



the housing  
network

West Midlands Voluntary & Community Sector

# **Annual Report 2007/8**

## **How we made a difference**

## Foreword

This report sets out how the Network has made a difference in 2007/08. You will see that we have made significant strides, but there is much more to be done to meet the challenges ahead. There are significant changes planned in both the regional organisational landscape and the funding environment, in addition there are a number of key regional and sub-regional policies and strategies, being developed, that we need to ensure the sector is able to effectively influence. This is vital if we are to ensure that the services provided and investment decisions address the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged households.

We believe passionately that small, rural and BME housing organisations have a key role to play in the exciting developments taking place across the region and the Network remains committed to ensuring that they have a voice and access to information that helps them to engage meaningfully in consultation and procurement processes. The need for the Network is therefore as pressing now as it has ever been.

I would like to thank the Lloyds TSB Foundation for its financial support for the Network. A key priority for the future is to secure funding to enable the Network to continue its activities when this funding ends in September 2008.

Finally, may I thank all those who have contributed to the work of the Network without their support these achievements would not have been possible.

**Alan Fraser**

**Acting Convenor**

## About the Housing Network

The Network was established in 2001 it is a regional network for voluntary and community sector organisations with an interest in housing and the development of sustainable communities in the West Midlands. The Network's overarching aim is to build a sustainable, informed, inclusive and influential regional Voluntary & Community Sector Housing Network. To achieve this, the Network's intends to: -

- Build on its inclusive approach to engagement and interaction with members.
- Strengthen its existing influence base in relation to the development of regional strategies and services.
- Ensure that effective practice is built into the policy process and that 'good practice' is promoted and shared.

The Network's activities include:

- Holding consultation events and conferences on issues related to housing and sustainable communities
- Responding to policy / consultation documents and producing reports aimed at influencing the policy agenda
- Reflecting the views of the sector on key regional and sub-regional decision-making forums
- Working with and supporting other networks in order to influence the regional agenda
- Disseminating briefing papers, news/policy updates etc for Network members and Commissioning and disseminating research;
- Holding training sessions on issues of concern to members or to address skill gaps
- Maintaining and developing a web-based resource ([www.housingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.housingnetwork.org.uk))
- Identifying and disseminating good practice.

## Making a Difference: the Network's Impact

The Network aims to deliver against five main outcomes. Our impact during the year against each of these outcomes is now reviewed.

### **Outcome 1: The sector's level of influence on West Midland regional and sub-regional policies and strategies is increased**

#### **Impact:**

The Network submitted consultation responses, on behalf of Network members, to three key regional policy documents: the Draft Regional Housing

Allocation Strategy; the Draft Regional Health and Well-Being Strategy; and the Draft West Midlands Economic Strategy Delivery Framework.

The Network was represented on the Supporting People Regional Information Group which is taking forward the delivery of the Regional Supporting People Strategy; and the Regional Homeless Implementation Group (chair) which is developing the Regional Homeless Strategy sub-regional action plans and leading on the Regional Homeless Strategy Refresh.

The Network was also represented on the Regional Assembly Affordable Housing Working Group which produced a 'guide to the delivery of affordable housing'.

The Network has also influenced national policy through its contribution to the Supporting People Expert Reference Group and its consultation response to the Housing Green Paper. The Network also highlighted the need for Local Area Agreements to include the National Indicators in relation to housing support and independent living for vulnerable groups.

Members were kept informed of key regional / national consultation exercises on issues such as: Supporting People Outcomes and the Quality Assessment Framework; Local Area Agreements and the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 3.

## **Outcome 2: The sector's capacity to engage with the West Midlands policy agenda, along with individual members' knowledge and skills is increased.**

### **Impact**

In order to increase the sector's capacity to influence the Network identified the key networks and partnership within the region and identified members to attend these fora and feed back to the wider network members. New links were developed with the voluntary and community sector Regional Specialist Infrastructure Partnership and with a number of the partnership groups for the Housing Market areas. In total the Network is represented on 20 fora.

Five General Network Meetings /consultation events were held which focused on key areas in which members wanted to develop their skills, knowledge and share experiences, namely homelessness, rural issues, supporting people and Local Area Agreements. Details of key regional/ sub-regional conferences/ seminars (organised by other organisations) were also circulated to members.

The Network website was kept up to date and maintained to provide a valuable information source. Over the period April 2007 to March 2008 over 48,800 viewed hits were recorded

As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 the Network had 89 members.

