

PUBLIC SERVICES NEWS!

AWICS

Independence.....Integrity.....Value
Adrian Waite (Independent Consultancy
Services) Limited



April 2006

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'AWICS' provides a full range of ethical management consultancy and training services, principally to those who provide public services such as local authorities, schools, colleges, housing associations, health authorities, voluntary bodies and many more.

All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance

This year we have organised a series of seminars in different venues around the country during February and March 2006 that allowed many delegates from local and national government, voluntary bodies and private companies to find out all that they wanted to know about local authority housing finance. These have been an outstanding success.

I am now travelling the country providing in-house sessions of 'All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance' for local authorities, regional government offices and others. This is a selection of what people who have attended the in-house courses have said:

"Five Star. Very relevant and informative."

"Gave me an insight into lots of different issues that local authorities face."

"Very interesting. Clear and easy to understand and pitched at the right level."

"Good use of PowerPoint. Clear enthusiastic delivery, unbiased objective presentation."

"Right amount of explanation. Enough detail and good links to our authority which really helps to understand where we are."

"It is a struggle to make finance entertaining, interesting and topical. All three achieved in spades."

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The in-house courses cover the following topics:

Housing Revenue Accounting, Rent Restructuring, Service Charges, Housing Subsidy, Capital Programmes, Housing Investment Programmes, the Decent Homes Standard, Housing Subsidy and Housing Investment Programme settlement for 2006/2007, Housing Revenue Account Business Plans, Comprehensive Spending Review, Efficiency & Effectiveness, Strategic Housing responsibilities, Best Value, Private Sector Housing and Homelessness, Supporting People, Housing Benefit, Regeneration, Registered Social Landlords, Options Appraisals, Stock retention and sustainability, Arms Length Management, the Private Finance Initiative, Stock Transfer and many other aspects of local authority housing finance.

The in-house course follows the same format as the regional courses, but is tailored to local requirements. This is done by using local data; such as the accounts, capital programme and housing subsidy to illustrate the presentation; and by emphasising issues of local relevance. For more details on an in-house course, please contact Adrian Waite on Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk or at the address below.

The course is accompanied by a very useful 100 page booklet entitled:

“All You Want To Know About Local Authority Housing Finance”

The in-house courses are competitively priced at £900 for a full day course or £600 for a half day course plus reasonable expenses.

Do you think that a working knowledge of local authority housing finance would put you and your colleagues in a position of advantage? Whether you are in a Local Authority or a Government Office; whether you are a Housing Manager, Tenant Representative, Elected Member, or even a member of the Housing Finance Team, you could benefit from one of our courses at which you will learn ‘All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance’

Many people – officers, elected members and tenants have already benefited from this course.

Sustainable Housing Business Plans and the Efficiency Agenda

We will be holding an autumn series of seminars on ‘Sustainable Housing Business Plans and the efficiency agenda. These will be held in venues around the country and will consider how retention and arms length management organisation authorities can prepare sustainable housing revenue account business plans that meet the government’s ‘fit for purpose’ criteria in the context of the ‘efficiency agenda’. The sessions will be designed for people with some knowledge of housing revenue account business plans and budgets, but they need not be experts. Those who would benefit from attendance would include staff of local authorities and arms length management organisations that have responsibilities for housing management, housing finance, business planning or procurement. It will also be relevant for elected members, members of boards of arms length management organisations, tenant representatives and staff of regional government offices with an interest in these matters. Details will be published on the ‘AWICS’ website and in the ‘Public Services News’.

All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance 2007

We will be holding another series of ‘All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance’ in the spring of 2007. Details will be published on the ‘AWICS’ website and in the ‘Public Services News’.

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April is Information and Consultation Month for Fenland Tenants

Fenland District Council believes that the best way to make sure that its tenants have good homes is to transfer them to a Housing Association. Before this can happen, though, tenants must decide if they want to support the move in a ballot that will probably be held in November. The final decision will be made by the tenants in this ballot.

