Recent TMO Annual Conferences have been memorable for basking in hot sunshine. Not so this year where conference delegates were greeted by showers and strong winds as they assembled at the Chesford Grange hotel in Warwickshire.

But the sun was not missed too much as conference delegates provided more than enough warmth and energy. Nearly 200 TMO members and staff took part in a packed programme of discussion. As always the emphasis was on sharing experience and ideas. This year’s event was notable for a relaxed and optimistic atmosphere which we hope is a good omen for the next twelve months. Full conference report inside.

COUNTDOWN TO LAUNCH OF NEW TENANT CONTROL OPPORTUNITIES

October 1st this year will see the introduction of new opportunities for council and housing association tenants who want a bigger say in the management of their homes. New regulation and government guidance will also help existing TMOs that are looking to manage more homes or are interested in advising new groups.

The new rules come out of a government review of the Right to Manage and the wider framework for the development of TMOs in this country. The NFTMO welcomes the changes, having argued that the current system, created in 1994, is too long winded with ballot rules much tougher than those for ALMOs and stock transfers.

Key features of the new arrangements are:

• There will be one main ballot of tenants before a TMO can be set up, with ballot rules in line with other tenant ballots on changes to management and ownership arrangements.

• The competence of a new TMO will be assessed by an independent Approved Assessor, not by the organisation that has been providing training and advice to the group.

• There will be a voluntary route to tenant management, avoiding the need for a Right to Manage Notice in places where the landlord is supporting the proposed TMO.

• There will be the possibility of grant support for Housing Association tenants that are interested in managing their homes.

• Tenant’s groups that want some limited responsibility, for example over the gardening or cleaning services, will have a simpler and quicker option called a Local Management Agreement.

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Speaking at the NFTMO Annual Conference Paul Lusk of Partners in Change said that the new regime would also help existing local authority TMOs that may be interested in managing housing association properties in their area or extending their management to neighbouring estates. He said that existing TMOs had a key role to play in promoting tenant control and advising new organisations.

TERRY GOES TO THE PALACE

NFTMO Chair Terry Edis has been to Buckingham Palace to be presented with the MBE he was awarded in the New Year’s honours list.

Terry is also Chair of WATMOS Community Homes and of Burrowes Street TMO in Walsall. He became involved in tenant management in the early 1990s, concerned about the housing conditions in which he and his neighbours lived and about the general decline in his neighbourhood. Terry was a founder member of the Burrowes Street TMO and started a process of regeneration that has transformed the area. Terry is now acknowledged as a leading figure in the world of community led housing. Many tenants’ groups have been inspired by visits to Burrowes Street and have had the benefit of Terry’s support and advice. The Federation is very proud of Terry and we offer him our warm congratulations and thanks.

TMO SPIRIT SHINES THROUGH

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SQUARING THE CIRCLE AT WENLOCK BARN

Not many TMOs use housing management contractors appointed through a competitive tendering process. Wenlock Barn TMO in London is one as George Varughese reports.

The Kingsway Community Enterprises (KCE) project forms part of a wider regeneration project on the Kingsway estate in Teignmouth, South Devon.

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IUT President Warns of World Wide Housing Shortage

The Conference was opened by Sven Carlsson, the President of the International Union of Tenants (IUT). The NFTMO are one of fifty-five IUT member organisations in 45 countries around the world. Membership of the IUT is growing each year. Sven explained “I think that the increase is due to the fact that tenants all over the world are facing harder times, meaning higher rents and insecure tenure.”

Sven picked out the shortage of affordable housing as a key concern across the world. “The lack of affordable housing is primarily a threat to social justice and stability,” he told delegates “and has been highlighted in Europe as an obstacle to labour mobility and economic growth. In major cities the lack of affordable housing has contributed to the stagnation of economic progress and continues to be one major ingredient to increased social exclusion and hinders integration.”

Beechwood and Ballantyne - the Next Chapter

What happens when a TMO moves from management to community ownership? The conference got some first hand information from Andy Hall, the Managing Director of the Beechwood and Ballantyne Community Housing Association (BBCHA). Having run a successful and effective TMO for ten years the Beechwood tenants voted to set up their own housing association when Wirral Council set out on transferring its entire stock to a new landlord.

BBCHA has a tenant majority board and took ownership of the estate in 2005. Since then the association has carried out over £5 million of improvements to the homes and environment. The business plan is stronger than ever and BBCHA is now widening its aims to help improve other neighbourhood services including health and education.

Electronic Polling a Hit with Delegates

During the NFTMO conference delegates were issued with electronic handsets to allow instant responses to a series of questions about their TMOs, the Federation and national housing policy. If you have ever watched ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire’ then you know how it works. Delegates were asked to select an answer from multi-choice questions and, as buttons were pushed around the conference room, results were displayed on the big screen. See the back page for some of the results.

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Annual General Meeting

The NFTMO Annual General Meeting was held on the Saturday afternoon of conference. Chair Terry Edis reported on a busy year for the Federation with plenty of input into government initiatives, including the new Right to Manage regulations and the proposed National Tenants Voice. Terry said that one worry was the dwindling numbers of TMOs in the North of England. A priority for 2008-9 would be to promote the new opportunities for tenant control in areas of the country where TMOs are thin on the ground.

