

TMO MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF TENANT MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS



Looking Forward to the Future?

What lies ahead for TMOs in England

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The NFTMO are looking to set-up a
national network of guide TMOs. Page 8



ALLOWANCE CUTS ARE HARD TO TAKE

It is not easy for TMOs to accept reductions in their management and maintenance allowances when rents and running costs are rising. Most TMOs operate with few staff, modest offices and voluntary effort. There is not much potential to 'trim the fat' off an organisation that may only employ a part-time manager and a caretaker.

The impact of a cut in allowances will often be a reduction in service to tenants. They will want to know why their rent is going up and yet the TMO has less money to spend on their services.

"Ah but," says the landlord, "the TMO has money in the bank from surplus generated in previous years! Therefore the allowances have been too high". Not necessarily, TMO surplus funds, where they exist, have often been created because the TMO can get things done more cost effectively through their voluntary effort and on-the-spot management. That surplus is for the benefit of the local community whose work created it.

Government policy has encouraged social landlords to save money, but the idea behind the 'efficiency agenda' in public service was surely to cut red tape and focus resources on front line services? Town Halls and Housing Associations should not, then, be passing cuts down to TMOs.

TMOs cannot expect to be immune from the impact of tightening budgets. What they do expect is proper consultation, genuine negotiation and compliance with the terms of their management agreement with the landlord.



TIME OFF WORK FOR TMO BOARD MEMBERS?

The Government has been consulting about extending the range of people who are legally entitled to take time off work to carry out public duties.

The consultation paper, called 'Standing for Office: Time-Off Entitlements' is available at www.nftmo.com and includes proposals to extend the entitlement to board members of TMOs.

The existing legislation covers people like councillors and school governors. It operates flexibly in that individuals are allowed reasonable time off to go to meetings or to carry out duties. The time must be agreed with employers beforehand and a specific amount of time off is not laid down in law.

Employers do not have to pay individuals whilst they take time off, although many do.

Will this proposal free up more people to serve on TMO committees? Are there any drawbacks to the idea? Let the NFTMO know your views or write directly to the government officials at Communities and Local Government (CLG). The closing date for the formal consultation is 19th December. You can view the NFTMO response at www.nftmo.com.

INTRODUCING TWO IMPORTANT NEW HOUSING AGENCIES

From December 1st two important new government agencies came into being. Each will have a big role in shaping the provision of affordable rented homes in this country.

The Tenant Services Authority (or TSA for short) is the new 'watchdog' that will regulate social housing landlords. Its full powers will apply to housing associations from the end of 2009 and to local councils from early in 2010.

The Homes and Communities Agency (or HCA) will be the single, national housing and regeneration agency for England. With an investment budget of over £5 billion per year, its role includes new housing development and the regeneration of existing homes.

The new agencies replace The Housing Corporation which has now been closed.

ASSESSORS APPOINTED TO CHECK TMO COMPETENCE

For the first time ever developing TMOs are now subject to external independent assessment of their competence.

An initial pool of 'Approved Assessors' has been appointed by the government to carry out the work.

Until October this year the TMO's own training and development agency was responsible for signing off a group as competent to manage. Critics questioned whether the training agency could make an objective assessment because of their long-term links with the group.

Now the job of assessing competence falls to an external Approved Assessor. Tenants can't be balloted on a TMO proposal until the Approved Assessor has confirmed that the group meets specified standards of competence.

A company called Grant Thornton has been awarded the contract to manage the Approved Assessor service. Project Manager Jane Taylor says her role is to make sure that the judgements of Assessors are consistent. "We will be reviewing and comparing the reports from each Assessor," she explained "so



that every TMO gets the same fair and clear assessment against the standards set out in the Right to Manage guidance."

The NFTMO welcomes the new assessment system that comes alongside a relaxation in the ballot rules to bring TMO ballots in line with other votes in the housing world. Roy Read of the NFTMO is now chairing a government working party that is monitoring the new arrangements. "The important thing for groups will be to show evidence of their competence in each area. It may be uncomfortable for some in the short-term but nobody gains if a TMO takes on management responsibility before it is ready."

