



National Federation of ALMOs Annual Report 2004

YEAR ONE - ACHIEVEMENTS

From a standing start the NFA has made tremendous progress to give its members:

- A strong and united front: by recruiting more than 50 ALMOs and aspirant ALMOs as members, housing's newest sector can speak with one voice
- High media profile: frequent positive coverage in *Inside Housing*, *Housing Today* and *Social Housing*
- Effective influence: access to health funding and social housing grant secured from government, plus helpful changes made to the inspection regime
- High quality services: following the appointment of Gwyneth Taylor, formerly LGA lead on housing, the briefings and advice line service has been strengthened. We have targeted governance as a key area and provided official guidance and workshops

Although only one year old the NFA has made its mark, and established itself as a force in the housing sector. This report sets out some of the key activities of the NFA in its first year of operation.

Lobbying

A key aim for the NFA is to promote the interests of ALMOs and to lobby government and other agencies on their behalf. This involves a wide range of activities encompassing finance, legislation and policy development. Since its inception the NFA has:

- Met the housing minister
- Established regular liaison with key officials in the ODPM, the Community Housing Task Force and the Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate
- Developed joint working arrangements with a range of other agencies with an interest in housing
- Responded to the ODPM's Public Sector Plus review of the Decent Homes target
- Successfully made the case for ALMOs to have access to social housing grant
- Obtained a place on the steering group of the ODPM research project on the evaluation and monitoring of ALMOs
- Argued for financial and operational freedoms for ALMOs
- Persuaded the Department of Health to allow ALMOs to bid for the Extra Care Housing Fund
- Produced a response to the ODPM consultation on changes to management and maintenance allowances
- Persuaded the ODPM to rethink its proposals for re-inspecting ALMOs
- Submitted evidence to the spending review
- Responded to the Audit Commission consultation paper on housing inspection and assessment
- Raised the profile of ALMOs and the NFA in the housing press
- Established the NFA as the consultative body on issues relating to ALMOs

Briefings

A key NFA service is in providing general advice to members, either at an individual level (by phone or email) or in the form of analysis and briefings that are issued to all members. Briefings issued over the last year have covered:

- Highlights of the Sustainable Communities Plan
- Analysis of the Round 1 housing inspections
- Briefing on the financial implications of the PSA Plus review
- Lessons from the Round 3 bids
- Housing Bill Standing Committee discussions concerning access to social housing grant for ALMOs

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Profiles

Our regular profile series provides details about key characteristics of ALMOs. Surveys produced or under development so far include:

- Profile 1 arrangements between the council and the ALMO
- Profile 2 Board and staffing issues
- Profile 3 Board member expenses and remuneration
- Profile 4 the tenant survey
- Profile 5 set up costs

Guidance

In addition to publishing ODPM and Audit Commission guidance on its website, the NFA has produced its own guidance on:

- Applying for funding under Rounds 3 and 4
- Establishing an ALMO Board
- Preparing for inspection
- Achieving continuous improvement in governance

Website

The NFA dedicated website is password protected for members only and, in addition to guidance and briefings, also contains details of ALMO and government announcements, standard documentation, examples of bids and other documents produced by ALMOs, and ALMO inspection reports, in order to ensure that all the key legislation, advice and guidance for ALMOs can be found in one place.

NFA member organisations may give access to the website to Board members, staff, tenants, leaseholders and councillors – there is no restriction on the number of individual users.

Events

The NFA provides regional events for its members. Two seminars on start up and operational issues were held in York and London last September while in December a further two workshops on governance issues took place for Board and shadow Board members.

Working with others

The NFA aims to maximise its resources by working closely with a number of other agencies in the sector including TAROE, HouseMark, the Northern Housing Consortium and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

In addition to supporting the work of the NFA steering group, regional meetings are also held to enable ALMO officers to exchange information and experiences. Meetings in the north are serviced by the Northern Housing Consortium.

About the NFA

The NFA was established on 1 April 2003. It is the representative body for ALMOs and supports the development of aspirant ALMOs. The objectives of the NFA include:

- Securing a long term financial future for ALMOs
- Promoting ALMOs as an effective means of delivering Decent Homes
- Persuading government to take account of the interests of ALMOs
- Establishing a vibrant and innovative ALMOs sector

The NFA is a not-for-profit organisation and income received from subscriptions and events, less costs reasonably incurred, is invested in providing services to its members. Membership is open to ALMOs and to local authorities setting up or interested in exploring the ALMO option. The NFA is administered by Housing Quality Network Services and overseen by a steering group of ALMOs.