Treasurer John Challinor reported a fall in income due to the ending of the Guide Neighbourhood Programme grant. Nevertheless the NFTMO had made a small surplus in 07-08 as a result of reducing overheads. Members agreed an increase in Federation membership fees to help finance future activity and agreed the annual accounts.

Five new executive committee members were elected to fill vacancies. A full report of the Annual General Meeting is available in the members’ area of the NFTMO website.

Joan Saves the Day

The traditional Friday evening conference quiz looked a non-starter when the box containing the questions went missing. Then up stepped Joan Minard from Childwall Valley EMB in Liverpool with a great set of quiz questions and answers. Its amazing what some women carry around in their handbags!

TMOs can Create Local Jobs

One theme at the conference was the potential for TMOs to create training and employment opportunities for local residents. Alicia Francis, Director of the PEP Trust, told delegates about a successful scheme where landlords were recruiting local residents as paid neighbourhood (community) workers. The PEP Trust offers a subsidised national training programme for residents who are recruited to these posts. In a workshop Andy Elder from Heartlands Resident Services Organisation in Birmingham described how a TMO can get work done through a community led contracting organisation set up to offer jobs and training to unemployed people in the neighbourhood.
THE REWARDS OF STUBBORN PERSISTENCE IN STALYBRIDGE

Stalybridge is a small dormitory town in Tameside, about 8 miles from Central Manchester. The Brushes estate is 249 houses built in two halves. The pre-war houses were good but the post war houses were of poorer quality. However, lack of investment and neglect caused both parts to fall into decline. Brushes estate developed a poor reputation from the late 1950’s when used to rehouse families from a nearby renewal area. This was compounded by the impact of chronic unemployment, weak tenancy enforcement and poor housing management during the 1980’s.

Then, a hard working tenant association and a Tameside Council housing professional worked together and ‘stopped the rot’. The early work and circumstances are recorded in ‘Swimming against the tide’ by Professor Anne Power and Rebecca Tunstall. In 1995, Brushes TARA approached Co-operative Housing Services (CHS) for help to set up a TMO. Partly influenced by the successes of nearby Carbrook Co-op and partly by a view that local management could transform the estate.

In 2003 after a long, fraught and tiresome process the Brushes estate management was transferred to New Charter Housing Trust. The local office is a very good house conversion, staffing is adequate and circumstances are recorded in ‘Swimming together and ‘stopped the rot’. The early work and the ‘greening’ of the neighbourhood. Capital investment has been steady and new tree planting is coming this year. In 2007, Brushes estate won an award from Britain in Bloom. Regular activities include a weekly lottery with profits recycled through estate activities which include pensioner outings, Christmas parties, Easter egg hunts and this year a polytunnel and garden shed to create a working garden.

Brushes estate was once a shabby place, stigmatized and dispiriting. Today it’s settled, pleasant and very well managed. It looks good and it feels safe. Walking lists are busypant and the estate is moving from strength to strength. Stubborn persistence brought Brushes into being. Steady and focused community regeneration has ended years of blight.

John Fenton wrote this article with help from Brushes Board members. John works for Agency for Community Empowerment. Brushes Estate Management Organization Ltd can be seen at www.brushesemb.co.uk and welcomes visits. Ring 0161 331 2463

Says Tenant Led Campaign

The announcement of the government’s Review of Council Housing Finance, has given Moonlight Robbery Campaign a new focus to end their campaign’s ‘ Moonlight Robbery’ of council tenants’ rents, payments and resultant under-funding of the management and repair of their homes.

People assume tenants’ rents are used in full to pay for management, maintenance and repairs to their homes. In fact government rents also go to cover repayments of loans used to buy land and build and improve council homes.

Tenants gain nothing from increased property values and when council homes are sold most of the proceeds go straight into the treasury. So it is patently unfair that tenants rather than the partnership between Brushes EMO and New Charter works well.

The Brushes Board have shown imagination and tenacity in demanding investment, fighting for new uses for spare land and running a well managed local office. Brushes staff, two housing management workers and a maintenance worker, are the last generic workers in housing in Tameside. Their accessibility, experience and good relationship with Board members has transformed Brushes estate.

The recent work has focused on new leisure facilities and the ‘greening’ of the neighbourhood. Capital investment has been steady and new tree planting is coming this year. In 2007, Brushes estate won an award from Britain in Bloom. Regular activities include a weekly lottery with profits recycled through estate activities which include pensioner outings, Christmas parties, Easter egg hunts and this year a polytunnel and garden shed to create a working garden.

The government is also making a straight profit from the Housing Revenue Account – this year pocketing £194 million to spend on non housing items. This profit, plus the amount of rent taken inappropriately to cover costs other than those relating to the management and repair of tenants’ homes is a ‘Moonlight Robbery’. This was £400 million this year and more than £19,000 million since 1997. Far from council housing being ‘subsidised’ as government and the media suggest, council tenants are in fact subsidising the tax payer. Another recent government report relating to the management and repair of tenants’ homes is a ‘Moonlight Robbery’. It totals £1,250 million shortfall and to ensuring that tenants homes are at a standard they expect from the rents they pay.