The Fenland Tenants' Forum has appointed 'AWICS' to act as Independent Tenants' Advisor. Our role is to give tenants independent advice so that they understand what the transfer of their homes would mean and can make their own minds up whether it is a good idea. Previous editions of 'Public Services News' have covered the progress of this project.

We have launched the 'Fenland Tenants' Friend' that is a new newsletter for tenants of Fenland District Council that is published jointly by the Fenland Tenants' Forum and the Independent Tenants' Advisor that will give Fenland tenants the FACTS about the proposed housing stock transfer.

In the April 2006 edition we look at:

- Why are we looking at stock transfer?
- What would stock transfer mean for tenants?
- What are tenants saying about their homes and neighbourhoods now?
- Who is looking after tenants' interests?
- Who is the Independent Tenants' Advisor and what does he do for tenants?
- What is the Transfer Options Development Group and who is on it?
- What is the Partner Selection Panel and who is on it?
- How will the Council choose the Housing Association to which your homes may transfer?
- What is the Shadow Board and who is on it?
- What does the Tenants' Forum think about transfer?
- How can tenants get involved?

The 'Fenland Tenants' Friend' can be freely downloaded from:

www.awics.co.uk/fenlandita/information.asp

We have also been in Fenland during April to give tenants information, answer their questions and listen to their points of view.

We have visited numerous villages and arranged meetings in all parts of the district to ensure that all tenants are aware of what is going on and can participate in the transfer options development process. The dates of these meetings were:

- MARCH – 10th April 2006 at Morton Avenue at 7.30pm
- WISBECH – 11th April 2006 at a venue to be arranged at 7.30pm.
- WHITTLESEY – 12th April 2006 at a venue to be arranged at 7.30pm.
- CHATTERIS – 18th April 2006 at the Council Centre at 7.30pm
- THORNEY TOLL – 20th April 2006 at the Village Hall at 7.30pm.

Copies of the presentations that were made at these meetings can be freely downloaded from:

www.awics.co.uk/fenlandita/transferoptionsdevelopment.asp

More is being done to identify tenant aspirations and to ensure that these can be met through the stock transfer. Focus groups have been convened in all parts of the district and covering all groups of tenants to identify what different groups of tenants value in their homes and neighbourhoods and where they think that improvements could be made.

Tenants have identified that there is a need to:

- Build more affordable homes
- Tackle anti-social behaviour
- Speed up the system for giving people aids and adaptations
- Improve security
- Set up a handyman and redecoration service for the elderly and disabled
- Introduce a gardening service for the elderly and disabled
- Introduce an 'easy moves' service for the elderly and disabled.

One thing that tenants clearly want is more affordable housing in Fenland. A combination of low incomes and increasing property prices and rents mean that many people in Fenland are not able to live in decent homes unless these are provided by the Council or housing associations. It is important to ensure that the Council and the housing association reach agreement on how many new affordable homes are to be built and how they are to be financed.

Following the placing of advertisements, a 'bidders conference' was held on 27th January 2006 at which tenants' representatives, Councillors and Council officers explained to housing associations what Fenland is looking for from the transfer. This includes improvements to homes and neighbourhoods, enhanced tenant participation and a genuine partnership between the Housing Association and its tenants. Interested housing associations submitted expressions of interest during February 2006 and the Partner Selection Panel has then short listed five associations that were requested to provide additional information. Following this the Partner Selection Panel identified three housing associations to go forward to the final phase of the selection process. These are:

- Circle Anglia Housing Association
- Hereward Housing Association
- Nene Housing Association

These Housing Associations were invited to a series of 'open days' at which 'AWICS' was also in attendance to answer questions and give advice. The Housing Associations have been invited to make presentations to the Partner Selection Panel and representatives of the Tenants Associations. The Partner Selection Panel, accompanied by representatives of the Tenants' Associations are also in the process of making site visits to these Housing Associations, accompanied and supported by 'AWICS'. Copies of information provided at the 'open days' and notes on the presentations can be downloaded from our website at:

www.awics.co.uk/fenlandita/information.asp

Tenants can contact the Independent Tenants' Adviser through a freephone helpline on 0800-028-3365.

