

"Added value
housing consultancy"

BG
CONSULTANCY



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'Under One Roof' The newsletter of BG Audit & Consultancy

Summer holiday...

We're all in a Cliff Richard mood at the moment. The constant sunshine (yes, even in Manchester!) and the long days only make it harder for us all to concentrate on work. Unfortunately, the recent London bombings brings home to us the potential unexpected risks that we all face. It is pleasing to say that no client staff or contacts were caught up in these incidents. Thankfully, those clients near the bombings had good procedures in place to manage the potential disruption. Hopefully, we can all put these horrific incidents behind us and get back to a more normal existence.

Continued growth

BG Audit and Consultancy continues its upward trend with the appointment of an Associate, Sarah-Jane Brown. Sarah-Jane has already carried out a demanding piece of work that involved pulling together diverse delegations for a large group into a consistent framework. As a possible key factor that the Audit Commission will look at in its inspections of RSLs, a number of other associations are now interested in this work. If you would like to know more about this type of work, please contact us.

Sarah-Jane brings 14 years experience within housing to the team. Her recent role as a Quality Services Manager builds on her 12 years in housing management and enables her to appreciate the demands placed on front-line staff.

Sarah-Jane's specialisms include continuous improvement, quality assurance, inspection, policies and procedures. This will help to greatly expand the services that we can offer, whilst her experience in risk management and due diligence compliments the services that we already offer.



We continue to acquire new clients and add new strings to our bow. New services now offered include:

- PI reporting system validation;
- Supporting People strategic reviews and assistance with validation reviews;
- Interim management assignments;
- Group structure delegations and frameworks.

The website has been recently updated and further details can be obtained from visiting www.bgauditandconsultancy.co.uk. If you would like specific details on these new services, Sarah-Jane can be contacted at the following address: s.j-brown@bgauditandconsultancy.co.uk

Equality & Diversity

Many RSLs have been found wanting in relation to equality & diversity during recent Audit Commission inspections. No longer are RSLs able to just pay lip service to these issues. Race, disability and sexual orientation are now all issues that RSLs have to take account of.

For BME RSLs the issues can be even more pertinent and recent failings identified from inspections have highlighted that even these organisations are not immune to criticism.



Engagement is the name of the game and the Equality & Diversity Unit at Tung Sing Housing Association has been very successful in the past 12 months in developing BME networks across Greater Manchester to ensure that engagement and participation are improved. The Unit can also provide assistance with the recruitment of BME staff and Board Members.

If you would like to know more about the wide range of services the Unit now offers, please contact Mark Nesbitt, Community & Diversity Manager at Tung Sing Housing Association on 0161 234 0287 or email him at mnesbitt@tungsing.co.uk.

S.U.M.O Week

Paul McGee has launched national SUMO week (5-11 September), to promote his new book, 'SUMO Shut Up and Move On'. Full details are on his new website

www.TheSumoGuy.com and he's kindly produced another piece for our newsletter:

"In this newsletter I'd like to focus on the words of an old Doris Day song and a piece of ancient scripture. In the 1956 film, 'The Man Who Knew Too Much', Doris Day sang 'Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be, the future's not ours to see.....'

Contrast that approach to life with some words from the book of Proverbs: 'Without vision people perish'. (Definition of perish: 'reduce to distress or inefficiency')

Two very different insights and yet I can't help thinking that in most cases we are probably better off ditching the Doris Day approach to life. Here's why:

- Without a vision for your future, your current circumstances and challenges become your sole focus. We can fail to 'see' the big picture or get things into perspective. We react to the immediacy of day to day challenges rather than adopt long term strategies to achieve success. We live life reactively rather than pro-actively, (which is a great recipe for generating stress in our lives).
- When we lack a vision for our future, we drift along in life, believing that success is a matter of luck and that ultimately fate determines our future not ourselves. We're travelling on a journey but someone else is driving.
- Losing sight of our vision can result in us becoming distracted and bogged down by the details of life. (It is interesting that the debate in some sections of the media about the Live8 concert has shifted away from eradicating debt and poverty and onto whether there are enough black artistes appearing at the event).

Just Start It! Quit waiting to 'feel motivated' or 'waiting for the right time'. **Shut Up** the dithering and **Move On** to doing something."

