



TRANSFERstoday

A newsletter for all those involved in stock transfer

Lost opportunity for BME landlords

Stock transfers have failed to involve black and minority ethnic-run housing associations sufficiently, research for the Housing Corporation has concluded.

This found that although more than 1m council homes have been transferred since 1989, very few have gone to specialist BME housing providers.

First opportunity

The report recommended that the government should give BME associations the first opportunity to win the support of tenants as a prospective landlord where ethnic minorities make up more than one-third of the total population.

It also called on councils to involve BME associations in all strategic housing decisions.

BME associations were urged to collaborate to form partnerships that could participate in transfers.

Corporation chief executive Jon Rouse said: "Stock transfer can make a real contribution to the

One problem facing councils that wished to engage BME associations was the hectic pace of the transfer process

continued growth of BME associations, and is particularly valuable in areas of significant ethnic diversity."

The report's author, housing consultant Greg Campbell, said BME associations had grown only

slowly and "the one factor which could have made a real difference – stock transfer from local authorities – has been almost totally lacking".

He called this "a real missed opportunity".

The report was based on studies of four places affected by transfer, and drew on good practice.

It looked at Bradford, where homes had been transferred, at Trafford and Wakefield, where transfer was in progress at the time, and at Tower Hamlets, where three BME associations had been shortlisted out of the 16 expected to take over various estates.

Not open

The researchers found that councils rarely chose their transfer association in an open way and "have often given little if any scope for BME associations to influence that process".

The research said: "BME housing needs and community cohesion have mostly been ignored, with some honourable exceptions."

The local history of BME associations was a factor. Bradford had long promoted BME housing issues and the post-transfer engagement was strong in particular through Manningham HA.

Wakefield and Trafford, however, served largely white communities and had little experience of working with BME associations. Consequently, these associations found it difficult

BME housing needs and community cohesion have mostly been ignored, with some exceptions

to become engaged in the transfer process. This applied to a lesser extent in Tower Hamlets, despite fewer than half of residents describing themselves as white.

One problem facing councils that wished to

engage BME associations was the hectic pace of the transfer process.

This left little time to develop relationships with BME associations or to seek out and act on their ideas. ■

● *BME housing associations and stock transfers* project report and good practice guidance can be seen at www.housingcorp.gov.uk.

PROGRAMME

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TRANSFERstoday

Issue 28 November 2005

National Housing Federation
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business for neighbourhoods



Transfers sweep iNbiz board

Transfer landlords have taken seven of the National Housing Federation's 15 annual iN business for neighbourhoods awards.

Two double winners

Pennine Housing 2000, formed by a transfer from Calderdale council, took the employer of choice award for its flexible and modern working conditions.

These include health strategies, career development and opportunities to support local community services through volunteering and a social enterprise scheme.

The association also saw the leadership award go to its chief executive Dave Procter.

The other landlord to take two awards was Richmond Housing Partnership, the transfer

association in Richmond-upon-Thames.

It won the Griffiths Older People Community Award for its retirement housing service.

Residents of its 18 retirement schemes said they wanted more organised social activities.

The association now offers them music therapy, information technology, courses, gardening competitions and a website.

These services have been extended to other older people in the area.

Richmond also took the communications award for its programme for young people.

This provides after-school activities on its

The activities on the estates have helped reduce the level of anti-social behaviour by up to 70%

largest and most problematic estates, which have helped to reduce the level of anti-social behaviour by up to 70%.

It marketed the programme through flying banners, a website, t-shirts, medals, trophies, posters and a behaviour agreement for participants.

Test Valley's transfer landlord Testway Housing won the performance award for achieving some of the lowest rent arrears in the country and high scores in all areas of customer service.

Somer Community Housing Trust, which works in Bath and North East Somerset, won the neighbourhood improvement award for its work on the troubled Avenues estate in Peasedown St John, which had been at serious risk of

long-term decline.

It has improved the environment with a Home Zone, which require slow traffic speeds and creates streets mainly for

Organised social activities have been extended to other older people in the Richmond area

pedestrians, new parking areas and street lighting.

Roy Litherland, a tenant of Helena Housing, in St Helens, won best neighbour category.