Tenants can also get involved through their local Tenants' Association. Contacts for the Tenants' Associations are shown below:

- Chatteris – Colin Greenwood 01354-693782 or Keith Haylett 01354-693048.
- Manea - Nicola Morris 01354-688098.
- March – Jean Key 01354-652933.
- Thorney Toll – Tony Coleman 07961-957878.
- Whittlesey –Irene Henson 01733-208368.
- Wisbech – Ron Butcher 01945-582094.

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Further information on the 'AWICS' role as Independent Tenants' Adviser at Fenland can be found on the website at: www.awics.co.uk/fenlandita

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Adrian Waite to speak at CIPFA conference: Introduction to Housing Finance – Methods of Managing Housing Stock - 29th June 2006

With a first class line up of practical sessions from practitioners, funding and advisory bodies this course is a must for all finance staff in Local Authority Housing Departments wishing to refresh their knowledge of current issues.

And Adrian Waite is to present the key session on methods of managing housing stock.

This course is an entry-level jargon free event which introduces the key issues impacting on the finance function in Local Authority Housing Departments. With a mixture of practical sessions from practitioners, funding and advisory bodies, the course considers key business aspects of housing funding. It will cover:

- Strategy and Finance
- Regional Housing Boards and Capital Allocations
- Methods of Managing Housing Stock
- Housing Finance Framework
- Supporting People
- Arms Length Management Organisations
- Homelessness
- Financing Council Housing
- The Financial Management of Housing Benefit

This course is aimed at part-qualified or newly qualified accountants and those new to the Housing Sector who wish to gain an introduction to the main drivers in managing Local Authority Housing finances. Managers and Board members with non-finance related backgrounds will find it of use in gaining an overview of the leading issues.

Adrian Waite's contribution will be to speak on methods of managing housing stock:

Methods of managing housing stock

- The options:
 - Stock retention – making it sustainable
 - Arms Length Management – what follows Decent Homes?
 - Private Finance Initiative
 - Mixed options
- Examining the financial implications of each option

The role of the accountant in options appraisal

The Local Authority housing service is considered by many to be at the crossroads. Different authorities are facing different challenges depending on whether they have opted for stock transfer, stock retention, arms length management, the private finance initiative or mixed options. This session will consider the financial implications of each of the challenges faced.

For more information or to book a place, visit the website of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy at:

<http://secure.cipfa.org.uk/cgi-bin/CIPFA.storefront/EN/product/VS21>

Free briefing papers on housing finance can be downloaded from:

www.awics.co.uk/briefing/housing.asp

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Additional Money to Help Regenerate Run Down Estates

The Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, announced last month a further £482million of investment to regenerate some of England's most run down estates.

The funding into the Housing Market Renewal programme will continue the Government's drive to turn around neighbourhoods that were suffering the blight of boarded houses, abandonment and anti-social behaviour. Pathfinders are already making a real difference to their communities, as a result of £500million of investment over the last three years.

The government states that more than 17,000 homes have been modernised, crime levels have fallen, the local environment has improved and the number of abandoned properties has declined. New confidence is returning to pathfinder areas with average house prices doubling since 2002. However, challenges still remain to close the gap between these areas and those around them.

The pathfinders are now starting stage two of the programme to continue the revival of their communities. The pathfinders will step up the regeneration of estates, providing an attractive mix of housing, both in terms of type and tenure. The continued emphasis on refurbishing homes will be expanded, with three times more homes being modernised than replaced. In partnership with local authorities and other partners, the pathfinders are working closely with communities to meet their housing needs and aspirations for the future.

Announcing the allocation at the South Yorkshire Transform pathfinder, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"Five years ago, some of these neighbourhoods were one step away from becoming ghost towns, blighted by boarded up houses and anti-social behaviour. Now we are beginning to see real progress in getting these areas back on track, with better housing, improved public services and cleaner, safer streets. We are seeing confidence return to these neighbourhoods and a reversal in the cycle of decline.