### **Outcome 3: The Network's ability to engage with and support hard to reach groups is improved**

#### **Impact**

The Network agreed the key hard to reach voluntary and community sector groups it wished to target; these are black and minority ethnic groups, rural groups and small groups as it was felt these were the groups that found it the most difficult to influence policy.

The Network reviewed its membership database and members were contacted by a representative from the Executive. Members from BME, rural and small voluntary and community sector groups were encouraged to stand for election to the Executive at the 2008 AGM.

In order to ensure that the Network's future delivery priorities met the needs of members the 2007 AGM focussed on: the achievements of the Network; future challenges and the external environment; and future plans for the Network. Following the AGM all members were asked whether there were other issues, in addition to those identified at the AGM, which need to be included in the Network's programme of work; along with 'what are the key messages that the Network need to get across to policy makers and who does it need to deliver these messages to?'. In addition a feedback slip was introduced for members to give their views at each Network meeting on: the meeting itself, what they had gained from the meeting and their views on future priorities for the Network. This feedback is reported to the Executive Committee.

Systems were put in place to monitor attendance at meetings and to circulate minutes to all members and place them on the website.

### **Outcome 4: Good practice is disseminated and shared**

#### **Impact**

Research conducted by member organisations and national bodies, such as Shelter's research on Black and Minority Ethnic Homelessness, and

Homeless links research on rural homelessness, was been disseminated to Network members through wider Network meetings  
All wider Network meetings include a slot to exchange experiences and share good practice.  
Policy briefings produced by relevant agencies, and other relevant information was circulated to all members on a regular basis

A case study of the Network for Destination West Midlands/RAWM was produced which highlighted key learning points from the development of the Network.

## **Outcome 5: The Network is sustainable and is able to secure long-term funding**

### **Impact**

As part of the process of securing longer-term legacy funding an initial meeting was held with the West Midlands Housing Secretariat to explore how the Network might contribute to the agenda of the new proposed regional structures to be in place by 2012. It was agreed that the Network would produce a paper for a meeting of the Regional Housing Forum, over the next year, outlining its role and how it could contribute to the agenda.

A response was submitted to the BASIS consultation exercise and an application was submitted for improving reach funding to provide funding up until the new regional structures are in place. Unfortunately these were not successful.

### **Governance**

The Network has an adopted constitution and is structured around an Executive Committee, an Annual General Meeting and at least three general meetings a year. The General Meetings are open to all members of the network. The Executive Committee members during the period April 2007 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 were:

Dave Hider (Convenor )	Herefordshire Supported Housing for Young People
Dave Brown (Deputy Convenor )	Furniture Exchange Stafford
Duncan Miller (Treasurer until October 2007)	Churches Housing Association Of Dudley and District
Jean Templeton	St Basils Housing Association
Neelam Sunder	Homeless Link – West Midlands

Nigel Potter	West Midlands Rural Housing Network/ Community First
Sheila Neary	Valuing Age and Experience Network
Gary Clarke (until October 2007)	Dorcas Housing Association
Liz Edwards (April 2007 -October 2007)	NUS West Midlands
Susan Wall (from April 2007)	Centrepoint
Alan Fraser (from October 2007)	Birmingham YMCA
Carol Gallagher (Co-opted Member)	Nuneaton and Bedworth Doorway
Lynne Beighton (Co-opted Member)	Secretariat

The accountable body for the Network during the period of review was Nuneaton and Bedworth Doorway.

## Financial Summary

Income and expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2008 was as follows: -

	£
<b>Income 2007/2008</b>	
Brought Forward from 2006/2007	23,668
Grant from Lloyds TSB	10,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>33,668</b>
<b>Expenditure 2007/2008</b>	
Secretariat ,Policy Development/ Specialist Support/ briefings for members	14,617
Accountable Body Fees and independent examination of accounts	3,660
Events/ meetings organised by the Network (including room hire, refreshments, member expenses).	663
Telephone, internet & postage	98
Travel and subsistence (members)	184
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>19,222</b>
<b>Total Funds Carried Forward 2007/2008</b>	<b>14,446</b>

## Contacting Us

There are a number of ways to contact us to find out more about the Network:

[www.housingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.housingnetwork.org.uk)

or email us at: [info@housingnetwork.org.uk](mailto:info@housingnetwork.org.uk)

or phone Lynne Beighton, Network secretariat: 01902 424564