



SPBM
2013 Annual Report
for Smaller Housing
Providers





Ninety-two per cent satisfied with services overall. That's right – 92%! Despite the harsh operating environment, despite (perhaps because of) the great work smaller housing providers have been doing to deliver value for money – 92% of their residents are satisfied with the services they receive. That's staggering. Think about it. Think about your own experiences of customer service, of service delivery, of navigating telecoms systems, of simply trying to speak to another human being who can answer your simple question or resolve your problem. Sometimes it feels we take for granted or even forget what we as a sector, what we as providers of vital services do.

I am pleased once again to commend this annual report to you. The support that Skills & Projects provide to smaller housing providers plays an important part in the work those organisations do to understand performance, learn from each other and enhance the value for money of what they do.

So what's to be said since I wrote the preface to last year's SPBM report?

Certainly the lack of affordable homes continues to choke off not only the aspirations of individual households but of local employers too - impeding their ability to create the jobs that will drive economic recovery. Welfare reform has been undermining the social housing offer – the increased cost of income collection coupled with the arrears of those that can't pay and can't move reduces our capacity to build homes and provide services. The reforms continue to concern investors, limiting the availability of affordable finance and, therefore, the ambition of growth plans. And as for the 'bedroom tax,' it is plain spiteful and divisive.

The risks government ministers have encouraged us to take – to sweat our balance sheets, experience and expertise – have provoked a debate with the regulator that asks how we protect our social assets while we are required to be creative and innovate - so essential at this time to fund social ambition. Further cuts planned for the public sector are likely to continue the process of fundamental change in the relationship between the state and the individual and with it the pattern of local service provision. This can only put further pressure on our housing management and community-based services. Despite the rhetoric, government is still incapable of (or lacking the commitment to) fixing our broken housing market, hence our taking the matter into our own hands with our *Yes to Homes* campaign.

But I'm ever the optimist. The sector's grasp of the operating environment is good and getting better. There is evidence, even in the smallest associations, of thoughtful business analysis, good understanding of their customers and neighbourhoods and an intelligent response. And many are revisiting their social missions to refocus on the things they want to do and must do to deliver that purpose.

But it's a refocus with a good business head, involving a thorough examination of growth potential, business and operating models, executive and non-executive information and learning needs, decision-making capabilities and accountability. I'm often asked if being commercial doesn't destroy the social mission. In fact, it helps to deliver that mission. I know that up and down the country work is in hand to put social housing providers in the best possible position to mitigate the risks and support social ambition. This report represents part of that work. It reminds us of the good work that smaller providers (and their larger counter-parts) do. And of course of what more can be achieved.

*David Orr,
Chief Executive,
National Housing Federation*

SPBM Review 2013

Membership continues to grow

SPBM is the national smaller housing providers' benchmarking network, facilitated by Skills & Projects in partnership with HouseMark. Aimed at housing providers with up to 1,000 homes, SPBM (www.spbm.co.uk) has continued to grow over the last year and membership currently stands at 116 organisations. In total, SPBM members (14 of whom are also HouseMark subscribers) own / manage over 50,000 homes across eight English regions. They come together in 12 regional and specialist benchmarking clubs. With over 850 HouseMark members, that's nearly a thousand social housing providers comparing performance and learning from each other nationwide.

"Even the initially more cynical housing associations now consider the SPBM data as invaluable".

SPBM enhancements

Over the last year, we have developed and introduced what has come to be known as 'the VFM report'. Developed in response to member feedback and with member input, these single page dashboard style reports enable performance comparisons to be made with a selected peer group, region, or nationally. They allow you to select what you want to compare, who with, and give an overview with colour coding to show performance against quartiles.

In line with changes at HouseMark, we have improved the data comparisons available to SPBM members. Notably, we are now able to report performance for different types of housing (general needs, housing for older people, supported housing) in more detail. We have been encouraging everyone to move to recording their performance using these new more specific indicators where possible.

Coming out of discussions at club meetings, we have also initiated a range of special cost comparison exercises - rent collection, repairs, insurance, audit, telephone, and staffing. At the time of writing, we are working on the formulation of new national repairs cost comparison indicators that allow for component accounting.