He is chair of a large tenants' and residents' association.

He has attracted hundreds of thousands of pounds to the Moss Bank area to provide opportunities for young people and to tackle nuisance and anti-social behaviour. ■

Major role in midlands regeneration

One of the largest stock transfer landlords has taken on a key role in what is believed to be the largest neighbourhood regeneration programme outside London.

Whitefriars Housing Group, which took over Coventry council's homes in 2001, is working in nearby Solihull on a 15-year programme to transform neighbourhoods which are home to nearly 40,000 people.

The project is expected to generate £1.8bn of private and public investment.

Regenerate North Solihull is designed to transform the Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst, Fordbridge and Smith's Wood areas.

These were built as overspill estates for Birmingham in the 1960s

'It is vital that local people have a sense of ownership and confidence in the programme'

and, unlike the rest of predominantly affluent Solihull, are among the most deprived areas in England.

Whitefriars was chosen because of its expertise in community regeneration gained in Coventry.

Chief executive Howard Farrand said: "We believe that the challenge of regeneration goes beyond improving the bricks and mortar of a place to take in all the other issues of daily life – including health, education, the environment and the fear of crime.

"Our first task will be to engage with local people because it is absolutely vital to the success of the project that they have a sense of ownership and confidence in the programme."

The others partners in the project are builder Bellway Homes and investment firm Inpartnership.

Key targets for the partners include

construction of 8,500 new homes and five new village centres including shops and community facilities.

Paying for itself

Revenue from private development is expected to help the programme to become self-supporting.

Solihull Council leader Ted Richards says: "We find ourselves unable to access funding for regeneration schemes like this.

"This partnership demonstrates the council's willingness to be real social entrepreneurs."

● Whitefriars is trying to home grow part of its construction workforce so that its renovation programme in Coventry is not disrupted by the labour shortages that plague the building industry.

As part of this work, it attracted more than 350 young people to a construction careers event staged with its building contractor partner Wates. ■

Industrial action follows failed vote

Sefton council has faced industrial action in key departments in a lengthy dispute that arose from its attempt to transfer its homes in August.

Two local Unison officials were suspended last May after incidents of alleged intimidation outside a shop used by the council to promote the transfer.

They were sacked for gross misconduct in November. The council said this was because of intimidation and because of their opposition to transfer.

But Unison general secretary Dave Prentis said they had been dismissed "for taking part in legitimate trade union activities, and defending council housing".

● The council said in August it would investigate allegations, unrelated to the two men, that bribery and impersonation had occurred during the ballot. A spokesman said this probe had not been concluded. ■

BRIEFING...

Law forces disclosure to 'anti' campaigners

Selby Council has been forced by freedom of information legislation to hand tenants' addresses to anti-transfer campaigners. It has written to all 3,300 tenants to warn them that they may receive potentially misleading information about the proposed transfer to Town & Village Housing.

Sunderland ahead of decent homes target

Sunderland Housing Group has met the decent homes target five years before the 2010 target and is approximately 18 months ahead of schedule on its investment plan, its annual report has said. Its regeneration projects include an £8.8m investment to buy 13 city-centre sites, but it said its activities were hindered by a shortage of land and the length of time needed to win planning permission. The group, one of England's largest transfer landlords, has modernised 5,000 homes in the last year and a further 17,000 homes have been partly modernised.

Labour transfers more than Tories

There have been 638,578 council homes transferred to housing associations since Labour came to power in 1997, well over twice the number transferred in the previous eight years under Conservative governments, housing and planning minister Yvette Cooper has told parliament.

Write off not anti-competitive, says minister

Housing and planning minister Yvette Cooper has told parliament that writing off debt for councils to assist stock transfer does not constitute impermissible state aid under European competition rules. She said in answer to a question from Labour MP Austin Mitchell that the write-off policy "does not distort or threaten to distort competition".

Cross Keys chief leads on city expansion

The chief executive of a recent stock transfer association has been asked to join a special group planning its area's growth. Mick Leggett, of Cross Keys Homes, which took over Peterborough council's housing last year, will help to plan for an extra 40,000 in the city by 2021.

Troubled times turned round

A transfer association that went through a difficult patch including Housing Corporation supervision has put its troubles behind it and is set to improve, Audit Commission inspectors have found.