(Paul McGee is an international speaker and author. He helps people and organisations to Shut Up and Move On from mindsets and behaviours that hinder their potential.)

Innovation boosts efficiency for Blackpool

We recently discovered an innovative project implemented by Blackpool Council Housing to boost their efficiency.

They found that whilst their contractors there had an impressive record of keeping repairs appointments, the tenants were frequently breaking them. This resulted in a waste of resource and unnecessary cost, with the work force tied up making unproductive visits.

Blackpool addressed this problem by sending text message reminders to their residents shortly before the repair appointment was due. They installed 'plug and play' software that bolted on to their existing system, meaning that all text messages are sent automatically from their computer system.

This resulted in an efficiency increase and initial customer satisfaction surveys have shown 100% tenant satisfaction with this new service.

They are now looking at growing their partnership with mobile software providers, Mobysoft, to use the software to provide 24/7 access to services, help with diversity issues and to increase efficiency in other areas such as rent arrears, gas servicing and accommodation re-letting.

We are aware that a number of RSLs are looking into this issue and with increasing pressure to deliver efficiency savings, we are sure that there are a raft of potential uses for this type of software.

(Mobysoft are a Manchester based company, more information is available at www.mobysoft.com or info@mobysoft.com)

Disaster recovery

One of our clients was recently updating its Disaster Recovery Plan in light of the London bombings. A bone of contention

was the need to retain Assured Tenancy Agreements as proof of tenancy, especially in court cases. The legal point of view is that these must be retained and the court may not accept cases where there is no signed document in place.

A more pragmatic view is that the courts will generally take special circumstances into consideration such as a fire in the office. To be safe though, RSLs may consider scanning the first and last page of each agreement and retaining these, along with a copy of the full blank document, electronically.

Conferences and training

The HAI AF Conference, chaired by Bill, went extremely well. Those who attended will have benefited from a plethora of excellent speakers.

Bill's sessions at the NHF Finance Conference also went well. Although when discussing the pros and cons of small RSLs merging and joining group structures, Bill will bring a suit of armour next time. The audience seemed to miss the key point that Bill was not suggesting that all RSLs need to be in big groups and that in fact small, specialist RSLs often perform better. His comment that generalist small and medium sized RSLs need to consider their whole *raison d'être*, seemed to be the point that generated the most discussion.

PI Validations

BG Audit & Consultancy, in conjunction with Mitchell Charlesworth Chartered Accountants, has been disappointed by the excessive costs that RSLs have been charged by organisations carrying out PI validations. There is a concern that because the report is shown to the Housing

We have joined forces with Mitchell Charlesworth to offer a quality and cost effective service to RSLs. We are happy to carry out re-validations that were originally completed by other organisations.

The Housing Corporation last year put off a decision to extend the requirement to RSLs with less than 2,500 units but the general consensus is that this requirement will be extended, along with a possible further expansion in the number of PIs to be covered.

Website

The BG Audit & Consultancy website has been updated with more information. A pdf version of this newsletter is available, plus details of our services, clients and Associates.

Please browse the site and email us with any comments that you may have.

A last thought....

Our last newsletter talked about the power of nature following the tsunami and this one goes out as London is still reeling from its first experience of suicide bombers.

Some of the scenes that we have seen recently on our television screens make some of the daily issues we face in housing pale into insignificance. And yet, there is a common theme running through these pictures...tolerance.

The Housing Corporation and Audit Commission are really pushing the issues of equality & diversity and we have waxed lyrical about it in this newsletter. Ultimately, it comes down to tolerance, of people and their particular needs. But by the same token, tolerance is also required by our customers of housing staff and the difficult job they have to do.

Our recent experience of front-line housing management has been a real eye-opener. As internal auditors, we need to understand the business. We would have thought that 18 months sat with housing staff would have

given us a special insight, but that has waned over time. The one factor that we try to bring to some of the situations that we face is tolerance. It is difficult facing these situations on a daily basis but with humour and tolerance we can try and make our little world a better place.

We know that many people in housing are religious and many have said prayers for those caught up in the bombings. We would like to echo those sentiments and hope that our next newsletter has a happier tone.



Bill Gill

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