In the coming year, we will be consulting members on further improvements to SPBM reporting, and we will be reviewing the 'profile data' with a view to making it more useful and user friendly. We will also be evaluating whether or not to re-model data-entry to replicate the system used by HouseMark with a view to improving data quality.

Value for money

Alongside preparation for the impact of the welfare reform, value for money has again very much dominated thinking, discussion and action within SPBM over the last year. Our main contribution to this agenda has been to organise a series of workshops, designed and delivered by Steve Smedley (Skills & Projects Associate and author of 'Social hearts, business heads: new thinking on VFM for housing associations').

To date, we have run six of these workshops, attended by over 50 SPBM member organisations. They have focused on providing participants with ways of thinking, a forum for discussion, and the necessary

information and tools to address the regulatory requirement to produce a VFM self-assessment. Feedback has indicated that the self-assessment template, around which the sessions have been based, has been and continues to be of particularly practical value. The emphasis on the key part that social purpose and values (as well as performance indicators) have to play in defining and self-assessing VFM has also clearly been well received. With each of the workshops being hosted by one of the participant organisations, we have been able to deliver them at low cost. A good model for SPBM members working together we think.

"I had nothing but compliments from my Board on our VFM assessment, so it shows how good the training was that day"

What next on value for money? We are thinking along the lines of something to help embed VFM thinking in the day to day activities of each and every member of staff. We are certain that value for money will continue to be prominent in club discussions next year's and we will be alert to SPBM member's ideas and needs.

Satisfaction

This year, we also delivered our first workshop on resident satisfaction for smaller housing providers. This focused on helping SPBM members and similar organisations understand the value of satisfaction measurement from a smaller housing provider perspective, learn from the experience of peer organisations, and work through how they can get the most from satisfaction measurement. We've learnt that there really is substantial interest in satisfaction from both those who want to better get to grips with survey methods, design and process, and those who want to explore action in response to survey findings, including performance benchmarking.

Over the last year, we have found ourselves working on a growing number of STAR surveys on behalf of smaller providers (most of whom are SPBM members)

and continue to be impressed by the practical use that these organisations make of the survey findings. In most cases, we have also been impressed with the high levels of satisfaction reported, in line with our analysis later in this report. We have also increasingly been working with

"An excellent well-rounded event that was extremely informative and will support us in making improvements"

the team at Feedback Services and hope to be able to say more about this relationship very soon – not least about the enhancement in the quality and quantity of performance data available to SPBM members that it can bring.

Looking ahead, we will continue to contribute to HouseMark’s regular reviews of the STAR framework and develop our work with SPBM clubs to define collective approaches to satisfaction. We will have our eye on Big Data and HouseMark’s current research analysis with Feedback Services to explore the factors outside a landlord’s control which affect satisfaction – something that may have particular implications for smaller providers.

Looking ahead

There is going to be a lot of activity among, interest in and focus on smaller housing providers over the next year. We know the NHF’s national smaller housing association group is looking to pursue some specific themes – development and growth; collaborative working; improving performance. We are aware that the g320 group in London is looking to up its activity and contribution with development, efficiency and social value all prominent on the agenda. We are contributing to research into the capacity of smaller housing organisations and we know several SPBM clubs are taking a considered look at what more they can achieve. We know that many SPBM members are interested in working together more closely to improve efficiency and effectiveness, and in developing the collective voice of smaller housing providers.

Here’s how we see our job... Keep looking for ways to enhance the performance data available. Continue to facilitate the discussion and collaboration within and outside of club meetings. Look for ways to bring more organisations into the SPBM network and community. Be proactive in supporting that network’s access to information, connections, services and (perhaps above all) dialogue and learning.

This is the third SPBM annual report for smaller housing providers. What SPBM becomes will continue to be determined by its members and where they want to go with our support.

Mark Anderson & Tim Taylor, Skills & Projects



You can come away with a little gem of an idea you’d not previously thought of ... and it encourages you to try new things”

Should have gone to Specsavers?



Better? Or worse? Better? Or worse?

You know when you are in the optician's chair and they are switching an extra lens in front of your eye, checking to find out if it's making your vision clearer? Well I've been asked the same questions many times since arriving last year into Innisfree and the constituency of smaller housing associations from a much larger organisation – Hyde Housing.

So what *is* my view? How *does* it look?