"However, challenges still remain. There is still much to do. We are determined to ensure these estates catch up with the urban renaissance happening in our towns and cities. This is a long term challenge to create places where people want to live and work, not leave. That is why we are allocating a further £482 million today to support that commitment."

The government says that there has been a revival in our towns and cities in recent years and demand for housing in the north has increased. The pathfinders' aim is to keep the most rundown neighbourhoods at the heart of this renaissance.

The £482million is being allocated to six pathfinders in South Yorkshire, Liverpool, North Staffordshire, Newcastle, Oldham/Rochdale, and East Lancashire. The investment will fund plans backed by local communities in these areas. Over the next two years the six pathfinders are expected to refurbish nearly 10,000 homes and replace around 3,000 with new homes – less than one per cent of the housing in pathfinder areas is being replaced. The investment will also go into public space improvement schemes and community projects, such as neighbourhood wardens.

The concept of the Housing Market Renewal schemes is that public money will be used as 'leverage' to bring private investment into areas of market failure.

During recent months it has also become clear that some of the pathfinder areas have been benefiting from an upturn in demand and market prices.

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Residents Helping To Shape Future for South Bank

Redcar and Cleveland Council is ready to approve an action plan for tackling the housing market collapse in South Bank that incorporates residents' views and concerns.

The first phase of the scheme, officially titled the South Bank Renewal Plan, will focus on clearing the areas of older terraced housing with the highest proportion of voids, while ensuring others are not left in isolation. The project team have been ready to start visiting the occupied properties to begin the exit strategy with residents in the priority area for acquisition and clearance since 1st April 2006.

The Council's Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal, Councillor Chris Abbott, said:

"We're not just knocking down houses - we're building a better community, one that will be sustainable and for the long term. We have listened to the community. We know there is backing and we also accept many want to see the newer housing left alone. These plans reflect that and they will help people who live in the worst- affected streets get the kind of modern homes they deserve for 21st Century living."

"Our consultation has shown the majority of people back the proposals, with support for clearance being strongest in the area where market failure is most advanced. I'm sure they will be delighted that we are making real progress to give them something to look forward to. We believe we have a proven track record - look at how houses are already being successfully cleared from Costa Street and Aire Street. The majority of those residents are now more than happy with their new homes and the relocation packages they received."

Latest figures show the first target area has 207 properties - 142 are void, while of the remaining 65, 29 are owner-occupiers with the rest a mix of private and social rented. The whole area, mainly to the west of Victoria Street and around the Queen Street/Redcar Road area, has 373 properties, with an estimated 176 void.

The Chairman of the South Bank Housing Strategy Steering Group, South Bank ward councillor Ian Jeffrey, said:

"The recommendations going to Cabinet have been influenced by residents' views and the workings of the Housing Strategy Steering Group and what the Council is considering in the report is a reflection of residents' views, as it should be. We regard the proposals as an opportunity for the people in South Bank to address some of the difficulties residents face and we want to work towards a resolution of these issues that will be a benefit for the people of South Bank."

"This plan will not only address the immediate problem but also hopefully be a step towards the creation of a community which has long term stability and will be attractive to future generations of residents."

The blueprint has already received Government backing, with funding for the first two years to cover the acquisition process. Confirmation of the exact total of the Council's successful funding bid, through Tees Valley Living, to the North East Regional Housing Board, is due from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister next week.

The Renewal Plan is a key part of the wider vision for South Bank to create a sustainable community of more than 900 new homes, supported by substantial investment in health, education, recreation and retail services to benefit the whole Greater Eston area.

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Community Interest Companies

Cynics have been confounded as over a hundred 'Community Interest Companies' have now been registered since part two of the Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act 2004 was passed and the Community Interest Company Regulations 2005 came into force on 1st July 2005. The hundredth Community Interest Company – 'Social Enterprise London' was registered on 27th January 2006.

