

## Housing chief executives - WhatsApp summary

February – March 2023

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### A note to readers

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These notes summarise recent discussions on Campbell Tickell's WhatsApp group for Chief Executives of housing associations and ALMOs across all four UK jurisdictions and the Republic of Ireland. A full summary of discussions from the inception of the group is available on request.

This is a closed group, open only to CEOs in housing associations and ALMOs. It currently has around 250 members.

While discussions are confidential and unattributable, members of the group are keen for the content themes and issues to be shared widely to assist with broader understanding.

**Please note:**

The following digest highlights matters that have been discussed in the group. None of the content should be treated as representing the collective views of the group as such, or be attributed to any of its members. The group is an information-sharing forum and not a policy-making body.

### Contact us

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If you are a housing CEO who would like to join, please email [james.tickell@campbelltickell.com](mailto:james.tickell@campbelltickell.com) or [greg.campbell@campbelltickell.com](mailto:greg.campbell@campbelltickell.com).

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### Latest highlights, February - March

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***Building safety and decent homes:***

1. Members shared their approach to funding shortfalls in disabled facilities grants (DSGs). Approaches included 'topping up' pots, covering the cost of smaller adaptations such as handrails, and funding larger adaptations on a case-by-case basis where necessary.
2. Members discussed the prospective requirements for housing staff to have professional qualifications. In general, members agreed that this would be a benefit to the social housing sector and make organisations better able to fulfil their duties of providing decent homes. However, there was some disagreement on how far this would go to address the building health and safety issues that led to this prospective mandate. Many members felt that the underlying causes relate more to austerity, fuel poverty, a lack of affordable housing and poor quality-control from contractors at the construction stage of developments.
3. The group continued to share examples of how different organisations are acting to tackle and prevent issues with damp and mould in their properties. Suggestions included installing temperature and humidity sensors, financial welfare checks, employing 'healthy homes advisors', enforcing a 'See It Report It' (SIRI) policy for any contractors or staff entering a property and paying for vulnerable families' heating bills.

4. Members expressed concern over recent fires occurring in residents' homes, some of which have been caused by lithium batteries in e-bikes and e-scooters.
5. The group identified overcrowded conditions as a major risk in relation to the damage fires can cause, and to the likelihood of damp and mould occurring. Members expressed concern about the lack of immediate solutions to resolve overcrowding resulting again from austerity, an undersupply of alternative accommodation and unscrupulous leaseholders.

***Cost-of-living crisis:***

6. Members continued to share the measures they are taking to help their staff with the current cost-of-living crisis. The different propositions included: salary increases between 5% and 8%; unconsolidated lump payments; and pro-rata consolidated payments that would see lower paid staff receive a higher increase than those on higher salaries.
7. CT collated this discussion into a summary overview of the different measures being taken, and this was shared amongst the group.
8. In light of the cost-of-living crisis driving a higher staff turnover, members shared examples of colleague benefits that create the most impact. This included salary increases; flexible working; inclusive culture; rewarding work; pension health and welfare benefits; and ethical leadership.

***Energy:***

9. After a recent fall in price of energy deals following months of rising energy costs, members speculated on whether to commit to energy deals at these new lows, or to wait and see if prices fall further.

***General / sharing of knowledge and good practices:***

10. The group continues to be a space that encourages and facilitates best practice between social housing providers.
11. Members shared advice and best practice on staying up to date on sector issues and ensuring that boards are fully briefed to allow for proper strategic overview. Suggestions included consolidated briefing papers and an example was shared amongst the group.
12. Members shared findings from tenant consultations. Results indicate that tenants value prompt repairs, quick response times and compassionate customer service most highly.
13. Members also discussed transitioning across technology systems for the day-to-day operating of business and case management.
14. Information was shared amongst the group on the Marriage and Civil Partnership Act 2022 and the safeguarding responsibilities of housing associations relating to issues of trafficking and so-called honour-based abuse and forced marriage.
15. The group recommended benchmarking services, conference speakers and interim programme directors.
16. Members also shared best practice on operating out-of-hours services over holidays and weekends.
17. Several members expressed annoyance at the recent rise in unscrupulous disrepair lawyers piggybacking on customer complaints which is costing tenants and associations alike money and damaging the reputation of the sector.
18. Members discussed moving to reduced working hours such as 4.5-day weeks or 9-day fortnights to boost productivity and reduce costs. Several members have already introduced these measures and shared positive impacts including colleague wellbeing, consistency of working days, improved colleague engagement with tenants and increased tenant satisfaction.