Well, over the last year there's been a lot of discussion about the housing crisis we are facing. Just like in Hyde. We've been actively making preparations for Welfare Reform and sharing our experiences about the impact for residents and our businesses. Just like in Hyde. And – maybe surprisingly to some – there's been significant thinking about what new homes we could develop in the current financial climate. Just like in Hyde.

“It feels like they've been out of the line of sight of others in the rest of the sector”.

But my fresh pair of eyes has also been detecting some other things too. I've been seeing organisations which look like they are close to their original mission – close to the issues that led them to being established in the first place – but who tend to treat this in a very matter-of-fact and understated way.

For many, this closeness to original mission is very much linked to other things they have maintained – a **'geographical' focus**, often with a very strong presence in a particular neighbourhood; a **'community' focus**, such as the BME organisations that predominantly serve a particular ethnic group; and a **'needs' focus**, such as those that meets the needs of older people.

And they are doing fantastic work, every day. But for lots of the great examples, it feels like they've been out of the line of sight of others in the rest of the sector. But we are on it now!

Earlier in the year, we published a report about the g320 grouping 'Flexible and focused: the specialists at the heart of neighbourhoods'. The report has proved to be a catalyst for us to identify three main work areas:

- Improving our development capacity

- Collaborating to become more cost efficient
- Becoming more confident at capturing, accounting for and promoting the social value we create.

Cast your eye on the last of these three. There's some interesting thinking on social value going on. Let me name check some of the pieces that have influenced me. HouseMark's 'Social Hearts, Business Heads' feels close to the work we do now with Skills & Projects. The HACT publication 'The social impact of housing providers' took a fascinating look at the macro-level effect of the work the sector does. More recently, HouseMark / Midland Heart's 'Journey to Impact' takes a different approach, seeking to demystify what works and why.

But g320 are a practical bunch. So we are starting to develop an approach that will suit our organisations, producing the positive evidence without distracting us from the day job. Some of it is likely to be 'hard' evidence, but we also expect to be telling stories about the difference we are making.

This will allow us to confirm that our work is changing people's lives and help us to understand in what way we are doing this. It will help us focus on maintaining and achieving more of these outcomes, amplifying our positive impact. And it will increase our confidence in communicating the impact of our work.

Let's go back to the darkened room with the optician. Her diagnosis is that I'm currently not seeing clearly what's in front of me – but that the new prescription will make the difference. The members of g320 are creating social value in abundance – but we just need a new frame to allow this to be more evident.

Better? Or worse? It's becoming crystal clear!

John Delahunty is Chief Executive of Innisfree HA and current Chair of g320 (www.g320.org)

"We also expect to be telling stories about the difference we are making".

Values, business, independence



Reflecting on values and performance

Housing associations are increasingly less reliant on government funding and in need of defining themselves much more clearly as independent, social businesses. In doing so, associations need to be clear about telling their 'values story' to their staff, customers and other stakeholders. It's a story in which clearly defined values are a focal point for running their business and delivering on what matters to customers.

Potentially, smaller associations have some distinct advantages over their larger cousins in this regard. They tend to have a much clearer focus either on a locality or a particular set of needs. Many still have a strong voluntary ethos and their Board tends to be much closer to the ground than their larger counterparts.

"For some, having a social purpose seems to be taken for granted"

Smaller associations undoubtedly do however face some serious challenges not least in coping with the changing environment in which they work without the breadth of resources which larger organisations can draw on. Dealing with the implications of welfare reform comes immediately to mind. This amplifies the need to be clear that they are combining being good at the business side (and therefore not wasting precious resources which could be enhancing services or providing new homes) with the aspirations and demands of their values.

For some, having a social purpose seems to be taken for granted. It is assumed that organisational values motivate staff and are understood by stakeholders. But is that really the case? It strikes me that now is a good time for smaller associations to get into some serious reflection:

- Are you clear about your values in a changing environment? If not you risk incoherent decision-making, negative effects on staff morale, uncertainty for stakeholders, challenges to your reputation.
- Are you clear about your priorities and do you know what you are good at?
- Do you need to follow larger associations in moving to smaller, more business orientated Boards? Is that right for smaller associations and your need for a stronger community and / or specialist focus and greater voluntary effort?
- If you are to retain your localised / specialist identity might you need to be clearer that you have robust mechanisms that help guarantee your independence and capture the voices of the wider communities and stakeholders with whom you interact?