Community Interest Companies are commercial companies that operate for the good of society in general or a specific section of the community. Any surpluses are used for the benefit of that community rather than the directors or shareholders. They can be a company limited by guarantee or shares or a public limited company.

There is an 'Office of the Regulator of Community Interest Companies' and requirements for Community Interest Companies in addition to the general company law. These include a need to file an annual community interest company report along with the usual accounts. This will be on public record and will describe how the Community Interest Company has met its objectives.

Community Interest Companies operate within an 'asset lock' whereby assets of the company must be retained and used for community purposes consistent with the company's objectives or transferred to another asset locked organisation such as a Community Interest Company or charity. The transfer of any assets from a Community Interest Company must otherwise be at market value.

By March 2006, 164 applications had been received. 105 have been registered, four have been withdrawn and 55 are under consideration. The companies concerned provide services including recycling, restaurants, buses and regeneration. Groups who benefit include children with special needs, pensioners and young people.

John Hanlon, the Regulator of Community Interest Companies, said:

"I believe that the scope and diversity of activities is limited only by people's imaginations and I am delighted to see the way community interest companies are already benefiting communities the length and breadth of the country."

Rt. Hon. Alun Michael MP, Minister of State for Industry and the Regions, said:

"I am thrilled there are now 100 Community Interest Companies. This shows that the Community Interest Company is an attractive legal vehicle for those operating social enterprises across the country. I am particularly delighted about the high proportion of new start-up businesses choosing this model. This demonstrates that the Community Interest Company structure is meeting the needs of new entrepreneurs looking to use their business for social good."

Community Interest Companies are seen as a way of unlocking entrepreneurial potential and directing it towards social and community goals. A Community Interest Company enjoys the freedoms and flexibilities of a private company but has to demonstrate a real commitment to social goals. The test will not be how many Community Interest Companies register, but how many are still trading in the future.

Anyone wishing to form a Community Interest Company or to convert an existing company into a Community Interest company can download application forms from www.companieshouse.gov.uk or www.cicregulator.gov.uk.

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Demands for Housing in the Midlands and North Increasing

A rise in people living by themselves will account for 72% of annual household growth up to 2026 according to the latest household projections published last month by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The figures also show significant increases in household growth within both the North and Midlands compared with previous projections.

The New Household Projections of Households for England and the Regions to 2026 show the number of households in England is projected to increase from 20.9million in 2003 to 25.7million in 2026. This amounts to 209,000 new households a year of which 150,000 are single person households. Just under a quarter of this increase in single person households is in the 55-64 age groups.

The projections are higher than previous projections due to higher household growth in the North and Midlands with 20,000 additional households a year compared to previous forecasts. Growth in the four southern regions accounts for 60 per cent of annual household growth, however it has fallen slightly compared with previous projections. This supports the case, made in the Government's response to the Barker Review of Housing Supply, for more affordable, high quality homes across the country.

The Government announced in its response to the Barker Review that it should increase new house building to 200,000 a year by 2016. Presently 160,000 new homes are built each year, which despite significant increases is still lower than in previous generations.

Research shows that if the current rates of building continue, the pressure on house prices will be such that in 20 years, the proportion of 30 year old couples able to afford their own home will drop from over 50 per cent to nearer 30%.

Housing Minister Yvette Cooper said:

"We have an ageing, growing population with more people living alone and if we don't build more homes to meet that need we will see house prices rise further pushing first time buyers out of the market. These figures show how important it is to build new homes for the next generation in every region.

"As the Barker Report set out, we also need more houses in all regions of the country. Rising housing demand is not just a Southern phenomenon. As last week's publication of the State of the Cities report has indicated, many cities in the north and west are developing successful economies and reversing the decline in population growth."

One part of the North that had been identified as being 'at risk' from market failure due to poor housing conditions, slow sales and 'buy to let' activity; was the West Bank area of Widnes. This area, next to the Runcorn-Widnes Bridge contains 600 homes of mixed tenures, almost half of which are privately owned pre-1919 back of pavement terraced properties.