Kerrier Homes Trust was awarded one out of the possible three stars and judged to have excellent prospects for improvement.

Lead inspector Shayne Hembrow said: "The trust has come a long way in a relatively short time.

"It has turned around a previously poor service and it is clear that the trust knows what it needs to do and has the track record to get it done."

Kerrier had acted on the recommendations of earlier inspections. Tenants now get an appointment for repairs and there is a customer contact centre.

Housing Corporation field director Andrew Wiles said: "Following a difficult and challenging period in supervision, I am very pleased that the trust has



been able to deliver improvements in its governance and management control, which has led to improvements in services to residents."

KHT took over some 3,500 homes from Kerrier council in 1998. Shortly after, concerns about governance and management led the corporation to place it under supervision.

New management was brought in after an unfavourable inspection report in 2003.

● Meanwhile, inspectors have judged South Staffordshire housing association to deserve two stars for providing a good service with promising prospects for improvement.

They praised its strong customer focus but criticised the lack of an appointment system for day-to-day repairs. ■

TAKEN AS READ... current research and recent publications

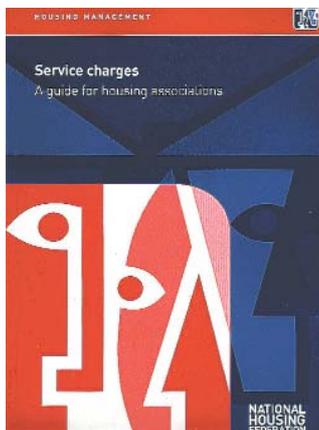
MAPPING THE MAZE: A GUIDE TO REGULATION AND INSPECTION

£28.95, member price: £24.95. Credit card order: 0870 010 7676, or email: bookshop@housing.org.uk. This new edition updates board members, staff and others and provides them with a valuable insight into the roles and approaches of those bodies that regulate and influence the work of housing associations.

NHF SCHEDULE OF RATES

Available from M3 Housing via: www.m3h.co.uk/RepMaint/sor.htm. This industry standard is used by over 300 social

landlords to help control maintenance costs and standards. It provides excellent benchmarking tools and a broad base of



comparables, defining and costing repair jobs. It includes contract conditions trade preambles and descriptions to fit repair history, works orders and tenders.

SERVICE CHARGES: A GUIDE FOR HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

£39.95, Credit card order: 0870 010 7676 or email: bookshop@housing.org.uk. This new edition provides comprehensive guidance and updates on service charge administration. It includes a new chapter on Supporting People as well as exploring the impact of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002.

DECENT HOMES STANDARD

www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/page/odpm_house_028604.hcsp. Key facts covering the definition of a decent home, option appraisals and funding figures.

ACTION FOR BETTER HOMES – 16 YEARS OF STOCK TRANSFER SUCCESS

Free. Contact Joanne Kelsall, tel: 0870 153 9426 or email: joannek@housing.org.uk. This update outlines the benefits of transfer in terms of investment, customer care, regeneration, innovation and good practice. It includes a range of case studies.

Tenants satisfied post transfer

Tenants say they have better homes and services after transfer, according to recent survey results from the National Housing Federation.

According to returns from the Feedback survey, satisfaction among tenants of transfer organisations is also increasing.

Overall, the message is clear across a range of indicators.

When asked "How satisfied are you with your landlord?", 81.9% of transfer tenants in 2004 were satisfied, compared to 70.3% of council tenants.

In response to the same question in 2000, 77% of transfer tenants were satisfied, compared to 78% of council tenants and 79% of tenants of other housing associations.