- How important is it that you develop an approach which focuses on driving efficiency and effectiveness throughout the organisation to produce finance for services, stock investment and development?
- Can you define what a business-like, values-led approach means in practice for your specific situation and context? Is this consistently understood and owned throughout the organisation and by your residents and other stakeholders?

Separate identities?

Housing associations will increasingly form a very diverse set of organisations in terms of what they are doing, how they are structured and what they are achieving.

Do smaller associations need to see themselves as partners of larger bodies or should they be emphasising their independence and developing more specific approaches? Are there opportunities for innovative collaboration between smaller associations and other localised bodies?

Does it still make sense for smaller associations to see themselves as part of one sector or do they need to promote themselves as a separate 'voluntary and value-led' sector which differentiates itself from the larger, more overtly commercial organisations?

Social value

There is a good deal of talk at the moment about social value. There are, however, inflated expectations in relation to evaluating social value, notably in the dangers of overly complex systems and setting organisations up to fail by expecting too much too soon.

This is of particular relevance to smaller associations. While they may not be able to draw on significant analytical resources, they may have advantages in terms of being closer to the ground and in their ability to know and narrate things not caught in the metrics net. Does this not free smaller associations to focus more on staff and stakeholder engagement to deliver rather than report social value?

“There are, however, inflated expectations in relation to evaluating social value”

Confidence is key

Given the scale of change within the sector and the fact that perceptions of housing associations in general tend to be formed by the way larger organisations operate, there is a danger that the confidence of smaller associations might be undermined.

While some argue for mergers, smaller associations should remember that the CIH publication ‘Does size matter?’ found little evidence that mergers in themselves bring significant benefits. According to the report, ‘There is little evidence that size, better quality services and lower costs are related’ and ‘Scale alone does not automatically provide efficiency’. Furthermore, let’s not talk about capacity and expertise purely in terms of finance and numbers. Specialist knowledge, local networks and voluntary effort are equally vital in looking at how social housing associations succeed.

Clarity of values and evidence of effectiveness as local businesses can only enhance smaller associations’ abilities to deliver excellent services.

Mark Lupton is an independent policy analyst. He is co-author of ‘Profiting from values – what can housing associations learn from independent value led businesses?’ and ‘Does size matter – or does culture drive value for money?’

“Let’s not talk about capacity and expertise purely in terms of finance and numbers”.

Performance comparison and improvement

Here we provide an insight into the overall performance of SPBM members for the year April 2012 to March 2013 in a number of key areas with two sets of comparative data:

1. The median performance of SPBM members (referred to as 'Smaller Providers') compared with the median for the sector as a whole, taken from HouseMark's National Club (referred to as 'All Providers')
2. Year on year performance data indicating the direction of travel in performance among SPBM members.

In doing so, we use a **traffic light system** indicating whether the median for smaller providers is higher, lower or the same as the median for larger providers, and **trend arrows** indicating whether performance among SPBM members has improved, declined or stayed the same¹.

The year on year figures come from SPBM members who submitted data for both 2011/12 and 2012/13. This explains why the trend data in this report are different to the median performance figures and the 2011/12 data are different to that presented in our 2012 Annual Report. In taking this approach, this ensures that the comparisons are as robust as they can be while providing trend analysis based on the performance of up to 73 smaller housing providers.

HouseMark data are median values for all organisations in the HouseMark National Club on HouseMark PI Tracking, based on data from around 420 providers of all sizes and including data from SPBM.

All SPBM and HouseMark comparisons are based on identically defined performance indicators.

"The high level of trust within the group really helps us in learning from each other"

¹ Except for 'Costs and investment' data where the use of trend arrows may be misleading.

Voids and lettings

The performance of SPBM members on rent loss from voids and average relet times (general needs and housing for older people) during 2012/13 compares well with that of all providers. Reported performance has improved in both areas over the last year.