Halton Borough Council has retained consultants to carry out an area based renewal study using the government's neighbourhood renewal assessment methodology. This includes engaging with the people who live and work in the area.

Following this a costed plan for action and intervention has been drawn up. This involves working with local residents to arrest any potential decline and ensure that future capital values can be secured at a far lower cost than if the area had been allowed to decline.

West Bank is now considered to be an area that is no longer in danger of market collapse.

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Housing Corporation: Funding and decision making processes

The Housing Corporation has a £1.7billion funding programme. It has recently opened this up to private developers as well as to registered social landlords. Peter Marsh, the Director of Resources at the Housing Corporation said:

"There's a challenge for us to see how far we can continue to raise our game... We're not saying the sector hasn't already raised its game... It's a question of how we can stretch things even further and think outside the box to do more with what we've got."

"It's about doing more for the same money but it's also about thinking about how we can do things differently... The extent to which some housing associations chose to play a bigger role in the market sale area in the creation of mixed communities, and what knock-on (effect) that has in terms of the potential to realise land values is something a number of big associations are already thinking about. If those considerations allow us to level more value out of our grant then we should pursue them."

In February 2006 the Government announced that it will legislate to modernise the Housing Corporation's decision-making, enabling the Agency to delegate decisions from Board level and bringing it into line with other Non Departmental Public Bodies. The Housing Corporation is a Non Departmental Public Body. Until recently, it was thought that the Corporation was able to delegate decisions from the Board to officers. Recent legal advice has raised doubts about this and the Housing Corporation has taken steps to deal with this. However, there is a need to legislate to ensure that the Housing Corporation comes into line with other Non Departmental Public Bodies.

This technical adjustment follows updated legal advice about arrangements for decision making that found that unlike many other Non Departmental Public Bodies the Corporation did not have an express power to delegate any of its statutory functions below board level. In the meantime, The Housing Corporation has introduced new procedures from 12th January 2006, ensuring that, where a matter required a Board decision this would be done at Board level. Housing Minister Yvette Cooper said:

"The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will legislate to modernise the Housing Corporation's decision making arrangements as necessary at the earliest opportunity. This will clarify its ability to delegate decisions from the Board to subcommittees and to officers."

The Government and the Housing Corporation have been in close discussions with Housing Associations and the Council of Mortgage Lenders and individual lenders to the sector to confirm the management of the process of approvals with them.

Meanwhile, the Housing Corporation's pilot project to fund new affordable housing through Hounslow Homes – a local authority arms length management organisation – has run into difficulties because Hounslow Homes is a housing management organisation rather than a landlord. Chris Langstaff, Managing Director of Hounslow Homes, said:

"We have got to find a way to demonstrate that we are a financially sound organisation and that the risk element in giving us any grant is minimal... I think it is recognising that the nature of arms length management organisations is that we don't have an asset base that can be taken into account in any assessment criteria that the corporation might be using."

The Housing Corporation is clearly going through a period of significant change.

Adrian Waite

Reforms to Council Tax could create a 'Wealth Tax'

Home owners that have enjoyed the largest rises in property prices may soon face much higher council tax bills. Sir Michael Lyons said he was studying plans that would see better-off homeowners and households making a "bigger contribution". His remarks seemingly confirm claims that householders who have improved their homes with extensions or even just those who have a nice view or a large garden would face the biggest council tax rises.