SOUTHWARK SHOWS THE WAY FORWARD

In October Southwark Council organised a Saturday conference to make Council tenants in the London borough aware of the new opportunities for tenant involvement and control.

The timing and format of the 'Tenant Management Initiatives' conference set a standard that it has to be hoped other social landlords will follow. Closing the day, Cllr Kim Humphreys said that satisfaction surveys in Southwark had consistently shown higher levels of satisfaction amongst TMO tenants. Cllr Humphreys, who is responsible for the



housing portfolio, told delegates "I want tenants in the borough to be happy, so it follows that I should be telling them about the potential benefits of setting up a TMO!"

BLENHEIM GARDENS GET KITE MARK



Blenheim Gardens RMO has become the latest organisation to be awarded the NFTMO Good Governance Kite Mark. The Resident Management Organisation was founded in 2001 and has a long-standing reputation for good practice. The picture shows the Kite Mark award being presented by Councillor Steve Reed to RMO Chair, Angela Bartley.

YOUNG LEADER'S DVD



A DVD record of the first NFTMO Young Leader's conference is now available. The video, music and CD cover were produced by young people who took part in the August conference, with the support of the Raw Materials media team. Free copies can be requested from the NFTMO.

TONY COX

The TMO movement has lost a great character and friend following the death of Tony Cox. Tony was for many years the chairman of the Beechwood and Ballantyne EMB in Birkenhead and provided important leadership up to and during their successful transition to a community based housing association. He was a regular speaker at NFTMO events and greatly respected by his friends and colleagues at Beechwood.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR TMOs? THE NFTMO CO-ORDINATOR LOOKS INTO THE CRYSTAL BALL

One chilly afternoon last year a group of TMO representatives were meeting to discuss community led stock transfers. Around the table were people from a variety of community organisations. Big and small, new and long established, urban and rural. A guest speaker, from a major international bank, was explaining how the bank assessed risk before lending to community-led organisations.



"We are looking for good governance" he said "together with a sound business plan. We are looking for viability and sustainability". As the meeting ended and people dispersed into the misty North London air not even Mystic Meg could have predicted that, of all the organisations present, it was the bank itself that would quickly turn out to be the least viable and have the most uncertain future.

If that experience teaches the TMO world anything it must be that we can't take the future for granted. Like it or not we have to keep a careful eye on how we are doing and how the world is changing around us. So, with or without a crystal ball, it is useful to ask ourselves where our own TMOs and the TMO sector as a whole might be in five to ten year's time. What are weaknesses that may undermine us, where are the opportunities and how might we be affected by forces beyond our control?

NUMBERS NOT INCREASING

Fourteen years after the Right to Manage was introduced less than 2% of council and housing association homes are managed by TMOs. The number of operating TMOs in the Federation database has hovered around 220 for years. For every new TMO that starts up, about ten per year, another one folds. An improved framework for developing new TMOs was introduced in October. We hope more and stronger TMOs will come through as a result. But what of the TMOs that are already up and running? Do you think your TMO will still be operating in 2014? What about 2020? What can be done to make it more or less likely?

TMOs are, by definition, small organisations at least partly dependent on voluntary effort. That makes them vulnerable, like a small boat on the open sea, to any storms that come their way. The loss of key committee members, a bad staff appointment, even a change in the attitude of the landlord, can rock the boat. To carry on the seafaring analogy, think of the landlord organisation as a giant container ship. Whatever dramas are unfolding on the bridge it steams on regardless. Councils do not fold because the chief executive is sacked or the council leader resigns under a cloud, or even when they overspend their budgets. Yet for a TMO such events can threaten survival.

GOVERNANCE IS THE KEY

Most TMOs that fail do so because of



Photo by Susannah Fields of Flashfields Photography

"Volunteers are the lifeblood of successful communities" – NFTMO young leaders conference 2008.

some failure of governance. That is why the NFTMO launched our Good Governance Kite Mark and why we welcome the introduction of independent assessment of competence for new TMOs. A large TMO in London recently closed in some disarray and they won't be the last. What a waste of all the time and energy invested by members of the community in those organisations!

