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Housing Management: Changing Practice

**Edited by
Christine Davies Ba, F.I.H.**

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To the homeless

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Preface

The recognition that management literature does not include specific material on housing organisations gave rise to the theme of this book, namely management in housing. In the last twelve or so years, there has been an emphasis by Central Government on the need to improve management in all organisations. The stream of Audit Commission Reports and research commissioned by the Department of the Environment has attempted to guide organisations in certain directions. Unhappily, improving management has often been an exercise in cost cutting. Nevertheless, the idea that it is important to examine management practice is a valid one. This is particularly so in housing, where managing, in its broadest sense of having skills to manage people and take a strategic view, is often lacking or not considered essential. There is a tendency to manage within the professional needs of procedures and day-to-day administration.

The underlying approach of all contributors to their subject is that management in the housing service must be consumer oriented and be aware that staff are a considerable resource in delivering a good service. Common themes that also appear are the importance of training staff and equal opportunities for tenants and managers. It is not surprising that these themes have emerged, for all the contributors are practitioners in their fields and have thought through their philosophies based on experience of management.

The organisation of the book falls into three areas. Chapters 1–3 examine the work of people in overall charge of a housing organisation. Chapters 4 and 5 are directed towards people who have moved into middle management and are uncertain about the expectations of them in their new positions. Chapters 6–8 examine the practicalities of everyday management which is the bulk of an estate manager's work.

Ted Cantle has written chapter 1 on the changing role of Housing Directors. This was written while he was at Leicester and reflects his managerial approach to running a Housing Department. He emphasises the importance of a strategic approach and the use of staff and tenants as a resource in achieving overall aims and objectives. He sets out what being a

Director involves and makes it clear that the managerial role needs a way of thinking which is distinct from the 'professional' approach.

John Belcher and Chris Blanter who are respectively Director and Deputy Director of a housing association in Sheffield complement the philosophy expressed in chapter 1. They describe the principles of organisational management and point up the difference between operational skills and managing. They also emphasise the changing role of managers and that managing upwards, using the knowledge of the staff, is the most productive way of achieving an organisation's objectives. Consumers and community links also figure strongly.

Chapter 3 expresses the view of Anil Singh, Director of a developing black housing association in Leeds. His approach is to set the operational management within a background of needs research and an overall strategy for a developing association. The aim of the chapter is to provide a text to give similar organisations an insight into the work and problems of achieving viability.

Hilary Brazell, who is a practising Management Trainer based in Manchester, sets out in chapter 4 the management skills necessary to become a successful manager. Certain personal skills must be cultivated to enable a person to manage other staff members. Techniques of how to manage people are explored together with the setting of goals and planning.

In chapter 5, Alex Dunlop, who is an accountant teaching at Sheffield Polytechnic, examines a framework for area budgeting. Many middle managers have no experience of budgeting, prior to promotion, so this chapter details the principles behind setting up a budget. This must be done within a planning framework that reflects both short and long term aims of an organisation.

An area that has been neglected in housing writing is that of repairs and maintenance. Marion Brion and Norman Griggs examine the ways in which this part of the housing service may become more efficient. The theme of strategic planning is expressed in this area through the benefits of programmed maintenance. They then look at computerised systems and how they might be improved. Finally, they argue that to achieve a good service recruitment and training of repairs staff should have a much higher profile.

Chapter 7 is about tenant participation and is written from the point of view of a tenant. Helen Ward has been a Council tenant for some years and combines this experience with working in the Tenant Participation Advisory Service. Housing staff are being expected to establish good relations with tenant groups, associations, etc., without always understanding that the tenants have decided views about their homes. This chapter firmly expresses what the expectations and feelings of tenants are and what the approaches of landlords might be.

The final chapter examines debt management, which is a bread-and-butter task of everyday managing. Christine Davies who is a housing consultant

looks at the recent research on the best way of managing arrears and compares it with the practice of a local authority. An important factor is, of course, an understanding of why tenants get into debt.

In many of the chapters, case studies have been used to demonstrate points made.

As editor I would like to thank all the contributors for the hard work they have put in to the writing. It is hoped that the book will prove useful to practitioners and students alike.

Christine Davies

List of Contributors

John Belcher has been Director of South Yorkshire Housing Association, Sheffield, since 1972. He is Secretary of Charter Housing Ltd and Chair of the NFHA Group Training Scheme. He has professional qualifications in banking and trustee work and academic qualifications in theology.

Chris Blanter BSc, Diploma in Training Management, is Manager of Charter Training Ltd which is part of the South Yorkshire Housing Association Housing Group. Prior to this job he had broad experience in development, management and personnel in Housing Associations. Currently, he is involved in providing management development services to a wide range of national organisations.

Hilary Brazell MA, Dip PM, MIPM, is a freelance trainer and training consultant (HB Management Training and Development). She is also an Associate of the Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester. She has worked with a number of local authorities and housing associations, designing and running learning events and management development activities at all levels.

Marion Brion PhD, MIH, was a senior lecturer in the Department of Business and Administrative Studies at Tottenham College, and Joint Head of the Centre for Housing Studies, Middlesex Polytechnic/Tottenham College. She has extensive research experience in housing with a particular interest in training for housing work. Currently she is Development Officer for ANVIET HA and a freelance consultant.

Ted Cante BSc, FIH, MIMBM, is Chief Executive of Nottingham District Council. At the time when he contributed his chapter he was Director of Housing at Leicester City Council. For some years he was Under Secretary at the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and previously held a number of senior housing posts.

Christine Davies BA, FIH, is a self-employed researcher and consultant. Until recently, she was Principal Lecturer in Housing Policy and Administration at Sheffield Polytechnic. Prior to teaching she worked in both local authorities and housing associations and was a director of a local authority Housing Department.

Alex Dunlop is a senior lecturer in the School of Financial Studies and Law, Sheffield Polytechnic. He specialised in Housing Finance for a number of years, particularly in respect of housing associations. He was formerly Accountant at Shelter, National Campaign for the Homeless, and currently is a member of the Executive of CHAR, the Housing Campaign for Single Homeless People.

Norman Griggs BEd, MA, MIAS, ACArb, is a senior lecturer at Anglia Higher Education College, Essex where he teaches Building Studies and has a special interest in the subject of maintenance and defects of buildings. He is one of the Chief Examiners for Building Studies for the Institute of Housing and has undertaken considerable research into the training of housing personnel and the needs of housing organisations with regard to repairs and maintenance.

Anil Singh BA, has been Director of Manningham Housing Association, Bradford since its beginning. He is also the North East representative on the Housing Advisory Group and sits on the NFHA Standards and Practice Committee.

Helen Ward BA(Hons) has been a development worker for the Tenants Participation Advisory Service since 1988. Prior to this job she was active in tenant politics, undertook some freelance training and research and lectured part-time in Communication Studies at Sheffield Polytechnic.