	All Providers	Smaller Providers	
Percentage of rent lost due to void properties	0.98	0.84	●
Average relet time in days	25.96	25.00	●

	2011/12	2012/13	
Percentage of rent lost due to void properties	0.85	0.82	↑
Average relet time in days	30.00	25.00	↑

Rent collection and arrears

While the performance of SPBM members on rent collection was only marginally below that of all providers, rent arrears were substantially higher. Performance on both rent collection and on arrears declined marginally. All data are for general needs housing and housing for older people.

	All Providers	Smaller Providers	
Rent collected as a percentage of rent owed	99.53	99.40	●
Current tenant arrears as a percentage of the annual rent debit	2.66	3.20	●

	2011/12	2012/13	
Rent collected as a percentage of rent owed	99.49	99.40	↓
Current tenant arrears as a percentage of the annual rent debit	2.98	3.00	↓

Repairs and maintenance

The performance of SPBM members and all providers on the completion of repairs within target times and at first visit was very similar, as was performance on gas safety checks. Performance on the completion of reactive repairs is up on last year. Again, all data are for general needs housing and housing for older people.

	All Providers	Smaller Providers	
Percentage of emergency repairs completed within target	99.20	100.00	●
Percentage of all reactive repairs completed within target	97.60	97.86	●
Percentage of dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate	99.96	100.00	●
Percentage of repairs completed right first visit	92.05	92.00	●

	2011/12	2012/13	
Percentage of emergency repairs completed within target	100.00	100.00	↔
Percentage of all reactive repairs completed within target	97.30	98.00	↑
Percentage of dwellings with a valid gas safety certificate	100.00	100.00	↔
Percentage of repairs completed at first visit ²	N/A ²	92.70	

² The performance indicator has changed from 'percentage of repairs completed right first time' in 2011/12 to 'percentage of repairs completed at first visit' in 2012/13.

Resident satisfaction

Levels of satisfaction for six of the seven STAR core measures reported by SPBM members were higher than the levels reported by all providers³. Performance on 'overall satisfaction' and four of the six other measures has improved or remained the same. Satisfaction with value for money (service charges) appears to have fallen substantially.

	All Providers	Smaller Providers	
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the overall service provided by their landlord	87	92	●
Percentage satisfied with the overall quality of their home	85	91	●
Percentage satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live	86	92	●
Percentage satisfied with the value for money for their rent	84	90	●
Percentage satisfied with the value for money for their service charges	75	74	●
Percentage satisfied with repairs and maintenance	82	90	●
Percentage satisfied their landlord listens to/acts upon their views	72	81	●

	2011/12	2012/13	
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the overall service provided by their landlord	92	93	↑
Percentage satisfied with the overall quality of their home	90	91	↑
Percentage satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live	90	93	↑
Percentage satisfied with the value for money for their rent	89	90	↑
Percentage satisfied with the value for money for their service charges	81	72	↓
Percentage satisfied with repairs and maintenance	89	89	↔
Percentage satisfied that their landlord listens to/acts upon their views	82	81	↓

³ 'Smaller Providers' data are median percentages from SPBM with the number of organisations submitting data for each indicator ranging from 33 to 54. 'All Providers' data are from HouseMark STAR Benchmarking with the number of organisations submitting data ranging from 48 to 76.

Staff engagement

SPBM members reported that on average they lost a substantially lower number of working days to sickness absence than other providers. SPBM members are losing marginally fewer days to sickness absence than they did in 2011/12.

	All Providers	SPBM	
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence	8.67	4.75	

	2011/12	2012/13	
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence	4.86	4.75	

While operating costs of SPBM members as a percentage of turnover have fallen, weekly management costs have risen. Weekly investment per unit has fallen. Last year, we reported a fall in operating costs, a rise in management costs and fall in weekly investment per unit.

	2011/12	2012/13
Operating costs as a percentage of turnover	76.20	72.19
Average weekly cost per dwelling on management	16.67	18.05
Weekly investment per unit	25.83	21.07

The data above are from audited accounts. While we recognise that there are significant variations in accounting practice, this is currently the best available headline insight into SPBM members' costs and investment decisions.

“The ability to discuss issues across the club becomes even more useful”

Smaller housing providers' salaries

Fifty-eight organisations (all of whom are SPBM members) participated in our fourth annual salaries survey for smaller housing providers. Thirty-nine of these organisations participated in 2012.