Governance problems are best dealt with early. TMOs need to regularly check the health of their governance arrangements and do something about it if things need attention. Landlords must support 'wobbling' TMOs who own up to weakness and want to get back on track. Not all landlords are willing or able to offer good support and some may seize the opportunity to close down a TMO while it is weak.

THE NEXT GENERATION?

Alison Gelder, Chief Executive of Housing Justice, says that the secret of sustainability in community organisations is to have a succession strategy. "Groups that depend heavily on one or two people are always at risk." she argues "Whereas groups that make sure they share knowledge, for example by encouraging less experienced members to 'shadow' committee officers, are much more likely to survive over time"

Many community organisations, not just TMOs, are used to seeing empty chairs at AGMs and struggle to find new committee members. Over 40% of TMO members attending this year's annual conference said that their biggest challenge was the

difficulty of getting new people involved.

Is volunteering going out of fashion? The answer is "no" according to recent research for the government. A Home Office citizenship survey in 2003 revealed a big rise in the numbers of people involved in community activity during the first years of the 21st century. In a national survey of volunteering published last year 40% of those questioned said they had volunteered regularly in the previous year.

This is good news. Volunteers are the lifeblood of successful communities. Evidence of this, if it were needed, can be found in a government report that analysed the 2005 Citizenship Survey in search of the key influences on social cohesion. The report said, "Individuals who engage in formal volunteering are more positive about cohesion. These individuals are likely to feel more empowered, have more interaction and form networks with people in their communities that they may not otherwise be in contact with."

IS SMALL BEAUTIFUL AGAIN?

The emergence of TMOs in the 1980s and 90s went alongside a trend for decentralisation in the housing world. Councils had become large and remote landlords so the opening of local offices, with the powers to get things done, was a widespread response. On the spot management, local repairs teams and closer links with the community – these were the order of the day. It was a housing management structure that was perfectly suited to TMOs.

But, as the 20th century drew to a close, centralisation and the economies of scale took over. Call centres opened and local offices closed. Small contractors were spurned in favour of 'partnering' with building sector giants. In some places the TMO estates were the only places to retain a local office and estate based managers.. In the era of centralisation TMOs now come under pressure to conform. TMO staffing arrangements may now be regarded as extravagant.

Might the pendulum swing back to local management again? Well history tells us yes.. Some experts are already predicting that the banking crisis will give rise to a new 'localism' as a reaction to the failure of huge remote organisations. So don't be surprised to see call centres being replaced by local offices in the future!

TO TRANSFER OR NOT TO TRANSFER?

This year's Housing and Regeneration Act paved the way for new regulations that will require councils to co-operate where a community organisation wants to explore a Tenant Led Stock Transfer. This will create potential opportunities for more TMOs to follow in the footsteps of WATMOS, Beechwood and Ballantyne and Stockwell Park who have all moved successfully from community management to community ownership.

NFTMO chair Terry Edis believes stock transfer may secure the future of some TMOs. "Even when they have been managing for years some TMOs may be worried about the long term because of uncertainty over future council policy. Transfer to a community owned landlord can give people more confidence that tenants will still be in control twenty years from now."

Terry rejects suggestions that community ownership is a form of privatisation. He is also the chair of WATMOS Community Homes in Walsall, a tenant led RSL created by the transfer of eight council TMO estates in 2003. "The whole point of WATMOS is to provide affordable rented housing. We are a not-for-profit landlord that is genuinely owned by the communities who live in our homes."

Even with the new regulations, a tenant-led stock transfer is still a massive undertaking. Hugh Maloney advised Stockwell Park TMO during their transformation to a



"Local offices with the power to get things done" – Housing Minister Iain Wright was impressed during a visit to Burrowes Street TMO this summer.

registered social landlord. "The process was extremely costly, not just in terms of money spent but also in the time and energy of volunteers." He warns. "TMOs embarking on a transfer face a big challenge"

The credit crunch will mean that fewer banks are willing to offer loans for stock transfers but funds should still be available, albeit at a higher rate of interest. TMOs looking to transfer will probably need to partner with an existing social landlord. We need more partner landlords with the structure and culture to support community controlled housing, and not smother it.

REGULATOR TO THE RESCUE?