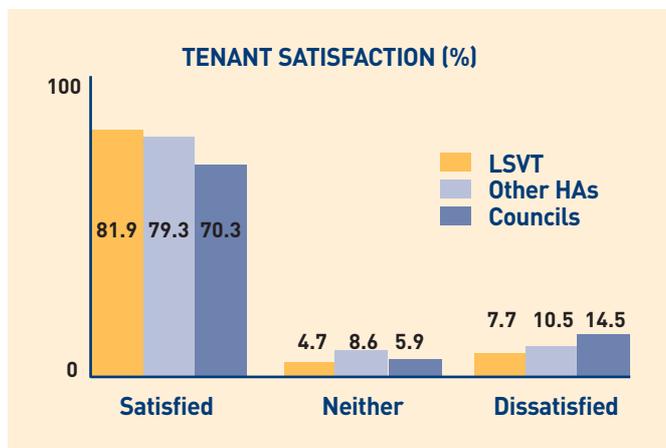
This year, transfer

landlords were more highly rated by their tenants for accommodation, with 86% of tenants saying they were satisfied, compared to 82% of council tenants and 82.5% of tenants of other housing associations. Rent is good value post transfer, say transferred tenants.

Rents and areas

When asked, "Is the rent good value for money?", 81.4% of transfer tenants thought their rent was "good" value, compared to 77.5% of other housing association tenants and 69.8% of council tenants.

Regarding their neighbourhood, 80.5% of transfer organisation tenants were satisfied, compared to 72% of local authority tenants and 77.3% of housing association tenants.



Home condition

Of transfer tenants, 81.3% said that the general condition of their property was good, compared to 71.5% of council tenants and 81.8% of housing association tenants.

Just over a third – 34% – of transfer tenants said it was very good, compared

to 26% of council tenants and 35% of housing association tenants.

Feedback has the UK's largest database of tenant opinion, based on around 220,000 tenants social housing. Contact: Carl Taylor, senior Feedback co-ordinator, carlt@housing.org.uk, tel: 020 7067 1099.

FORTHCOMING

The National Housing Federation runs events and conferences to provide information, advice and support to individuals or organisations involved in the stock transfer process or housing in general.

More details of Federation services appear on our website at www.housing.org.uk

To find out more or to book a place, Contact the business support team on 0870 010 7676 or bss@housing.org.uk

23 November
Understanding the role of audit committees
Leicester

24 November
National stock transfer network
West Bromwich Albion FC
Contact: Joanne Kelsall 0870 153 9426 or joannek@housing.org.uk

25 November
Lettings and homelessness conference and exhibition
Brighton

December 2005
First south west finance conference
Dawlish

24-25 January 2006
NHF Maintenance conference and exhibition
Coventry

3-5 February 2006
National board members' conference
Birmingham

2-3 March 2006
Chief executives' conference
London



Booking ahead...
7 June 2006

National stock transfer conference
The only stock transfer conference in the housing calendar
Highpoint, Leicester

NATIONAL STOCK TRANSFER NETWORK

Tackling anti-transfer campaigns Experiences and best practice

Speakers include:

- Tony Ingham
IBP Communications
- John Craggs
Sunderland Housing Group
- Graham Holland
Amber Valley Housing

24 November
10.00am-3.30pm
West Bromwich Albion FC

Mixed tenure: not just tenants

Work by NHF transfer organisations is being used to support government-sponsored research into links between tenure and deprivation.

There is a growing sense that concentrations of poverty will only be broken up through addressing housing mix, and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has been asked by the Treasury to look at the links between tenure and poverty in England's most deprived areas.

The NRU approached the National Housing Federation to identify case studies demonstrating tenure diversification schemes and the barriers and benefits experienced by housing associations.

Eight case studies which illustrate the before and

after picture have been identified. Some are near completion and some have recently completed all building phases. Others have finished building a mixed-tenure development so critical social impact indicators can be evaluated.

One of the case studies was Sunderland Housing Group (SHG), which has changed the tenure profile of several neighbourhoods.

SHG is an LSVT that took over 36,000 dwellings from Sunderland City Council in 2001.

SHG's starting point was a thorough appraisal of all neighbourhoods it was working in. It made decisions on investment according to providing the most sustainable homes for each neighbourhood, using its own 'neighbourhood assessment matrix

There is a growing sense that concentrations of poverty will only be broken up through addressing housing mix

suitability tool'.

Following this, the group is modernising 29,000 sustainable homes through its investment plan.

In 2003, SHG launched a renewal plan to replace unsustainable neighbourhoods with new, mixed-tenure developments.

The plan is a comprehensive programme that aims predominantly to regenerate social housing single-tenure estates and neighbourhoods.