Our 2013 survey has revealed that:

- Salary increases ranged from 0% to 4.6% with the median salary increase being 2% (compared to 2.5% in 2012)
- While no decreases in salaries were reported, 11 organisations reported no increase at the last review (compared to seven in 2012)
- The salaries paid to Chief Executives ranged from £28k to £91k with a median salary of £64k (the same as last year)
- The total employer payment to pensions (including past service deficits) ranged from 1.4% to 24.7% with the median employer payment being 7.6% (compared to 7.4% in 2012)
- Four of the participating organisations remunerate the Chair of their Board and one organisation remunerates other Board members (compared to two and none in 2012)
- Expenditure on salaries as a percentage of financial turnover ranged from 12% to 69%. Median expenditure was 23% (much the same as in 2012)
- The median - full time - equivalent number of staff employed was 3.3 per 100 properties managed
- One third of participants reported there had been no turnover in staff.

In addition to total salaries costs, average salaries, job role salaries and salary increases, our 2013 report provides a wealth of detail on the reward packages provided by participating organisations - pensions, bonuses, overtime, leave and a range of other entitlements and allowances. Alongside the main findings report, we provide a profile of each organisation and details of the job roles within the participating organisations (659 job roles this year).

The 58 organisations that participated in this year's survey own and / or manage 78 to 1,192 homes. In total, they own and / or manage 22,255 homes across eight English regions and employ 1,594 staff.

"The salaries survey is a really useful piece of work"

The salaries survey came about in response to demand from our SPBM benchmarking subscribers and is available to all participating organisations without charge.

The tables below show the median, upper and lower quartile salaries for some common job roles.

Housing Management	Lower quartile £000's	Median £000's	Upper quartile £000's
Director, Manager or equivalent	36.3	43.2	51.9
Housing officer and equivalent	24.4	27.1	30.8

Maintenance	Lower quartile £000's	Median £000's	Upper quartile £000's
Manager and equivalent	37.0	42.1	49.2
Officer and equivalent	22.8	26.4	31.0

Finance & human resources	Lower quartile £000's	Median £000's	Upper quartile £000's
Finance director	55.4	57.6	59.9
Finance manager and equivalent	37.0	42.4	45.5
Head of HR/Core service or equivalent	25.5	36.2	45.6
Finance officer and equivalent	25.0	29.2	31.7

Support	Lower quartile £000's	Median £000's	Upper quartile £000's
Support services manager	32.0	36.7	45.3
Support Worker/ Scheme manager or equivalent	19.6	22.3	27.1

The median salary for eight of these job roles rose between 2012 and 2013. It fell for two of the job roles.

News from the clubs

bm320 (London)

Over the past year we have really valued the ability to access data so readily, and even the initially more cynical housing associations now consider the SPBM data as invaluable. Sharing thoughts around resident involvement and minimizing the impact of welfare reforms, has provided a platform for new ideas to take shape and good practice to be shared. In particular, I attended a fantastic presentation given by Sian Williams, from Toynbee Hall charity on financial inclusion, which has proved to be extremely useful. Now we have established a process that works well, in the next year it will very much be a case of the club carrying on the good work we have begun. In the future, however, it may be useful to consider opening up discussions over the potential of starting new clubs for specialist areas such as homelessness or student accommodation.

Chair: Nevil Osborne, Keniston HA

Community Housing Associations (North West)

This year, we have taken time to review our benchmarking processes, consolidate information and identify any anomalies across associations. This process has raised more questions than it has provided answers. More importantly it has opened up a dialogue to ensure a consistency in the use of definitions and performance indicators. Plans for the year ahead are to continue reviewing aspects of the club, such as how it is currently structured. Consideration will be given to the potential of developing sub-groups and we are looking into ways to integrate the information collated by SPBM across different areas of the business, in order to maximize its potential across the organisation. More recognition of the individual characteristics of each club, and more comparable 'core performance indicators' across clubs are areas that could perhaps be given consideration by SPBM in the future, although we very much feel that the information provided is helping us to move in the right direction.

