Budgeting and Business Planning for a Local Authority Housing Revenue Account. We believe in quality rather than quantity and so numbers at each session are limited to twenty people to permit the maximum possible interaction and participation.

Who should attend?

All those with an interest in developments in local authority housing finance in England, including Senior Management and Housing Managers in Local Authorities and Arm's Length Management Organisations, Elected Members, ALMO Board Members, Housing Accountants, Civil Servants, Tenant Representatives and College Lecturers. The course will assume a basic knowledge of local authority housing finance but will not assume that delegates are experts.

The course is accompanied by a very useful book entitled: **"Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England 2014"**

Venue and Date: London: Novotel Hotel, Waterloo – Tuesday 8th July 2014

For more information or to book a place, please visit: <http://www.awics.co.uk/devts.asp>

This seminar and workshop is also available in-house. For further information about in-house sessions, please contact Adrian Waite on 017683-52165 or adrian.waite@awics.co.uk

14

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CAPITA CONFERENCES

Social Housing Finance Conference

14th July 2014, Central London

With the Government making an **additional £300 million available through the HRA borrowing programme** and launching a review into **how more social housing can be built**, this event is ideally timed to update you on **innovative ways to invest** in affordable housing.

Key speakers include:

- **Simon Smith**, Assistant Director of Financial Consultancy, **CIH**
- **Jim Bennett**, Head of Corporate Strategy, **Homes and Communities Agency**
- **Caroline Green**, Senior Advisor, **Local Government Association**
- **Stephen Flowitt-Hill**, Director of Housing and Finance, **Saffron Housing Trust**
- **Simon Price**, Head of Housing, **Wokingham Borough Council**

Benefits of attending:

- Hear from the HCA on how to **access grant funding and borrowing**
- Gain insight into common **strengths and challenges** in local authorities' **progress with self-financing**
- Take away findings from the **Lyons Housing Review** on **maximising house building**
- Learn how **pension-fund-backed financing** enables the efficient use of assets to **create new homes**
- Understand how the **issuing of a bond can diversify funding sources** and enable the provision of **high quality and affordable housing**
- Explore **how one council has set up a company** to build homes **at low social rents and invest the dividends** to fund other areas of investment

Who should attend:

- Chief executives
- Finance directors and managers
- Housing directors and managers
- Asset management teams
- New homes and housing investment teams

Readers of the 'AWICS' Housing News will receive a 20% discount off the published rates when using booking source code DISCAW - Does not apply to concessionary rate; discounts cannot be combined

For more information:

<http://www.capitaconferences.co.uk/public-sector-conferences/housing/full-conference/article/social-housing-finance-conference.html?code=DISCAW>

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Wanted Voluntary Audit Committee Members

Impact Housing has been providing services to Cumbrian Communities since 1975. We are a charitable housing association that also provides a whole host of other services, including supported housing, support for young people, domestic violence services, specialist elderly accommodation and community businesses.

Following the retirement of existing Members of our Audit Committee, we are looking for capable new Members.

The role of an Audit Committee is to look at the affairs of the organisation and how it is run, with an objective and questioning stance. It is good practice to have some members on Audit Committee who are not on the Board and have not been involved in the organisation in the past.

We are particularly keen to recruit members who have some experience of Audit. Financial and/or business skills would also be useful. You would not need to know anything about housing associations, but it would be useful if you knew something about third sector organisations (i.e. how charities operate).

Have a look at our website to find more about us. If you like what you see, let us know. Our Audit Committee Meetings are held quarterly, usually in Workington, Carlisle or Penrith.

We currently pay your travel and other out-of-pocket expenses.

For an informal chat, ring

Adrian Waite	Chair	07502 142 658
Mike Muir	Chief Executive	07813 858 905

More information can be found at: <http://www.impacthousing.org.uk/news/wanted-voluntary-audit-committee-members>

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PLACE AN ADVERTISEMENT IN THE AWICS HOUSING NEWS
PLEASE CONTACT Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk**

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