Owner-occupiers from right to buy make up between 5% and 20% of households, with the remainder mainly being tenants of single-tenure

former council homes.

Three recently completed schemes have tackled the need to diversify tenure. Homes are provided for sale and rent at an average ratio of 25:75. The homes for sale provide cross-subsidy to ensure the rented units are affordable.

SHG identified that site assembly issues can be a difficult challenge to overcome. Negotiations with owner-occupiers are carried out by the group's dedicated home owner advice team and more than 180 owner-occupied properties have been acquired voluntarily to date. ■

Peter Harrison
Regeneration manager,
Sunderland Housing
Group, tel: 0191 525 5000

FINANCE

Service charges post transfer

Transfer to new and existing associations creates difficulties of its own.

The local authority will probably have pooled all its costs under the housing revenue account, although service charges for leaseholders may have been identified.

Issues around service charges post transfer and what housing associations can include in them are discussed in the NHF's *Service charges: A guide for housing associations*.

Transfer RSLs have to:

- identify the costs at scheme level;
- distinguish between net rent and services charge at scheme level; and
- resolve the above while

The transfer documentation will set out limitations of service charge recovery, especially within the first five years post transfer

complying with the rent guarantee in the transfer document.

The transfer document will include the rent and service charge guarantee. This will refer to the pre-ballot consultation, which would usually include information on service charges and a sample of the new tenancy agreement.

The transfer documentation will set out limitations of service charge recovery, especially within the first five years post transfer. Staff should be aware of this.

What is included in

services charges depends on the lease or tenancy agreement, and the law, whether part of the statute of or case law.

A list of what is included in service charges useful when presenting information to tenants

To work out how much service charges should be, you will need to work out the costs from financial records.

New scheme, new list

Housing associations should draw up a list of services for each development, as different schemes can have different services. These should be attached to tenancy agreements.

The book recommends recording information under separate headings –

including staffing costs, depreciation and insurance of plant, for example.

Housing staff should design the services charge pro forma with their colleagues in finance so finance codes can be included on the form.

This will remind those working out the service charge where to find the information they need.

Most service charges are covered by housing benefit. The main items that are ineligible are charges for personal fuel, food, general counselling and support and leisure items. ■

Service charges: A guide for housing associations, see Taken as Read, p3

Feedback forum

Letters, advice and opinion welcome. Write to: The Editor, *Transfers Today*, NHF, Lion Court, 25 Procter Street, London WC1V 6NY. Email: joannek@housing.org.uk

SMALL ASSOCIATIONS

The Federation's Smaller Housing Associations conference in November examined issues including remaining dynamic, retaining independence and focusing on excellence.

NHF chief executive David Orr said: "We need openness and accountability to demonstrate efficiency.

"We are partners of government, not creatures of government – retaining independence is critical to our continuing success. Innovation and creativity grow from independence of ideas."

Keynote speaker Teresa Graham, deputy chairman of the better regulation task force, said that the principles of good regulation included proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeting.

She said that the voluntary sector – which included housing associations – had a unique role in "creating social capital and thereby strengthening civil society".

She also raised the issue of whether regulation of the voluntary sector was inhibiting innovation.

Ms Graham added that the Housing Corporation's new approach to regulation was a step in the right direction.

She went on to say that challenges for small housing associations included dealing with the cumulative burden of inspection and enforcement with limited resources. ■

The views in *Transfers Today* do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the National Housing Federation

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE: PROCUREMENT

Ground control

A new landlord was faced with turning around a grounds maintenance service and awarding a new contract – on a limited budget and little information.

After Rushcliffe Homes, a subsidiary of Metropolitan Housing Trust, took over 3,445 council homes in January 2003, it had to continue using the council's grounds maintenance staff and offer them the opportunity to tender for the new contract.

The offer document contained an undertaking to improve the grounds

The specification moved away from listing tasks to focus on what tenants and staff could expect to see

maintenance service which was perceived as being poor and not meeting tenants' expectations.

Of the many issues facing Rushcliffe, some of the most problematic were a lack of records, limited in-house expertise on running such a service (a council client officer had managed the contract) and, because the likely costs were difficult to gauge, it was difficult to set budgets.