Chair: George Evans, Eldonian Community Based HA

EEBM (East of England)

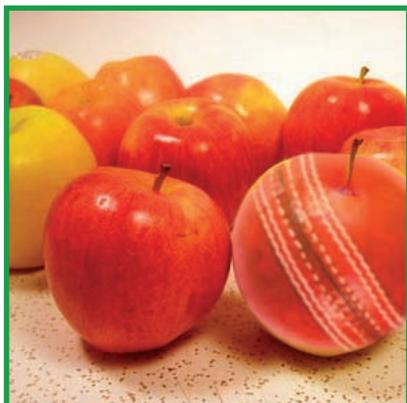
Now in our third year, the group is feeling more established. With a stable and regular attendance, we are feeling the benefits of more trusting relationships. It's no longer just about KPIs. It's about sharing good practice, especially in the area of welfare reform and VFM. You can come away with a little gem of an idea you'd not previously thought of or considered to be too radical, and it encourages you to try new things if someone else is doing it already with success. We are now in a good position to really look into what the figures mean, share information in more depth and move on with our learning in terms of good practice. Our aims for the coming year are to get more people involved in the club by promoting our work and raising our profile generally.

Chair: Craig Glasper, King Street Housing

HfOP (Housing for Older People)

As a relatively new club, we are pleased to have seen our membership increase steadily over the last year. Benchmarking has been very important this year, especially for Housing Committees and Boards, but also the ability to network and share relevant issues that affect most of us. An agreement made to meet in members' premises has been very interesting, as each 'venue' has provided insight into what others do and how. Over the coming year the inclusion of STAR indicators will be interesting and could lead to significant savings for some organisations. I do, however, have some concerns about welfare reform and how it will affect some residents, including those under retirement age. Looking ahead, I have gained a lot from attending my own club, so how much more beneficial would it be if we could get 100-200 members together for a conference? It could be pretty dynamic with high-grade motivational speakers, we could learn from the things we do in common and for example create a utilities club to buy energy supplies.

Chair: Chris Wren, CESSA



"SPBM enables us to compare like with like (small apples with small apples)"

London BME

The inspiration to establish this club came out of our awareness of the Solomon Group's activities. Two year on, we have been able to establish a set of common KPI reference points that give us greater confidence in decision-making and that allow us to see where our individual strengths lie. SPBM enables us to compare like with like (small apples with small apples) and through access to the national HouseMark data a wider contextual understanding (smaller apples with larger ones). In doing so, the high level of trust within the group really helps us in learning from each other. And with VFM being a regulated standard, SPBM has become crucial in helping us know where we stand and how we might improve by working together. The club is just as much a forum for sharing good practice as sharing data. If we find that a particular member is performing particularly well in a specific area they share what they are doing –how they are playing the game and why they are scoring high. The club is an opportunity to do many things, not least achieve real cost savings. Joint procurement, for example, is high on our list of priorities over the next year.

Contact: Aziz Rahim, North London Muslim HA

OMBM (Offender Management)

As far as the club is concerned, it's really all about being able to talk to each other and sharing good practice. We place great importance on catching up, even in the current climate where sometimes we are in competition for limited funding. There is comfort in knowing others are in a similar position and we can learn from each other's experiences of working with different authorities. It's good to share ideas, whether it is new innovative structures, or ideas on seeking funding elsewhere. Last year was all about VFM. The coming year will be about sharing what we have learnt and how we are able to express this. More generally, we need to up our game - be more creative and innovative as a networking group. It's going to be a real challenge to provide the same quality within funding limitations, and the learning and support we get through the group can certainly help. Very specifically, I would like us to make more use of webinars and video conferencing to enable networking and sharing of ideas without time away from the office.
Chair: Nigel Hills, Salvation Army HA

"We investigate ways of pooling resources, including efficiency savings through joint procurement"

SHAPE (South East)

Our aim is to promote excellence amongst our members and support each other through sharing and comparing performance data, best practice and experience. We investigate ways of pooling resources, including efficiency savings through joint procurement. We have an annual programme of meetings and the highlight this year was our joint staff conference which was well attended and received great feedback. Our members have been very positive about the new 'VFM report' from SPBM as it provides easy access to wide range of comparative performance data. SHAPE has a strong membership and for the coming year we will continue to support each other and strive for excellence. We are very pleased with the support we get from SPBM and we continue to evaluate the PIs and reports to ensure that we maximise the benefits we get from membership.
Chair: Patricia Shadforth, Franklands Village HA



"It's good to share ideas, whether it is new innovative structures or ideas on seeking funding elsewhere"



SolFed & Solomon Project (London)

The two groups continue to work closely together. Our main achievement this year has been in using benchmarking data to inform a major project to cross-evaluate each association's performance on tenant scrutiny. As a result, tenants were able to put together a report with a series of recommendations that we are now acting on. In doing so, they made it clear that they want us to find new ways of making savings that can be passed onto tenants. In defining 'good value' they want us to put an emphasis on quality as well as costs. Going forward this year, we feel we are going through a process of maturity as a club and it feels like an appropriate time to review our benchmarking processes. We want to progress our successes so far by being open to new opportunities for inspiration.

