

## ***Review March 2023***

This has been a challenging 12 months for social housing:

- The emergence of historically high levels of inflation has undermined HRA viability and business planning assumptions whilst squeezing the incomes and spending power of their tenants.
- Increasing complaint volumes and negative Housing Ombudsman findings have highlighted the importance of quality landlord services and delivering for tenants.
- Additional requirements and costs associated with the introduction of new fire and building safety regulations.
- Increasing evidence of stock condition problems, including damp and mould.
- Preparation for the introduction of enhanced consumer regulation and inspection.
- Ongoing need to plan for the decarbonisation of the housing stock and improve energy efficiency.

CWAG has responded by focussing activities around key priority areas, providing opportunities for networking and mutual support as well as continuing to work with the LGA and others in the sector to make the case for housing.

### **Policy Level Engagement**

CWAG continues to work closely with the Local Government Association (LGA), National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) and the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH). As a group we meet regularly to discuss and co-ordinate sector responses on key areas of developing policy.

CWAG is also represented on sector wide groups including:

- The DLUHC Local Authority Housing Strategic Advisory Group
- The DLUHC HRA Technical Working Group
- LGA Finance Advisers Group
- Regulator of Social Housing – LA housing liaison group
- Home Office Group (Fire Safety Regulations)

### **Connecting CWAG members and sharing good practice.**

A new CWAG website was introduced during the year significantly updating and improving the Group's online offer.

A regular news update is provided for CWAG members covering housing related policy news, briefing material, examples of good practice and information on new publications and government releases.

A Client Officer Group has been established enable wider discussion and information sharing as councils prepare for the introduction of enhanced consumer regulation.

The policy officer acts as a contact point for advice as well as helping to match up requests for support with members who can help.

## **Meetings and Events**

Over the past 12 months, the group has continued to arrange an online programme of topical meetings and other events covering housing policy and other operational issues. The programme draws in sector experts and contributions from CWAG members.

As many current issues impact the wider social housing sector, there have been several joint events in conjunction with the NFA and ARCH as well as sector-wide events hosted by the LGA and accessible to CWAG members.

### Meetings and events held over the past year:

- Complaints handling (May 2022) including presentation by Rebecca Reed from the Social Housing Ombudsman on the Insight Report into damp and mould.
- Dealing with disrepair claims (May 2022) case study including an examination of practical measures available to councils facing mounting claims and strategies to prevent repair issues escalating into legal redress.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (October 2022) - Kate Dodsworth from the Regulator of Social Housing discussed the outcome of the consultation on Tenant Satisfaction Measures. This was followed by a practical presentation by Jonathan Cox from Housemark discussing issues for councils around implementing the new TSM arrangements.
- Social Housing Rents Consultation (September 2022) – CWAG members met to discuss the consultation and shape the Group’s response.
- Finance and Business Planning workshop (January 2023) –facilitated by Steve Partridge from Savills -
- The CWAG Clienting Group set up with meetings in December 2022 and March 2023.

CWAG has also linked up with partners in the sector to offer access to joint events and webinars:

- Fire and Building Safety webinar – July 2022 (joint event with the NFA and ARCH)
- Decarbonisation webinar – September 2022 (joint event with the NFA and ARCH)
- Social Housing Regulation Bill – November 2022 (LGA hosted webinar)
- Fire and Building Safety webinars - November 2022/ December 2022/ March 2023 (LGA hosted webinar)
- Complaints Handling – March 2023 (LGA hosted webinar)

## Looking Forward

Over the coming months attention will be focussed on a series of consultations covering the detail of the new consumer standards, learning from complaints, and evaluating the initial data from TSMs. Other priorities include updating asset management strategies, proposed changes to the Decent Homes standard and the implications for longer-term viability of Housing Revenue Accounts given increasing demands on existing resources. CWAG will work with members to reflect views and concerns and share information and good practice between authorities.

## Benefits of Membership

**Events** - The annual meetings programme is free to CWAG members. Topics are suggested by CWAG members and include both housing policy and practical operational issues relating to managing ALMOs and wider developments in the ALMO sector.

**Advice and Support** - CWAG is a mutual support group with members providing advice and support to each other on an informal basis. In addition, the Group is involved in clarifying and developing good practice guidance in areas of concern identified by members.

**Housing Policy** - As a Special Interest Group, CWAG has access to the LGA, DLUHC and RSH with the opportunity to participate in and influence current policy debates.

**Working with others - policy development and good practice** - CWAG works together with other housing organisations including the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) and the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) on projects and issues where there are shared interests. Working in partnership brings benefits and enhanced impact.