The new Tenant Services Authority (TSA) may improve the prospects for tenant management through regulation. Richard Sorensen of the TSA told the NFTMO this month that the TSA would be the first housing regulator to regard tenants as the main client for its services. "We want to enable tenants to access detailed information about how their landlord is performing in their neighbourhood." he explained. "Dissatisfied tenants groups will be able to involve the TSA and trigger a process that may lead to poor landlords having to contract out the housing management to a different provider. This could create opportunities for TMOs."

The Federation is also expecting the TSA to make sure that councils carry out their statutory duties under the Right to Manage regulations. We want to see firm action by the regulator where councils are deliberately obstructing tenants who want to exercise those rights.

A NEW DAWN FOR RENTED HOUSING?

The banking crisis and the associated decline of the UK housing market may also offer an opportunity for the social rented sector to regain some ground as a tenure of choice. The pursuit of owner occupation at all costs has been at the expense of rented housing which has been regarded by successive governments as 'housing of last resort'.

Suddenly the attractions of a rented home are more obvious. Now is the time for government, local councils and housing associations to promote those advantages. We have got to start removing the stigma that has attached itself to rented housing. 65% of delegates at the NFTMO conference said that Council and Housing Association homes should be available to people of all incomes and backgrounds. No surprise then that the NFTMO strongly opposes recent suggestions that tenants should be forced out of their homes if their earnings increase..

Maybe, community ownership and management can play a part in restoring the rented sector's public image. Tenant control can offer some of the 'feel good' factors of owner occupation but without the personal financial risk. What is more, it returns the focus to community rather than the 'me, me, me' culture that is now becoming discredited.

So will TMOs survive and prosper or be swept away by changing times, like Woolies and your local post office? Keep an eye on that crystal ball!

Trevor Bell



Your Management Agreement – The TMO's Tool Box

28 January in London

Contact: contact@nftmo.com

Understanding the Role of the Tenant Services Authority

29 January in Birmingham

Contact: info.instep@tribalgroup.co.uk

Housing Finance

29 & 30 January in Chester

Contact: mc.lawton@traffordhall.com

London/South

TMO Regional Conference

5 February in London

Contact: info.instep@tribalgroup.co.uk

West Midlands/North

TMO Regional Conference

12 February in Manchester

Contact: info.instep@tribalgroup.co.uk

How To Give Your TMO a Health Check

18 February in Milton Keynes

Contact: contact@nftmo.com

Anti-Social Behaviour Workshop: A Tenant's Perspective

26 February in Leeds

Contact: info.instep@tribalgroup.co.uk

Writing and Editing for Community Newsletters

9- 11 March in Chester

Contact: mc.lawton@traffordhall.com

Dealing with Intimidation – A TMO Survival Guide

12 March in London

Contact: contact@nftmo.com

Is Your Door Really Open?

16 & 17 March in Chester

Contact: mc.lawton@traffordhall.com

TMOs and Leasehold Management

18 March in London

Contact: contact@nftmo.com

www.nftmo.com



Photo by Susannah Fields of Flashfields Photography

ONE-TO-ONE

OUR NEW REGULAR INTERVIEW FEATURE STARTS WITH A YOUNG PERSON'S VIEWPOINT

In August the NFTMO ran our first national 'Young Leaders' conference. The energy behind the event was NFTMO executive committee member Adeleke Adeyemi. Afterwards Adeleke interviewed one of the participants, Tope Omtopsha. Tope is 19 years old and lives in the Holland Rise estate in South London. This is an extract from their discussion.

What is it like as a young person growing up on a TMO estate?

Everybody complains and complains that young people are playing around but there is never anything to do. There was nobody to approach with our ideas. The adults do not have a good relationship with young people. They see us as troublemakers.

How would you like adults or the TMO to communicate with you on the estate?

They should appoint a young person to be part of the estate committee. This person should get a say like the adult committee members. That way rather than just getting our views this person can challenge the board's views. To put ideas into effect rather than thinking nothing will be done. Young people should get recognition for what they are doing. Their estates should hold an award show that recognises what young people do.

What is your view about the media reports of knife crime by young people?