Chair: Tony Withnell, Lambeth & Southwark HA

"Benchmarking has been very important this year, especially for our Housing Committees and Boards"

SWBM (South West)

Aside from the usual mutual support available, the club continues to provide a valuable learning experience highlighting good practice. Our club training session on VFM self-assessment was a highlight and the performance and salary benchmarking becomes more useful as the years go by. We are entering a period of uncertainty as welfare reform takes hold and understand the need to keep this topic high in our risk appraisals. At such times, the ability to discuss issues across the club becomes even more useful as we do not have big internal teams to whom we can turn.

Chair: Peter Moore, Cornwall Rural HA (Text: John Thomson, SHAL)

"The club continues to provide a valuable learning experience"



WMBM (West Midlands)

The group is the first off-shoot from the more established collaborative activities of smaller providers in the West Midlands, reflecting the importance we attach to benchmarking performance. We are a young group, just 18 months old, but feel we have built a network of likeminded organisations with the same aspirations. Now that we are receiving the reports it gives us the opportunity to look into things in more detail, really getting to grips with and exploiting the information. At the moment, we particularly want to get more of a handle on customer satisfaction. In doing so, we are focusing on making our questions pertinent and relevant, drilling down into the data, making sure we have real clarity. Over the next year,

we hope to increase participation in the group. We would say to SPBM - please keep up the good work. We've been impressed with your energy and commitment. Your support is helping us to procure things in the most efficient and effective way possible and live by our strapline 'Big does not equal great and great does not equal big' (Jim Collins).

Chair: Trevor Palfreyman, Adullam

"We have really valued the ability to access data so readily"

YHBM (Yorkshire & Humberside)

Having the quarterly benchmarking information has been appreciated by all our members. It has been particularly helpful in terms of the new requirements to self-assess VFM as all of us are very keen to get these right. The club meetings really make a worthwhile contribution to achieving that ambition, as did the excellent VFM workshop attended by all members of the group earlier

this year. Other presentations given on specialisms such as dealing with 'arrears' and 'health and safety' have also been invaluable for our smaller organisations, who don't necessarily have these resources in-house. One of the big advantages of getting together each quarter is the ability to sit down and let the conversation ebb and flow. Great things come out of that process, such as sharing information and ideas that are beyond the remit of benchmarking – both detail (e.g. computer software recommendations) and broader brush (e.g. new ways to generate value within the business).

Chair: Paul Roberts, York HA



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About Skills & Projects

Skills & Projects provide a wide range of consultancy services to help housing providers improve services and engage with their residents through an understanding of satisfaction, performance and profiling data. We specialise in supporting the benchmarking activities of over 100 smaller housing providers in partnership with HouseMark, and in customer / resident satisfaction measurement. Our services are highly flexible, and always carefully tailored to the requirements and budgets of our customers. Skills & Projects have been providing consultancy services to the social housing sector for over 15 years.

Our close working relationship with HouseMark plays an essential part in ensuring that SPBM activity remains in sync with the rest of the sector and in enabling our on-going work to develop and improve benchmarking services for smaller housing providers. The relationship also brings substantial benefits for SPBM members, enabling them to compare performance with over 850 other providers using a level playing field of clearly defined, standard performance indicators. We continue to encourage our members to make greater use of the wealth of searchable information and good practice available to them online through HouseMark's knowledge base.

For further information visit www.skillsprojects.co.uk

You can also call us on **0845 539 1963**

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About HouseMark

HouseMark is the leading provider of business intelligence and value for money solutions to the social housing sector and is jointly owned by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation; two not-for-profit organisations which reinvest their surpluses in the social housing sector.

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