These views are not necessarily those of the NFTMO. For more information about the Moonlight Robbery Campaign please see www.moonlightrobbery.org.uk.

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CONSULTATIONS ON PROPOSED NATIONAL TENANTS VOICE

Consultation meetings have been held around the country to get feedback from council and housing association tenants about a government plan for a new ‘National Tenants Voice’. The idea is to have a national set up that will support tenants organisations, feed into government policy and generally protect tenants’ interests.

Along with other tenants’ organisations the NFTMO has been taking part in a project group which was aimed to make recommendations to the Department of Housing about how the National Tenants Voice should be established.

The idea being discussed at the recent consultation meetings is to have a National Tenant Council with a membership of about 50 tenants including tenants chosen from the three national and regional tenant organisations and by other tenant bodies so as to cover a wide range of circumstances and interests.

There would also be a tenant majority management board which would be responsible for how the business operates, National Tenants Voice (NTV) staffing, contracts and be accountable for its funding.

The plan is that no volunteers will be paid for their involvement in the NTV (other than their expenses). The NTV is expected to have only a small staff team – with most of its work contracted out by the board.

What is the National Tenants Voice Aiming to Achieve:

- an established, confident and assertive tenant movement that unquestionably
  makes to the level of their choosing

communication flow with tenants nationally, regionally and locally
- services delivered to tenants of the quality that tenants want done in the way that tenants want
- an equal partnership between tenants and their landlords
- tenants able to get involved in decision-making to the level of their choosing
- a widened community who can access social housing
- the championing of being a tenant as a tenure of choice

For more information or to book a place, contact:

TPAS - Tel: 0161 868 3500 Website: www.tpas.org.uk • Trafford Hall - Tel: 01244 300246 Website: www.t Traffordhall.com

NFTMO - Tel: 01704 227053 • Website: www.nftmo.com • InStep: Tel: 0500 844 111 Website: www.instepservices.co.uk.

NFTMO Chair and Deputy, Terry Ede and Ray Reast, explained the NTV proposals to conference delegates.

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MOONLIGHT ROBBERY! SAYS TENANT LED CAMPAIGN

Thomas Cooper of the Moonlight Robbery Campaign has asked us to publish this article about their campaign for changes to the housing finance system;

The government’s Review of Council Housing Finance, has given Moonlight Robbery Campaign a new focus to end their campaign’s ‘ Moonlight Robbery’ of council tenants’ rents, payments and resultant under-funding of the management and repair of their homes.

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‘RESIDENTS AS NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKERS’ PROGRAMME OPEN TO TMOS

The PEP Trust recently completed an exciting pilot programme, working with housing associations and local authorities to employ and train residents as community and tenant participation workers. Residents employed as Neighbourhood Workers within their communities play an important role in empowering local people and enabling them to influence service delivery and neighbourhood regeneration.

With their unique understanding of their community and its concerns, and their ability to tap into local networks, residents as neighbourhood workers can provide an important bridge between landlords, service providers and residents, facilitating communication and engagement, building trust and acting as catalysts for sustainable community activity and service improvements.

The ‘Residents as Neighbourhood Workers’ programme was independently evaluated by Bristol University and was found to have:

- improved community relations and resulted in greater social cohesion on the estates
- resulted in greater engagement of BME residents in those areas where services were being delivered to BME residents
- resulted in more residents involved in decision-making processes on their estates
- resulted in a significant reduction in numbers of anti-social behaviour incidents two areas
- developed stronger relationships between landlords and their communities
- brought in additional resources to several of the communities
- improved joint working between landlords, the community and other agencies
- improved the reporting of housing management and anti social behaviour issues and enabled landlords to respond more quickly to emerging issues
- resulted in better informed housing management and investment decisions

The pilot programme’s results clearly demonstrate the potential of Neighbourhood Workers to contribute to the current housing and regeneration agenda:

- They provide a ‘home grown’ resource for empowering communities and creating a local voice which can influence local service provision and drive up standards.
- They can be a resource to support community cohesion initiatives, building on their understanding of the dynamics of their local community and their ability to build intergenerational and cross cultural relationships based on trust, mutual respect and a common agenda.
- They can provide a community development resource to support communities in transition on large scale regeneration and housing development projects.
- They provide a local point for partnership working based on a resident-led agenda.
- The programme is consistent with the concept of ‘resident to resident learning’ promoted by the Guide Neighbourhood Project and encapsulated in the revised tenant management arrangements.

As well as being a resource for local communities and neighbourhoods, Residents as Neighbourhood Workers also provides a clear route to employment for residents in social housing, creating local role models and fostering a working culture.

The PEP Trust is now rolling out the Residents as Neighbourhood Workers programme. If your TMO is interested in being involved or just finding out more, then contact Alicia Francis at Alicia@newmanfrancis.org or telephone 020 8555 2139.

If you have a contribution to make to a future issue please contact magazine@nftmo.com or ring 01704 227053.