Starting out

Using historical information on costs and the advice of a consultant, a maximum contract sum was agreed.

A tenant advisory group (TAG) was established from tenants who had expressed an interest in grounds maintenance to work with officers on writing a specification and selecting a contractor.

Do you have any good practice, experience or knowledge that could benefit others? Contact editor Joanne Kelsall, email: joannek@housing.org.uk

The tenants worked with an external consultant to develop a specification. This was challenging exercise as the specification had to be realistic given the budget.

The specification attempted to move away from the traditional approach of specifying the type of tasks and the frequency they should be undertaken to one based more on output. This focused on what tenants and staff might reasonably expect to see when inspecting an area.

One area of concern for tenants was collection of grass cuttings. It was felt these detracted from the appearance of schemes, especially in wet weather when they clumped together. In the end, the specification did not require the contractor to pick up the clippings as it was felt the cost could not be accommodated. Tenants felt strongly, however, that this was an issue they would revisit when selecting the contractor.

Selection and review

The consultant and housing staff, using an evaluation framework, graded the submissions. Companies had to outline how they would achieve the standards required within the budget. Two were selected to present their submissions to the TAG.

The TAG spent a great deal of time asking questions and exploring the approach each contractor would take in regard to specific issues such as tenant complaints and interaction with scheme managers or tenant representatives. The opportunity was taken to confirm whether the contract could include grass clippings collection and both contractors explained why it could not.

The most problematic issues were a lack of records, limited in-house expertise and costs that were difficult to gauge

The TAG took a vote after asking the views of officers, and a clear majority favoured appointing Continental Landscapes. The company started on site in November 2004.

After selecting the contractor, the TAG asked to meet again around six months after the contract was awarded to review progress and discuss any issues that may have arisen.

This meeting was held jointly with the contractor, as it was felt a more informal 'question and answer' session would be of benefit in going through what had happened and what was planned for the future.

The TAG has met again, with officers and the contractor, a year after the contract commenced to track progress and discuss related issues.

The main issue was awarding a contract for the programmed maintenance of trees for which Rushcliffe Homes is responsible. As in previous meetings, officers outlined progress in surveying the trees concerned and options for procuring the work.

At its last meeting, the TAG decided that its 'start and finish' remit was at an end. However, it felt that it would be beneficial to continue in a scrutiny role, meeting twice a year with officers and the contractor, and reporting its views to elected tenant representatives. ■

Sheila Hyde
Chief executive officer,
Rushcliffe Homes, email:
sheila.hyde@
rushcliffe-homes.co.uk

One-to-one advice for chairs

Chairs of transfer landlords can get one-to-one help from someone already doing the job, in a pilot mentoring project run by the National Housing Federation.

Chairs are matched with another chair who has more experience of the role, preferably nearby. For example, a chair of a new organisation is put in touch with a chair of an established transfer landlord.

‘The knowledge of having a support mechanism there to bounce ideas back and forth is invaluable’

Andrew Almond-Bell was recently made chair of Shoreline Housing Partnership in Grimsby, North East Lincolnshire, where he is concentrating on best value services for the tenants, employees and Shoreline as a whole.

Locally born and bred, he is a manager at a chemical company on the banks of the Humber and recently gained his master’s degree in business administration. He plans to use his

extensive knowledge of operations management to improve services.

He applied to become a board member for a number of reasons.

He says: “First, I had amassed a considerable knowledge base – both practical and theoretical – in operations management.

“This includes issues such as workplace learning, organisational learning and organisational culture. I was looking for an opportunity to develop these skills further.”

Having felt that he had “taken from the community” in various ways, he thought the was time was right to put something back.

The prospect of being able to fulfil this as a voluntary board member seemed ideal.

Building skills

Despite his thorough experience, Mr Almond-Bell felt that mentoring would help his role.

He says: “While I believed that I possessed good communication and negotiating skills, I felt that I needed additional guidance

‘I wanted to make sure issues were debated correctly and that the right decisions and courses of action were taken’

through the finer points of chairing a board of 15 members, plus officers, each with differing backgrounds, passions, directions and approaches, to ensure that everyone was afforded the opportunity to contribute.

“I wanted to make sure that issues were debated correctly and that the right decisions and courses of action were taken.”