My view is that there is too much in the media on knife crime. The media need to promote the good things that we do. For example, I work very hard with other young people in media and have built up a positive network of social entrepreneurs to help not just myself but those around

me. I would like to see the media plug more youth projects on TV and encourage social enterprises by young people. They need to show more positive young people as role models.

Given that TMO residents will read the TMO Magazine across the country, what can TMOs do to support young people in their communities?

TMOs should send in articles about positive things that young people are doing on their estates. The NFTMO should have a young-person-of-the-month article in every issue of the magazine and on its website.

Is there a need for a national voice for young people living on TMO estates?

I think there should be, because sometimes things don't happen and a national group can help to encourage more to be done. Also if there is something good happening on one TMO estate then they could share that idea with other TMOs.

How would you like to be involved in developing Young Leaders?

I would like to train to become a young leader myself. So that I can help other young people become leaders. I can then share my ideas and be a role model to more young people. Hopefully the NFTMO will promote this.

Thanks Tope. Clearly TMOs everywhere need to work with young people who are willing to take active roles on their estates and enable them to voice their concerns and calls for change.

The full text of the interview is available at www.nftmo.com

'GUIDE' TMOs CAN HELP SHOW THE WAY

The NFTMO is aiming to establish a national network of 'Guide TMOs' and is inviting expressions of interest from TMOs and co-ops who might be interested in being part of that network.

Guide TMOs will help to promote tenant controlled housing amongst council and housing association tenants and will offer guidance to tenants' groups who are exploring or developing a TMO style approach. Guide TMOs will show people what TMOs are all about – including the difficulties and challenges.

The work of Guide TMOs might include hosting study visits, mentoring and advising other groups, offering shadowing opportunities and model documents and contributing to training events.

Who can be a Guide TMO?

Guide TMOs must have a track record of solid performance and of being accessible to local groups. They are likely to be a TMO that already hosts visits from other groups and takes part in

networking events. They should have examples of good practice and the TMO will need to be able to share experience and knowledge with others. Guide TMOs are not expected to be excellent in every aspect but they should be self aware and keen to improve.

Support for Guide TMOs

Training will be offered to representatives of Guide TMOs. Some funding is available to provide small grants for things like an information leaflet about the TMO. Grants will also be available to cover the hosting costs of study visits.

How to become a Guide TMO

If your organisation is interested in becoming a Guide TMO then contact the NFTMO or download an application form from www.nftmo.com.



THE NFTMO COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO WISH ALL THE READERS OF THE TMO MAGAZINE A HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL 2009.

DON'T MISS THESE GREAT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- Your Management Agreement – The TMO's Tool Box. January 2009.
- How To Give Your TMO a Health Check – Techniques for developing and operating TMOs and Co-ops - Milton Keynes. February 2009.
- Dealing with Intimidation – A Survival Guide for TMO committee members and staff - London – March 2009
- TMOs and Leasehold Management - London - March 2009

See inside for more details...

NFTMO
The National Federation of
Tenant Management Organisations

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BOOK NOW FOR REGIONAL CONFERENCES

For the third year running the NFTMO is promoting two regional one-day TMO conferences. The events are a great opportunity to share experiences and discuss topical issues with other TMOs and Co-ops in your region. Organised in partnership with InSTEP.

London/South

TMO Regional Conference
Thursday 5th February 2009
The Resource Centre,
Holloway, London

West Midlands/North

TMO Regional Conference
Thursday 12th February 2009
Brittania Hotel, Manchester

To book for the regional conferences telephone 0500 844 111 or email info.instep@tribalgroup.co.uk.

ABOUT THE NFTMO

The National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations (NFTMO) is a national voluntary membership organisation. Our main purpose is to facilitate networking and support for TMOs in England and to promote community control as an option within regeneration initiatives and in areas of greatest need. We have an elected voluntary management committee and a part-time co-ordinator.

We run national and regional conferences and training courses for TMO members and staff. We promote good practice through guidance and initiatives like our Good Governance Kite Mark. Membership is open to all TMOs and similar organisations and to tenants groups who are working toward tenant management. You can download an application form from our website.

Visit our website at www.nftmo.com or contact us at contact@nftmo.com or on 01704 227053.