This has all arisen from a report on Council Tax Sir Michael was commissioned to do by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, and although his final report has been delayed until later this year there seems to be no doubt that Sir Michael thinks a system where rises in household wealth trigger proportionally higher bills would be a fair and just way of proceeding. Sir Michael, the former Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council said:

"If you have two houses next to each other that have got the same income but one of them has got considerably more wealth, it doesn't seem inappropriate to reflect on whether those households with more wealth should make a bigger contribution, particularly if that wealth has been increased as a result of living in a particular community. House prices have gone up faster in some areas than others, so in areas where it is seen as good to live in it is more than likely that your house price is going to rise by above average"

The government is currently planning to carry out a revaluation of properties for Council Tax purposes for the first time since 1991. It is expected that this would mean that better off households in the South East would face the biggest rises in council tax bills. Even moving up just a single tax band would potentially cost the average householder about £270 extra a year. The Conservative shadow local government secretary Caroline Spelman MP said:

"The cat is well and truly out of the bag, Sir Michael's comments confirm our fears that John Prescott has every intention of turning the looming revaluation to turn a local services tax into a crude wealth tax. These plans to cash in on the uplift in property prices make it clear that labour don't miss a trick when it comes to raking in even more tax."

Meanwhile, information gathered by council tax inspectors on a home's bedrooms, bathrooms, floor area, garage area and extensions could be published on the internet, it has emerged. Paul Sanderson, the director of modernisation for the Valuation Office Agency, told a property consultancy magazine:

"I think it is far better to have all this information out in the public domain and allow full access to accurate and up to date data about property." The Conservative however have branded the plans a "snooper's charter".

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats have renewed their calls for the replacement of the Council Tax with a Local Income Tax.

In the 1970s I was told by a Revenues Officer that, regardless of political rhetoric, no government would ever abolish the rates because they were easy to calculate, easy to collect, difficult to avoid and gave the government a substantial tax yield. In the eighteenth century, Adam Smith, an economist still well regarded in right wing circles, wrote about the characteristics of a good tax and gave a 'poll tax' as an example of a bad tax as it is difficult to collect and often regarded as inequitable. In 1990 rates were replaced by a 'poll tax' and despite the subsequent compromise of the 'Council Tax' local authority finance seems to have been in turmoil since then. Perhaps the Revenues Officer and Adam Smith were right?

Adrian Waite

'The Start of Something Special' as Tenants Vote Overwhelmingly in Favour of transfer at Halton

'AWICS' carried out the financial analysis for Halton Borough Council during its housing stock options appraisal and recommended that the Council consider a stock transfer. The Council has now officially transferred its ownership and management of its 6,300 homes to Halton Trust following an overwhelming vote in favour of the transfer by tenants. The trust is underpinned by loan arrangements secured by Lloyds TSB.

However the trust's work is not just about improving homes. The quality and range of services to both existing and future tenants will be improved – placing tenants at the heart of everything. Using its charitable status the Trust will invest heavily in the borough. Local neighbourhoods will benefit through environmental and sustainable community projects. Investment activity will also boost the wider economy through increased employment and business opportunities.

We wish the Halton Trust and its tenants all the best for the future!

AWICS Supports Young Enterprise Scheme - Backdoor Promotions

Backdoor Promotions are a Young Enterprise company from Appleby Grammar School. The company was set up with the sole aim of bringing the vast amount of young Cumbrian bands to a much larger audience all around the county and beyond by holding bi-monthly events and gigs all over the North of England.

When the company was set up we had little capital and no real money to get ourselves started and still needed to have money to register as a company and get a trading licence. 'AWICS' helped us out with sponsorship.

AWICS gave us a cheque to buy our registration and to have enough capital to invest in our first few events. It goes without saying that if not for the support and backing of AWICS, Backdoor Promotions would have struggled to survive in the world of business.

The whole board of directors at Backdoor Promotions would like to thank AWICS for their support and help in getting Backdoor Promotions off the ground as a company.

The Board of 'Backdoor Promotions'

Services on offer!

'AWICS' also offers a wide range of management consultancy and training courses in management and financial topics. These include: Business and Best Value Reviews, Financial Advice on Procurement, Housing Finance, Public Authority accounting, Performance Management, Lecturing and Training. For further information, please contact Adrian Waite on: Adrian.Waite@awics.co.uk or 017683-52347 or 54005.

Note: Any views that are expressed in this newsletter are those of the author of the article and do not necessarily reflect the views of 'AWICS' or of Adrian Waite.

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