He continues: “The knowledge of having a support mechanism there to bounce ideas back and forth is invaluable.

“Distance was an initial worry. I am on the east coast and my mentor is almost on the west coast. It is very important to establish effective communication and we settled for emails and the telephone as these proved to be very effective.

“I believe that I was very fortunate to be appointed

with a superb mentor, Janet Hale of Knowsley housing trust, who has given me tremendous support and guidance. For that I am truly grateful.”

Trust and demands

Mr Almond-Bell says the mentoring programme had helped him to be more patient and considerate of others, irrespective of their approach, manner, demands and delivery.

He adds that trust is essential for board members as well as chairs and that this can only be gained through time and honesty.

When asked what he would say to other chairs considering the mentoring programme, he says: “Quite simply, given the opportunity, sign up for it.” ■

For more information, contact Joanne Kelsall, National Housing Federation, email: joannek@housing.org.uk, tel: 0870 153 9426, mobile: 07740 859 854

POINT OF CONTACT

These are regional NHF contacts. If you have a problem or issue about transfer, they can usually put you in touch with someone with relevant experience.

CENTRAL REGION

Tel: 0870 153 9426

Gina King

Head of central region, ginak@housing.org.uk

East

Claire Astbury

Regional manager clairea@housing.org.uk

East Midlands

Jenny Allen

Regional manager jennya@housing.org.uk

West Midlands

Regional manager: vacant

Contact: June Clare junec@housing.org.uk

NORTH REGION

Tel: 0161 848 8132

Manchester office

Annie Hopley

Head of north region annieh@housing.org.uk

North West/Merseyside

Samantha Miller

Regional manager Samantham@housing.org.uk

Leeds Office

North East/Yorkshire & Humberside

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Julie Gamble

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New RSLs: supporting people

Despite funding issues and the problem of the onerous administration burden, supporting people remains a valuable programme which does offer the possibility of better quality, a needs-led services and real stakeholder partnership.

Appointing a lead officer will ensure there is one point for information and relationship building and prevent information getting lost

The programme poses immediate and longer-term issues for new stock transfer landlords that should be addressed alongside one another.

Suggestions here are not exclusive and each landlord will have different and additional concerns and priorities.

Where supporting people 'sits' in the organisation will, to a degree, depend upon the amount of supported housing that the new landlord has.

Whether supported housing is in the same section as general needs housing or has its own department, it has been proved to be good practice to appoint one lead officer

for it. This will ensure there is a central point for information and relationship building and prevent information being lost across the organisation.

Contracts

Supporting people grant is delivered via a contract.

Providers of supported housing and their managing agents need a clear understanding of what these contracts should be delivering. Rent accounts may need to be unpicked to arrive at an understanding of realistic overheads.

Current scheme review status, timescales and restrictions on current and future contracts should be taken into account.

Relationship building

The essential working relationship to be maintained is with the council's supporting people team. Sadly, in many local authorities, many of the necessary relationships are still at an early stage.

The relationship between an LSVT and a local authority will be different

Nearly a quarter of landlords said they had not renewed tenancies because of the local housing allowance scheme

from that between a council and an in-house provider. It will be different again when it involves councils, associations and the voluntary sector.

Understanding the dynamics involved will support good partnership foundation building.

Essential is the engagement with other local and regional providers. This can be achieved by joining a local provider forum. This will prove a support network and information-sharing group.

Risk

Much of the necessary risk assessment to be undertaken will depend on how up to speed the new organisation is the regime.

Issues such future provision, amalgamation, expansion or withdrawal need to be investigated.

Business planning

As part of the culture change from council to RSL, the process of business planning and performance need to be established.

A business thinking culture will probably not have been defined while the homes were controlled by the local authority.

Decisions regarding the planning of any new



schemes will entail an understanding of the Housing Corporation bidding process and the links between supporting people, revenue grant and any future bids for capital funding.

Inspection

Housing associations are subject to the regular inspection regimes of both the Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation. These procedures will be unfamiliar to the new organisation and will be challenging with much preparation required.

Education

Supporting people is nothing if not complicated. New officers and new board members will need to have a working knowledge of the it to make informed decisions on some of the above issues. ■

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