

LGA Special Interest Groups

2014 Annual Report to LGA Leadership Board

SIG NAME, LEAD OFFICER, AUTHORITY AND CONTACT DETAILS:

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CURRENT MEMBERSHIP:

[Note: Only LGA member authorities are entitled to SIG membership]

Ashfield District Council
Barnet LB
Bassetlaw District Council
Blackpool Borough Council
Cheltenham Borough Council
Colchester Borough Council
Cornwall County Council
Derby City Council
Durham County Council
Eastbourne Borough Council
Enfield LB
Gateshead MBC
Haringey LB
Hounslow LB
Lambeth LB
Lewisham LB
Manchester City Council
Newark & Sherwood District Council
Newcastle City Council
North East Derbyshire DC
Northumberland County Council
Nottingham City Council
Poole BC
Sedgemoor District Council
Shropshire County Council
Solihull MBC
South Tyneside MBC
Sutton LB
Tower Hamlets LB
Waltham Forest LB
Westminster City Council
Wolverhampton City Council

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

CWAG Terms of Reference are attached.

KEY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

CWAG is the representative body of stock owning authorities where the housing stock is managed by Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs).

The Group aims to provide an effective link between member authorities and government departments, and others with a national policy and operational remit affecting councils with ALMOs.

CWAG aims to have an active role in influencing the national policy agenda, particularly in respect of ALMOs.

As a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association (LGA), CWAG is keen to work with the LGA to inform and influence policy activity on housing so it reflects the needs and concerns of Councils with ALMOs.

CWAG aims to develop positive partnerships with ALMOs and the National Federation of ALMOs to ensure best outcome for tenants / leaseholders.

The Group also provides a forum for mutual support for member authorities, facilitating the exchange of ideas and sharing best practice between members.

KEY ACTIVITIES/OUTCOMES OF WORK UNDERTAKEN

CWAG has an Annual Work plan agreed each year at the AGM in the autumn. The Executive Group oversees progress made in delivering the work plan. During the past year, the following areas of work have been progressed:

Working with the LGA and others.

CWAG is committed to working co-operatively with other groups and organisations to make the case for housing.

During the past 12 months CWAG has continued to develop and improve joint

working with the LGA and other organisations keen to influence the housing policy agenda. We particularly value the regular catch up meetings with LGA Policy Advisers and we are keen to continue working closely with the LGA, contributing to LGA campaigns and policy responses.

Examples of joint working include:

- Joint survey of the initial impacts of welfare reform changes in conjunction with the NFA and ARCH.
- Joint CWAG / ARCH Workshop on TMO issues.
- CWAG AGM included a discussion session with the senior LGA Policy Adviser focussing on current LGA housing campaigns and how CWAG members can assist and contribute.

Self-Financing

Providing support for CWAG members on self-financing remains a priority, particularly in the context of new pressures on business plans arising from changes to rent policy and implementing welfare reform.

CWAG continues to hold two workshops each year focussed on self-financing and business planning issues. These workshops are delivered by Consult CIH and remain very popular with members, providing specialist advice and guidance as well as the opportunity to network and share good practice. Topics covered during the year include new-build and development opportunities, changes in rent policy, dealing with the business plan impacts of welfare reform, HRA ring-fence, voluntary code and other accounting issues.

CWAG was also a contributor to the ARCH led research examining the early impact of self-financing on council housing. The research findings 'Innovation and Ambition – the impact of self-financing on council housing' were published in May 2013.

Welfare Reform

The impact of welfare reform has been a dominant theme within the work programme over the past year. CWAG has been keen to gather feedback from members on the effects of welfare reform changes and share information around local initiatives and approaches.

An initial members' survey on the impact of the 'Bedroom Tax' was followed by a wider survey of impacts in October 2013, carried out in partnership with the National Federation of ALMOs and ARCH.

CWAG used General Meetings to facilitate information sharing, discussion and debate on a range of topics linked to welfare reform, for example through case studies from a number of members focussing on specific areas (see below).

- Responding to the 'Bedroom Tax' including case studies from:
 - Manchester City Council - Developing indicators to measure and track the impact of welfare reform changes.
 - Leeds City Council – Reclassification of stock.
 - Newcastle - Working with RPs and developing a strategic view across the City.

- The Wakefield Direct Payment Pilot – Implications and Challenges

Developing the ALMO Model

Over the past couple of years, a key objective of CWAG has been to provide information and support to members reviewing the long-term options for managing their council housing.

Where authorities have completed reviews and chosen to retain their ALMO, the agenda has now shifted and many authorities are developing the ALMO model in new ways to address local issues and deliver local solutions.

For CWAG this means ensuring there are opportunities to share and discuss new initiatives and developing good practice. In line with this, the CWAG General Meeting in January considered how the council /ALMO relationship is changing and the new type of Management Agreement that is now emerging.

Promoting Good Practice and Improving Services for Members

CWAG continues to offer a topical programme of General Meetings and workshops, with input from guest speakers and sector experts as well as practical case studies from CWAG members.

Details of CWAG meeting topics and speakers held during the past year are outlined below:

Welfare Reform

The Wakefield Direct Payment Pilot – Implications and Challenges

Rachel Willoughby

Responding to the ‘Bedroom Tax’ case studies from CWAG Members

- Developing indicators to measure and track the impact of welfare reform changes –*Martin Oldfield Manchester CC*
- Reclassification of stock – *Lorraine Wright Leeds CC*
- Working with RPs and developing a strategic view across the City – *Marie MacDonald Newcastle CC*

Housing Policy and Practice

The Future of Social Housing – current challenges & future prospects

Pete Bailey– Independent Consultant

LGA Policy Update

Clarissa Corbisiero - Senior Adviser LGA

Guide to Scrutiny – presentation and discussion around current best practice

Alistair McIntosh – Chief Executive HQN

Future of ALMOs

How should a council manage its relationship with its ALMO?

*Richard Sorensen – housing consultant and Managing Director at Tenants Matter Ltd
Rob Main – Newark and Sherwood DC*

Workshops

Complaints Workshop

Rafael Runco

The workshop considered the implications of new arrangements for dealing with tenants' complaints through designated persons and tenants' panels as well as the new role of the Housing Ombudsman

Finance Workshops

Steve Partridge, Ben Taylor and Simon Smith – Consult CIH

A number of events were held during the year covering issues around self-financing and business planning.

Topics covered include new-build and development opportunities, changes in rent policy, dealing with the business plan impacts of welfare reform, HRA ring-fence, voluntary code and other accounting issues.

TMO Workshop

Joint event with ARCH bringing together practitioners with responsibility for TMOs